

Banet-Wiser, S. (2007). *Is Nick for kids? Irony, camp, and animation in the Nickelodeon brand. Kids rule! : Nickelodeon and consumer citizenship.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Synopsis

The author discusses the history and evolution of the Nickelodeon brand. She notes that this channel, unlike any others at the time, was dedicated to children's programming 100% of the time. She explains how Nickelodeon challenged the view on children's programming at the time by seeing children as consumer citizens and by rejecting toy-based programming and instead utilizing creator driven programming. She also noted that the brand's identity (us vs. them) was also its marketing strategy. Nickelodeon claimed to represent and respect kids, but it did not simply sell this rebellious feel to children alone, it also marketed to a transgenerational audience of both kids and adults. She notes that to market to both audiences and to others, its shows utilized double coded content, which often featured ironic humor, irreverence, camp, self-reflexive humor, and kitsch. She demonstrates the aforementioned ideas by discussing three specific examples – *Ren & Stimpy*; *SpongeBob Squarepants*; and *The Fairly Odd Parents*.

Key Concepts

- **Double coding:** “where a program has at least two levels of “code” to its logic so that it appeals to different audiences, such as adults and children, or heterosexuals and gay people” (p. 181).
- **Camp:** “is a style that is predominantly about artifice and exaggeration and exists in tension, not in agreement, with consumer culture, and affiliated with homosexual culture” (p. 191).
- **Creator Driven Animation:** “animated shows with new and original storylines” seen as a “rebellious, antiestablishment move” (p. 185).

Key Quotes

- “According to Nickelodeon logic, if adults are sometimes not stuffy, just as children are sometimes not innocent and naive, it proves (or disproves) nothing about the essential nature of adulthood or childhood; it proves only that adults and kids can play at being each other” (p. 180).
- “So many cartoons are produced based on licensed toy characters...Nickelodeon cartoons, in contrast, often critique the very context in which they are aired, poking fun at toy gimmicks and consumer culture” (p. 181).
- “Nickelodeon, where the line between play and seriousness, irony and earnestness, and consumerism and citizenship is deliberately blurred and therefore made all the easier to interpret from the logic of a consumerism that makes everything saleable” (p. 210).

Essential Question

- How might Nick's marketing strategy be immoral or unethical, specifically in relation to how it sells to children?