



## Marketing and Its Effects on Children's Emotional and Social Development

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### Abstract

The pervasive influence of marketing on children's emotional and social development is a subject of growing concern in contemporary research. This study explores how marketing strategies, including advertisements and brand interactions, impact children's emotional well-being and social behaviors. With children being one of the most impressionable demographics, marketing campaigns often shape their perceptions, desires, and self-image from an early age. This research delves into how marketing messages can foster both positive and negative emotional responses and how these responses translate into social behaviors. The study employs a comprehensive review of recent literature, supplemented by empirical data, to analyze various dimensions of marketing's impact on children. Key findings suggest that while certain marketing strategies can enhance social skills and promote positive emotional development, others may lead to adverse effects, such as increased materialism, dissatisfaction with self-image, and peer pressure. The research highlights the dual role of marketing as both a potential tool for positive reinforcement and a source of emotional and social challenges. By examining the mechanisms through which marketing influences children, the study provides insights into how marketers can design campaigns that support healthy emotional and social growth. It also offers recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers to mitigate the negative effects of marketing while leveraging its potential benefits. This research underscores the need for a balanced approach to marketing practices, advocating for strategies that prioritize children's well-being and foster a supportive environment for their emotional and social development.

**Key Words:** Marketing Strategies, Children's Emotional Development, Social Development, Brand Influence, Advertising Impact, Materialism, Self-Image, Peer Pressure, Positive Reinforcement, Policy Recommendations.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The ethical implications of advertising's impact on children have long been a subject of scrutiny. Pollay (1986) and subsequent scholars have critiqued advertising for providing a distorted reflection of reality, arguing that it fosters materialism and dissatisfaction by glorifying consumerism and idealizing the "good life" (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). Research has substantiated these concerns, showing that frequent exposure to advertising can increase materialistic values among children and diminish their life satisfaction, often due to parental denial of purchase requests (Opreet al., 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a, 2003b). However, these studies primarily focus on materialism and immediate dissatisfaction, leaving a gap in our understanding of the broader impacts of advertising on children's overall well-being (Kunkel & Roberts, 1991).

Well-being research generally follows two paradigms. "The hedonic paradigm focuses on current happiness and life satisfaction, while the eudaimonic paradigm emphasizes psychological well-being and the development of personal strengths and potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001)". According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is multifaceted and includes environmental mastery, personal development, life purpose, self-acceptance, autonomy, and healthy interpersonal relationships. These aspects are crucial for attaining happiness and are indicative of life satisfaction in a variety of situations, according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001; Waterman, 2008).

In the Indian context, where children are increasingly exposed to advertising through digital media and traditional channels, understanding the impact of advertising on their psychological well-being is crucial. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the relationship between advertising exposure and children's well-being. It is the first to investigate how advertising affects psychological well-being and life satisfaction among children in India.

The study's objectives are threefold: First, to assess whether advertising exposure negatively influences children's life satisfaction. Second, to determine if psychological well-being serves as a mediator in this relationship. Third, to provide detailed insights into how various dimensions of psychological well-being mediate the effects of advertising exposure on life satisfaction. This research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the ethical implications of advertising and provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and parents.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Direct Effect of Advertising Exposure on Life Satisfaction**

The relationship between children's exposure to advertising and their life satisfaction has garnered significant scholarly attention. Evidence suggests that increased advertising exposure can diminish life satisfaction among children. This phenomenon is generally explained through three key mechanisms.

Firstly, the **social comparison** theory posits that advertising creates an idealized world brimming with luxury and perfection. According to Pollay (1986), such portrayals can prompt children to compare their own lives with the seemingly superior lives depicted in advertisements. This discrepancy often results in feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction as children perceive a gap between their reality and the idealized world they are exposed to, leading to a decline in life satisfaction (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a).



Secondly, **consumption experiences** are crucial in understanding this relationship. Advertisements often present products in an exaggeratedly favorable light—whether through enhanced visuals, animations, or persuasive messaging. The actual experience of these products frequently fails to meet the high expectations set by advertisements, leading to disillusionment and decreased happiness when children realize that the advertised benefits do not materialize as expected (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a). This mismatch between expectation and reality contributes to a drop in life satisfaction.

Lastly, there are **more complex cause-and-effect chains** associated with advertising exposure. The impact of advertising may be mediated by various factors, including the frequency and context of exposure, the child's individual psychological traits, and their socio-economic environment. These chains often intertwine social comparison and consumption experiences, magnifying their outcome on children's emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction.

Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of advertising on children. This theoretical background underscores the need to examine not only the direct effects but also the underlying processes that link advertising exposure with changes in life satisfaction.

Advertising participate a significant position in shaping children's materialistic values and their purchase requests. By constantly promoting new and desirable products, advertisements can cultivate a sense of materialism among children. This materialism often translates into increased demands for these products from parents. When children's purchase requests are unmet, the resulting disappointment and unhappiness can adversely affect their overall life satisfaction (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a).

Recent studies, including those focusing on children aged 8-12, have not consistently found a direct relationship between advertising exposure and life satisfaction (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003b; Oprea et al., 2012). However, they suggest that advertising impacts life satisfaction indirectly through mechanisms such as materialism, increased purchase requests, and the subsequent disappointment from parental denial. Thus, our first hypothesis posits that:

**H1: Advertising Exposure has a Negative Effect on Children's Life Satisfaction. Direct Effect of Advertising Exposure on Psychological Wellbeing**

Advertising not only reflects consumer values but also influences psychological values. Consumer values emphasize the importance of possessions, while psychological values view these possessions as means to achieve status, happiness, and other desirable traits, such as independence and pride (Ewen et al., 2002; Kunkel & Roberts, 1991). To understand how advertising affects psychological wellbeing, it is essential to examine the psychological appeals used in advertising and their potential impact on various dimensions of psychological wellbeing.

**(A) Psychological Appeals in Advertising**

A number of common psychological appeals are found in content assessments of child-directed advertising. These can be broadly categorized into three groups:

- [i] General Child-Directed Advertising:** This category includes a range of product types, such as toys and games, beverages, food. Common appeals found in this category are:

**Fun/Play:** Advertising often emphasizes fun and play as central themes, showcasing products in engaging and entertaining contexts (Page & Brewster, 2007).

**Fantasy/Imagination:** Advertisements frequently use imaginative characters or scenarios to captivate children's attention (Page & Brewster, 2007).

**Action/Adventure:** Products are associated with excitement and daring activities, appealing to children's desire for adventure (Warren et al., 2008).

**Trickery/Deceit:** Some ads depict humorous situations involving trickery or deceit, often involving adults (Folta et al., 2006).

**Parental Approval/Disapproval:** Advertisements may feature endorsements from authority figures or imply the absence of negative consequences for certain behaviors (Warren et al., 2008).

[ii] **Food Advertising:** This subgroup focuses specifically on food-related ads and includes additional appeals:

**Achievement/Enablement:** Ads link food consumption with the ability to achieve goals or gain control over personal or environmental challenges (Warren et al., 2008).

**Athletic Ability:** Some food ads highlight enhanced physical performance resulting from product consumption (Lewis & Hill, 1998).

Understanding these appeals is crucial for linking advertising exposure to psychological wellbeing. Every attraction has the potential to impact several aspects of psychological well-being, including control over one's surroundings, personal development, life purpose, self-acceptance, independence, and healthy interpersonal connections. By examining these dimensions, we can better understand how advertising impacts children's psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction.

The third and last set of content analyses contrasts the appeals of general audience advertising with those of child-directed advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2002; Lewis & Hill, 1998; LeBlanc Wicks et al., 2009; Warren et al., 2008). Children are often exposed to general-audience advertising because they enjoy watching television shows intended for broader audiences (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2000). In general-audience advertising, themes such as happiness and achievements are prevalent, but there is also a strong emphasis on physical attractiveness and owning the best products. The appeal of physical attractiveness suggests that consuming the product will enhance one's beauty (Lewis & Hill, 1998). The appeal of owning the best emphasizes having high-quality products that garner admiration (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2002).

#### **(B) Linking Appeals to Psychological Wellbeing**

Nine common attractions in child-directed advertising are identified from the content analyses: play/fun, action/adventure, fantasy/imagination, parental approval/disapproval, trickery/deceit, athletic ability, achievement/enablement, physical attractiveness, and having the best. Each of these appeals can influence different dimensions of psychological wellbeing, allowing us to formulate specific hypotheses regarding their effects.

**(C) Environmental Mastery**

Environmental mastery refers to an individual's ability to manage their environment to meet their needs (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The appeal of achievement/enablement, common in both child-directed and general-audience advertising, suggests that consuming the product can help gain control over undesirable aspects of oneself and the environment. This appeal may enhance children's perceived environmental mastery by promoting a sense of control and capability:

**H2: Advertising Exposure has a Positive Effect on Children's Environmental Mastery**

**Personal Growth**

Feelings of continuous personal development and self-actualization are associated with personal progress (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The Psychological Well-Being scale for children (PWB-c) measures children's receptivity to new experiences, which is a common definition of personal growth for kids (Oprea, 2012). Action/adventure appeal, which is common in both general child-directed and food advertising, associates items with excitement and thrill-seeking. This appeal can increase children's receptivity to new experiences and promote personal development by igniting their sense of adventure:

**H3: Advertising Exposure has a Positive Effect on Children's Personal Growth**

**Purpose in Life**

Purpose in life involves having a sense of direction and goals (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The appeal of fantasy/imagination, frequently used in child-directed and children's food advertising, encourages children to imagine their future. Prior studies have shown that fantasy/imagination appeals in television content can stimulate day dreaming (Valkenburg & Van der Voort, 1994). We hypothesize that these appeals in advertising can increase children's contemplation about future possibilities, thereby enhancing their sense of purpose in life:

**H4: Advertising Exposure has a Positive Effect on Children's Purpose in Life**

These hypotheses highlight how various appeals in advertising can influence different dimensions of children's psychological wellbeing, offering a nuanced understanding of advertising's impact on children's development. The aspect of psychological wellness that entails feeling good about oneself is self-acceptance (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Advertising for general audiences and children's meals frequently uses appeals to physical attractiveness, athletic prowess, and possessing the best. These arguments suggest that having particular things is necessary for success and that simply being oneself is insufficient. The broad consensus is that advertising lowers people's judgments of themselves, despite conflicting findings from earlier research (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a):

**H5: Advertising Exposure has a Negative Effect on Children's Self-Acceptance**

**Autonomy**

The desire and capacity to make decisions on one's own are related to autonomy (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Children usually seek parental assistance for large decisions, but they frequently make little decisions on their own (Fattore et al., 2007). Children's participation in both individual and group decision-making is the definition and metric for autonomy in the Psychological Well-Being scale for children (PWB-c) (Oprea, 2012). Parents' rejection is depicted without any negative

repercussions, and parents are frequently mocked in general child-directed and children's food advertising. Children may become less appreciative of their parents as a result of this representation and be more inclined to make their own decisions:

**H6: Advertising Exposure has a Positive Effect on Children's Autonomy. Positive Relationships with Others**

Having warm and fulfilling interactions is a component of the last dimension, positive relationships with others (Ryff & Singer, 2008). It is believed that by making fun of adults and diminishing children's respect for their parents, general child-directed and children's food advertising can endanger children's relationships with their parents. More significantly, advertising is thought to reduce positive interactions with people by prioritizing material items over human connections (Chaplin & John, 2007):

**H7: Advertising Exposure has a Negative Effect on Children's Positive Relationships with Others.**

***Overall Psychological Wellbeing***

As was previously said, advertising may have a good impact on certain aspects of psychological wellbeing (autonomy, personal development, environmental mastery, and life purpose) and a detrimental impact on other aspects (self-acceptance and healthy interpersonal connections). It is difficult to forecast the overall effect of advertising on psychological wellbeing because these impacts can vary in strength and direction. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H8: Advertising Exposure has an Effect on Children's Overall Psychological Wellbeing. Direct Effect of Psychological Wellbeing on Life Satisfaction**

According to research, life satisfaction is positively predicted by each aspect of psychological wellness as well as by psychological wellbeing as a whole (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Consequently, we anticipate:

**H9: Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, and Positive Relationships with Others are Each Positive Predictors of Children's Life Satisfaction.**

These hypotheses provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the nuanced effects of advertising on children's psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction, incorporating multiple dimensions of wellbeing and linking them to specific advertising appeals.

As we consider the cumulative effect of all dimensions of psychological wellbeing, it becomes evident that the overall psychological wellbeing plays a significant role in determining life satisfaction. The integration of various dimensions—ranging from environmental mastery to positive relationships with others—forms a comprehensive measure of a child's overall psychological wellbeing. Consequently, we hypothesize:

**H10: Overall Psychological Wellbeing is a Positive Predictor of Children's Life Satisfaction.**

These hypotheses provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the nuanced effects of advertising on children's psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction. By incorporating multiple dimensions of wellbeing and linking them to specific advertising appeals, we can better understand the broader implications of advertising exposure on children's overall development and satisfaction with life.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Methodology

This study employed a rigorous three-wave panel design, collecting data from a substantial cohort of 1,133 children aged 8-12. Psychological well-being was assessed comprehensively, encompassing dimensions such as environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships with others. This approach allowed for a nuanced analysis of how advertising exposure impacts various facets of psychological well-being over time.

#### 3.2 Sample and Procedure

Our study focused on children aged 8 to 12 years, a group that has some understanding of persuasive advertising appeals but may not always apply this knowledge unless prompted. This makes them relatively vulnerable to advertising effects. Between January and April 2024, we gathered short-term longitudinal survey data from 2,987 children in Delhi NCR, India, aged 8 to 12 (53.2% males; mean age 9.93 years), divided into three measurement waves spaced six weeks apart.

An adult internet panel was used to recruit the responders. We reached out to parents whose kids were in the target age range. Parents sent out invitations to their children if they were permitted to participate. Children and parents were told that each questionnaire would take roughly 20 minutes to complete and that the study focused on children's television consumption and overall satisfaction. Parents and kids were informed at every wave that participation in the study was completely optional and that they might leave at any moment. The university's ethics committee granted the study IRB permission.

Children who participated in Waves 1 and 2 received 50 INR in credits for the research company's reward system, while those who participated in Wave 3 received a 100 INR gift voucher for an online store. There were three waves: the first occurred from January 21 to January 30 ( $N = 2,987$ ), the second from March 4 to March 13 ( $N = 1,877$ ), and the third from April 15-14 ( $N = 1,133$ ). Age ( $\chi^2(4, n = 2,987) = 4.64, p = 0.33, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.04$ ) and sex ( $\chi^2(1, n = 2,987) = 0.00, p = 1.00, \text{phi} = 0.00$ ) had no bearing on dropout, indicating that panel attrition was random.

Because prior research has shown that short time lags are suitable for examining the linear impacts of advertising on broad beliefs and attitudes, the waves were given six weeks apart.

#### 3.3 Measures

##### 3.3.1 Advertising Exposure

Commercial television exposure served as a stand-in for children's exposure to advertisements. Despite its simplicity, this approach is just as valid and trustworthy as survey or diary measurements that account for the density of advertisements. Since commercial television is still a popular channel for advertisers, we concentrated on it. We chose the most popular commercial television networks among Indian children between the ages of 8 and 11 (such as Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and Cartoon Network) and asked the kids how frequently they watched each network in order to create our proxy. Never, sometimes, frequently, and very often were the response categories. A scale score (Wave 1:  $SD = 0.51, M = 2.30$ ; Wave 2:  $SD = 0.51, M = 2.28$ ; Wave 3:  $SD = 0.52, M = 2.24$ ) was calculated by averaging the four-item scores.

### **3.3.2 Psychological Wellbeing**

The 24-item PWB-c scale, a modified version of the original PWB scale, was used to assess children's psychological wellbeing. Almost never, occasionally, often, and very often were the response categories for the items in each dimension that started with "How often [...]". The item scores for each dimension were averaged to obtain the scale scores.

**Environmental Mastery:** evaluated the degree of control kids have over their surroundings (e.g., "How often do you choose what you do after school?") (Wave 1: SD = 0.53, M = 2.82; Wave 2: SD = 0.52, M = 2.81; Wave 3: SD = 0.52, M = 2.77).

**Personal Growth:** evaluated receptivity to new experiences (e.g., "Do you like to engage in new activities?") (Wave1: SD = 0.57, M = 2.81; Wave2: SD = 0.59, M = 2.82; Wave3: SD = 0.58, M = 2.82).

**Purpose in Life:** Assessed how often children think about their future (e.g., "Do you think about what you want to be when you grow up?") (Wave 1: SD = 0.69, M = 1.97; Wave 2: SD = 0.68, M = 1.99; Wave 3: SD = 0.69, M = 1.97).

**Self-Acceptance:** Assessed self-esteem (e.g., "Are you proud of yourself?") (Wave 1: SD = 0.55, M = 2.64; Wave 2: SD = 0.56, M = 2.69; Wave 3: SD = 0.58, M = 2.72).

**Autonomy:** Assessed independent result-creation (e.g., "Do you make choices by yourself?") (Wave 1: SD = 0.48, M = 2.64; Wave 2: SD = 0.46, M = 2.62; Wave 3: SD = 0.47, M = 2.61).

**Positive Relationships with Others:** Assessed positive social interactions (e.g., "Do you do fun things with your parents?") (Wave 1: SD = 0.41, M = 2.87; Wave 2: SD = 0.40, M = 2.85; Wave 3: SD = 0.40, M = 2.84).

### **3.3.3 Overall Psychological Wellbeing**

All 24 responses (Wave 1:  $\alpha = 0.81$ , SD = 0.32, M = 2.66; Wave 2:  $\alpha = 0.83$ , SD = 0.32, M = 2.67; Wave 3:  $\alpha = 0.84$ , SD = 0.33, M = 2.66) were averaged to produce a composite score for general psychological wellbeing.

### **3.3.4 Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction was measured using eight questions. In the first seven, children were asked to rate their level of happiness with their homes, parents, friends, class, school, and themselves. Their overall level of happiness was the subject of the eighth inquiry. The answer categories ranged from 1 (not happy) to 4 (very happy). The item scores were averaged to create a scale score (Wave 1:  $\alpha = 0.84$ , SD = 0.46, M = 3.22; Wave 2:  $\alpha = 0.85$ , SD = 0.46, M = 3.17; Wave 3:  $\alpha = 0.86$ , SD = 0.47, M = 3.17).

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Zero-Order Correlations**

We evaluated the relationships between advertising exposure and the six aspects of psychological wellbeing and life happiness, as well as the bivariate relationships between children's exposure to advertising, life satisfaction and overall psychological wellbeing. Life satisfaction at Wave 3 and advertising exposure at Wave 1 did not significantly correlate, indicating that these constructs are unrelated. At Wave 2, on the other hand, exposure to advertising at Wave 1 was positively



associated with psychological well-being in all six variables. Additionally, life satisfaction at Wave 3 was positively correlated with general psychological wellness as well as the aspects of personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, and pleasant interactions with others at Wave 2.

#### 4.2 Latent Variable Modeling

The study employed structural equation modeling to ascertain the direct and indirect impacts of children's exposure to advertisements on life happiness. Figures 1 and 2 show the models that were used to test each hypothesis. Latent variables were incorporated into both models for life satisfaction, general psychological health, and advertising exposure. In all versions, the advertising exposure scale served as a manifest indicator for the latent variable advertising exposure (AE), whereas the scale scores for the six PWB-c dimensions (EM, PG, PL, SA, AU, and PR) served as manifest indicators for the latent variable psychological wellbeing. Using the factorial technique, the eight items for life satisfaction were divided into three parcels (parcels A, B, and C; labeled PA, PB, and PC).

**Table I: Correlations between Children's Advertising Exposure, Overall Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction**

Measure	Wave1	Wave2	Wave3	Wave1	Wave2	Wave3	Wave1	Wave2	Wave 3
<b>Advertising Exposure</b>									
Wave1	1								
Wave2	0.65***	1							
Wave3	0.68***	0.70***	1						
<b>Psychological Wellbeing</b>									
Wave1	0.20***	0.12***	0.14***	1					
Wave2	0.18***	0.17***	0.13***	0.70**	1				
Wave3	0.16***	0.11***	0.19***	0.68***	0.78***	1			
<b>Life Satisfaction</b>									
Wave1	0.04	0.02	-0.01	0.59***	0.48***	0.50***	1		
Wave2	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.50***	0.60***	0.52***	0.72***	1	
Wave3	0.03	-0.01	0.05	0.48***	0.53***	0.64***	0.71***	0.77***	1

**Notes:**

**Sample Sizes:** NWave1 = 2, 987, NWave1 = 1, 877, NWave1 = 1, 133

**Significance Levels:** \*\*\*p≤ 0.001, \*\*p≤ 0.01, \*p≤ 0.05

**Table II. Correlations between the Six Dimensions of Psychological Wellbeing, and Children's Advertising Exposure and Life Satisfaction**

Measure	Wave	Environmental Mastery (EM)	Personal Growth (PG)	Purpose in Life (PL)	Self-Acceptance (SA)	Autonomy (AU)	Positive Relationships (PR)
Advertising Exposure	Wave1		0.20***	0.08***	0.15***	0.05*	0.15***
	Wave2		0.14***	0.04	0.14***	0.02	0.08**
	Wave3		0.18***	0.05	0.12***	0.01	0.10*
Life Satisfaction	Wave1		0.19***	0.40***	0.06**	0.50***	0.28***
	Wave2		0.14***	0.38***	0.03	0.45***	0.25***
	Wave3		0.12***	0.35***	0.01	0.55***	0.18***

**Notes:**

Environmental Mastery (EM) Personal Growth (PG) Purpose in Life (PL)

Self-Acceptance (SA) Autonomy (AU)

Positive Relationships (PR)

**Sample Sizes:** NWave1 = 2, 987, NWave1=1, 877, NWave1 = 1, 133

**Significance Levels:** \*\*\*p≤0.001, \*\*p≤0.01, \*p≤ 0.05

Item parceling was strategically employed to enhance the precision of measuring the latent variable of life satisfaction. By aggregating multiple indicators into fewer parcels, this method streamlines the model, promoting both parsimony and statistical power (Kline, 2005). Ideally, each latent variable should be represented by two to four parcels to ensure robustness (Little et al., 2002).

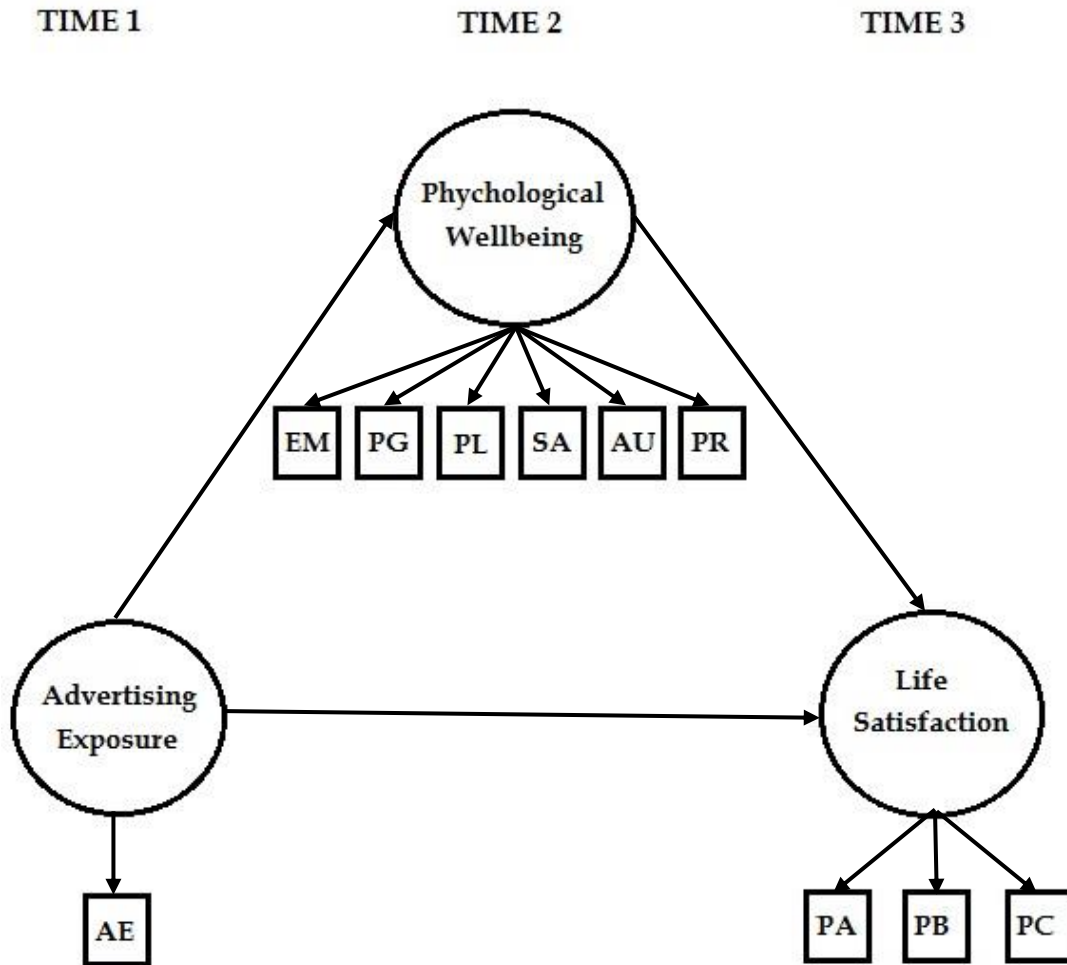
The study employed structural equation modeling to ascertain the direct and indirect impacts of children's exposure to ads on life satisfaction. Figures 1 and 2 show the models that were used to assess each hypothesis. Latent variables were incorporated into the models for life happiness, exposure to advertisements, and general psychological health. The scale scores for the six PWB-c dimensions (EM, PG, PL, SA, AU, and PR) functioned as manifest indicators for the latent variable psychological wellbeing in all versions, while the advertising exposure scale functioned as a manifest indicator for the latent variable advertising exposure (AE). The eight life satisfaction items were separated into three parcels (parcels A, B, and C; designated PA, PB, and PC) using the factorial technique.

The purpose of the second model (Figure 2) was to investigate theories pertaining to the six aspects of psychological well-being (H2 through H7 and H9). The causal relationship between advertising exposure at Wave 1 and life satisfaction at Wave 3 was maintained in this model. But by substituting causal links from advertising exposure at Wave 1 to each manifest measure of psychological health in Wave 2, it improved the methodology for psychological wellbeing. The causal pathways from these indicators to the latent variable of life satisfaction at Wave 3 were also included.

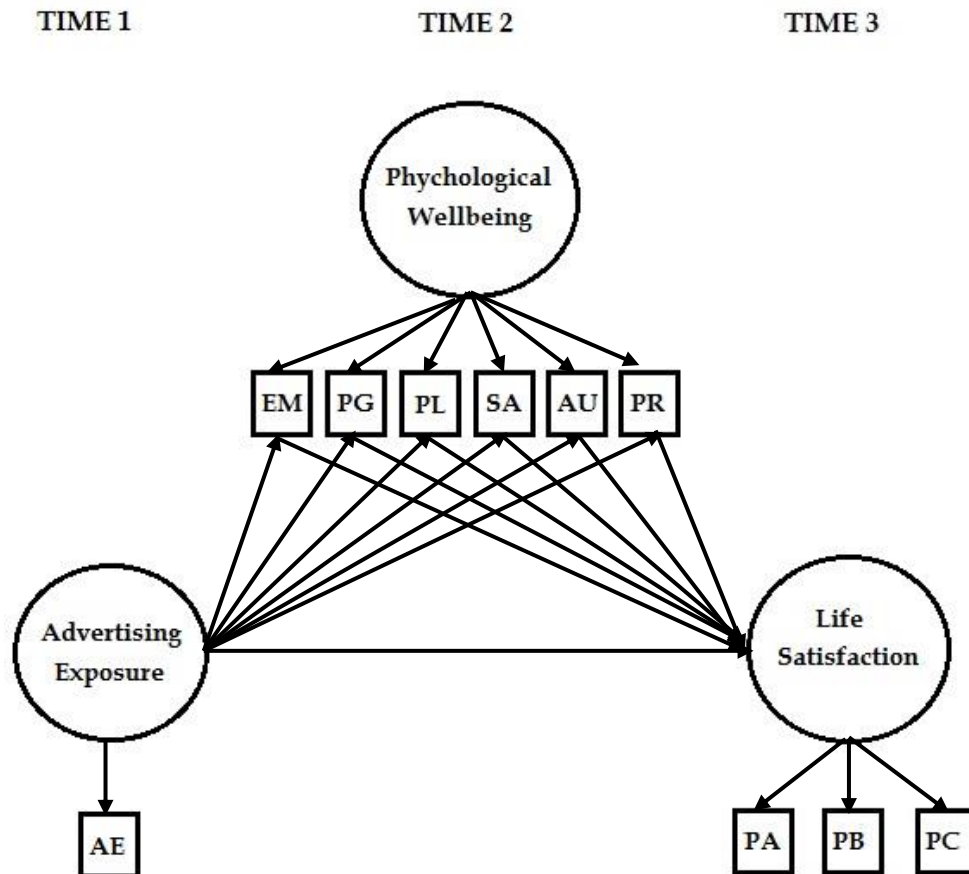


The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess model fit. An RMSEA score less than 0.05 and a CFI value more than 0.95 indicate an excellent model fit. A CFI score between 0.90 and 0.95 and/or an RMSEA value between 0.05 and 0.08 imply an adequate fit (Kline, 2005).

**Figure 1: Mediation a 1 Model Used to Estimate the Causal Relations Between Children's Advertising Exposure, Overall Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction**



**Figure 2: The six aspects of psychological wellbeing – environmental mastery, personal development, purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships with others – as well as life satisfaction are estimated to be causally related to children's exposure to advertising using a mediational model.**



**Mediational Model for Overall Psychological Wellbeing**

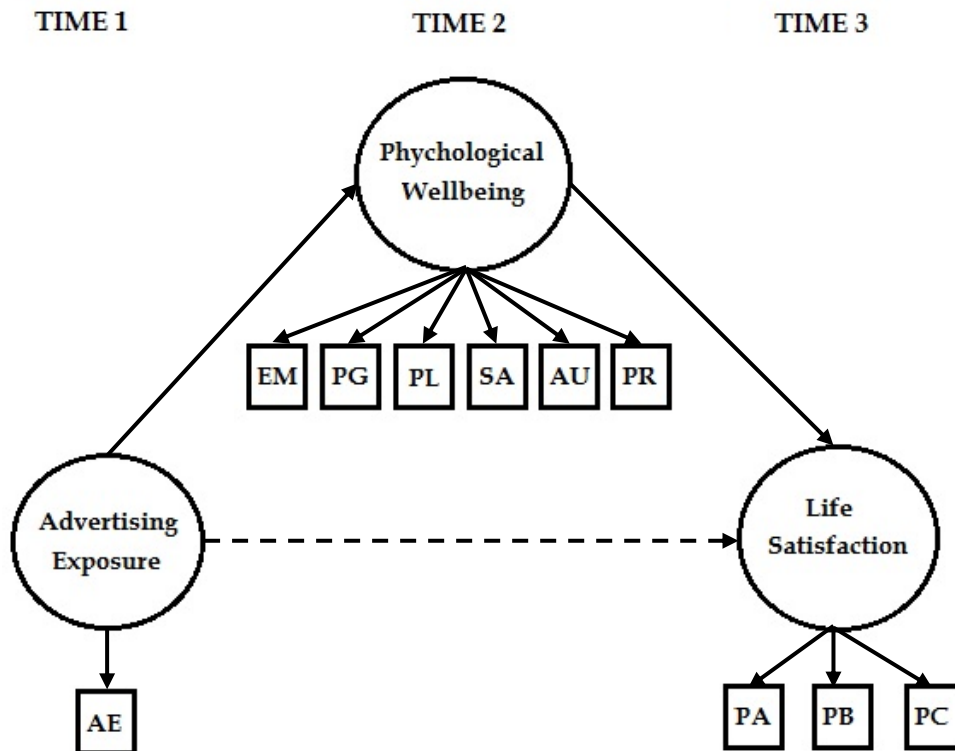
The initial model (Figures 1 and 3) demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with a chi-square value of  $\chi^2$  (DF = 33, N = 1,133) = 298.79,  $p < 0.001$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.92, and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.08 ( $p\text{-close} = 0.00$ ). This thorough causal model showed that children's exposure to advertising had a direct detrimental impact on life satisfaction, in contrast to correlation analyses (H1;  $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). It also verified that there was an indirect impact through psychological well-being. As expected, exposure to advertising was favorably associated with overall psychological wellness (H8;  $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), which was associated with life satisfaction (H10;  $\beta = 0.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The cumulative direct and indirect effects of children's exposure to advertising on life satisfaction were not significant, according to Boots trap analyses (N = 1,000) ( $\beta = 0.02$ , 95% CI [-0.05, 0.08],  $p = 0.513$ ).

**Mediational Model for the Six Dimensions of Psychological Wellbeing**

The adapted model, incorporating the six dimensions of psychological wellbeing as mediators (Figures 2 and 4), showed a strong fit to the data, with  $\chi^2$  (DF = 23, N = 1,133) = 126.63,  $p < 0.001$ , CFI of 0.97, and RMSEA of 0.06 (p-close = 0.02). According to this model, there was no significant direct correlation between children's exposure to advertising and life happiness (H1;  $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.695$ ). Advertisement exposure was found to positively predict environmental mastery (H2;  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), personal progress (H3;  $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ), life purpose (H4;  $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and autonomy (H6;  $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), according to the data. Advertising exposure, however, did not substantially predict either positive connections with others (H7;  $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.205$ ) or self-acceptance (H5;  $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.146$ ).

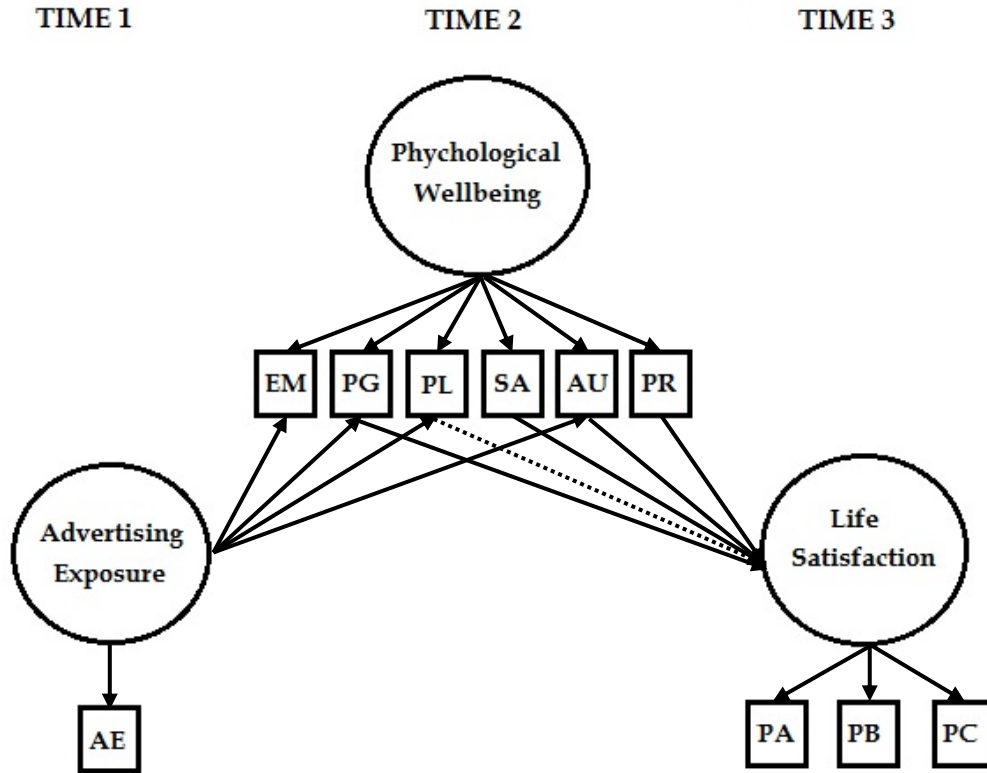
Personal growth ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-acceptance ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), autonomy ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), and positive relationships ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were all found to be significant positive predictors of life satisfaction in the analysis of the relationships between the wellbeing dimensions and life satisfaction. As anticipated, there was no significant relationship between environmental mastery and life happiness ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.275$ ).

**Figure 3: Observed Mediational Model with Overall Psychological Wellbeing**



**Note:** Solid lines represent positive effects and dashed lines represent negative effect. Non significant effects have been omitted.

Figure 4: Observed Meditational Model with the Six Dimensions of Psychological Wellbeing



Note: Solid lines represent positive effects and dashed lines represent negative effect. Non significant effects have been omitted.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS CONCLUSIONS

Children's exposure to advertising is ubiquitous, yet the impact of this exposure on their psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction remains a topic of debate. Advertising is often criticized for promoting materialism and fostering negative traits such as self-centeredness and disdain (Piachaud, 2007; Strasburger, 2001). Conversely, some argue that advertising can also promote positive qualities like pride and independence (Kunkel & Roberts, 1991). This study aimed to shed light on this debate by exploring the relationship between advertising exposure and life satisfaction.

Finding out if children's exposure to advertisements has a direct impact on life satisfaction was our initial goal. Our investigation found no significant direct association, which is in line with earlier longitudinal research (Oprea et al., 2012). Nonetheless, we discovered that exposure to advertising has a favorable impact on psychological health overall, which raises life satisfaction.

Our second goal was to use the six aspects of psychological health to investigate the indirect impacts of advertisement exposure. The findings showed that exposure to advertising had a

favorable impact on autonomy, personal development, environmental mastery, and life purpose. On the other hand, it had no discernible impact on healthy interpersonal connections or self-acceptance. Although life happiness was positively predicted by personal development, independence, self-acceptance, and healthy relationships, environmental mastery and life purpose did not match these predictions. Specifically, purpose in life negatively predicted life satisfaction, suggesting that advertising may prompt children to idealize the future, leading to dissatisfaction with their current circumstances (Strasburger, 2001; Piachaud, 2007).

### **5.1 Future Research**

The current study, conducted over a short six-week period, detected significant but modest effects of advertising exposure on psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction. To deepen our understanding of these effects, future research should consider longer study durations and broader variability in advertising exposure. This would help assess the stability of these effects and examine whether they vary across different age groups. It is also crucial to explore whether advertising affects self-acceptance differently in adolescents compared to younger children.

Future studies should also investigate individual differences within age groups, such as children's personality, developmental stage, and social context, which may influence media effects. Experimental research using methods like the think-aloud technique could provide further insights into how children interpret advertisements and the psychological values they perceive.

### **5.2 Findings**

An interesting pattern emerged from the analysis: a complex interaction of indirect effects was noted, even if the total direct effect of advertising exposure at Wave 1 on life satisfaction at Wave 3 was not statistically significant. In particular, Wave 2's measurement of general psychological well-being counterbalanced the detrimental direct effect of advertisement exposure with a beneficial indirect effect. Additional data analysis revealed that the association between advertisement exposure and life happiness was positively mediated by personal development and autonomy. On the other hand, life purpose turned out to be a negative mediator, indicating that advertising's impact is complex and differs depending on the psychological well-being dimension.

### **5.3 Implications**

This study contributes to the ongoing ethical debate about the unintended effects of child-directed advertising. While traditional discussions focus on the negative consequences, such as materialism and dissatisfaction (Watkins et al., 2016; Pollay & Gallagher, 1990; Pollay, 1986), our findings suggest that advertising can also have positive unintended effects. Specifically, advertising appears to promote environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy.

These findings offer a nuanced perspective on child-directed advertising, indicating that while it has potential negative consequences, it also contributes positively to children's sense of control, openness to new experiences, direction in life, and self-agency. This balanced view underscores

the need for continued research and consideration of both the positive and negative impacts of advertising on children.

#### **5.4 Social Implications**

The findings contribute significantly to the ethical discourse on child-targeted advertising, suggesting that such advertising may enhance children's perceived control over their environment, foster openness to new experiences, provide direction in life, and boost self-agency. These insights are crucial for policymakers, educators, and parents who are engaged in discussions about the impact of advertising on young audiences.

#### **5.5 Notes**

- [i] We used data from Wave 1 to estimate cross-sectional models in addition to the longitudinal models. The footnotes that follow provide specifics on the findings of these analyses. We decided not to include models including variables from all waves (i.e., advertising exposure, psychological wellbeing, and life satisfaction at Waves 1, 2, and 3) or cross-lagged paths in order to enhance statistical power and maintain the ideal 20:1 ratio of cases to free parameters (Kline, 2005).
- [ii] Using data from Wave 1, we observed similar effects. The model obtained an adequate fit by linking the error terms of personal growth and life purpose in order to compensate for shared measurement error (Kline, 2005):  $\chi^2(DF = 33, N = 1,133) = 278.17, p = 0.00, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.08$  with  $p\text{-close} = 0.00$ . It was discovered that exposure to advertising predicted both life satisfaction (H1;  $\beta = -0.14$ ) and overall psychological wellness (H8;  $\beta = 0.15$ ), with life satisfaction being predicted by overall psychological wellbeing (H10;  $\beta = 0.91$ ). At  $p = 0.000$ , every effect was statistically significant.
- [iii] Analysis of Wave 1 data yielded comparable results. The model, without any modifications, demonstrated a good fit:  $\chi^2(DF = 23, N = 1,133) = 183.08, p = 0.00, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08$  with  $p\text{-close} = 0.00$ . Advertising exposure was found to predict life satisfaction (H1;  $\beta = -0.07, p = 0.002$ ) and positively predicted environmental mastery (H2;  $\beta = 0.21, p = 0.000$ ), personal growth (H3;  $\beta = 0.08, p = 0.009$ ), purpose in life (H4;  $\beta = 0.14, p = 0.000$ ), and autonomy (H6;  $\beta = 0.13, p = 0.000$ ). However, it did not significantly predict positive relationships with others (rejecting H7;  $\beta = 0.07, p = 0.024$ ) or self-acceptance (rejecting H5;  $\beta = 0.05, p = 0.090$ ). Each dimension of psychological wellbeing was found to predict life satisfaction, with the following effects: environmental mastery ( $\beta = 0.07, p = 0.003$ ), personal growth ( $\beta = 0.15, p = 0.000$ ), purpose in life ( $\beta = -0.07, p = 0.004$ ), self-acceptance ( $\beta = 0.40, p = 0.000$ ), autonomy ( $\beta = 0.13, p = 0.000$ ), and positive relationships ( $\beta = 0.35, p = 0.000$ ).

#### **5.6 Originality/Value**

This study is groundbreaking in that it examines advertising's impact on psychological health and life satisfaction at the same time. The study establishes a standard for further research in this area by providing insightful information on the precise impacts of advertisement exposure through the use of a large sample and a longitudinal panel approach.



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