

Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship

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When it comes to children's television programming, Nickelodeon is the 800-pound gorilla on the block. A division of Viacom International, its 24/7 broadcasts via satellite are considered not only the most successful producer of children's programming, but the most successful cable network in history.

In *Kids Rule!*, Banet-Weiser, associate professor of communication at the University of Southern California, thoughtfully explores the relationships between children, media, citizenship, and consumerism, placing these within the historical context of the 1980's and the growth of cable programming. More importantly, she examines the complex balancing act that Nickelodeon has maintained between these categories. Banet-Weiser writes, "Quite simply, Nickelodeon changed the children's television landscape, and ushered in a new way of marketing to kids that appealed to both children and adults, even while emphasizing the differences between them... Nickelodeon, in short, is a media demonstration of the politics of being a consumer in a brand-dominated culture."

The six chapters cover consumer citizenship, network history, branding and marketing, gender and feminism, race, irony, and camp in Nickelodeon's animation programming. The book is at its best when explaining the inherent dualism of Nickelodeon's culture. How, for instance, a network that has included prominent feminism (girl power) and an equally impressive commitment to racial diversity, can be seen as embedding both of these positive advocacies squarely within consumer culture—in effect using these attributes as a marketing and branding strategy. Banet-Weiser illustrates the manner in which Nickelodeon gives children empowerment through a refreshingly even-handed treatment of racial and gender diversity, a diversity tinged with ambivalence, but far ahead of the other networks in its advocacy.

With great clarity the author succeeds in taking the concept of consumer citizenship for children out of the realm of theory and into a real world of consumerism and marketing. *Kids Rule!* illuminates the manner in which this hugely successful network has transformed the former wasteland of children's programming into a community of juvenile citizens.

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