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## **New ways and new quality in market research among young customers: Market research through creative ways of spending time: the case study of PLAYDO**

### **Nowe metody i nowa jakość w badaniach marketingowych przeprowadzanych wśród dzieci. Badania marketingowe przez kreatywne sposoby spędzania czasu: studium przypadku PLAYDO.**

*Artykuł przedstawia problem prowadzenia badań społecznych i marketingowych wśród dzieci i młodzieży. Jednym z kluczowych założeń jest stwierdzenie, że młodzi konsumenci stanowią coraz większy segment na rynku oraz iż kwestie etyczne są kluczowe w badaniach z dziećmi. Artykuł prezentuje różne podejścia do badań z dziećmi w oparciu o klasyfikację zaproponowaną przez Williama J. McDonalda. W artykule przedstawione zostało case study projektu badawczego PLAYDO wpisującego się w podejście creative drama. Badania prowadzone w ramach projektu badawczego PLAYDO prowadzone są w formie zabaw. Przedstawione case study prezentuje projekt z kilku stron. Podkreślona zostaje rola edukacyjną projektu. Po drugie zaznaczony został fakt, że metodyka badań w PLAYDO jest specjalnie dopasowana do możliwości rozwojowych dzieci i młodzieży. Po trzecie podkreślony został aspekt etyczny projektu PLAYDO i zgodność ze standardami badawczymi. Opisując projekt zaznaczono również ważną kwestię jaką jest prowadzenie badań w znanym dla dzieci środowisku (szkoła, przedszkole). Prezentowany projekt zakłada, że badania mają być realizowane w przyjaznym środowisku co ma pozytywny wpływ na proces realizacji badania.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** *PLAYDO, etyka, podejście badawcze, badania marketingowe na dzieciach, młodzi konsumenci,*

### **Introduction**

Children are without a doubt an important consumer group operating on modern markets. Their importance to the studies as well as the markets can be described as three-dimensional. First of all, children are consumers themselves, secondly they have a significant impact on the size and structure of the expenses of their families and, thirdly, they are the consumers of the future<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately there are no official statistics regarding the size of the young consumer market but the date presented by

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<sup>1</sup> S. Baxter: It's not kids' play! Reflecting on the child-orientated research experience, International Journal of Market Research, Vol. 53, 1/2011, p. 63-74.

Ipsos suggest that 2/3 of parents give pocket money to their children (age 4 till 18) of average 56 PLN a month. The children spend their money mostly for sweets (61%), drinks (37%) and magazines (27%). The children participate in choices made by their parents and influence them while making decisions about buying sweets (86%), yogurts (78%), drinks (65%) or toys (63%)<sup>2</sup>. "In 2002, U.S. four- to twelve-year-olds spent \$30 billion. American twelve- to seventeen-year-olds spent \$112.5 billion in 2003. In 2003, 33 million U.S. teens aged twelve to nineteen each spent about \$103 a week"<sup>3</sup>. Having influence on buying patterns of their whole family's the estimated amount on which the two to fourteen- year-olds have sway over is 500 billion USD<sup>4</sup>. Therefore by influencing the young ones you can influence the buying decision of the whole family. Therefore, many research as well as several companies dealing with market research and marketing research seek to know and understand the young consumer behavior in order to create goods and services most suitable for the target group as well as create a more relevant and compelling marketing strategy, not only for today but also for tomorrow. Research institutes regularly study views of adult Poles, leaving out the opinions of preschoolers and pupils, and the fact that they soon will be entering adulthood, taking professional outlook and make consumer decisions. The presented in this paper approach PLAYDO gives voice to the youngest generation, allowing them to comment on important social phenomena and products which they are being targeted by. Market research conducted on young consumers are undoubtedly a very tempting area but it can be also very controversial. Concerns related to the research among the youngest are primarily of ethical but of methodological nature.

## **Objective and the methodology of the analysis**

This paper is a case study and a meta-analysis of market research methods used on young consumers in the PLAYDO project. It also shows the opportunities and challenges which researchers face while surveying the youngest consumers. The aim of this study is, therefore, to reopen the discussion on the efficacy and ethics of market research conducted on children as well as a discussion on the new research method conducted in a form of creative research activities, resembling fun and creative ways of spending time. According to the classification of methods of market research conducted on children made by William J. McDonald, there are three main approaches to this type of research: the creative-drama approach, the structural approach and the adult-orientated approach. The adult- orientated approach is characterized by the perception of children as miniature adults and therefore an appropriate treatment, the structural approach is characterized by the perception of the child as an individual at different stages of development, to which the appropriate research instruments should be adjusted. Finally, the creative-drama approach is based on games and learning through play, act or

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<sup>2</sup> Ipsos, Dzieci i pieniądze: kieszonkowe nie poddaje się kryzysowi, Internet: <http://www.ipsos.pl/kieszonkowe-dzieci-2010> [15.07.2013].

<sup>3</sup> S.L. Calvert: Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing, The future of Children, Vol 18, 1.2008, p.207.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

draw<sup>5</sup>. The method used in PLAYDO therefore contributes to the latest trend of market research.

The analysis as well as the conclusions presented in this paper are derived from data collected during the desk research and pilot studies carried out inter alia in the form of research on environmental attitudes of children. The desk research was based on qualitative meta analysis and included literature-based discovery as well as methods used in the pilot study: observation and focus group interviews (FGI). This research topic has been selected to test the additional possibility of using the model to a broader study of the market, which could be applied not only for typical marketing research, but also for social research, such as surveys of attitudes and surveys used in social campaigns. The pilot study was conducted on a purposive select sample of pre-schools, primary schools, junior high and high schools students of 20 children in February 2013. The main objective of the pilot was to determine the correctness of the conceptual study and optimization of scheduling a single study in different age groups. In addition, the study provided the opportunity to test some research tools, which are described below. An additional source used in this paper are examples of specific tools used in the study which are internal materials of the PLAYDO project.

## **Market research through creative ways of spending time**

The need of using other research methods while conducting research on children the adults was pointed out inter alia by Izabela Sowa<sup>6</sup>, Langbourne Rust and Carole Hyatt<sup>7</sup> or Vivica Kraak and David L. Pelletier<sup>8</sup>.

The idea to conduct market research on young consumers in a fun and creative way of spending time is derived inter alia from Stacey's Baxter's studies which have shown that children under seven years do not understand the concept and the idea of "research", but nevertheless children of all the age groups studied (from five to twelve years) considered the interviews carried out in the study as "fun" because of the colors and images used as well as the short duration of the study, which did not result in children being bored by the interviews. Older children from the age of ten also pointed out that a positive aspect of market studies was, the fact, that there were no wrong answerers to give<sup>9</sup>. The study conducted by Stacey Baxter has further shown "... that children enjoy completing short, colorful questionnaires that enable them to express their opinions (rather than test them). Findings also suggest that children appreciate having an adult present to assist when needed"<sup>10</sup>. Referring to such study results while creating the research method used in the project PLAYDO was meant to ensure that emphasis was

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<sup>5</sup> Za. Ibidem. p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> I. Sowa: Metody badań marketingowych dzieci i młodzieży, Prace Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu, nr 1004/2003, p. 378--383.

<sup>7</sup> L. Rust, C. Hyatt: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Child Research, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 18/1991, p. 18- 22.

<sup>8</sup> V. Kraak, D.L. Pelletier, How Marketers Reach Young Consumers: Implications for Nutrition Education and Health Promotion Campaigns, *Family Economics & Nutrition Review*, Vol. 11, 4/1998, p. 31 - 39.

<sup>9</sup> S. Baxter: Exploring children's attitudes towards research participation, *International Journal of Market Research*, Vol. 54 , 4/ 2012 p. 455 - 464.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 461.

placed on the creation of survey methods which would be the most attractive and non-invasive within a child's perspective. The main focus of the new method was to find the best possible way to combine the child's needs with a research method so an original research method involving different forms of creative activities, resembling fun and creative ways of spending time would be developed. Research carried out in this form should by definition enable to obtain the desired information and prevent rapid loss of the child's interest and attention as well as to provide for the child's educational method and an interesting form of developing their own creativity. Being aware of the ethical and psychological challenges faced by the market research involving children, also presented in this paper, research carried out within the project PLAYDO is interdisciplinary and takes into account the perspectives of both psychological and pedagogical science. The project involves the parents and educators of individual institutions and eventually children foundations, associations and the media.

The research carried out within the project PLAYDO is being carried out in a for the child familiar atmosphere – in their kindergarten or the school they attend. The aim is to reduce the possible discomfort of the children, as well as to allow a full concentration on the undertaken subject, rather than to force them to learn and domesticate the new environment. For this reason, the conversation is moderated by a teacher or educator working in the institution becoming the child's familiar point and thus providing a sense of comfort and security. Also research conducted on groups of children which already know each other or are friends seems to create a more friendly and secure atmosphere, which makes the children more willing to answer the questions and participate in the research<sup>11</sup>. Each test scenario is being prepared based on the concepts of children development phases. The survey always begins with a brief conversation with the child on a subject pointed out by them, which allows children to feel safe and comfortable. The parents are always informed about the whole process and the researcher walks them through the whole procedure – their presence is mandatory for the study of children in preschool and voluntary for children in the early school age and further. The presence of a parent also provides greater confidence, boldness and ensures natural behavior in the case of small children. In addition, the parent can sometimes be helpful in the interpretation of the words and actions of their own child, so that the conduction of the study can be carried out more efficiently and faster, which is important especially because of the limited possible attention span of children. Young respondents may, at any stage of the study refuse to answer a question or to complete a task. Conducting a research in a well-known, familiar and considered as safe environment is also intended as a way of minimizing stress, which has been recognized as one of the factors that negatively affect the child's ability to memorize. In addition, inadequate situational condition, the lack of security and support for children cause an increased tendency to give false answers<sup>12</sup>. Tests carried out in laboratories and in research agencies can be considered as new environment for a child can be associated with stress, anxiety and uncertainty.

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<sup>11</sup> M.J. Hoppe, E.A. Wells, D.M. Morrison, M.R. Gillmore, A. Wilsdone: Using focus groups to discuss sensitive topics with children, *Evaluation Review*, 19/1995, p. 102-114.

<sup>12</sup> D. J Birbeck, M.J.N.Drummond: Research with Young Children: Contemplating Methods and Ethics, *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, Vol. 7,2/ 2007, p. 23 - 24.

The conducted interviews are recorded by cameras to capture not only the responses articulated by the children but also, in some cases, which may be even more valuable, observe the behavior of individual respondents. During the test, it can be seen how a child copes with the product, toy, internet service, as well as expresses his emotions, needs and experience.

The test methods used in the PLAYDO are adjusted to each of the analyzed age groups. The number of questions and their level of difficulty increases accordingly to each age group. The form of questions and most of all the research areas and themes are the same for all the studied age groups, which allows comparison of the structure of views and perceptions. The research uses qualitative test methods including in-depth interviews (IDI), observation, in-depth interviews conducted in pairs, focus group interviews (FGI) as well as classical surveys designed for school-age children (ten to twelve years old).

Studies conducted on children are most often carried out using qualitative research methods, such as individual in-depth interviews or focus groups with children and their parents - all in order to provide them with comfort and freedom of expression but also an exciting, fun-like form, and primarily understanding even by the youngest children, who cannot precisely determine the level of satisfaction with the use of a scale. Games are tailored to each examined age group's potential. An example of such a tool is a game prepared to study preferences of preschool children on the product, which is: a set of ghosts: *BuuuuuGhost!* The first step was the design of a psychological and pedagogical characteristics of the studied age group. As part of this process was determined that children in preschool and middle childhood, are characterized by a large need of movement and animation, an increase of their intellectual potential, language proficiency, learning aptitude, an growing autonomy, greater performance as well as the orientation in concepts such as age, vast curiosity, involuntary memory and a memory characterized by fragmented situations and events. The event memory is global, there are still gaps in the memory, which are being filled by imagination. The main activity of the children at this age is playing. The child masters the ability to use symbols to represent objects in thought and action. It can be difficult for a child this age to separate what is real from what is unreal. Children at this age can be characterized by their great curiosity, great spontaneity and uncontrollable desire. Learning is highly selective, and the child's interests are spontaneous. Children identify strongly with their own gender, contains temporary friendships, divides colleagues into friends and enemies. Rules are being seen as a necessity<sup>13</sup>. Based on these characteristics a scenario for a play has been created which can be implemented in groups from four up to six persons from the age from three to four years with a maximum playing time of twenty five minutes and from five to six years with a maximum playing time of thirty minutes.

The conducted study consists of three stages: the first stage is a game through role playing, motor tasks, symbolic and construction tasks. The second stage is the use of projection methods which inter alia are: the drawing method, role playing, situations, characters, description of an ambiguous situation and diagnose of the psychological

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<sup>13</sup> Zob. D.E. Papalia, O.S. Wendkos: *Human Development*. McGraw-Hill Book Company. 1986; A. Brzezińska: *Psychologiczne portrety człowieka*. Praktyczna psychologia rozwojowa, GWP, Gdańsk 2000; R. Vasta, M. Haith, S.A. Miller: *Psychologia dziecka*, WSIP; Warszawa 2004.

distance phenomenon. Finally, the study includes an interview: tailored to the age of the child, consisting of short not suggestive questions. Due to the characteristics of the age group outlined above an operationalization and selection of main indicators was made. For the youngest group the following indicators were chosen: whether the product stimulates the child in terms of mobility, whether product develops, provides and requires learning, the characteristic of the child's reaction on the product (the first reaction, the reaction rate), the length of the interest in the object, the scope of independent actions, the ability to use the product in a group, whether the product promotes entering into group roles, typical reactions, emotional reactions, etc., the use of the product by the child's gender or the gender of the product. In the case of the analyzed product: a set of ghosts: *BuuuuuGhost!* the survey was focused on the analysis of emotional reactions to various ghosts, from positive to negative reactions. The product has been diversified due to the shape, color, smell and names which resulted in selecting six ghosts. During the observation the children were encouraged to play with the ghosts. At this stage, the subjects of the analyze were the following issues: with which toys the children have played, how much time they spend playing with each ghost, and how soon they began to play with them. In the next stage of the study a story of the teddy bear (a prerequisite) was told. The teddy bear was described as sick, and having difficulties to fall asleep. Children were then asked which of the ghosts they would have chosen to help the teddy bear to fall asleep. Using a cartoon of the bear leaving on a trip, the children were asked to indicated the ghost they believed the teddy bear would take with him. Children were asked to indicate which one of the ghosts the teddy bear would to chose for his best friend.

The essence of each scenario is that every survey conducted with a child would have a fun, play like character. This can be achieved through using attractive for a child meeting scenarios, play word association, various game roles, drawings and interesting and fun tasks to do and solve, and everything with the goal of a fun and exciting experience due to the participation in the project. The moderator and psychologists are observing while the child is using the product or toy and playing with it. They talk to him about his experiences, needs, and perceptions.

An important issue is also that the survey is intended to make the product more suitable to the needs of children as its main recipients and not the promotion of specific brands in their minds and as a effect encouraging them to buy certain products or adopt certain attitudes. This makes much of the ethical concerns related to marketing activities addressed to children and outlined below to become less important.

### **Concerns related to market research conducted on young consumers**

The method characterized above is not free from ethical concerns related to social studies or market research conducted on children. Assuming that a child is not aware of the impact of advertising mechanism and such practices are considered to be unethical and misleading, one should ask himself whether other activities from the field of marketing, including marketing research, if they are not being recognized as such, should they also be regarded as unfair<sup>14</sup>?

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<sup>14</sup> S. Baxter, op.cit., p. 456.

Important in this context are the results of the already cited studies from Stacey Baxter, according to which the youngest children (around the age of five years) did not understand the concept of marketing research and were not able to describe their feelings about the subsequent use of the information obtained from them<sup>15</sup>. This dilemma remains unsolved, unfortunately, also in the case of PLAYDO.

The main ethical dilemma associated with research on children is a matter of the necessary protection of the child and to goal of obtaining the desired information. The possibility of obtaining the desired information is limited, inter alia by the voluntary nature of participation in the study which is also being granted in the project PLAYDO. Derivative principle of avoiding causing harm and a voluntary participation is the principle of informed consent for study participation<sup>16</sup>. In the case of research on children especially those in preschool, it's hard to get a fully consent, which is why the consent is given by a parent. Also as ethically questionable can be seen a practice to mislead the respondents by not offering them the exact purpose of the study. This point becomes particularly problematic within this method, especially when the child is considering the study as a play and when the youngest age group does not understand what the obtained information will be used for by the researchers. Again, the burden of understanding and taking the responsibility must be transferred to the parents. David J. Birbeck, Murray J. N. Drummond analyzing the ethical and methodological controversies recommend to "...use methodologies which support children's intellectual and social abilities. (...) research considerations and associated ethical dilemmas can be addressed if researchers, instead of pretending to be children or taking on the questionable role of noninterfering adults, recognize that adults are part of a child's life. It is more appropriate to enter the research environment as a participating adult able to adopt the role of a sensitive, empathetic and caring adult. A relationship based on trust and mutual respect can be developed allowing the researcher to uphold the ethical imperatives when working with children"<sup>17</sup>.

Another controversy associated with research conducted on children is the accuracy and reliability of the survey. As indicated above, is not suitable environmental conditions, which do not give the child a sense of security and support can increase the likelihood of not understanding the instructions or giving incorrect answers, which would limit the usefulness of these results and the ability to verify the results of such a study. The project PLAYDO makes an attempt to eliminate this risk, first of all by ensuring a safe, familiar and comfortable environment and further more by emphasizing on the observation of reactions of children, and not just relying on their assessment and emotions articulated.

Apart from the above signalized attempts to overcome the ethical concerns that may raise in the context of market research conducted on children in PLAYDO also a number of standards of quality and safety testing is being used. During the whole research procedure, psychologists and pedagogues work to ensure that the form, timing and subject of the study are coherent with the child's capabilities. They also ensure that participation in the research is for the participants mainly fun, by interesting games,

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<sup>15</sup> S. Baxter, op.cit., p. 462.

<sup>16</sup> E. Babbie: *Badania społeczne w praktyce*, PWN, Warszawa 2004, s. 517.

<sup>17</sup> D. J. Birbeck, M.J. N. Drummond, op.cit., s. 27.

materials stimulating the imagination, showing interesting pictures, organizing role plays. Their presence at each test is mandatory. Research opportunities are tailored to the child's physical, cognitive and mental development stage as well as his language and communication skills. The research is adjusted to the different stages of the emotional, social development and the child's social as well as his personality.

During the process of designing and conduction the researchers follow the International Code of IC / ISOMAR of ethics, safety and quality of research. In relation to the way of conducting research as described by Code crucial in a study is the welfare of the participating children. The study cannot be intended as a disturbing experience or cannot cause them any harm.

## **Conclusion**

The presented method of PLAYDO is a part of the global research market trends. The conducted desk research indicates the absence of similar studies on the Polish market. The presented method of research not only offers the possibility of obtaining the child's opinion about a product which enables to adjust the product to the child's capabilities, but also allows the researcher to obtain reliable information, gathered in natural and comfortable for the child environment, using ethical methods. Research in the form of games and fun also brings a number of benefits for the child, giving him the possibility of an interesting way of spending time and having fun with role-playing, drawing and other tools and tasks used in the study. This form of testing can allow the child to acquire new language, social and emotional skills, thanks to accordingly prepared tools. It also provides the opportunity to demonstrate that their opinion matters and also make them feel that way. This form of research is also able to be carried out in form of social research among children, as demonstrated during the pilot studies on environmental attitudes. Market research carried out by the method described in this paper also allows to offset many of the ethical and methodological concerns that arise in the context of a research conducted on children. By taking into account the psychological and pedagogical perspective it also enables a research matched to the development stage of the child and the appropriate interpretation of the collected empirical material.

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### **Summary:**

The article presents the problem of social and market research among children and youth. The author assumes that young consumers represent a growing segment of the market. The author highlighted the importance of ethical issues in research conducted on children and young respondents. The article presents a different approach to the study of children based on the classification proposed by William J. McDonnald. The article presents a case study of a research project PLAYDO, which is consistent with the assumptions of the *creative drama* approach. First of all, the author emphasizes the educational role of the project. Secondly, she emphasizes the fact that the methodology used in the research project PLAYDO is specifically adapted to the possibilities and the development of children and youth. Thirdly, the author describes the ethical aspect of the project PLAYDO and compliance with research standards. Describing the project, the author points out that it is important to conduct research in a familiar environment (nursery or school). The project assumes that the research will be carried out in a friendly environment which has a positive influence on the process of implementation of the survey.

Key words: PLAYDO, ethic, , research approach, market research conducted on children, young consumers

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