



# The impact of online marketing on children's behaviour

Results of a European  
Commission study

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**DG Justice and Consumers**



## Objectives of the study

- Identify the most common, questionable online marketing techniques that children are exposed to
- Test and assess the influence of sophisticated marketing techniques on children and their behaviour
- Investigate whether parents recognise and understand the implications of online marketing, and how they regulate the online activities of their children
- Map policy interventions in Member States and at EU level to alleviate children's vulnerability to online marketing



## Research method

### **Preparatory phase:**

- Systematic review of literature
- Review of legislation and regulatory framework
- In-depth analysis of games

### **Main phase:**

- Focus groups with children and parents
- Survey with parents
- Behavioural experiments with children

Preparatory phase covered EU28 + Norway and Iceland

Focus groups and survey in 8 countries: ES, IT, FR, PL, NL, DE, UK, SE.

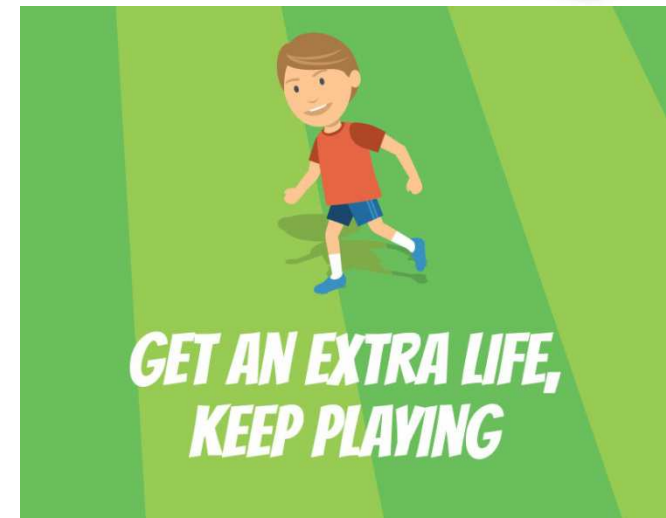
Two behavioural experiments in NL and ES.

## Results

# Mapping of games

In-depth review of 25 of the most popular online games:

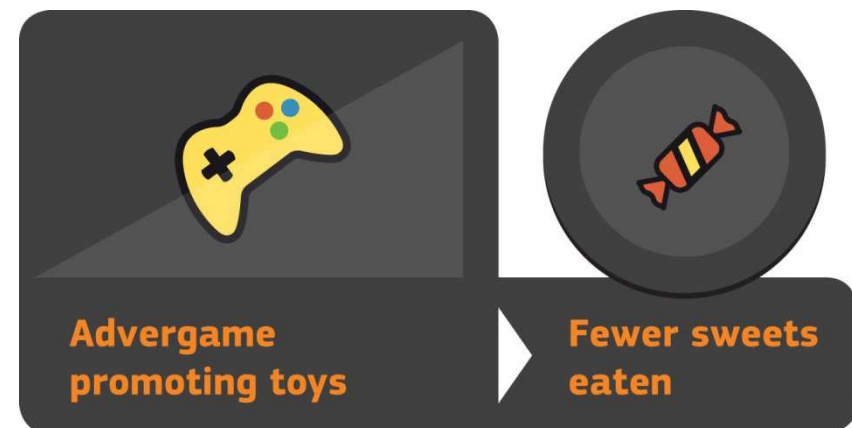
- Embedded or contextual advertisements in all advergames, all social media games and half of the games provided through popular application platforms
- Other common features were in-app purchases and prompts to extend game play



## Results

# Effects of embedded advertisements

- Playing a game that promoted snacks increased children's snack consumption significantly more compared to playing a game that promoted toys
- Embedded advertisements have a subliminal effect on children – they affect children without them being aware of it

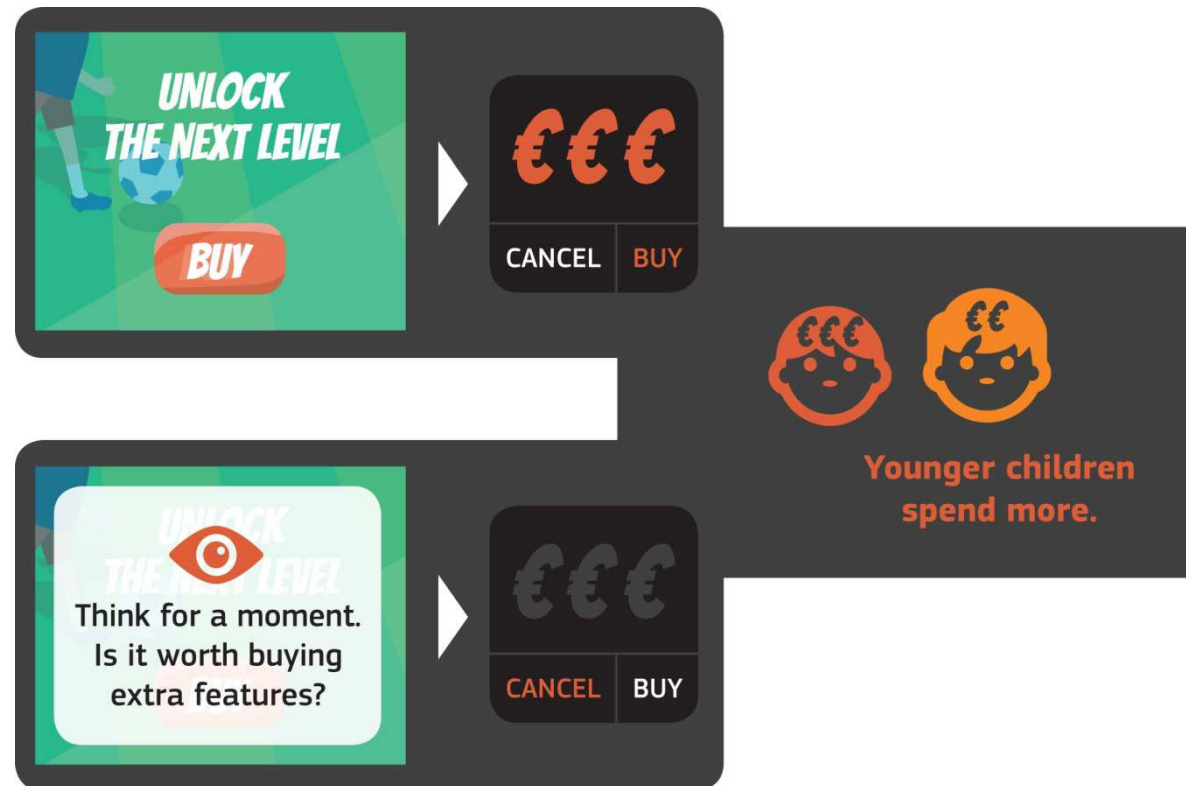




## Results

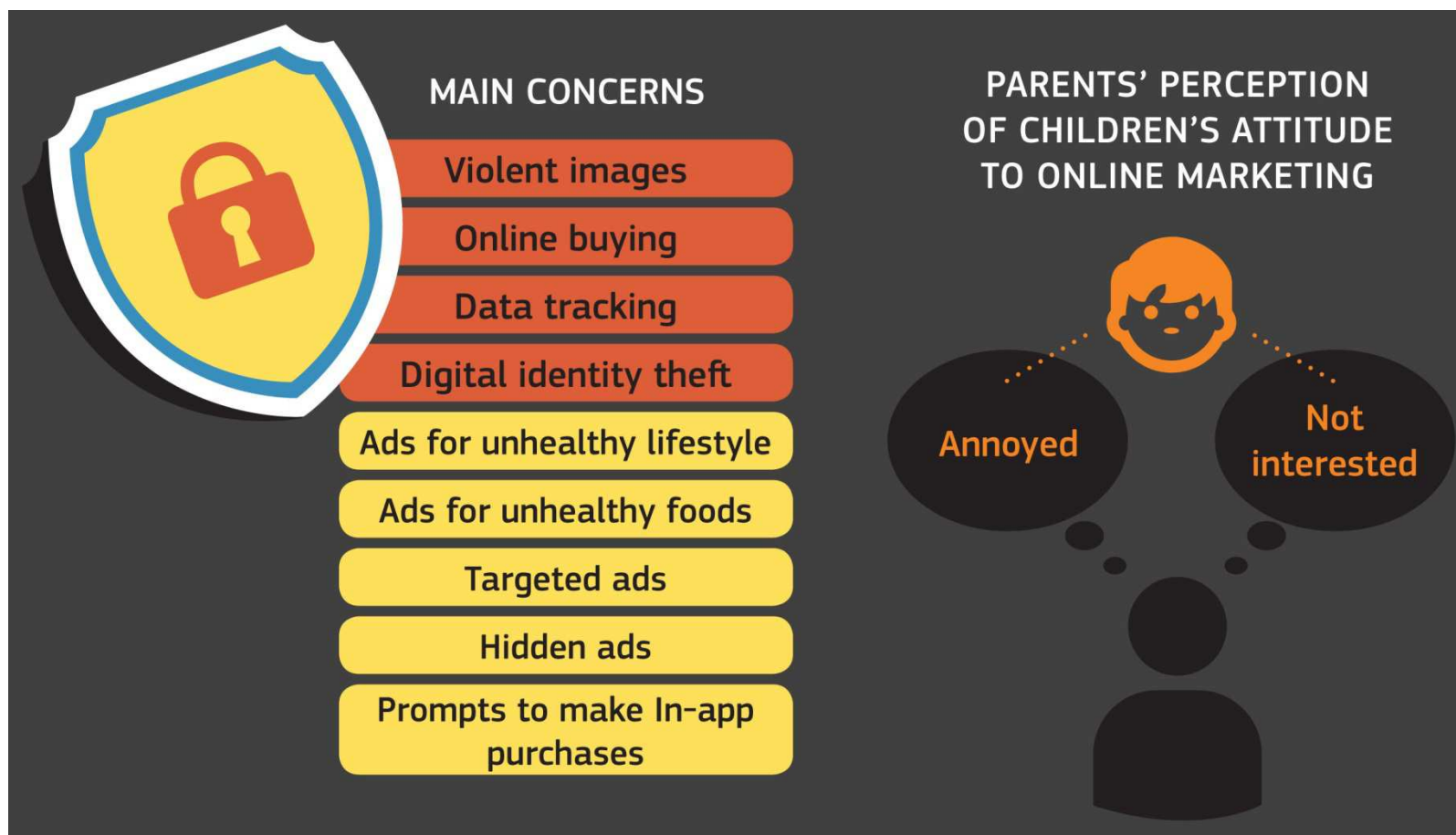
# Effects of prompts to make in-app purchases

- Prompts to make in-app purchases have significant impact on children's purchasing behaviour
- Younger children are particularly vulnerable
- Protective measures targeting children directly may reduce spending



## Results

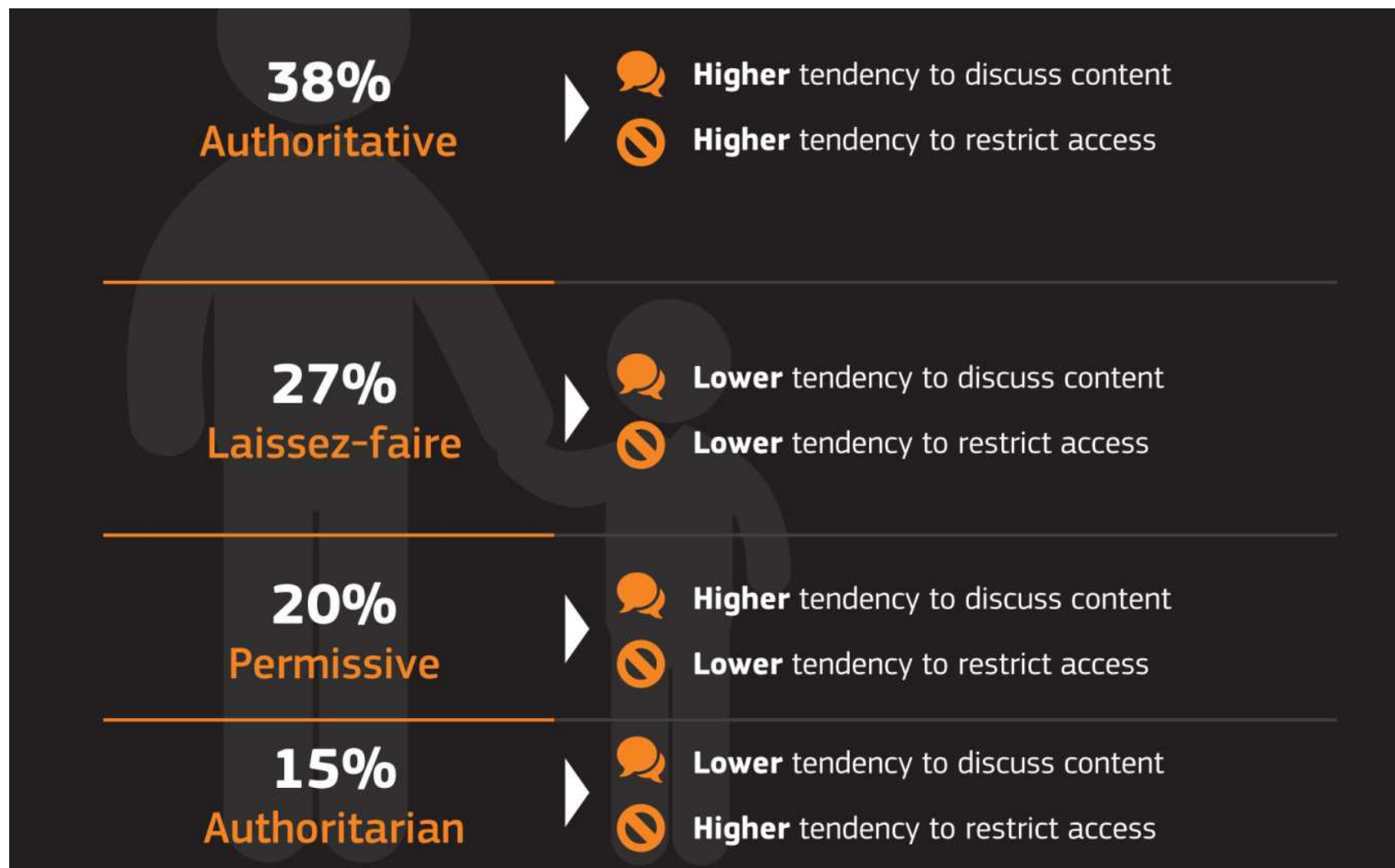
# Parental protection





European  
Commission

## Results





## How is this study useful?

- Confirms the need for a strong and harmonised protection of children as consumers

### Informs:

- the revision of the UCPD Guidance
- The ongoing review of EU consumer and marketing law
- The proposed Directive on Audiovisual Media Services (AVMSD)
- Enforcement of consumer rights

