



CHILDREN AS CONTENT CREATORS: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES AND NAVIGATING MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

The surge of marketing and media communication targeting children as digital consumers prompts questions about their vulnerability and understanding of these messages. This qualitative study, grounded in Social Construct Theory, explores how children's messages are constructed, marketed, and disseminated in the digital media marketplace. The study considers children's interactions with traditional practices and emerging content-creation strategies. This insightful exploration aims to inform ethical marketing practices, empower children as discerning active media participants, and contribute to fostering media literacy in the digital landscape. The study employs narrative methods like thematic analysis and discourse analysis to showcase children's online expression. The article shows how children utilise different digital formats for diverse content creation and employ specific stylistic elements to achieve their functional goals. This probe highlights a significant shift: children are becoming active players in creating the internet environment rather than passive consumers. They are producing material, expressing themselves, and even generating income in addition to consuming content. To provide a secure and encouraging online environment for these budding young creators, this disruptive trend demands a sophisticated knowledge of children's digital experiences.

Keywords: content creation, functional analysis, narrative methods, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, content styles, digital media platforms, NFT

1. Introduction

A social-constructivist perspective views children as active constructors of knowledge. Child consumers have been the emphasis of growing attention from marketing and media communicators recently. We can regard the knowledge of children's persuasive power over their parents' purchasing behaviour as one of the most significant reasons for this particular interest, however, there are several more inherent factors. Children are appealing to marketers because they can influence their home environment, even if they are not a strong or economically influential demographic. Social media usage among children is still on the increase. Millions of children follow videos, blogs, and vlogs (video blogs), which have grown quite popular (Lin et al., 2018). Even the professionals in

marketing and the media are aware that a child's persuasive ability grows with age; hence, their messaging is mostly aimed at younger customers. Traditional and innovative marketing communications strategies are employed to accomplish this goal, which is to persuade the young customer of the value of possessing a certain good or service, with familiar surroundings (school, family) being tactfully included in the communication process.

Young children also influence their families' purchasing habits (Bertol et al., 2017). As a result, the study's main objectives are to ascertain certain marketing communication tools and use specific narrative forms and visual methods that encourage young customers to create digital content and

promote their self. Academics such as educators, psychologists, and sociologists draw attention to the detrimental effects of endorsing materialism and advocate for regulations limiting advertising directed toward minors (McNaught, 2021). The acceptance of preventative and intervention techniques that will take into consideration the unique developmental characteristics of children and teens is where the value of the information resides (McAloon & Lazarou, 2019). By the time they are five years old, one in ten children will possess a smartphone, tablet, or other mobile device (Dilci & Eranil, 2019). For the ecology of advertising, kids have always been both a resource and a commodity. Over the last few years, with internet access, children have also become successful online content generators and have garnered followers. With a varied and widespread viewership base, the children's generated content in turn has generated revenue and has turned them into entrepreneurs, advertisers, influencers, and marketers. The probe showcases how children have transformed from being passive content gobblers to informed content creators.

1.1 Methodology and research significance:

Understanding children's fundamental motives and how these impact market dynamics is still lacking, even though children are producing and sharing information online more often. Conventional approaches disregard children's agency as producers and participants in the social creation of meaning, viewing them as passive consumers.

This article analyses children's messages in burgeoning online markets using a social construction theory methodology. By employing a thorough analysis of academic journals and papers, the researchers investigate how children actively shape these digital environments' meanings, negotiate identities, and affect market dynamics.

The researchers investigate how children's interactions and content contribute to the social construction of meaning inside developing online platforms using a qualitative content analysis of research articles. This research attempts to refute oversimplified consumer-centric viewpoints and shed light on children's agency.

2. Children as Creators, Consumers, and the Lure of Marketisation:

Youngsters are actively influencing online spaces as prolific creators rather than only being passive consumers of digital material (Manago & McKenzie, 2022). This dual function involves intricate dynamics entwined with profit-driven market forces. Children use social media sites like YouTube, NFT market places and Instagram as producers to express themselves, create groups, and even monetise (Hudders et al., 2024). But these platforms also use influencer marketing and targeted advertising, which makes it harder to distinguish between genuine expression and commercialisation and may make kids more susceptible to manipulation (Ait-Lamkadem, S., & Smail, O. 2020). Children are exposed to marketing tactics as customers who make use of their emotional reactivity and developing cognitive capacities (De Veirman et al., 2019). Persuasive design, influencer endorsements, and gamification encourage impulsive buying and brand devotion, which raises moral questions regarding manipulation and its effects on children's development. Collaboration among researchers, platforms, politicians, and parents is necessary to navigate this complex terrain and guarantee that children's rights, welfare, and essential media literacy skills take precedence over commercial forces (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014). Then and only then will there be a digital environment where kids can flourish as consumers and producers, given voice and without being taken advantage of commerciality and businesses.

2.1 Marketing and Media Communication Strategies for the Child as Consumer:

Online advertising often employs stealth marketing strategies, such as product placement in movies, websites, and video games, which are products of more recent marketing strategies. Marketers utilise paid public displays of products and services across a variety of media to sway children's attention towards the products or services and interest in buying projected things. These presentations are based on the "Four Ps" of marketing: product, place, pricing, and promotion (Goi, 2009). Toys, sugar-coated cereals, fast food joints, candies, and other items targeted towards children have mostly not changed throughout time (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992). However, these same things are

increasingly being targeted online to children by marketers (Weber et al., 2006). Children and teenagers have become increasingly powerful consumers throughout time, even if the things that are advertised to them haven't changed much (Marshall, 2010). Young children have become a market that corporations actively pursue due to the luxury of today's young. These days, young people have annual spending power in the billions.

Communication and marketing strategies for media messaging to children are numerous and the perspectives highlight the role that personal selling plays in an organization's effectiveness. These theories include the behavioural equation theory, the purchasing formula theory, the proper set of circumstances theory, and the AIDAS (Securing attention, interest, desire, and action) theory of selling (Ahinful & Asomaning, 2017). The amount of time individuals spend viewing internet information has expanded with the introduction of digital technology. Children of today are raised in a digital age with widespread access to communication tools and the internet (Ersoy, 2019). Even though children have a big say in what their families buy, there are ethical issues with direct marketing tactics that target them. Persuasive strategies used by advertisers include emotional appeals, catchy jingles, and cartoon mascot characters. The growth of influencer marketing makes it more difficult to distinguish between natural material and covert advertisements, which might lead to children making unhealthy decisions. Effective communication and ethical responsibility must be balanced, which requires:

- (a) **Transparency and Disclosure:** Giving parents and kids the information they need to make educated decisions is made possible by clearly disclosing sponsored content and influencer collaborations.
- (b) **Targeting responsibly:** Focuses on concentrating on goods that are suitable for the target audience's age and avoiding deceptive methods that take undue advantage of weaknesses.
- (c) **Encouraging health and well-being:** Giving priority to messages that stress responsible consumption and good

practices rather than depending just on emotional reactions.

- (d) **Collaborative Efforts:** Bringing together, educators, legislators, and child advocate organisations will work to develop and implement moral standards for marketing to children.

To successfully navigate this complicated environment, marketing strategies must change to become more ethical and open, guaranteeing that children's rights and welfare come before financial gain.

2.2 Marketing and Media Communication Strategies for Children as Content Producers:

Young children who were formerly passive consumers of material are now actively reshaping online spaces as creators, marking a remarkable transformation in the digital world. This change forces the marketing sector to review its approaches. Directly targeting children using conventional techniques that are loaded with deceptive strategies creates moral questions and runs the danger of taking advantage of their weaknesses (Lavuri & Aileni, 2021). Rather, a conceptual change that places an emphasis on openness and responsible communication is required. Children and their guardians are given the power to make educated decisions through disclosures and the unambiguous labelling of sponsored material. Age-appropriate messaging and conscientious targeting ought to take the place of strategies that take advantage of cognitive limitations or emotional reactions. Children can also actively participate in their own marketing methods. Instead of depending just on deceptive attractions, collaborative activities with businesses may capitalise on their originality and authenticity, encouraging healthy behaviours and ethical consumption. Ensuring children's well-being is prioritised and may be further achieved by collaborating with child advocacy groups and educators to develop age-appropriate legislation and ethical principles. Marketers need to take the initiative in response to this shift. In the future, marketing will involve working with young creators to create a responsible and engaging digital environment rather than merely focusing on consumer targeting. This may be achieved by embracing children's agency, design processes and placing a high value on ethical practices (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014).

The emergence of children as content providers necessitates a re-examination of marketing tactics. While there are frameworks provided by models like AIDAS (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action, Satisfaction) and DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results), they must be modified to be used responsibly by children as advergames are gradually gaining popularity because of their persuasiveness and enjoyment factors (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2008).

Promotion of children's content shouldn't rely on deceptive strategies that take advantage of their developing cognitive capacities. Organic growth of showcased channels may garner attention and inspire children to share what they have created on platforms they are already in associated with. Relatable topics and stories should pique people's interest rather than making wild claims or feeling under pressure to go viral.

Emotionally charged appeals or manufactured scarcity should not be used to drive desire. Instead, emphasise the importance of developing one's unique voice, fostering community, and picking up new skills. There should be no undue pressure to execute or excessive commercialisation of an action. Through collaborations with advocacy organisations and child educators, it may emphasise involvement, constructive relationships, and the provision of responsible material.

Satisfaction shouldn't depend exclusively on approval from others or endorsements from brands. Encourage delight in the process of producing, interacting with others, and giving back to the online community. Then, DAGMAR becomes essential, establishing quantifiable objectives that put welfare ahead of profits. Track meaningful content production, good interaction, and responsible digital citizenship instead of likes, views, or monetisation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is in line with this ethical strategy, which guarantees that children's best interests come first. We can empower young innovators, encourage positive online conduct, and create a digital future where their views are heard rather than silenced by modifying AIDAS and DAGMAR to fit the needs of responsible children-oriented marketing and create positive outcomes (Cho et al., 2024).

3. Narrative Formats Employed on Popular Online Platforms:

Children are actively reshaping online worlds through varied content production on sites like YouTube, Instagram, and NFT markets, going beyond mere passive watching. The unique story structures of these "kidfluencers" need to be analysed in light of their rise (Jung et al., 2022). The following categories apply to the YouTube and Instagram videos that are watched the most: (a) do-it-yourself (DIY) videos; (b) unboxing videos; (c) walkthrough videos; (d) product reviews; and (e) shop visits (Treviño & Morton, 2019).

- (a) **DIY & Upcycling:** Children learn about the world through the generation of knowledge and the hacking (moulding) of content as autonomous, self-determining learning that is firmly anchored in early childhood experiences of open-ended inquiry, theory building, testing, and reflection (Hibbert & Gillett, 2009). Children bring their ingenuity to "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) instructions, drawing viewers in with humour and personalisation. They are inspired by adult material. Upcycling projects demonstrate creativity and problem-solving while adding an eco-conscious edge. Through content production and community building, people in these areas become "experts," and sharing becomes an integral part of learning (Kuznetsov & Paulos, 2010).
- (b) **Product Reviews & Unboxing:** Driven by enthusiasm and expectation, children make unboxing videos where they share real-life responses and thought-provoking explorations. These frequently turn into product evaluations, influencing younger audiences with relevant viewpoints (Bozzola et al., 2022).
- (c) **Walkthroughs & Playthroughs:** Using gaming platforms, children make walkthroughs and playthroughs where they share experiences and provide advice and tactics, fostering a sense of community. These stories frequently highlight teamwork and problem-solving abilities (Khoirunnisa, 2020).
- (d) **Brand Collaborations & Store Visits:** By embracing influencer marketing, companies work with children to create

sponsored content and store visits. Although these stories raise questions regarding exploitation, they provide insights into children's purchasing habits and their involvement in corporate advertising (Calvert, 2008).

- (e) Short-Form Content & Viral Potential: Children have been making short, eye-catching videos for Instagram Reels and TikTok. Their stories are fuelled by humour, music, and popular challenges, which attract people from across the world and promote a sense of community. However, the drive to become viral may also lead to unreasonable expectations and performance anxiety (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

Navigating the complexity of children's online presence requires an understanding of these disparate formats and the underlying motives behind them. Researchers, platforms, and parents must work together to create a nurturing and secure atmosphere that fosters children's creativity while preserving their well-being and moral engagement in the digital world.

3.1 Case Studies of Children Run Successful YouTube and Instagram Handles:

The following case studies showcase the usage of a) do-it-yourself (DIY) videos; (b) unboxing videos; (c) walkthrough videos; (d) product reviews; and (e) shop visits.

- (a) Ryan's World (YouTube):

Author: Ryan Kaji

Background: Ryan Kaji produces instructional films, toy reviews, and challenges with the assistance of his family.

Success: With 36.4M subscribers and 2.6K videos it has successful collaborations with toy brands and other sources, Ryan's World has grown to become one of the most well-known YouTube channels.

- (b) Ella and Alex (Instagram):

Creators: Ella and Alex Weaver

Background: Two sisters named Ella and Alex use Instagram to showcase their creativity and sisterly relationship by sharing their travels, do-it-yourself projects, and family experiences.

Success: With 1,417 posts and 588K followers their lovable material has attracted devoted following, opening doors for sponsored posts and corporate partnerships.

- (c) Kids Diana Show (YouTube):

Creator: Diana

Background: Diana is a young Ukrainian child who appears on her family's YouTube channel in videos that include challenges, pretend play, and educational information.

Success: With a total of 119M subscribers and 1.1K videos, The Kids Diana Show, has resulted in partnerships with children's entertainment firms and merchandising agreements globally.

- (d) Gavin Thomas (Instagram):

Creator: Gavin Thomas

Background: Gavin, often known as "Baby Gavin," rose to stardom on Vine before moving to Instagram to share hilarious skits, impressions, and family memories.

Success: With 1224 posts and 1.3M followers Gavin has a sizable Instagram following because of his humorous videos, which have helped him work with businesses and make appearances on TV shows.

- (e) Julianna, Miya, and Keira (YouTube):

Creators: Julianna, Miya, and Keira Stauffer

Background: The Stauffer sisters showcase their everyday lives and sibling interactions on their family's YouTube channel through family vlogs, challenges, and lifestyle videos.

Success: With 263K subscribers and 2.1K videos their channel has become more well-known, drawing a devoted following as well as chances for sponsored material and brand collaborations.

- (f) Txunami (Instagram):

Creator: Txunami

Background: Txunami is a young model and fashionista who captivates her audience with her immaculate sense of style by posting her excursions, beauty secrets, and trendy ensembles.

Success: With 137 posts and 5.1M followers Txunami has developed her personal brand, worked with fashion businesses, and attended fashion events to become a well-known influencer on Instagram.

- (g) Everleigh Rose (YouTube and Instagram):

Creator: Everleigh Soutas

Background: Everleigh showcases her ability and personality through her family-supported content creation on YouTube and Instagram, which includes dancing videos and vlogs.

Success: Has 406 posts and 5M subscribers on Instagram, 667K subscribers and 47 videos on YouTube, Everleigh has been able to pursue acting, modelling, and brand collaborations.

(h) GamerGirl (YouTube):

Creator: KarinaOMG

Background: Karina, also known as GamerGirl, appeals to a younger audience interested in gaming content with her gaming challenges, vlogs, and videos on her channel.

Success: With 5.98M subscribers and 1.7K videos GamerGirl has opened doors for sponsorships in the form of item sales and collaborations with gaming brands.

4. Children and the NFT Frontier:

Children as creators have emerged as a unique development in the rapidly expanding field of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). The intricacies of cryptocurrencies and possible legal ambiguities make this development intriguing, but it also demands careful investigation. NFTs may be used by children to sell digital art, express their creativity, and even build virtual communities (Ågren & Aarsand, 2024). Parental supervision and platform assistance are necessary because to the financial concerns. It is essential to comprehend the swings in bitcoin prices, prudent spending practices, and the legal ramifications of possession. To guarantee informed involvement, platforms can incorporate parental control mechanisms, educational resources, and age-appropriate interfaces (Amagir et al., 2017). Although children's creative curiosity may be fostered in the NFT sphere, it is imperative to prioritise financial literacy and ensure their safety. To properly and ethically traverse this unfamiliar region, cooperation between parents, educators, and platform creators is imperative. The introduction of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) has given kids a new platform to express their creativity and potentially get money from their digital artwork. Though intriguing, it calls into question the narrative structures that are often used in this field. Well-known websites such as Nifty Gateway and Foundation provide a variety of choices, encouraging investigations:

(a) Static Visuals: Children produce eye-catching digital paintings, and graphics that are frequently filled with observations or anecdotes from their own lives. These

still NFTs demonstrate the creators' creative ability and capacity for visual narrative (O'Halloran, 2008).

- (b) Short Video Clips: Animation and music may be added to concise, captivating stories using platforms such as Mintable. Children use familiar topics, humour, and current music trends to draw in viewers.
- (c) Interactive Experiences: Creating virtual worlds next to NFT artwork is made possible by more sophisticated systems like Cryptovoxels. Youngsters can create interactive games or immersive galleries, combining human interaction with spatial design to create storytelling.
- (d) Collaborative Creations: Async Art and other such platforms encourage youngsters to engage with seasoned artists on larger pieces of art. This style promotes narrative experiences that are shared throughout communities.

It is essential to comprehend these many story structures to analyse how the field of child-created NFTs is changing. Navigating legal issues, financial accountability, and possible exploitation problems need parental supervision and platform assistance. As this field develops, it will be crucial to take ethical issues and age-appropriate resources into account to provide a secure and supportive environment where young artists may explore their artistic expression via the lens of NFTs.

4.1 Case Studies of Successful Children NFT:

The NFTs are digital collectibles, trading cards, utility and security tokens, Virtual real estate, Gaming tokens, Virtual fashion, Music and media tokens and Event tokens.

(a) Pixelmatic (Decentraland):

Creator: A young artist named Sarah (pseudonym)

Platform: Decentraland (A platform for virtual reality developed on the Ethereum blockchain)

Background: Twelve-year-old Sarah, a budding digital artist, drew inspiration for her pixel art figures from cartoons and video games she loved. Her parents encouraged her to pursue her artistic interests, and they educated her about NFTs and decentralised platforms such as Decentraland.

Success: Sarah created her NFTs using pixel art on the Decentraland marketplace. She

managed the process of putting her artwork up for sale and advertising it on social media with her parents' assistance. As a result of the Decentraland community's interest in her collection, collectors, and enthusiasts finally sold everything, giving Sarah a sizeable profit in cryptocurrency. Sarah's accomplishments demonstrated the ease of use and empowerment that NFT platforms can provide to emerging artists, allowing them to exhibit and earn money from their work in a decentralised online environment.

(b) CryptoKitties (Ethereum blockchain):

Creators: Aiden and Emily (pseudonyms)

Platform: Ethereum blockchain (CryptoKitties, a blockchain-based virtual game)

Background: The siblings Aiden and Emily, who are 11 and 9 years old, respectively, were first exposed to blockchain technology by their early adopters of cryptocurrency, their parents. The twins decided to start their collection of digital assets because they were intrigued by the idea of digital ownership and distinctive tokens.

Success: Through their parents' instruction, Aiden and Emily became knowledgeable about Ethereum smart contracts and the ERC-721 token standard, which is utilised to create NFTs. They came up with the idea and created a range of distinct digital cats, each with special qualities. The Ethereum blockchain was then used to mint these cats as NFTs, which were then offered for sale on the CryptoKitties marketplace. Even while their collection was still small, Aiden and Emily's cats quickly became well-known among CryptoKitties fans, and some of their virtual pets even went up for significant cryptocurrency transactions. Their accomplishments showed how children might be involved in the developing NFT market, using their imaginations and IT skills to produce and sell digital content.

(c) Art Blocks (Ethereum blockchain):

Creator: Alex, a 13-year-old digital artist

Platform: Ethereum blockchain (Art Blocks, a generative art NFT platform)

Background: Alex began exploring with generative art approaches utilising code at an early age, having realised his interest in digital art. He was motivated to produce his line-up of generative art by the colourful and abstract works on Art Blocks.

Success: Alex built a variety of distinctive generative art algorithms that created captivating visual compositions and patterns under the tutelage of his parents and mentors in the digital art world. He minted his works on Art Blocks as NFTs and shared them on social media. Alex's inventive approach to generative art inspired collectors and art aficionados, resulting in his creations selling out rapidly on the Art Blocks marketplace. Alex's accomplishment showed that young artists may succeed in the NFT area by experimenting with new digital art media.

(d) SuperRare (Ethereum blockchain):

Creator: Lily, a 10-year-old digital illustrator

Platform: Ethereum blockchain (SuperRare is an online marketplace dedicated to rare digital art.)

Background: Digital illustration became Lily's interest at an early age, and she began posting her artwork on social media. She investigated potential in the NFT area when the digital art community took an interest in her vibrant and quirky graphics.

Success: Lily started minting her digital artworks as NFTs on SuperRare, a website where art aficionados and collectors could buy rare digital assets. Her paintings, which frequently featured adorable creatures and exotic settings, attracted a lot of attention on the site, and some of them sold for a high price in cryptocurrency. Lily's success on SuperRare not only gave her a way to create income but also attested to her ability and originality as a young NFT ecosystem digital artist.

(e) KnownOrigin (Ethereum blockchain):

Creator: Max, a 14-year-old digital painter

Platform: Ethereum blockchain (KnownOrigin, a platform for digital art NFTs)

Background: Max used internet courses and art groups to find his passion for digital painting and craftsmanship. He chose to display his works on KnownOrigin after being influenced by well-known digital artists there.

Success: Max established a distinct aesthetic that was defined by vivid hues, minute details, and fantastical subjects. His digital paintings were first offered for sale as NFTs on KnownOrigin, where collectors and art aficionados took an interest in them. Max gained recognition as a bright young artist in the digital art NFT market when his works of art on the platform swiftly sold out. His accomplishments enriched the digital art

ecosystem by inspiring other up-and-coming artists to investigate NFT platforms as channels for exhibiting and monetising their work.

These case studies demonstrate how children may take part in and profit from the expanding NFT ecosystem by using their imaginations and technological know-how to produce worthwhile digital content on blockchain platforms. Young people who are passionate about digital art and creativity may use NFT platforms to exhibit their abilities, connect with a worldwide audience, and get paid and recognised for their work.

5. Conclusion:

The combination of ideas with create a nuanced portrait of infancy in the digital era. Though children have a lot of creative potential and can use the internet to express themselves and even make money, there are issues with marketing ethics, different story formats, and the emerging NFT market. The key takeaway is to practise collective responsibility. The rights and welfare of children must come before business interests in marketing tactics, which must place a high priority on openness and age-appropriate message. To provide a secure and empowering online environment, parents and platforms must work together to comprehend the complex narratives that children generate. To manage complexity and ensure ethical engagement in the NFT world, competent advice, and age-appropriate tools are essential. Messages targeted at children were previously created using traditional marketing models like AIDAS and DAGMAR. The roles have now been reversed. Since they are becoming skilled content producers, children are actively using these same models to promote their own material on digital media. Marketing tactics must be reframed in light of this change. Rather than targeting children, businesses should work with them, recognising their autonomy and ethical principles. Children may be empowered to make educated decisions regarding content production and internet interaction by utilising platforms that incorporate instructional features. With the right digital literacy training, parents can help their kids navigate the complexity of internet marketing. This changing environment necessitates careful behaviour. Through models like AIDAS and DAGMAR, children

are reinventing marketing, and by understanding this, we can navigate a future where digital spaces foster creativity, put children's welfare first, and empower them to become more than simply consumers but also responsible and empowered online content producers.

The case studies demonstrate how children may flourish in this environment, giving parents a ray of hope. They may become recognised, engage with audiences around the world, and add to the NFT ecosystem by utilising their creativity and technological know-how. But this potential has to be developed in an ethical environment that puts their welfare and responsible participation first. Moving forward, a multifaceted strategy is essential. Researchers need to keep looking at what children are doing online so that lawmakers and platforms can create tools and rules that are appropriate for children's ages. To securely lead their children, parents must possess digital literacy abilities. In the end, everyone involved must work together to create a responsible and moral digital environment to make sure that kids not only succeed in the virtual world but also have a positive and significant impact on their future.

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