JYU DISSERTATIONS 775

Sonali Srivastava

Advertising Ethics and Children as Consumers in Digital Environments

JYU DISSERTATIONS 775

Sonali Srivastava

Advertising Ethics and Children as Consumers in Digital Environments

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa S212
toukokuun 17. päivänä 2024 kello 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of
the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä,
in building Seminarium, old festival hall S212, on May 17, 2024, at 12 o'clock.

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2024

Editors
Olli-Pekka Moisio
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä
Päivi Vuorio
Open Science Centre, University of Jyväskylä

Copyright © 2024, by the author and University of Jyväskylä

ISBN 978-952-86-0131-9 (PDF)
URN:ISBN:978-952-86-0131-9
ISSN 2489-9003

Permanent link to this publication: http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-86-0131-9

ABSTRACT

Srivastava, Sonali
Advertising ethics and children as consumers in digital environments
Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2024, 91 p. + original articles
(JYU Dissertations
ISSN 2489-9003; 775)
ISBN 978-952-86-0131-9 (PDF)

Children are a significant consumer group and active users of digital platforms. This dissertation aims to explore concerns related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments and how children navigate contemporary digital commercial environments.

To examine macro-level ethical concerns that advertisements (re)produce societal stereotypes, girls' portrayals in fifteen contemporary fast fashion advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of Nordic fast fashion companies H&M, Lindex, Kappahl, and Gina Tricot were analysed by using visual discourse analysis. Advertisements addressing buyers of teenage girls' clothing in Finland, available from January 2019 to June 2020, were examined. Moreover, to examine ethical concerns regarding the privacy invasiveness of contemporary advertising formats, eight (*N* = 38) focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to explore children's perspectives on online profiling and targeted advertisements and their privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context. The FGDs were conducted with participants aged 13 to 16 in schools in Finland's capital region between December 2020 and May 2021. The FGD data was analysed by using thematic analysis.

The results suggest that the analysed advertisements portrayed girls in avidly stereotypical ways or used complex images that subtly reproduced stereotypes. While discussing contemporary advertising formats, some participants raised the macro-level ethical concern that targeted advertisements may encourage over-consumption. Some expressed ethical concerns regarding (i) the opacity of online data gathering processes and resultant privacy-invasive advertisements, (ii) experiences of privacy-invasiveness from online profiling, (iii) challenges in opting out of online data collection and (iv) the long-term ramifications of online profiling and targeting in limiting their choices and perspectives. Some children found contemporary online advertising formats unproblematic because they (i) deemed online profiling non-intrusive, (ii) found targeted advertisements helpful, and (iii) considered the monitoring of their previous online activities as "normal". While navigating contemporary commercial digital environments, children adopted some practices that helped them protect their online commercial privacy, at least to some extent. In contrast, certain practices made them vulnerable to digital commercial surveillance.

Keywords: children, online privacy, advertisements

TIIVISTELMÄ

Srivastava Sonali
Mainonnan eettisyys ja lapset kuluttajina digitaalisissa ympäristöissä
Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2024, 91 s. + alkuperäiset artikkelit
(JYU Dissertations
ISSN 2489-9003; 775)
ISBN 978-952-86-0131-9 (PDF)

Lapset ovat merkittävä kuluttajaryhmä ja aktiivisia digitaalisten alustojen käyttäjiä. Tämän väitöskirjan tavoitteena on tarkastella mainonnan eettisyyttä lasten digitaalisissa ympäristöissä sekä sitä, miten lapset navigoivat nykyajan digitaalisissa kaupallisissa ympäristöissä.

Tarkastellakseen laajoja eettisiä huolenaiheita mainosten kyvystä (uudelleen)tuottaa yhteiskunnallisia stereotypioita, väitöskirjassa analysoidaan visuaalisen diskurssianalyysin avulla tyttöjen kuvaamista viidessätoista tämänhetkisessä pikamuotimainoksessa, jotka ovat julkisesti esillä pohjoismaisten pikamuotiyritysten H&M:n, Lindexin, Kappahlin ja Gina Tricot'n Facebook-sivuilla. Tarkasteltavat mainokset olivat teini-ikäisten tyttöjen vaatteiden ostajille suunnatut, tammikuusta 2019 kesäkuuhun 2020 saatavilla olleet mainokset Suomessa. Tarkastellakseen myös nykyisten mainosformaattien eettisiä yksityisyysongelmia järjestettiin kahdeksan (N=38) fokusryhmäkeskustelua, joissa tarkasteltiin lasten näkökulmia profilointiin ja kohdennettuun mainontaan verkossa sekä heidän yksityisyyskäytäntöjään ja navigoimistaan digitaalisessa kaupallisessa kontekstissa. Fokusryhmäkeskustelut järjestettiin Suomessa pääkaupunkiseudun kouluissa 13–16-vuotiaille osallistujille joulukuun 2020 ja toukokuun 2021 välillä. Fokusryhmäkeskusteluaineisto analysoitiin käyttämällä temaattista analyysia.

Tulosten mukaan tutkimuksessa analysoidut mainokset esittivät tytöt stereotyyppisessä valossa tai käyttivät monitahoisia kuvia, jotka uudelleentuottivat stereotypioita hienovaraisesti. Nykyisistä mainosformaateista keskustellessa osa osallistujista nosti esiin laajan eettisen huolensa siitä, että kohdennetut mainokset saattavat kannustaa ylikulutukseen. Osa taas ilmaisi eettisen huolensa i) verkkotiedonkeruun läpinäkymättömyydestä ja siitä seuraavista yksityisyyttä loukkaavista mainoksista, ii) yksityisyyttä loukkaavista verkkoprofilointikokemuksistaan, iii) haasteista kieltäytyä verkkotiedonkeruusta ja iv) verkkoprofiloinnin ja kohdentamisen pitkän aikavälin seurauksena tapahtuvasta heidän valintojensa ja näkökulmiensa rajoittamisesta. Jotkut lapsista eivät pitäneet nykyisiä verkkomainontaformaatteja ongelmallisina, sillä he i) eivät pitäneet verkkoprofilointia tunkeilevana, ii) pitivät kohdennettuja mainoksia hyödyllisinä ja iii) pitivät aiemman verkkotoimintansa seuraamista ”normaalina”. Navigoidessaan nykyisissä kaupallisissa digiympäristöissä lapset omaksuivat joitain käytäntöjä, jotka jossain määrin auttoivat heitä suojaamaan verkkoyksityisyyttänsä kaupallisessa kontekstissa. Toisaalta tietyt toimintatavat päinvastoin tekivät heistä haavoittuvaisia digitaaliselle kaupalliselle valvonnalle.

Avainsanat: lapset, verkkoyksityisyys, mainokset

Author Sonali Srivastava
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä
Email sonali.s.srivastava@jyu.fi
ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1871-5023

Supervisors Professor Terhi-Anna Wilska
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä

Markku Lonkila
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of Jyväskylä

Reviewers Anna Sparrman
Linköping University

Sirkku Kotilainen
University of Tampere

Opponent Sirkku Kotilainen
Faculty of Information Technology and Communication
University of Tampere

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Working on an article-based doctoral dissertation is akin to hurdling in athletics. Publishing each article can be compared to crossing an obstacle, with the day of public examination constituting the finishing line. As I approach the finish line, I would like to thank those who supported me in this journey.

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my main supervisor, Professor Terhi-Anna Wilska, for her valuable guidance, support, and time. Thank you, Terhi-Anna, for commenting on my research plans, article manuscripts and dissertation. I am also grateful for the funding and opportunity you provided me to work full-time in the DigiConsumers project. Additionally, I am extremely grateful to the funding bodies – The Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland, University of Jyväskylä's Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, and Ellen ja Artturi Nyyssösen säätiö. I also thank the schools that agreed to participate in my research and the children who took part in the focus group discussions. This research would not have been possible without their enthusiasm and interesting discussions.

I am grateful to Associate Professor Johanna Sjöberg from Linköping University, Sweden, who co-authored my first article. Johanna's insightful comments enhanced my understanding of reflexive writing in visual research. I also thank my co-author in the second and third articles, Dr Jussi Nyrhinen, especially for his help in collecting the data. Jussi's further exploration of certain important points raised by the participants enriched the data. Additionally, I am grateful to Matilda Holkkola, who was working as a research assistant for the DigiConsumers project during the time I collected the data for my second and third articles. Matilda provided valuable help in collecting, transcribing, and translating the data in Finnish. I also thank Matilda for helping me in writing the dissertation abstract in Finnish. I extend my thanks to Julia Nuckols for editing some of the Finnish text I wrote in the dissertation and in the information letter for schools.

I am grateful to Professor Sakari Tapaile for his insightful comments on my dissertation in the Digital Life seminar. I also thank my second supervisor, Professor Markku Lonkila, for his helpful comments on my dissertation. I am thankful to the pre-examiners of this dissertation, Professor Sirkku Kotilainen and Professor Anna Sparrman, for their valuable comments that have helped me refine this dissertation. I thank Professor Sirkku Kotilainen for being the opponent in this dissertation's public examination.

My dissertation would not have been possible without the constant support of my family, both in India and Finland. I thank my father, my sister and her family for their emotional support. I am grateful to my family in Finland, my husband Manish, and our two children, Tiia and Megh. Thank you, Manish, for being a patient listener and sounding board for my thoughts and ideas. Thank you, Tiia and Megh, for your jokes, which helped me relax. Lastly, I would like to thank Finnish nature (Suomen luonto) because taking long walks in the woods was a major destresser for me throughout this journey.

Espoo, April 2024
Sonali Srivastava

TABLES

TABLE 1 Summary of the articles and the research questions......................18
TABLE 2 The author’s contribution to each article in this dissertation 20
TABLE 3 Summary of group composition..57
TABLE 4 The main contributions of each article in this dissertation 65

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
TABLES
CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ... 11
1.1 Background of the study ... 11
1.2 Description of the target group ... 13
1.3 Research questions and dissertation structure ... 17

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ... 21
2.1 Children and consumption ... 21
2.1.1 The emergence of children as consumers ... 21
2.1.2 Research on children as consumers: Dichotomous views and the need to move away from dichotomies ... 28
2.1.3 How this study conceptualises children and children's consumption ... 31
2.2 Advertising ethics ... 32
2.3 Children in advertisements ... 34
2.4 Commercial targeting of children ... 38
2.4.1 Advertising to children through magazines, Saturday matinees and the radio ... 38
2.4.2 Advertising to children on television ... 39
2.4.3 Advertising to children on the internet ... 42
2.5 Privacy in the digital commercial context ... 48
2.5.1 Research on children's privacy in the digital commercial context ... 49
2.6 Summary of research gaps ... 51

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ... 53
3.1 Methodology ... 53
3.1.1 Data collection and analysis ... 54
3.2. Ethical considerations ... 57

4. KEY RESULTS FROM THE ARTICLES ... 60
4.1 Article 1: Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements ... 60
4.2 Article 2: Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements ... 61
4.3 Article 3: Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context ... 63

5 DISCUSSION 66
5.1 Issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers and targets of marketing in digital environments 67
5.2 Reasons why children do not perceive contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic 69
5.3 How children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments that raise ethical concerns related to user data collection and profiling 70
5.4 Implications 71
5.5 Contribution 73
5.5.1 Contribution to academic research 73
5.5.2 Practical contributions 75
5.6 Limitations and suggestions for future research 76

SUMMARY IN FINNISH 77

REFERENCES 79

ORIGINAL PAPERS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Digitalisation has rendered some traditional issues concerning advertising ethics more pertinent and introduced certain new challenges related to advertising ethics. Advertising ethics centres on "what *ought* to be done" (and not just what is legally permitted) while advertising (Cunningham, 1999, Ethics Defined section, para 1, emphasis original). Drumwright (2007) points out that the very term *advertising ethics* can invoke cynicism. It has been described as the "ultimate oxymoron" (Beltramini, 2003, p. 215). Some even express the view that the high cynicism against advertising is primarily because it is the most visible tool of a business (Beltramini, 2003; Cunningham, 1999). Nevertheless, ethics is considered an important subject of study in the advertising literature (Cunningham, 1999), although there is a need for more academic research in this field (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004). According to Drumwright (2007), an analysis of ethics in advertising has generally focused on the micro and macro levels, but these levels are not unconnected. The micro level primarily focuses on advertising's effects on individuals. Macro-level analysis has broadly focused on the societal level, and there are three main criticisms of advertising: (i) "encouraging excessive materialism", (ii) engendering or sustaining societal stereotypes, and (iii) "creating false values and the resulting problematic behaviours" (Drumwright, 2007, p. 406). Förster & Weish (2017) note that while digitalisation has made some of the concerns mentioned above more relevant, novel advertising formats prevalent in digital environments have brought forth new issues related to advertising and ethics. Significant contemporary concerns related to advertising and ethics are regarding the loss of user privacy in user data collection and analysis practices that inform online profiling and targeted advertisements, the non-transparent methods through which it is done and

nearly non-existent options for consumers to refuse online data collection (Förster & Weish, 2017).

Children are a formidable consumer group (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003; Schor, 2004; Buckingham, 2011) and significant users of various digital platforms (Stoilova et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2018; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2022). Therefore, the issues of advertising ethics identified above also concern children, and perhaps more so for two main reasons. Firstly, concerning the macro-level critique that advertisements (re)produce societal stereotypes, it has been recognised that the more vulnerable social groups are often stereotyped in advertisements (Drumwright, 2007; Cunningham, 1999; Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005), and, as Daniel Thomas Cook (2002) points out, children are relatively powerless as a social group because they cannot exercise much influence on how they get portrayed by advertisers. They also lack the ability to organise themselves to resist certain visual representations, unlike women and ethnic minorities (Cook, 2002). Post digitalisation, images (including advertisements) have become more ominous as digitalisation has facilitated their wider circulation (Rose, 2016; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018), which makes it even more vital to study how children are visually represented in advertisements available in digital environments, especially on social media platforms that reach wider audiences.

Secondly, concerning contemporary advertising formats, such as targeted advertising, that are informed by covert user data gathering and profiling, scholars suggest that online targeting, in which suggestions of content and advertisements are based on data from users' previous online activities, can be highly detrimental to children because they can limit their access to novel viewpoints and alternatives (Milkaite & Lievens, 2019). Due to the invisible and automated algorithmic decision-making processes that underpin online targeting, children may be offered limited choices at a crucial life stage when they undertake critical decisions pertaining to their lives (Milkaite & Lievens, 2019, 2020). Moreover, Sonia Livingstone and colleagues (2019a) point out that the widespread digital data-gathering practices can jeopardise children's data privacy and security. It also remains unclear how adeptly children recognise the persuasive intent of online targeted advertisements (Zarouali et al., 2020). Finally, tracking children's online information and activities threatens their right to privacy (UNICEF, 2018) and other rights enumerated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (van der Hof, 2016; Milkaite & Lievens, 2019). However, these issues of advertising ethics remain underexplored in relation to children as consumers in digital environments. Hence, this article-based dissertation focuses on these topics.

While researching children as consumers, an important consideration is how a research project conceptualises children. This study draws from the field of childhood studies in which children are conceptualised as social actors who are agentic in (re)constructing their social worlds and not passive subjects (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998). Using the conceptualisation of children as social actors, scholars from childhood studies, Anna Sparrman and Bengdt Sandin

(2012) underscore the importance of contextualising or situating children's consumption. "This means putting children in focus, in relation to consumption, and investigating how children take part in or are made part of consumer culture" (Sjöberg, 2015, p. 109). Emphasising the former, on somewhat similar lines, Cook (2010) underscores the importance of considering the plural ways in which children experience the commercial world as members in society. Guided by the idea of situating child consumption (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012; Sjöberg, 2015) and Cook's (2010) proposal to pay attention to children's multiple ways of approaching the commercial sphere, this dissertation focuses on how children are made part of the contemporary digital consumer culture and how they take part in it. The study is situated in the Finnish context. The main aim of the study and the research questions guiding this study are described below, but before that, a description of the target group is presented.

1.2 Description of the target group

This study focuses on children. While analysing the macro-level ethical concerns related to the visual representations of certain groups in advertisements, I have focused specifically on young girls. In sub-study article 1, I have analysed advertisements targeted at buyers of teenage girls' clothes. My motivation for analysing young girls' visual representations was primarily related to the general concern that girls' images are often sexualised (Merskin, 2004; Durham, 2007; Vänskä, 2017; Holland, 2004) and girls are usually depicted conventionally as, among other roles, innocent (Vänskä, 2017; Cann, 2012), future carers (Holland, 2004; Seiter, 1995). A need to have alternative visual representations of girlhoods has been emphasised, especially in relation to the sexualisation of girls' images (Coulter, 2010). Secondly, the argument that Cook (2002) makes about children being powerless in determining how commercial actors depict them and that they cannot protest against certain kinds of portrayals also applies to young girls. Young girls are rarely consulted in how they are visually represented, and they may not be able to easily organise themselves to resist certain visual representations. Moreover, they cannot influence how they are represented as they are not employed in the marketing departments of companies where such decisions are made.

I have specifically chosen to examine girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements because, historically, the clothing and fashion industry was one of the first to have identified young (teen) girls as a target group (Schrum, 2004; Cook, 2004b). Even in contemporary times, girls and young women remain a vital consumer group of fast fashion (Horton, 2018). Since girls are a major source of revenues for fast fashion companies, it is important to examine how fast fashion companies portray girls and the notions they propagate about girls through their advertisements. Simply put, in choosing to examine fast fashion advertisements, my main objective was to explore if fast fashion companies provided the much-needed alternative visual portrayals of girlhoods or if they sustain stereotypical

ideas about young femininities. The portrayal of girls in fast fashion companies' advertisements remains under-researched. Secondly, girls' visual representation in advertised images available on a platform like Facebook, which targets advertising to consumers from varied age brackets (Omnicore, 2021) and is accessible to a vast number of audiences, is understudied.

The study focuses specifically on the advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of Nordic fast fashion companies Hennes & Mauritz (H&M), Lindex, Kappahl, and Gina Tricot. These companies have committed to encouraging gender equality in their workforce and also among the people in their supply chain (H&M, 2019; Lindex, 2019; Kappahl, 2018, 2019; Gina Tricot, 2016, 2019). Such commitments, which involve incorporating societally responsible values in a company's internal programmes, fall into the category of "institutionalised" corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Pirch et al., 2007, p. 126). The institutionalised CSR programmes, especially those aimed at encouraging workforce gender equality, of companies that deploy women-empowering advertising messages have been critically scrutinised (e.g., Sterbenk et al., 2022). However, it is under-researched how companies that announce institutionalised CSR initiatives towards encouraging workforce gender equality depict young girls in their advertisements. It is necessary and interesting to explore this also from the perspective of advertising ethics, not least because advertisements, especially those available in digital environments, reach various societal audiences and are an important means for companies to communicate with society. Moreover, given that scholars have consistently emphasised that ethical advertising, especially advertising that challenges gender stereotypes, is a useful tool for companies to reflect their ethical commitments towards society (Stevens & Östberg, 2012; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002), it may be reasonable to expect such companies to challenge conventional gender norms in their advertisements.

The second and third sub-study articles in this dissertation examine how children aged 13 to 16 years interpret contemporary practices like online profiling and targeted advertisements and how they negotiate their privacy against commercial data gatherers, respectively. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in May 2018 in the European Union (EU), prompted me to consider this age group for my study. The age of digital consent is the legally designated age at which an individual can consent to online data collection without requiring parent's approval (Pasquale et al., 2020). The GDPR advocates setting the digital age of consent between 13 and 16 years and leaves it to the discretion of EU member countries to decide what age they choose in this range, which means that parental approval or special permission is not required before gathering the data of children falling into this age group for commercial purposes, as would be needed for younger children as per Article 8 of the GDPR (Livingstone, 2018). Underlying this recommendation is a presupposition that children belonging to this age group understand consent mechanisms (Livingstone, 2018; Keen, 2020). However, children have not been consulted before fixing this age range and there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding what this age group understands about data protection and online privacy

(Livingstone, 2018). Therefore, to address this paucity of empirical evidence, my study focuses on the perspectives and practices of children aged 13 to 16 years (the age bracket recommended in the GDPR for setting the age of digital consent) residing in an EU member state, Finland.

It is perhaps important to provide a justification for the terminology I have used to refer to the research participants. As mentioned above, in all the sub-study articles the focus has been on what could be termed the teenage group. However, in this dissertation, I do not describe them as teenagers. Instead, I have used the term children to refer to this group. The reasons for doing so are discussed below.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish between what has been seen as a socio-cultural perspective of childhood, youth and adulthood and a developmental view. Wyn (2015) notes that a social constructionist perspective views the categories of childhood, youth and adulthood as fluid and determined by historical, social, cultural, institutional and economic contexts. In contrast, a developmental perspective would argue for childhood, youth and adulthood to be age-bound categories (Wyn, 2015). I ascribe to a social constructionist view of childhood as elaborated in the field of childhood studies, which conceptualises childhood as a social and cultural construction and treats children as agents who participate in (re)constructing their social lives (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998). Childhood studies as a field resists developmental psychology's age-based classifications, which are considered somewhat reductionist (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998; James & James, 2012). Since the word teenage is an age-based classification and does not reflect the conceptualisation of childhood I ascribe to, I prefer to use the term *children* instead.

Moreover, the fluidity of concepts like childhood, youth and adulthood has been underscored in the changing societal context. It is claimed that post-modern societies have brought significant changes to the life of young people, and the transformation to adulthood does not necessarily take place at the age it used to because young people are spending longer in education and gaining employment later (Hunt, 2016; Threadgold, 2020). According to Hunt (2016), an elongation of youth is discernible. This is also reflected in the definition of youth as someone between 16 and 25 years of age in policy documents across different national contexts. Thus, youth now denotes people above the teenage years as opposed to the past, when teenage was largely tantamount to youth. At the same time, Hunt explains, developments like the inception of puberty earlier than in the past and the adoption of teenage fashion styles by younger children suggest that youth is also beginning earlier. Thus, youth is getting stretched in both directions (Hunt, 2016). While the fluidity of categories like childhood, youth and adulthood has been underscored by various researchers (Furlong, 2012; Wyn, 2015; Nayak & Kehily, 2013), the developments described above further undermine age-based gradations and increase the importance of viewing these categories as sociocultural (Hunt, 2016).

Secondly, Allison James and Adrian James (2012) note that an overemphasis on age-based gradation by childhood studies' researchers could lead to the

reinforcement of developmental psychology's model that invisiblises children's agency. Likewise, I prefer to use the term children as opposed to teenagers because using the latter would mean essentialising the view of children as passively undergoing universal stages of development. Lastly, Sørenssen (2012) observes that when academic researchers use terms that are invented by marketers, they might participate in reproducing the notion that children are only consumers. Since the category of teenager was primarily marketers' creation (Schrum, 2004; Osgerby, 2008), in this dissertation I will not use the word teenager to describe my sample so that I do not participate in sustaining the notion that children are only consumers. That stated, it is necessary to clarify that I have used the words teenagers and tweens while discussing the evolution and segmentation of the children's market and while describing marketers' strategies towards such segments.

Researchers from childhood studies have used UNCRC's definition of a child as a person between 0 and 18 years (James & James, 2012; Nayak & Kehily, 2013), which does not mean that childhood studies ascribe to the view that there is no difference between children aged 0 and 18 years (James & James, 2012). Moreover, even the *The Routeledge Companion to Children and the Digital Media* is described by the editors as a compilation that provides insights into the "digital lives of under-18s around the globe" (Green et al., 2021, p. 1), reflecting an acceptance of UNCRC's definition of the child. Therefore, I use UNCRC's definition of children.

While the above discussion focused on the justifications for theoretically treating the teenager as a child and preferring one terminology over the other, I would also like to point out why I made the choice of using concepts from childhood studies and not youth studies. The latter, one might argue, could have been used because the age range of the participants is 13 to 16 years. While youth studies has a rich tradition of researching young people's consumption (e.g., Maffesoli, 1995; Hollands, 2002), it has also been pointed out that there is a need in youth studies to rethink how the youth are conceptualised (Cieslik & Simpson, 2013; Threadgold, 2020). The main danger being that neither young people's agency and creative capacities should be overly celebrated, nor should their risks be overemphasised (Cieslik & Simpson, 2013; Threadgold, 2020). Such introspections have taken place and are ongoing in the field of childhood studies as well (e.g., Spyrou, 2018; Prout, 2005).

However, researchers in childhood studies have provided conceptualisations of the child that can emphasise their agency but do not overlook their vulnerability. This is even more important when considering children as consumers in digital environments where commercial surveillance constantly undermines users' agency (Peacock, 2014). The conceptualisation of the child as a social actor by Sparrman and Sandin (2012), which I describe in more detail in the next chapter, helps me take a balanced and more realistic view of children. Moreover, when it comes to studying children as consumers, there has been a call to move away from binary positions of viewing the child as either vulnerable or agentic (Cook, 2004a; Buckingham, 2011). The somewhat open idea

of situating child consumption (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012) that guides me in this dissertation helps me meet this goal. Therefore, I use concepts from childhood studies and not youth studies while researching children's consumption. In so doing, I follow other researchers who have researched teenagers as consumers in digital environments (e.g., Willett, 2009; Stoilova et al., 2019a, 2020) and as consumers in general (e.g., Davidson, 2012) by using concepts from childhood studies.

1.3 Research questions and dissertation structure

The main aim of the study is to understand the concerns related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments and how children navigate contemporary digital commercial environments. The research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: What are the issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers and targets of marketing in digital environments?

(a) How are young girls visually represented in advertisements available in digital environments?
(b) How congruent are these visual representations with the companies' institutionalised CSR initiatives towards encouraging gender equality?
(c) What ethical concerns do children express in relation to contemporary digital marketing practices like online profiling and targeted advertisements?

RQ 2: What are the reasons for children not perceiving contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic?

RQ 3: How do children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments that raise ethical concerns related to user data collection and profiling?

This article-based dissertation consists of three published articles and an introductory section. Table 1 summarises the theoretical viewpoint adopted in each article and the research questions in this study the articles help answer. The second chapter describes the conceptual framework that guides this dissertation. Chapter three elaborates on this study's methodology and ethical considerations. Chapter four discusses the key results of the three articles. The findings and their implications are discussed in the fifth chapter. Chapter five also highlights the contributions and limitations of the study and makes some suggestions for future research.

TABLE 1 Summary of the articles and the research questions

Research question	Article	Theoretical viewpoint
RQ 1: What are the issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers and targets of marketing in digital environments?	Article I, II and III	Visual commercial construction of girls (Article I). Children's perspectives on online profiling and targeting (Article II). Children' s online commercial privacy negotiation practices (Article III).
RQ 2: What are the reasons for children not perceiving contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic?	Article II	Children's perspectives on online profiling and targeting. Theories explaining users' experiences of privacy violations.
RQ 3: How do children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments that raise ethical concerns related to user data collection and profiling?	Article III	Children's online commercial privacy negotiation practices

To answer research question 1, I will draw on the findings of all three articles. Article 1 focuses on girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements. Thus, it helps investigate ethical concerns related to the visual representation of a specific social group. The second and third articles focus on children's perspectives on contemporary advertising practices such as online profiling and targeted advertisements and their privacy negotiation practices, respectively. Therefore, they help in finding out the ethical concerns that these contemporary advertising formats raise among children as consumers and targets of marketing. To answer the second research question, I will use the results of the second article, which primarily investigates children's perspectives on online profiling and targeted advertisements. Dwelling on children's perspectives will help in understanding why they do not perceive contemporary digital marketing practices like covert data collection, profiling and targeted advertising as problematic. The third research question will be answered by using the results of the third article, which discusses the practices children adopt while negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial domain.

The list of original publications is provided below and my contribution as the first author in each article is listed in Table 2.

I	Srivastava, S., Wilska, T.-A., & Sjöberg, J. (2022). Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *25*(6), 501–524.

II	Srivastava, S., Wilska, T.-A., & Nyrhinen, J. (2023a). Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements. *Journal of Children and Media*, *17*(4), 559–578.

III	Srivastava, S., Wilska, T.-A., & Nyrhinen, J. (2023b). Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context. *Childhood*, *30*(3), 235–252.

TABLE 2 The author's contribution to each article in this dissertation

Article name	Literature review	Design and data	Methods and results
Article I. Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements	Primarily responsible for conducting and writing up the literature review.	Primarily responsible for the study design. I collected the data from the companies' public Facebook pages and sought permission from the companies to reprint the advertised images in the journal article.	Mainly responsible for analysing the advertised images, writing up the results, discussion, and theoretical contributions. Co-authors provided valuable feedback on the analysis and the discussion sections. They also read and commented on the revised versions of the manuscript during the peer review process.
Article II. Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements	Primarily responsible for developing the conceptual framework and writing the literature review.	Mainly responsible for designing the study. I identified the topics to be covered in the focus group discussions (FGD), including the screenshots to be shown to the participants for initiating discussions on the topics covered. I also participated in data collection by conducting the English language FGDs. I acted as an observer in the Finnish FGDs.	Mainly responsible for analysing the qualitative data, describing the results, writing the discussion, conclusions, and theoretical contributions. Co-authors read and commented on the manuscript, including the revised versions of the manuscript during the peer review process.
Article III. Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context	Primarily responsible for developing the conceptual framework and writing the literature review.	Mainly responsible for designing the study. The second and third articles use the same FGD data. Hence, my contribution in planning the FGDs and collecting data is the same as described above.	Mainly responsible for analysing the qualitative data, describing the results, and writing the discussion, conclusions, and theoretical contributions. Co-authors read and commented on the manuscript, including the revised versions of the manuscript during the peer review process.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Children and consumption

Contemporary children are an important consumer group, and they also exert an influence on the family's purchase decisions (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003; Buckingham, 2011; Schor, 2004; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Shin, 2021). Moreover, marketers also realise children's potential as future consumers and often attempt to develop children's brand loyalty for products like cars from a young age (Shin, 2021). This section traces children's emergence as consumers. I will elaborate how the changing ideas of children and childhood brought fundamental transformations in the lives of both younger and older children, and in some way were also instrumental in bringing them closer to markets. Secondly, I will discuss the segregation of children's markets on the basis of age and gender. Next, there is a discussion of the dichotomous views on children's consumption and how research on children's consumption has conceptualised children. After that, how this study conceptualises children and children's consumption is clarified.

2.1.1 The emergence of children as consumers

The emergence of children's consumer culture in the USA can be traced to the middle of the 19th century, especially between the years 1890 to 1940 (Jacobson, 2004, 2008; Buckingham, 2011). Lisa Jacobson (2008) observes that the mass and cheap production of goods made possible by mechanisation in the latter half of the 19th century led marketers to target new demographic groups. This led to an increase in the variety of toys and clothes offered for children's consumption between 1890 and 1920 (Jacobson, 2008). Stephen Kline (1993) makes a similar observation in relation to the toy market.

However, while understanding the emergence of children's consumer culture, it is also vital to pay attention to the changing discourses related to children and childhood during the late 19th and early 20th century (Cross, 2004b; Cook, 2004b; Jacobson, 2008). Viviana Zelizer (1985) notes that a change in the value of children was discernible between the 1860s and 1930s in the USA. Although labour law reforms initiated during the 1860s gradually made the economically useful child, who was usually employed for industrial and farm work, useless in terms of economic value, the child gained an emotional value that made children priceless (Zelizer, 1985).

Drawing attention to the discourses on children and childhood and their link with children's consumption, Garry Cross (2004b) points out that two ideas of childhood innocence coexist and are mainly responsible for adults', especially parents', ambivalence around children's consumption. Firstly, the idea of childhood innocence that philosophers like Locke and Rousseau popularised, which viewed children as sacred and needing protection, can be termed "sheltered innocence" (Cross, 2004b, p. 13). Sheltered innocence largely contributed to notions that children are sacred and away from "profane" markets. In relation to consumption, the ideas of sheltered innocence endorsed delayed gratification and carefully nurturing the tastes of middle-class children to develop them into responsible future citizens and consumers (Cross, 2004b). Cross points out that a more radical romantic perspective of childhood innocence, which viewed the child as a special being capable of enjoying the wonders of the world, led parents in early 20th-century American families to indulge their children with gifts that would give them novel pleasures that adults were seen as incapable of enjoying. Cross (2004b, p. 14) terms this "wondrous innocence" and proposes that it was primarily responsible for parental gift-giving and introduced children to unlimited consumption. Cross further notes that apart from ideological reasons, shrinking family sizes and improved living standards during the late 19th and early 20th centuries enabled increased spending on children. Moreover, expert advice from around the late 1920s encouraged permissive parenting, and parents even became tolerant of their children testing boundaries and becoming a little mischievous. However, when children started enjoying products that were incongruent with middle-class ideas of consumption, parents asked for regulations to limit children's consumption of violent toys, video games and cheap comics, thus resorting to ideas of sheltered innocence. Both "sheltered innocence" and "wondrous innocence" coexist and are in constant tension when it comes to parental and even general societal attitudes towards children's consumption (Cross, 2004b, p. 42).

Hugh Cunningham (2020) points out that changing ideas of children and childhood contributed to various child-saving initiatives. While child-saving movements aimed to curtail infant mortality and mainly brought working-class mothers' child-rearing habits under state monitoring, even among middle-class mothers, there was considerable anxiety about their infant's health (Cunningham, 2020). These anxieties were primarily due to the high rates of infant mortality, especially during the 1920s in the USA (Cook, 2004b). Ellen Seiter (1995) notes

that toy advertisements constituted less than 20 per cent of the advertisements in *Parents* magazine during the 1920s up until the 1940s, and advertisements for nutritional products and supplements were more dominant, thus reflecting general concerns over children's health. Given these anxieties, there was increased emphasis on educating mothers in scientific ways of child-rearing (Cunningham, 2020; Cook, 2004b). According to Cook (2004b), the opening of the infant clothing section in the big department stores in the 1920s and the presence of expert nurses there aimed to address maternal angst around infant health and safety.

Moreover, marketers recognised the role of the mother as the key decision-maker for the family's purchases, and department stores made attempts to make the store environment and layout conducive for the mother (Cook, 2004b, 2003). Advertisements constructed the mother as a moral figure who prioritises her children's interests and welfare (Cook, 2004b). Gradually, the focus moved from infant safety and hygiene to development, and advice columns and advertisements in *Parents* magazine (launched in 1926) popularised developmental psychology's, specifically Jean Piaget's, ideas of universal stages of child development and encouraged mothers (their implied audiences) to track children's growth (Seiter, 1995). Advertisements targeted at parents highlighted the developmental and educational benefits of toys for children through much of the twentieth century (Kline, 1993; Seiter, 1995), although during the 1940s and 1950s some advertisements also positioned the toy as a provider of pure joy and delight to the child (Seiter, 1995).

Researchers suggest that from around the late 1920s and early 1930s, marketers began to view children as important consumers in the USA (Cook, 2000; 2004b; Jacobson, 2004; Cross, 2004b), which does not mean that mothers ceased to be important decision-makers of children's purchases (Cook, 2000). Cook's (2004b) distinction between customer and consumer clarifies the importance that children gained. Treating a group as a consumer involves understanding that category or group and their needs on a more continuous basis, even post-purchase (Cook, 2004b). This attention towards children as consumers happened primarily for three reasons. Firstly, monthly allowances became common in the early 20th century, which meant children had their own money to spend, thus leading marketers to consider them more seriously as consumers (Jacobson, 2004). Secondly, the realisation of the child's future potential as a buyer, which was not absent previously, became more pronounced among marketers (Cook, 2004b). Thirdly, marketers became aware of the sentimental value of the child in the 20th-century middle-class family (Kline, 1993; Jacobson, 2004, 2008; Cook, 2004b; Cross, 2004b), and they recognised that children could play an important role in influencing their parents' purchases (Cook, 2004b). The need then became to make products appealing for children, and efforts were directed at designing packages and even cereals, biscuits and other products in ways that would attract children (Cook, 2000; 2004b). A certain "pediocularity" or seeing with children's eyes was discernible in marketers' treatment of children (Cook, 2003, p. 160). Pediocularity was not just the creation of marketers; its

inception can be traced to Ellen Key's ideas of "children's self-determining rights" and the general emphasis in the early 20th-century child-raising approach where experts emphasised a more child-centred outlook and the child's individual personality (Cook, 2004b, p. 67). Child-rearing experts from the 1930s and 1940s onwards promoted the idea of keeping the child's desires central (Seiter, 1995). Although Americans were still enamoured by the idea of childhood innocence, they also "admired children for their spontaneity, spiritedness and spunk" (Jacobson, 2008, p. 8).

Cook (2004b, p. 19) points out that to develop and market children's products, marketers needed a "commercial persona", which is an imaginary construct or model that could help them visualise the child consumer for whom they were developing and marketing their products. At this time, market research on children was embryonic, and marketers relied on their experiences to draw inferences about the child consumer (Jacobson, 2004; Cook, 2000, 2004b). Moreover, knowledge from developmental psychology, which viewed children as undergoing specific stages of development at different ages, guided marketers (especially the work of E. Evalyn Grumbine in the 1930s) and provided them a "template" for developing and marketing products (Cook, 2000, p. 494, 2004b). At the same time, developmental psychology experts' emphasis on the child's personality, especially from the 1930s onwards, led to viewing a child as a person or individual with distinct desires (Cook, 2004b). Thus, according to Cook (2004b, p. 89), in the children's clothing sector, the introduction of the toddler clothing range for boys and girls as not just a size category but also a style category was a direct repercussion of the "new" child-rearing practices that viewed the child as a person and child stars like Sherley Temple as the embodiment of the toddler personality. The toddler was constructed as a person with an inherently active and adventurous personality and certain products were projected as "naturally" good or even essential for the toddler stage. The spaces in department stores also began to gradually reflect pediocularity (Cook, 2004b). For instance, department stores adjusted the counter height, created well-equipped play spaces and added toilet facilities suitable for younger children near the children's section (Cook, 2003, 2004b; Jacobson, 2008). The play area was a form of advertising as the toys in it were available in the store (Jacobson, 2008).

While the discussion above mainly centred around younger children as consumers, the changing ideas of children and childhood and ensuing child labour reforms also impacted the position of older children as consumers. The idea that childhood is a special stage and children need protection was also partly responsible for child labour reforms during the late 19th and early 20th century in the USA and Europe (Cross, 2004b; Cunningham, 2020), although other factors like mechanisation and the arrival of immigrants were also responsible for reducing the demand for children's labour (Zelizer, 1985). After initial resistance from working-class parents, who relied on their children's income from labour, the reformists' agenda for the abolition of child labour began to be gradually accepted by working-class parents primarily because governments in Europe and the USA introduced tuition-free compulsory schooling during the 1920s

(Cunningham, 2020). Compulsory schooling helped in bringing children closer to markets in various ways. Firstly, marketers increasingly used schools to advertise their products to working-class children (Jacobson, 2004). Companies like Lifebuoy and Shredded Wheat developed wash-up charts and coloured charts depicting the stages of wheat development from harvest to the breakfast table, respectively, and promoted them as educational material in schools (Cook, 2000).

Secondly, high schools were pivotal in the development of the teenage market (Schrum, 2004; Jacobson, 2004; Cook, 2004b). While the term *adolescence*, coined by the psychologist G. Stanley Hall in 1904, was described as a transitionary period (13–17 years) between childhood and adulthood (Cook, 2004b, p. 127), it was mainly used by professionals (Schrum, 2004). The word *teenager* became popular during the 1940s and is mainly marketers' creation (Schrum, 2004; Osgerby, 2008). High school and the rising attendance rates in high school during the 1930s due to the Great Depression, which postponed young people's employment, have been seen as highly instrumental in the emergence of the teenage market (Jacobson, 2004; Schrum, 2004). While marketers courted the middle-class teenage boy and constructed him as a savvy consumer interested in various new electrical appliances in the 1920s (Jacobson, 2004), the teenage market that emerged around the time of rising high school attendance during the 1920s and 1930s was more focused on the teenage girl (Schrum, 2004; Jacobson, 2004). Schrum (2004) notes that although the post-World War II period is considered the time when the teenage market became prominent, a teenage girl culture was already forming in the USA between 1920 and 1945. Cook (2004b), somewhat similarly, observes that the teenage girl as a clothing category appeared in the clothing industry during the late 1930s and early 1940s primarily due to teen girls' desire to adopt a sartorial identity akin to college girls and distinct from younger girls. The teen persona was constructed as that of a fashion-conscious girl. The teen space in the department store was carefully separated from the sections for children and adults and had a youthful décor, thus reflecting the distinctness of this category (Cook, 2004b). Moreover, younger salesclerks were employed to cater to the teen girl (Cook, 2004b; Jacobson, 2004).

High school provided girls of the same age group opportunities to be together, and girls were shaping both group and individual identities where good looks and popularity were emphasised (Schrum, 2004). Advice columns, especially in magazines like *Seventeen*, constructed good looks as attainable through make-up and quality grooming practices for girls (Jacobson, 2004; Schrum, 2004), and girls were receptive of these messages (Schrum, 2004). However, according to Schrum (2004), girls also played an active role in trying out and even rejecting styles and make-up that did not suit their needs; thus, they were not just passive recipients of market offerings. There is also evidence that some teen girls made fun of advertisers' claims about the transformational capacities of beauty products, which further emphasises that they did not take these messages unquestioningly (Schrum, 2004). Practices like dating also

became common in high schools (Jacobson, 2004). Advice columns in magazines enjoined girls to focus on self-presentation and beauty to win a date, whereas athletic abilities and success in competitive sports were emphasised for boys (Jacobson, 2004).

Teenagers (both girls and boys) became a formidable consumer group during the post-World War II commodities boom in the USA and their high spending capacity was mainly financed by allowances parents offered and part-time work (Osgerby, 2008). The same trend could be seen in Europe during the 1950s (Osgerby, 2008). In Finland, where this study is situated, the 1960s is seen as the transformational decade when various consumer goods flooded the Finnish market and the general living standards rose considerably from the previous decades of decelerated economic growth after Finland's loss in World War II (Heinonen, 2013). In the 1960s, youth became recognised as an important consumer group in Finland, primarily because of the practice of giving an allowance or "pocket money" (Heinonen, 2013, p. 15). However, Finland differed greatly in comparison to other consumer societies as values of thrift were encouraged and conspicuous consumption was largely discouraged, both among adults and young people (Ruckenstein, 2013).

Another market category that warrants discussion is that of the tween. As a consumer category, the tween is highly gendered as only the tween girl is discussed in relation to consumption, whereas the tween boy is constructed as a user of games (Coulter, 2014). The predecessor of the current tween category in clothing was the pre-teen category and was addressed to girls who attended junior high school (Cook, 2004b, Cook & Kaiser, 2004). In the clothing sector, Cook (2004b) notes, the pre-teen was never developed as a strong consumer category as marketers were more engaged in attracting teen buyers, and sizing for this transitionary stage was also seen as a challenge because some girls grew quicker than others. Apart from sporadic attempts to address the pre-teen in the clothing sector (Cook, 2004b), the pre-teen remained largely under-addressed as a consumer category during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s (Coulter, 2014; Quart, 2003). The growing population of pre-teen girls and their aspirations for a style of dress that was closer to that of teen girls led marketers to pay attention to this pre-teen category sometime around the early 1960s (Cook, 2004b). The pre-teen and the sub-teen referenced the teen (Coulter, 2014) and thus they could be seen as a somewhat "aspirational" stage where the transitionary (girl) subject longs to be the teen (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 211). According to Coulter (2014), the tween today, however, is not this aspirational subject. It is, instead, a formidable "identity in and of itself" (Coulter 2014, p. 11), especially given the wide assortment of products catering to the tween market (Coulter, 2014; Quart, 2003).

Coulter (2014) has traced the emergence of the tween (girl) as a significant consumer category and attributes it to factors taking shape during the 1980s and early 1990s. Firstly, the deregulation programme of the Reagan administration meant that programme-length commercials were allowed for advertising toys to children, and the cable multi-channel system made it possible to target

advertising specifically to each market segment. The possibility to sell licensed merchandising using popular toy characters was an added advantage. These factors brought a sharp rise in television programmes, toys and other offerings addressed to the young girls' market. While addressing the 8- to 12-year-old (tween) girls, marketers used appeals that would resonate with teens because of the general understanding that younger children aspire to be like older children. For instance, Mattel's Barbie and the Rockers deployed "the teen aesthetics of glamour, rock and roll, and fashion" (Coulter, 2014, p. 39). Moreover, Coulter notes, interest groups' disapproval of high advertising to young children during the years preceding the deregulation had made advertisers cautious. They found it safer to target the 8 to 12 (tween) age group because while doing so they could cite consumer socialisation research in the USA, which had affirmed that this age group was adept at critically assessing advertisements' selling intent (Coulter, 2014).

Secondly, Coulter (2014) explains, during the 1980s, marketers became increasingly aware that teens were a rather fickle consumer group, who could change their buying habits erratically. Therefore, marketers began to focus on building brand awareness from a younger age so that tweens would be loyal customers in the future and present. Thirdly, women's rising rates of employment made marketers uncertain about women's continued participation in consumer culture, thus leading them to target younger girls as consumers through magazines like *Seventeen* in the 1980s. Lastly, as marketers focused their attention on young girls, the biological fact that middle childhood ceases with puberty offered marketers various possibilities to market products (such as personal hygiene products, deodorants, hair removing creams and shavers, the first bra) catered specifically to the girl's body during puberty. The tween girl could only provide these opportunities for "commodifying puberty" as the puberty of boys does not require or was not constructed as needing this wide array of products (Coulter, 2014, p. 59).

Coulter (2014) further notes that feminism and the rise of popular female pop icons aided in the process of the consolidation of the tween as a market category. Coincidentally, feminist scholars, who had largely ignored young girls before the 1980s, directed more attention to researching girls' creative capacities and agency, which helped make girls visible as individuals with their own practices. The popularity of stars like Cindy Lauper and Madonna in the 1980s, and groups like the Spice Girls later in the 1990s, whose songs celebrated freedom and a distinct style of dressing and makeup for girls, not only gave girls and young women female pop icons, but also led to the popularisation of a new kind of girlhood that was not restricted to domesticity. The so labelled tween girl was not passive in the process of the development of this tween consumer identity. She participated in it by partaking in marketing surveys and focus groups that tried to understand tween preferences and by buying the products offered to the tween market, perhaps because it was the first time she was being recognised and made visible (Coulter, 2014).

To sum up, the emergence of children's consumer culture was supported by various factors. The notion of childhood as a special stage and the need to protect children (as in the case of child-saving initiatives and labour law reforms) also brought children closer to markets. The advocacy of permissive parenting styles by experts and a higher focus on child-centred parenting gave further impetus to the position of the child consumer (Cook, 2004b; Seiter, 1995; Cross, 2004b; Jacobson, 2008). Knowledge from developmental psychology helped marketers develop the children's market and position certain consumer products as "naturally" beneficial for the child (Cook, 2000). However, children were not passive in these processes and actively accepted or rejected certain toys, games and trends (Seiter, 1995). The discussion above also shows how age/stage, style (toddler) and gender (more conspicuous in the teen and tween girl categories) became essential bases for segmenting the children's market and how girls participated in the latter.

Children's position as consumers further solidified in the 21st century. Children's higher engagement with consumer goods was supported by a range of reasons: the rising income levels of parents (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003; Schor, 2004), increasing family democracy and children's higher participation in family purchase decisions about everything from snacks to cars and family vacations (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003; Schor, 2004), parents' longer working hours and subsequent spending of "guilt money" on various gifts for their children (Schor, 2004, p. 25), children's increased interaction with markets from a young age due to parents' workforce participation (Schor, 2004), higher life expectancy leading to multigenerational households and grandparents as a formidable category of spenders on their grandchildren (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003) and rising remarriages and blended families, which may lead to parents buying gifts for their children because of guilt over the emotional upheavals caused by these changes (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003). For their part, increasingly from the 1990s, marketers have described children as sophisticated and savvy consumers (Cook, 2000). Marketers adroitly claim they empower children by providing them a wide assortment of consumer products to choose from (Schor, 2004; Cook, 2007). Eventually, this empowerment is highly intransitive in that it is restricted to the world of consumption and primarily benefits corporations (Cook, 2007).

2.1.2 Research on children as consumers: Dichotomous views and the need to move away from dichotomies

Children's consumer culture invokes binary views; some see consumer culture as harmful for children, while others (usually marketers) argue that children are active and savvy consumers (Cook, 2000, 2004a; Buckingham, 2011). Those subscribing to the former idea regard children as innocent, vulnerable and passive, whereas those who endorse the latter consider children as autonomous and choice-making subjects (Cook, 2004a; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Buckingham, 2011). These debates mirror the general structure agency discussions in the social sciences (Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad,

2010). Moreover, these debates raise various questions as to whether children are naïve or competent consumers (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2017). Such binary positions, however, do not acknowledge that in modern capitalist economies, children are imbricated in consumer culture and that it is not a force that lies outside children's lives and invades them (Cook, 2004a; Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010). Given that markets and consumer capitalism are a central constituent of children's lives in most Western societies, it is hard to delineate how commercially imposed meanings impact children's personal identity (Cook, 2004a; Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2013). Therefore, while researching children's engagement with commercial culture, it is important to move away from dichotomous positions and explore a middle ground (Cook, 2004a; Buckingham, 2011).

Academic research on children's consumption using the perspective of developmental psychology and consumer socialisation has primarily been criticised for taking the view of the child as undergoing definitive stages of development and as a passive "becoming" (Cook, 2004a, 2010; Buckingham, 2011). Research drawing on developmental psychology has primarily focused on children's ability to comprehend the persuasive intent of advertisements and the effects they have on promoting child obesity and materialistic values (Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Willett, 2022). "Effects research" has been criticised for various reasons (Buckingham & Tinsgtad, 2017, p. 308; Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Willett, 2022). Firstly, the experimental methods used in effects research are seen as artificial because children are shown certain stimuli and their reactions are observed, often leaving unclear how they would behave in real-life situations (Livingstone & Hargrave, 2006; Buckingham, 2011). Moreover, effects research considers children as blank slates, with the pre-supposition of a "cause-and-effect" relationship between advertisements and children (Buckingham & Willett, 2022, p. 52; Buckingham, 2011). In other words, by applying a "classical behaviourist model of stimulus response", advertising is deemed as producing certain effects on children's "attitudes", "values" and purchase behaviours, but the impact of other variables is rarely acknowledged (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2017, p. 309). Research on advertising literacy mainly focuses on children's understanding of the persuasive intent of advertising. In much of advertising literacy research, children are shown certain advertisements, and their advertising literacy is measured or tested by using pre-designed survey questionnaires (e.g., Panic et al., 2013; Verhellen et al., 2014), which leaves insufficient scope to understand how children interpret advertisements or the way they engage with them. Moreover, most advertising literacy research views children as deficient because they treat adult-like levels as the benchmark and children are seen to possess underdeveloped cognitive abilities (e.g., Van Reijmersdal et al., 2012).

As noted above, the consumer socialisation perspective has also been used to study children's consumption. Consumer socialisation is defined as the "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant for their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward 1974, p.

2). Research on consumer socialisation has been criticised primarily because the socialisation perspective considers children as passive recipients of knowledge and does not acknowledge how children negotiate the meanings or alternatives that markets provide them with or how they make sense of the consumer world (Ekström, 2006; Cook, 2010; Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2017). More generally, the child is treated as a "becoming" and not as an active social actor (Cook, 2010; Buckingham & Tinsgtad, 2017). To address the lacunae in the consumer socialisation approach of researching children as consumers, Ekström (2006) recommends taking multiple foci and adopting plural methods to understand how consumption varies between different social and cultural groups. In contrast, Cook (2010, p. 69) considers the concept of consumer socialisation "beyond rehabilitation" primarily because it treats children as passive "becomings" and conceptualises children as progressing linearly from an unknowing to a knowing consumer.

As an alternative, Cook (2010) proposes the idea of consumer enculturation. Cook notes that enculturation takes as its starting point childhood studies' view of children as social actors and acknowledges the plurality of childhoods. In childhood studies, childhood is viewed as a social and cultural construction and children are treated as active agents who participate in the (re)construction of their social worlds (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998). The contexts, lives and plural perspectives of children are central to the idea of consumer enculturation, which helps to bring forth children's multiple experiences of consumption and how they "encounter the 'commercial world'" (Cook, 2010, p. 73). Thus, the focus is not on assessing whether children obtain the "correct" skills and in the "proper order", rather it is on understanding "the *kinds* of knowledge" and "dispositions children adopt" (Cook, 2010, p. 73, emphasis original). While paying attention to children's ways of making sense of consumption, Johansson (2010) uses actor-network theory to draw attention to how children construct themselves as consumers in a situation, and how their various consumer subjectivities in any situation are dependent on both human and non-human actors. Johansson shows that beings and becomings are not polar opposites, and in any given situation children can act as either. Moreover, these concepts are not qualities of children; instead, how children act depends on the situation (Johansson, 2010).

Another approach to researching children's consumption, proposed by Sparrman and Sandin (2012), which also conceptualises children as social actors, is that of situating or contextualising child consumption. They posit that such an approach helps in challenging dichotomous positions related to children's consumption. At the same time, they state that "there is, however, no single theoretical or methodological solution that will achieve this" (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012, p. 16). This makes it a rather open concept that researchers can think *with*.

2.1.3 How this study conceptualises children and children's consumption

One way of situating child consumption is to put children at the centre and examine how they have been made part of consumer culture or how they take part in it (Sjöberg, 2015). This study is guided by the idea of situating or contextualising children's consumption. It examines both how children are made part of digital consumer culture by analysing how children, specifically young girls, are portrayed in advertisements circulated in digital environments. The study also analyses how children take part in digital consumer culture by exploring children's (13–16 years) perspectives on online targeted advertisements, which are an integral part of contemporary digital consumer culture, and their privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context. This is also in line with Cook's (2010) suggestion to focus on children's multiple experiences of consumption and the knowledge they bring forth when they face the commercial domain.

The way children are conceptualised is a crucial determinant of how one approaches research pertaining to children's consumption. While childhood studies pioneered ideas of childhood as a social and cultural construction and recognised children as agents, as opposed to passive objects, scholars from the field have also carried out further introspections and critical reflections on the concept of children's agency (e.g., Oswell, 2013; Hammersley, 2016; Spyrou, 2018). Oswell contends that the idea of children as agents may reproduce the notion of an autonomous and competent child, somewhat ignoring the limitations on children's agency (Oswell, 2013). Hammersley (2016) cautions against taking a non-nuanced and simplistic understanding of children's agency as that might under acknowledge the complex structures that undermine children's agency. Similarly, Coulter (2021), writing in the context of research related to children in digital environments, posits that how the child is defined and understood has an impact on how the digital child is seen. Coulter, however, cautions that while studying the digital child, it is also important not to be overly celebratory about children's agency and to take cognisance that children are highly constrained by the structures of digital media (Coulter, 2021). The latter becomes even more pertinent in the context of online commercial data gathering practices that threaten users' agency (Peacock, 2014). Hence, this study works with a more balanced view of children as social actors. Being a social actor is defined as "acting in society through complex systems of social relations, experiences, materialities, competencies, and, indeed, incompetencies" (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012, p. 12). This definition of children as social actors enables recognising both the vulnerabilities and competencies of children, and, in turn, helps in taking a non-dichotomous view of them as consumers. Children are not considered either naïve or competent, but as occupying the fluid and negotiable space lying "somewhere in between these two dichotomies", which means that a child can be "naively-competent" or "naively-naïve" (Sparrman, 2009, p. 300).

2.2 Advertising ethics

Advertising ethics is an interdisciplinary topic that has been investigated from various perspectives (Förster and Weish, 2017). Cunningham (1999, Ethics Defined section, para 1, emphasis original) defines advertising ethics as "what is good or right in the conduct of the advertising function. It is concerned with questions of what *ought* to be done, not just with what legally must be done." It is essential to be cognisant that law and ethics cannot be equated, and a common mistake is to assume that what is unethical is automatically declared illegal (Cunningham, 1999). Advertising law draws from advertising ethics but does not include all of it (Drumwright, 2007).

According to Drumwright (2007), advertising and ethics has generally been analysed at two levels: the micro and macro, and Drumwright also proposes the meso level, which mainly includes the organisational actors, like advertising agencies, and their ethical sensibilities towards advertising. Micro level issues focus on the effect of advertising on individuals, whereas the macro level issues are concerned with the societal impact of advertising, although the two levels can also be overlapping (Drumwright, 2007). The main macro-level ethical concerns with advertising relate to the promotion of materialistic values (for instance, promoting excessive consumption over other societal values), reinforcement of stereotypes (for example, stereotypes related to gender, race, age etcetera) and promotion of false values and resultant disturbing behaviours (such as causing nutritional problems in populations by advertising high fat foods) (Drumwright, 2007, p. 406).

O'Guinn (2007) reflects upon the macro-level ethical concern that advertisements promote materialism. O'Guinn argues that people were interested in acquiring material possessions even before advertising appeared. So, it is hard to conclusively suggest whether and how much advertisements are instrumental in promoting materialism. O'Guinn, however, concedes that advertisements are one of the instruments though which people shape their social worlds, which includes their aspirations, and advertising propounds "consumption centred solutions" (O'Guinn, 2007, p. 458).

Macro-level concerns, such as the promotion of stereotypes through advertisements, have been raised mainly by examining visual representations in advertisements. Such analysis views advertisements as a cultural product that represents identity (Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005; Borgeson & Schroeder, 2002). Here, advertisements are considered as instrumental in shaping people's ideas about themselves and others (Schroeder, 2002). Schroeder and Borgeson (2005, p. 584) use Gordon's (2000) concept of "epistemic closure", which highlights that essentialising certain beings closes possibilities of developing any alternative understanding of them and constitutes a form of oppression. Schroeder and Borgeson highlight how marketing communication, including advertised images, can create "epistemic closure" by portraying certain groups in essentialist ways. Visual representations can promote certain notions about groups that can be

limiting to the group's self-identity and the way others perceive those groups. The researchers propose an ethics of representation in marketing and urge marketers to avoid advertised representations that (re)produce stereotypes based on gender, race, sexuality, age, and so on (Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005). It is usually vulnerable groups that are often stereotyped (Cunningham, 1999; Drumwright, 2007; Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005) because they lack the power to resist how they are represented (Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005). The ominous presence of marketing communication in people's lives does not necessarily improve their critical abilities towards advertising (Schroeder, 2002).

Cunningham (1999) insists that the concepts of responsibility, accountability and intention must guide ethical decision-making related to advertising. Intention entails that advertisers should think not only about the intended consequences of advertising, but also pay attention to its possible unintended consequences. The concept of responsibility and accountability underscore that advertisers have a broader responsibility towards the society in general (Cunningham, 1999). Somewhat similarly, Drumwright (2007, p. 408) notes that advocates of corporate social responsibility have argued for a "triple bottom-line". It basically means that apart from the financial bottom line, corporations' ethical responsibility should extend to their communities and the environment. Drumwright explains that a fourth dimension has also been proposed which involves assessing the firm's impact on culture. This points towards macro-level ethical issues and increases the responsibility of advertisers (Drumwright, 2007). Along similar lines, Stevens and Östberg (2012) argue that advertisers always have a choice to either challenge or sustain gender stereotypes, and doing the former is part of their ethical responsibility. They go on to point out that a firm's corporate social responsibility agenda should not just include reducing environmental damage or promoting fair labour practices, but challenging gender stereotypes through advertisements should also be an ethical responsibility of corporations (Stevens & Östberg, 2012). Other scholars have also expressed similar views endorsing ethical representational practices by marketing managers and a higher degree of introspection while depicting various groups (Borgeson & Schroeder, 2002).

Förster and Weish (2017) note that concerns related to visual representations in advertisements have occupied researchers for a long time. In other words, it can be described as a traditional concern of advertising critique and ethics. Digitalisation has increased the circulation of images, including advertised images, thus rendering images ubiquitous (Rose, 2016; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018) and making this macro-level concern of advertising ethics even more pertinent. Moreover, digitalisation has introduced certain advertising formats that raise various novel ethical concerns (Förster & Weish, 2017). For instance, large amounts of users' data are gathered by tracking their online activities, often covertly, to generate users' data profiles and predict their preferences so as to target advertisements at them (Acquisti et al., 2016). These practices raise concerns related to users' privacy (Acquisti et al., 2016; Förster & Weish, 2017). Förster and Weish (2017) point out that another ethical concern is

that there is a lack of transparency about the way data is gathered, and ethical advertising must make this clear. They further contend that adequate options to refuse data collection are not made available to users so that they can exercise a choice and decline giving away their data. Therefore, "the scope and scale of ethical questions" related to advertising has expanded post-digitalisation (Förster & Weish, 2017, p. 19). Since children actively use a variety of digital platforms (Stoilova et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2018; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2022), these issues related to advertising ethics also impact children as consumers.

2.3 Children in advertisements

Children's images have been used in advertisements not just to sell children's products but even products that are not related to children (Cross, 2004b; Seiter, 1995; Vänskä, 2017). Given the relative powerlessness of children as a group, they cannot organise themselves like other minority groups do, such as women and ethnic minorities, to resist how they are portrayed (Cook, 2002). Cook (1999) observes that while representing children in advertisements, marketers selectively promote ideas about children and childhoods that help them meet their commercial interests to sell their products. Thus, visual commercial representations of children promote certain versions of children and childhoods (Cook, 1999).

Previous research shows that advertisements targeting parents (mainly mothers) often use ideas of care, development and comfort to convey notions of an ideal childhood (Gram, 2004). In Seiter's (1995) analysis of children's portrayal in toy advertisements, Seiter points out that when the advertisements targeted parents, images of children enjoying the toys were common, with a complete avoidance of images showing children as demanding. Instead, expressions of aspiring for toys was often communicated by portraying children as dreaming of the toys (Seiter, 1995).

Childhood innocence has been identified as a recurring theme in various visual representations of children in advertisements (Cross, 2004a; Vänskä, 2017). Cross (2004a) notes that images of children with a wide-eyed look of innocence have been promoted to convey romantic ideas of childhood innocence almost from the beginning of the 20th century. These visual representations try to project the idea of children's delight and pleasures though consumption (Cross, 2004a). Vänskä (2017, pp. 72–73) observes that contemporary fashion advertisements continue to employ ideas of childhood innocence, and it has been so widely used in images of children that it has become some kind of "truism". Cross (2004b) notes, however, that along with childhood innocence, the image of a cool child is also promoted in toys. Nonetheless, Cross (2004b) does not specifically analyse advertisements. Boulton (2007) has analysed the portrayal of children in advertisements of hip-hop clothing, and Boulton observes that the depiction of children looking directly at the camera challenges the ideas of childhood innocence and teases the adult–child binary. The intermixing of elements that

play with the thin boundaries between sexuality and innocence has also been reported in advertisements featuring children, especially young girls (Holland, 2004; Vänskä, 2017). Vänskä (2017, p. 87) labels this "eroticised innocence".

Images of children in advertisements are guided by particular ideas about childhood at any given time, and ways of portraying children have distinct histories (Vänskä, 2017). Korsvold (2012) illustrates this point in a study comparing the visual representation of children and young people in the Norwegian clothing company Helly Hansen's advertisements in the 1950s and the 1980s to the present. The research shows how the representation of childhood is guided by the cultural and historical context of the market to which the advertisements are targeted. In both periods, given the Nordic market context, the advertisements reflected ideas of an ideal Nordic childhood close to nature, the importance of free play and safety for children. However, Korsvold points out some dissimilarities in the portrayals during the two periods as well. In the 1950s, children were constructed as innocent and passive, whereas from the 1980s onwards they increasingly began to be portrayed as active and competent subjects. The latter is seen as marketers' attempts to ideologically integrate notions of children's agency, albeit with the commercial intent of appealing directly to children as target consumers (Korsvold, 2012).

Cook (1999) has examined the commercial images of children published in trade journals in the clothing sector from the 1920s to the 1980s in the USA. Cook notes that even as early as the late 1920s, some of these images construct children as possessing "personhood" and acting as agents in relation to their consumption choices. This "personhood" status also meant that children were portrayed as emulating adults' gender stereotypes, with young girls being depicted as objects of young boys' gaze and often subordinate to boys. Cook observes that in the late 1960s, however, the visual representation of girls as subordinate was often replaced by images of girls taking the lead over boys. Cook attributes this change to the fact that the girls' clothing market had become much more significant than that of boys, thus making it important to depict girls as confident and active (Cook, 1999). Seiter's (1995) analysis of children's visual representation in toy commercials also discusses girls' depiction as passive but Seiter also identifies some changes in the style of representation in later years. For example, in advertisements for construction toys and train sets in the 1950s and 60s, mothers and daughters were often shown as onlookers while sons and fathers played actively. Seiter observes that in later periods when girls were shown as active, they were pictured without boys (Seiter, 1995). Girls have usually been depicted in gender stereotypical ways as interested in beauty and appearance (Seiter, 1995; Holland 2004). Gender stereotypes were also reproduced by picturing girls playing with dolls, miniature kitchens, and vacuums, thus reinforcing stereotypical ideas that girls are interested in caring roles and housework (Holland, 2004; Seiter, 1995). Norms of heterosexuality have also been reinforced in advertisements featuring young girls (Lindén, 2013).

According to Vänskä (2017), the visual commercial construction of children's gender and sexuality has also undergone minor changes in response

to changing societal attitudes and the emergence of new target markets. Complex images are often used so that different target consumers can be addressed. For instance, Vänskä (2017) points out that although most fashion advertisements featuring girls and boys together uphold gender stereotypes, a few portrayals also create a certain degree of ambivalence such that the image may not be outrightly perturbing for those who oppose gender stereotypes and may also appeal to those who hold conservative views on gender relations. Moreover, while there appeared some images of tomboyish girls in fashion advertisements, images of girly boys were completely absent because "femininity in boys is shunned and considered pathological" (Vänskä, 2017, p. 159). Vänskä (2017) further notes that elements that portray little girl pairs as homosexual are clearly incorporated, but when two boys are pictured together, masculinity is highlighted along with some hints of homosexuality, thus leaving the images open to interpretation. Non-heterosexual elements have been incorporated because gays and homosexuals have begun to be recognised as a lucrative market segment. Still, at the same time, advertised images intermix heterosexual elements to appeal to non-homosexual groups as well (Vänskä, 2017). In research pertaining exclusively to girls, complex images of girls in which "traditional and contemporary femininities" are simultaneously reflected in a given image were observed in a semiotic analysis of advertisements found in British teen magazines (Cann, 2012, p. 78).

Previous research also shows that girls' images in advertisements are often sexualised (Holland, 2004). From around the 1950s, the image of girls began to be sexualised in toy advertisements by depicting girls standing in front of a mirror dressed in panties, and even when advertisements showed girls performing housework, they were pictured with "protruded buttocks", revealing their panties (Seiter, 1995, p. 176). Researchers report that girls' images have also been sexualised in fashion and clothing advertisements (Merskin, 2004; Vänskä, 2017) and in commercials for products targeted at readers of teen magazines in the USA (Graff et al., 2013; Speno & Aubrey 2018).

Merskin (2004) notes that such sexualised representations are partly responsible for the increase in sexual crimes against girls. Merskin thinks it is important to explore what messages such images convey to girls and boys about sex. Moreover, girls are usually powerless and lack agency in how they are portrayed as desirable (Merskin, 2004). Savage (2011) takes a similar stance and wonders what repercussions such portrayals have on girls in general and celebrity girls like Mylie Cyrus, whose images are sexualised. Unpacking the discourses on the sexualisation of girls' images, Lumby (2010) highlights that such discourses deny girls any agency and primarily reflect adult anxieties around keeping the idea of innocence intact. The latter argument is supported by R. Danielle. Egan and Gail Hawkes (2008), who posit that girls' (and not boys') sexuality is almost always the reason for anxieties, and there is an attempt to portray girls as innocent and asexual. Any alternative readings of girls' images become impossible when societal discourses around their sexualisation are ubiquitous (Lumby, 2010). Durham (2007) does not make any value judgements

on the sexualisation of girls' images but draws attention to the exclusionary character of these images. While commenting on the sexualised images of girls in *Seventeen* magazine, Durham notes that these representations not only create the myth of "sexuality as exhibitionism" but emphasise that only girls with a specific body type (for example, the slender girl and not the girl with disabilities or those who do not meet the ideal bodily weight criteria) can engage in this exhibitionism (Durham, 2007, p. 22). Additionally, Durham (2007) asserts such representations deny any sexual agency to girls and teach them that they are sexual objects of the male gaze.

Rosalind Gill (2007, 2008) observes a shift from sexual objectification to a self-chosen sexual subjectivity in representations of girls and women from around the 1990s. Gill asserts that a "postfeminist sensibility" became evident in media portrayals of girls and women, whereby they were portrayed as actively choosing to engage in bodily display instead of being represented as passive objects who were sexualised (Gill, 2007, 149). Girlpower is a version of postfeminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 5), and this discourse, which equated empowerment with hyper-femininity, individual (primarily consumer) choices and choosing various products to express one's femininity, was popularised by marketers precisely because it did not fundamentally challenge the heteronormative patriarchal order by continuing to link women with body and appearance (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Zaslow, 2009; Mc Robbie, 2007, 2009). According to Angela Mc Robbie (2009), feminist ideas of agency and choice were cleverly deployed to underscore individual empowerment through consumption without any focus on issues that would bring about any structural changes to girls' and women's lives. Gill (2008) calls out the rhetoric of sexual agency in postfeminist media texts and poses the question: if this is sexual agency, then why are we surrounded by images of women and girls that suit the gaze of a heterosexual male? In other words, Gill asserts that if these representations promoted sexual agency, then ideal female beauty standards would not have been upheld. Fat women and disabled women, among others, would not have been made invisible (Gill, 2008). Gill's (2008) concerns about the absence of multiple body types are somewhat akin to those expressed by Durham (2007) about the advertised portrayals of girls discussed above. However, Durham (2007) did not discuss postfeminism's rhetoric of sexual agency, as Gill (2008) does. Coulter (2010), commenting on the general discourse on the sexualisation of girls' images, somewhat similarly expresses that it is concerning that the media does not promote alternative images of girlhood. Additionally, scholars have underscored the need to research how teen and tween girls themselves negotiate these discourses (e.g., Vares et al., 2011).

Previous research shows that children's images are also racialised. For instance, Seiter (1995) points out that initially toy advertisements primarily featured white children, but as the purchasing power of other ethnic groups (as parents) was recognised, marketers began to include boys from other ethnicities in toy advertisements. However, unlike the white boy, who was shown as taking a central role or looking directly at the camera, boys from other ethnicities were

usually shown as passive or with their backs towards the camera in toy advertisements (Seiter, 1995). Vänskä (2017) notes that although the majority of the advertised images depicted only white children as innocent, a few advertisements also portrayed children of African origin as innocent. However, the children were not overly dark-skinned, thus implying that when the skin is lightened children become innocent. Vänskä attributes the inclusion of children from other ethnicities in high fashion advertising to a recognition of the buying power of other racial groups (Vänskä, 2017).

To conclude, the discussion above shows that children and childhoods have been visually represented in multiple ways in advertisements. These varied visual commercial constructions demonstrate how markets participate in shaping notions about children and childhoods. Secondly, they show how the recognition of new buyer groups may bring a few subtle changes in children's portrayals. Lastly, research and critical commentary on the sexualisation of girls' images show how concerns may be related to societal anxieties about girls' innocence. At the same time, these discussions underscore the need for alternative and more inclusive portrayals of girls.

2.4 Commercial targeting of children

In this section, I will discuss the general trends in advertising to children within different media. The idea here is not to comprehensively describe every method or technique adopted by marketers while advertising to children. Instead, given the research topic, I highlight how development of various media forms enabled improved targeting of children as a consumer group.

2.4.1 Advertising to children through magazines, Saturday matinees and the radio

Marketers consolidated their efforts towards juvenile advertising as early as the 1920s in the USA, and various magazines such as *American Boy*, *St. Nicholas,* and *Youth's Consumption* enjoyed a fairly good circulation in the late 1920s (Jacobson, 2004). In the 1930s, advertisers further accelerated their efforts towards advertising to children, not least due to the democratisation of the middle-class family, which was more likely to listen to children's demands, and the rise of age-graded spaces for children that made it easy to segregate them into viable markets (Jacobson, 2004, 2008). For instance, leisure activity groups like the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts brought out their own magazines that introduced children to various commercial offerings as early as the 1920s (Jacobson, 2004, 2008). Later, magazines like *Seventeen*, launched in 1944, became highly instrumental in advertising the latest trends in fashion and beauty to high school girls (Schrum, 2004; Cook, 2004b; Jacobson, 2008; Massoni, 2006), and the fictional character Teena primarily guided girls in spending their allowance (Massoni, 2006; Jacobson, 2008).

Movies and radio were also used to advertise to young audiences. Saturday matinees were attended by a large gathering of children from the middle and working classes, and these matinees often included cartoons (Bruce, 2008). Cross (2004b, p. 132) notes that when network radio appeared in the USA in 1926, it initially offered children's programmes without commercials. However, by 1930, advertisers recognised that children were attentive listeners, and the radio became a medium to advertise products like breakfast cereals directly to them, especially during children's afternoon programme slots that were aired after school (Cross, 2004b). Advertising was more direct on radio programmes in which shows like *Little Orphan Annie* encouraged children to drink Ovaltine (Bruce, 2008). Radio Clubs were also commonly used for advertising, where children were sent "badges and secret messages", which "could be deciphered with decoder rings" that were only available to those who bought the sponsor's product (Bruce, 2008, p. 32). Kline (1993) points out, however, that it was primarily teens who could be targeted with advertising on radio and magazines, but it was relatively challenging for marketers to reach younger children through magazines and the radio because young children mostly listened to family programmes. Eventually, it was the introduction of television that enabled more effective communication between younger children and marketers (Kline, 1993).

2.4.2 Advertising to children on television

According to David Buckingham (2000, p. 147), within the media television environment, there has been a trajectory of "gradual deregulation" and a shift towards "global multi-channel media systems". This gave rise to higher commercialisation of media entertainment offerings and increased specialised channels catering to children of different age groups (Buckingham, 2000). These specialised channels helped marketers reach children more directly with their products meant for a particular segment of the children's market (Montgomery, 2007; Schor, 2004). This section primarily describes how advertising on television developed and became more targeted and, later, stealthier. The section also describes some strategies marketers employed to make their advertising resonate with children.

During the early years of television in the USA, broadcasters made children's television programmes a commercials-free zone to encourage families to buy a television (Seiter, 1995). Initially, the main sponsors for television shows were manufacturers of snacks and cereals (Bruce, 2008). In the 1960s, the rules changed whereby networks produced television shows, and the sponsors purchased advertising time on shows (Seiter, 1995). After Mattel's success in advertising during the top-rated show *Mickey Mouse Club* (Kline, 1993; Cross, 2004b), toy companies became increasingly interested in television advertising (Kline, 1993). More importantly, the success of expensive products such as Mattel's burp gun convinced marketers that children could even convince their parents to buy toys that did not possess any educational value (Kline, 1993). Marketing experimentations increased, and one such case in the 1960s was that of the doll Barbie (introduced in 1959), which was more like a fashion model

rather than the earlier babylike dolls that girls could care for and use to emulate motherhood during play (Cross, 2004b; Kline, 1993). While marketing Barbie, the marketers created a personality around the doll, which helped capture young girls' imaginations (Kline, 1993). The Barbie is an example of how the focus on "cute" (largely driven by parents) gradually shifted to "cool" in child culture, especially toys (Cross, 2004b, 2010).

Saturday morning shows (kidvid) were also a landmark in television advertising because they brought forth massive advertising opportunities for advertisers to directly target children (Seiter, 1995; Buckingham, 2000; Wartella & Robb, 2008; Cross, 2004b). According to Seiter (1995), Saturday morning shows were created mainly because Hanna-Barbera's animation techniques enabled the creation of low-cost animation, making animation shows profitable for networks. Saturday morning was a kids' zone (Seiter, 1995; Cross, 2004b) as parents were generally sleeping late or catching up on chores or the news at this time (Seiter, 1995). Children of different ages were targeted at different time slots in the Saturday morning shows, thus making the marketing more targeted towards each age group (Young, 1990 cited in Seiter, 1995).

Parents and interest groups expressed concerns over the increase in television advertising aimed at children in the USA, and groups like ACT (Action for Children's Television) appealed to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to restrict the time of television advertising to children and also stop programme-length commercials, and ACT's demands were partly accepted (Wartella & Robb, 2008; Montgomery, 2007). However, the Reagan administration's deregulations during the 1980s revoked many of the restrictions and programme-length commercials, which were programmes that used popular toys as main characters, were allowed and they significantly boosted television advertising (Wartella & Robb, 2008; Kline, 1993; Schor, 2004). Deregulation was a victory of neoliberal market forces that constructed the child consumer as a discerning and choice-making subject (Cook, 2007). As mentioned above, corporations promoted this conceptualisation of the child consumer, more so from the 1990s (Cook, 2000).

Deregulation in Britain and the USA meant that various cable channels sprang up, which also accentuated possibilities to advertise to children of different ages on these channels (Buckingham, 2000). MTV became a popular channel among teens (Schor, 2004), while Nickelodeon (which was advertisement-free in the beginning but could not sustain this model for long) became a highly successful cable network for younger children's programmes (Montgomery, 2007; Schor, 2004). Some networks, such as Fox Kids Network, had separate channels for boys and girls (Montgomery, 2007), which was a substantial departure from the past when girls did not even have special programmes for them on television and had to watch boys' shows because in the media industry it was thought that girls would watch boys' shows, but boys would not accept girls' programmes (Seiter, 1995; Kenway & Bullen, 2001). In Finland, the gradual liberalisation of broadcasting started around the second half of the 1980s, but before that, state control on Finnish television broadcasting was higher (Hellman, 2010; Sihvonen, 2015). Writing in the context of children's

television channels, Sihvonen (2015) points out that Yleisradio (a public broadcaster) almost remained a monopolistic channel for children's programmes until the middle of the 1990s, and its programming had a high pedagogical orientation. A shift towards more populist content came with the launch of Kolmoskanava (Channel 3) in 1986. Sihvonen notes that although Kolmoskanava was also partly owned by Yleisradio, its children's programmes consisted of explicitly commercial content, such as programme-length commercials, including *Strawberry Shortcake* and *He-Man*. While Kolmoskanava was taken over by another commercial channel in 1993, commercial channels catering to children increased gradually during the 1990s. In 2000, DTT (Digital Terrestrial Television) channels for children further increased the competition between commercial channels (Sihvonen, 2015).

It is perhaps important to highlight some of the strategies employed by marketers to make advertisements more appealing to children. Firstly, the advertisements targeted at children did not have any educational appeals, as was the case with advertising to parents; they referred to a separate world of children's fun and fantasies, which also led to children and parents having "mutually exclusive motivations" in buying a toy (Seiter, 1995, p. 57). The gate-keeper model in which advertisers needed to convince the mother about the nutritional value of food products became less prominent, but sometimes in food marketing, marketers followed a "dual messaging strategy" where different elements (such as the vibrant colours of foods and drinks while advertising to children, and nutrition value while targeting mothers) were emphasised in advertisements targeting children and parents (mothers), respectively (Schor, 2004, p. 50). Moreover, Schor (2004, pp. 51–54) points out that the theme of "cool" was invoked in various advertisements by showing children and teenagers as smarter than their parents and teachers, and contravening adult authority was celebrated in such commercials. Advertisers deny charges of anti-adultism and project it as children's empowerment instead (Schor, 2004). "Age compression" was another facet of television advertising (Schor, 2004, p. 55) where the identification of younger children with teen fashions was encouraged by using teen clothing and hairstyles in advertisements targeted at younger children (Seiter, 1995; Schor, 2004). Age compression is observed to be most common in marketers' approach to the tween market and is characterised by selling various teen products (clothes, cosmetics, music and toys) to younger girls aged 8 to 12 years and increasingly to girls as young as 6 years (Schor, 2004; Quart, 2003). Marketers justified this by arguing that due to societal changes, including increased divorce rates, children's access to adult media and the commencement of puberty relatively earlier, "kids are getting older younger (KAGOY)", and, therefore, they are more sophisticated than children of previous generations (Schor,2004, p. 56).

Sandra Calvert (2008) highlights that stealth marketing techniques became common on television and some of them were also observable on the internet later. These included the use of branded characters, whereby popular children's show characters were used to sell various goods and even vacations (Calvert,

2008, p. 208). Product placements, in which the main character would use a particular product in a movie or children's television programme, were widely used for advertising to children (Calvert, 2008, Schor, 2004). Examples include Reese's Pieces in the film *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (Calvert, 2008; Schor, 2004) and Fiji water advertised on the show *Seinfeld* (Schor, 2004). Klein (2002) describes how brand awareness and loyalty were created among teens by showing characters wearing J. Crew clothing in popular TV shows such as *Dawson's Creek*. Celebrity endorsements in which celebrities endorsed or were pictured using a product in an advertisement, became increasingly common (Calvert, 2008, p. 208). This kind of advertising was very different from spot advertising, which was initially used to market sugary foods to children (Wartella & Robb, 2008), and such stealth marketing techniques tested both younger and older children's capacities to distinguish it as advertising (Calvert, 2008).

To summarise the discussion above, the increasing availability of specialised cable and television channels targeted at children also translated to higher advertising to children on television. Advertisements targeted at children tried to appeal to their sensibilities. Besides from spot advertising, stealth marketing techniques were introduced. In the next section, I will discuss advertising to children on the internet.

2.4.3 Advertising to children on the internet

By the time the internet arrived for home usage in 1993 in the USA, children were somewhat accustomed to advertisements through various television channels catering specifically to them (Montgomery, 2007). The quick uptake of digital technology by teenagers coupled with initial parental enthusiasm about the internet as an educational medium, not least because of MIT researcher Seymour Papert's belief in the internet's capability to transform education, made the internet popular among children (Montgomery, 2007). The enthusiastic uptake of the internet by children also led marketers to consider it as a lucrative medium for marketing (Wartella & Robb, 2008; Schor, 2004; Montgomery, 2007).

As discussed above, stealth marketing techniques became popular in television advertising, and some such techniques were also used subsequently on the internet. In this section, I will discuss some marketing techniques that became unique to online environments. Advergames, in which products were subtly placed in video games, became very common on the internet (Wartella & Robb, 2008; Schor, 2004; Quart, 2003; Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). Corporate sponsors paid gaming companies to feature their products in their games, which was a reversal from the past when the game companies had to pay licensing fees to corporations for permission to use their logos (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004).

Viral marketing, which is a form of word-of-mouth marketing on digital platforms (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004), has become widely used on the internet (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Calvert, 2008; Wartella & Robb, 2008). According to Kaikati and Kaikati (2004), viral marketing involved recruiting and paying young people to spread a positive word for a product among ordinary internet users on chatrooms or through weblogs. Weblogs, more commonly known as blogs,

where young users express themselves and discuss issues that are important for them, became popular among children, and their interactive formats were very appealing to teenagers. Noticing their popularity, companies like Dr Pepper not only created weblogs to promote their upcoming offerings, but they also paid and trained popular webloggers to popularise Dr Pepper's new offerings through their blogs (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). Influencer marketing can be considered an extension of this viral marketing model. With social media came the possibility of a novel means of endorsement through peers, namely, social media influencers (De Veirman et al., 2019). Given their high digital immersion, children could create videos and develop product reviews, thus engaging in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Bao et al., 2019). The potential for eWOM led marketers to approach popular social media influencers and compensate them for a positive product review, leading to the development of a practice called influencer marketing (De Veirman et al., 2017). Many popular child influencers review toys and share fun tutorials (De Veirman et al., 2019). Children spend a reasonable amount of time watching their favourite influencers' videos, including influencer marketing content (Folkvord et al., 2019; Martínez & Olsson, 2019).

Gathering data on customers was a practice that existed even before the arrival of the World Wide Web (Evans, 2009), and children were no exceptions. As early as the late 1930s, department stores enrolled middle-class teen girls in product development juries so that their preferences could be understood (Cook, 2004b). Market research on children as consumers became well organised after the 1960s when marketers gathered data about their interests by using surveys, focus group discussions on new products (Cook, 2000; Schor, 2004; Quart, 2003), and some even used more invasive ways such as ethnographic research to find out how tween girls use products (Schor, 2004). However, the internet greatly enhanced corporations' potential and possibilities for the collection of user data (Evans, 2009; Solove, 2004).

Similarly, the internet provided marketers with various opportunities for gathering data on children's preferences and interests (Schor, 2004; Montgomery, 2007; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2017; Shin, 2021). Apart from the usual means of data collection (such as registration information while logging into websites, clickstream analysis to track how users interacted with a website, and so on) that were applied to all users (Solove, 2004), some methods specifically exploited young people's need for self-expression. For instance, Montgomery (2007, p. 120) uses the case of Bolt.com to show how companies capitalised on teenagers' desire for "autonomy", self-expression, developing connections and identity building. Bolt was a website launched in 1996 that provided various interactive surveys, bulletin boards and online discussion forums where teenagers could express their views on any topic. The information shared by its members on the website was gathered and various tools were used to generate customer profiles. Bolt traded this information with marketers who then emailed various targeted advertisements based on users' profiles to individual Bolt members (Montgomery, 2007). Montgomery (2007) notes that from the mid-1990s up until

the dot-com boom, various websites, portals and content networks were launched for children, especially teenagers.

The development of tracking technologies like the web beacon, which is basically a "tracking pixel" that helps to track the site users' activity on a website (Turow & Draper, 2012, p. 134) and further improvements in cookies enhanced the capacity for user data collection (Lupton, 2015; Bermejo, 2019). According to Acquisti et al. (2020, p. 746), tracking technologies have continuously evolved such that when users began using "cookie managers" to avert "cross-site tracking", marketers started using "'flash' cookies". More sophisticated and evasive tracking mechanisms like "device fingerprinting" were developed, and the technology continues to grow (Acquisti et al., 2020, p. 746). The introduction of mobile web and Wi-Fi further increased commercial data gathering capabilities (Lupton, 2015; Bermejo, 2019). The advent of smartphones helped in gathering more individualised information due to three main reasons. Firstly, one smartphone was likely owned by a single user as opposed to desktops that could be used by multiple people (Bermejo, 2019). Secondly, geolocation trackers on smartphones could be used for gathering users' location information (Bermejo, 2019). Lastly, various smartphone applications (apps) further helped in gathering personal information on an individual user (Wang et al., 2011).

The emergence of online platforms, particularly social media platforms, has been instrumental in augmenting user data collection (Peacock, 2014; Langlois et al., 2015; Lupton, 2015; Van Dijck et al., 2018). According to Van Dijck et al. (2018, p. 4), "an online 'platform' is a programmable digital architecture designed to organise interactions between users—not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies." Van Dijck et al. categorise platforms into "infrastructural" and "sectoral", with the former providing the infrastructure (such as cloud computing, platform interface, app stores, and so on) on which sectoral platforms operate, thus making the infrastructural platforms a dominant force in the "platform ecosystem". The infrastructural platforms, at least in the West, are owned by the big five technology giants (Google/Alphabet, Facebook/Meta, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple). The idea of a platform society encapsulates how platforms have permeated various integral aspects of social life, from education (schools and colleges use, for example, Google classroom) and health (various health apps individuals use for monitoring health parameters) to news (Facebook and Twitter have been used for distributing news), and so on (Van Djick, et al., 2018, pp. 4–5). Langlois et al. (2015) note that on the pretext of providing free services to increase users' social connections, social media platforms like Facebook encourage and invite users to share information about themselves (for example, their photos, their routine activities and preferences), which they then use for categorising and profiling users. Thus, due to improved tracking technologies (Acquisti et al., 2020) and the increasing number of platforms (Van Dijck et al., 2018; Langlois et al., 2015), large amounts of data can be collected about people's various actions and interactions, such as their browsing history, the content they liked or shared, their geographical location, and more (Lupton, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2019a). This has been termed

"datafication", which is defined as the process of turning users' actions and interactions into data that "can be recorded, sorted or indeed commodified by governments and private companies" (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2022, p. 1). Children's high participation in digital environments (Stoilova et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2018; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2022) and the recording of large amounts of their online personal information (shared either by them or by others on their behalf) is one of the primary reasons why children have become highly "datafied" (Lupton & Williamson, 2017, p. 781).

Simone van der Hof (2016, pp. 412–414) provides a data typology that explains how data that is provided explicitly by users as well as data that is tracked is gathered in digital environments. This data typology divides data into three categories. The first category consists of data that users provide themselves (data shared), which includes data shared by users explicitly or knowingly but perhaps not always purposely, such as photos and updates shared on social media platforms and personal information provided during registration on apps or websites. The second category can be described as "data given off'' or behavioural data or metadata, which consists of data left mostly inadvertently by users through their everyday online activities. It includes search history, clicks, likes, device location, videos watched, time spent browsing a page, and so forth. This data given off or data that is not given explicitly is tracked by using cookies and other tracking technologies that are constantly evolving. Finally, "inferred data" (or profiling) is obtained by analysing data shared or published by users, "data given off" and perhaps data from various other sources, generally by employing algorithms (van der Hof, pp. 213–214). Inferred data, which is extremely important for commercial actors, forms the basis of targeted advertisements (Stoilova et al., 2020). Online targeted advertising is defined as "any form of online advertising that is based on information the advertiser has about the advertising recipient, such as demographics, current or past browsing or purchase behavior, information from preference surveys, and geographic information" (Schumann et al., 2014, p. 59). The web provided huge potential for targeted advertising because the pages of websites are variable (or non-static) and each time a user clicks, a different advertisement can be shown (Solove, 2004).

While online profiling and targeted advertisements may provide users with more relevant content and advertisements, they also raise various ethical concerns (Drumwright, 2007; Flyverbom & Whelan, 2019; Acquisti et al., 2016). They pose a threat to children's (and adult users') privacy (Montgomery et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2019a; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2017; Shin, 2021). Much of commercial data gathering takes place in an invisible fashion on various digital platforms, which makes it very challenging for users to exercise much control over it (Montgomery, 2015). Moreover, consumers cannot take effective decisions regarding their online privacy as they possess inadequate knowledge about "when their data is collected, for what purposes and with what consequences" (Acquisti et al., 2016, p. 442). It is highly paradoxical that social media platforms ask users to open up about their lives while keeping their data collection practices completely opaque (Langlois et al., 2015). Emphasising this opacity, van der Hof

(2016, p. 418) highlights Esther Keymolen's concept of "invisible visibility", which encapsulates how individuals are increasingly visible to commercial organisations, but individuals are not aware of this visibility. In relation to privacy in digital environments, this creates a lack of reciprocity where users, especially children, may find it hard to conceptualise who is the receiver of their information and how their data moves, thus making it challenging for them to negotiate their privacy (Steeves & Regan, 2014).

Although education and parental involvement are crucial in supporting children's privacy rights, the obfuscatory nature of commercial data harvesting mechanisms makes it challenging for even adults to fully comprehend these practices and help children, thus pointing to the importance of more effective regulations (Livingstone et al., 2019a). Regulations like the GDPR, especially the Recital 38, which recommends that parental approval be taken before processing of children's personal data for profiling and marketing purposes, are seen as a positive step (Livingstone, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2019a). However, Recital 38 informs Article 8 of the GDPR, and Article 8 clarifies that children under 16 years are eligible for such protection, and EU member states can choose to set this age of digital consent anywhere between 13 and 16 years (Livingstone, 2018). Therefore, the GDPR not only assumes that parents of younger children will be able to engage with consent terms (Livingstone, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2019a), it also makes various assumptions about older children's (13 years and above) capacity to engage with privacy terms (Livingstone, 2018; Keen 2020).

Moreover, the idea of consent and choice is central to most of the privacy regulations (Solove, 2013; Waldman, 2018), including the GDPR (Keen, 2020). However, the terms of consent are lengthy and cryptic, which makes them largely useless in protecting users' privacy (van der Hof, 2016; Waldman, 2018; Solove, 2013). Thus, Solove (2013, p. 1880) posits that the "notice, choice and consent model" of privacy protection or "privacy self-management" is rather problematic and requires rethinking. Mantelero (2017) notes that it is crucial to shift the focus away from individual users to how corporations (re)purpose users' data and commercial actors' accountability in ensuring users' privacy. Waldman (2018) proposes a way of making corporations more accountable. Waldman highlights that since privacy terms are lengthy and unintelligible, trust often guides users' information disclosure and consent decisions (Waldman, 2018). In the online privacy context, trust is defined as "a positive expectation of the trustor towards a trustee's (e.g., individual or company) conduct regarding the use of the trustor's personal information" (Meier & Bol, 2023, p. 101). Waldman (2018, p. 87) highlights the concept of privacy as trust and proposes that corporations should be made accountable by acting as "fiduciaries" of users' information and privacy legislation should make sure that corporations do not break users' trust.

Privacy scholars have discussed about the long-term harms that data profiles can cause by sorting individuals into categories, which have far-reaching impact on the credit, advertisements, content, price offers and discounts individuals receive (Cohen, 2013; Turow & Draper, 2012; Solove, 2004). Solove (2004, p. 20) uses the term "aggregation effect" to describe how small chunks of

seemingly harmless data when combined with large datasets can have far-reaching implications on people. The long-term impact of online data gathering, analysis and automated decision making on children are still unknown, but remain concerning (Milkaite & Lievens, 2020). Concerns have been expressed that digital dossiers (Solove, 2004) may follow children into adulthood and impact their access to education, employment opportunities and financial services (Montgomery et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2019a). Moreover, the suggestion of content and advertisements on various digital platforms restrict and govern human actions, experiences and choices (Flyverbom & Whelan, 2019). Similarly, Livingstone et al. (2019a, p. 6) note that ubiquitous commercial surveillance entails that our digital traces become the instruments through which our choices and options are increasingly "determined for us by others". Milkaite and Lievens (2020) point to the dangers of automated decision-making and the possibilities of social sorting for children. They note that just because an algorithm arrives at the conclusion that a child might not be interested in particular content or advertisements, it may not suggest those to children, which can deny them opportunities to make informed choices and weigh different life options at a crucial time in their lives when they make far-reaching decisions pertaining to their lives (Milkaite & Lievens, 2020). Moreover, widespread harvesting of children's data raises concerns about data privacy and security (Livingstone et al., 2019a). Lastly, there are also apprehensions that children may not always be able to recognise how online targeted advertisements seek to persuade them to buy the advertised products or services (Zarouali et al., 2020).

It has also been pointed out that online data gathering, analysis and profiling endangers children's right to privacy and protection of personal data (UNICEF, 2018). Van der Hof (2016, pp. 426–433) undertakes a comprehensive discussion of how these practices are antithetical to the principle of non-discrimination (article 2), the right to life and development (article 6), the right to be heard (article 12) and the best interest of the child (article 3) enshrined in the UNCRC. Van der Hof explains that social sorting (made possible through online data gathering, analysis and profiling) can impact children directly if they are understood to be at risk or are seen as a risk to society. Social sorting can also impact children "indirectly through their parents" or guardians. Children's right to development (article 6) includes the right to personal development. Personal development encompasses the right to "(informational) self-determination". The latter can get impacted when children are not given any control over how their personal information is used to construct their digital identities. Moreover, development also requires that children have possibilities to regulate access to themselves and create spaces where their worldviews and identities can develop in the absence of commercial, parental and governmental surveillance, which is challenging in today's digital reality (van der Hof, 2016).

Van der Hof (2016) explains that children's right to express their opinion and be heard (article 12) is intertwined with the right to intellectual privacy which involves an individual's right to develop their opinions freely. This has become almost impossible in this age of digital surveillance, when all our actions

can be monitored. Finally, the best interest principle, which requires that the best interests of the child becomes the guiding force in all decisions related to children, gets constantly threatened in digital environments where corporate and Governmental interests (which sometimes even conflict with children's interests) are given primacy (van der Hof, 2016). Milkaite and Lievens (2019) posit that algorithmic profiling and targeting of children can have far-reaching consequences. Since profiling results in advertisements and content being suggested based on users' prior online activities, children might be offered "more of the same", which could jeopardise their access to novel ideas, thus obstructing the realisation of UNCRC's articles 13 and 14 that underscore the right to receive information and freedom of thought, respectively (Milkaite & Lievens, 2019, European Union section, para 8).

To sum up, advertising to children on the internet and the underlying processes that inform it raises various ethical concerns. Although these concerns are significant for all consumers, they are even more prominent for children primarily because they impact their future choices and possibilities and are incompatible with some of the rights and principles outlined in the UNCRC.

2.5 Privacy in the digital commercial context

Concerns regarding privacy date back to the 1960s in the USA when government record keeping on computerised systems began to generate public unease, and in current times such concerns have been aggravated due to the increased gathering of user data in digital spaces (Solove, 2004). However, it has been acknowledged that privacy as a concept is difficult to define (Solove, 2008; Nippert-Eng, 2010; Nissenbaum, 2010; Cohen, 2013; Acquisti et al., 2016). Many initial conceptualisations have emphasised privacy as an individual right and focused on individual control. Warren and Brandeis (1890, p. 195), for instance, considered privacy as the "the right to be let alone" (p. 195). Westin (1967, p. 12) defines privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others." Somewhat similarly, Schoeman (1984, p. 3) notes that privacy is regarded as a "claim, entitlement, or right of an individual to determine what information about himself (or herself) may be communicated to others." However, researchers increasingly started suggesting that not just individual factors, but environmental or situational factors were also important in how self-disclosure decisions take place and how privacy is understood (Masur, 2018).

Scholars have emphasised conceptualising privacy as a social and cultural construction (Nippert-Eng, 2010; Cohen, 2013). Taking a similar point of departure, Helen Nissenbaum (2004) proposes the idea of privacy as contextual integrity. According to Nissenbaum (2004, 2010), norms governing the flow of information in a given context determine how information flows in that context. Thus, Nissenbaum (2004) conceptualises privacy as dependent on contexts.

Livingstone et al. (2019a, 2019b) build on Nissenbaum's (2004) idea of privacy as context dependent. Livingstone et al. (2019a) highlight three contexts where privacy is relevant in digital environments. These are "between an individual and (i) other individuals or groups (interpersonal privacy); (ii) a public sector or third sector (institutional privacy); or (iii) a commercial for-profit organisation (commercial privacy)" (Livingstone et al., 2019a, p. 13). Thus, the "three types of privacy" are interpersonal privacy, institutional privacy and commercial privacy (Livingstone et al., 2019b, p. 4). Masur (2018) has also made a similar distinction and identified the horizontal dimension of privacy, which includes privacy between users, and the vertical dimension of privacy, which includes users' privacy vis-a-vis governments and corporations. However, I prefer to use Livingstone et al.'s (2019a&b) categorisation as it further distinguishes between the institutional and commercial contexts.

2.5.1 Research on children's privacy in the digital commercial context

The majority of studies on children's online privacy have focused on the interpersonal context (e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2014; Lapenta & Jorgenson, 2015; Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2019). Recent events like the Edward Snowden revelations and the Cambridge Analytica data misuse case along with the generally high levels of digitalisation have led to a higher concern over commercial and governmental surveillance (Stoycheff, 2023). As discussed previously, online data-gathering practices of commercial actors are opaque and complex to discern for all users, including children. Therefore, given the non-transparent nature of these practices, any comprehensive investigation of children's perspectives on their privacy in the digital commercial context and their privacy protection practices necessitates exploring (i) children's knowledge of which data is collected for online profiling and subsequent commercial targeting, (ii) their perspectives on the latter and (iii) the privacy negotiation practices they adopt in this context.

Previous research has investigated children's knowledge of online data collection. Research shows that children infer that there are associations between their previous online activities and the targeted advertisements they are presented with on digital platforms (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020; Stoilova et al., 2019a). Keen (2020) conducted qualitative interviews with children (12–16 years) in New Zealand to investigate their awareness of the data collected for commercial profiling and the harms conceptualised by participants from such practices. In that study, most children were aware that their location information and profile details were utilised for profiling them (Keen, 2020). However, in another study by Holvoet et al. (2021), in which FGDs were conducted with children (12–14 years) in Belgium to investigate the privacy management practices they adopted based on their awareness of online user data collection, the results were slightly different. Although some participants were aware that advertisers gathered and used location information for personalising advertisements, their participants seldom discussed that details shared during registration for apps was utilised for data profiles (Holvoet et al., 2021). A few

participants in Holvoet et al.'s (2021, p. 320) research inferred that snooping was carried out via "built- in microphones" on devices, and the data was utilised for personalising advertisements. Still, a majority of the participants in Holvoet et al.'s (2021) were unconvinced that such practices took place.

Previous research has also explored children's perspectives on online targeted advertisements. Stoilova et al. (2019a), in the United Kingdom, employed focus group discussions (FGDs) to fathom children's (11–16 years) perspectives on online profiling and targeting. That research shows that some participants trusted known corporations with their data. Furthermore, few participants in Stoilova et al.'s (2019a) study talked about the longstanding effect of online profiling and targeting on diminishing their access to alternative viewpoints and options. In their study, some children found online profiling creepy or disturbing. The possibilities of data hacking featured as children's primary concerns, even while they talked about online commercial surveillance. Other, somewhat more remote concerns expressed were about data leaks and misuse, although there was an awareness of this eventuality among children (Stoilova et al., 2019a). Keen's (2020) research (described above) concluded, based on interviews with children aged 12 to 16 years, that children deemed targeted advertisements helpful because of their relevance. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees considered profiling and targeted advertisements non-disturbing. Although the gathering of location data was a concern among some children, their disquiet was mainly about their physical safety or "physio-spatial" privacy (Keen, 2020, p. 15). In a study by Zarouali et al. (2020), which used a developmental psychology perspective, a survey was employed to investigate young people's (12–17 years) capacity to critically assess online targeted advertisements' persuasive intent. Their research revealed that older children (around 16 years) had sophisticated and "adult-like" abilities to critically assess targeted advertisements (Zarouali et al., 2020, p. 357).

As mentioned above, there is limited research on children's privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context, and existing research has predominantly focused on the interpersonal context (Stoilova et al., 2019b). According to existing research, managing privacy by reading and editing privacy terms and conditions is considered exacting and taxing by children because privacy notifications are overlong and communicated in complex language (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018). Pangrazio and Selwyn (2018) organised a workshop before developing an app that would assist children's privacy management practices. In their pre-app-development workshop, some participants (aged 11–17 years) mentioned that they used a virtual private network (VPN) to protect personal data (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018). Holvoet et al.'s (2021) study highlights the pivotal role of trust in children's (aged 12–14 years) online consent decisions. Some participants in that study mentioned they trusted big companies' websites and readily accepted cookies on them. Before taking the decision to accept cookies, some of their participants checked if the website was secure. Their study reports that children did not usually read privacy notifications before accepting cookies, and some participants accepted

the terms to quickly proceed with their online work. Holvoet et al. (2021) also show that trust played a central part in children's online information disclosure decisions. They report that when children assessed the reliability of apps and websites before disclosing information online, children were mainly dependent on or guided by gut feelings or intuition (Holvoet et al., 2021).

2.6 Summary of research gaps

As discussed previously, issues of advertising ethics remain under-researched in relation to children as consumers in digital environments. Concerning girls' portrayals in advertisements, research has, for instance, focused on girls' visual representation in magazine advertisements (Merskin, 2004; Cann, 2012; Graff et al., 2013; Speno & Aubrey, 2018) and "direct-to-consumer" advertisements of Gardasil HPV vaccine in different media (print, television and internet)(Lindén, 2013, p. 83). However, despite the enhanced circulation of images enabled by digitalisation (Rose, 2016: Sturken & Cartwright, 2018), scant attention has been paid to the portrayal of girls in advertisements available in digital environments, especially on platforms like Facebook that target advertisements to consumers belonging to different age groups (Omnicore.com, 2021). Secondly, although how specific companies engaging in women-empowering advertisements fare in their institutionalised CSR initiatives, such as for a gender-equal workforce, has been analysed (Sterbenk et al., 2022), the opposite is understudied, especially in relation to young girls. However, it may be interesting and significant, especially from the perspective of advertising ethics, to scrutinise the depiction of girls in advertisements of companies that have declared institutionalised CSR commitments to encourage gender equality in the workforce.

There is generally scant research on the ethical concerns (and non-concerns) that children express regarding contemporary online advertising formats like targeted advertisements and how they navigate commercial digital spaces where unethical user data collection and tracking practices are rampant. In the light of regulations like the GDPR, it has been pointed out that more empirical evidence is required about what children residing in the EU understand about privacy in the digital commercial context (Livingstone, 2018), and the present study helps in providing this evidence. More importantly, the conceptualisation of the child in the existing studies remains problematic. Studies from developmental psychology compare children to the adult benchmark (e.g., Zarouali et al., 2020). Some studies do not elucidate how they view children, but their approach leans towards testing or assessing children's knowledge and perception primarily to identify a lacuna in it (e.g., Keen, 2020; Holvoet et al., 2021). Only a few studies have made children's perspectives and voices central to their research endeavour (e.g., Stoilova et al. 2019a, 2020), and the present study contributes to such research. In particular, the conceptualisation of children provided by childhood studies scholars remain under-utilised in research related to children's online commercial privacy. For instance, to my knowledge, previous research on

children's online commercial privacy has not used Sparrman and Sandin's (2012) conceptualisation of children as social actors. As discussed before, Sparrman and Sandin's (2012) conceptualisation of the child as a social actor provides a lens to view the child as agentic but also susceptible to vulnerabilities. Therefore, it may be particularly suitable for researching children's online privacy in the digital commercial context, a context where the largely opaque commercial surveillance that increases users' vulnerabilities is ever present (Peacok, 2014). Moreover, using this conceptualisation of children aids in preventing a classification of children into binary categories of competent/incompetent, agentic/vulnerable, and so on.

Furthermore, to my knowledge, issues of advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments have not been investigated by using ideas from childhood studies, especially ideas such as situating child consumption (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012; Sjöberg, 2015) and Cook's call to understand the different ways children "'encounter' the commercial world" (Cook, 2010, p. 73).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Methodology

In any given research project, the ontological and epistemological positions guide the methodology (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Another term that has been used for describing epistemology and ontology is *philosophical worldview* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research, which explores concerns related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments, is ontologically relativist. It means that this research acknowledges there are multiple constructed realities which are dependent on human experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The epistemological position of this study can be described as that of constructionism. Constructionists try and understand how human beings construct or interpret a phenomenon in a given social, historical and cultural context (Schwandt, 2007; Hacking, 1999). Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that a constructivist worldview, often combined with interpretivism, stresses that individuals make sense of the world they live in and ascribe subjective meanings to their experiences, and these meanings may be directed at objects or situations. The researcher also acknowledges that their own background and experiences shape how they interpret the research data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

It is also important to clarify that this dissertation endorses weak constructionism. Weak constructionism, unlike the strong social constructionism, does not claim that every idea or object is a social construct; rather, it seeks to understand how human beings interpret or construct something (Schwandt, 2007). In the context of this research project, a weak constructionist epistemological position entails that I acknowledge that girls are a biological entity. However, using ideas from the field of girlhood studies, in which discourses pertaining to girlhoods and young femininities are understood as vital

in moulding societal ideas about girls (Driscoll, 2002; Aapola et al., 2005), and the theory and method of visual discourse analysis, I try to investigate the visual discursive construction of girls in advertised images. Similarly, while exploring contemporary issues of advertising ethics, such as the invisible data collection mechanisms behind online targeted advertisements, I acknowledge that practices like online data gathering, profiling and targeting are essentially privacy invasive, but I try to investigate how children themselves interpret these practices. This epistemological position guides the methods of data collection and analysis used in this study. I will elaborate on these methods in the ensuing paragraphs.

3.1.1 Data collection and analysis

Two methods of data collection were used in this study to gain an understanding of the issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments. Guided by the concept of situating child consumption, investigating how children are made part of consumer culture (Sjöberg, 2015) was one of the first steps. Therefore, the visual representation of young girls in contemporary advertisements was analysed.

Following Gillian Rose's (2016) explanation of images, images are understood as non-neutral entities that present the world in specific ways. Visuality, which includes understanding "how we are made to see" (Foster, 1988, p. iv), was the object of study. The focus was on how girls are visually constructed or how girls are made to be seen in these advertisements. The theory and method of visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2016) was used. While discussing visual discourse analysis, Rose (2016) refers to Michel Foucault's views on discourses, in which discourses are understood as sets of statements that impact how things are understood in a society. Visual discourse analysis focuses on how discourses are (re)produced by images and how images participate in constructing certain notions about the subject depicted in the image (Rose, 2016). Rose (2016) elaborates upon the method of visual discourse analysis, and invites researchers to focus on the details, contradictions, and visible as well as invisible in images to unearth how discourses are constructed through images. In the field of girlhood studies, discourses surrounding girlhoods and young femininities are seen as significant in shaping notions related to girls (Driscoll, 2002; Aapola et al., 2005). Thus, girlhood studies' conceptualisation of girls was used in conjunction with the theory and method of visual discourse analysis.

The data consisted of contemporary advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of Nordic fast fashion companies. Advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of H&M, Lindex, Kappahl and Gina Tricot were chosen for the analysis. In particular, advertisements targeting purchasers of teenage girls' clothes in Finland were analysed. Fast fashion advertisements were analysed because fast fashion clothes are popular among teenagers due to their low prices and variety (Nguyen, 2021), and women and girls particularly enjoy the variety that fast fashion provides (Horton, 2018). The study was particularly interested in the notions about girls these fast fashion companies promote in society. Therefore, it was vital to choose a digital platform that is accessed by and

targeted at consumers from different age groups in society. Given that Facebook is a social media platform that gets extensively used for advertising to people belonging to varied age groups (Omnicore, 2021), advertised images on the public Facebook pages of companies were chosen for the analysis. Choosing Facebook for data collection also helped in understanding how young girls are visually represented in advertisements available in digital environments.

Fifteen advertised images available in the photos section of the aforementioned companies' public Facebook pages, available from January 2019 to June 2020, were chosen. There were seven images from Kappahl, five from H&M, two from Lindex and one image from Gina Tricot. One of the reasons why these Nordic fast fashion companies' advertisements were chosen for the analysis was because they were relevant from the perspective of advertising and ethics. These four Nordic fast fashion companies have declared various initiatives to promote gender equality among their employees and people working at the supply chain level (H&M, 2019; Lindex, 2019; Kappahl, 2018, 2019; Gina Tricot, 2016, 2019). Given these "institutionalised" CSR initiatives (Pirsch et al., 2007, p. 126), investigating how these companies visually portray girls in their advertisements was interesting and important.

To examine contemporary issues of advertising ethics, like online data gathering, profiling and targeted advertisements, in relation to children as consumers in digital environments, children's interpretations of these practices were explored. Again, I was guided by the idea of situating children's consumption which includes understanding how children take part in consumer culture (Sjöberg, 2015). Additionally, I was also guided by Cook's (2010) emphasis on exploring the multiple ways in which children approach the commercial world. The aim was to explore children's perspectives on online profiling and targeted advertisements, which are an essential element of contemporary digital consumer culture, and their ways of navigating online commercial environments. Understanding children's perspectives entails attending to children's ways of interpreting their social worlds (Hallde'n, 2003, cited in Sparrman, 2009). Given that this study centres on the digital commercial world, the focus was on investigating children's ways of understanding their digital commercial environments.

Focus group discussions (FGD) allow children to discuss their views on a common topic and are also helpful for children who may not prefer to participate in a one-to-one interview with an adult researcher (Horner, 2000). Hence, FGDs were used for gathering data for this part of the study. During the FGDs, the participants were also given a worksheet wherein they could fill out all the sources from which they thought apps found information related to them. While filling out these worksheets, children either opted to do pair work (which means doing the worksheet in pairs) or group work. These lists were discussed later during the FGDs so that the participants could further explain the observations they had made and the concerns, if any, they had.

As mentioned previously, according to the GDPR, EU member states can fix the age of digital consent between 13 and 16 years, and Finland has assigned

13 years as the country's age of digital consent (Livingstone, 2018). Therefore, the participants recruited for the FGDs were children within the age threshold of 13 to 16 years. The FGDs were conducted between December 2020 and May 2021. The participants were recruited by their schools. A total of three schools from the Finnish capital area participated in the study. Although it was not part of the research design to collect data from children belonging to different school districts and age was the only criteria used in defining the sample, it so happened that the three schools that agreed to participate were a little distinct from one another. One school welcomes students residing anywhere in Helsinki. The other two schools enrol students from the pupil catchment area, and the two districts where these schools are situated vary somewhat. One school is situated in a district with an annual average income above that of the Helsinki capital region. The other school is located in a district with a lower average annual income than that of the Helsinki area.

Eight FGDs (*N* = 38) were conducted, out of which five were in Finnish and three in English. The latter was the language of three FGDs because one of the schools was bilingual and children enrolled in bilingual schools often hail from varied nationalities, although data on their nationality was not collected as that was not part of the research design. The FGD groups were mixed gender groups. Small group sizes of four to six children are considered favourable as they are akin to common peer group situations (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Therefore, every group included four to six participants. The composition of every group and language of each FGD are described in Table 3. Each FGD lasted an average of 50 minutes. In the course of the FGDs, pupils in one group mentioned that recently they had taken part in a school lesson on online privacy management.

Thematic analysis which includes six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used for analysing the FGD data. A flexible method of analysis like thematic analysis, which can be used if one is taking a constructionist or a realist epistemological position (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was preferred over other methods of data analysis. The method entails looking for recurring patterns of meaning across a given set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six steps include: (i) familiarising oneself with the data, (ii) identifying the initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing the themes, (v) defining and naming themes and (vi) writing up the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The FGD data was transcribed and deidentification was performed by anonymising the data and removing other identifiers. Next, the data in Finnish was translated into English. After reading the transcripts numerous times, the data was coded. The whole process was done manually, and no specialised software was used. A theoretical approach to coding, which entails coding the data guided by specific research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was employed. The codes and accompanying data extracts were gathered (or collated) to identify themes. The themes were reviewed various times before they were finalised. The focus was mainly on semantic themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) explain that when a constructionist approach is taken "latent themes" are often studied but there are no rigid rules around this, and "different combinations are possible". Therefore,

it is also important to clarify that although my epistemological position is that of weak constructionism/interpretivism, I did not focus on latent themes and the analysis does not highlight how children drew from certain discourses while discussing online profiling and targeted advertisements. I was more interested in how they interpreted or viewed these practices.

TABLE 3 Summary of group composition

Participants per school	Language of FGD	Group	Boys	Girls	Age (Years)
School 1, total participants = 14	English	Group 1	1	4	13–14
		Group 2	2	3	14–15
		Group 3	2	2	15–16
		Total	5	9	
School 2, total participants = 13	Finnish	Group 4	0	4	15–16
		Group 5	3	1	15–16
		Group 6	2	3	15–16
		Total	5	8	
School 3, total participants = 11	Finnish	Group 7	2	3	14–15
		Group 8	2	4	15–16
		Total	4	7	

3.2. Ethical considerations

The issue of copyright is very important when using visual materials, and it is important that images are reproduced after permission has been sought from the copyright holder, even if one uses images available on social media platforms or web banner advertisements (Rose, 2016). Permission from the companies was sought before reprinting all the fifteen advertised images used in article 1. Moreover, since these images were reprinted in an article that is published as open access (Article 1), it was indicated that their re-use is not permitted until one seeks permission directly from the companies. In other words, steps were taken to clarify that the advertised images are not covered under the copyright agreement that governs the rest of the content of article 1. Since visual discourse analysis as a method is interpretive, the role of researcher reflexivity has been emphasised (Rose, 2016). This involves understanding that a researcher's subjectivity plays a significant role in how images are interpreted, and it is important to take a self-critical approach while analysing images and producing the research report (Rose, 2016). I tried to pay special attention to reflexivity while writing the analysis and have reported how researcher subjectivity may have played a role in the images that were selected for the analysis. Moreover, while analysing the images, I tried to think about how the same image could be open

to some other interpretations. I have also discussed possible alternative interpretations of the images while writing the analysis presented in article 1.

The collection of FGD data for this research project also required various special ethical considerations primarily because the participants were children. Before starting the data collection process, a specialist from the Human Sciences and Ethics Committee at the University of Jyväskylä, was consulted. The specialist was provided with a description of the research design. Based on this description, the specialist ruled out the requirement for a separate ethical approval because the research design did not meet the criteria of research that would require a separate ethical approval. Therefore, a separate ethical approval was not carried out. The University of Jyväskylä follows the guidelines outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research & Integrity (TENK) (2019). Following these guidelines, informed consent was gathered from children if they were 15 years and above. In case of children younger than 15 years, informed consent was sought from their parents (TENK, 2019). The terms of consent were repeated before starting the FGDs and it was reiterated that participation was voluntary.

Spyros Spyrou (2011, p. 154) cautions that "Power mediates all research production, and child research is no exception". I tried to reflect on this issue of power asymmetries while designing the data collection process. As a first step, I reflected upon how I understood or conceptualised children. Following scholars from childhood studies, this study conceptualises children as social actors (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998). Pia Christensen and Allen Prout (2002) propose the idea of ethical symmetry as a guide for childhood studies researchers. They note that ethical symmetry involves, first and foremost, treating children as fellow participants or social actors in society. Nevertheless, given generational differences, adult researchers should also be mindful of the power imbalance between children and adults (Chritensen & Prout, 2002). I was guided by the idea of ethical symmetry, whereby I viewed children as equal citizens but also tried to be sensitive to the power asymmetries inherent between an adult researcher and child participant.

Moreover, since the FGDs were conducted in schools, an environment that can enhance children's feelings of being assessed (Punch, 2002), it was even more important to be mindful of the power asymmetries between the adult researchers and the participants. I tried to bridge these power asymmetries by adopting the following steps. First, by opening up to the participants and sharing that most adults, including the two researchers present at the FGD, do not fully comprehend the various online privacy notifications. Initiating the discussion with something simple and familiar is generally recommended for engaging participants and also making the atmosphere informal (Gibson, 2012). Therefore, at the beginning of the FGDs (while introducing themselves), the participants were asked to name their favourite apps. Moreover, I carefully chose the screenshots that were shown during the FGDs. I tried to ensure that the screenshots were from social networks like Instagram and TikTok and gaming apps like Fortnite primarily because these apps are considered to be popular among young people belonging to this age group. Besides providing a reference

to the participants about the common online scenario being referred to, screenshots also helped make the environment fun. Thirdly, participants were also asked to share some tips on how they usually tried to protect their personal data online. In other words, the aim was to make it a process where children share their tips with adults and not vice versa so that they do not feel inferior to the adult researcher. Fourthly, since Punch (2002) recommends emphasising that no response or perspective is right or wrong, it was constantly reiterated that there are multiple perspectives on the matters being discussed and all views are welcome. Lastly, words such as *privacy*, *threats* and *risks* were deliberately avoided during the FGDs for two reasons. First, it was to create a relaxed environment where children do not feel that something serious was going on. Secondly, and more importantly, it was to avoid influencing participants' accounts. Only when they used such words or more casual ones (such as "creepy", "scary", "dodgy", "suspicious" or "odd"), were they asked to elaborate on their concerns.

Since it is recommended to also be mindful of the differences between children stemming mainly from factors such as different articulation abilities, introversion and extroversion (Punch, 2002), an important ethical consideration was to ensure that all the participants got equal opportunities to participate and share their views. Firstly, some very simple points, such as allowing everyone to speak by taking turns and re-checking in case anything was not clear (Gibson, 2012), were emphasised before the FGDs began. Moreover, two researchers were present in every FGD. One undertook the role of an observer while the other was the moderator. Paying attention to non-verbal cues is very helpful in supporting quieter members in a FGD (Sim, 1998). Therefore, the observer's tasks included paying attention to non-verbal cues. The teachers were requested to create FGD groups with participants from the same grade. This helped in reducing the chances that the older children would dominate children who were junior to them (Gibson, 2007). Small group sizes also helped in facilitating equal participation.

4 KEY RESULTS FROM THE ARTICLES

This dissertation consists of three articles. The first article helps in highlighting macro-level issues of advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments and focuses on how children (young girls) are visually represented by marketers in advertisements available on their public Facebook pages. The second and third articles dwell on contemporary issues such as the privacy-invasive online data collection and profiling practices that inform commercial targeting and children's privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context. The three articles are presented below in the order of their relevance in answering the three research questions of this dissertation. They are not presented in the order in which they were published. The main contributions by each article in this dissertation are summarised in Table 4.

4.1 Article 1: Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements

Sub-study article 1 analyses how young girls are visually constructed in contemporary fast fashion advertisements in digital environments. Advertisements targeted at buyers of teenage girls' clothing in Finland were analysed. A visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2016) of 15 advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of Nordic fast fashion companies, H&M, Lindex, Kappahl and Gina Tricot was conducted. In the advertised images, girls were visually constructed as heterosexual, caring, innocent, sexy posers, active self-presenters and self-surveyors, carefree and environmental activists. Some of these visual constructions, such as the visual representation of girls as heterosexual, caring and innocent, articulated traditional ideas related to young femininities. The portrayal of girls as sexy posers reproduced postfeminist ideas of girls as volitionally sexy. However, postfeminist media texts have been criticised for sustaining conventional beauty standards under the garb of choice and empowerment and for popularising a shallow notion of sexual agency which

excludes women and girls who do not possess normatively sexy bodies (Gill, 2008). Some complex visual constructions were also discernible. The latter included the visual construction of girls as active self-presenters and self-surveyors, carefree and environmental activists. These complex visual constructions intermixed traditional and progressive ideas surrounding girlhoods. In other words, the complex visual constructions of girls subtly resurrected stereotypical ideas surrounding young femininities and stopped short of clearly challenging stereotypical notions about girls.

That some of the visual representations of girls were outrightly stereotypical, whereas others resurrected stereotypes surrounding girls in subtle ways were unexpected results for two reasons. Firstly, because these advertisements of Nordic fast fashion companies addressed buyers of teenage girls' clothing in Finland. Nordic welfare states are known to follow "state feminism" due to multiple concerted state-sponsored programmes that assist in invigorating women's workforce participation and promoting gender equality (Formark et al., 2017, p. 10). Moreover, the discourse of agentic Nordic girlhoods is very popular in Nordic countries (Österlund, 2012). Molander et al. (2019) point out that while advertising, Nordic companies frequently reproduce the welfare state's values. Korsvold (2012), underscores the vital role that the society in which a market is contextualised plays in determining advertised portrayals. For instance, children's visual representations in advertisements addressing a Nordic country (Norway) promoted ideals of Nordic childhoods (Korsvold, 2012). The visual representations reflecting traditional ideas of girlhood that were observed in article 1 did not seem congruent with ideas of state feminism. They also did not seem to reproduce discourses of agentic Nordic girlhoods, which could be invoked when marketing in a Nordic country like Finland. Visual representations deploying postfeminist discourses and complex portrayals only pass an impression of being in sync with the values of state feminism and the notions of agentic Nordic girlhoods. Therefore, these results seemed surprising considering the societal context of the markets. Secondly, since these fast fashion companies have, as mentioned previously, announced various "institutionalised" CSR commitments (Pirsch et al., 2007, p. 126) to promote gender equality in their workplace as well as in their supply chain, one could expect their advertisements to also reflect these values when visually representing young girls. However, that was not the case.

4.2 Article 2: Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements

The second article in this dissertation explored children's awareness of being commercially profiled online and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements. The data was gathered using FGDs with children aged 13 to 16

years in schools situated in Finland's capital region. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of eight FGDs (N = 38) was conducted. According to the results of this article, children deduced that data on their location, demographics (age and gender), previous online activities and past conversations gets collected for online profiling.

This article also explored children's perspectives on online targeted advertisements. The main finding was that children had multiple perspectives on practices like online profiling and targeted advertisements. A few participants deemed targeted advertisements helpful. Some other participants, who were 15 to 16 years old, held the view that targeted advertisements encourage overconsumption. The latter, the participants explained, was because targeted advertisements are based on a knowledge of the products users want and thus can easily convince consumers to buy those products. A few participants observed that targeted advertisements limit new perspectives and choices because they infer users' preferences based on their previous online activities. Thus, varied brands and even news may rarely get suggested. Some participants found data profiling, which forms the basis of targeted advertisements, unintrusive because they trusted known companies or apps to keep their data secure. Another reason for finding profiling non-intrusive was that a few participants were at ease with a certain level of online data collection. Some participants deemed profiling disturbing or creepy because it ushered in a sense of being watched or surveilled. While discussing the possible harms of online data collection and profiling, a few participants identified risks such as hacking and their data being sold to unwanted parties. Additionally, some participants expressed an unease over the collection of location information as they felt that someone could physically harm or even murder them by using their location data. Some participants had ambivalent views on targeted advertisements and found them helpful but also concerning. The former was because targeted advertisements provided them with relevant advertisements. However, they were concerned because they found it disturbing that companies collected their data, and they also conveyed unease regarding the possibility of data misuse. A number of participants considered targeted advertisements based on their previous verbal conversations most creepy, which reflects their privacy expectations surrounding online targeted advertisements.

An interesting finding in this article was that, based on their experiences, many children felt that their verbal conversations were recorded (by the mobile phone or app) and used for personalising advertisements. Targeted advertisements that drew from their previous conversations were seen as highly privacy invasive, even by those participants who deemed online profiling and targeted advertisements undisturbing, primarily for two reasons. Firstly, because when recording conversations, their consent had not been taken. Another associated point they highlighted for being particularly disturbed by voice-based targeted advertisements was that when their online activities are tracked and data about their online activities is gathered, they sense they are not unaware and, therefore, have an elevated feeling of control. In contrast, when voice data gets

recorded, they are not made aware and cannot restrict the information they give out. Using the social contract theory (Martin, 2016), this article identifies that children's privacy expectations in relation to targeted advertisements are that their data should not be gathered without their consent or awareness. The second expectation is that data on previous verbal conversations or voice data must not be utilised for commercial profiling. The latter seems to suggest that the surveillance of previous online activities by commercial actors is considered "normal" or permissible by some children.

4.3 Article 3: Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context

The third article explores children's privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context. The data and method of analysis is the same as in the second article. However, in this article, the responses of participants who had taken part in a lesson on online privacy management at school some time back were separated from those of other groups. The group that had attended a privacy management lesson was called, somewhat unimaginatively, Focus Group Lesson (FGL) and the other group was referred to as Focus Group Standard (FGS). This was mainly done because the privacy management lesson could place participants in FGL at an advantage and their privacy negotiation practices could be more advanced. The main findings of the article were that children adopted the following practices for negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context: (i) controlling information shared knowingly, (ii) controlling the information given specifically for commercial profiling, (iii) multiple ways of using cookies notification and (iv) a tactic reflecting a paradoxical view of control.

In controlling information shared knowingly, children from FGS described how they evaluated the trustworthiness of apps and websites prior to sharing information online. A few participants evaluated trustworthiness intuitively, and they reported attending to a website's appearance to recognise if it was unreliable. However, some children also mentioned paying attention to particular indications to gauge if a website or app was untrustworthy. For instance, they mentioned avoiding websites with many pop-up advertisements. Some participants mentioned that they did not depend exclusively on their own evaluations. Rather, when in doubt, they scouted for additional information (for example, by searching on Google) before deciding to handout their details on an app or website. Despite the participants' cautious approach prior to registration on websites, registering options did not seem to be perceived with suspicion by them. Individuals' data can be circulated to various websites if users register on websites using Google and Facebook because when users log in to a website using Google or Facebook, the website can request their data from these services, which possess large amounts of users' data (Stokes, 2017). However, this did not feature among participants' concerns because when they were asked about the

option they chose when they were presented with an alternative between "creating an account" or "registering by using Google or Facebook", a majority of the children described selecting Google or Facebook. Only a single participant, who belonged to FGS, reported not selecting any of the two options because her mother had made her aware of this issue.

Only a few participants mentioned controlling information given specifically for commercial profiling. The mechanisms they employed included using a VPN, deleting their search history on Google, and so on. These participants belonged to both FGS and FGL. Another result was that children described multiple ways of reacting to cookies notifications. Some children accepted cookies either without thinking or to expeditiously proceed with their online work. Several participants, from both FGL and FGS, got overwhelmed by the lengthy privacy notifications expressed in complicated language when they tried to choose privacy terms. Thus, they reported "accepting all cookies" even when they wanted to edit the terms. A few participants from FGL and FGS noted that they accepted necessary (mandatory) cookies whenever it was feasible to do so. Children from FGS also reported accepting cookies after evaluating the trustworthiness of websites, especially in case of websites that they did not regularly use. Some participants mentioned they usually accepted cookies on big companies' websites because they trusted such companies. A few others desisted accepting cookies on websites where the secure symbol was absent. Children also described certain other signs of suspicion that they looked for before deciding on the consent option. These included examining the site URL or just checking if the website appeared to be translated using Google Translate.

A tactic with a paradoxical view of control was reported by a few children from both FGL and FGS, but primarily by children from FGL. These participants mentioned that they regulated their pace of scrolling or purposely liked the videos and "things" that interested them so that apps like Instagram and Tik-Tok would learn that they wanted more of such content or advertisements. This was an interesting result. It could be interpreted as an agentic action through which children tried to control the content or advertisements they received, but, at the same time, they also provided more accurate information to commercial actors for profiling them. A surprising finding in this article was that there were no significant differences between the practices adopted by participants in FGS and FGL. Furthermore, it was children from FGL who mainly employed the tactic with a paradoxical view of control, which left them more pregnable to commercial surveillance.

TABLE 4 The main contributions by each article in this dissertation

Article title	Main contribution
Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements	• The article contributes primarily to the research field of girls' visual commercial representations. It does so by unpacking how complex portrayals of girls can usher in an ambivalence that ends up sustaining stereotypical ideas related to girlhoods. • It also contributes to research on Nordic consumer culture by highlighting that girls' portrayals by Nordic companies may not clearly reflect values of state feminism.
Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements	• The article advances research on adolescents' knowledge of the data gathered for online profiling by identifying that adolescents deduce that in addition to the data on previous online activities, location, and demographics, data on their verbal conversations (voice data) also gets utilised for profiling and targeted advertisements. • The study contributes to research on adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements. It identifies that adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of targeted advertisements are that data should not be collected without their awareness and commercial entities should not utilise voice data or data on previous conversations for profiling purposes. • This study also highlights that online profiling gives some adolescents a privacy-invasive feeling of being watched, and others have a threshold until which they consider online data collection for profiling permissible. • Moreover, some adolescents hold ambivalent views on online targeted advertisements.
Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context	• The article contributes to research on children's negotiation of online commercial privacy. It does so by identifying an act of digital agency by children that might satisfy their immediate needs but can also make them more susceptible to commercial surveillance. • Secondly, it identifies some of the factors children consider while assessing the trustworthiness of apps and websites before making online information disclosures.

5 DISCUSSION

This dissertation aimed to understand the concerns related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments and how children navigate contemporary digital commercial environments. The research questions explored were:

RQ 1: What are the issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers and targets of marketing in digital environments?

(a) How are young girls visually represented in advertisements available in digital environments?
(b) How congruent are these visual representations with the companies' institutionalised CSR initiatives towards encouraging gender equality?
(c) What ethical concerns do children express in relation to contemporary digital marketing practices like online profiling and targeted advertisements?

RQ 2: What are the reasons for children not perceiving contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic?

RQ 3: How do children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments that raise ethical concerns related to user data collection and profiling?

The answers to these research questions, implications of the findings, the study's contribution, its limitations and suggestions for future research are presented in the ensuing sections.

5.1 Issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers and targets of marketing in digital environments

A macro-level concern of advertising ethics is related to the societal values promoted by advertisements (Förster & Weish, 2017). Advertisements have been criticised for promoting stereotypical ideas on certain social groups (Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005). A visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2016) of fifteen advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of Nordic fast fashion companies, H&M, Lindex, Kappahl and Gina Tricot, showed that girls were represented in outrightly stereotypical ways in some advertisements, while some portrayals were complex. Complex portrayals sustained stereotypes surrounding young femininities in subtle ways. In other words, these complex visual constructions did not succeed in vehemently questioning or challenging stereotypes related to young femininities. While complex visual representations that included contradictory ideas were also seen in a previous study by Cann (2012), in which magazine advertisements were analysed by attending to signs and signifiers, this study unpacks more textual and visual means through which girls' images can be rendered complex so as to exude an ambiguity that does not sufficiently challenge stereotypes surrounding girls. Moreover, to my knowledge, previous studies have not examined the visual representation of girls in advertisements available on the public Facebook pages of companies. Lastly, the stereotypical portrayals (cogent or complex) of girls in the advertisements of Nordic fast fashion companies that have announced various institutionalised CSR initiatives to promote workforce gender-equality shows that their commitments did not permeate through the visual representation of girls in their advertisements. To the best of my knowledge, how corporations that announce institutionalised CSR programmes towards encouraging workforce gender equality portray young girls in advertisements has not been examined before.

A macro-level ethical concern about advertising is that advertisements encourage excessive materialism and consumption (Drumwright, 2007). While materialistic attitudes could be present in humans even before the advent of advertising, it is important to acknowledge that advertising promotes consumption by creating aspirations for products (O'Guinn, 2007). Some children who were 15 to 16 years old expressed similar concerns about contemporary digital marketing practices like online targeted advertisements, although this dissertation cannot claim to make age-related generalisations. They noted that since targeted advertisements showed them relevant products that they wanted to buy, such advertisements were more likely to persuade users to buy products, thus leading to over consumption. This is somewhat similar to the findings of a previous research that employed survey data to assess the critical abilities of adolescents towards targeted advertising and concluded that adolescents about 16 years old displayed better critical skills (Zarouali et al., 2020).

Contemporary issues of advertising ethics for children as consumers in digital environments can be categorised as related to (i) the opacity of online data

gathering processes and resultant privacy-invasive advertisements, (ii) experiences of privacy invasiveness from online profiling, (iii) challenges in opting out of online data collection and (iv) the long-term ramifications of online profiling and targeting in limiting their choices and perspectives.

The results indicate that, based on their experiences, children deduced their voice data was also getting recorded for commercial profiling and ensuing targeting. Since a key task of advertising ethics in digital environments is to uncloak how users' data is collected and utilised (Förster & Weish, 2017), children's experiences raise ethical concerns about the non-transparent nature of online data-gathering practices. Moreover, children found online targeted advertisements based on their voice data most privacy invasive, which further indicates that personalisation based on voice data is considered unacceptable and highly intrusive by children. Secondly, from an ethical standpoint, contemporary online data collection practices raise various concerns related to users' privacy (Förster & Weish, 2017). This issue related to advertising ethics was also raised by some children who identified hacking and data misuse risks. This was also reported in a previous study (Stoilova et al., 2019a). Moreover, a few participants expressed angst about physical harm due to location tracking, which is akin to the findings of Keen's (2020) study. Although previous research elaborates on the risks children identified, it does not explain why children found profiling to be privacy invasive. This study identifies that children found online profiling creepy or intrusive to their privacy because it generated feelings of being surveilled or observed among them.

Thirdly, several children also expressed that they found privacy terms long and cryptic, and due to this they often ended up "accepting all cookies", even when they wanted to edit the terms. This finding conforms with previous research (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018). Any ethical digital advertising requires that users be given an option to refuse data collection (Förster & Weish, 2017). Moreover, current privacy legislations like the GDPR require that terms and conditions be laid out clearly, especially for child users, although platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram still have not fully met these directives (Milkaite & Lievens, 2020). Therefore, children's reported experiences of frustration with lengthy privacy terms is an ethical issue surrounding advertising in contemporary digital environments.

Lastly, privacy scholars have highlighted how data collection, sorting, automated decision-making processes and targeting lead to children's (and other users') choices being determined by others (Solove, 2004; Livingstone et al., 2019a; Montgomery et al., 2017). Milkaite and Lievens (2020) note that such practices are even more concerning for children because small chunks of data may be used to draw inferences about children and sort them into categories based on those inferences. The long-term ramifications of these practices on children's development and lives are hard to predict now. For instance, it is possible that children will remain "stuck with a certain profile" and not be offered choices, information and opportunities just because algorithms inferred that certain content would be irrelevant to them, and this could adversely impact children's

right to development and reduce their possibilities to access different kinds of information throughout their childhoods (Milkaite & Lievens, 2020, p. 8). These ethical concerns related to the long-term impact of profiling and targeting were raised by a few participants in this study who mentioned that targeted advertisements restrict their choices and perspectives, which is in line with Stoilova et al.'s (2019a) findings.

5.2 Reasons why children do not perceive contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic

Based on the results, the reasons children do not perceive contemporary digital marketing practices as problematic can be described in the following terms: (i) online profiling is not seen as privacy-invasive, (ii) targeted advertisements are viewed as helpful, and (iii) monitoring of previous online activities is considered "normal" or permissible.

Some children reported that they did not consider online data collection and profiling to be privacy intrusive. One of the reasons they cited for the latter view was that they generally considered popular apps like Instagram reliable and trusted these apps to keep their data secure. This is congruent with the findings of Stoilova et al. (2019a). Moreover, some participants seemed to have an imaginary threshold until which they were tolerant of or comfortable with online data gathering. This has not been reported by previous research. Secondly, some children also reported finding targeted advertisements helpful because they suggested products that were relevant to them. This finding concurs with previous research (Keen, 2020).

Lastly, some participants seemed to find the tracking or monitoring of their online actions by commercial actors as "normal" or permissible. This was primarily reflected in the strong disapproval expressed towards targeted advertisements based on voice data or previous conversations by even those participants who considered online profiling non-invasive. There was a resentment for voice-based targeting because voice recording was done without participants' awareness and they did not expect voice data to be utilised for profiling and targeting. However, the surveillance of previous online activities for profiling was expected or "normal". In other words, targeted advertisements based on voice data did not meet their privacy expectations in relation to targeted advertisements. This has not been reported in previous studies. There were also some participants who were ambivalent about targeted advertisements and found them both helpful and disturbing. The former was because they appreciated relevant content and advertisements, while the latter was because they thought companies should not gather personal data and they feared the possibility of data misuse. Ambivalent views could indicate permissiveness towards online profiling. However, they may also reflect scepticism towards it.

Ambivalent views on online targeted advertisements have not been reported in previous research with children.

5.3 How children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments that raise ethical concerns related to user data collection and profiling

The practices that children adopt while navigating contemporary digital environments, where covert data gathering and profiling takes place, are somewhat complex and can be categorised into (i) practices that help protect their privacy from commercial actors, at least to some extent and (ii) practices that make them more vulnerable to commercial surveillance. Practices like evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites before disclosing information online, controlling the information given specifically for commercial profiling, accepting mandatory cookies whenever possible and evaluating websites before making online consent decisions could fall in the former category. Whereas practices like accepting cookies unthinkingly, not evaluating registering options before signing into apps and websites, readily accepting cookies on big companies' websites and the tactic with a paradoxical view of control can be part of the latter category.

When children explicitly provide information online, they take some steps to assess the trustworthiness of apps or websites. Holvoet et al. (2021) have also shown that trust governs children's decisions to share their information online. Holvoet et al. (2021) observed that children's gut feelings guided them when they assessed the reliability of apps and websites. However, their research does not pinpoint the factors children focused on when they were governed by intuition. This study noted that when children were assessing apps and websites intuitively, they focused on the website's general appearance or look. This has not been pointed out by previous research. Moreover, in the present study, the participants were not guided mainly by their gut feelings when gauging the reliability of apps and websites. Here, the results of the present study are dissimilar to Holvoet et al.'s (2021) findings. Some children were definitely governed by gut feelings while assessing websites and apps. However, others also reported being mindful of dubious or unusual signs on websites and apps. They mentioned that they refrained from sharing their information if they encountered such suspicious signs. A few participants pointed out that if they were doubtful about the credentials of a website, they sometimes looked up information (usually on Google) about that website before making information disclosures.

A few children reported controlling the information that they gave specifically for commercial profiling. One of the main ways of doing so was by using a VPN, which has also been reported in previous research (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018). Some children also reported that they accepted mandatory cookies when it was plausible to do so. Previous research has not reported this.

Additionally, children assessed websites and desisted from accepting cookies on websites where the secure symbol was not present. This was also found in previous research (Holvoet et al., 2021). Moreover, in this study, some more signals (for instance, an odd-looking site URL) that children observed while assessing websites before accepting cookies were identified, which indicates children's overall sense of caution in online environments.

As mentioned above, some practices adopted by children in digital commercial environments made them more vulnerable to commercial surveillance. For instance, accepting cookies without thinking or for just moving on with their online work does not help children protect their online commercial privacy. This practice has also been reported in previous research (Holvoet et al., 2021). Secondly, registering options on apps and websites did not raise concerns among the majority of the children, which has not been reported by previous research. Thirdly, trusting the websites of big companies and instantly accepting cookies on them, which was also found by Holvoet et al. (2021), could be problematic as there is no guarantee that such companies may not employ third-party cookies. Lastly, the practice with a paradoxical view of control, in which children reported adjusting their scrolling pace or deliberately liking certain content or advertisements on Instagram and TikTok to receive more of them, is both agentic and problematic. From the perspective of privacy protection, this practice made children more vulnerable to corporate surveillance because in trying to exercise control over the advertisements or content they receive, children also ended up providing highly accurate information about their preferences to commercial actors. This complex practice has not been identified in previous research.

5.4 Implications

The findings of this study have various implications at the societal level. A pertinent traditional issue related to advertising ethics identified in this dissertation is that the contemporary fast fashion advertisements analysed in this study left stereotypes surrounding young femininities almost unchallenged. They perpetuated stereotypes associated with girls and young femininities either subtly or cogently. Since, as mentioned previously, these fast fashion companies have announced various initiatives to promote gender equality in their workplaces as well as in their supply chains, it is even more concerning that they promote gender stereotypes or do not adequately challenge them while portraying young girls in their advertisements. An important ethical issue with the perpetuation of stereotypes through advertised portrayals is that they can cause "epistemic closure" by limiting the way stereotyped social groups are seen by society (Schroeder & Borgeson, 2005, p. 584). According to Knoll et al. (2011), gender stereotypical representations could restrict how society perceives the groups that are depicted in a stereotypical manner, and such representations may also reduce the expectations that stereotyped groups have of themselves, thus

limiting the life prospects or chances of these groups. Similarly, these gender stereotypical portrayals can limit how girls perceive themselves and how society views girls. Such visual representations do not provide any alternative images of girlhood. In so doing, they help maintain a status quo and may discourage girls from challenging a gender-stereotypical societal order. Considering the high circulation that contemporary digital platforms afford advertised images and images in general (Rose, 2016; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018), these findings become even more pertinent.

Some children raised the macro-level ethical concern that has traditionally been associated with advertising's role in promoting excessive consumption (Drumwright, 2007; O'Guinn, 2007). Moreover, they expressed that such concerns were more pronounced with online targeted advertisements due to their congruence with users' interests, which reflects children's critical reflections on targeted advertisements. However, this was only brought up by a few participants. Therefore, more awareness could be raised about these issues, not least because targeted advertisements are ominous in contemporary online environments.

The participants seemed to be more or less aware of being surveilled in online environments. In other words, they were mostly cognisant that their previous actions, location information and demographic details were used for online profiling and targeting. Furthermore, drawing from their experiences, they deduced that their previous verbal conversations (voice data) were also utilised for profiling purposes. This finding indicates that contemporary commercial surveillance methods are so obfuscatory that they often leave children confused about the various data sources through which they become more visible to corporations. This underscores the need to push corporations to make their data collection sources clearer or more transpicuous to ordinary users, especially children. Moreover, another contemporary issue related to advertising ethics that this study identifies is that some children found online data gathering and profiling intrusive because it made them feel they were being surveilled or watched over. This reflects the need to ensure that children are made aware of privacy protection mechanisms that can help them opt out of such data collection. At the same time, many children's sense of frustration with lengthy privacy notifications reflects that only awareness-raising programmes are insufficient. Instead, corporations must also simplify privacy terms. The latter has also been suggested by other researchers (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018; Milkaite & Lievens, 2020). Lastly, only a few children expressed concerns about the long-term impact that profiling and targeting may have in restricting their access to varied worldviews and choices, which seems to suggest that more awareness needs to be raised about these issues.

An exploration of the reasons why children do not perceive contemporary marketing practices like online profiling and targeting as problematic reflected a certain level of permissiveness among some children towards the monitoring of their online activities. This suggests that children's awareness of the consequences of online data collection and profiling must be increased. Such

awareness-raising could be a means to address permissive attitudes and enhance children's critical reflections on these issues. The other two reasons why children found practices like online profiling and targeting unproblematic were because of a general sense of trust in big corporations to keep their data secure and relative comfort with a certain level of online data collection. Moreover, some children just found online targeted advertisements useful or helpful mainly due to their relevance. These findings also raise the need for increasing children's awareness about corporations' use and misuse of user data and how relevance is achieved at the cost of user privacy.

Findings related to the practices children adopt while navigating digital commercial environments have various implications. Firstly, this study highlights the crucial role that trust plays in children's online information disclosure and consent decisions. Therefore, it is vital to make corporations more accountable by making them fiduciaries or trustees of children's personal information and for privacy legislation to ensure that corporations live up to children's expectations and protect children's data from misuse, as Waldman (2018) proposes for ensuring users' privacy. At the same time, the finding that children tend to readily accept cookies on big companies' websites suggests that children's knowledge of cookies needs to be enhanced. Since few children took steps to control the information they provided or ended up giving away for commercial profiling, there seems to be a general need to improve children's knowledge surrounding various methods of data protection. Moreover, practices such as accepting cookies for quickly proceeding with one's online pursuits, not giving much consideration to cookies and an uncritical acceptance of login options like Facebook or Google while registering on apps and websites further indicate that children's awareness of online data movements and privacy management strategies needs to be raised. Lastly, the tactic reflecting a paradoxical view of control, which was primarily adopted by children who had attended a privacy management session at school, suggests that it may be critical to make sure that privacy education also informs and transforms children's day-to-day online practices.

5.5 Contribution

5.5.1 Contribution to academic research

This dissertation attempted to provide an understanding of the issues related to advertising ethics in relation to children as consumers in digital environments. Furthermore, it tried to explore how children navigate contemporary digital commercial environments that are characterised by practices such as the harvesting of user data, which create various power asymmetries between corporations and users.

By analysing how young girls are visually constructed in contemporary fast fashion advertisements available in digital environments, the study becomes one

of the few to examine the notions about girls circulated by fast fashion companies in their advertisements. The study is also one of few to research the visual construction of girls in advertisements available on a popular digital platform like Facebook, which is widely used for advertising to people across different age groups (Omnicore, 2021). These aspects make this a study that focuses on an under-researched yet powerful medium of advertising in contemporary digital environments. Moreover, the study examines how companies with institutionalised CSR initiatives towards promoting workforce gender-equality portray social groups like young girls, which is an under-researched yet important topic, especially from the vantage point of advertising ethics. By investigating how children navigate commercial digital environments and the online user data collection that underpins them, this study contributes to existing research on children's privacy practices vis-a-vis commercial data gatherers after the implementation of the GDPR across the EU in May 2018 (e.g., Holvoet et al., 2021). It does so by bringing in the perspectives and practices of children residing in Finland.

Most studies that have tried to examine children's understanding of the current digital marketing practices, like online targeted advertisements, draw from the developmental psychology perspective that conceptualises the child as a becoming and regard "adult-like" capacities as the benchmark (e.g., Zarouali et al., 2020). Other studies have not clarified how they conceptualise children and childhoods, but their research implicitly suggests that they are assessing children and what they *lack* (e.g., Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020). However, only a few studies in this area have taken children's perspectives seriously (e.g., Stoilova et al., 2020; Stoilova et al., 2019a). By using the conceptualisation of children from childhood studies as social actors (Prout & James, 1997; James et al., 1998) and Sparrman and Sandin's (2012) definition of social actors, this study has tried to capture children's social actorship in contemporary commercial digital environments. This entails taking a balanced view of children as both competent and incompetent, agentic but also prone to vulnerabilities (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012) and viewing them as neither naïve nor competent but recognising that they can occupy a space in between these dichotomies (Sparrman, 2009). The study is one of the first to approach issues of advertising ethics concerning children as consumers in digital environments, especially children's perspectives on online targeted advertisements and their negotiation of online commercial privacy, by using ideas such as situating child consumption (Sparrman & Sandin, 2012; Sjöberg, 2015) and Cook's (2010) proposal to investigate the multiple ways in which children engage with and approach the (digital) commercial world. These are both ideas that scholars of childhood studies have proposed pursuing. Lupton and Williamson (2017) have noted, however, that researchers from childhood studies have paid scant attention to children's privacy rights in digital environments. This study was also an attempt to address this gap and connect research on children's privacy with childhood studies' approach to children as consumers and that field's conceptualisation of the child.

5.5.2 Practical contributions

This dissertation also makes some practical contributions. By analysing the visual commercial construction of girls, the study helps identify how complex images may end up sustaining societal stereotypes related to young femininities. The findings can help sensitise marketers who use girls' images in advertisements. The findings may be particularly useful for companies with institutionalised CSR initiatives on gender equality by heightening their awareness that they should critically reflect on how they portray societal groups like young girls so that their advertised messages align with the ethical values they commit to in their institutionalised CSR initiatives. The findings can also inform interest groups that work towards more ethical advertised portrayals, especially advocacy groups in Finland, as the research has specifically looked at advertisements targeting buyers in Finland. For instance, bodies such as Finland's Council for Ethics in Advertising (Mainonnan Eettinen Neuvosto) have increasingly taken a strict approach towards gender stereotypes being reflected in advertisements featuring young children (Mikkulainen, 2017). However, these findings alert us that gender stereotyping is still a critical issue in advertisements featuring young girls, and advocacy groups should continue to work towards more non-gender stereotypical portrayals of girls.

When dealing with children's privacy rights in the digital age, there is a need for a comprehensive approach which includes elevating users' awareness, raising corporations' accountability, and improving regulations (Livingstone et al., 2019a). Likewise, the findings of this dissertation indicate that children's online privacy rights can be upheld only if various actors are involved. The findings on why children perceive contemporary digital marketing practices such as online profiling and targeting as unproblematic indicate lacunae in children's knowledge. Media literacy educators in Finland can make use of these findings. They could develop educational materials and awareness-raising initiatives to enhance children's knowledge about the repercussions of online data gathering, profiling and targeting. Additionally, the Finnish National Agency for Education (Opetushallitus) and those working with new educational plans can utilise these results while laying out the obligatory digital literacy skills for pupils. Similarly, an exploration of how children navigate contemporary commercial digital environments, which are characterised by covert user data collection practices, helped in identifying some of the areas where children can benefit from more information, such as knowledge about types of cookies and online data protection mechanisms. While Finland has been recognised as a frontrunner in imparting media literacy education (Forsman, 2020), these findings help identify areas where children in Finland might require more knowledge and awareness. This may be particularly critical as children's digital footprints increase and newer mechanisms of commercial surveillance develop simultaneously.

Moreover, the data for this study was collected over two years after the implementation of the EUGDPR. Therefore, by providing empirical evidence that children find it hard to manage consent terms due to the complicated language

of these terms, the study also helps in identifying some ways to improve existing privacy legislation such as the GDPR. Finally, by highlighting that children make trust-based decisions when they disclose information online and consent to data collection, the study (using ideas from Waldman, 2018) proposes making corporations trustees of children's data. Therefore, the study proposes alternative ways of approaching children's privacy (other than privacy self-management), which might interest policy-makers (both within and outside of the EU) and could make corporations more accountable. Furthermore, the finding that children often experience receiving online targeted advertisements based on their voice data can be used by advocacy groups to put more pressure on corporations to make their data gathering processes transparent.

5.6 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study suffers from various limitations, which need to be highlighted. Firstly, it only focuses on the portrayal of young girls in advertisements. Future studies could also look at how boys and androgynous children are visually constructed in advertisements available on digital platforms. Moreover, the study only considers fast fashion advertisements targeted at buyers in Finland. Future studies could scrutinise advertisements from other product categories and in different countries. Advertisements available on other social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat could also be analysed. Moreover, studies could also analyse how young influencers, who have a large following among children, visually present themselves. Finally, a future study could adopt an intersectional approach. In other words, it could examine how the visual portrayal of girls in advertisements may transpire at the intersection of discourses related to gender, race, ethnicity and social class.

While exploring children's perspectives on online profiling and targeted advertising and their privacy management practices, this study used FGDs. Children's voices are highly contextual, and the same children may express themselves differently in varied settings (Spyrou, 2011). The FGDs were conducted in schools, and it is possible that children would have felt more relaxed in a setting such as a playground or cafe, and their responses would have differed accordingly. Moreover, it is possible that more articulate children managed to express more, although steps were taken to ensure equal participation. Participant observations could have been a tool to gather more insights on children's ways of acting in digital environments, and future studies could use them. The study focused only on children living in the capital region in Finland and did not consider children from specific socioeconomic backgrounds. Future studies could consider children living in smaller towns in Finland and those from certain school districts and backgrounds.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Digitalisaatio on lisännyt makrotason eettisiä huolenaiheita mainonnassa, erityisesti mainosten roolia yhteiskunnallisten stereotypioiden (uudelleen)tuottajana, koska digitalisaatio on lisännyt kuvien kiertoa. Lisäksi nykyaikaiset mainosmuodot, kuten online-kohdistetut mainokset, ovat tuoneet mukanaan uusia eettisiä huolenaiheita, jotka liittyvät ensisijaisesti käyttäjien yksityisyyteen. Lapset ovat merkittävä kuluttajaryhmä ja erilaisten digitaalisten alustojen aktiivisia käyttäjiä. Mainonnan eettisiä kysymyksiä ei kuitenkaan tutkita lasten suhteen. Tästä syystä tämän artikkelipohjaisen väitöskirjan tavoitteena on ymmärtää joitakin mainonnan etiikkaan liittyviä huolenaiheita suhteessa lapsiin kuluttajina digitaalisissa ympäristöissä ja miten lapset navigoivat nykypäivän digitaalisissa kaupallisissa ympäristöissä. Tämä tutkimus sijoittuu suomalaiseen kontekstiin.

Tämän väitöskirjan keskeiset tutkimuskysymykset ovat: (i) Mitkä ongelmat liittyvät mainonnan etiikkaan suhteessa lapsiin kuluttajina ja markkinoinnin kohteina digitaalisissa ympäristöissä? (ii) Mitkä ovat syitä siihen, että lapset eivät koe nykyaikaisia digitaalisia markkinointikäytäntöjä ongelmallisina? (iii) Miten lapset toimivat nykyaikaisissa eettisiä huolenaiheita herättävissä kaupallisissa digitaaliympäristöissä, joissa käyttäjistä kerätään dataa ja heitä profiloidaan?

Tarkastellakseen laajoja eettisiä huolenaiheita mainosten kyvystä (uudelleen)tuottaa yhteiskunnallisia stereotypioita, väitöskirjassa analysoidaan visuaalisen diskurssianalyysin avulla tyttöjen kuvaamista viidessätoista tämänhetkisessä pikamuotimainoksessa, jotka ovat julkisesti esillä pohjoismaisten pikamuotiyritysten, H&M:n, Lindexin, Kappahlin ja Gina Tricot'n, Facebook-sivuilla. Tarkasteltavat mainokset olivat teini-ikäisten tyttöjen vaatteiden ostajille suunnatut, tammikuusta 2019 kesäkuuhun 2020 saatavilla olleet mainokset Suomessa. Tarkastellakseen myös nykyisten mainosformaattien eettisiä yksityisyysongelmia järjestettiin kahdeksan (N = 38) fokusryhmäkeskustelua, joissa tarkasteltiin lasten näkökulmia profilointiin ja kohdennettuun mainontaan verkossa sekä heidän yksityisyyskäytäntöjään ja navigoimistaan digitaalisessa kaupallisessa kontekstissa. Fokusryhmäkeskustelut järjestettiin Suomessa pääkaupunkiseudun kouluissa 13–16-vuotiaille osallistujille joulukuun 2020 ja toukokuun 2021 välillä. Fokusryhmäkeskusteluaineisto analysoitiin käyttämällä temaattista analyysia.

Tulosten mukaan tutkimuksessa analysoidut mainokset esittivät tytöt stereotyyppisessä valossa tai käyttivät monitahoisia kuvia, jotka uudelleentuottivat stereotypioita hienovaraisesti. Nykyisistä mainosformaateista keskustellessa osa osallistujista nosti esiin laajan eettisen huolensa siitä, että kohdennetut mainokset saattavat kannustaa ylikulutukseen. Osa taas ilmaisi eettisen huolensa i) verkkotiedonkeruun läpinäkymättömyydestä ja siitä seuraavista yksityisyyttä loukkaavista mainoksista, ii) yksityisyyttä loukkaavista verkkoprofilointikokemuksistaan, iii) haasteista kieltäytyä verkkotiedonkeruusta ja iv) verkkoprofiloinnin ja kohdentamisen pitkän aikavälin seurauksena tapahtuvasta heidän valintojensa ja näkökulmiensa rajoittamisesta. Jotkut lapsista eivät pitäneet nykyisiä verkkomainontaformaatteja ongelmallisina, sillä he i) eivät pitäneet verkkoprofilointia tunkeilevana, ii) pitivät kohdennettuja mainoksia hyödyllisinä ja iii) pitivät

aiemman verkkotoimintansa seuraamista ”normaalina”. Navigoidessaan nykyisissä kaupallisissa digiympäristöissä lapset omaksuivat joitain käytäntöjä, jotka jossain määrin auttoivat heitä suojaamaan verkkoyksityisyyttänsä kaupallisessa kontekstissa. Toisaalta tietyt toimintatavat päinvastoin tekivät heistä haavoittuvaisia digitaaliselle kaupalliselle valvonnalle.

Nämä tulokset osoittavat, että yritysten on kuvattava lapsia eettisemmin. Lisäksi useimmat lapset eivät ole tietämättömiä nykyaikaisiin mainosmuotoihin liittyvistä eettisistä huolenaiheista, ja jotkut ryhtyvät mahdollisiin toimiin niiden torjumiseksi. Kouluttajien, edunvalvontaryhmien, lainsäädännön ja yritysten on kuitenkin tuettava lapsia paremmin, jotta lasten oikeuksia kansalaisina voidaan kunnioittaa digitaalisissa ympäristöissä.

REFERENCES

Aapola, S., Gonick, M., & Harris, A. (2005). *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power, and Social Change.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Acquisti, A., Brandimarte, L., & Loewenstein, G. (2020). Secrets and Likes: The Drive for Privacy and the Difficulty of Achieving It in the Digital Age. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *30*(4), 736–758. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1191

Acquisti, A., Taylor, C., & Wagman, L. (2016). The Economics of Privacy. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *54*(2), 442–492. https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.54.2.442

Adorjan, M., & Ricciardelli, R. (2019). A New Privacy Paradox? Youth Agentic Practices of Privacy Management Despite "Nothing to Hide" Online. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, *56*(1), 8–29. https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12227

Bao, T. , Chang, T. S., Kim, A. J., & Moon, S. H. (2019). The characteristics and business impact of children's electronic word of mouth in marketing communications. *International Journal of Advertising*, *38*(5), 731–759. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2018.1559558

Beltramini, Richard. F. (2003). Advertising Ethics: The Ultimate Oxymoron? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *48*, 215–216.

Bermejo, F. (2019). Online Advertising as a Shaper of Public Communication. In R. F. Jørgensen (Ed.), *Human Rights in the Age of Platforms* (pp. 119–136). The MIT Press.

Borgerson, J. L., & Schroeder, J. E. (2002). Ethical issues of global marketing: Avoiding bad faith in visual representation. *European Journal of Marketing*, *36*(5/6), 570–594. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560210422399

Boulton, C. (2007). Don't Smile for the Camera: Black Power, Para- Proxemics and Prolepsis in Print Ads for Hip-Hop Clothing. *International Journal of Communication*, *2*.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practice guide for beginners.* Sage Publications.

Bruce, A. (2008). Children's Media Consumption and Struggles for Cultural Authority in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. In L. Jacobson (Ed.), *Children and Consumer Culture in American Society A Historical Handbook and Guide* (pp. 27–42). Praeger Publishers.

Buckingham, D. (2011). *The material child: Growing up in consumer culture*. Polity.

Buckingham, D., & Tingstad, V. (2017). Children as consumers. In M. Keller, B. Halkier, T.-A. Wilska, & M. Truninger (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook on Consumption* (pp. 303–313). Routledge.

Buckingham, D. (2000). *After the death of childhood: Growing up in the age of electronic media*. Polity Press.

Buckingham, D., & Tingstad, V. (2010). Introduction. In D. Buckingham & V. Tingstad (Eds.), *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (pp. 1–16). Palgrave Macmillan.

Buckingham, D., & Willett, R. (2022). Constructing Children as Consumers. In D. Lemish (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Children, Adolescents, and Media* (Second, pp. 49–56). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Calvert, S. L. (2008). Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing. *The Future of Children*, *18*(1), 205–234.

Cann, V. (2012). Competing Femininities: The Construction of Teen Femininities in Magazine Adverts. *Networking Knowledge*, *5*(1), 59–83.

Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2002). Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood*, *9*(4), 477-497.

Cieslik, M., & Simpson, D. (2013). *Key Concepts in Youth Studies.* Sage.

Cohen, J. (2013). What privacy is for. *Harvard Law Review*, *126*, 1904–1933.

Cook, D. T. (1999). The Visual Commoditization of Childhood: A Case Study of a Children's Clothing Trade Journal, 1920s-1980s. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *3*(1–2), 21–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.1999.11892220

Cook, D. T. (2000). The Other "Child Study": Figuring Children as Consumers in Market Research, 1910s–1990s. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *41*(3), 487–507. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2000.tb00089.x

Cook, D. T. (2002). Interrogating Symbolic Childhood. In D. T. Cook (Ed.), *Symbolic Childhood* (pp. 1–12). Peter Lang Publishing Group.

Cook, D. T. (2003). Spatial Biographies of Children's Consumption: Market Places and Spaces of Childhood in the 1930s and Beyond. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *3*(2), 147–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405030032001

Cook, D. T. (2007). The disempowering empowerment of children's consumer "choice": Cultural discourses of the child consumer in North America. *Society and Business Review*, *2*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465680710725263

Cook, D. T. (2010). Commercial Enculturation: Moving Beyond Consumer Socialization. In D. Buckingham & V. Tingstad (Eds.), *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (pp. 63–79). Palgrave Macmillan.

Cook, D. T. (2013). Taking exception with the child consumer. *Childhood*, *20*(4), 423–428. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568213501858

Cook, D. T. (2004a). Beyond Either/Or. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *4*(2), 147–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540504043678

Cook, D. T. (2004b). *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1220jj5

Cook, D. T., & Kaiser, S. B. (2004). Betwixt and be Tween: Age Ambiguity and the Sexualization of the Female Consuming Subject. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *4*(2), 203–227. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540504043682

Coulter, N. (2010). Looking for savvy girls in the post-girl-power era. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, *2*(1), 177–187.
Coulter, N. (2014). *Tweening the girl: The crystallization of the Tween Market*. Peter Lang Publishing Group.
Coulter, N. (2021). Child Studies Meets Digital Media: Rethinking the Paradigms. In L. Green, D. Holloway, K. Stevenson, T. Leaver, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children* (pp. 19–27). Routledge.
Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Fifth edition). SAGE.
Cross, G. (2010). Children and the Market: An American Historical Perspective. In D. Marshall (Ed.), *Understanding Children as Consumers*. SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251539
Cross, G. (2004a). Wondrous Innocence: Print Advertising and the Origins of Permissive Child Rearing in the US. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *4*(2), 183–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540504043681
Cross, G. S. (2004b). *The cute and the cool: Wondrous innocence and modern American children's culture*. Oxford University Press.
Cunningham, H. (2020). *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003033165
Cunningham, P. H. (1999). Ethics of Advertising: Oxymoron or Good Business Practice? In J. P. Jones (Ed.), *The Advertising Business: Operations Creativity Media Planning Integrated Communications*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231440
Danielle E. R., & Hawkes, G. (2008). GIRLS, SEXUALITY AND THE STRANGE CARNALITIES OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Deconstructing the Discourse of Corporate Paedophilia. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *23*(57), 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640802233278
Davidson, S. (2012). 'Consider the fact that I am considerate' Parent-teen bargaining. In A. Sparrman, B. Sandin, & J. Sjöberg (Eds.), *Situating child consumption: Rethinking values and notions of children, childhood and consumption* (pp. 97–113). Nordic Academic Press.
De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, *36*(5), 798–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035
De Veirman, M., Hudders, L., & Nelson, M. R. (2019). What Is Influencer Marketing and How Does It Target Children? A Review and Direction for Future Research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2685. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02685
Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture & Cultural Theory*. Columbia University Press.
Drumwright, M. E., & Murphy, P. E. (2004). HOW ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS VIEW ETHICS: Moral Muteness, Moral Myopia, and Moral Imagination. *Journal of Advertising*, *33*(2), 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2004.10639158

Drumwright, M. E. (2007). Advertising Ethics: A Multi-level Theory Approach. In G. J. Tellis & T. Ambler (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Advertising* (pp. 398–415). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Durham, M. G. (2007, May). *Sex and Spectacle in Seventeen Magazine: A Feminist Myth Analysis*. Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA.

Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2002). Interviewing children and adolescents. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 181–201). Sage.

Ekström, K. M. (2006). Consumer socialization revisited. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 71–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2111(06)10004-6

Evans, D. S. (2009). The Online Advertising Industry: Economics, Evolution, and Privacy. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *23*(3), 37–60. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.23.3.37

Finnish National Board on Research & Integrity TENK. (2019). *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland*.

Flyverbom, M., & Whelan, G. (2019). Digital Transformations, Informed Realities, and Human Conduct. In R. F. Jørgensen (Ed.), *Human Rights in the Age of Platforms* (pp. 53–72). MIT Press.

Folkvord, F., Bevelander, K. E., Rozendaal, E., & Hermans, R. (2019). Children's bonding with popular YouTube vloggers and their attitudes toward brand and product endorsements in vlogs: An explorative study. *Young Consumers*, *20*(2). https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-12-2018-0896

Forsman, M. (2020). Media Literacy and the Emerging Media Citizen in the Nordic Media Welfare State. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2(1), 59–70. https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0006

Förster, K., & Weish, U. (2017). 1.1 Advertising Critique: Themes, Actors and Challenges in a Digital Age. In G. Siegert, M. B. Rimscha, & S. Grubenmann (Eds.), *Commercial Communication in the Digital Age: Information or disinformation?* (pp. 15–36). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110416794-002

Foster, H. (1988). Preface. In H. Foster (Ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (pp. ix–xiv). Bay Press.

Furlong, A. (2012). *Youth studies: An introduction*. Routledge.

Genz, S., & Brabon, B. A. (2009). *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh University Press.

Gibson, F. (2007). Conducting focus groups with children and young people: Strategies for success. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *12*(5), 473–483.

Gibson, J. E. (2012). Interviews and Focus Groups With Children: Methods That Match Children's Developing Competencies. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *4*(2), 148–159. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2012.00119.x

Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *10*(2), 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898

Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising. *Feminism & Psychology*, *18*(1), 35–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353507084950

Gina Tricot. (2016). *Sustainability Report 2016*. https://www.ginatricot.com/cms/work/sustainability/policys/ginatricot_hallbarhetsredovisning2016_eng_low.pdf

Gina Tricot. (2019). *Ginatricot Sustainability Report 2019*. https://www.ginatricot.com/cms/work/sustainability/policys/Gina-Tricot-Hallbarhetsredovisning-2019_low.pdf

Graff, K. A., Murnen, S. K., & Krause, A. K. (2013). Low-Cut Shirts and High-Heeled Shoes: Increased Sexualization Across Time in Magazine Depictions of Girls. *Sex Roles*, *69*(11–12), 571–582. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-013-0321-0

Gram, M. (2004). The Future World Champions?: Ideals for Upbringing Represented in Contemporary European Advertisements. *Childhood*, *11*(3), 319–337. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568204044886

Green, L., Holloway, D., Stevenson, K., Leaver, T., & Haddon, L. (2021). Introduction: Children and Digital Media. In L. Green, D. Holloway, K. Stevenson, T. Leaver, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.

Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?* Harvard University Press.

Hammersley, M. (2016). Childhood Studies: A sustainable paradigm? *Childhood*, *24*(1), 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216631399

Heinonen, V. (2013). Introduction: The Formation of the Finnish Type of Consumer Society between the East and the West, the1950s and 1960s. In V. Heinonen & M. Peltonen (Eds.), *FINNISH CONSUMPTION An Emerging Consumer Society between East and West* (pp. 10–37). Finnish Literature Society.

Hellman, H. (2010). Liberal turn in media policy: The case of Finland's digital television. *International Journal of Digital Television*, *1*(2), 193–213. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdtv.1.2.193_1

H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) Group. (2019). *H&M Group Sustainability Report 2019*. https://sustainabilityreport.hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HM-Group-Sustainability-Performance-Report-2019.pdf.

Holland, P. (2004). *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery*. I.B. Tauris.

Hollands, R. (2002). Divisions in the Dark: Youth Cultures, Transitions and Segmented Consumption Spaces in the Night-time Economy. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *5*(2), 153–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260220134421

Holvoet, S., Jans, S. D., Wolf, R. D., Hudders, L., & Herrewijn, L. (2021). Exploring Teenagers' Folk Theories and Coping Strategies Regarding Commercial Data Collection and Personalized Advertising. *Media and Communication*, *10*(1), 317–328. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4704

Horner, S. D. (2000). Using focus group methods with middle school children. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *23*(6), 510–517. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200012)23:6<510::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-L
Horton, K. (2018). Just Use What You Have: Ethical Fashion Discourse and the Feminisation of Responsibility. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *33*(98), 515–529. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2019.1567255
Hunt, S. J. (2016). *The Life Course: A Sociological Introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Jacobson, L. (2004). *Raising consumers: Children and the American mass market in the early twentieth century*. Columbia University Press.
Jacobson, L. (2008). Advertising, Mass Merchandising, and the Creation of Children's Consumer Culture. In L. Jacobson (Ed.), *Children and Consumer Culture in American Society A Historical Handbook and Guide* (pp. 3–26). Praeger Publishers.
James, A., & James, A. (2012). *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435613
James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge University Press.
Johansson, B. (2010). Subjectivities of the Child Consumer: Beings and Becomings. In Buckingham, David & V. Tingstad (Eds.), *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (pp. 80–93). Palgrave Macmillan.
Kaikati, A. M., & Kaikati, J. G. (2004). Stealth Marketing: How to Reach Consumers Surreptitiously. *California Management Review*, *46*(4).
KappAhl. (2018). *KappAhl: Annual Report 2018*. https://www.kappahl.com/globalassets/corporate/investors/annual–interimreports/20172018/kappahl_2018_eng_del1.pdf.
KappAhl. (2019). *Annual Report 2019: Operations Sustainability Earnings.* https://www.kappahl.com/globalassets/ corporate/investors/annual–interim-reports/20182019/kappahl_annual_report_2019/.
Keen, C. (2020). Apathy, convenience or irrelevance? Identifying conceptual barriers to safeguarding children's data privacy. *New Media & Society*, *24*(1), 50–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960068
Kenway, J., & Bullen, E. (2001). *Consuming children: Education-entertainment-advertising*. Open University Press.
Klein, N. (2002). *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*. Picador.
Kline, S. (1993). *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing*. Verso.
Knoll, S., Eisend, M., & Steinhagen, J. (2011). Gender roles in advertising: Measuring and comparing gender stereotyping on public and private TV channels in Germany. *International Journal of Advertising*, *30*(5), 867–888. https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-5-867-888
Korsvold, T. (2012). Revisiting Constructions of Children and Youth in Marketing Advertisements: A Historical and Empirical Study of the

Norwegian Company Helly Hansen. *YOUNG*, *20*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/110330881102000101
Langlois, G., Redden, J., & Elmer, G. (2015). Introduction: Compromised Data—From Social Media to Big Data. In G. Langlois, J. Redden, & G. Elmer (Eds.), *Compromised Data From Social Media to Big Data* (pp. 1–14). Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
Lapenta, G. H., & Jørgensen, R. F. (2015). Youth, privacy and online media: Framing the right to privacy in public policy-making. *First Monday*. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i3.5568
Lindén, L. (2013). 'What Do Eva and Anna Have to Do with Cervical Cancer?' Constructing Adolescent Girl Subjectivities in Swedish Gardasil Advertisements. Girlhood Studies, 6(2). https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2013.060207
Lindex. (2019). *Lindex launches new code of conduct with focus on gender equality*. https://about.lindex.com/press/news-and-press-releases/2019/lindex-launches-new-code-of-conduct-with-focus-on-gender-equality/
Livingstone, S. (2018). Children: A special case for privacy? *Intermedia*, *46*(2), 18-23.
Livingstone, S., & Hargrave, A. M. (2006). Harmful to children? Drawing conclusions from empirical research on media effects. In U. Carlsson (Ed.), *Regulation, awareness, empowerment: Young people and harmful media content in the digital age* (pp. 21–48). Nordicom.
Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2019a). *Children's data and privacy online: Growing up in a digital age. An evidence review*. London School of Economics and Political Science.
Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2019b). *Talking to children about data and privacy online: Research methodology.* London School of Economics and Political Science.
Lumby, C. (2010). Ambiguity, Children, Representation, and Sexuality. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *12*(4). https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1673
Lupton, D. (2015). *Digital sociology*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
Lupton, D., & Williamson, B. (2017). The datafied child: The dataveillance of children and implications for their rights. *New Media & Society*, *19*(5), 780–794.
Maffesoli, M. (1995). *The Time of the Tribes, the Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. Sage.
Mantelero, A. (2017). From group privacy to collective privacy: Towards a new dimension of privacy and data protection in the big data era. In L. Taylor, L. Floridi, & B. van der Sloot (Eds.), *Group privacy: New challenges of data technologies,*. Springer.
Martin, K. (2016). Understanding Privacy Online: Development of a Social Contract Approach to Privacy. Journal of Business Ethics, 137(3), 551–569. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2565-9
Martínez, C., & Olsson, T. (2019). Making sense of YouTubers: How Swedish children construct and negotiate the YouTuber Misslisibell as a girl

celebrity. *Journal of Children and Media*, *13*(1), 36–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2018.1517656
Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2014). Networked privacy: How teenagers negotiate context in social media. *New Media & Society*, *16*(7), 1051–1067. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814543995
Massoni, K. (2006). 'Teena Goes to Market': Seventeen Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (As) Consumer. *The Journal of American Culture*, *29*(1), 31–42.
Masur, P. K. (2018). *Situational privacy and self-disclosure: Communication processes in online environments*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
McRobbie, A. (2007). TOP GIRLS?: Young women and the post-feminist sexual contract1. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(4–5), 718–737. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380701279044
McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. SAGE.
Meier, B., & Bol, N. (2023). Privacy and Trust. In S. Trepte & P. K. Masur (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Privacy and Social Media* (pp. 1000–1109). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
Merskin, D. (2004). Reviving Lolita?: A Media Literacy Examination of Sexual Portrayals of Girls in Fashion Advertising. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *48*(1), 119–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764204267257
Mikkulainen, L. (2017, July 21). *Rekoilla eivät leiki vain pojat – sukupuolirooleihin kiinnitetään mainonnassa yhä enemmän huomiota*. https://yle.fi/a/3-9733000
Milkaite, I., & Lievens, E. (2019). Children's Rights to Privacy and Data Protection Around the World: Challenges in the Digital Realm. *European Journal of Law and Technology*, *10*(1). https://ejlt.org/index.php/ejlt/article/view/674/912
Milkaite, I., & Lievens, E. (2020). Child-friendly transparency of data processing in the EU: From legal requirements to platform policies. *Journal of Children and Media*, *14*(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2019.1701055
Molander, S., Östberg, I., & Kleppe, I. A. (2019). Swedish Dads as a National Treasure: Consumer Culture at the Nexus of the State, Commerce, and Consumers. In S. Askegaard & J. Östberg (Eds.), *Nordic Consumer Culture State, Market and Consumers* (pp. 119–146). Palgrave Macmillan.
Montgomery, K. C. (2007). *Generation digital: Politics, commerce, and childhood in the age of the internet*. MIT Press.
Montgomery, K. C. (2015). Youth and surveillance in the Facebook era: Policy interventions and social implications. *Telecommunications Policy*, *39*(9), 771–786. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2014.12.006
Montgomery, K. C., Chester, J., & Milosevic, T. (2017). Children's Privacy in the Big Data Era: Research Opportunities. *Pediatrics*, *140*(Supplement_2), S117–S121. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758O
Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. J. (2013). *Gender, Youth and Culture Global Masculinities and Femininities* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Nguyen, T. (2021). *Gen Z Doesn't Know a World without Fast Fashion*. https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2021/7/19/22535050/gen-z-relationship-fast-fashion
Nippert-Eng, C. E. (2010). *Islands of privacy*. The University of Chicago Press.
Nissenbaum, H. (2004). Privacy as Contextual Integrity. *Washington Law Review Washington Law Review*, *79*(1), 119–158.
Nissenbaum, H. (2010). *Privacy in context: Technology, policy, and the integrity of social life*. Stanford Law Books.
O'Guinn, T. C. (2007). Advertising, Consumption and Welfare. In G. J. Tellis & T. Ambler (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Advertising* (pp. 445–460). SAGE Publications Ltd.
Omnicore (2021). *Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts*. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/facebook-statistics/.
Osgerby, B. (2008). Understanding the "Jackpot Market": Media, Marketing, and the Rise of the American Teenager. In P. E. Jamieson & D. Romer (Eds.), *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media Since 1950* (pp. 27–58). Oxford University Press.
Österlund, M. (2012). Nordic Girlhood Studies: Do We Need to Get Over the Pippi Longstocking Complex? In P. Broomans & van der W. Margriet (Eds.), *Peripheral Feminisms Literary and Sociological Approaches* (pp. 35–42). Centre for Gender Studies, Euroculture, Globalisation Studies. https://www.rug.nl/research/globalisation-studies-groningen/publications/researchreports/reports/peripheralfeminisms.pdf.
Oswell, D. (2013). *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights*. Cambridge University Press.
Pangrazio, L., & Selwyn, N. (2018). "It's Not Like It's Life or Death or Whatever": Young People's Understandings of Social Media Data. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(3), 1–9.
Pangrazio, L, & Sefton-Green, J. (2022). Learning to live well with data Concepts and challenges. In L. Pangrazio & J. Sefton-Green (Eds.), *Learning to live with datafication Educational Case Studies and Initiatives from Across the World* (pp. 1–16). Routledge.
Panic, K., Cauberghe, V., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2013). Comparing TV Ads and Advergames Targeting Children: The Impact of Persuasion Knowledge on Behavioral Responses. *Journal of Advertising*, *42*(2–3), 264–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.774605
Pasquale, L., Zippo, P., Curley, C., O'Neill, B., & Mongiello, M. (2020). Digital Age of Consent and Age Verification: Can They Protect Children? *IEEE Software*, 39(3), 50–57. https://doi.org/10.1109/MS.2020.3044872
Peacock, S. E. (2014). How web tracking changes user agency in the age of Big Data: The used user. *Big Data & Society*, 1(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951714564228
Pirsch, J., Gupta, S., & Grau, S. L. (2007). A Framework for Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility Programs as a Continuum: An

Exploratory Study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *70*(2), 125–140. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9100-y
Prout, A. (2005). *The Future of Childhood*. Routledge.
Prout, A., & James, A. (1997). A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood:Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (pp. 7–32). Falmer Press.
Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, *9*(3), 321–341.
Quart, A. (2003). *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers* (1 ed). Basic Books.
Ramazanoglu, C., & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist methodology: Challenges and choices*. Sage.
Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th edition). SAGE Publications Ltd.
Ruckenstein, M. (2013). *Lapsuus ja talous*. Gaudeamus.
Savage, S. L. (2011). The Visual Rhetoric of Innocence: Lolitas in Popular Culture. *Visual Arts Research*, 37(2), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.5406/visuartsrese.37.2.0101
Schoeman, F. D. (1984). Privacy: Philosophical dimensions of the litera- ture. In F. D. Schoeman (Ed.), *Philosophical dimensions of privacy: An anthology* (pp. 1–33). Cambridge University Press.
Schor, J. (2004). *Born to buy: The commercialized child and the new consumer culture*. Scribner.
Schroeder, J. E. (2002). *Visual consumption* (transferred to digital printing). Routledge.
Schroeder, J. E., & Borgerson, J. L. (2005). An ethics of representation for international marketing communication. *International Marketing Review*, *22*(5), 578–600. https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330510624408
Schrum, K. (2004). *Some wore bobby sox: The emergence of teenage girls' culture, 1920-1945*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Schumann, J. H., Von Wangenheim, F., & Groene, N. (2014). Targeted Online Advertising: Using Reciprocity Appeals to Increase Acceptance among Users of Free Web Services. *Journal of Marketing*, *78*(1), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.11.0316
Schwandt, T. (2007). *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986281
Seiter, E. (1995). *Sold separately: Children and parents in consumer culture*. Rutgers University Press.
Shin, W. (2021). Marketing to Children through Digital Media: Trends and Issues. In L. Green, D. Holloway, K. Stevenson, T. Leaver, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children* (pp. 285–294). Routledge.
Sihvonen, M. (2015). "We Are More Serious"—Children's Television in Finland and Paradigmatic Shifts in Yleisradio's Children's Programming. *Journal of Children and Media*, *9*(2), 177–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.1015434

Sim, J. (1998). Collecting and analysing qualitative data: Issues raised by the focus group. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *28*(2), 345–352.
Sjöberg, J. (2015). Visual-commercial discourses of infants in direct marketing sent to first-time parents. *Young Consumers*, *16*(2), 107–140. https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-08-2014-00465
Solove, D. J. (2004). *The Digital Person Technology and Privacy in the Information Age*. New York University Press.
Solove, D. J. (2008). *Understanding privacy*. Harvard University Press.
Solove, D. J. (2013). Privacy Self-Management and the Consent Dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 1880–1903.
Sørenssen, K. I. (2012). Tweens as a commercial target group Children and Disney filling the category. In A. Sparrman, B. Sandin, & J. Sjöberg (Eds.), *Situating Child Consumption Rethinking values and notions of children, childhood and consumption* (pp. 177–194). Nordic Academic Press.
Sparrman, A. (2009). Ambiguities and paradoxes in children's talk about marketing breakfast cereals with toys. *Young Consumers*, *10*(4), 297–313. https://doi.org/10.1108/17473610911007139
Sparrman, A., & Sandin, B. (2012). Situated Child Consumption An Introduction. In A. Sparrman, B. Sandin, & J. Sjöberg (Eds.), *Situating Child Consumption Rethinking values and riotions of children, childhood and consumption* (pp. 9–31). Nordic Academic Press.
Speno, A. G., & Aubrey, J. S. (2018). Sexualization, Youthification, and Adultification: A Content Analysis of Images of Girls and Women in Popular Magazines. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *95*(3), 625–646. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699017728918
Spyrou, S. (2011). The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood*, *18*(2), 151–165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210387834
Spyrou, S. (2018). *Disclosing Childhoods*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47904-4
Steeves, V., & Regan, P. (2014). Young people online and the social value of privacy. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, *12*(4), 298–313. https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-01-2014-0004
Sterbenk, Y., Champlin, S., Windels, K., & Shelton, S. (2022). Is Femvertising the New Greenwashing? Examining Corporate Commitment to Gender Equality. Journal of Business Ethics, 177(3), 491–505. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04755-x
Stevens, L., & Östberg, J. (2012). Gendered bodies Representations of femininity and masculinity in advertising practices. In L. Peñaloza, N. Toulouse, & L. Visconti (Eds.), *Marketing management: A cultural perspective* (pp. 392–407). Routledge.
Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Nandagiri, R. (2020). Digital by Default: Children's Capacity to Understand and Manage Online Data and Privacy. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 197–207. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i4.3407

Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Nandagiri, R. (2019a). *Children's data and privacy online Growing up in a digital age. Research findings.* London School of Economics and Political Science.

Stoilova, M., Nandagiri, R., & Livingstone, S. (2019b). Children's understanding of personal data and privacy online – a systematic evidence mapping. *Information, Communication & Society*, *24*(4), 557–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1657164

Stokes, N. (2017). Should you use facebook or google to log in to other sites? *Techlicious*. https://www.techlicious.com/blog/should-you-use-facebook-or-google-to-log-in- to-other-sites/

Stoycheff, E. (2023). Institutional Perspectives on Privacy. In S. Trepte & P. K. Masur (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Privacy and Social Media* (pp. 37–44). Routledge.

Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2018). *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture* (Third edition). Oxford University Press.

Sutherland, A., & Thompson, B. (2003). *Kidfluence: The marketer's guide to understanding and reaching generation Y - kids, tweens and teens* (Rev. ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Threadgold, S. (2020). Figures of youth: On the very object of Youth Studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *23*(6), 686–701. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636014

Turow, J., & Draper, N. (2012). Advertising's new surveillance ecosystem. In K. Ball, K. D. Haggerty, & D. Lyon (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*. Routledge.

UNICEF. (2018). *Children's online privacy and freedom of expression.*

Van der Hof, S. (2016). I agree ... Or do I? A rights-based analysis of the law on children's consent in the digital world. *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, *34*(2), 409–445.

Van Dijck, J. van, Poell, T., & Waal, M. de. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world.* Oxford University Press.

Van Reijmersdal, E. A., Rozendaal, E., & Buijzen, M. (2012). Effects of Prominence, Involvement, and Persuasion Knowledge on Children's Cognitive and Affective Responses to Advergames. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *26*(1), 33–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.04.005

Vänskä, A. (2017). *Fashionable childhood: Children in advertising*. Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Vares, T., Jackson, S., & Gill, R. (2011). Preteen girls read 'tween' popular culture: Diversity, complexity and contradiction. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, *7*(2), 139–154. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.7.2.139_1

Verhellen, Y., Oates, C., De Pelsmacker, P., & Dens, N. (2014). Children's Responses to Traditional Versus Hybrid Advertising Formats: The Moderating Role of Persuasion Knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, *37*(2), 235–255. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-014-9257-1

Waldman, A. E. (2018). *Privacy as trust: Information privacy for an information age*. Cambridge University Press.
Wang, N., Xu, Heng, & Grossklags, J. (2011). Third- Party Apps on Facebook: Privacy and the Illusion of Control. *5th ACM Sym- Posium on Computer Human Interaction for Management of Information Technol- Ogy*, 1–10.
Ward, S. (1974). Consumer Socialization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *1*(1), 1–15.
Warren, S. D., & Brandeis, L. D. (1890). The Right to Privacy. *Harvard Law Review*, *4*(5), 193–220.
Wartella, E., & Robb, M. (2008). Historical and Recurring Concerns about Children's Use of the Mass Media. In S. L. Calvert & B. J. Wilson (Eds.), *The Handbook of Children, Media, and Development* (pp. 7–26). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
Westin, A. F. (1967). *Privacy and freedom.* Atheneum.
Willett, R. (2009). 'As soon as you get on Bebo you just go mad': Young consumers and the discursive construction of teenagers online. *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, *10*(4), 283–296.
Wyn, J. (2015). ThinkingAboutChildhoodandYouth. In J. Wyn & H. Cahill (Eds.), *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies* (pp. 3–20). Springer.
Zarouali, B., Verdoodt, V., Walrave, M., Poels, K., Ponnet, K., & Lievens, E. (2020). Adolescents' advertising literacy and privacy protection strategies in the context of targeted advertising on social networking sites: Implications for regulation. *Young Consumers*, *21*(3), 351–367. https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-04-2020-1122
Zaslow, E. (2009). *Feminism, Inc: Coming of age in girl power media culture* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan.
Zelizer, V. A. R. (1985). *Pricing the priceless child: The changing social value of children*. Basic Books.

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

GIRLS' PORTRAYALS IN FAST FASHION ADVERTISEMENTS

by

S. Srivastava, T.-A. Wilska & J. Sjöberg 2022

Consumption Markets & Culture, *25*(6), 501–524.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2022.2067149

Open Access article.

CONSUMPTION MARKETS & CULTURE
2022, VOL. 25, NO. 6, 501–524
https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2022.2067149

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Girls' portrayals in fast fashion advertisements

Sonali Srivastava [a], Terhi-Anna Wilska [a] and Johanna Sjöberg [b]

[a]Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland; [b]Department of Thematic Studies - Child Studies, Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden

ABSTRACT
This study analyses the visual construction of girls and notions surrounding young femininities articulated by 15 contemporary advertisements of Nordic fast fashion companies, available on their public Facebook pages in Finland. A visual discourse analysis identifies some blatantly stereotypical and a few complex visual constructions of girls as heterosexual, caring, innocent, sexy posers, active self-presenters and self-surveyors, carefree and environmental activists. The implications of our findings, particularly in shaping societal notions surrounding girls, are discussed. The study contributes primarily to the research field of visual commercial representation of girls by unpacking how their complex portrayals can create an equivocation that eventually resurrects stereotypes surrounding young femininities. It advances studies on Nordic consumer culture by highlighting that girls' portrayals by Nordic companies may not clearly reflect the values of state feminism. The study can benefit marketers by sensitising them to how the complex visual representations of girls may (re)produce stereotypes.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 9 December 2020
Accepted 12 April 2022

KEYWORDS
Advertisements; young femininities; visual analysis; representation

Introduction

In girlhood studies, discourses on young femininities are considered pivotal in shaping notions of girls (Driscoll 2002; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005). Visual images also (re)produce societal discourses and impart certain ideas on the subject depicted (Rose 2016). Therefore, examining the discourses constructed by images featuring girls is essential because those images propagate notions on girls hence young femininities to their audiences and shape their ideas on girls. Advertised images have been described by Jonathan Schroeder (2002) as a form of "visual consumption". This emphasises the powerful role that advertisements play in shaping societal ideas (Schroeder 2002) and even societal views on gender (Schroeder and Zwick 2004). Visual representation of girls in advertisements is an established research field (see Holland 2004; Merskin 2004; Cann 2012; Lindén 2013; Graff, Murnen, and Krause 2013; Speno and Aubrey 2018). This study belongs to that research field. It analyses the visual construction of girls in contemporary fast fashion advertisements and the notions on young femininities they articulate.

Fast fashion refers to garments produced in a brief turnaround time and at low costs, usually in the Global South (Thomas 2019). Teenagers find fast fashion particularly appealing as it offers a variety of clothing at affordable prices (Nguyen 2021). Horton (2018, 519) points out that women and girls are especially attracted to the variety offered by fast fashion. Given the influential

CONTACT Sonali Srivastava sonali.s.srivastava@jyu.fi Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

position of fast fashion in specifically teenage girls' clothing market, it is vital to study the visual construction of girls in fast fashion advertisements. The visual construction reflects notions about girls and young femininities that fast fashion companies propagate in society through their advertisements. The relative powerlessness of the important customer group of young girls further strengthens the social relevance of scrutinising these reflections.

To our knowledge, the visual construction of girls in fast fashion advertisements has not been examined before. In the current study, we address this topic by posing the following research questions: (i) How are girls visually constructed in fast fashion contemporary advertisements? and (ii) What kind of notions related to young femininities do these advertisements convey?

We have employed visual discourse analysis (Rose 2016) to analyse 15 advertised images. Our focus is on notions surrounding young femininities. Hence, we have examined advertisements that feature young girls and are targeted at buyers of teenage girls' clothing. Advertisements addressing the Finnish market found on the public Facebook pages of the Nordic fast fashion companies Hennes & Mauritz (H&M), Lindex, KappAhl and GinaTricot from January 2019 to June 2020 have been analysed.

The Nordic context shapes our expectations that these advertisements may convey non-stereotypical notions on young femininities. Molander, Östberg, and Kleppe (2019, 140) note that marketers in Nordic consumer culture often align their advertising messages with the welfare state's orientation. For instance, Baby Bjorn's advertisements use the Swedish welfare state's values of gender-equal parenting to promote progressive ideas on fatherhood. Nordic welfare states are understood to follow "state feminism" due to their initiatives to encourage women's labour participation and promote gender equality (Formark, Mulari, and Voipio 2017, 10). Korsvold (2012, 14) shows that advertisements of Helly Hansen targeted at the Nordic market in the 1950s and 1980s reproduced historical, cultural and regional notions of an ideal Nordic childhood. She highlights that the societal contexts of markets shape advertised portrayals. The idea of agentic Nordic girlhoods (Österlund 2012) could get mirrored in these companies' advertisements, and more so, because they address audiences in a country like Finland that ranks relatively high on gender equality (World Economic Forum 2020). This Nordic context thus forms a backdrop to this study.

The internal policy commitments of the companies mentioned above also shape our expectations of their possibly challenging stereotypes related to young femininities, which is the chief reason behind our analysis of their advertisements. "Institutionalised" corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives include internal policy commitments that promote social goals and help companies meet their social and ethical responsibilities (Pirsch, Gupta, and Grau 2007). These fast fashion companies have announced such initiatives as well, as they aim to promote gender equality in the workforce and supply chain (GinaTricot 2016, 2019; H&M Group 2017, 2019; KappAhl 2018, 2019; Lindex 2019, 2020). The companies that promote gender equality in their workforce could also be expected to reflect such commitments in their advertisements by portraying girls in non-gender stereotypical ways. This expectation stems from academic literature that urges for-profit companies to advance their ethical agenda by challenging stereotypes in their advertisements (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002; Stevens and Ostberg 2012).

Through this study, we intend to contribute to the research field of visual representation of girls in advertisements. Prior research suggests that young girls are represented in gender-stereotypical ways (Holland 2004) and their imagery is often sexualised (Merskin 2004; Graff, Murnen, and Krause 2013; Speno and Aubrey 2018). Previous studies have also identified multiple portrayals of girls in advertisements (Lindén 2013) as well as complex images encompassing contradictory ideas (Cann 2012). However, how complex images of girls end up resurrecting stereotypical notions related to young femininities remains understudied. We address this gap and contribute to the existing literature by identifying various ways by which girls' portrayals are made complex to convey an equivocation that does not fully undo stereotypes related to young femininities. The unpacking of complex visual commercial constructions of girls is essential to understand how they may hinder the propagation of non-stereotypical notions on young femininities. We identify starkly stereotypical portrayals as well. By examining how the Nordic context shapes the visual

representation of girls in these advertisements, the study also contributes to research on Nordic consumer culture.

The article is structured as follows: first, we discuss the previous literature on the visual representation of girls in advertisements. Next, we describe our materials and method and present the results. Finally, we discuss the contributions, implications and limitations of the study and conclude by making suggestions for future research.

Previous research on visual representation of girls in advertisements

Before we discuss previous studies on the visual representation of girls in advertisements of various products and by clothing companies per se, it is pertinent to point out that teenagers also fall in the category of children (United Nations General Assembly 1989). Therefore, we draw from studies that focus on children's representation in clothing advertisements, even though they concentrate, for the most part, on younger children. In the upcoming sections, we first discuss how commercial portrayals of young girls have reflected assumptions about girls that are informed by traditional discourses on young femininities. Then, postfeminist discourses that project girls as actors are discussed along with the criticism of these discourses. These two discourses were discernible in our dataset, either singly in certain images or in a complex mix in others.

Traditional ideas on girls as heterosexual, caring, innocent and interested in appearance

The idea of heterosexuality is a constricting view on gender and sexuality often reproduced by advertisements. Judith Butler (1990) argues that the consistent visualisation of only two genders has led to the consolidation of what she terms the "heterosexual matrix"—the idea of heterosexuality as natural. Daniel Thomas Cook (1999, 27), in his study on children's representation in clothing advertisements, shows that even young children are portrayed as heterosexual, reflecting adults' assumptions on gender relations. A study on girls in Finland, Canada and Australia reports that heterosexuality was the hegemonic discourse within which young girls practised their evolving sexuality (Harris, Aapola, and Gonick 2000). Research on advertisements and magazine content targeted at teenage girls has revealed that they promote heteronormative values and assume girls' heterosexuality (Durham 2007; Lindén 2013).

The traditional association of girls with roles of care and domesticity has been reproduced in their visual representation (Holland 2004, 187). The gendered division of labour that arose in the industrial age has been seen as the genesis of the idea of women and girls as caring and suitable for the domestic sphere (Carter and Steiner 2004, 12). The portrayal of girls in outdoor, non-domestic spaces like forests and the countryside has been understood as a bid to connect nature with femininity and naturalise the latter (Cann 2012; Lindén 2013).

The conservative notion of girls' innocence and naivety has been reinforced in their portrayals (Cann 2012, 77). Egan and Hawkes (2008) describe the insistence on girlhood innocence as a bid to control girls' sexuality, which amounts to positioning them as largely innocent and thereby asexual. However, some studies observe that visual elements articulating contradictory ideas of sexuality and innocence are often deployed in the same image to create ambiguity (Holland 2004, 192; Vänskä 2017). Vänskä (2017, 87), in her study on young children's representation in high fashion advertising, terms this as "eroticised innocence".

The idea of appearance and preening as the domain of girls has been conveyed in advertisements (Holland 2004, 187). The association of the female body with appearance has been criticised by feminist scholars since the 1960s and 1970s (Gill 2007a). Bartky (1990, 79–80) asserts that patriarchy and consumer capitalism exert an invisible gaze, akin to Michel Foucault's idea of the panopticon gaze, to produce a female subject who practises self-surveillance and is fully aware that she is an object of display. Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005, 136) contend that young girls work on their appearance because they are encouraged to view their bodies as objects that exist primarily for

the pleasure of others. Research with young girls has shown that girls often discuss personal appearance in their peer groups, and practise self-surveillance to ensure that their bodies appear beautiful (Carey, Donaghue, and Broderick 2011).

Cook (1999) argues that commercial visual representations of children express the various assumptions of marketers about childhoods. Similarly, the gender-stereotypical representations of girls discussed above seem to communicate certain ideas and assumptions about girls. Feminist scholars have criticised the gender-stereotypical depiction of young girls and women (Gill 2007a; Carter and Steiner 2004).

Girl power and postfeminism

Angela McRobbie (1997) observes that although representations associating girls with domesticity and passivity did not completely disappear, some changes were discernible in media portrayals of girls and women from the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were represented more as active subjects instead of passive and docile (McRobbie 1997). Girl power discourses became very popular in many Western countries from the early 1990s and were characterised by the representation and positioning of girls as active, agentic subjects who could do and achieve anything (Harris 2004; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005; Griffin 2004). British girl band the Spice Girls rendered girl power into a more commercial and marketable idea (Genz and Brabon 2009; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005).

Girl power is a strand of postfeminism (Genz and Brabon 2009, 5). In relation to media representations, Rosalind Gill (2007b, 149) has defined postfeminism as a contradictory sensibility, encompassing feminist and antifeminist ideas simultaneously. She asserts that various elements mark this sensibility, one of them being the idea of girls and women as subjects—as opposed to objects—choosing to display their bodies (Gill 2007b, 149). Sexualisation of teen girls' images has been observed in fashion advertising (Merskin 2004) and advertisements of various products in teen magazines in the USA (Graff, Murnen, and Krause 2013; Speno and Aubrey 2018). However, these studies do not differentiate between sexual subjectivity and objectivity using the postfeminist discourse. Neoliberal ideas and values promote the view of individuals as autonomous agents who shape their lives through personal choices (Gill 2007b). Elements of individual choice chime well with neoliberal values that started gaining popularity during the time that postfeminist sensibility began to appear in media materials (Gill 2007b, 153; Gill and Scharff 2011, 7). The unabated popularity of neoliberal values has meant that this sensibility remains relevant even today (Gill 2017).

Postfeminist media texts have been criticised by feminist media critics for various reasons. One criticism is that they create a rhetoric of empowerment by using neoliberal values of individual choice and agency, but only reinstate some gender-stereotypical ideas and leave patriarchal values unthreatened (Gill 2007a, 2008; McRobbie 2008, 2009). Moreover, freedom to consume is narrowly equated with empowerment (McRobbie 2009). To sum up, feminist media critics assert that the propagation of agentic femininity by postfeminist discourses wraps within itself certain stereotypes about women.

Multiple and complex visual construction of girls

Lindén's (2013) visual discourse analysis of direct-to-consumer advertisements of the Gardasil HPV vaccine in Sweden reports multiple visual representations of girls. She identifies portrayals of girls that either deploy girl power discourses representing them as "independent" and "sporty" or traditional discourses depicting them as "dependent, at-risk and heterosexual" (Lindén 2013, 94). In her semiotic analysis of advertisements in British teen magazines, Cann (2012) observes complexity through the use of signifiers that simultaneously indicate what she terms "traditional and contemporary femininities in the same text" (78). Cann's (2012) analysis almost suggests that the latter is superior to the former by under-problematising contemporary femininities.

However, how complex images of girls stop short of challenging stereotypes related to young femininities is understudied. This study intends to contribute to the existing literature by identifying how complexity gets created in girls' portrayals to exude an ambivalence that does not adequately challenge stereotypes related to young femininities.

Materials

We study the visual construction of girls in contemporary fast fashion advertisements targeted at buyers of teenage girls' clothing. Given the "institutionalised CSR commitments" (Pirsch, Gupta, and Grau 2007, 137) of Nordic fast fashion companies H&M, Lindex, KappAhl and GinaTricot to promote gender equality, their advertisements were chosen for our analysis. According to H&M's sustainability report (H&M Group 2017), they aim at creating a workplace free from sex-based discrimination. They outline these goals for workers in the company's supply chain as well (H&M Group 2019). Lindex aims to increase the number of women in leadership positions and ensure the implementation of gender-equal policies in its suppliers' factories (Lindex 2019, 2020). Promoting gender equality in employment and at the workplace is mentioned in KappAhl's sustainability strategy in successive annual reports (KappAhl 2018, 2019). GinaTricot has recognised gender equality as a goal and management approach (GinaTricot 2016) and pledged to support the empowerment of women workers in its supply chain (GinaTricot 2019, 20). These commitments lead us to expect these companies to portray girls with caution in a non-gender stereotypical fashion. Therefore, their advertisements were chosen for scrutiny in this study.

Since social media platforms have a higher ability to target customers by employing sophisticated algorithms (Montgomery, Chester, and Milosevic 2017, 118), a social media platform was selected as the source of data collection. Apart from traditional advertisements, even influencer advertising is prevalent on social media platforms. Nevertheless, brand control on messaging is somewhat diluted in influencer advertising (Martínez-López et al. 2020, 1819). Since our choice of analysing the advertisements of specific companies was rooted in an expectation that their policy orientation might be reflected in their advertising, we chose to analyse only traditional advertisements where company control over messaging is higher.

The data for this study was collected by visiting the public Facebook pages of the above-mentioned Nordic fast fashion companies catering to Finland. The advertised images were collected from the public Facebook pages of H&M (https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/), Lindex (https://fi-fi.facebook.com/Lindex), KappAhl (https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/) and GinaTricot (https://fi-fi.facebook.com/GinaTricot/). These images were collected by visiting the "photos" section (*kuvat* in Finnish). The data was collected in July 2020. Given our focus on contemporary fast fashion advertisements, we selected advertised images appearing from January 2019 to June 2020 for our analysis. All analysed images have been reprinted after obtaining permission from the companies.

Apart from Facebook, social media platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok may host traditional advertisements as well. Since we aim to examine the notions surrounding young femininities articulated by contemporary fast fashion advertisements, we attempted to scrutinise advertisements viewed by a wider audience that are potentially instrumental in informing their ideas related to young femininities. Therefore, we sought to collect data from a social media platform that was employed to advertise to users of various age groups like girls, guardians and parents. Furthermore, parents as "second-order consumers" (Knudsen and Kuever 2015, 172) are significant customers of teenage girls' clothing apart from girls themselves, so they may well be targeted with advertisements for teen girls' clothes. Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok are used mainly by young people, but Facebook is used for advertising to all age groups of consumers (omnicoreagency.com 2021). Facebook was chosen as the source of data collection since its advertisements reach a wider audience.

Since these fast fashion companies produce offerings for different age groups, there were various advertised images targeted at buyers of girls' clothing in the photos section. As our focus was on advertised images targeted at buyers of teenage girls' clothing, our attempt was to select images featuring young girls as opposed to female children or women. It was not very challenging to distinguish young girls from women. However, that was not the case when we tried to distinguish between female children and young girls because the differences between their visual presentations were often somewhat blurry, posing some challenges in selecting the images to be analysed.

To address this challenge, we looked for visual markers employed in the images to communicate the visual presentation of young girls as opposed to female children. This included paying attention to the appearance of elements that are associated with young girls. Physical markers included the appearance of breasts, rounder hips, fuller thighs, fuller arms, longer legs and the style of posing adopted by the girl models in the images. Hair that was rough-looking and wavy, as opposed to the smooth locks of female children, was observed. Skin that appears rough, the explicit use of makeup to appear older and thicker eyebrows indicated the visual presentation of young girls and not female children. Some other visual indicators included the presence of accessories popular among young girls, such as choker necklaces, ankle-length boots and hooded sweatshirts. One or more of these visual markers appear in each of the images that form the data for analysis. Since images are polysemic (Gill 2007a), we acknowledge a level of researcher subjectivity in the selection of data for analysis.

The data consists of 15 advertised images. In some images in our dataset, girls appear with young boys and younger children. The small number of images catering to buyers of teenage girls' clothing during the given period could be because, as mentioned above, these companies do not produce offerings only for the teenage girls' clothing market. Moreover, it is important to reflect upon how our subjectivity may have impacted the number of images we chose to include in the dataset. Given the challenges and dilemmas we faced in determining if the girls represented young girls or female children, we may have excluded some advertised images because we interpreted the visual presentation of girl models in the images as more akin to that of female children. Therefore, we cannot claim this sample to be fully representative. Nevertheless, it is reflective because the mere presence of these images on companies' Facebook pages indicates that these advertisements have been instrumental in communicating notions about young femininities that these companies have chosen to propagate.

Method

Gillian Rose (2016, 187–188) developed the method of visual discourse analysis to analyse how images construct discourses and the manner in which visual presentations in them are articulated to appear truthful and (re)produce certain notions on the subject presented. According to Rose, images are not neutral but rather instrumental in presenting a selective version of the social world (Rose 2016, 2). Foucault's ideas on discourse are central to the theory and method of visual discourse analysis. Rose explains Foucault's ideas on discourse as a set of statements that shape knowledge and thereby influence people's actions (Rose 2016, 188).

The importance of discourses related to girlhoods and young femininities in different historical, cultural and social contexts is emphasised in shaping societal ideas on girls in the field of girlhood studies (Driscoll 2002; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005). In this study, this theoretical approach towards girls and young femininities has been combined with the theory and method of visual discourse analysis to analyse how girls are visually constructed in the advertised images and what notions on young femininities they (re)produce.

Rose (2016) highlights that, as a method, visual discourse analysis involves studying images carefully and categorising them by identifying important key themes in and across images. It also requires paying attention to details, contradictions, complexities, visible and invisible in images to identify discourses articulated through them so as to construct a particular visual presentation

as truthful (Rose 2016, 205–206). Intervisuality can be used to identify discourses as well (Sparrman 2018). Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000, 7) explains that the concept of intervisuality involves thinking of what an image may be reminiscent of to the onlooker. We have used this concept of intervisuality by looking at what some images in our sample reminded us of and then paying attention to the discourses on young femininities that this similarity may indicate.

In line with Rose's (2016) method, we studied the images individually and then together. All the visual occurrences and textual references were noted, and these comprised our initial set of themes in every image. Some of these themes seemed related and were grouped under one key theme. Multiple themes and key themes that could be related to various discourses were discernible in these images. However, we concentrated on themes that were relevant to discourses on young femininities. Images with similar key themes were categorised together, but single images with important themes were not ignored. We also identified key themes in a single image that could be related to two different discourses on young femininities.

Rose (2016) recommends undertaking multiple readings of images because it often leads to the revision of initial categories. Likewise, after the initial categorisation, the images in each category were again studied carefully to look for details, contradictions, visible, invisible and even intervisuality to identify the discourses that were being articulated through the images. Based on this reading, the initial categorisation was revised. We found that some images with common key themes like girls in an outdoor environment or girls posing with a pout were not necessarily indicative of the same discourse on young femininities. This close reading was performed multiple times to carefully identify the discourses articulated by the images in order to construct a particular visual presentation of girls as truthful. The categorisations were revised multiple times based on new observations. After this process of close readings and revisions, we concluded that in the advertised images in our sample, girls were visually constructed as *heterosexual, caring, innocent, sexy-posers, active self-presenters and self-surveyors, carefree and environmental activists*. We now discuss how these are visually constructed in the advertisements.

Results

We first elaborate on the visual construction of girls as *heterosexual, caring and innocent* that are based on stereotypical assumptions about girls. Then we describe the visual construction of girls as *sexy posers* that deploy postfeminist discourses by showing them as acting in front of the camera as sexual subjects. Finally, we discuss the complex visual constructions of girls as *active self-presenters and self-surveyors, carefree and environmental activists. They* use ideas of an agentic girl subject but do not disassociate from traditional notions on girls. Our analysis therefore contributes to the research field of visual representation of girls in advertisements. It does so by unpacking various ways in which girls' portrayals can be made complex to impart an ambiguity that does not fully unseat stereotypes related to young femininities.

Heterosexual

Butler (1990) explains, through the concept of the heterosexual matrix, that the constitution of gender within the binary frame helps "naturalise" heterosexuality. This conventional discourse of heterosexuality is constructed through four images from KappAhl. In Figure 1, a girl and a boy are pictured wearing formal clothing, smiling and looking directly at the camera. They are shown standing huddled close to one another with the boy's arm placed around the girl, his hand resting on her elbow and the girl's arm around him resting on his shoulder. Her head is bent slightly towards the boy, while the boy is standing straight with legs apart, perhaps to signify authority and thereby masculinity. Elements like formal dressing, their manner of standing huddled together and the girl's head bent towards the boy all combine to make it appear as if they are being projected as a future adult couple.

Figure 1. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2351922791756808/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

Somewhat similarly in Figure 2, a young girl and a boy are pictured in an outdoor location with autumn leaves strewn around them. They appear to be running happily, as both are shown smiling and looking directly at the camera. Buildings or passers-by are not visible in the background, which signifies privacy. Their picturisation at a lonely spot combined with the gleeful look on their faces, seemingly to indicate happiness at being able to steal a candid moment together, gives the image a romantic tone.

The picture in Figure 3 is in an indoor location and shows a boy and a girl seated together on the same stool. The girl looks directly at the camera with a serious and slightly defiant expression, while the boy looks away from the camera with a somewhat disinterested look. The boy is shown wearing a pair of deep red trousers as opposed to blue or grey colours "usually" associated with boys. Vänskä (2017, 78) posits that even colours signify gender, and red is associated with strength and masculinity. Any visual indicators of androgyny such as makeup, long hair and blended clothing style (Vänskä 2017, 155) do not appear in this image. Moreover, visual markers of femininity and masculinity through long and short hair, respectively (Vänskä 2017, 139), are present in the image. These clear visual markers of gender identity of the boy and the girl seen alongside their placement on the same stool seem to indicate that they are both pictured as a couple, something that the defiant expression on the girl's face helps reinforce.

It is relevant to point out that the boy and girl pairs pictured in these images are not engaged in any sexually explicit or romantic acts, and they could well be interpreted as siblings or just friends. However, the manner of picturing the boy and girl pairs as a future adult couple standing close to one another in formal clothes in Figure 1, running in an outdoor location in Figure 2 and seated on the same stool in Figure 3 provides less support for alternative interpretations of these images. Notably, peers, generally considered important in young people's lives, are invisible in these images indicating an intent to show the girl and boy pairs as a couple.

Figure 2. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2438498443099242/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

Figure 3. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2282798822002539/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

Figure 4. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2438497956432624/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

The fourth image (Figure 4) shows a group of children of varying ages sitting on a sofa that appears to be placed surprisingly in the middle of a forest. The oldest-looking girl and boy are sitting together. A toddler sits near the girl, and older children (older than the toddler) occupy the sofa with them. The visual arrangement bears an intervisuality with a heteronormative nuclear family posing for a family photograph. Heteronormativity even gets expressed in how the girl and the boy, visually presented as the two oldest, sit next to one another with the girl's legs placed comfortably on the boy's lap signifying familiarity and fun.

The images help sustain the traditional notion that girls are primarily heterosexual as they align with the heterosexual matrix.

Caring

Emerging from the industrial economy's gendered division of labour, traditional discourses on women and girls construct them as predisposed to undertake caring responsibilities (Carter and Steiner 2004, 12). This traditional discourse on girls gets articulated in three advertised images from KappAhl. In all three images, older girls are pictured along with younger children.

Figure 5 shows a group of mixed-age children sitting near a Christmas tree, wearing clothes in Christmas colours like red, green and white. Four out of the five children are visible, while one is partly visible. Notably, while all the children, including the partly visible child, are shown holding a gift, the girl represented as the oldest has a small child on her lap and not a gift. She smiles and looks happily at the child, visually indicating contentment. Furthermore, the comfort with which she is shown holding the toddler suggests confidence. A similar idea of confidence and contentment in caring is exuded through Figure 4. Here, a toddler is placed near the older girl and not near the older boy. Similar to Figure 5, the girl is shown holding a toddler happily and confidently.

While not pictured directly caring for a child, a young girl appears with a female child in need of care in Figure 6. This image shows two girls sitting on a swing and smiling. The older girl looks at

Figure 5. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2523190361296716/?type=3&theatre%5C. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

the camera while the girl child gazes at the floor. Though the older girl is not directly caring for the girl child in this image, she is pictured alongside a child with a plastered leg hence someone potentially in need of care.

Holland (2004, 187) points out that gender-stereotypical images of girls present them as training to take over the roles of their mothers and occupy a gendered world of adults. In these images, girls are not only associated with caring but are shown to be enjoying it, thereby creating an effect of

Figure 6. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2660784260870658/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

truth that girls are "naturally" adept at caring. The invisibility of boys in these caring responsibilities or the placing of younger children only on girls despite the presence of boys in the image further cements this notion related to girls.

Innocent

Egan and Hawkes (2008) point out that ideas of innocence and almost compulsory asexuality are pushed onto young girls, which becomes a means of monitoring their sexuality. This discourse of girlhood innocence gets articulated in two images.

Figure 7 shows two girls wearing night pyjamas. Partly covered in a white duvet, they are standing against a white background, making white predominant in the image, with only the clothes of one girl in deep red appearing as a contrast. The girl in white clothes looks away from the camera and has a dreamy look in her eyes. Her head is slightly tilted as she leans on the other girl indicating dependence. It is somewhat contradictory that the dreamy-eyed girl sports a T-shirt with the image of Snow White, a fairy tale character, more likely to be the choice of little girls instead of older ones. These overly childlike pyjamas could indicate a bid to emphasise the girl's innocence that the dreamy look in her eyes and pose of dependence further reiterate.

White is also predominant in Figure 8 that shows a blonde-haired girl sitting with white cushions in the background. She is pictured wearing an unbuttoned white shirt, a white vest or sleeveless T-shirt underneath and a pair of denim shorts that make her legs visible. She looks away from the camera with a soft smile and a slightly dreamy look in her eyes. Perhaps she is dreaming of a "summer staycation", as the text on the image indicates. Just like the other image, the predominance of white in this image is stark. White is associated with purity, virginity and innocence (Vänskä 2017, 90).

In visual representations, boundaries between innocence and sexuality are made rather blurry because advertisers often deploy elements signifying both within the same image (Holland 2004; Vänskä 2017). In Figure 8, this blurriness between innocence and sexuality is discernible. While innocence gets expressed by the use of white and a dreamy look on the girl's face, certain features also lend the image a sexualised character. Elements like the girl's visible naked legs and her white unbuttoned shirt could be read as suggestive when combined with her soft smile and gaze away from the camera that seems to suggest that she is waiting for someone to join her in her cosy, cushioned space.

Figure 7. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/hmsuomi/photos/a.1923897201169167/3180550135503861/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © H&M. Reuse not permitted.

Figure 8. Image URL: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/GinaTricot/photos/a.10150107818417896/10157505646827896/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/GinaTricot/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © GinaTricot. Reuse not permitted.

However, the theme of innocence is distinct in both images and gets expressed through the predominantly white background and the dreamy look on the girls' faces. By picturing an older girl in a manner reminiscent of a young child, Figure 7 helps in reproducing the traditional discourse of girlhood innocence and sustains the notion that older girls are primarily asexual. Figure 8 produces the notion of girlhood innocence but intermixes it with sexuality by playing with both elements.

Sexy posers

An essential element that characterises postfeminist discourses is the construction of girls and women as sexual subjects (Gill 2007b). This postfeminist discourse gets produced in two images where visual strategies are deployed to show that girls are *willingly* posing in a sexy manner.

In Figure 9, a girl of Southeast Asian origin stands holding her braids on both sides, simultaneously winking and pouting, and wearing heavy eye makeup. She is pictured looking directly

Figure 9. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/hmsuomi/photos/a.1923897201169167/3057059121186297/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © H&M. Reuse not permitted.

Figure 10. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/hmsuomi/photos/a.1923897201169167/3057059124519630/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © H&M. Reuse not permitted.

at the camera and so at the onlooker of the image. The words "thank u, next" are inscribed on her T-shirt, making an intertextual reference to Ariana Grande's popular song about her multiple ex-boyfriends (Grande 2018). The visual arrangement makes both the girl and the words inscribed on her T-shirt prominent. The latter viewed along with the pouting, winking and her heavy eye makeup—that accentuates the wink—give the image of the girl a sexualised character. It makes one wonder if the "next" in "thank u, next" indicates sexual frivolity. It could even be read as a mark of power, suggesting that the girl can choose and dismiss who she courts, thus signifying individual choice and agency.

In Figure 10, three girls of Southeast Asian origin are pictured looking directly at the camera. The girl in the middle sports a slight pout, while the girl on her left is pouting with her eyes partly closed and chin held slightly up in a manner that signifies sexual pleasure. The third girl has a serious and defiant look on her face. She is wearing a sweatshirt with the image of a woman whose cleavage is visible and eyes are closed in a manner that suggests sexual pleasure. The sexualised imagery of a woman on a young girl's sweatshirt is confusing. It could be interpreted as the projection of the wearer's aspirational self or could indicate that the image recognises lesbian girls. In Gill's (2008) analysis of the representation of "hot lesbians" in advertisements, she identifies the portrayal of two similar-looking girls posing together and embracing in a sexually explicit manner, looking feminine and suiting a heterosexual male's fantasy. While the girls in Figure 10 are similar-looking, they are not engaged in sexually explicit acts amongst themselves and are simply pictured standing. Thus, it cannot be conclusively suggested whether the girls are being portrayed as lesbians or not. However, components like the first girl's pout and partly closed eyes to indicate sexual pleasure, the second girl's soft pout and the suggestive image on the third girl's sweatshirt offer the image a sexualised character.

Although both these images have a sexualised tone, they also communicate volition by using visual strategies like girls looking directly at the camera and so at the onlooker of the image. It leads one to argue that these images depict girls as actively engaged in posing in a sexy manner and not as passive objects. In so doing, they produce the postfeminist discourse of sexual subjectivity. The images exude the notion that girls willingly enjoy posing sexily.

Active self-presenters and self-surveyors

Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005, 136) observe that, "Young women are encouraged to relate to their bodies as objects that exist for the use and aesthetic pleasure of others, and to work on the improvement of their appearance." This discourse that associates girls with interest in appearance

Figure 11. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/Lindex/photos/a.10150778194024094/10156985254999094/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/Lindex. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © Lindex. Reuse not permitted.

and self-presentation gets articulated in three images. However, it has been cloaked in the language of choice and agency characteristic of girl power discourses (Harris 2004).

Figure 11 shows a girl wearing a pair of skin-tight jeans or jeggings, an off-white woolly jumper and ankle-length boots. She is pictured standing, looking directly at the camera with a smile on her face. Her hands rest on her waist as she strikes a pose with the heel of one shoe resting on the floor and her toe in the air, suggesting that she is posing confidently to display the clothes that she is wearing. Figure 12 shows a girl looking directly at the camera and smiling. She is posing confidently in her outfit with her hands outstretched in a manner that indicates self-presentation.

In both images, girls are actively presenting themselves in their clothes. It can be argued that to pose for a clothing company's advertisements, one has to present the body in those clothes. Noteworthily, in both images the girls are advertising a woolly jumper and brown furry jacket as well. However, the need for these clothes is not visually argued to be based on the attribute of comfort because the girls are not shown to be engaged in an activity wearing them. They actively pose in them instead.

Both images deploy gestures that indicate confidence. In Figure 11, gestures like the girl facing the camera with a smile, hands on her waist, chin up, heels resting on the floor and the toes of a foot in the air reflect confidence. In Figure 12, confidence is indicated through gestures like the girl

Figure 12. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/Lindex/photos/a.10150778194024094/10156879744324094/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/Lindex. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © Lindex. Reuse not permitted.

facing the camera with a smile and her hands outstretched. Although laced with confidence, the deployment of these gestures in the images helps pass on the impression that the girls are *seeking to be seen* and approved in their clothes.

Exuding similar ideas of self-presentation, Figure 13 shows three girls sitting in an outdoor location under the open sky. They are pouting and posing in front of an invisible object held by one of the girls. It could be a mirror or perhaps a phone camera to take a group selfie. One of the girls is winking, another pouting. The third girl uses her hair to make a moustache held above her pouted mouth and is perhaps toying with a transgender identity. Through visual occurrences like the girls' playful pouting and winking, the image attains an element of fun even as the girls engage in scrutinising themselves in the clothes and accessories that they sport. The text alongside the image "make the school hallway your own catwalk with the season's latest collection" (translated from Finnish) further echoes the idea of self-presentation and thereby self-scrutiny.

Girls are shown pouting and winking in Figures 9 and 10 as well, as previously discussed under the visual construction of sexy posers. However, this image is interpreted differently because the pouting and winking that the girls perform here appear to be activities they playfully engage in amongst themselves. Unlike the images of girls discussed under the visual construction of sexy posers, these girls are not shown looking directly at the camera in a manner that indicates they are inviting the onlooker.

In Figure 13, self-surveillance gets indicated because the girls gaze at themselves in a mirror or pose for a selfie, with the text urging them to "make the school hallway their own catwalk". Interestingly, the advertisement addresses the girls directly and calls upon them to "make" the school hallway their catwalk. While this can be interpreted as addressing girls as empowered and choice-making subjects, the choice they are being asked to exercise is related to *presenting* their bodies in multiple clothes, just like a model does on a catwalk, to invite everyone's gaze and envy. Therefore, the tone of empowerment is invoked only to encourage girls to present their bodies in different clothes. Furthermore, the text seems to send out the message to girls that even at school, they should be conscious of how they appear to others and therefore engage in self-surveillance.

Both the images in Figures 11 and 12 portray girls as actively and confidently presenting themselves. Similarly, Figure 13 shows them as engaged in self-surveillance, with the text calling upon them to make active choices in buying new clothes to present their bodies. Therefore, these images together articulate the notion that girls are "naturally" inclined towards self-presentation and practise self-surveillance, but it has been well-packaged in ideas of choice and agency that characterise postfeminist girl power discourses using textual and visual strategies.

Figure 13. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/hmsuomi/photos/a.1923897201169167/3080119108880298/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © H&M. Reuse not permitted.

Carefree

Girls are traditionally associated with home and domesticity, and even though they are increasingly visible in social spaces, they are often affiliated with enclosures like shopping malls (Driscoll 2002, 259). Outdoor spaces can also be connected with nature (Cann 2012; Lindén 2013), thereby invoking the traditional idea of a natural association between femininity and nature (Ortner 1972). A complex portrayal of girls in an outdoor space that could be interpreted as either progressive or traditional is observed in one image.

Figure 14 shows two girls in an outdoor location. Perhaps it is a playground because a wire net and some parts of a playground are visible behind them. One girl holds and balances the other on her shoulders as both smile and have fun outside in the sun; these elements give them a carefree look. One can argue that showing girls having fun in an outdoor space like a playground produces a counter-discourse to the one that associates them with domestic spaces. However, the playground itself is open to two interpretations. If one associates the playground with sports, the image could be interpreted as breaking stereotypes related to girls. On the other hand, the playground could be viewed as an outdoor space close to nature, thus invoking femininities' natural association with nature. This image constructs two discourses on young femininities depending on how the outdoor space in it is interpreted.

This image shares certain features with Figure 13 that was discussed under the visual construction of active self-presenters and self-surveyors. In both images girls are shown having fun in an outdoor environment. However, we chose not to categorise that image under the visual construction of carefree girls because we noted several essential differences between the two images. Girls in this visual construction are having fun with each other, whereas the girls in Figure 13 are engaged in acts like looking at themselves in the mirror or taking selfies that seem to construct them as self-conscious. The textual emphasis in Figure 13 is on the self-presentation of girls.

Figure 14. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/hmsuomi/photos/a.1923897201169167/3266748903550650/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/hmsuomi/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © H&M. Reuse not permitted.

Environmental activists

Girl power discourses are understood to propagate the idea of girls as agentic (Harris 2004; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005; Griffin 2004). An assumed closeness between femininity and nature is a traditional idea related to femininity (Ortner 1972). Two discourses related to girls get constructed and sustained through the image from KappAhl in Figure 15, thus creating a complex mix.

Figure 15 shows two girls, one of a shorter height and one slightly taller. They are pictured standing, with tall green grass and tropical trees appearing behind them. The taller girl has an arm placed

Figure 15. Image URL: https://www.facebook.com/KappAhlSuomi/photos/a.1538935169722245/2596914433924308/?type=3&theater. Source: https://fi-fi.facebook.com/KappAhl/. Date of access: 10 July 2020. © KappAhl. Reuse not permitted.

around the shorter girl's shoulder. Although visual markers of femininity like long hair (Vänskä 2017, 139) are sported by the taller girl, the dominating manner in which she stands, with legs apart in a masculine fashion and arm over the shorter girl's shoulder, can be read in different ways. The pose could indicate masculinity and thereby an androgynous identity, especially if the tropical trees in the background were to be read as signifying the depiction of people from certain indigenous groups where boys keep long hair. However, the pose could well indicate an attempt to portray a powerful girl.

The text "fix the future" written on the shorter girl's T-shirt, and the grass and trees in the background aid in establishing that the advertisement is referring to the Earth's future. These elements show that the message of saving the environment is what the advertised image is attempting to communicate by using the imagery of these girls. The taller girl's serious expression and slightly raised eyebrows viewed alongside the message "fix the future" offers her image an intervisuality with the famous Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg, who is known for demanding the same from significant world leaders (BBC 2020). However, the girl is not blonde and as white-skinned as Thunberg.

Therefore, the girls, especially the taller girl with the overpowering pose in which she stands with the shorter girl, are shown to occupy the role of activists. Girl power discourses are typically understood to portray girls as empowered, agentic and active (Harris 2004; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005; Griffin 2004); this could be read as an articulation of girl power discourses. Noteworthily, environmental degradation—the issue to which these girls are employing their activism and the future for which they are urging action—impacts the entirety of humankind and not just girls. Nevertheless, boys and younger children are not present in this image even though they appear in other advertisements from KappAhl in our sample. The discourse of a natural closeness between femininity and nature (Ortner 1972) gets constructed through the invisibilisation of boys and younger children in the image.

While intervisuality with a teen activist associates the girl with agency and action, characteristic of girl power discourses, the image also naturalises femininity by showing the environment as the subject of activism. Therefore, the image articulates the notion that girls can deploy their activism but are likely to do so for causes like the environment because of their assumed closeness to the Earth.

Discussion

In this study, we employed visual discourse analysis to analyse the visual construction of girls and notions on young femininities articulated by 15 contemporary fast fashion advertisements. We found some outrightly stereotypical depictions and some complex ones that upheld stereotypes, albeit in relatively subtle ways.

Some images depicted girls in a traditional manner as heterosexual, caring and innocent. The portrayal of sexy posers reproduced postfeminist discourses. These results conform with previous studies on the visual representation of girls in advertisements which observe the portrayal of girls as caring (Holland 2004), innocent (Cann 2012), heterosexual (Lindén 2013) and sexy (Merskin 2004; Graff, Murnen, and Krause 2013; Speno and Aubrey 2018). Like Lindén (2013), we found some images that either use traditional discourses or postfeminist discourses.

We also found some complex images which created an ambiguity that did not fully dislodge stereotypes related to young femininities. The visual construction of environmental activists associates girls with agency and action on the one hand but also reinstitutes the traditional association of femininity with nature on the other. This is somewhat similar to Cann's (2012) study, where contradictory ideas create complexity. However, Cann (2012) identifies this through signifiers, and we show visual discursive constructions.

Unlike previous research, and as an original contribution, we have identified more visual and textual means by which girls' portrayals can be made complex so as to convey an ambivalence that does not fully challenge feminine stereotypes. While progressive ideas of choice and agency were used, the stereotypical association of girls with appearance and self-presentation was simultaneously reinstated in the visual construction of girls as active self-presenters and self-surveyors. In the visual construction of carefree girls, the image is left ambiguous by showing girls with a playground behind them—an outdoor space that could either be associated with closeness to nature or sports. Therefore, we identified more ways by which complexity was created by either cloaking the image in the language of girls' agency or by using a background that is open to two interpretations, with neither of the portrayals avidly challenging stereotypes related to young femininities.

We also aimed to consider how these advertisements were positioned in the Nordic context. Given Nordic states' initiatives to promote gender equality through "state feminism" (Formark, Mulari, and Voipio 2017, 10), traditional visual constructions seem a little out of place. Postfeminist girl power discourses purportedly align with notions of an agentic Nordic girl subject (Lindén 2013), and their utilisation can be understood as a convenient choice while advertising in Nordic markets. However, since the postfeminist sensibility does not challenge the status quo (McRobbie 2009; Gill 2007b), the deployment of this discourse seems like rhetoric as opposed to genuinely progressive imagery. Molander, Östberg, and Kleppe (2019, 140) have observed that Nordic companies often align with the welfare state's orientation in their advertisements. Korsvold (2012) shows that children's portrayal in advertisements targeted at the Nordic market upheld regional ideals of Nordic childhoods. Traditional portrayals neither display an alignment with state feminism nor reflect regional ideals of agentic Nordic girlhoods. Visual constructions invoking postfeminist discourses and complex portrayals *give the impression* of being in tandem with the values of state feminism and the ideals of agentic Nordic girlhoods. Therefore, our results do not conform fully with Molander, Östberg and Kleppe's (2019) and Korsvold's (2012) observations related to Nordic consumer culture.

We chose to analyse the advertisements of Nordic fast fashion companies H&M, Lindex, KappAhl and GinaTricot as we were interested in exploring whether their institutional CSR commitments towards promoting gender equality percolate down to their commercial portrayal of girls. The expectation that such companies would likely challenge stereotypes on young femininities guided our choice. However, our findings left us asking for some vehemently non-stereotypical depiction of girls. At a contextual level, our results suggest that these companies do not extend

their institutional agenda of promoting gender equality to the visual representation of girls in their advertisements.

Since advertisements play a central role in shaping societal ideas on gender (Schroeder and Zwick 2004), our results have broader implications as well. Gender-stereotypical representations could limit the expectations of societal groups portrayed stereotypically, thereby restricting their life opportunities (Knoll, Eisend, and Steinhagen 2011). The visual construction of girls as caring may promote the societal view of girls primarily as future carers. It might even encourage girls to unquestioningly accept a gendered division of labour. An alternative portrayal could have shown girls coding on a laptop, preparing to join the future workforce. In images showing mixed-age children, older boys instead could have been pictured holding younger children. The visual construction of girls as heterosexual tends to normalise girlhood heterosexuality. Propagation of girlhood innocence and asexuality reinforces the traditional good and bad girl binary, wherein the latter signifies sexuality (Vänskä 2017). Likewise, instead of portraying girls as innocent and reproducing such binaries, a progressive image could have shown girls and boys enjoying friendship together.

The visual construction of girls as sexy posers sustains postfeminist ideas of girls as empowered sexual subjects. However, Gill (2008) criticises this postfeminist version of sexual agency as hollow because it upholds normative beauty standards, excludes girls who do not fit them and gives paramount importance to sexual attractiveness. Likewise, by depicting girls as sexy posers, these advertisements might encourage society to value girls merely for sexual attractiveness. Gill (2008) warns that the postfeminist idea of sexual agency could be rather insidious for girls' subjectivities because it prompts them to monitor their bodies to suit the male gaze but does so under the garb of empowerment and choice, making it harder to critique and easier to internalise.

Gender stereotyping in advertising has become more subtle (Gauntlett 2008, 85), and this also holds for the complex portrayals of girls that we observed in our analysis. Although the complex portrayals seem to deploy some progressive ideas, a close reading suggests that they simultaneously resurrect certain stereotypes related to young femininities. In doing so, the notions surrounding girls and young femininities they promote are somewhat restrictive. For instance, the visual construction of girls as active self-presenters and self-surveyors limits the use of girls' agency to the domain of self-presentation. The stereotypical notion that associates femininity with appearance (Holland 2004) thus gets endorsed. An unequivocally non-stereotypical advertisement could have encouraged girls to make consumption choices of clothes for comfort rather than to showcase themselves.

Similarly, the visual construction of carefree girls seems only a half-hearted attempt to disassociate girls from feminine stereotypes. Instead of showing girls in an outdoor space that is open to interpretation, a more gender-equal portrayal could be girls engaging in sports in mixed-gender teams. Likewise, the visual construction of girls as environmental activists that portrays them as agentic is indeed positive. Nonetheless, these advertisements could have extended girls' activism to other domains instead of sustaining the traditional idea of closeness between nature and femininity. Instead, boys and younger children could have appeared alongside girls as environmental activists.

We do not and cannot conclusively suggest that these images are intentionally made non-stereotypical. Nevertheless, we wish to highlight that marketers must engage critically with the advertisements they produce for their audiences, and more so if their companies commit to promoting values of gender equality. The analysis provided in this study can be used for such critical engagement, and the study also has practical usage. It can benefit marketers designing advertised images featuring young girls, as it sensitises them to how complex portrayals of girls can resurrect stereotypes related to young femininities. It even offers some suggestions to make portrayals of girls unambiguously non-stereotypical, which marketers might find helpful.

Like all studies, this study suffers from certain limitations. First, it is limited to a rather small sample of 15 advertised images. Furthermore, it only considers a very small sector of the market:

the clothing and advertisements of four fast fashion companies. Future research could study advertisements from more market sectors and clothing companies. Since this study mainly contributes to the research field of visual representation of girls and young femininities in advertisements, our focus was chiefly on discourses related to gender. Future research could analyse the visual commercial construction of girls at the interstices of discourses on gender, body, beauty standards and race.

This study contributes to the research field of visual commercial representation of girls in new ways. It identifies various visual and textual means by which complexity gets created in girls' images to express an equivocation that does not fully dislodge stereotypes related to young femininities. It advances studies on Nordic consumer culture. It does so by highlighting that Nordic companies' advertisements targeted at buyers in a relatively gender-equal Nordic country neither clearly reflected the values of state feminism nor cogently mirrored ideas of agentic Nordic girlhoods in their portrayal of girls. Furthermore, this study raises a potent question in the Nordic context which is equally pertinent to the visual commercial construction of girls in general. It asks the following question: If Nordic companies can align with the welfare state's orientation and promote progressive ideas on fatherhood globally through their advertisements (Molander, Östberg, and Kleppe 2019), why do they shy away from vehemently endorsing values of state feminism while portraying girls? It is beyond the scope of this study to pinpoint why these marketers do not challenge stereotypes avidly while portraying girls. Presumably, they use these advertisements because their research data indicates that such images will resonate with young girls and their parents and help sell fast fashion. Eventually, this kind of equivocal approach that this analysis has identified only fritters away opportunities to propagate progressive notions on young femininities through advertisements, not least because these companies are present in non-Nordic markets as well.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for all their valuable and helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Academy of Finland: [Grant Number #320370]; Strategic Research Council: [Grant Number #327237].

Notes on contributors

Sonali Srivastava (Master of Social Science in child studies, Linköping University) is a Doctoral Student of Sociology at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research interests include visual culture, consumer culture, digital marketing and children's online privacy.

Terhi-Anna Wilska is Professor of Sociology at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research covers consumer behaviour, sociology of consumption and consumer culture. Recent topics of interest include sustainability in consumption and everyday life, ageing and life course, digitalisation and commerce.

Johanna Sjöberg is an Associate Professor at the Department of Thematic Studies - Child Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. Her research focuses on children, consumption and visuality. She is currently working on two research projects: "Escaping shame or taking a vacation from the family? The market for private mother/baby homes and children's boarding houses 1915-1975" and "Children's Cultural Heritage - the visual voices of the archive".

ORCID

Sonali Srivastava http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1871-5023
Terhi-Anna Wilska http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7516-7356
Johanna Sjöberg http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6901-4417

References

Aapola, Sinikka, Marnina Gonick, and Anita Harris. 2005. *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power, and Social Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1990. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.

BBC. 2020. Greta Thunberg: Who is She and What Does She Want?", last modified February 28. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49918719.

Borgerson, Janet L., and Jonathan Schroeder. 2002. "Ethical Issues of Global Marketing: Avoiding Bad Faith in Visual Representation." *European Journal of Marketing* 36 (5/6): 570–594. doi:10.1108/03090560210422399.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Cann, Victoria. 2012. "Competing Femininities: The Construction of Teen Femininities in Magazine Adverts." *Networking Knowledge* 5 (1): 59–83. https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/53738/.

Carey, Renee N, Ngaire Donaghue, and Pia Broderick. 2011. "'*What you Look Like is Such a big Factor*': Girls' own Reflections About the Appearance Culture in an all-Girls' School." *Feminism & Psychology* 21 (3): 299–316. doi:10.1177/0959353510369893.

Carter, Gynthia, and Linda Steiner. 2004. "Mapping the Contested Terrain of Media and Gender Research." In *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*, edited by Cynthia Carter, and Linda Steiner, 11–36. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Cook, Daniel Thomas. 1999. "The Visual Commoditization of Childhood: A Case Study of a Children's Clothing Trade Journal, 1920s-1980s." *Journal of Social Sciences* 3 (1–2): 21–40. doi:10.1080/09718923.1999.11892220.

Driscoll, Catherine. 2002. *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture & Cultural Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Durham, Meenakshi Gigi. 2007. Sex and Spectacle in Seventeen Magazine: A Feminist Myth Analysis." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Feminist Scholarship Division, San Francisco, CA.

Egan, R. Danielle, and Gail Hawkes. 2008. "GIRLS, SEXUALITY AND THE STRANGE CARNALITIES OF ADVERTISEMENTS." *Australian Feminist Studies* 23 (57): 307–322. doi:10.1080/08164640802233278.

Formark, Bodil, Heta Mulari, and Myry Voipio. 2017. "Introduction: Nordic Girlhoods—New Perspectives and Outlooks." In *Nordic Girlhoods: New Perspectives and Outlooks,* edited by Bodil Formark, Heta Mulari and Myry Voipio, 1–22. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

Gauntlett, David. 2008. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction, 2nd ed*. London: Routledge.

Genz, Stéphanie, and Benjamin A. Brabon. 2009. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007a. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007b. "Postfeminist Media Culture." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 147–166. doi:10.1177/1367549407075898.

Gill, Rosalind. 2008. "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising." *Feminism & Psychology* 18 (1): 35–60. doi:10.1177/0959353507084950.

Gill, Rosalind. 2017. "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20 (6): 606–626. doi:10.1177/1367549417733003.

Gill, Rosalind, and Christina Scharff. 2011. "Introduction." In *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, edited by Rosalind Gill, and Christina Schraff, 1–17. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

GinaTricot. 2016. Sustainability Report 2016. https://www.ginatricot.com/cms/work/sustainability/policys/ginatricot_hallbarhetsredovisning2016_eng_low.pdf.

GinaTricot. 2019. Sustainability Report 2019. https://www.ginatricot.com/cms/work/sustainability/policys/Gina-Tricot-Hallbarhetsredovisning-2019_low.pdf.

Graff, Kaitlin A., Sarah K. Murnen, and Anna K. Krause. 2013. "Low-Cut Shirts and High-Heeled Shoes: Increased Sexualization Across Time in Magazine Depictions of Girls." *Sex Roles* 69 (11–12): 571–582. doi:10.1007/s11199-013-0321-0.

Grande, Ariana. 2018. *Thank u, next.* YouTube video, 5:30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl1aHhXnN1k.

Griffin, Christine. 2004. "Good Girls, Bad Girls: Anglocentrism and Diversity in the Constitution of Contemporary Girlhood." In *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, edited by Anita Harris, 29–44. New York: Routledge.

Harris, Anita. 2004. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge.
Harris, Anita, Sinikka Aapola, and Marnina Gonick. 2000. “Doing it Differently: Young Women Managing Heterosexuality in Australia, Finland and Canada.” *Journal of Youth Studies* 3 (4): 373–388. doi:10.1080/713684386.
H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) Group. 2017. H&M Group Sustainability Report 2017. https://sustainabilityreport.hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HM-Group-Sustainability-Performance-Report-2019.pdf.
H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) Group. 2019. H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2019. https://sustainabilityreport.hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HM-Group-Sustainability-Performance-Report-2019.pdf.
Holland, Patricia. 2004. *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery*. London: I.B. Tauris.
Horton, Kathleen. 2018. “Just Use What You Have: Ethical Fashion Discourse and the Feminisation of Responsibility.” *Australian Feminist Studies* 33 (98): 515–529. doi:10.1080/08164649.2019.1567255.
KappAhl. 2018. KappAhl: Annual Report 2018. https://www.kappahl.com/globalassets/corporate/investors/annual–interimreports/20172018/kappahl_2018_eng_del1.pdf.
KappAhl. 2019. Annual Report 2019: Operations Sustainability Earnings. https://www.kappahl.com/globalassets/corporate/investors/annual–interim-reports/20182019/kappahl_annual_report_2019/.
Knoll, Silke, Martin Eisend, and Josephine Steinhagen. 2011. “Gender Roles in Advertising: Measuring and Comparing Gender Stereotyping on Public and Private TV Channels in Germany.” *International Journal of Advertising* 30 (5): 867–888.
Knudsen, Gry Høngsmark, and Erika Kuever. 2015. "The Peril of Pink Bricks: Gender Ideology and LEGO Friends.” In *Consumer Culture Theory (Research in Consumer Behaviour, Vol. 17)*. edited by Anastasia E. Thyroff, Jeff B. Murray, Russell W. Belk, 171–178. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
Korsvold, Tora. 2012. “Revisiting Constructions of Children and Youth in Marketing Advertisements.” *Young* 20 (1): 1–17. doi:10.1177/110330881102000101.
Lindén, Lisa. 2013. “‘What Do Eva and Anna Have to Do with Cervical Cancer?’ Constructing Adolescent Girl Subjectivities in Swedish Gardasil Advertisements.” *Girlhood Studies* 6 (2): 83–100. doi:10.3167/ghs.2013.060207.
Lindex. 2019. “Lindex Launches New Code of Conduct with Focus on Gender Equality | Lindex Group,” Last Modified October 15. https://about.lindex.com/press/news-and-press-releases/2019/lindex-launches-new-code-of-conduct-with-focus-on-gender-equality/.
Lindex. 2020. Lindex Sustainability Report 2020. https://about.lindex.com/files/documents/ lindex-sustainability-report-2020.pdf.
Martínez-López, Francisco J., Rafael Anaya-Sánchez, Irene Esteban-Millat, Harold Torrez-Meruvia, Steven D’Alessandro, and Morgan Miles. 2020. “Influencer Marketing: Brand Control, Commercial Orientation and Post Credibility.” *Journal of Marketing Management* 36 (17–18): 1805–1831. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2020.1806906.
McRobbie, Angela. 1997. “More! New Sexualities in Girls’ and Women’s Magazines.” In *Back to Reality: Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, edited by Angela McRobbie, 190–209. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
McRobbie, Angela. 2008. “YOUNG WOMEN AND CONSUMER CULTURE.” *Cultural Studies* 22 (5): 531–550. doi:10.1080/09502380802245803.
McRobbie, Angela. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
Merskin, Debra. 2004. “Reviving Lolita?” *American Behavioral Scientist* 48 (1): 119–129. doi:10.1177/0002764204267257.
Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2000. “The Multiple Viewpoint: Diasporic Visual Culture.” In *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1–19. London: Routledge.
Molander, Susanna, Ingrid Östberg, and Ingeborg Astrid Kleppe. 2019. “Swedish Dads as a National Treasure: Consumer Culture at the Nexus of the State, Commerce, and Consumers.” In *Nordic Consumer Culture State, Market and Consumers*, Edited by Søren Askegaard and Jacob Östberg, 119–146. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1
Montgomery, Kathryn C., Jeff Chester, and Tijana Milosevic. 2017. “Children’s Privacy in the Big Data Era: Research Opportunities.” *Pediatrics* 140 (2): S117–S121.
Nguyen, Terry. 2021. “Gen Z Doesn’t Know a World without Fast Fashion.” https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2021/7/19/22535050/gen-z-relationship-fast-fashion.
Omnicoreagency.com. 2021. “Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts,” last modified July 19, 2021. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/facebook-statistics/.
Ortner, Sherry B. 1972. “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” *Feminist Studies* 1 (2): 5–31.
Österlund, Mia. 2012. “Nordic Girlhood Studies: Do We Need to Get Over the Pippi Longstocking Complex?” In *Peripheral Feminisms Literary and Sociological Approaches*, edited by Petra Broomans and Margriet van der Waal, 35–42. Groningen: Centre for Gender Studies, Euroculture, Globalisation Studies. https://www.rug.nl/research/globalisation-studies-groningen/publications/researchreports/reports/peripheralfeminisms.pdf.
Pirsch, Julie, Shruti Gupta, and Stacy Landreth Grau. 2007. “A Framework for Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility Programs as a Continuum: An Exploratory Study.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 70: 125–140. doi:10.1007/s10551-006-9100-y.

Rose, Gillian. 2016. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials, 4th ed*. London: SAGE Publications.

Schroeder, Jonathan E. 2002. *Visual Consumption*. London and New York: Routledge.

Schroeder, Jonathan E., and Detlev Zwick. 2004. "Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 7 (1): 21–52. doi:10.1080/1025386042000212383.

Sparrman, Anna. 2018. *Visual Discourse Analysis I & II: To Research Image and Visuality*. PowerPoint Presentation. Linköping: Linköping University.

Speno, Ashton Gerding, and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey. 2018. "Sexualization, Youthification, and Adultification: A Content Analysis of Images of Girls and Women in Popular Magazines." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 95 (3): 625–646. doi:10.1177/1077699017728918.

Stevens, Lorna, and Jacob Ostberg. 2012. "Gendered Bodies— Representations of Femininity and Masculinity in Advertising Practices." In *Marketing Management: A Cultural Perspective*, edited by Lisa Peñaloza, Nil Toulouse, and Luca M. Visconti, 392–407. London: Routledge.

Thomas, Dana. 2019. *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*. New York: Penguin Press.

United Nations General Assembly. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." *United Nations, Treaty Series* 1577 (3): 1–15.

Vänskä, Annamari. 2017. *Fashionable Childhood: Children in Advertising*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

WEF (World Economic Forum). 2020. Global Gender Gap Report 2020. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

II

AWARENESS OF DIGITAL COMMERCIAL PROFILING AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN FINLAND AND THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE TARGETED ADVERTISEMENTS

by

S. Srivastava, T.-A. Wilska & J. Nyrhinen 2023

Journal of Children and Media, *17*(4), 559–578.

https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2257813

Open Access article.

JOURNAL OF CHILDREN AND MEDIA
2023, VOL. 17, NO. 4, 559–578
https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2257813

Awareness of digital commercial profiling among adolescents in Finland and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements

Sonali Srivastava, Terhi-Anna Wilska and Jussi Nyrhinen

Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

This study explores adolescents' awareness of the sources that inform online profiling and their perspectives on online targeted advertisements. It employs thematic analysis to analyse eight focus group discussions ($N = 38$) with adolescents (13–16 years) in Finland's capital region. The study advances research on adolescents' knowledge of the data gathered for online profiling by highlighting that adolescents infer that apart from previous online activities, data on their verbal conversations also inform targeted advertisements. The study also advances research on adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements by identifying that adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of targeted advertisements are that data should not be collected without their awareness and commercial entities should not use data on previous conversations for profiling. This study also pinpoints that online profiling gives some adolescents a privacy-invasive feeling of being observed, and others have a boundary until which they consider online data collection for profiling permissible. Moreover, some adolescents express ambivalent views on online targeted advertisements. The findings reflect some adolescents' acceptance of online profiling and knowledge gaps that can inform media literacy educators. The findings raise concerns about the opacity of online commercial data-gathering practices. Therefore, we urge corporations to demystify their data collection processes.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 12 October 2022
Revised 6 September 2023
Accepted 7 September 2023

KEYWORDS
Children; online profiling; targeted advertisements; online privacy; surveillance

IMPACT SUMMARY

Prior state of knowledge: Previous research shows that some adolescents find online profiling, which forms the basis of online targeted advertisements, privacy-invasive. However, why adolescents find certain targeted advertisements more privacy-invasive and others less intrusive is underexplored.

Novel contribution: Adolescents find online targeted advertisements that draw on their previous verbal conversations more privacy-invasive than those based on their prior online activities,which

CONTACT Sonali Srivastava sonali.s.srivastava@jyu.fi Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

reflects their privacy expectations in the context of online targeted advertisements.
Practical implications: Our findings reflect that some adolescents regard the tracking of their online activities by commercial entities as normal or permissible. Media literacy educators can use these results and devise educational programs to counter adolescents' permissive attitudes.

Introduction

Adolescents are active users of various digital platforms (Livingstone et al., 2019; Stoilova et al., 2019a), and large amounts of user data are collected on these platforms (Livingstone et al., 2019). Observers contend that Instagram and Facebook even track users' activities on other apps, websites and offline stores (Fowler, 2021). According to Simone Van der Hof's (2016) data typology, some of the data collected in digital environments is provided knowingly or voluntarily by users, for instance, through the content they share and their profile details. Van der Hof notes that a large chunk of data is also "given off" by users unknowingly or involuntarily. For example, information on location, browsing history, likes, clicks, time spent viewing a post, etcetera. Both kinds of data and possibly data from other sources are aggregated and analysed to generate users' profiles, and profiling forms the basis of the targeted advertisements users receive on digital platforms (Van der Hof, 2016). Online targeted advertisements are "any form of online advertising that is based on information the advertiser has about the advertising recipient, such as demographics, current or past browsing or purchase behaviour, information from preference surveys, and geographic information" (Schumann et al., 2014, p. 59).

When it comes to adolescents, online profiling and targeted advertisements have broadly raised three main concerns. First, related to adolescents' ability to critically evaluate the persuasive intent of targeted advertisements (Zarouali et al., 2020). Secondly, the online data collection practices underpinning profiling can threaten adolescents' privacy (Stoilova et al., 2019a), and reports of possible data security breaches by popular apps like TikTok further exacerbate privacy threats (Milmo, 2023). Lastly, profiling can lead to advertisements and content being targeted based on users' previous online actions, thus reducing their exposure to new ideas and choices, which interferes with adolescents' right to receive information and freedom of thought as guaranteed in articles 13 and 14, respectively, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Milkaite & Lievens, 2019).

However, adolescents' perspectives on commercial profiling and subsequent targeting in digital environments are underexplored (Stoilova et al., 2019b). Exploring adolescents' perspectives can help understand what benefits and harms they identify in such practices, thus providing valuable insights into adolescents' understanding of these issues. Given that online data collection practices are largely opaque (Livingstone et al., 2019), any critical evaluation of online profiling and targeting by adolescents requires, first and foremost, an awareness of the online data collection that precedes profiling (Zarouali et al., 2020).

Previous studies on adolescents' knowledge of the data gathered for commercial profiling (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020) had disparate results. Previous research exploring adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements has found that some adolescents considered online profiling privacy-invasive (Stoilova et al., 2019a). However, why they found profiling privacy-invasive is not explained. Moreover, why adolescents find certain targeted advertisements more privacy-invasive and others less intrusive and what privacy expectations in the context of targeted advertisements does that reflect is underexplored. Understanding the latter can provide some insights about (i) the collection of which or what user data adolescents find acceptable for profiling purposes and (ii) what their experiences of privacy-invasiveness depend on in the context of targeted advertisements. The present study tries to address the above-mentioned gaps by delving deeper into adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements. The study has two aims. First, it investigates which data do adolescents think inform their online profiles. Next, it explores adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements.

The data consists of eight focus group discussions (FGDs) ($N = 38$) conducted with adolescents aged 13–16 years in schools across Finland's capital region. "Media (digital, data and critical) literacy" can play a significant role in improving adolescents' understanding of the commercial repurposing of their data in digital environments (Stoilova et al., 2019a, p. 43). Finland has a strong tradition of media literacy education and is often regarded as an ideal example in this respect (Forsman, 2020), thus making it an interesting context for this study.

Framing gaps in previous literature

Previous research exploring adolescents' knowledge of online data collection shows that adolescents observe that their previous online actions are connected to the targeted advertisements they receive (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020). Keen (2020) has employed qualitative interviews with adolescents (12–16 years) to explore their knowledge of the data collected for commercial profiling and the harms they perceive from it. Keen (2020) notes that adolescents knew that their location data and profile details are used for their online profiling. In contrast, Holvoet et al.'s (2021) study, which uses FGDs with adolescents (12–14 years) to explore their privacy management practices based on their knowledge of online data gathering, has somewhat different findings. While some of their participants understood that advertisers collected location information to personalise advertisements, they rarely mentioned that details provided while registering into apps were also used for profiling (Holvoet et al., 2021). Some participants in their study thought "eavesdropping through built-in microphones" on devices contributed to targeted advertisements, but most did not believe the latter to be true (Holvoet et al., 2021, p. 320).

Given the opacity of online data collection methods (Livingstone et al., 2019), for adolescents to critically evaluate online profiling and targeting, they should first be aware of the preceding online user data collection (Zarouali et al., 2020). In other words, before investigating if adolescents consider online profiling and targeting problematic or privacy-invasive, it is important to find out if they are even aware that they are surveilled in digital environments because online data collection processes are not transparent. Therefore, our first research question is:

RQ1: Which user data do adolescents think gets collected for their online profiling and subsequent targeting?

Previous research has also investigated adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements. Research informed by developmental psychology has focused on the age at which adolescents start developing advertising literacy. Advertising literacy is defined as the ability to understand and critically evaluate the persuasive intent of advertising messages (Hudders et al., 2017). A survey conducted among adolescents (12–17 years) shows that older adolescents (aged 16 years) possess more advanced critical processing abilities against targeted advertisements (Zarouali et al., 2020).

Besides advertising literacy, adolescents also need to understand how the covert online data gathering practices behind targeted advertisements can threaten their privacy (Zarouali et al., 2020). As noted above, Keen's (2020) study also explored adolescents' conceptualisation of harm from online commercial surveillance. Keen found that adolescents considered online targeted advertisements helpful because they helped them find suitable products. In Keen's (2020) study, most adolescents did not find profiling and targeted advertisements privacy-invasive. While some adolescents were uncomfortable about companies collecting location data, their concerns centred around personal safety, reflecting that they were bothered about their "physio-spatial" privacy (Keen, 2020, p. 15).

Stoilova et al. (2019a) have used FGDs to gather adolescents' (11–16 years) perspectives on online profiling and targeting. Some of their participants trusted familiar companies to keep their data safe. Moreover, only a few participants in their study discussed the long-term ramifications of online profiling and targeting in reducing their exposure to new choices. Stoilova et al. (2019a) also found that sometimes younger participants were more or equally aware of privacy issues compared to older ones, thus leading the researchers to observe that there is no specific age at which a new level of understanding is reached, and age cannot be the sole determinant of privacy-knowledge. In their study, some adolescents expressed a sense of creepiness about being profiled online. E-safety harms like hacking were adolescents' primary concerns, even in relation to online commercial surveillance. Data leaks and misuse were remote concerns in the commercial context, although adolescents were aware of these possibilities (Stoilova et al., 2019a). While Stoilova et al. (2019a) highlight the risks adolescents considered, they do not explain why adolescents found online data collection and profiling creepy or privacy-invasive.

Various theories have been used to explain users' experiences of privacy invasiveness. Phelan et al. (2016) have used the social presence theory to explain users' (undergraduate students at a university) negative responses to online data collection and targeted advertisements. The theory proposes that users consider computers human agents and describe online data collection as creepy because users feel that they are "being watched" (Phelan et al., 2016, p. 5246). Sutanto et al. (2013) explain (adult) consumers' responses to targeted advertisements by using Petronio's (1991) information boundary theory, which proposes that people have mental boundaries beyond which they regard information sharing privacy-invasive. They show that consumers find the collection and use of their data for profiling and targeting intrusive beyond a certain point. If the collection of certain information is considered uncomfortable, consumers experience privacy transgressions (Sutanto et al., 2013). However, to our knowledge, the theories mentioned above have not

been used to explain adolescents' (13–16 years) experiences of privacy invasiveness, which could differ from that of adults (both young and old) due to varied awareness levels and developmental differences.

Previous research concerning adolescents' perspectives on online profiling and targeting has also not explored why adolescents find certain online targeted advertisements more privacy-invasive than others and what that reflects about their privacy expectations in the context of online targeted advertisements. The social contract approach to privacy emphasises the importance of implicit agreements in any context (Martin, 2016). Martin (2016) uses the social contract narrative to develop a framework for identifying users' online privacy expectations and the cause of privacy violations. According to this framework, "procedural contract norms" of notice and choice (for example, through privacy notifications) are essential but not the only way to meet users' privacy expectations. Martin proposes that in any context, "micro privacy norms" about *what* user data (information type) will be used, *how* it will be used and *who* will have access to users' information also guide users' privacy expectations. Users experience privacy transgressions if online data collectors violate "procedural contract norms" or make changes in the "microcontract" norms (Martin, 2016, pp. 557–559). To our knowledge, previous research has not explored adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of online targeted advertisements, and the social contract framework has not been employed to unpack these expectations.

To address gaps in the existing literature discussed above, the present study delves deeper into adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertising. The second research question and sub-questions are:

RQ 2: What are adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements?

RQ 2.1: What are the benefits and disadvantages of targeted advertisements, according to adolescents?

RQ 2.2: Why do adolescents find online data collection and profiling for targeted advertising privacy-invasive?

RQ 2.3: What are adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of online targeted advertisements?

Materials and methods

This article uses data from eight FGDs conducted in schools in Finland's capital area to explore adolescents' knowledge of being profiled online, their negotiation of online commercial privacy and their perspectives on targeted advertisements. Exploring children's and young people's perspectives involves focusing on their ways of understanding their lives and surroundings (Halldén, 2003 cited in Sparrman, 2009). We are guided by this idea and have used it to explore adolescents' ways of interpreting their online environment. FGDs are ideal for gathering adolescents' perspectives as they enable them to engage in conversations on a given topic (Horner, 2000). Therefore, we chose FGDs as the method of data collection.

Sample

The digital age of consent is the minimum age a user must attain before organisations can collect, process and store their data without parental approval (Pasquale et al., 2020). Although the GDPR recommends the digital age of consent to lie between 13 and 16, the age of digital consent in Finland is 13 years (Livingstone, 2018). Therefore, the sample consisted of adolescents aged 13–16 years. There were 38 participants (14 boys and 24 girls), and all the participants were recruited by their schools. The three schools that participated in our study are somewhat diverse. One school caters to pupils from all across Helsinki. The other two schools invite students from the pupil catchment area. One of these two schools is located in a district where the average annual income is higher than in the Helsinki capital region in general. The other school is in a district with an average yearly income lower than in the capital region.

Since small group sizes of 4–6 adolescents are recommended because they simulate everyday peer group interactions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002), each group consisted of 4–6 participants. Out of eight FGDs, five FGDs were conducted in Finnish and three in English. English was used in three FGDs because the school was bilingual (Finnish and English). Pupils attending bilingual schools are usually from various nationalities. For details on group composition and the language used in each FGD, please refer to Table 1. During the conversations, the participants in one group informed us that they had recently attended a school lesson on online privacy management. The data collection took place from December 2020 to May 2021.

The focus group discussions

As outlined in the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research in Finland formulated by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019), informed consent was gathered from adolescents aged 15 years and above and from their parents if participants were under 15 years. Two researchers were present in every FGD. One acted as the moderator, while the other mainly observed. To ensure a clear understanding of informed consent, the consent terms were repeated before initiating the FGDs. Since the school environment can make participants feel they are being assessed, researchers must emphasise that there are no correct or incorrect answers (Punch, 2002). Gibson (2012) recommends laying out ground rules like allowing everyone to speak and respecting everyone's opinions. We highlighted these points before starting the FGDs. The average length of an FGD was 50 minutes.

Table 1. Summary of group composition.

Participants per school	Language of FGD	Group	Boys	Girls	Age (Years)
School 1, total participants = 14	English	Group 1	1	4	13–14
		Group 2	2	3	14–15
		Group 3	2	2	15–16
School 2, total participants = 13	Finnish	Group 4	0	4	15–16
		Group 5	3	1	15–16
		Group 6	2	3	15–16
School 3, total participants = 11	Finnish	Group 7	2	3	14–15
		Group 8	2	4	15–16

Screenshots of targeted advertisements on Instagram were used to initiate the discussion. We showed the participants screenshots of two targeted advertisements from separate Instagram accounts. One from the researcher's account and one from an adolescent's account (after anonymising it). The aim of showing advertisements from two separate accounts was two-fold. One, to initiate discussions on targeted advertisements and ascertain if the participants recognised them. Second, to investigate what the participants thought about different users receiving different advertisements. In other words, we wanted to explore if the participants understood why different users receive different targeted advertisements and if they considered it problematic in any way. Each FGD was unique, and we asked some questions based on the discussions. Some probes we used during the discussions were: (i) How do you feel about apps knowing something about you so that they can suggest advertisements to you, (ii) why do you think different people get different targeted advertisements, and (iii) do you think targeted advertisements could have some bad sides? To avoid influencing participants' accounts, we refrained from using words like privacy, harm and threat. We asked them to elaborate on their concerns only when the participants used these words.

During the FGDs, we also asked the participants to do a worksheet.[1] On the worksheet, we asked the participants to list all the sources from where they thought apps get information about users. We wanted to find out if the participants list sources that include data shared knowingly (for instance, profile details), unknowingly or data that gets tracked as opposed to users explicitly giving that data (for example, data on what users watch, like, their search history) and data from any other sources. This helped us ascertain if the participants knew that their online actions were tracked and formed the basis of targeted advertisements and *which* activities they thought got recorded. The participants chose to do the worksheets in pairs or as a group. We also discussed their lists after they finished the worksheets so that the participants could further elaborate upon their observations.

Analysis strategy

The audio recorded FGDs were transcribed and anonymised. Pseudonyms have been used while quoting the participants. Transcriptions and items listed on the worksheet in Finnish were translated into English. The data was analysed using the six-step thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These six steps include (i) familiarisation with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes and (vi) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After undertaking multiple readings of the transcripts, the data was coded. A theoretical approach to coding wherein one codes the data with specific research questions in mind (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted. The codes and accompanying data extracts were collated together to search for themes. The themes were reviewed multiple times after reading the codes and accompanying data extracts.

Understanding that users' details and previous actions form the basis of targeted advertising

While discussing which data gets collected for profiling, as discussed below, our participants mentioned data on their (i) profile details, (ii) previous online activities (such as search history, posts liked and shared, and so on), (ii) location and (iv) previous verbal conversations.

Most participants in our study understood that users receive different targeted advertisements based on their profiles. All the participants were shown screenshots of targeted advertisements from the researcher's and an adolescent's Instagram accounts. In almost all the groups, participants started trying to identify which advertisement belonged to the adult's account and which to the adolescent's account. One advertisement was for a brand of muesli, and the other was for a shop called Flying Tiger of Copenhagen, which sells various items like stationery, accessories, etcetera.

> "Those ads have probably come depending on the user. And probably the ad targeted to the child promotes a store that sells more products that are targeted to children, and the ad (targeted) to adults has those kinds of products that adults might buy, for example, food." (Jutta,15)

The participants were asked to list the various sources from where apps like Instagram get information about users. We will discuss the sources they listed and their discussions.

The participants seemed to generally understand that the data they generate in digital environments forms the basis of targeted advertisements in apps like Instagram.

> "No, it might be from like other apps that collect information as well, like from those things that you do." (Matias,14)

One of the sources that the participants in all the groups listed was search history on apps and Google. They also discussed this.

> "Well, those things you're interested in suddenly come to your app, for example, on *Instagram*. If you search for cars on the internet, for example, or shoes, or clothes, those will come to your Instagram, too." (Olli,15)

Other sources that the groups listed were the posts shared, liked and commented on, hashtags used and followed, people and topics they followed, time spent viewing a post and terms they accepted while registering into apps.

Many participants were cognisant that apps tracked their location and advertised to them.

> "I have also noticed that your location affects the ads. Like when I was in Tiger (a shop) for TET (work-life familiarisation programme for middle school students in Finland), I started to get some ads for Tiger. I have only given Instagram, maybe Snapchat, permission, and that started to show me ads for Tiger specifically because I was working and spending a lot of time in Tiger. [. . .]" (Kia, 16)

Participants also listed sources like demographic details entered in their profiles such as gender. While writing the list in groups, they clarified this to other participants.

Venla (15): I don't understand why they ask about gender.

Kim (15): Because it's for the ads.

Many participants deduced that their verbal conversations were recorded in addition to their online activities, and apps use this information to targeted advertisements.

> "Yes, so like sometimes the apps like trace what you have been looking at and also some apps like listen to you and then they give you ads for like things you have been looking at and things you might be interested in because of the things you have looked at before." (Tiina, 13)

When asked what they thought listened to their verbal conversations, the participants had varied responses. Some mentioned "apps", and others said "smartphones". Nevertheless, many participants discussed their experiences of receiving targeted advertisements based on previous conversations. They mentioned these experiences on their own without us bringing up this topic.

> "I have noticed that if I have talked about something, for example wanting to buy some shirt, with my friend, you will get ads about exactly what you have talked about when you open the social media. For example, if you talk about some online store, you will get ads about the online store right away." (Rhea, 15)

Their discussions and the sources the participants listed on the worksheets reflect that most participants understand that their actions in digital environments are tracked and form the basis of profiling and subsequent commercial targeting. Moreover, several participants' accounts reflected that, due to their experiences, they thought that data on their previous verbal conversations were also used for online profiling and targeted advertisements.

Adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements

Our participants' views on online targeted advertisements can be categorised into the themes listed and discussed below.

(1) Helpful.
(2) Helpful but also concerning.
(3) Targeted advertisements encourage overconsumption.
(4) Targeted advertisements hinder new choices and perspectives.
(5) Targeted advertisements based on voice data are the creepiest.

Our participants also discussed online profiling that informs targeted advertisements. Their views can be categorised under the following themes that are listed and subsequently discussed below.

(1) Profiling underlying targeted advertisements not disturbing.
(2) Profiling underlying targeted advertisements creepy.

Helpful

Some participants noted that targeted advertisements sometimes helped them in finding relevant products.

> "Sometimes it (profiling and targeting) can be good, if you really find something that you've looked for." (Nick, 15)

Participants liked targeted advertisements because they corresponded with their interests.

> "I don't know. It's kinda like ok because I wouldn't like to see ads for things that I'm not even interested in." (Leena, 14)

Helpful but also concerning

Some participants seemed ambivalent about targeted advertisements. They found them fun but also acknowledged that the data collection underlying profiling and targeting was disturbing.

> "In one way it is fun and in another way it is very disturbing." (Venla, 15)

This participant expressed unease over companies knowing users' information.

> "[. . .]. Maybe because it is personal information, in my view, companies shouldn't know it". (Venla, 15)

Another participant in this group mentioned that using profiling to serve users better was good but expressed concerns about the chances of data misuse.

> "It's kind of good because then you don't get stuff that does not interest you at all, as long as there isn't someone who starts to use it in a wrong way, it is a little scary." (Paul, 15)

Targeted advertisements encourage overconsumption

A few participants talked about online targeted advertising as inimical because it showed products that users wanted to buy, which could persuade them to purchase those products, thus leading to overconsumption.

> "Maybe they can target advertising, and you may also end up buying that product more easily when they know that you want to buy it, and when you can see it all the time it makes you feel like buying it away. And the threshold to buy decreases and you might buy more useless things." (Rhea, 15)

Targeted advertisements hinder new perspectives and choices

Two groups discussed the long-term impact of online profiling and subsequent targeting on users' perspectives and choices.

In one group, participants described how targeted advertising reduced variety by showing advertisements of the same brand.

Kia (16): Maybe I think that one of the bad sides is that [. . .] it basically puts you in a narrow space and [. . .] keeps giving you the same content if you search for it, and [. . .] it basically kind of stops you from getting new stuff.

Suvi (15): It forms like a bubble.

Kia: Yes, [. . .] like it can be hard to find new content because it keeps suggesting the same stuff to you all the time. [. . .]

Pia (16): And then you don't get the latest information. If they keep suggesting the same bike, you wouldn't know if there was some new and better model [. . .]

In another group, content suggestion based on the kind of news people had consumed previously was viewed as antithetical to developing multiple perspectives.

"I don't think it's such a problem in terms of advertisements that people get advertisements related to the items that they are interested in, but in terms of news. It would be better for people to get a lot of variety of news so that people would know more about the world [. . .]. But if they don't get the news because Google thinks they are not interested in it, they will not know that their way of thinking might be very wrong. "(Diana, 15)

Targeted advertisements based on voice data are the creepiest

As discussed previously, many participants inferred that data on their verbal conversations were collected for profiling and targeted advertisements. Product suggestions based on previous verbal conversations were viewed as a considerable privacy breach, even by participants who found online targeted advertising non-intrusive.

Interviewer: You mentioned that in general these targeted ads don't bother you. But you mentioned that it is kind of creepy that they are listening to what you are saying. If it is so, then is it more of a problem than if they are tracking your behaviour online and tracking your data?

Matias (14): It's like a violation of your privacy, and they can like listen to your conversations on a daily basis and know a lot about you that you wouldn't want them to know.

It was somewhat challenging for the participants to pinpoint why they felt marketers collecting data on their verbal conversations was creepier or scarier than data collection on their previous online activities. Mostly, they just expressed how catastrophic it can be. However, in one group, the participants tried to articulate the reasons. One participant felt that the missing consent in audio recorded data made recording of verbal conversations more invasive.

"Cause you might, especially now that they don't like tell you that they are listening to you, cause you like press the consent, you like accept. You kind of understand.[. . .]" (Tiia, 15)

Somewhat similarly, some participants mentioned that a lack of awareness about conversations being recorded meant that they had fewer chances of controlling the information they gave, which made such data collection more invasive to their privacy.

> Tapio (15): I also think that recording audio or video is more like spying rather than recording your data from the actual phone (when you are scrolling) because then you know that you are on the phone, but when your phone is turned down and it's recording your audio, then you are not actually on the phone, so it shouldn't be then recording your audio.

> Eva (15): At least you can control what you are doing on the phone (while browsing), at least up to some point.

We probed further to understand if accepting privacy terms and choosing cookies made this group feel more in control of their personal information. One participant's explanation indicated that the cookie notification offered him a sense of choice that he could at least opt out of data collection if he wanted.

> "Well, you don't have to press the accept but when you are like pressing the accept you give consent." (Jesse, 15)

Profiling underlying targeted advertisements not disturbing

Some participants did not find targeted advertisements disturbing.

> "I would say that they aren't useful, but they aren't harmful either" (Tom,15).

One of the justifications the participants provided for not finding profiling and targeting disturbing was that they trusted popular apps like Instagram.

> "Feel ok, like it won't go anywhere, the information." (Mikko,14)

In one group, a few participants discussed that older and familiar apps garnered more trust.

> "There have been discussions about this, for example, about how especially the newer apps may feel unsafe because you don't really know about them [. . .]." (Anu, 15)

A few participants' accounts reflected that they had a certain boundary up until which they were permissive to online data collection. However, in one group, some participants warned their friends about the extent of information apps can collect.

> Miri (15): I mean, if they know some basic things about me, like I like dresses, then it's ok, [. . .] but if they know more, then it can be scary.

> Tom (15): Yes, but with your information, like location, [. . .] they can [. . .] figure out even a lot more like where you live and your address.

> Paul (15): Yes, because they look at your IP address and get a lot of information from that.

Profiling underlying targeted advertisements creepy

Some participants (both younger and older adolescents) found online profiling and subsequent targeting creepy.

> "I also think that it's a bit creepy, and sometimes I just think that how many things about me do they know more than what I personally know about myself." (Katri, 13)

One reason the participants gave for feeling creepy about online data collection and profiling was that they felt they were being observed.

> "Well, you know, because somebody, or maybe not somebody but something, for example, artificial intelligence, can find out what you like and so on, something like observes you or, I mean, can see what products you like and can advertise them directly to you. It makes you feel like someone is watching what you do." (Rani, 15)

While discussing the possible harm that data collection by apps like Instagram could pose, a few participants mentioned e-safety breaches like hacking.

> "It feels like what if they want to use it for something else than advertising, and that someone who I don't want to can have information about me, like my address or something else personal [. . .]. And hacking has increased lately, so it feels like what if someone knows things about me, they can use the information against me and make my life difficult or even ruin it." (Diana, 15)

A few participants also discussed possible risks like their data getting sold. However, they voiced these concerns after being probed further. Therefore, these did not seem to be their primary concerns.

> "They can sell it (information) to other companies." (Leena, 14)

Some participants' accounts reflected that they were apprehensive about apps knowing their location because they feared for their safety.

> "It would be horrible if someone would look at your location all the time. I have listened to enough criminal podcasts in which someone hacks your phone and looks at your location and comes to murder you." (Diana, 15)

While discussing why digital commercial profiling seemed creepy, some participants expressed the need to learn more about the commercial repurposing of their data. They wanted schools to discuss these topics in more detail.

> Jutta (15): Yeah, it would be nice to get correct information about these things.
>
> Rani (15): For example, in school, because they don't talk about these things very much.

Discussion

Our findings concur with previous research which shows that adolescents discern that their previous online actions (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020), location information (Holvoet et al., 2021; Keen, 2020) and demographic details (Keen, 2020) form the basis of online targeted advertisements. In Holvoet et al.'s (2021) study, some participants thought that data from verbal conversations gets used for personalising advertisements, but most did not believe so. In contrast, in our research, due to their experiences, many participants believed that data on previous verbal conversations informed profiling and targeted advertisements.

As observed in Keen's (2020) research, some participants in our study also found online targeted advertisements helpful. A few participants in our study expressed concerns over how targeted advertisements may encourage overconsumption because

they correspond with their interests and could entice them to buy those products. Zarouali et al. (2020) found that older adolescents (aged about 16 years) are better at critically evaluating the persuasive intent of targeted advertising messages. Although the adolescents who discussed this in our study were older (15–16 years), we also had some participants from this age group who appreciated the accuracy of targeted advertisements without much critical reflection. It is possible that these participants knew about online targeted advertisement's persuasive intent but did not discuss it during the FGDs. Nevertheless, based on our findings, we cannot conclusively suggest that age influences adolescents' critical abilities towards targeted advertising. In our research, a few participants discussed the long-term implications of online commercial profiling and targeting in hindering novel perspectives. Stoilova et al. (2019a) had similar findings.

Like in Keen's (2020) research, some of our participants as well did not consider online profiling disturbing. There seemed to be two reasons for it. Firstly, akin to Stoilova et al.'s (2019a) findings, a few of our participants also trusted familiar apps. Additionally, we found that a few adolescents considered online profiling nonintrusive because they seemed comfortable with a certain amount of their online data being gathered. This could be a reflection of the information boundary theory, which proposes that consumers have mental thresholds beyond which they consider online data collection privacy-invasive (Sutanto et al., 2013).

Congruent with Stoilova et al.'s (2019a) results, some participants in our study as well found the profiling underlying targeted advertisements creepy and identified data hacking and misuse as possible risks. Like in Keen's (2020) study, a few of our participants also expressed unease over the collection of location data, reflecting they valued their physio-spatial privacy. Additionally, we found that some adolescents found online profiling creepy because it gave them a feeling of being observed. This could be explained by the social presence theory, which proposes that individuals treat computers as human agents and online surveillance often gives users feelings akin to being observed (Phelan et al., 2016). Both younger and older participants in our study expressed discomfort with online profiling, which conforms with Stoilova et al.'s (2019a) observation that there is no specific age at which adolescents' privacy awareness develops. However, given that the age variance among our limited number of 38 participants was only three years and there were fewer participants aged 13–14 years (Table 1), we cannot conclusively suggest that age does not impact privacy awareness. Moreover, to avoid influencing participants' responses, we did not use words like "privacy" and "threats" but discussed further when participants expressed privacy concerns. Due to the absence of any direct questioning, we cannot make claims on *all* participants' privacy awareness.

Furthermore, we found that some adolescents considered online targeted advertisements helpful but also concerning. Adolescents' non-dichotomous views indicate that they acknowledge the privacy invasiveness of profiling but also appreciate relevant advertisements and content.

Participants' privacy expectations and online targeting based on voice data

Additionally, we identified that adolescents regarded targeted advertising based on previous verbal conversations (recorded by devices or apps) as more privacy-invasive

than advertisements based on previous online activities. They gave two reasons for feeling so. One, because their consent was not sought in case of the recording of conversations. Another related reason they identified for feeling perturbed was that when data on their online activities gets collected, they feel they are aware and, therefore, have a higher sense of control. Whereas, in the case of voice data being recorded, they are unaware and cannot control the information they give away.

When we apply the social contract framework (Martin, 2016) to adolescents' perspectives, we can pinpoint that online targeted advertisements based on voice data are seen as more privacy-invasive because the procedural norms of notice and choice are disrespected as voice data is recorded without adolescents' awareness or consent and changes are also made to the micro privacy norms regarding *what* data is used when data on previous conversations (voice data) is utilised for profiling, as illustrated in Figure 1. This shows that in the context of online targeted advertisements, adolescents' privacy expectations are that data should not be collected without their awareness and voice data should not be used for profiling. The former indicates that adolescents' experiences of privacy invasiveness from targeted advertisements depend on *how* data for profiling gets collected, and the latter suggests that the monitoring of previous online actions is expected or "normal" and hence permissible.

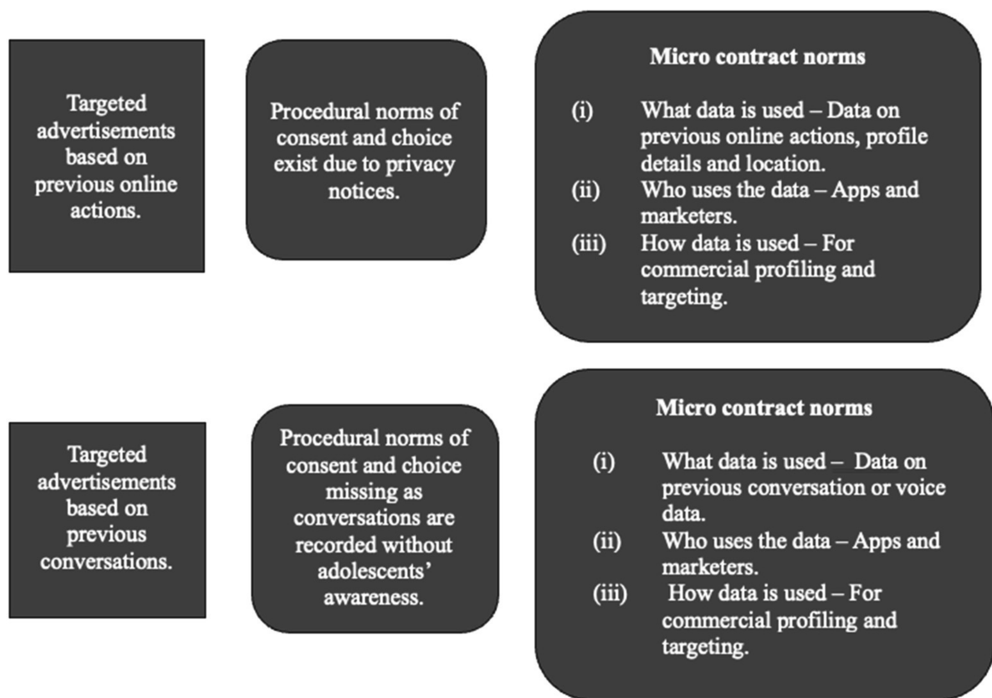


Figure 1. Applying Martin's (2016) social contract framework to unpack privacy violations in voice based targeted advertisement.

Implications

Regarding the surveillance of their previous online activities as "normal" indicates an acceptance of this practice by some adolescents, even though it is highly privacy-invasive. Moreover, when adolescents' concern centres on *how* data gets collected for profiling rather than on the intrusive practice of online profiling, they are more likely to accept the latter uncritically. A few adolescents found targeted advertisements helpful but also concerning, which could be interpreted in two ways. It can be regarded as an acknowledgement of the privacy-invasiveness of commercial surveillance. However, the appreciation of relevant advertisements or content could also indicate an acceptance of profiling. Permissive attitudes could lead to commercial surveillance remaining unquestioned by adolescents, thus highlighting the need to counter permissiveness by raising adolescents' awareness of the ramifications of such practices.

The finding also raises concerns about the opacity of online commercial surveillance. Whether companies listen to private conversations and target users with advertisements remains an open question, and studies have both supported and denied such claims (Kröger & Raschke, 2019). Moreover, there are contentions that marketers are developing, and possibly already using, mechanisms to utilise voice data to improve personalisation (see for example, Turow, 2021). We cannot conclusively suggest that companies use data from verbal conversations for targeted advertising, but we also think it is important to take adolescents' concerns and experiences seriously. Therefore, we urge corporations to be more transparent about the data they use for online profiling.

We also consider how our findings are situated in the Finnish context, with its high emphasis on media literacy in schools. Our participants were generally aware of which data gets tracked for commercial purposes. However, whether information is taken from private conversations or other sources does not make much difference to the possibility of data exploitation and the repercussions on the subject (Kröger & Raschke, 2019). Therefore, some adolescents' relative comfort with their online actions getting monitored reflects grey areas in their knowledge. Moreover, participants' awareness levels seemed to differ. While some critically reflected on commercial digital surveillance, a few others considered it relatively unproblematic. Some participants even wished schools would teach more about the commercial repurposing of online data. These insights regarding adolescents' knowledge gaps can be used by media literacy educators in Finland.

Limitations and contributions

We acknowledge some limitations in our study that open avenues for future research. Firstly, adolescents' knowledge can differ due to factors like technical skills and socio-economic backgrounds, among others (Livingstone et al., 2019). Therefore, more research in different countries and among varied socio-demographic consumer groups can reveal social and cultural differences or new perspectives that were not covered in our study as it was limited to the Finnish capital region. Second, the study has identified that adolescents found targeted advertising based on prior verbal conversations more privacy-invasive than those based on data on their previous online activities. However, only one group could articulate the reasons for feeling so and qualitative methods limit drawing generalisations to populations. Therefore, quantitative studies could be conducted to reveal how targeted advertising based on previous

verbal conversations and online activities are associated with adolescents' experiences of privacy-invasiveness.

Despite the limitations identified above, the present study makes some significant contributions. It contributes to existing research exploring adolescents' knowledge of the data collected for profiling by highlighting that adolescents deduce that data on their verbal conversations also informs commercial profiling and targeting. The study also advances research investigating adolescents' perspectives on online targeted advertisements by pinpointing why some adolescents find online profiling privacy-invasive. Secondly, the study identifies adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of online targeted advertisements. Thirdly, it highlights that some adolescents have an imaginary boundary up until which they find online data gathering permissible. Lastly, the study identifies ambivalent views on online targeted advertisements among some adolescents.

Conclusions

To conclude, our thematic analysis of eight FGDs ($N = 38$) with adolescents aged 13–16 years in Finland's capital region shows that our participants thought that data on their location, demographics (age and gender), previous online actions and past conversations gets collected for online profiling. Our participants had multiple perspectives on online targeted advertisements. Some participants found targeted advertisements helpful, whereas a few others found them helpful but also concerning. Some thought targeted advertisements encourage overconsumption. A few others noted that targeted advertisements hinder new perspectives and choices. While some participants found the profiling underlying targeted advertisements non-disturbing, there were some others who found it creepy because it gave them a feeling of "being watched". Several participants regarded targeted advertisements based on voice data as the creepiest, which reflects that adolescents' privacy expectations in the context of targeted advertisements are that data should not be collected without their awareness and commercial entities should not use data on previous conversations for profiling. We recommend raising adolescents' awareness about the ramifications of commercial surveillance and urge corporations to make their data collection process for profiling transparent.

Note

1. Additional information – We were guided by Van der Hof's (2016) data typology in designing this worksheet. According to this typology, online targeted advertisements are based on inferred data or profiling. Inferred data is derived by analysing data shared knowingly (but not necessarily intentionally) and unknowingly by users and possibly data from other sources, usually using algorithms (Van der Hof, 2016).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable and helpful comments. We are grateful to the schools that participated in this study and thank the participants who contributed their time to this study. We would also like to thank Matilda Holkkola for her help as a research assistant in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This study is funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland, grant #327237 and the Academy of Finland, grant #320370.

Notes on contributors

Sonali Srivastava is a doctoral researcher at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research focuses on children as consumers in digital environments. Sonali's research interests include children's consumer culture, visual culture, and children's online privacy.

Terhi-Anna Wilska is Professor of Sociology at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research covers consumer behaviour, sociology of consumption and consumer culture. Recent topics of interest include digitalisation of consumption, social media and young people, and sustainability in consumption and everyday life.

Jussi Nyrhinen is a postdoctoral researcher in sociology at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy in University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Nyrhinen has been involved in studies investigating digitalisation in the retail business, and the consequent disruptions in consumer behaviour, retail spaces and local retail firms' strategies and policies.

ORCID

Sonali Srivastava http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1871-5023

Details of ethics approval

A specialist from the Human Sciences and Ethics Committee, University of Jyväskylä was consulted before undertaking the data collection. Based on the description of the research design, the need for a separate ethical approval was ruled out by the specialist from the Human Sciences and Ethics Committee, University of Jyväskylä. The university follows the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research in Finland (2019). As per these guidelines, we were asked to gather informed consent from children if they were 15 years and above and from parents in case of children aged below 15 years. We followed these guidelines and gathered informed consent. A description of this is also provided in the Materials and methods section of the manuscript. Since the research design did not meet the criteria of research that would require a separate ethical approval (a description of such criteria was provided to the researchers by the Human Sciences and Ethics Committee, University of Jyväskylä), a separate ethical approval was not carried out.

References

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(77), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2002). Interviewing children and adolescents. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 181–201). Sage.

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity guidelines. (2019) . *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland*. TENK.

Forsman, M. (2020). Media literacy and the emerging media citizen in the Nordic media welfare state. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, *2*(1), 59–70. https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0006

Fowler, G. A. (2021, September 29) How to block Facebook from snooping on you. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/08/29/stop-facebook-tracking/

Gibson, J. F. (2012). Interviews and focus groups with children: Methods that match children's developing competencies. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *12*(5), 473–483.

Holvoet, S., De Jans, S., De Wolf, R., Hudders, L., & Herrewijn, L. (2021). Exploring teenagers' folk theories and coping strategies regarding commercial data collection and personalized advertising. *Media and Communication*, *10*(1), 317–328. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4704

Horner, S. D. (2000). Using focus group methods with middle school children. *Research in Nursing and Health*, *23*(6), 510–517. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200012)23:6<510:AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-L

Hudders, L., De Pauw, P., Cauberghe, V., Panic, K., Zarouali, B., & Rozendaal, E. (2017). Shedding new light on how advertising literacy can affect children's processing of embedded advertising formats: A future research agenda. *Journal of Advertising*, *46*(2), 333–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1269303

Keen, C. (2020). Apathy, convenience or irrelevance? Identifying conceptual barriers to safeguarding children's data privacy. *New Media Society*, *24*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960068

Kröger, L. J., & Raschke, P. (2019). Is my phone listening in? On the feasibility and detectability of mobile eavesdropping. In S. Foley (Ed.), *Data and applications security and privacy XXXIII* (pp. 102–120). Springer International Publishing.

Livingstone, S. (2018). Children: A special case for privacy? *Intermedia*, *46*(2), 18–23.

Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2019). *Children's data and privacy online: Growing up in a digital age: An evidence review*. London School of Economics and Political Science.

Martin, K. (2016). Understanding privacy online: Development of a social contract approach to privacy. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *137*(3), 551–569. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2565-9

Milkaite, I., & Lievens, E. (2019). Children's rights to privacy and data protection around the world: Challenges in the digital realm. *European Journal of Law and Technology*, *10*(1). https://ejlt.org/index.php/ejlt/article/view/674/913

Milmo, D. (2023, March 8). TikTok unveils European data security plan amid calls for US ban. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/08/tiktok-european-data-security-regime-us-ban-social-video-app

Pasquale, L., Zippo, P., Curley, C., O'Neill, B., & Mongiello, M. (2020). Digital age of consent and age verification: Can they protect children? *IEEE Software*, *39*(3), 50–57. https://doi.org/10.1109/MS.2020.3044872

Petronio, S. (1991). Communication boundary management: A theoretical model of managing disclosure of private information between marital couples. *Communication Theory*, *1*, 311–335.

Phelan, C., Lampe, C., & Resnick, P. (2016). It's creepy, but it doesn't bother me. *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 5240–5251. https://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858381

Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, *9*(3), 321–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568202009003005

Schumann, J. H., von Wangenheim, F., & Groene, N. (2014). Targeted online advertising: Using reciprocity appeals to increase acceptance among users of free web services. *Journal of Marketing*, *78*(1), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.11.0316

Sparrman, A. (2009). Ambiguities and paradoxes in children's talk about marketing breakfast cereals with toys. *Young Consumers*, *10*(4), 297–313. https://doi.org/10.1108/17473610911007139

Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Nandagiri, R. (2019a). *Children's data and privacy online: Growing up in a digital age. Research findings*. London School of Economics and Political Science.

Stoilova, M., Nandagiri, R., & Livingstone, S. (2019b). Children's understanding of personal data and privacy online – a systematic evidence mapping. *INFORMATION COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY*, *24* (4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1657164

Sutanto, J., Palme, E., Tan, C. H., & Phang, C. W. (2013). Addressing the personalization-privacy paradox: An empirical assessment from a field experiment on smartphone users. *MIS Quarterly*, *37* (4), 1141–1164. https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2013/37.4.07

Turow, J. (2021). *The voice catchers: How marketers listen in to exploit your feelings, your privacy, and your wallet*. Yale University Press.

Van der Hof, S. (2016). I agree . . . or do I? A rights-based analysis of the law on children's consent in the digital world. *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, *34*(2), 409–445.

Zarouali, B., Verdoodt, V., Walrave, M., Poels, K., Ponnet, K., & Lievens, E. (2020). Adolescents' advertising literacy and privacy protection strategies in the context of targeted advertising on social networking sites: Implications for regulation. *Young Consumers*, *21*(3), 361–367. https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-04-2020-1122

III

CHILDREN AS SOCIAL ACTORS NEGOTIATING THEIR PRIVACY IN THE DIGITAL COMMERCIAL CONTEXT

by

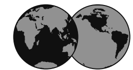
S. Srivastava, T.-A. Wilska & J. Nyrhinen 2023

Childhood, *30*(3), 235–252.

https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682231186486

Open Access article.

Article



Childhood
2023, Vol. 30(3) 235–252
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/09075682231186486
journals.sagepub.com/home/chd
Sage

Children as social actors negotiating their privacy in the digital commercial context

Sonali Srivastava, Terhi-Anna Wilska and Jussi Nyrhinen
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyvaskyla, Jyvaskyla, Finland

Abstract

This study advances research on children's negotiation of online commercial privacy by identifying an act of digital agency by children that may serve their current needs but can also impact children negatively. Secondly, it identifies certain factors children consider while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites before disclosing information online. Eight focus group discussions with children (13–16 years) in Finland's capital region are analysed using thematic analysis. Our findings highlight that while children's digital literacy education is needed, ensuring that education translates to children's online practices is also essential. We also recommend increasing corporations' accountability in ensuring children's privacy.

Keywords

Children, online privacy, personal data, digital agents, corporate surveillance

Introduction

While participation on various digital platforms provides children with numerous opportunities for education, entertainment, socialising and civic engagement, the opaque data collection practices in digital environments can also expose them to privacy risks and infringe their rights (Milkaite and Lievens, 2019). Ever-evolving tracking technologies like cookies, fingerprint devices and geolocation trackers enable the tracking of users' data in and across various digital platforms in a largely invisible fashion (Turow, 2012; Lupton, 2015). Users' actions in digital environments can now be recorded and converted to data that corporations and governments can use, making data immensely valuable

Corresponding author:
Sonali Srivastava, Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyvaskyla, PO Box 35 FI-40014, Jyvaskyla 40014, Finland.
Email: sonali.s.srivastava@jyu.fi

(Lupton, 2015). The recorded data is mined using algorithms to generate user profiles, and profiling informs the targeted advertising users encounter on digital platforms (Turow, 2012; Lupton, 2015). Large-scale profiling leads to a kind of corporate digital surveillance (Bodle, 2016).

Personal data collection, analysis and subsequent profiling impact children's right to privacy and protection of personal data (UNICEF, 2018). Milkaite and Lievens (2019) point out that children's profiling can be particularly problematic because it can lead to advertisements and content being targeted based on their previous actions online, leading to 'more of the same', thus reducing their exposure to new ideas. UNCRC's articles 13 and 14 that emphasise the right to receive information and freedom of thought, respectively, can be hampered by such profiling (Milkaite and Lievens, 2019). Moreover, such practices can diminish children's and young people's exposure to varied perspectives at a stage in their lives when they explore different identities and make significant life choices (Milkaite and Lievens, 2019). However, children's privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context are underexplored (Stoilova et al., 2019). Hence, the present study explores how children aged 13–16 years negotiate their privacy in the digital commercial context. It draws upon childhood studies' conceptualisation of children as social actors (Prout and James, 1990).

It is perhaps more important to explore teenagers' privacy negotiation practices after the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was implemented across the EU in May 2018. This is so because the GDPR's recommendation to fix a digital age of consent between 13–16 years presumes that children in this age cohort are 'able and willing' to manage online consent mechanisms (Keen, 2020: 3). The data of this study consists of eight focus group discussions (FGDs) with 13–16 years old children from schools located in Finland's capital region. This study advances research on children's negotiation of online commercial privacy by exploring the factors that children aged 13–16 years residing in the EU consider while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites before disclosing information online. The study also explores how children exert their agency in the digital commercial context.

This article proceeds as follows: first, we describe how the digital commercial context can undermine children's privacy. We then elaborate on digital agency, followed by a discussion on children's agency in childhood studies. Next, we discuss previous literature on children's privacy negotiation in the digital commercial context before elaborating on the methodology. In the findings, we present how children control the information they disclose online, the practices they adopt for restricting the information they give for commercial profiling, the multiple ways children react to the cookies notification and how children try to manipulate the algorithms to receive their preferred content and advertisements. Our results suggest that when children assess the trustworthiness of apps and websites intuitively, they pay attention to the website's general appearance before disclosing information online. Unlike previous studies, our findings highlight that children are not primarily guided by gut feelings while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites before making online information disclosures. Moreover, the study identifies an act of digital agency by children that may help them exert some influence over the content or advertisements they receive. However, it can also have some negative repercussions on

children. At the end of this article, we discuss the implications of our findings. We conclude by highlighting the limitations and contributions of the study.

Children's privacy and the digital commercial context

Sonia Livingstone and colleagues (2019a:13) identify three contexts or relationships in digital environments where users' privacy matters: 'between an individual and (i) other individuals or groups (interpersonal privacy); (ii) a public sector or third sector (institutional privacy); or (iii) a commercial for-profit organisation (commercial privacy).' Commercial privacy is defined as 'how my personal data is harvested and used for business and marketing purposes' (Livingstone et al., 2019b: 4). To distinguish the different kinds of data that circulate in digital environments, Simone van der Hof (2016) divides data into three types. First, 'data shared' includes data shared by users knowingly but not necessarily intentionally, such as content posted on social media platforms and personal information given while registering on apps or websites. Second, 'data given off' or behavioural data consists of data left mostly unknowingly by users through their online activities. It includes search history, clicks, likes, device location, videos watched, time spent browsing a page, etcetera. Cookies and other tracking technologies track data given off. Finally, 'inferred data' (also called profiling) is derived from analysing 'data shared', 'data given off' and possibly data from other sources, usually by employing algorithms. In this study, we use van der Hof's (2016) data typology and focus on the digital commercial context and therefore commercial privacy. 'Inferred data' that forms the basis of targeted adverting is the most pertinent in the commercial context (Stoilova et al., 2020).

Exercising control over data collection for commercial purposes on digital platforms is challenging for users because such data collection takes place in a largely invisible fashion (Montgomery, 2015). Actions and interactions that previously went unrecorded can now be recorded in digital environments, making privacy something that always needs to be negotiated instead of being a given (Livingstone et al., 2019a). Children share a one-way relationship with marketers who collect their data online, and this leaves little scope for the negotiation of privacy (Steeves and Reagan, 2014). Consent is used to legitimise the act of watching over data subjects (van der Hof, 2016) but they have no options to revoke this consent (Steeves and Reagan, 2014). Moreover, the complex language of privacy policies makes it difficult for users to understand what they consent to, rendering the notice-and-consent model ineffective in addressing the asymmetrical power relationship between users and data collectors (Waldman, 2018).

Waldman (2018) notes that users' online information disclosure and consent decisions are often based on factors like trust and proposes that trust should be the benchmark of privacy legislation. Once users entrust corporations with their data, the latter should act as 'fiduciaries' of users' information (Waldman, 2018:87). As 'information fiduciaries', companies should ensure that they do not misuse this data to manipulate users, and privacy legislation must ensure that companies do not abuse users' trust (Waldman, 2018:88).

Users' digital agency

Within the all-encompassing structures of digital surveillance, some scholars have called upon users to exert their digital agency (for example, Beer, 2009; Kennedy and Moss, 2015). Better knowledge of online personal data collection and mining processes and how they determine users' digital experiences and choices is one way to develop users' digital agency (Beer, 2009). Beer (2009) envisages that through such knowledge, users can determine the information they share and steer the algorithms in the direction they wish them to take. This could lead to skilled agents acting in reflexive ways instead of fully resisting the algorithms (Beer, 2009). Kennedy and Moss (2015) opine that digital agency can be promoted if 'publics' begin to determine how they are represented instead of vice versa.

When it comes to children's agency, childhood studies scholars Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) emphasise the importance of recognising children as social actors, agentic in shaping their social lives and that of others around them. The central idea was to give a voice to children and challenge the dominant view of children as incomplete 'becomings' (Oswell, 2013: 40). However, scholars from within the field have critically engaged with the idea of children's agency (for example, Oswell, 2013; Spyrou, 2018). One point of critical reflection has been the tendency to view children's agency as essentially positive. Such a view could disregard that children may not necessarily act in their or others' best interests while being agentic (Valentine, 2011; Spyrou, 2018). Abebe (2019) invites childhood studies researchers not just to recognise the existence of children's agency but to consider what kind of agency it is and what purpose it serves.

Previous research on children's negotiation of online commercial privacy

Studies on children's strategies to navigate online privacy have focussed mainly on data given knowingly (Stoilova et al., 2019). In relation to the latter, Marwick et al. (2010) observe that privacy protection strategies of adolescents fall under the categories of avoidance and approach. Avoidance strategies include refraining from using certain websites, and approach strategies involve taking active steps to protect privacy like providing false information and reading privacy statements (Youn, 2009). Previous studies on teenagers' privacy protection practices report that they often share incomplete personal information with websites (Youn, 2005; Lenhart et al., 2011) and rarely read privacy statements on them (Youn, 2005).

Few studies have explored children's online privacy negotiation practices in the digital commercial context (Stoilova et al., 2019). In Pangrazio and Selwyn's (2018) workshop, organised before developing an app to support children's privacy management practices, a few participants (aged 11–17 years) reported using a VPN to protect personal data. Their participants found online privacy notifications lengthy and complicated to read (Pangrazio and Selwyn, 2018). Stoilova et al. (2020) note that incomprehensible privacy terms on websites and difficult to disable cookies lead children to experience a sense of powerlessness against personal data collection for commercial purposes. Many

participants in their study carried a misconception that strategies like providing a fake name and age, which they used in the interpersonal context, can also protect them from commercial actors (Stoilova et al., 2020). Holvoet et al. (2021) found that trust played a significant role in children's (aged 12–14 years) online consent decisions. Some of their participants trusted big companies' websites or checked if the website was secure before accepting cookies. In their study, children usually accepted cookies without reading the terms, and some did so to move ahead with their online activities. Holvoet et al. (2021) note that trust also played an important role in children's online information disclosure decisions. They report that while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites, children were guided mainly by a gut feeling. A few participants, though, could 'recognise signals referring to suspicious data requests' (Holvoet et al., 2021:322), which suggests that upon receiving data requests on a website or app, some participants could recognise certain requests as suspicious. However, Holvoet et al. (2021) do not adequately clarify what their participants considered or paid attention to when they were guided by their gut feelings while evaluating the trustworthiness of websites and apps.

The present study contributes to the existing literature on children's negotiation of privacy in the digital commercial context by providing insights into how children residing in the EU evaluate the trustworthiness of apps and websites before making online information disclosure decisions and how they exert their agency in the digital commercial context. The study poses the following research question:

RQ – How do children aged 13–16 years negotiate their privacy in the digital commercial context?

Methodology

This article uses data from eight FGDs conducted in schools across Finland's capital area to explore children's understanding and negotiation of privacy in the digital commercial context and their perspectives on targeted advertising. The digital age of consent in Finland is 13 years, and the GDPR recommends that EU member states fix this age between 13–16 years (Livingstone, 2018). Therefore, children aged 13–16 years were recruited for the study. FGDs are helpful in gathering children's perspectives through a dialogical process (Gibson, 2012). They simulate a peer group situation which can facilitate the participation of children who may not want to speak individually with adults in interviews (Horner, 2000). Small group sizes of 4–6 children are optimal as they replicate common peer group interactions (Eder and Fingerson, 2002). Hence, each group consisted of 4–6 participants. Table 1 summarises the group composition. All the 38 participants were recruited by their schools. Eight FGDs were conducted, out of which five were in Finnish. Three FGDs were conducted in English because the school was bilingual (English and Finnish). Students attending bilingual schools often belong to different nationalities. The average length of an FGD was 50 min. The data collection took place between December 2020 and May 2021.

According to the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research in Finland, we gathered informed consent from participants aged 15 years and above and from their parents in the case of participants below 15 years (TENK, 2019). We tried to ensure a clear

Table 1. Summary of group composition.

Group	School	Boys	Girls	Age (Years)
1	Bilingual	1	4	13–14
2	Bilingual	2	3	14–15
3	Bilingual	2	2	15–16
4	Finnish	0	4	15–16
5	Finnish	3	1	15–16
6	Finnish	2	3	15–16
7	Finnish	2	3	14–15
8	Finnish	2	4	15–16

understanding of informed consent by repeating the consent terms and inviting questions before the FGDs. The voluntary nature of consent was reiterated. One group informed that they had recently attended a school lesson on privacy protection. Hence, they could have better privacy negotiation practices. We will refer to this group as Focus Group Lesson (FGL henceforth) to distinguish the responses of its participants. The rest of the groups will be denoted as Focus Group Standard (FGS henceforth).

Christensen and Prout (2002) recommend adopting the 'ethical symmetry' approach between children and adults in research that views children as social actors. This mainly involves not treating children as unequal or inferior to adults. However, they caution that researchers should not ignore the power imbalance between children and adults arising from generational differences. We were mindful of this power imbalance and tried to bridge it by interacting with the participants in a friendly manner. We also showed our inclination to learn from them and asked them to give us tips to protect our personal data, just as we would ask adult participants. The school environment can exacerbate children's feelings of being evaluated, and adult researchers must stress that there are no right or wrong answers (Punch, 2002). We emphasised the latter and highlighted that there were multiple perspectives based on experiences. Moreover, we often reiterated that even we get confused with various online notifications.

Differences between children, like varied articulation abilities, extroversion and introversion, should not be ignored (Punch, 2002). We tried to facilitate equal participation by keeping in mind the differences between children. Firstly, simple points like taking turns to speak and re-asking the moderator if something is unclear (Gibson, 2012) were highlighted before the FGDs. Moreover, two researchers were always present in the FGDs, and one of us acted as an observer. Since attending to non-verbal cues can support quiet participants (Sim, 1998), the observer was assigned this task. To avoid domination of older children over younger ones (Gibson, 2007), we requested that the teachers organise groups with children from the same grade. Small group sizes were also conducive to equal participation.

Using van der Hof's (2016) data typology, we showed our participants screenshots of scenarios where data is given (registering options on an app and website), given away (a webpage with cookies notification) and images of targeted advertisements based on

inferred data. Cookies are files installed by a website on the browser, so accepting cookies enables tracking of users' online activities (Rafter, 2022) or data 'given away'. Our discussions centred around using various apps and websites and browsing the internet on different devices. Since content shared on social media platforms also constitutes data given (van der Hof, 2016), we tried to gauge whether our participants contemplated controlling the content they shared. We did not want to use the word privacy as that could influence participants' responses. Hence, we used indirect probes like asking why they visited their favourite social media platforms, and in some groups the participants themselves discussed this. Since starting the discussion with something simple and familiar helps build engagement and informality (Gibson, 2012), we asked the participants to name their favourite app while introducing themselves. Similarly, the screenshots that we showed them were from social networks like Instagram and TikTok and gaming apps like Fortnite that are popular among this age cohort.

The audio recorded FGDs were transcribed and anonymised. Transcriptions in Finnish were translated into English. The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Children's negotiation of privacy in the digital commercial context

Controlling information shared knowingly

Stoilova et al. (2020) note that many participants in their study thought that strategies used to protect interpersonal privacy like using fake name and age would also help them protect their privacy against commercial actors. Similarly, when we discussed how the participants shared their personal information while registering on apps and websites, most children reported faking their age. However, for all the groups, the motivation for faking age was not related to protecting personal information but to getting permission to use apps with a higher age limit.

> 'Yeah, because not all apps let you in if you are under 16 or at least under 13. So, you won't get in anywhere.' (Jutta, 15)

Children assess the trustworthiness of apps and websites before disclosing information (Holvoet et al., 2021). Similarly, many children, but none from FGL, discussed how suspicious apps or websites raised a red flag for them. While evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites, children are primarily guided by gut feelings (Holvoet et al., 2021). A few participants in our study were also somewhat guided by intuition. They mentioned looking at a website's layout or appearance to identify an untrustworthy website.

> 'I feel like there's really rarely you do come across a site where if you are looking for information on something and it asks you to sign in but looks … just the layout of the site is bad and when you press something it goes somewhere else and weird stuff like that, then I would leave the app and go and find something more trustworthy.' (Tapio, 15)

However, some children also reported looking for concrete signs to identify suspicious websites or apps before sharing their information. Olli (15) considered a missing lock symbol as a sign of concern: 'well I don't know, […].usually, there always is a lock if it's safe, there up.[…]' Nick (15) reported withholding his information on a site with lots of pop-up ads: 'or I tend not to put my information if there are a lot of those pop-up ads.'

A few children reported not relying solely on their assessments. Instead, they searched for more information before making information disclosures.

> ' […] And umm but before I do that (provide my email) I usually check or sometimes I search on the internet like is this website trustable and like that it's not a scam or something like that.' (Tiina, 13).

An avoidance strategy (Marwick et al., 2010) was also reported by some participants from FGS who avoided registering on websites that they would use infrequently.

> 'If I like use it often, then I might make an account, but if it's just random, I won't.' (Rita, 14)

Despite the care the participants exercised before registering on websites, registering options per se were not viewed suspiciously. Registering on websites using Google and Facebook can expose users' personal data to various websites (Stokes, 2017). When asked what they chose when given an alternative between registering through these options or creating their account, most participants reported using Google or Facebook. Only one participant from FGS mentioned not choosing either because of her mother's warnings.

> 'My mum told me that I shouldn't, and I think I read an article about it too.' (Suvi,15)

Many participants reported watching content on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram instead of actively posting there, but it was challenging to ascertain if this was due to privacy concerns or other reasons like shyness. However, the persistence and searchability of data on social media platforms (boyd and Marwick, 2011) was a cause of concern for a few participants from FGS who reported considering their sharing practices on apps.

> Tiina (13): Yeah, if you like accept the cookies, it, for example, says that *TikTok* is allowed your data. And like the videos you post, even if you have a private account and then you accept it, then they like get the data. They like said in the privacy policy, and most of the people don't read it through. So they'll usually like accept it without seeing like what they are accepting.
>
> Rahul (13): Yeah, I just wanted to add that my dad says that 'if you put something on the internet, it never comes out of there and stays there.'

Inferred data that forms the basis of targeted advertising consists of 'data given' and 'data given off' (van der Hof, 2016). Therefore, by adopting these practices, children made some attempts at privacy protection that would also have some protective impact on

their privacy against commercial actors. It is important to point out that we found it challenging to understand if the motivation to share personal information cautiously was with commercial operators in mind or for general e-safety. Multiple actors seemed to be on children's minds when they reported controlling the information shared knowingly in digital environments. They used the word 'they' to describe those who could access and use their data. When probed further about who they thought these 'they' were, the participants came up with various answers like 'the marketers', 'people who make these websites', 'the app'. Nevertheless, the practices reported by our participants reflect a general caution they exercise in digital environments.

Controlling the information given specifically for commercial profiling

The data sharing mechanisms that our participants mentioned above were with multiple actors in mind. Therefore, we talked about the practices they adopted to control the information given to apps and websites that could potentially be used for commercial profiling. We did this by showing our participants screenshots of targeted advertisements on Instagram and product suggestions during web surfing and asking them if they had ever tried to make these advertisements incongruent with their preferences or reduce or control the information they give to the internet.

Diana (15, FGL) explained a mechanism of control like deleting search history:

> 'I also have this thing in *Google* that it does not save my search history. It's turned off completely. It's like I can't even see what I have searched because it's not there.'

Some participants from FGL talked about using 'private mode', although they were unsure if it protects all the data:

> Interviewer: Have you ever tried to reduce or control the amount of information you give?
>
> Lasse (14): At least I have put the setting in Google so that it doesn't collect the information.
>
> Ari (14): Private mode
>
> Interviewer: What? Private mode?
>
> Fiia (15): So, it goes to a private browser and doesn't collect the information.
>
> Lasse: Remember.
>
> Fiia: I don't know if it allows cookies.

Jutta (15) from FGS mentioned occasionally controlling the access of websites to her phone memory:

> 'I may have occasionally tried not to give all the permissions right away. I have thought for a moment if I have to give all the permissions to websites to the files on my computer or on my phone. When you download an application, they ask for access to the memory of the phone,

> and you consider if you can use that application without giving your permission. And with that, I try to limit it a bit.'

Like in Pangrazio and Selwyn's (2018) study, a few participants from FGS in our study also reported using a VPN sometimes. Rahul (13), reported occasionally using a VPN: 'Maybe if you use VPN, they can't really track you because everything that you have is not actually you.'

Very few participants adopted the data protection practices mentioned above. The children who did so belonged to both FGL and FGS.

Multiple ways of using cookies notification

The EU cookies directive makes it mandatory to notify users in the EU about the presence of cookies on apps and websites, apprise them about how the data collected using cookies will be used and give them the option to accept or refuse the use of cookies (Ansari, 2022). This directive also applies to those cookies that track users' location data (Slack, 2022). We showed our participants a screenshot of a cookie notification with the options 'accept all' and 'cookies settings'. They mentioned noticing the same or similar notifications on various websites. We then asked our participants how they usually reacted to such notifications. Most children accept cookies without reading the terms (Holvoet et al., 2021). Somewhat similarly, some of our participants reported accepting cookies unthinkingly.

> 'I don't know. I haven't ever thought about it. I always just accept them.' (Kaisu,16).

Children often accept cookies to get a faster passage to the app or website (Holvoet et al., 2021). Likewise, some of our participants, including a few from FGL, accepted cookies to quickly move on with their online activities.

> 'Well, usually I accept all the cookies because that is how I can quickly go to browse what I want to.' (Rhea, 15)

Children find it challenging to manage their privacy by reading lengthy terms and conditions of consent (Pangrazio and Selwyn, 2018). Similarly, many participants, including some from FGL, got discouraged by the difficult language and exhaustive terms when they tried to modify privacy notifications.

> 'Yeah, I feel like it's very hard to understand. And there's like a lot of things and that it's just a lot easier to press "accept all cookies".' (Rita, 14)

A few participants, including some from FGL, reported hiding location data. Tom (15) noted: '[…]. I sometimes remove the location information if I can.'

Trust plays a vital role in children's online consent decisions (Holvoet et al., 2021). Similarly, some children from FGS, but none from FGL, mentioned assessing the

trustworthiness of websites before accepting cookies. Kia (16) said: 'I check the overall site, where I am, and is it reliable at all […]. I don't maybe accept straight away.'

They evaluated trustworthiness based on various factors. Children often trust big companies and accept cookies on their websites (Holvoet et al., 2021). Likewise, some participants from FGS trusted big companies' websites.

> 'If it's a known website or belongs to a big company, I usually put "I accept".' (Paul,15)

Sites without a secure symbol were not trusted (Holvoet et al., 2021). Similarly, a few participants from FGS reported not accepting cookies where the secure symbol was missing

> 'More often I see whether it is sketchy or not when at the top it says, "not secure".' (Lucia, 13)

Participants in one FGS, where some children reported not accepting cookies on suspicious sites, described the signs they looked for to identify untrustworthy websites. Kim (15) mentioned paying attention to the language: 'If you can clearly see that they have been translated with *Google Translate*, and they just look suspicious.' Tom (15) recommended studying the domain name: '[…] if the website's name is just a mixture of numbers and letters, it's shady.'

Discussions at school shape privacy concerns (Stoilova et al., 2020). Similarly, some, but not all, participants from FGL reported checking cookies and accepting only mandatory ones whenever possible.

> 'Before, I always did so that I just accepted straight away, but after when we talked about this in one of our Finnish lessons, I have started to look through them a little or like see if I can only accept the mandatory ones, then I choose that option or sometimes I just block them all.' (Satu, 14, FGL)

A few participants from FGS also mentioned selecting only the mandatory cookies.

> 'Yes, I also have almost the same. If you see there is still the option that says the minimum cookies, then I press it.' (Sam,15)

Tactic reflecting a paradoxical view of control

Until now, the practices discussed are broadly based on an interpretation of control as taking steps to withhold information. However, participants in two groups also discussed a tactic that overturned this idea of control. A somewhat paradoxical view of control underpins the tactic that we report now.

When asked if there is any way to stop the ads from being highly accurate about them or the internet from knowing what they like, the participants in one FGS mentioned pre-selecting the content that interested them. They reported doing so to avoid irrelevant content and advertisements. Olli (15) said: 'but in some apps, you can select by yourself

what you are interested in. For example, on *Pinterest* and those like *Spotify*, you can select what music you like, and these kinds of things will come.' Kaisu (16) chimed in, 'Yeah, I have, on *Pinterest*.'

In FGL, one participant mentioned searching and deliberately 'liking' posts about the things she wanted.

> Interviewer: okay, do you guys think that there is any way to control ads or stop them from being too accurate about you? Or stop the internet from knowing what you are doing? Do you have any advise?
>
> Fiia (15, FGL): I remember at least once when I wanted pictures of a certain thing [...] so I started to type and search for it and liked some posts so that it (app/website) would know that I want them.
>
> Interviewer: So, you went to do it on purpose?
>
> Fiia: Yes

Two more participants joined in this conversation and reported managing their 'likes' and scrolling pace to receive what interested them. They responded to a question related to advertisements. However, we are unsure if the participants' use of the term 'videos' means video advertisements, content videos, or both because both appear on Instagram and TikTok. Either way, they give information about their preferences.

> Satu (14, FGL): I have done so in *TikTok* that when there started coming a lot of things that I didn't like at all, then I started liking more videos (advertisements and/or content) that interested me so I would get more of those (videos).
>
> Diana (15, FGL): I have noticed on *Instagram* and *TikTok* that when you stop at something while scrolling then you get more of those (content and/or advertisements). So, like if there's something I don't like, then I just go past it very quickly so that it (*Instagram or TikTok*) would know that I don't like them. [...].

A rather simplistic way to interpret these children's paradoxical view of control is that they provide more accurate information about themselves for commercial profiling and thus compromise their privacy. However, considering that users' digital agency can involve steering the algorithms to suit themselves (Beer, 2009), such a tactic could also be viewed as an exercise of digital agency. These participants understand that their actions leave traces in digital environments. Based on this knowledge, they try to modulate their actions to influence the content or advertisements they receive. By doing so, they also give more precise information for their commercial profiling. While this does not protect these children's privacy, this could also be viewed as an attempt to utilise online profiling to receive what they find relevant or useful. Children in other groups mentioned either scrolling past irrelevant advertisements or enjoying relevant advertisements when they received them. However, none of the other groups reported trying to influence the content or advertisements they received, as these two groups did.

Discussion

In this study, we explored how children negotiate their privacy in the digital commercial context. Our thematic analysis of eight FGDs ($n = 38$) with children aged 13–16 years in Finland suggests that children adopted the following practices: (i) controlling information shared knowingly, (ii) controlling the information given specifically for commercial profiling, (iii) multiple ways of using cookies notification and (iv) a tactic reflecting a paradoxical view of control.

Controlling information shared knowingly reflects that many children, but none from FGL, made online information disclosure decisions based on trust. Here our findings concur with Holvoet et al.'s (2021) research. Holvoet et al. (2021) found that while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites, children were primarily guided by gut feelings. However, their research does not elaborate on what kind of factors their participants paid attention to when they used their gut feelings to evaluate websites. We found that when children evaluated apps and websites intuitively, they paid attention to the general appearance or layout of the website before making information disclosures. To the best of our knowledge, previous studies have not noted this. Unlike Holvoet et al.'s (2021) study, our participants were not primarily guided by gut feelings while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites. Although some children evaluated websites intuitively, others mentioned looking for specific signs of suspicion on websites and apps and reported withholding information when they noticed such signs. A few of our participants even reported searching for information about websites before making information disclosures. Additionally, we found that registering options raised privacy concerns for only one child from FGS, which reflects the need to improve children's awareness of online data flows. Only a few children from FGL and FGS reported restricting the information given specifically for commercial profiling. This indicates that more efforts are required to improve children's awareness of data protection mechanisms.

Multiple ways of using cookies notification reflect children's varied ways of reacting to cookies notification. We found that some children accepted cookies either unthinkingly or to move ahead with their online activities. This reflects the need to build more awareness about editing privacy notifications to control online tracking. Many children, including some from FGL, reported getting discouraged by the incomprehensible language of privacy notifications when they tried to modify them. This indicates that difficult to edit cookies can lead children to experience powerlessness against digital data collection (Stoilova et al., 2020). Like in Holvoet et al.'s (2021) study, in our research as well some children, but none from FGL, based their consent decisions on trust and accepted cookies on big companies' websites. The latter reflects children's misconceptions and raises the need to educate children about varied types of cookies because even big companies' websites can use third-party cookies. Like Holvoet et al. (2021), we also found that some children from FGS refrained from accepting cookies on unsecure websites. Additionally, we found that children from FGS looked for various signs to evaluate the trustworthiness of websites before accepting cookies, which reflects their general caution in online environments. A few children accepted mandatory cookies whenever possible, and this

has not been observed in previous studies. The children who did so belonged to both FGL and FGS. It suggests that implementing their knowledge of privacy management mechanisms helps children in protecting their personal data.

To the best of our knowledge, the tactic reflecting a paradoxical view of control has not been observed in previous studies. It is both agentic and problematic. The children who adopted this tactic provided information for more precise profiling. However, they also tried to exert some control over what gets done with their data. These children did not resist the algorithms but acted as reflexive agents who guided the algorithms in the direction the children desired (Beer, 2009). Childhood studies scholars caution that children's agency might not necessarily have positive implications (Valentine, 2011; Spyrou, 2018). It is essential to consider what purpose children's agency serves (Abebe, 2019). Therefore, it is vital to examine what implications this act of digital agency may have for children. While children might experience a sense of control by receiving relevant content or advertisements, eventually, it is the marketers who benefit from children's act of digital agency because they receive more accurate information for profiling children. Through their agentic actions, the children ensure the effectiveness of algorithms, thus augmenting corporate digital surveillance.

This act of digital agency can be particularly problematic for children for two main reasons. Firstly, from a children's rights perspective, practices like profiling and targeting, where children receive content and advertisements based on their previous online actions, hinder children's right to receive information and freedom of thought because they keep receiving content that matches their preferences, thus reducing their exposure to new ideas (Milkaite and Lievens, 2019). Secondly, such practices can be concerning as they may reduce children's and young people's access to multiple viewpoints at a life stage when they explore various identities and make important life choices (Milkaite and Lievens, 2019). Therefore, by disclosing data about their preferences and aiding the accuracy of algorithms, these children themselves reduce their exposure to new ideas and choices, which can have various negative ramifications.

Children's privacy against commercial actors is an important policy concern (Livingstone et al., 2019a). Hence, our results have broader implications. Researchers have called upon corporations to play a more significant role in ensuring that children's online privacy rights are protected (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio and Selwyn, 2018). Based on our findings, we support this view. Firstly, given that children found it hard to comprehend and edit lengthy privacy terms, we support previous researchers who have urged corporations to simplify privacy notifications (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio and Selwyn, 2018). Secondly, our finding that trust plays a pivotal role in children's privacy management decisions raises the need to increase corporations' accountability. Therefore, we endorse Waldman's (2018:88) recommendation that once users entrust corporations with their data, corporations should act as 'information fiduciaries', and privacy legislation must ensure that corporations uphold the trust that users posit in them. Waldman's (2018) proposal could help in increasing corporations' accountability in ensuring that children's online data is protected.

We observed that children from FGL and FGS adopted almost similar privacy negotiation practices. Moreover, it was concerning that the tactic with a paradoxical view of control, which made children vulnerable to more accurate profiling, was primarily adopted by children from FGL. We support the calls for increasing children's digital literacy (Stoilova et al., 2020; Pangrazio and Selwyn, 2018), especially their knowledge of cookies. However, our findings also suggest that it is crucial to ensure that privacy education translates to children's everyday practices and actions.

Conclusion

Like all studies, this study suffers from certain limitations. Bühler-Niederberger (2010: 379) underscores that research with children must consider the 'horizontal dimension' of differences between children that can limit their possibilities to act. Children's digital competencies can greatly differ due to factors including their socio-economic background and technical skills (Livingstone et al., 2019a). This study does not take into consideration children from different socio-economic backgrounds or from certain school districts. Moreover, it only considers schools in an urban setting like the capital area of Finland.

Despite the limitations enumerated above, this study makes some important contributions. It identifies an act of digital agency by children that may help children exert some influence over the content and advertisements they receive. However, it can also have various negative implications for children as it enhances the commercial digital surveillance of children and may reduce their access to new choices and viewpoints. Secondly, our research highlights that when children evaluate the trustworthiness of apps and websites intuitively, they pay attention to the appearance of a website. Moreover, unlike previous research, this study highlights that children are not primarily guided by gut feelings while evaluating the trustworthiness of apps and websites before disclosing information online. Although some children assessed websites intuitively, others identified specific signs of suspicion. A few children even searched for information about websites before making information disclosures.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study is funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland, grant #327237 and the Academy of Finland, grant #320370.

ORCID iD

Sonali Srivastava https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1871-5023

References

Abebe T (2019) Reconceptualising children's agency as continuum and interdependence. *Social Sciences* 8(3): 81.

Ansari M (2022) Eu cookies directive. In: *FreePrivacyPolicy*. Available at https://www.freeprivacypolicy.com/blog/eu-cookies-directive/#2_Have_A_Cookies_Policy (Accessed 25 April 2023).

Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(77): 77–101.

Beer D (2009) Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious. *New Media and Society* 11(6): 985–1002. DOI: 10.1177/1461444809336551.

Bodle R (2016) A critical theory of advertising as surveillance. In: Hamilton J, Bodle R and Korin E (eds) *Explorations in Critical Studies of Advertising*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 138–152.

boyd D and Marwick AE (2011) Social privacy in networked publics: teens' attitudes, practices, and strategies. In: *A Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society*. Oxford, UK: pp. 1–29.

Bühler-Niederberger D (2010) Childhood sociology in ten countries: current outcomes and future directions. *Current Sociology* 58(2): 369–384.

Christensen P and Prout A (2002) Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood* 9(4): 477–497. DOI: 10.1177/0907568202009004007.

Eder D and Fingerson L (2002) Interviewing children and adolescents. In: Gubrium JF and Holstein JA (eds) *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 181–201.

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) guidelines (2019) The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland. Available at https://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/Ihmistieteiden_eettisen_ennakkoarvioinnin_ohje_2019.pdf.

Gibson F (2007) Conducting focus groups with children and young people: strategies for success. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 12: 473–483.

Gibson F (2012) Interviews and focus groups with children: methods that match children's developing competencies. *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 4: 148–159. DOI: 10.1111/j.1756-2589.2012.00119.x.

Holvoet S, Jans SD, Wolfg RD, et al. (2021) Exploring teenagers' folk theories and coping strategies regarding commercial data collection and personalized advertising. *Media and Communication* 10(1): 317–328.

Horner SD (2000) Using focus group methods with middle school children. *Research in Nursing and Health* 23(6): 510–517.

James A and Prout A (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.

Keen C (2020) Apathy, convenience or irrelevance? Identifying conceptual barriers to safeguarding children's data privacy. *New Media and Society* 24: 50–69.

Kennedy H and Moss G (2015) Known or knowing publics? Social media data mining and the question of public agency. *Big Data and Society* 2(2): 1–11. DOI: 10.1177/2053951715611145.

Livingstone S (2018) Children: a special case for privacy? *Intermedia* 46(2): 18–23.

Livingstone S, Stoilova M and Nandagiri R (2019a) *Children's Data and Privacy Online: Growing up in a Digital Age: An Evidence Review.* London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Livingstone S, Stoilova M and Nandagiri R (2019b) *Talking to Children about Data and Privacy Online: Research Methodology.* London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Lenhart A, Madden M, Smith A, et al. (2011) Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites: how American teens navigate the new world of 'digital citizenship. Report. Available at http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2011/PIP_Teens_Kindness_Cruelty_SNS_Report_Nov_2011_FINAL_110711.pdf.

Lupton D (2015) *Digital Sociology.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Marwick AE, Murgia-Diaz D and Palfrey JG (2010) Youth, privacy and reputation (literature review). http://papers. ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1588163.

Milkaite I and Lievens E (2019) Children's rights to privacy and data protection around the world: challenges in the digital Realm. *European Journal of Law and Technology* 10(1).

Montgomery KC (2015) Youth and surveillance in the facebook era: policy interventions and social implications. *Telecommunications Policy* 39: 771–786.

Oswell D (2013) *The Agency of Children. From Family to Global Human Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pangrazio L and Selwyn N (2018) "It's not like it's life or death or whatever": young people's understandings of social media data. *Social Media + Society* 4(3): 1–9.

Punch S (2002) Research with children: the same or different from research with adults? *Childhood* 9(3): 321–341.

Rafter D (2022) What are cookies? In NortonLifeLock. Available at: https://us.norton.com/blog/how-to/what-are-cookies (Accessed 20 January 2023).

Sim J (1998) Collecting and analysing qualitative data: issues raised by the focus group. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 28: 345–352.

Slack C (2022) Privacy practices for user location. In: *FreePrivacyPolicy.* Available at https://www.freeprivacypolicy.com/blog/user-location-privacy-practices/ (Accessed 25 April 2023).

Spyrou S (2018) What kind of agency for children? In: Spyrou S (ed) *Disclosing Childhoods*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 117–156.

Steeves V and Regan P (2014) Young people online and the social value of privacy. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society* 12(4): 298–313.

Stoilova M, Livingstone S and Nandagiri R (2019) Children's understanding of personal data and privacy online – a systematic evidence mapping. *Information, Communication and Society* 24. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2019.1657164.

Stoilova M, Livingstone S and Nandagiri R (2020) Digital by default: children's capacity to understand and manage online data and privacy. *Media and Communication* 8(4): 197–207.

Stokes N (2017) Should you use facebook or google to log in to other sites? In: *Techlicious.* Available at https://www.techlicious.com/blog/should-you-use-facebook-or-google-to-log-in-to-other-sites/ (Accessed 25 November 2021).

Turow J (2012) *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

UNICEF (2018) *Children's Online Privacy and Freedom of Expression*. New York, NY: UNICEF.

Valentine K (2011) Accounting for agency. *Children and Society* 25(5): 347–358.

Van der Hof S (2016) I agree ... or do I? A rights-based analysis of the law on children's consent in the digital world. *Wisconsin International Law Journal* 34(2): 409–445.

Waldman AE (2018) *Privacy as Trust: Information Privacy for an Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Youn S (2005) teenagers' perceptions of online privacy and coping behaviors: a risk–benefit appraisal approach. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 49(1): 86–110.

Youn S (2009) Determinants of online privacy concern and its influence on privacy protection behaviors among young adolescents. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* 43(3): 389–418.