Chapter 10
Children Using Social Media to Connect with Others and With Consumer Brands

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ABSTRACT

Children's use of social media affects their interactions with consumer brands. Because children's social media use is a part of people's increasing use of social platforms to communicate and share content with each other, it is important to understand how children are using such platforms as sources of market-related information. This is because children's socialisation as consumers depends upon their accessing a range of market-related information sources, and social media platforms are envisaged to facilitate such access. Children's interactions with consumer brands are governed by interaction processes, and such processes shape the relationships that children may form with brands. Understanding these interaction processes will provide insights for parents, educators, and business marketers seeking information as to how the next generation of consumers use social media for market-related activities.

INTRODUCTION

Children connect with others in their social relationships, and this is how children build their identities and gain social skills (Oyserman, Elmore et al. 2012). Such social connections enable conversations about aspects of the world, and this in turn enables children to actively construct their world (Gergen 2009). Because social connections involve constant communication, within this connecting are possibilities for people including children to change how others think about the world (Gergen 2009).

Social media technologies offer people easy ways of communicating globally with each other (Schultz and Peltier 2013), and the speed of uptake of such technologies is unprecedented. The growth in the numbers and the scale of social media networking sites as ways for people to communicate and share

their lives is demonstrated by examples such as "more video uploaded to YouTube in one month than the three major networks in the USA created in 60 years" (Hoffman and Novak 2012; pg.69).

Clustering social media sites into three groups provides a more systematic way of envisaging how people engage with social media; so for example Facebook is a social network; Twitter and tumblr are both microblogging sites; and YouTube is a content community (Smith, Fischer et al. 2012). There are continuing new entrants to the social media space, so it is far from saturated, and such entrants seem to attract large numbers of users quickly, e.g. the site Zynga with the social game known as "CityVille" achieved status as the fastest growing game of all time, moving from zero to 100 million users in a mere 43 days (Hoffman and Novak 2012). Internet websites such as Disney's Club Penguin, offered to very young children and that offer limited social experiences, have been available for some time. However, other websites that are part of the social media ecosystem (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden 2011) e.g. such as YouTube, have only recently focused on spaces for children to consume content and to socialise.

So people's social media use can be envisaged as actively shaping their social connections, and such use has relevance to how children connect socially with each other too. Additionally, children's consumer development relies upon their acquisition of social, cognitive, and physical skills (John, 1999) so their social media use can be conceptualised as influential upon their consumer development too. This is because social media technologies allow the breakdown of communication barriers between geographically and socially dispersed communities (Barber 2013), and the breaking of these barriers facilitates much easier social interaction, social influence and idea exchanges between people.

This Chapter offers a perspective on children's use of social media to connect with each other, and to form relationships with brands such as celebrity or person brands. The topic is an important part of the technology conversation about how such use relates to children's acquisition of market-place knowledge and skills.

This Chapter is divided into four parts. Part one identifies important issues and discusses how children use social media to connect with others and with consumer brands for their identity development projects. Part two takes a uses and gratifications perspective to show how children make personal gains by using social media. Part three draws the discussion together from Parts one and two and proposes some solutions including an interaction typology for children's brand interactions using social media.

The final part of this Chapter discusses the implications of children's use of social media for such purposes, discussing how children's brand interactions on social media begin to shape their subsequent brand relationships.

BACKGROUND

The possibility of enabling brands to be involved in pathways of influence between consumers networking on social media is an attractive idea for consumer brand marketers, because of the potential for increasing consumer-brand engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn et al. 2014). However, managing brands in the social media space is a key challenge for marketers, because of the constantly evolving, real-time interactions among consumers that might involve brands, and over which brand marketers have little control (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins and Wiertz 2013). Thus, because people's social media interactions are known to involve consumer brands, such interactions should be envisaged as collective, co-creation activities among people involving many brand authors of a brand's story, and some of these authors are consumers (Gensler, Volckner et al. 2013). Further, because children's development as consumers is so socially-

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