Chances and Strategies of Marketing with Regard to the Formation of Children's Brand Awareness

- An Empirical Study of Children's and Parents' Perceptions –

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Today children are one of the most important target groups for marketing. One way to approach children as consumers and attract their interest is to target them through brands. In order to reach the objective of creating brand awareness, marketers make use of a wide scope of marketing strategies. To design them, it is necessary to analyse children, the formation and degree of their brand awareness.

Objectives: This empirical study aims at identifying children's level of brand awareness, their familiarity with selected marketing tools (children's clubs, promotion, merchandising and websites) as well as their impact on children's brand awareness. Due to parents' pivotal role for children's consumer socialization, their perceptions towards children being addressed by marketing are examined. Moreover, the degree parents assign to the strategies is analysed as well as possible discrepancies regarding children's level of brand awareness, as perceived by parents and by children.

Methods: For the purposes of the study a quantitative approach was adopted. In total 208 children aged between 8 and 11 years and 208 corresponding parents took part. The study was conducted at 4 German elementary schools and comprised paper-based questionnaires for both children and parents. Major factors such as children's limited literacy, expressiveness and short attention span were taken into consideration.

Results: The results reveal that the majority of the children are highly brand aware regarding both children and adult brands. Children further express clear preferences in terms of branded product categories. With regard to the four exemplary marketing strategies, it turns out that children are familiar with all of them and that there are significant positive relationships between the tested strategies and children's brand awareness. The strategies' influence is also recognised by the participating parents. They view this impact and marketers' course of action rather critically and utter their concerns about the exploitation of children's gullibility for the purpose of profit maximization. Besides, a comparison of the infantile and parental perceptions of children's level of brand awareness shows considerable mismatches.

Conclusions: From the study it emerges that marketers are able to create and strengthen brand awareness among children, for typical children – such as toys or sweets - as well as adult brands – such as cars or bank accounts. When developing their strategies, marketers should take into consideration that children start becoming brand aware at a considerably early age, and that parents' and children's perceptions differ greatly. Furthermore, it seems advisable for corporations to understand and handle parental concerns proactively.

Key Words: Marketing Strategies; Children; Brand Awareness; Parental perceptions; Quantitative research

1. Introduction and Objectives

„Getting inside kids' heads" (Mc Gee 1997, p. 52) – has been described as the aim of marketing to children. One strategy for realising this objective is to position brands in children's minds in order to create valuable and durable memory traces and hence brand superiority. The importance of this approach becomes easily apparent when considering children's pivotal role in marketing: they have advanced to one of the most important target groups due to their current purchasing power, their ability to influence the family decision making process and in particular as they represent tomorrow's customers, which per se suggests an enormous potential for firms.

Against this background, companies need to target children effectively. Brands have proved successful to the effect that children are attested sensitivity about and interest in the topic of branding. By now, there is a wide range of marketing strategies used in branding. They include television advertising, promotion, sponsorship, events, companies' websites or merchandising. In theory, each of them is regarded as an effective measure to position brands in consumers' minds and, thereby, lead to awareness of - and fondness for – brands in order to contribute to the widely discussed phenomenon of brand equity.

In academic research, the main focus has so far been on television. While this strategy has been examined thoroughly, the impact of other strategies on children's brand awareness has been rather neglected. Evidence-based empirical data that allows a better understanding of their influence is rather scarce. In this study, this research gap is addressed. The need for research becomes clear when considering today's market situation: the economy is

characterised by saturated markets, increased competition, information overloads and less advertising impact. Bearing that in mind, an understanding of all operated strategies concerning children's perceptions – including factors that cause appeal to them as well as their relationship with brand awareness – seems indispensable. A profound knowledge of branding strategies for children is also fundamental for any successful marketing concept for children. A further need for research becomes evident when considering the findings of children's experts: children are not adults and have a different stage of development, diverse cognitive abilities, needs and expectations; hence it does not seem expedient to assume the same effects for adults and children concerning brand awareness.

However, for the marketing's objective of entering children's minds, the parental perspective should also be considered, as they contribute to children's consumer socialisation and have the necessary financial resources at their disposal. Evidence has been found with regard to disparities between children's and parents' perceptions of children's degree of brand awareness and also with regard to parental concerns over the influences of branding. However, a desideratum to research is parents' awareness of children's important role for the marketing. Besides, it is hardly known how they assess the marketing's strategies' impact on their children and what their main concerns are.

The aim of this study is to provide empirical insights into the relationship between children and brands. For this purpose, the age group of 8 to 11 year old children is examined. Four marketing strategies – children's clubs, companies' websites, merchandising and promotion – are analysed with regard to the chances of exerting influence on the brand awareness of these elementary school children. The constituent elements of children's brand awareness are elaborated in the context of a theoretical, literature-based analysis. Based on the latter, a quantitative empirical instrument for both children and parents is developed. By means of two questionnaires both for parents and children, it is then examined to what extent children's brand awareness is pronounced, how familiar children are with the exemplary marketing strategies and what their impact is on children's brand awareness. Furthermore, brand importance to children and the parental attitude towards the topic of branding for children are looked at. Besides, it is assessed whether the chosen research format for children can be conferred upon other phenomena such as brand image and whether it can also contribute to theory in terms of quantitative research with children.

2. Literature Review

For decades, children were not seen as a profitable target group, even less as independent consumers but rather as "(…) sons and daughters of consumers" (Mc Neal 1992, p. 4). From a historical point of view, children attracted the attention of businesses for the first time after the Second World War. That was the time of the "baby-boom" in the US and in Europe. Via television, children could easily be targeted, while the increasing social prosperity caused the introduction of a multitude of children's products. Nevertheless, for the most part children were presumed to be "bitplayers". Since they only had some pocket money at their disposal, children were restricted in making purchases.

Until the 1980s, the predominant idea on the part of the marketer was that investing in children was not really worthwhile, since it took years until they reached market age (Effertz 2008; McNeal 1992). This attitude has fundamentally changed. Since the mid-1980s, children have moved into the centre of interest as a potential target group for a growing number of businesses selling typical children's products – such as toys or sweets – or adult products – such as cars, bank accounts or flights. According to the former US professor in marketing and expert in children's marketing, McNeal, children can no longer be ignored as customers. By now, they are seen as one of the most important target group (McNeal 1992 and 2007).

What characterises this target group further is that children represent a heterogeneous market. Therefore an exact characterisation is rather difficult: the group of children is very complex, multifaceted and dynamic; in every period of life their needs and values change. Moreover, children are very different depending on their gender and age; i.e. their stage of development. Besides, their scope of interests and activities is manifold (McNeal 1992).

Their importance for business and marketing activities is underlined by their tripartite economic position: they stand for being current, influencer and future market. The current market comprises their current purchasing power and moreover, regards children as independent consumers (McNeal 1992). They also stand for being an influencer market, meaning that children often have a say within the family decision making process. This phenomenon is also called 'indirect purchasing power' (Raab and Unger 2005; Mehner 2008). Children's influence is considerable and spans over several product categories: co-determination goes from food products such as chocolate or cereals to non-food products such as trainers, clothes, toys or mobile phones (Lang 1997). However, their influence often goes

beyond this to major purchases such as holiday trips, theme park visits or car purchases (Schor 2004). Generally speaking, it can be noticed that the level of co-determination increases by age. The influencing ability on part of the children has also been recognised by the marketing and as a result, children are now often addressed directly, even if the product is not designed for their direct usage, such as advertising spots for holiday trips or cars which are often shown on children's TV channels (Schor 2004). Perhaps most important is that children account for a future market: children are only at the beginning of their consumer socialisation and consequently can turn into consumers for basically all products or brands (McNeal 1992; McNeal 1999 and McNeal 2000). The prerequisites therefore are to get involved with the target group and to shape children as customers. Special attention should be paid to establishing a relationship and to supporting today's children to the point of reaching market age. In other words, marketing to children should be seen as a long-term investment that has the potential to lead to future customers and future purchasing power (Opalka 2003; Effertz 2008). Businesses should hence try to identify the value of children and accordingly determine actions in order to win children over as their actual or future customers.

Being aware of the importance of children as a target group and their characteristics, the marketing must focus on creating children's interest in their offers. One concept in this context is that of brands. A brand itself is defined as a symbol, logo, design or image that is designed to identify the product or service (Kotler, Keller, Brady et al. 2009). Brands by now play a pivotal role for business, contribute to business success considerably as they represent one of the main assets. The prerequisite, however, is to create first of all awareness. Brand awareness consists by definition of brand recognition and brand recall (Keller 2003) of which brand recognition begins to develop earlier and is hence more distinct than brand recall. This results from the fact that brand recognition demands lower cognitive efforts (Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005). Moreover, brand awareness is defined as not being inherent, but is described as a learning process which starts in early childhood: first impressions of brands are stated to form already from age of two or three (Sommer 1998, Melzer-Lena 1998, McNeal 1999). The main reason for such an early point of developing incipient brand awareness is that children are surrounded by brands (Wiener 2004). This early contact with brands results in a considerable level of brand literacy, which in turn allows brands to become part of children's concept formation: "The child does not primarily learn the umbrella term car, but almost contemporaneously the brand. Parents do not possess a car according to children, but an Opel or a VW" (Sommer 1998).

For the age group, examined in this study, the following insights are of further important: according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children in the preoperational stage (7 and 12 years) acquire cognitive abilities which are essential for brand-conscious consumer behaviour (Ebeling 1994). Le Bigot further argues that children express acceptance or refusal in terms of brands and that differentiation only evolves in the course of their development. Such differentiation abilities start between 8 and 10 years of age: for the first time, hierarchies are formed based on concrete characteristics. For instance, *Mars* is regarded as sweeter than *Duplo* (Sommer 1998). Moreover, elementary school children start to be able to connect brands with other people or vice versa. In this context it is assumed that children characterise those persons to a certain degree according to brands which are favourable or not. Besides, individuals such as celebrities can enlarge and consolidate the importance of brands, which in turn can lead to the association of such attributes with other people. McNeal cites the example of Michael Jordan promoting the brands *Nike* and *Wheaties*: "[S]eeing the other children who wear Nike's or Wheaties as exceedingly athletic" (McNeal 1999, p. 203). This phenomenon is widely called the "power of brands" (Le Bigot 1996; McNeal 1999). Children seem to grasp the notion of this pattern and apply it. It is important, however, to take into consideration that the given description cannot be generalised for all children.

Furthermore, different sources such as parents, schools, peers and television as well as personal and cognitive abilities contribute to children's brand awareness (Cowell 2001; Dotson and Hyatt 2005; Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005).

Consequently, the question that arises is how to create brand awareness. In this context, the different marketing strategies play an important role. In other words, the marketing mix is fundamental with the product, price, distribution or communication strategies. Within the marketing mix, marketing communications is "undoubtedly the most visible element" (Puth 2000, p. 273), as consumers are exposed to some for it every day, especially in today's vast communication environment. As the empirical study is based on the communication strategy which is generally defined as representing the voice of the brand (Keller 2003), the focus within this article is on the latter strategy: by now, a wide spectrum exists including advertising, promotion, sponsorship among others. In academic research the main focus has been on television advertising in relation with children's brand awareness while rather little attention has been paid to other modes of communication and their chances to foster children's brand awareness (Gunter and Furnham 1998; Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005).

Hence, as mentioned before, the study directs its focus on four different aspects of the communication strategy: these are promotions included within other products such as cereal packages or sweets, websites of companies, merchandising and children's clubs. These are related to children's brand awareness within the empirical study.

Marketing techniques and advertising are an integral part of everyday life. Thus, children are confronted with the phenomenon every day. However, this omnipresence of marketing is regarded as rather problematic in ethical and moral respects, as children are in the developmental stage. What is ethically right or wrong, in general as well as in this special context, largely depends on the position taken (Preston 2005; Crane, Andrew and Matten 2007).

As a result, controversial viewpoints with a multitude of facets about marketing to children have emerged since the 1960s (Cowell 2000). Nevertheless there is a general consensus that children are still developing and consequently have limited cognitive or critical abilities in comparison to adults. Hence, it is called for a careful treatment by marketers (Gunter and Furnham 1998; Baacke and Kommer 2000; Bhattacharyya and Kohli 2007; Mehner 2008). What evokes disagreement and thus controversial positions is the ethical assessment: on the one hand, there are the protectionists who postulate the banning of any marketing actions to children as children lack the intellectual and emotional maturity necessary for being capable of understanding, assessing critically and defending themselves against the persuasive intent of marketing. This gullibility and naivety makes children vulnerable and requires protection. On the other hand, there are libertarians who argue that marketing actions are part of the free market economy and therefore inevitable and necessary for children's development into consumers (Gunter and Furnham 1998, Cowell 2000, Furnham 2002). Libertarians advocate the education of children, as this is "crucial to make them become knowledgeable consumers and to not being deceived by marketers" (Pettersson and Fjellstrom 2006). Hereby, libertarians call parents and schools into duty (Gunter and Furnham 1998; Cowell 2000, Furnham 2002). Parents are regarded as the major socialising agents who introduce children to the concepts of purchasing and exemplify consumption patterns to their children through their own behaviour (Gunter and Furnham 1998). It is postulated that parents cannot deny responsibility and furthermore, "should not expect legal sanctions to do what they should be doing" (Gunter and Furnham 1998, p. 188). However, it has to be said that the latter approach only works in "ideal" situations and that in reality "not all parents are equally conscientious in

training their children in the various activities and nuances of consumer behaviour" (Gunter and Furnham 1998, p. 176). Consequently, schools are responsible for teaching consumer education. Furthermore, the companies themselves are asked to become involved in consumer education (Gunter and Furnham 1998, Cowell 2000). It has become evident that there are diverging positions towards the topic of marketing to children and hence differing suggestions on how to deal with this phenomenon. The German state has reacted to certain concerns about children's particular characteristics. However, the legal framework is not always unambiguous and still contains a considerable degree of grey areas (Deutscher Werberat 1998; Effertz 2008; Mehner 2008; Kommission für Jugendmedienschutz der Landesmedienanstalten 2009).

3. Research Questions

Up to this point, the relevant literature has been compiled: it focuses on the importance of children as market participants and the resulting chances for the marketing. Having determined children's purchasing power and their interests and characteristics, companies and the marketing can decide on how to develop children's interest in their offers: one crucial concept in this context, as described, is brands. Prerequisite is the creation of brand awareness, which can be developed by means of marketing strategies applied to address children. Further, the controversial discussions on marketing to children that have emerged in the last years with its varying viewpoints are addressed. The empirical study attempts to identify children's level of brand awareness regarding the selected brands, their familiarity with selected marketing strategies as well as the strategies' correlations with their brand awareness.

In addition to children's self-assessment, interesting insights into this topic can be attained by examining parents' perceptions, in particular because of their pivotal role in children's socialisation (Dotson and Hyatt 2000). On the one hand, it is of interest whether there are any discrepancies between the level of children's brand awareness perceived by children and by parents. On the other hand, the focus is on parents' perceptions towards children being addressed by the marketing and its different strategies.

The addressed research questions are formed on the basis of the outlined concepts in the theory part. It should be noted that the following research questions as well as the corresponding findings represent only an excerpt of the actual study.

Brand awareness is a core variable in consumers' purchasing process (Keller 2003; Esch 2005). Brand awareness will lead to the formation of evoked sets and hence influences actual purchases. However, becoming aware of a brand requires several interactions with the brand. It requires a certain level of consciousness. It remains unclear, so far, how consciously children process information about brands. Hence, in a first step it is interesting to identify to what degree children are brand aware and if so, to which extent they show brand awareness. Hence, the first research question is:

Research Question 1:
How pronounced is children's brand awareness?

Brand awareness can be found in many product categories and is not restricted to children's products (Ebeling 1994). However, little is known about the type of brands that reach brand awareness most easily. Hence, the second research question is:

Research Question 2:
Which brands are predominant and mostly embedded?

It is noticeable that children often demonstrate clear product or brand wishes from an early age and hence show the ability for forming brand preferences (Fischer, Schwartz, Richards et al. 1991). The German "Kids-Verbraucher-Analyse 2008" found that brand importance scored very high on trainers, bags or jeans (Egmont Ehapa Verlag 2008). Hence:

Research Question 3:
What are the main product categories in which brands are regarded as important by the children?

Attention is further paid to the various marketing strategies applied to address children. For one thing, these aim at profit maximization and for another, at securing future market share among the preadolescent children (Silberer 1993). In order to realise these objectives children first of all have to be made aware of brands and their existing brand awareness has to be strengthened. The main focus in academic research so far has been on television and advertising (Gunter and Furnham 1998; Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005), less on the websites of companies, children's clubs or promotions. Hence, it remains to be seen whether such

strategies relate to children's brand awareness. The following research questions are of interest:

Research Question 4:
To which degree are children familiar with the different marketing strategies such as children's clubs, websites of companies, merchandising products or promotions?

Research Question 5:
Do the different marketing strategies have positive influence on children's brand awareness?

Several studies are subjected to parental concerns over potential effects that different strategies such as advertising or branding in general terms could have on their children (Harradine and Ross 2006). However, parental perception of the strategies' influence on their children's brand awareness has been disregarded so far. This aspect is addressed by the subsequent research question:

Research Question 6:
How do parents perceive the degree of the respective strategies' influence on their children's brand awareness?

Furthermore, it is of importance to identify parents' standpoints with regard to children being addressed by marketing. Several studies substantiate the critical assessment of the latter by parents. Moreover, parents are concerned about the influence that branding can have on their children (Harradine and Ross 2006; de Chernatony and McDonald 2003). However, the aspects constituting the parents' attitude have been omitted as yet. Hence, the research question is:

Research Question 7:
What are the impressions of parents with regard to the way marketing addresses children?

Harradine and Ross (2006) demonstrated that parents tend to underestimate their children's level of brand awareness. In this study, it will be examined whether these results can be reproduced in a German context. Hence:

Research question 8:
Is children's degree of brand awareness in self-assessment higher than estimated by parents?

4. Method

Before illustrating the methodology, the instruments' structure, the sampling design and the data collection process, the focus is on aspects that have to be taken into consideration when doing research with children.

4.1 Research with Children: Essentials

"Children are a unique market that requires specialized market research" (McNeal 1999, p. 235). This statement refers to the fact that children do not only differ from adults in terms of age, but also in terms of skills, behaviour and perception patterns as well as life contexts (Lang 1998; Götze 2000). Because market research principles are designed for adults rather than children (McNeal 1999), it should become clear that those principles are rather inappropriate without any adaptation. Hence, market research with children needs to be subjected to particular conditions (Graue and Walsh 1998; Lang 1998; McNeal 1999).

The following factors can be considered problematic: children's literacy, their different stages of development and their limited lexicon. As a result, sceptics have occasionally called the quality of the existing data into question. Moreover, there are concerns over confidentiality and ethics (Scott 2008): often, parents or teachers are consulted instead of the children themselves. Without doubt, such sources of information can deliver valuable insights. However, evading children completely is not advisable. One needs to take their characteristics into account in order to design the appropriate research instrument. As a consequence, the "best people to provide information on the child's perspective, actions, and attitudes are children themselves" (Scott 2008; Kellet and Ding 2008).

It is considered crucial that the researched topic is of relevance to children in terms of experience and knowledge. Besides, as children's attention span is rather short, it is recommended not to exceed a time span of more than 60 minutes, even better not to go beyond an average school lesson of 45 minutes (Lang 1997). In order to perpetuate children's attention, changing types of questions such as closed-ended and open questions as well as different scales have also been suggested (Lang 1997).

The use of abstract terms or long and complicated sentences should also be avoided, while the language level should apply to that of children. The same is true for abstract thought questions, as those require competences which are not at all or insufficiently developed

among children between eight and eleven (McNeal 1999). Pictures, logos or small cards have also proved useful. This visual technique helps to overcome possible language and comprehension problems. Pictures can clarify an issue to a far greater extent than verbal representations can (Lang 1998; McNeal 1999). Visualisation can be also found in the smiling face scale which was developed in 1965 by Wales, one pioneer of marketing to children in the United States. The scale consists of a sequence of facial expressions from happy to sad. Children are asked to select the face which best reflects their point of view. Hence, such a scale aims at obtaining satisfaction ratings (Wells 1965, Götze 2003). To reduce the level of abstraction in terms of rating, school marks can also be applied (Lang 1998).

It is strongly recommended to subject the respective research method to a pretest (Scott 1997). In addition, experts such as teachers should be consulted in order to evaluate the research method's applicability (Tinson 2009).

With respect to parents' enlistment it should be noted that parents know a lot of details about their children and moreover can increase research accuracy. This includes information on the ownership of certain consumer goods, school achievement or children's personality traits (Lang 1997; Gunter and Furnham 2006). However, one drawback emerges: parents do not necessarily know about their children's inner thoughts or are not entirely aware of what their children like to do. As Scott states, "there is often a very large gulf between parental observations about their child and the child's own perceptions" (Scott 1997, p. 332). In this context, McNeal points out the importance of "be[ing] aware of the social desirability variable" (McNeal 1999, p. 238). Keeping all this in mind, it becomes clear why multiple sources are recommended for many research areas (Scott 1997).

In recent research, qualitative methods have been used to a greater extent than quantitative research, but nonetheless, surveys have been employed to gain insight from children (Tinson 2009). In principle, both qualitative and quantitative research can be employed with children as with adults. Quantitative research is "feasible with children from the age of 7" (Tinson 2009, p. 52), provided that the questionnaire is designed carefully. It is indispensable to consider the above mentioned peculiarities when designing any research instrument for children (Tinson 2009). In comparison to quantitative research there are also various qualitative options such as focus groups (Götze 2003), observational research (McNeal 1999; Gunter and Furnham 2006), experiments (McNeal 1999), projective techniques and picture drawing (McNeal 1999; Gunter and Furnham 2006; Greig, Taylorand and MacKay 2007).

Whether to use a quantitative or qualitative approach depends on the research topic and on children's age and capabilities. Moreover, it is decisive to consider what is intended – either explorative or confirmatory research. For each study, the advantages and disadvantages of the methods have to be compared in order to identify the best possible approach.

4.2 Study Group Specification

The target group referred to as "children" needs to be specified as the empirical study does not cover the entire range of ages typically associated with this term. The term "children" is not synonymous with all children, but refers only to those being between 8 and 11 years in age. The decision for using this age group is based on the age group classification concept of Acuff (Acuff 1997). Generally speaking, age groups can be formed according to the developmental phases in children's lives and are often referred to in segmenting the children's market. By now, diverging classification concepts can be found (Acuff 1997; Hansen 1996; McNeal 1992). Acuff divides children into five age groups. Of these, the group of interest for the present study is that of 8- to 12-year old children: characteristic is that their logical thinking develops and that these children start to deal with their environment. They discover the concept of questioning their surroundings critically (Acuff 1997). Besides, they identify more strongly with the world of adults and older children, which increases towards the end of this age group. They try to reduce and disapprove of childlike behaviour patterns. Besides, the peer group gains more importance: it offers orientation and the opportunity to try new things. Moreover, the world of commerce becomes a subject of discussion: for the younger ones, typical children products are of interest, whereas for the older ones, those products start losing their appeal and adolescent and adult products respectively begin to arouse curiosity. Furthermore, the consumption of cartoon character products or products related to music groups serve the purpose of identification and differentiation from others (Acuff 1997). Being taken seriously is another issue children are concerned with within this stage of development (Acuff 1997; Borgelt 2006). As a consequence, marketers should keep childlike elements in their promotional addressing to a minimum and design their communication as rather entertaining and adjusted to children's new product interests (Mehner 2008; Egmont Ehapa Verlag 2009).

However, it should be noted that the inter and intra transition of the age groups is rather dynamic. For example, a 9-year-old child can act or be assessed by others like a 7-year-old

child or vice versa, depending on factors such as intelligence, motor function, speech faculty or emotionality (Baacke 1998).

4.3 Sample, Data Collection and Procedure

The sample of the underlying quantitative empirical study is drawn from the population of pupils at German elementary schools aged between eight and eleven years who are in the third or fourth grade, and from their parents. In total, 208 children aged between 8 and 11 as well as 208 corresponding parents took part. The proportion in terms of gender is balanced quite well: the sample includes 52% of boys and 48% of girls. The data was gathered in 16 classes at four elementary schools in Germany between February and April 2009.

Out of this population, understood as the "entire set of people, objects or institutions about [whom] we wish to make generalisations" (Sapsford 2007, p. 6), a convenience sample is drawn. Convenience samples are widely used in academic research. It was further considered that, in contrast to random sampling which "is almost always difficult and expensive, often prohibitively so" (Lunneborg 2007, p. 790) convenience samples allow for a relatively easy sample selection and data collection, which is more efficient in terms of time and therefore money. During selection, attention was paid to comparability in terms of class and school types, namely that age and gender were similar and that all schools constituted hedge-schools.

The data was collected by means of a survey in written form, for both children and parents. The realisation of the empirical study was carried out in two phases: in the first instance, a pretest was designed, tested upon a small-scale sample, analysed and subsequently revised. The improved version of the questionnaire was the basis for the main study. The children were asked to complete the paper-based questionnaire in the classroom supervised by the researcher, while parents participated from home on an exclusively self-administered basis.

The reason to prepare a questionnaire administered in class instead of a postal survey is the possibility of being on site. Consequently, several problems which typically tend to emerge are avoided: these include potential comprehension problems which can be clarified immediately when the researcher is present. Moreover, it can be assumed that the return rate in comparison to postal surveys is higher, because the questionnaires are filled in by all participants at the same time and can be directly collected by the researcher upon completion (Schnell, Paul and Esser 2005; Diekmann 2007). A further advantage is the lower level of costs, "particularly if [the research activities] can be group-administered" (Wilson 1996, p.

102). In addition to the cost factor, Scholl emphasises both the minor organisational effort and the time frame (Scholl 2003). This approach also allows for a larger sample size. The same research method was also employed for parents. Unlike the children, however, parents were asked to complete the questionnaires at home for practical reasons such as time, costs and logistics (De Leeuw 2008).

With regard to the aforementioned aspect of generalisation, it has to be said with constraints that, within this study, generalisation is not fully intended, as this research has a rather explorative character. In other words, the study's aim is rather a combination of confirming certain aspects on the one hand and to a greater extent providing for an innovative explorative perspective on the other hand. This results from the fact that certain aspects have been neglected in prior research and hence require an explorative approach as a starting point such as the potential impact of the four exemplary marketing strategies.

The questionnaires were distributed in German. The children's questionnaire is a compilation of newly developed items and items already applied in research. Moreover, it is composed of three thematic parts. The first part deals with *children's brand awareness*, their *knowledge about brands* as well as *brand importance* and their *brand preferences* respectively. Subsequently, the focus is on different *child-oriented marketing strategies* as well as children's awareness and knowledge of them. In the last part, attention is then drawn to *socio-demographic data*. The questionnaire consists of 26 questions. Apart from two exceptions the questions are exclusively closed-ended. Hence, answers are predetermined, which allows for children's limited abilities to reason and to abstract (McNeal 1999). In conjunction with several questions, the smiling faces, pictures and logos described in section 4.1 are adopted. This serves as a means to reduce the level of abstraction on the part of the children. The author has decided for an uneven instead of an even scale with five response options in order to avoid forcing the respondents' answer in one or the other direction. However, a five-point-scale is linked to the risk that respondents tend to choose the middle category. Most references on methodology do not regard any of the two scales as wrong or right; as Raithel (2006, p. 68f) states: "Both types – even or unevened scales – have advantages and disadvantages".

In order to assess children's brand awareness, 25 well-known brand logos from brands such as Nutella, Mercedes Benz or Adidas were provided to the children (overview of the 25 brand logos in the appendix). Criteria for the selection of brands were based on children's most

favoured product categories identified by the Kinder-Verbraucher-Analyse for 2008 (Egmont Ehapa Verlag 2008) and were chosen according to the "Kinderwelten-Studie 2007" carried out by the marketing cooperation IP Deutschland (IP Deutschland 2007). The generated compilation of brands represents a combination of non-food and food products. At the same time the choices provide a mixture of typically known children's brands (such as Playmobil or Lego) and typical adult brands (such as Marlboro or Mercedes Benz). The latter are less part of children's everyday life in the sense that actual usage cannot be assumed. In contrast, brands such as Lego or Scout are rather inherent to their daily lives and refer to their usage and perception context. Moreover, using brand logos instead of only brand names allows both for children's need for visualisation (Lang 1998; McNeal 1999) and their need for a simplified demonstration of issues (Lang 1998; Kellett and Ding 2008).

In contrast to the children's questionnaire, the paper for the parents is composed of more newly developed items rather than items already applied in existing research. This results from the fact that several issues have been neglected in academic research so far and hence the questionnaire's structure has a rather explorative character. The questionnaire consists of five parts and 29 questions. To begin with it is of interest whether parents are aware of the *role their children play for product marketing*. Subsequently, the focus is on their *awareness* in terms of the existing *child-oriented marketing strategies*. In this context, parents' *perceptions* of the strategies' influence on their children's brand awareness are also addressed. The third part deals with their ability to *assess their children's level of brand awareness* correctly as well as the responsible sources of brand knowledge and *parents' importance of brands*. The fourth part comprises the issue of *parental attitudes towards children's being addressed by marketing*. Finally, *socio-demographic data* is surveyed. Except for three questions, there are only predetermined answer options. Rating scales are predominant, in particular uneven scales ranging from one to five. The decision to use these is based on the same reasons as described for the children's questionnaire: thereby, respondents are not forced to decide in one direction. However, as pointed out earlier, one possible drawback can be respondents' potential tendency towards the neutral middle category (Raithel 2006).

5. Findings

5.1 Brand Awareness

To investigate the first research question "*How pronounced is children's brand awareness?*" it is focused on the brand awareness variable: brand awareness is measured as the sum of brand recognition and brand recall. The resulting variable was classified into five categories: *1 no brand awareness at all*, *2 low brand awareness*, *3 moderate brand awareness*, *4 high brand awareness* and *5 very high brand awareness*. These were established on the basis of 50 possible points a child could reach in total. The measure is composed of a maximum of 25 points for brand recognition and 25 for brand recall. Children with a score from 0 to 10 points were classified into group 1, from 11 to 20 into group 2, from 21 to 30 into group 3, from 31 to 40 into group four and finally from 41 to 50 into group 5. Using this classification, group 1 remains empty; hence all children within this sample show some level of brand awareness. A rather small percentage represents group two: 4% of the participating children are merely brand aware at a low level. By contrast, 42% can be characterised as medium brand aware. The majority of the children are highly brand aware (53%). Very high brand awareness can be attested to less than 1% of the children. In consequence, the corresponding research question can be answered by saying that children's brand awareness is distinct.
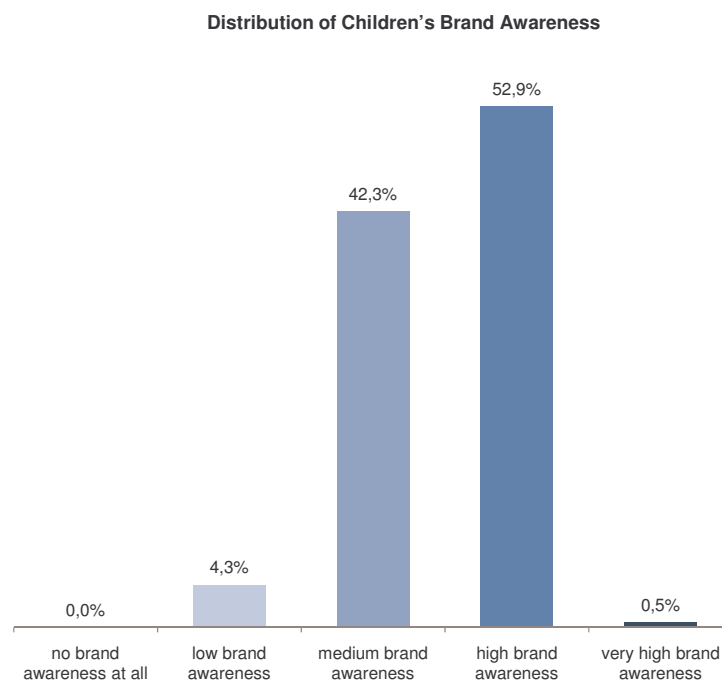
Figure 1: Distribution of Children's Brand Awareness

In addition to knowing children's degree of brand awareness, it is also interesting to identify *which brands are predominant and mostly embedded*. In order to answer the corresponding research question 2, the values of recognition and recall are summed for each brand. As to *Nutella* this is as follows: Sum_Recognition_Nutella is totalled with Sum_Recall_Nutella. The values range from *0 no child knows and remembers* the brand to *2 every child remembers and recalls*. The results for the 25 brands are then ranked. *Nutella* and *Lego* represent the most predominant and embedded brands (both m = 1.66, SD = 0.474; SD = 0.494). *McDonald's* and *BMW* stand for strong brands among the children as well (both m = 1.61, SD = 0.508; SD = 0.596). The middle category is composed of *Elmex* (m = 1.08, SD = 0.593), *Marlboro* (m = 1.01, SD = 0.641) and *Nokia* (m = 1.01, SD = 0.667). At the lower limit *Kellogg's* (m = .86, SD = 0.728), *Playstation* (m = .65, SD = 0.746) and *msn* (m = .34, SD = 0.608) can be found (cf. figure 2, p. 16).

On the one hand, these figures suggest a confirmation of what has been identified before: children's level of brand awareness regarding the selected brands is considerable, not only with regard to typical children brands, but this becomes evident for adult brands as well. Both types of brands seem to be well-positioned in children's minds. The latter is one central aim of marketing: brands or products should ideally become part of the so-called evoked set. Based on these results, it stands to reason that most of the used brands are well-known and embedded by a majority of the children. The research question can hence be answered by stating that *Nutella, Lego* and *McDonald's* are the brands with the highest brand awareness (cf. figure 2, p. 19).

Brand	Value
nutella	1,66
LEGO	1,66
McDonald's	1,61
BMW	1,61
SpongeBob	1,56
adidas	1,53
Mercedes Benz	1,48
playmobil	1,39
kinder Schokolade	1,39
(brand)	1,38
Milka	1,36
Coca-Cola	1,33
Scout	1,21
Capri-Sonne	1,18
Diddl	1,12
elmex	1,08
Marlboro	1,01
NOKIA	1,01
Monte	0,98
BiFi	0,97
Nike	0,90
xbox	0,87
Kellogg's	0,86
PlayStation	0,65
msn	0,34

N=208
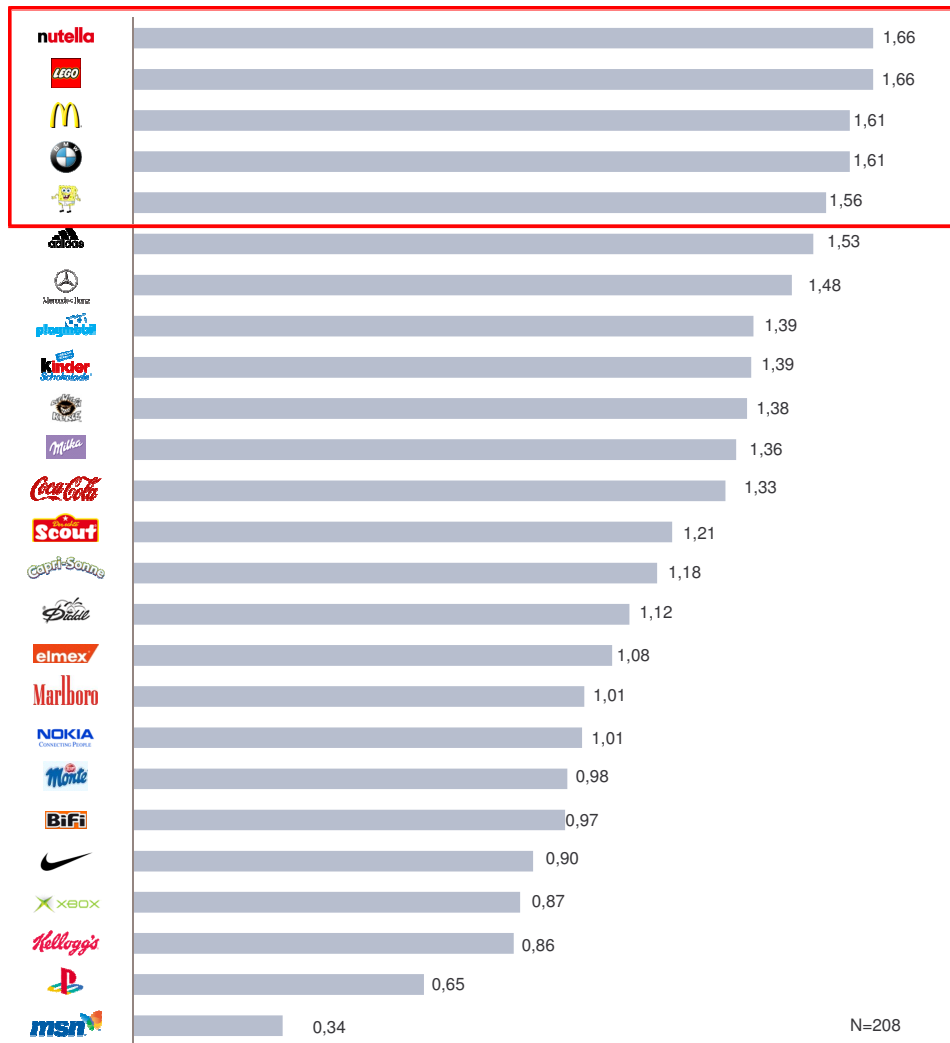
Figure 2: Children's Brand Awareness

Of further interest is to understand whether parents can estimate children's level of brand awareness correctly or whether there are gaps as often stated in the literature. This is to be determined within research question 8: *Is children's degree of brand awareness in self-assessment higher than estimated by parents*? In order to answer this research question, parents are provided with the same 25 brands as their children and are asked to estimate which brands their children are aware of and which they could recall. Parents' answers are compared with those of the children and based on that, disparities with regard to all brands are calculated. The greatest difference emerges with the brand *Nokia*: here there is a 54% disparity, which clearly shows that parents underestimate children's brand awareness regarding this brand. This could result from the fact that *Nokia* is an adult brand and that parents therefore might have assumed less awareness among their children. Similar figures can be ascertained for *Marlboro* (52%), *Mercedes Benz* (44%) and *BMW* (40%). It is striking

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that all of these brands are adult brands. *Bifi*, which is not necessarily an adult brand, still shows a difference in perceptions of 38%. *Nike* holds 33% divergence which is followed by *Xbox* with 31%. The mismatches observed for *Elmex* (28%) and *Scout* (26%) are less obvious but still considerable, on par with *Playstation* (26%). *CapriSonne* has a misinterpretation rate of 18% and *Adidas* of 14%. More consistency can be noticed with the brands *Lego* as well as *Playmobil* (both 3%) and *Spongebob* and *Kinderschokolade* (both 2%). (cf. figure 3, see below).
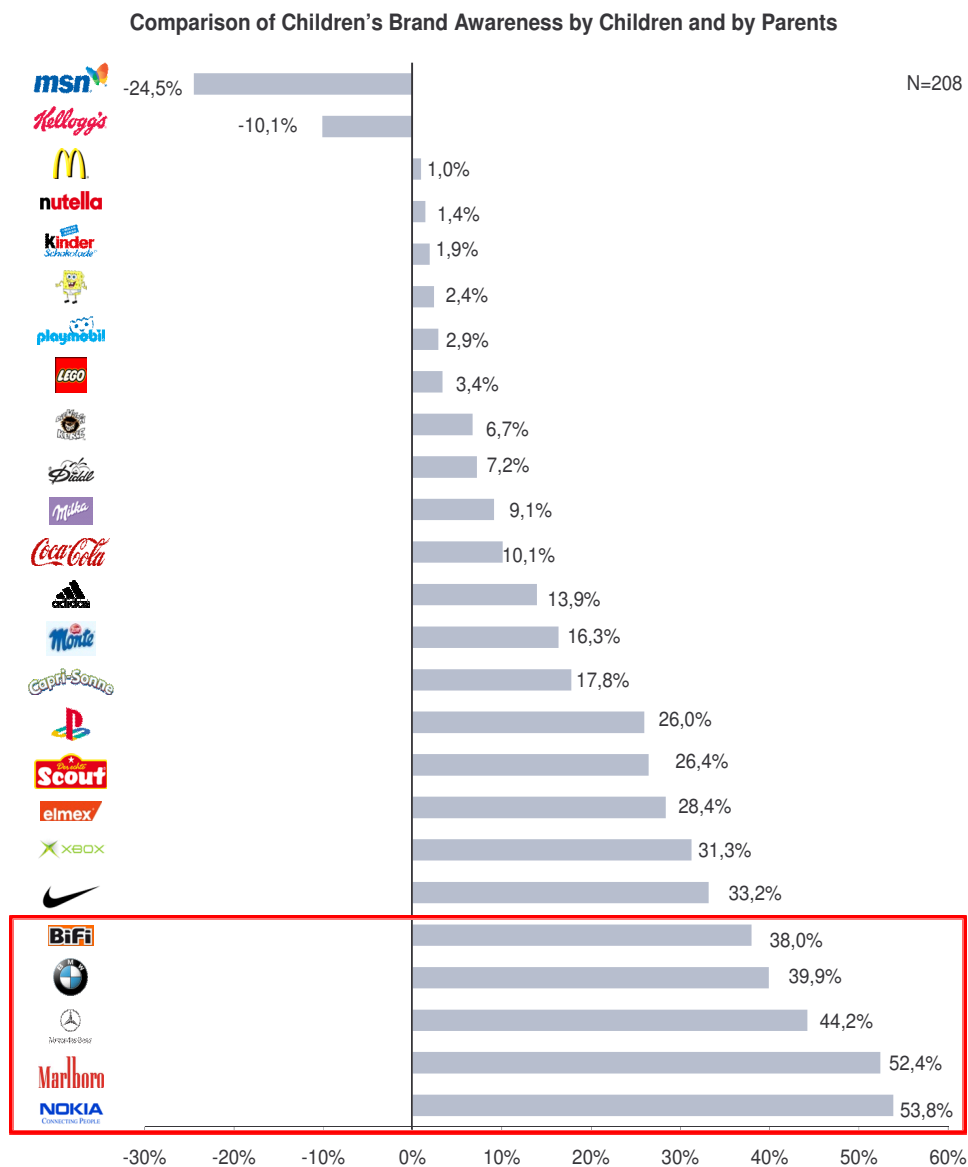
Figure 3: Comparison of Children's Brand Awareness by Children and by Parents

Parents underestimate their children's familiarity with brands to an enormous extent. The greatest disparities emerge with the so-called adult brands such as *Nokia, Mercedes Benz* or *Marlboro*. As reasoned before, parents possibly do not expect children to be conversant with adult brands yet as those are not tangent or inherent to their daily life compared to typical

children brands such as *Lego*. Other potential reasons could stem from underestimating their children's radius of perceptions. Better estimations are managed with regard to classic children brands such as *Lego, Playmobil, Kinderschokolade* or *Nutella*. Children grow up with these brands, exhibit a high usage rate and the brands are part of their daily life. Therefore, parents' perceptions in terms of their children's brand awareness may focus on those. It was not in the scope of this study to explore how these divergences develop. However, it would be worthwhile to investigate these in depth in the future in order to better understand parents' misconceptions. Nevertheless, these results confirm former studies such Ross and Harradine's (2006) and allow for affirmation of the corresponding research question: children's degree of brand awareness in self-assessment is higher than estimated by their parents. In other words, the latter implies that children have a considerable understanding of the market landscape which is very valuable to marketers.

5.2 Brand Importance

In order to answer research question 3 – *What are the main product categories in which brands are regarded as important by the children?* – the given items such as toys, trainers or clothes are ranked. The scale ranges from *1 totally important* to *5 not important at all*. Similarly to what was found in the Kids-Verbraucher-Analyse (Egmont Ehapa Verlag 2008), branded clothes play an important role as well (m = 2.23, SD = 1.254). Mobile phones (m = 2.23, SD = 1.201) are regarded as equally important. Moreover, there is a clear tendency towards having branded trainers (m = 2.32, SD = 1.194). Additionally, brands of school equipment (m = 2.44, SD = 1.291), bicycles (m = 2.47, SD = 1.2.62) and bags (m = 2.50, SD = 1.274) are evaluated as important. Less importance, however, is attached to branded drinks (m = 3.05, SD = 1.261) and sweets (m = 3.44, SD = 1.332) (cf. figure 4, p. 19). Based on what was substantiated in former studies, it was expected that children can clearly express brand wishes for the products presented. Hence, the results within this sample are in accordance with previous findings (Fischer, Schwartz, Richards et al. 1991) (cf. figure 4, p. 22).
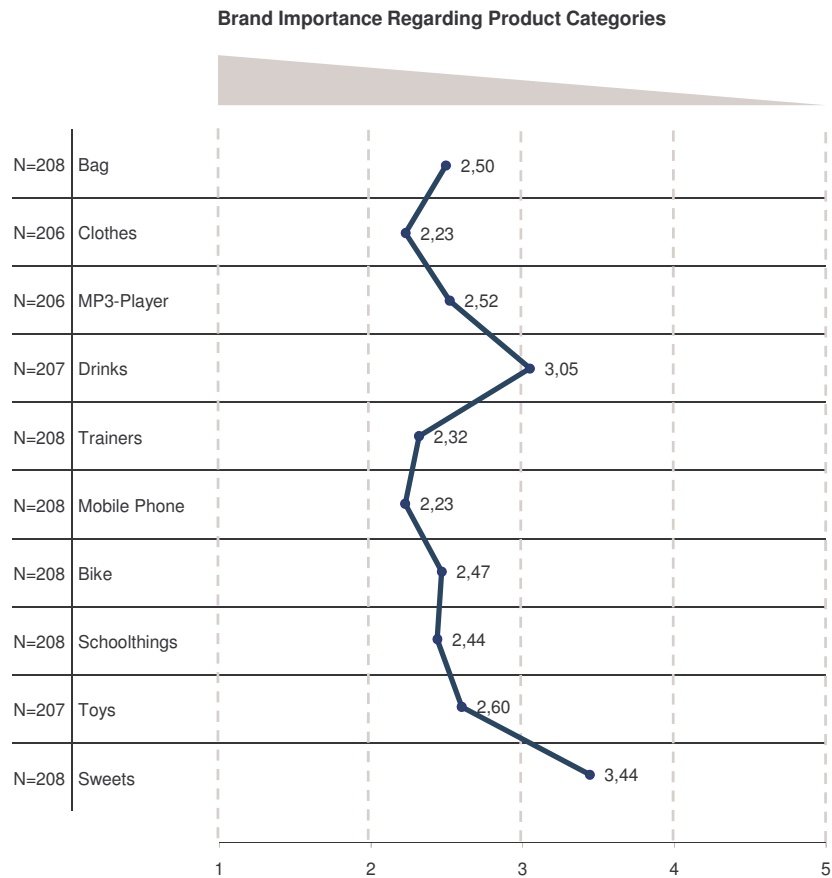
Figure 4: Brand Importance Regarding Product Categories

5.3 Marketing Strategies

Research question 4 *To which degree are the children familiar with the different marketing strategies?* focuses on four exemplary marketing strategies addressed to children: children's clubs, companies' websites, merchandising products and promotions. In order to answer this research question, frequency distributions for all four strategies are determined as well as the average awareness rates. It turns out that the children show medium to high awareness of which the merchandising strategy scores highest with 90%. The exemplary promotions are familiar to 76% of the children, whereas the awareness rate of children's clubs accounts for 62%. The different websites of companies are least familiar (39%).

Strategy	Average Awareness Rate
Children's Clubs	62%
Websites of Companies	39%
Merchandising	90%
Promotions	76%

Table 1: Average Awareness Rates for the Different Marketing Strategies

According to these figures it can be concluded that children do show familiarity and that their tendency towards turning their awareness into actual purchases should not be underestimated. In other words, the high percentages can presume a considerable popularity among children and further, it can be affirmed that those marketing strategies have an impact on children.

Research question 5 focuses on whether the exemplary *marketing strategies have positive influence on children's brand awareness*. Marketing strategies – in general as well as with regard to children – aim at increasing brand awareness or tying consumers in (Preuß and Steffens 1993) and hence can be regarded as the means to realise the intended objective. Based on this, the hypotheses are established. In order to investigate whether the exemplary marketing strategies really exert influence on children's brand awareness, correlations are conducted. It is important to take into consideration that comparisons with previous findings cannot be made as the focus in academic research has so far been on other influencing factors such as television advertising. Consequently, the findings within this study should be considered first insights which can be revised, deepened and supplemented in the context of future studies. Carrying out correlation analyses for the different marketing strategies and brand awareness, it becomes obvious that there are positive weak relationships which moreover are significant except for children's clubs ($p > 0.05$). However, the significance level with children's clubs still suggests that there is a tendency that familiarity with children's clubs also influences brand awareness. Overall, the results show a recognisable tendency that knowledge about the existence of the four exemplary strategies contributes to children's overall brand awareness, or in other words, that the more children's clubs, promotions, websites of companies or merchandising products they know, the higher is their brand awareness. Besides, based on the figures it stands to reason that these types of strategies seem to be effective with the participating children. Nevertheless, the opposite cannot be precluded, as it can also be that high brand awareness contributes to higher awareness of the different strategies.

A possible reason for the latter assumption could result from the fact that within research question 4, children showed distinct familiarities with the strategies which in turn argues for the success of the corresponding strategies. Another reason might be that children learn more about the respective brands which in turn can positively affect their brand awareness, as their scope of known products increases or certain brands become more embedded. Overall, it can be concluded for the exemplary strategies that they seem to have a positive influence on

children's brand awareness; this result was precluded in terms of familiarity of the strategies by the findings. Hence, it can be said that those strategies seem to realise the aim of making children aware of their brands or products and even contribute to increasing their brand awareness. In future research, it would be interesting to test the directionality of the stated relationships between the strategies and brand awareness. However, as aforementioned, the contrary direction cannot be analysed within this study.

		Brand Awareness
Children's Clubs	Pearson´s r	**.181**
	Significance (2-tailed)	**.009**
	N	208
Websites of Companies	Pearson´s r	**.213**
	Significance (2-tailed)	**.002**
	N	208
Merchandising	Pearson´s r	**.248**
	Significance (2-tailed)	**.000**
	N	208
Promotions	Pearson´s r	**.262**
	Significance (2-tailed)	**.000**
	N	208

Table 2: Correlations Exemplary Strategies and Brand Awareness

It is also of interest to identify which degree of influence parents assign to the different marketing strategies. This is determined by research question 6 – *How do parents perceive the degree of respective strategies' influence on their children's brand awareness*. The different given strategies such as advertising, merchandising or repetitions are ranked by the parents from *1 not all* to *5 very much*. Parents regard *television* as the most influential factor for children's brand awareness (m = 4.67, SD = 0.590). *Repetitions* and *slogans* are both ranked identically as very influential (m = 4.14, SD = 9.14 and 9.19). According to parents, the *presentation of products on children's eye-level* is further regarded as contributing strongly to children's learning about brands (m = 4.12, SD = 0.952). *Merchandising products* with a mean of 0.404 (SD = 0.950) and *promotions* (m = 3.70, SD = 1.078) are also classified as strong influence factors. *Allusions of belonging to a group* (m = 3.24, SD = 1.136), *special offers* (m = 3.05, SD = 1.086) and the *internet* (m = 2.99, SD = 1.184) are ranked in the middle category. Influence is also assigned to *sweepstakes* (m = 2.97, SD = 0.990) or *websites* (m = 2.73, SD = 1.156), yet to a lower degree than television or merchandising products. The results of all strategies can be found in the appendix (figure 5, p. 50).

According to parents' subjective perceptions, the different existing marketing strategies have a strong ability to influence children's brand awareness. This could be seen in coherence with

the results of the relationships between children's brand awareness and the different strategies.

5.4 Parents' Perceptions

It is also of interest to understand how parents assess the fact that their children are directly addressed by marketing strategies by research question 7: *What are the impressions of parents with regard to the way the marketing addresses children?* Parents were supposed to express their opinion based on a given range of answer options from *1 I strongly approve, 2 I approve, 3 I do not approve and 4 I do not mind.* The analysis reveals that most parents (66%) express a negative attitude ("I do not approve"). 17% approved of marketing's courses of action, however, only 1% appreciate it fully. Another 17% stated that they do not mind. These figures clearly suggest that parents disapprove of the fact that their children are addressed by product marketing.

Parents' Standpoint towards Children's Addressing by the Marketing

I don't mind	16,6%
I don't approve	65,7%
I approve	17,1%
I strongly approve	0,6%

N=181
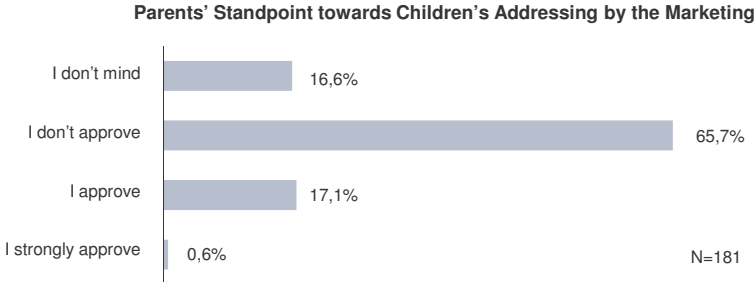
Figure 6: Parents' Standpoint towards Children being Addressed by the Marketing

In addition to the insight that the majority of the parents disapprove of addressing children as consumers and that in contrast only a low percentage approves, it is of interest to grasp which motivations lead to this opinion. In total 26% of the parents made use of the opportunity to substantiate their opinions by using the open comment function.

Parents show great concern and suspect that their children could become too purchasing- and brand-oriented, especially at a too early age and particularly regarding adult products. The latter could result in pressure among children to have certain brands, especially in order to be accepted by others. This could entail conflicts within the family about brands and the necessity to possess those. Parents seem to even think one step ahead and show inquietude as to a negative impact on children's personality formation. Besides, parents regard firms' profit orientation as their overall goal. Thereby, parents deny the firms any possible good intention. They do not believe that product marketing wants to make contributions to children's

orientation within the wide range of products and brands. Parents also refuse to consider the fact that marketing could represent reality or that it focuses on children's welfare.

Based on what has been identified so far, it seems advisable to investigate whether parents' rather negative standpoint is also related to a positive attitude towards any kind of restrictions by the state. This can be answered with a clear *yes*: 77% of the parents gave their consent to legal restrictions. 14% stated to *not* be *appreciative* of any legal restrictions and 10% chose the *neutral* answer option (cf. figure 7, see below). When analysing parents' comments in this respect, two lines of argument seem to occur. One is based on parents' appreciation of further legal restrictions and the other originates from their refusal. Parents approving restrictions express that there is "too much advertising" or that there are "too many branded products" and hence that their children are "distracted from reality to irrelevant things" according to the motto: "All that glitters is not gold." Furthermore, parents state approval because they believe that children are influenced too easily but are not yet capable of "judging the price performance ratio correctly as well as quality aspects". Moreover, one parent accuses marketers of lying and therefore argues in favour legal restrictions. In contrast to these statements there are some parents within the group of those who argue against restrictions, who consider legal actions "unrealistic as there is a free-market economy". Several other comments can be seen in accordance with this one. They also refer to parental responsibility: "It is incumbent to the parents to regulate television consumption and to explain to children the other side of highly praised goods." In this context, another parent indicates: "I think it also depends on the parents to which extent children are concerned with advertising and branded products." Another interesting comment indicates that restrictions are "very difficult or even impossible as this would mean to prohibit advertising for children's products completely". Subsequently, some parents are in favour of educating children in this matter rather than imposing bans. Furthermore, parents point out the necessity of learning to cope with these conditions on part of the children.

To conclude, it could be said that parents seem to advance clear views depending on whether they are in favour or opposed to restrictions.

Attitude Towards Legal Restrictions

I don´t mind. 9,5%

N=201

I don´t appreciate it. 13,9%

I appreciate it. 76,6%
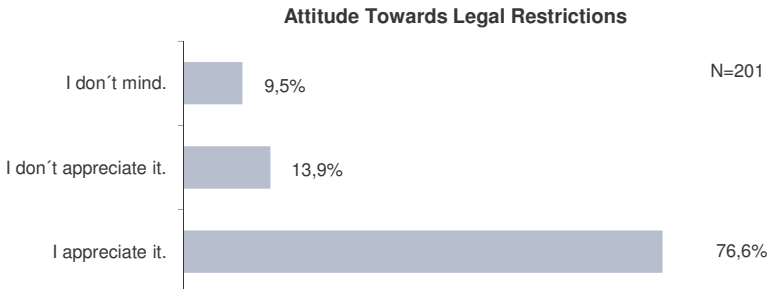
Figure 7: Attitude Towards Legal Restrictions

6. Discussion and Implications

The aim of the present study was to deliver a broad insight into children as consumers, with the emphasis on exploring brand awareness from different perspectives including children's and parents' point of view. The main focus was to provide a better understanding of the extent of children's brand awareness, of the scope of marketing strategies as well as of mechanisms aimed at creating brand awareness in this target group. Furthermore, it was to identify the parental attitude as well as parents' assessment of marketing strategies and their influence. It was also of vital importance to investigate whether children's and parents' evaluation of children's brand awareness are congruent.

From a *methodological perspective* the challenge was to conceive a questionnaire for children that dealt with the topic comprehensively and at the same time complied with the multifaceted standards for doing research with children. The subject is part of children's knowledge and experience, as children are surrounded by brands in everyday life. However, the questionnaire had to embrace their limited level of literacy and comprehension as well as their need for short, simple and clear instructions and sentence structures. In addition, emphasis was put on using visualisations such as the smiling face scale. It was also necessary to keep the questionnaire to an appropriate length aligned to children's attention span. With regard to the parents' questionnaire, the focus was on designing instructions as well as answer options that were clear and self-explanatory, as the researcher was not available for direct inquiries.

With regard to the application of the children's questionnaire, the paper-pencil format has proved useful, in particular as it is consistent with children's working style in school. The level of difficulty and the degree of necessary literacy was perceived as adequate by the children, according to their feedback after the survey and the minimal enquiry rate. The use of the smiley face scales as well as logos and pictures appealed to the children and enhanced their understanding.

The children's questionnaire complies with the theory, substantiating that quantitative research is possible for children, however, with the premise of allowing for the advised research peculiarities. This in turn suggests a greater implementation of questionnaires for this age group on part of the marketing.

With regard to the *content of the results* it becomes evident that children show brand awareness, which distributes mainly across moderate and high brand awareness and results

from considerable degrees of both brand recognition and recall, with a slight emphasis on recall. These findings clearly confirm the results of various studies conducted by Ross and Harradine (2005), McNeal (1999), Melzer-Lena (1998) or Ebeling (1994), all stating that children tend to become brand aware at an early age. Moreover, it turned out that children are well acquainted with several brands. The top five are Nutella, Lego, Mc Donald's, BMW and Spongebob. Besides, it became evident that awareness is given for both children and adult products which overall clearly indicates that children show sensitivity towards the presented brands. However, discrepancies turned out in terms of children's self-perception and the parental perception of children's brand awareness: apparently, parents systematically underestimate both the advent of the development of children's brand awareness and the extent of this phenomenon. This is true in particular for adult brands, but even for certain children brands, which confirms findings of previous studies (cf. Ross and Harradine 2006). It stands to reason that parents do not expect their children to be familiar with a multifarious range of brands at that age and moreover, do not seem to have realised that the radius of children's perceptions, be it in general or in terms of products and brands, has enlarged. These results imply that addressing children by the marketing seems worthwhile from an early age, which is additionally supported by the fact that children's general learning aptitude is described as being very distinct in this developmental stage. The marketing can build on this age groups' existing brand awareness and enhance or strengthen it for both children and adult products. In terms of the latter, it seems crucial to approach young children with adult brands as their scope of interest seems to be wider than restricted to only those that are close or inherent to their experience. This suggests considerable potential for marketers in terms of building long lasting relationships. Thus a long-term vision should be adopted even though return rates may become apparent only in various years when children reach market age. Besides, the mismatch clearly shows that it is fundamental to listen to the children themselves and not only to parents. Which was the case for a long time, in particular against the background that the aim of the marketing is to "get into children's heads" (Mc Gee 1997, p. 52). Moreover, as suggested before, it stands to reason that it is important to understand the discrepancies and to target marketing strategies to both parents and children, but definitively with an emphasis on children.

In addition, it was aimed at investigating to which extent the four exemplary marketing strategies – children's clubs, companies' websites, merchandising products and promotion – have an impact on children's brand awareness. These strategies are frequently used for

children as a target group. They intend creating brand awareness. However, so far the main focus in academic research in terms of strategies and children's brand awareness has been on television advertising (Gunter and Furnham 1998; Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005) and hence such relationships have rather been neglected. According to the respective correlations, these strategies seem to have an impact on the formation of children's brand awareness. The strategies' overall influence is reflected in children's high familiarity with all four strategies. Overall, it is advisable to keep targeting children with appealing offers. All four strategies seem to be promising with regard to creating brand awareness among children. Against the background of those results, it stands to reason that those strategies appeal to children and consequently meet with success: the first step for purchasing brands or becoming member and thus building relationships has been effectively reached. This in turn suggests highly promising chances for the marketing to create brand relationships with children.

The parental perspective was also addressed in this matter and it turned out that marketing's influencing abilities are realised by the *parents*. Moreover, strong impact is assigned to television, advertising, repetitions, slogans or eye-level presentations in supermarkets. Considerable impact is also related to merchandising and promotion according to parents. This perception is congruent with the finding that these strategies have an impact on children's brand awareness and further means that parents are familiar with the scope of strategies. However, when examined parents' perceptions towards the children's addressing by the marketing and its strategies, a clearly negative assessment is noticeable: parents are highly concerned over the influence branding can have. The most prominent concerns refer to an extensive brand orientation, especially for brands or products that are designed for adults. Based on this, parents suspect brand pressure among children's peers and family conflicts if brands cannot be purchased or are not supported in the same way as children do. Further concerns refer to firms' aim of profit maximization as one of the main reasons for targeting children with brands as well as the exploitation of children's gullibility and limited critical abilities. This corresponds to parents overall denial of any good intention by the marketing such as giving orientation in the massive amount of products or becoming an idea of what quality is like. This rather negative attitude is in line with parents' postulation of further restrictions enacted by the state. It becomes evident that only a small percentage of parents disapprove of further state intervention: those parents state that brands and the respective marketing's course of action are part of the free market economy and are necessary for firms' viability and success. At the same time they refer to the omnipresence of brands and the

necessity of getting used to this reality as being part of consumer socialisation. Besides, some parents argue that prohibiting brands can lead to even more interest in brands. In this context, the issue of parental responsibility of educating children with regard to marketing's intentions and functions is raised forcefully. This negative standpoint of parents is in line with previous findings (de Chernatony and McDonald 2003, Ross and Harradine 2006).

These hereby identified aspects correspond in their basic notion with the ethical debate about marketing to children: there are two main viewpoints; that of the protectionists which is negative and hence denounces any marketing to children and that of the libertarians who refer to parental and academic responsibility, but also to that of firms. Parents' knowledge on the importance of children as target group, the marketing strategies with regard to branding in conjunction with the predominant approval of stricter legal regulations should not be ignored and handled with care by the marketing: parents could themselves take action such as reducing television consumption, educating their children or buying less branded products. These are measures some respondents carried out already. Whether this would really lower children's fondness for brands cannot be assessed here, but as mentioned before should be considered. Hence, the marketing should deal with these issues rather than ignoring them, in particular as parents are needed due to monetary aspects. Therefore it stands to reason that the marketing proceeds actively, meaning to address both parents and children, but from a different perspective. With regard to children it could be advisable to address their needs and in terms of parents emphasise stronger on aspects that reassure their concerns. Moreover, the marketing could engage in consumer education and hence demonstrate the often postulated responsibility of parents.

The majority of the parents expressed concerns over the influences of branding. In order to lower those, but in particular in order to strengthen children's knowledge on marketing's mechanisms, a greater integration of this topic is suggested for the academic curricula. In this context the project "Media Smart" (Media Smart 2007) is leading in Germany. Media Smart is a non-profit initiative for enhancing children's media and advertising competence already at elementary school age, including the explanation of the economy and the marketing. Hereby, children should learn to deal with these phenomena self-determinedly and constructively as they are inherent in our everyday life. This initiative has been created by academic experts as well as advertising or marketing businesses.

A further aim on part of the marketing linked to the strategies is brand importance. Within this study the majority of the children demonstrate that brands play a decisive role for them and moreover, can express brand preferences. The product categories that brand importance is attached to are clothes, mobile phones, trainers, school things and bags.

Overall, the research instruments and the results can be assessed as adequate and further as a suitable research basis for evaluating the impact of marketing strategies on children's brand awareness and the resulting chances for the marketing, in particular against the background of children's important role as target group for the marketing. Moreover, these results describe children's brand awareness in its characteristics as well as the parental perspective with regard to their attitude towards children's addressing, their estimated knowledge and impact of the strategies as well as concerns. Overall the results provide marketers with a broad understanding on both children's and parents' perspective on brands, that can be utilised for crafting effective branding strategies.

7. Limitations and Future Research

It is suggested to conduct further studies with a representative number of children out of the population of elementary school children in order to confirm more firmly what has been found. Besides, from a methodological viewpoint, it stands to reason to retain the paper pencil format for both parents and children as it proved successful. However, with regard to the children's questionnaire it could be also considered to design a computerised version – as such a questionnaire format was already tested with elementary school children as well as received well, especially as children tend to be more and more familiar with this medium and in part show high affinity (Tinson 2009). Moreover, this medium allows for a different variety due to its interactivity, however, at the same time it has to be taken into account that – if it is decided for the environment "school" – computer-based learning is not yet incorporated into curricula to a great extent. Therefore the majority of elementary schools in Germany are not yet equipped with sufficient computers as secondary schools.

The approach of assessing the topic as well as its implementation within the questionnaire can be conferred upon other phenomena, such as brand associations or image which in addition to brand awareness constitute brand equity. The same is true for further executed marketing

strategies to children as well as for a wider scope of brands as the results apply to the exemplary brands and strategies.

Further suggestions refer to an increased implementation of this quantitative approach with children in the marketing. Ideal would be a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research as by means of the latter deeper and often unexpected aspects emerge. Having said this, it is further advised to conduct qualitative studies based on these results as certain aspects could not be investigated in the context of the quantitative approach: these include aspects that constitute the success of the exemplary marketing strategies from a children's perspective as well as children's motivations for liking certain brands presented within this study. This is in particular true for adult brands as these enjoy great awareness and popularity among the respondents, but in academic research still represent a desideratum. What could not be ascertained further is the quality of the mismatches between children's and parents' perceptions and therefore research in this matter is highly recommended in order not to pass up opportunities. Furthermore, reasons or motivations for having become member of children's clubs or showing affinity towards promotions could not be explored.

Moreover, this study was conducted with children attending hedge-schools; in this context a comparison to children growing up in bigger cities would be interesting in order to identify similarities or discrepancies in terms of the strategies' awareness as well as the resulting level of brand awareness. Besides, this study is limited to Germany, but its extension to other countries could potentially offer interesting comparative results, especially against the background of comparison and the international marketing context.

The results of the empirical study offer several new insights on the topic of branding and children and are useful for theory, especially with regard to the four exemplary strategies in conjunction with children's brand awareness. Moreover, implications are given to marketers for targeting children and parents and for market research. The approach of this study stands apart from older studies as it addresses both children's and parents' perceptions on those aspects. It has been identified that there are considerable mismatches between the children's and parents' perceptions and that therefore the marketing has to consider a double perspective.

Marketing to children with its various dimensions represents a widely and controversially discussed topic in academic, social, legal and educational respect. In addition to its relevance,

it is a very sensitive issue, which cannot ignore the ethical responsibility on part of the marketing. Therefore it remains to hope that this phenomenon and corresponding marketing strategies will also be examined further in the future. If this subject is explored in more detail, this study can guide marketers in developing effective and ethically appropriate strategies of "getting inside kids' heads".

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I. Questionnaire for the Children – English Version

QUESTIONNAIRE

First, I would like to ask you some questions about brands.

1. Please have a look at the brands. Which of these brands do you recognize? Please mark them with a cross.
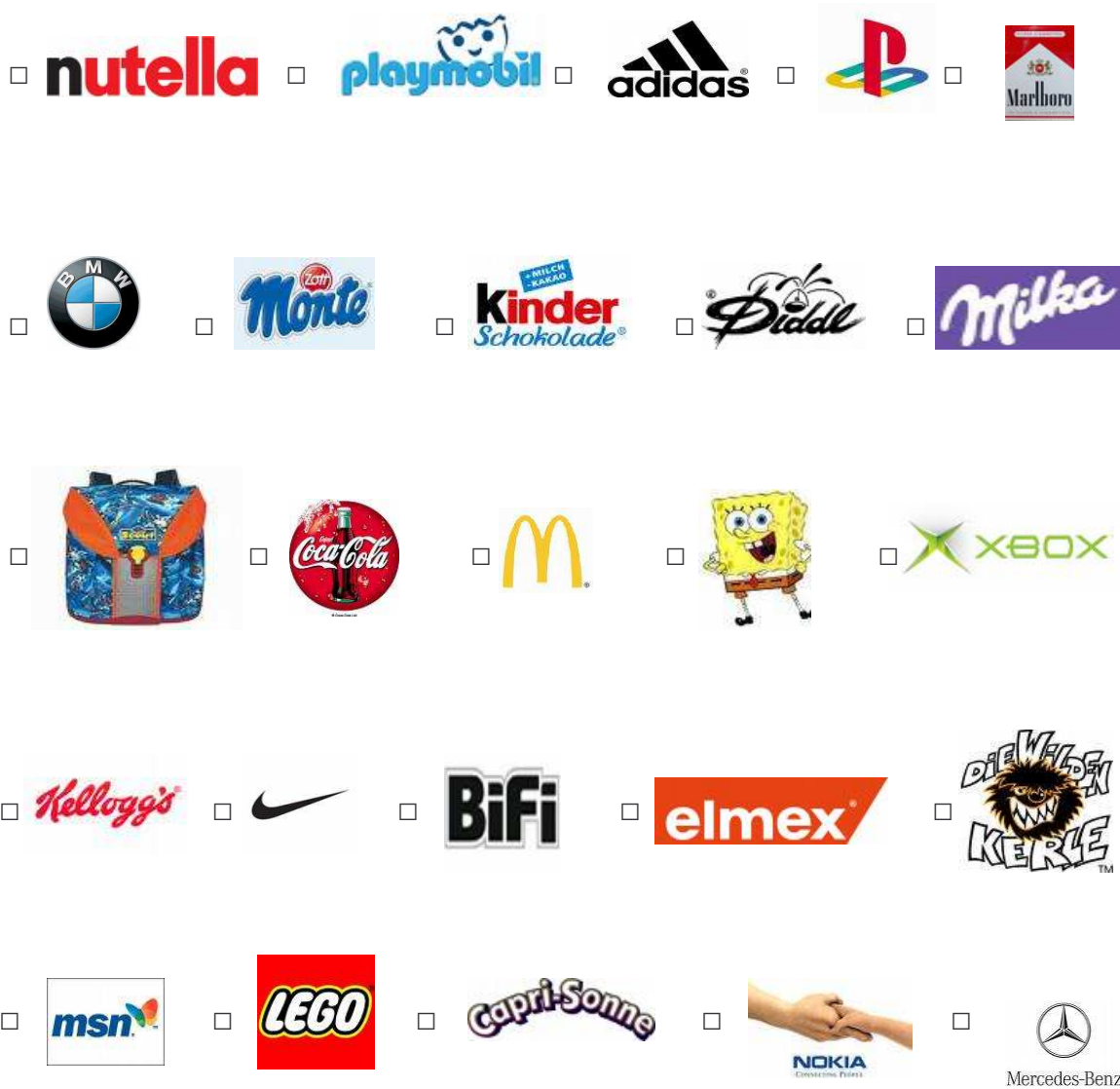
2. You have seen the different brands and have ticked those that you know. Which brands can you remember? Please write them down.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Can you remember where you have come across those brands? You can tick more than one answer.

☐ on television ☐ with my friends

☐ on the internet ☐ in magazines

☐ in the shop ☐ in catalogues

☐ with my parents ☐ with other adults

☐ with my siblings ☐ on billboards

☐ other: _____

4. Do you know any of the following children's clubs? Are you perhaps even a member?

		KNOW		MEMBER	
		yes	no	yes	no
McDonald´s		☐	☐	☐	☐
Lego		☐	☐	☐	☐
ZDF - Tivi		☐	☐	☐	☐
Ferrero Magic Kinder Club		☐	☐	☐	☐
Jet Friends Lufthansa		☐	☐	☐	☐
Sparkasse Knax-Club		☐	☐	☐	☐
Cedy´s World Mercedes Benz		☐	☐	☐	☐
other:	_____	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Perhaps you surf the internet. Do you sometimes visit any of the following websites?

	yes	no
Playmobil	☐	☐
Lego	☐	☐
Kellogg`s	☐	☐
ZDF - Tivi	☐	☐
Cedy´s Welt (Mercedes Benz)	☐	☐
McDonald´s	☐	☐
Toggo	☐	☐
Nike	☐	☐
1001 Spiele	☐	☐
Barbie	☐	☐
Spielaffe	☐	☐
other: _____	☐	☐

6. Do you know or possess anything from Spongebob, Hannah Montana or High School Musical?

	KNOW		BOUGHT	
	yes	no	yes	no
Spongebob	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hannah Montana	☐	☐	☐	☐
High School Musical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Zoey 101	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pokemon	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. If yes, what do you have from Spongebob?

Spongebob	yes	no
stickers	☐	☐
toys (games, puzzle)	☐	☐
rucksack / bag	☐	☐
pencil case	☐	☐
clothes (jacket, T-Shirt…)	☐	☐
Bottle	☐	☐
cup /drinking glass/ plates	☐	☐

8. Which of the following promotion campaigns do you know and have you already bought the corresponding product?

		KNOW		BOUGHT	
		yes	no	yes	no
MB- games serial (e.g. Monopoly)	im	☐	☐	☐	☐
101 Dino Pets computer game	im	☐	☐	☐	☐
audio book Die Wilden Kerle	im	☐	☐	☐	☐
„adidas" – sports premiums	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dragon Hunters stickers	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clone Wars laser sword	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
audio book „Drei Fragezeichen"	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lego's discount voucher	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
Madagascar card game	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
„Be Four" mini radio	in	☐	☐	☐	☐
20 free songs	im	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Please have a look at the following sentences. What applies best to you?

	absolutely right	right	so so	not right	not right at all
I like brands that my friends have.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brands I see on television are important to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like brands that my favourite television stars have.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like brands that my brothers and sisters have.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like brands that my parents have.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brands are important to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. If you go shopping, how important is the brand of the product to you?

	totally important	important	so so	not important	not important at all
school bag / rucksack	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
clothes (jeans, T-Shirt)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mp3-player	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
soft drinks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
trainers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mobile phone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
bike	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
school things	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
toys	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
sweets	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
other: _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Are brands important to you?　☐ yes　☐ no

12. If brands are important to you, why?

Brands are important to me, because…

	totally important	important	so so	not important	not important at all
… my friends have them, too.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… I feel like my favourite television character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… then I am cool.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… I show what I like.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… I like trying new things	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… I like brands.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… then others like me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… then I am like my friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… I am fan of my favourite television character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
… other: _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Now I have some questions on advertising.

13. **What do you think: Why is there advertising?**

    Advertising exists, …

	yes	no
… so that my parents know what they can buy for me.	☐	☐
… so that I know which new things are there.	☐	☐
… so that new things become popular quickly.	☐	☐
… so that people can buy things they do not need.	☐	☐
… so that television earns money.	☐	☐
… so that firms can sell more.	☐	☐
… so that we have something to laugh about	☐	☐
… so that I can do something in the meantime. (drink something, go to the toilet)	☐	☐
… so that television is not so boring.	☐	☐

14. **Do you believe what is said in commercials?**

    ☐ yes   ☐ no   ☐ sometimes

15. **You see something in commercials: How often do you want to have the products that you have seen?**

    ☐ very often   ☐ often   ☐ rarely   ☐ never

16. **If you could mark advertising from 1 to 6, which mark would you chose?**
    MARK _____

17. **Here are some sentences. Please have a look at them and say what you think.**

	true	so so	not true
I like advertising because it is funny.	☐	☐	☐
I like avdertising as I know what is new.	☐	☐	☐
Advertising is exciting.	☐	☐	☐
I think advertising is boring.	☐	☐	☐
I like advertising as I meet my favourite television character again.	☐	☐	☐
I like things that my friends have.	☐	☐	☐

18. The following questions are related to the pictures. Please answer the questions.

	Kellogg´s Smacks	**Honey Wheat** from **Aldi**
Which product do you like more?	☐	☐
With which product are you more popular with your friends?	☐	☐
Which product has a better quality?	☐	☐
I like _____ more, because _____ .		

	Scout Schulranzen	**Schulranzen** from **Lidl**
Which product do you like more?	☐	☐
With which product are you more popular with your friends?	☐	☐
Which product has a better quality?	☐	☐
I like _____ more, because_____ .		

	I-Pod	**Silver Crest MP3-Player** from **Lidl**
Which product do you like more?	☐	☐
With which product are you more popular with your friends?	☐	☐
Which product has a better quality?	☐	☐
I like _____ more, because_____.		

19. Do the following sentences apply to you?

	yes	no
I talk with my parents about what I have seen on television.	☐	☐
I talk with my parents about advertising.	☐	☐
I watch commercials.	☐	☐
I use the internet.	☐	☐

20. Perhaps you sometimes surf the internet. What do you do in the internet?

	not at all				very often
	1	2	3	4	5
chatting (with friends)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
playing online games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
playing learning games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
searching for information for school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
taking part in sweepstakes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
informing myself about products	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
downloading music	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
surfing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
writing e-mails	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
other: _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

At the end I would like you to tell me something about yourself.

21. Which grade do you attend? _____

22. How old are you? _____ years

23. I am ☐ a girl ☐ a boy .

24. Do you have any older sisters or brothers? ☐ yes ☐ no

25. If yes, how many? _____

26. If yes, how old are they? _____ years

Thank you very much!!!

II. Figures

**Perceptions of Strategies' Influence
on Children's Brand Awareness**

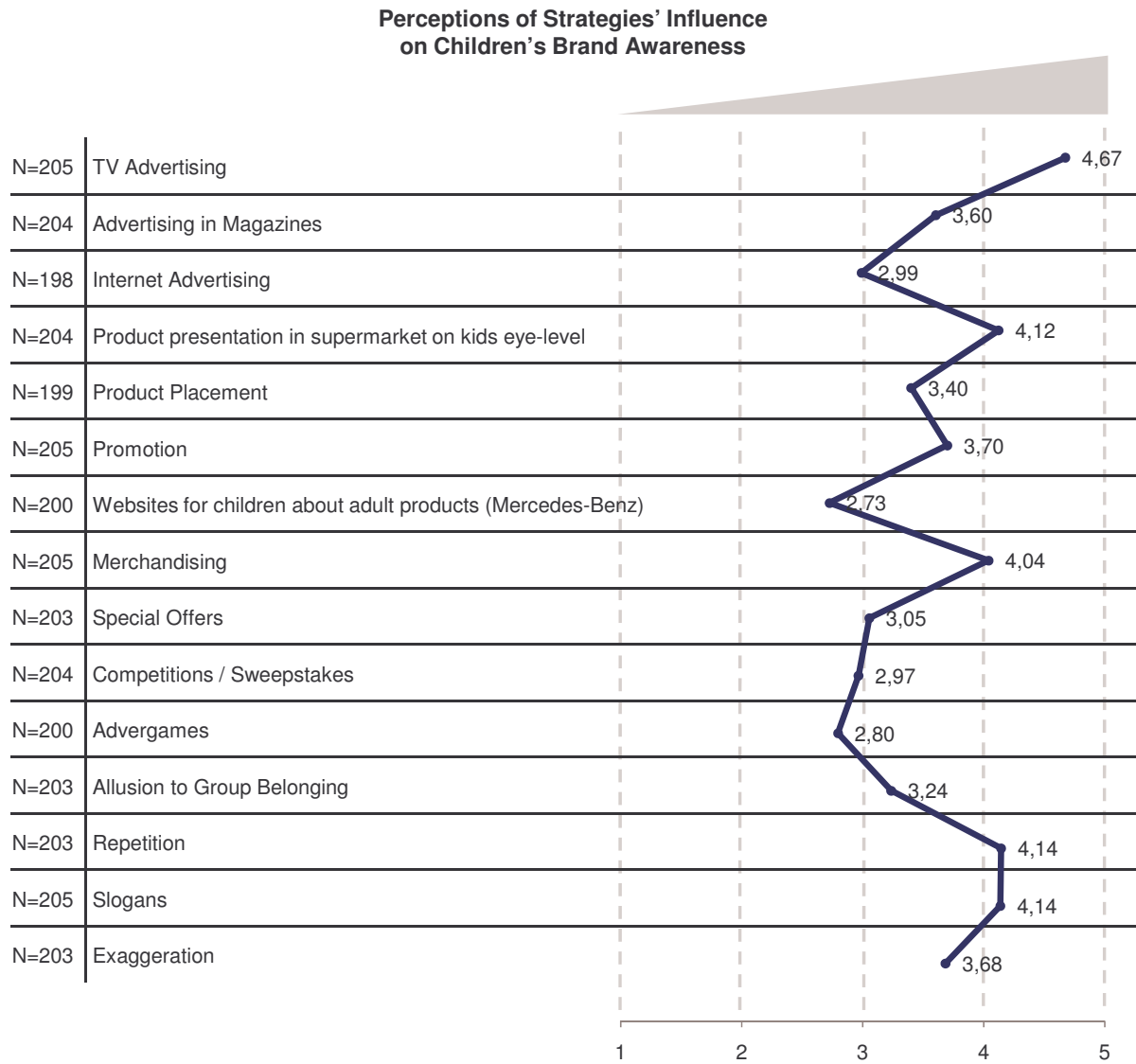|		
N=205	TV Advertising	4,67
N=204	Advertising in Magazines	3,60
N=198	Internet Advertising	2,99
N=204	Product presentation in supermarket on kids eye-level	4,12
N=199	Product Placement	3,40
N=205	Promotion	3,70
N=200	Websites for children about adult products (Mercedes-Benz)	2,73
N=205	Merchandising	4,04
N=203	Special Offers	3,05
N=204	Competitions / Sweepstakes	2,97
N=200	Advergames	2,80
N=203	Allusion to Group Belonging	3,24
N=203	Repetition	4,14
N=205	Slogans	4,14
N=203	Exaggeration	3,68

Figure 5: Perceptions of Strategies' Influence on Children's Brand Awareness