

Marketing's Voice for Kids

Associate Professor Elizabeth "Betsy" Moore of the marketing faculty is an expert on marketing to children and a pioneer in the study of "adver-gaming"—online children's games with brands embedded in them. Her 2007 article "The Online Marketing of Food to Children: Is It Just Fun and Games?" won the Thomas C. Kinnear/Journal of Public Policy & Marketing Award in 2010.

Much of her recent research has focused on efforts by the food and beverage industry to self-regulate marketing aimed at children. She has testified before the Federal Trade Commission and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science on this topic and contributed a chapter to the 2013 book *Advances in Communication Research to Reduce Childhood Obesity*, published by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Moore is also a popular teacher, having won three awards for teaching in the past two years: the 2013 Rev. Edmund P. Joyce, C.S.C., Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, the 2012 Blessed Basil Moreau Outstanding Undergraduate Professor of the Year Award, and the 2012 James Dincolo Outstanding Teaching Award.

Betsy Moore



Photography by Matt Cashore (ND '94)

Q: You earned a master's in elementary education at the same time you were studying for your Ph.D. in consumer behavior at the University of Florida. Why?

A: I was interested in bridging what I had learned in the business world with my longstanding interests in developmental psychology, or how children's thinking and social skills develop. I brought these seemingly disparate interests together by studying the impacts of marketing on children and families, which was the topic of my dissertation, as well as a number of research studies since graduate school. More recently, I've begun to focus on childhood obesity and marketing's role, both as a contributing factor and a key force for good in resolving it.

Q: For several years you've been a member of the St. Joseph County Reducing Obesity Coalition. Do you think advertising is to blame for childhood obesity?

A: It's extraordinarily difficult to show a direct causal link; however, there's a lot of research that shows that exposure to food advertising impacts children's preferences. Advertisers wouldn't be spending all this money if it weren't having an impact. Certainly parents have a responsibility, too, but it's hard for them because advertising is so pervasive.

Q: Since your study on adver-gaming came out, business organizations have voluntarily adopted some reforms on marketing to kids. Have they helped?

A: There have been over a hundred product reformulations. If you look at the sugar content in cereals, for example, they've dropped substantially since the inception of the (Better Business Bureau's) initiative. Food manufacturers have changed where they are placing ads. The products parents are most concerned about aren't being targeted directly at children anymore.

Q: How can parents teach kids to be smarter consumers?

A: I am just finishing a major review and study of the impact of parents and families on childhood obesity, so it's a topic I have spent considerable time thinking about. Clearly there are many contributors to the problem. A resolution will take sustained efforts from many stakeholders, including families, schools, communities, food and beverage marketers, the public health community and the government. The good news is that there are signs of progress such as product reformulation and the voluntary industry reforms. And parents should remember that there are always teachable moments, such as when you're in the store with your child. Be aware that he or she is watching the choices you make.