

Parents, Choose Goodwill Instead of the Till this Christmas

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With this season's top toys retailing up to £100 each, it's not too late for parents to ditch commercialism and go back to basics with their children, says Professor Isabelle Szmigin, an expert in consumer behaviour and marketing, from the University of Birmingham Business School:

"There is really little doubt that Christmas continues to get more and more pressured for parents. All you have to do is to watch some commercial channels from the middle of October to see that the range and price of toys for Christmas has expanded beyond belief.

Perhaps the most worrying is the price of toys for the very young - the all walking, singing, crying, baby dolls, puppies, elephants etc. that are now readily available if you have the money to pay for them.

"But while we can lay a lot of blame on the makers and marketers, as parents we also have to take some responsibility. I know as a working parent myself there are times when it is just easier to leaf through a catalogue all readily marked up for you by your children but really wouldn't we be better to take the time to say: 'no', to lay the ground rules for presents, e.g. one big present only?

"Just as we cannot expect teachers to be responsible for ensuring our children's' good behaviour, as parents we need to teach children the meaning of Christmas and perhaps more importantly in our credit led environment, the meaning of money. We need to tell them that some things really are too expensive and also I think we need to teach children from a young age that giving is what Christmas is all about - that means that they should be saving their pocket money, or making little presents for their nearest and dearest rather than only thinking about how much they can acquire.

"It is the parents that have to take the lead on this. Without wanting to sound like Scrooge there are so many ways that Christmas can be special without cluttering up the house with more plastic - cooking together, going to a show, making Christmas decorations, reading Christmas stories - and no it is not harking back to a non-existent golden age, we all have it in our power to make Christmas what we want rather than another commercial extravaganza."

Ends

For further comment from Isabelle please contact:

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Notes to Editor:

Isabelle Szmigin has published in a wide range of academic journals including Psychology and Marketing, The European Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Marketing Management and the Journal of Consumer Marketing. She is on the editorial advisory board of the International Marketing Review and has acted as guest editor on Psychology and Marketing and The Journal of Marketing Practice. Her research interests lie in the area of conceptualising consumer behaviour and also services and relationship marketing. Her book: Understanding the Consumer examines the complexity and unpredictability of consumers in the marketplace of the twenty first century. Isabelle has worked in industry and in the financial services sector and retains many contacts in financial services due to her current research in services and relationship marketing. She is currently visiting Professor to the University of Limerick where she is working with colleagues in the areas of relationship marketing and consumer attitudes to credit.

Isabelle is a full member of the Market Research Society, and a member of the British Psychological Society, the Academy of Marketing, Association for Consumer Research, the Academy of Marketing Science and the Higher Education Academy

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