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Media release

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Mobile phones – commercialising childhood

Young children are being increasingly targeted by mobile phone manufacturers according to the Australia Institute.

In a research paper entitled *Mobile Phones and the Consumer Kids*, Christian Downie and Kate Glazebrook say mobile phone manufacturers are increasingly devoting special attention to ‘tweens’ - children aged between six and 13 - in attempts to develop brand loyalty for life.

“This is another example of the pressures being put on young children to consume and to compete with their peers for expensive consumer goods from a young age, Mr Downie said.

“It is an ethos that is not only harmful to childhood development but, in the case of mobile phones, very costly. A leading Australian banker has labelled mobile phones ‘a debt trap for our kids’.”

Drawing on data from Roy Morgan Research’s Young Australians Survey, the paper finds:

- Mobile phones are marketed to parents on security grounds, but most children who own them are motivated by status and aesthetics in their purchasing decision.
- Fifty-three per cent of tweens believe the brand of their phone is important and 62 per cent believe that the way the phone looks is important. Sixty-one per cent of child mobile phone owners want the latest technology and features and 54 per cent plan to upgrade their phone.
- As phones become more expensive and children are encouraged to use phones to download the latest ringtones, games and videos, the costs rise.
- Of children who own mobile phones, almost one in five say they spend too much on their mobile phones; and even more of their parents agree.