



Decision Factors in Purchasing Denim Jeans: Comparison of Teens and College Students

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A pair of denim jeans is a daily fashion item that almost every teen and college-age individual owns and wears on a regular basis. The population of teens born between 1994 and 2010 is estimated to be more than 23 million and is the fastest growing segment in the apparel industry (Schrorer, 2012). Recent research (Setlow, 2000) has shown that apparel companies are targeting this growing population as they have large discretionary spending power. Based on observational studies, the lifestyle of current teens is very similar to college-age individuals in that they grew up with digital technology and they prefer to communicate via text messaging and social networking such as Twitter and Facebook (Berk, R. 2009; Callegari, 2010; Roche & Williams, 2006).

According to a recent study by Callegari (2010) on social networking, the impact of social media on teens is much greater compared to previous generations as they can easily get trend, fashion, and media updates from one another through various types of social networking platforms. Marketing companies and retailers have utilized these social media platforms in order to capture the attention of these consumer populations.

Traditionally marketing campaigns have differentiated between teens and the college-age population, based on the premise that teens are not as financially independent as their college-age peers. However, research has demonstrated that the teens actually have larger spending power and more discretionary income due to limited financial responsibilities. Marketing teens and college students is substantial, and understanding their unique communication styles through social media is essential in appropriately marketing to this segment of the consumer market.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to provide insight into current social media influences and purchasing power of the population. Due to the similarity in environment that teens and college students grew up in, it was necessary to compare these two groups. This research aimed to investigate the teens and college-age students' decision factors and influences on what denim items they purchase.

Methodology

A random sampling of 163 females responded to a set of questionnaires. The survey consisted of 32 questions pertaining to internet media influences (e.g. social media internet, TV, magazines), influence of people (e.g. friends, family, celebrities, no influence), shopping places (e.g. online, department, discount, retail store, specialty store), and purchasing decision factors (e.g. fit, cost, brand, style, and color) on decision-making related to purchasing selection.

Descriptive statistics were used to compare frequencies for each variable: age groups, influences, and decision factors. Age groups were divided into two different generation groups: 48 % high school age participants attending middle and high schools (age 11-17 in 2012) and

52% college age participants (age 18-30 in 2012). Contingency tables and Chi-square test with Likelihood ratio were used at 95 % confidence level to find the following significances between teens and college students: internet/media influences, influence people, and decision factors.

Results

In this study, only 4% of participants identified that Internet media influences their decisions to purchase a pair of jeans. While 31 % of college students stated that TV had significant influence, only 14% of teens identified TV as an influence on the apparel item they purchased (chi-square value of 9.451 with p-value of 0.05). Even though they spend many hours surfing the Internet and watching TV, fashion magazines had significantly greater influence on both generations with teens (31 %) and college-aged participants (34%) reporting they were more likely to purchase fashion jeans found in magazines compared to TV and internet influences.

Decision factors were not significantly different between the two groups (chi-square value of 3.673 with p-value of 0.299). 38.5% of teens and 42.4 % of college students rely on personal preference as opposed to influence of others (chi-square value of 7.570 with p-value of 0.056). They reported slightly different opinions about the influence of other people in that college students reported higher influence of friends and celebrities on apparel choices compared to high school students, who reported family being a bigger influence (21.8%). Celebrities were shown to be the least influential on purchasing decisions in both groups, which may be contradictory to most apparel company's celebrity marketing strategies.

When teens select and purchase an outfit, they consider the following factors: fit 69%, cost 18%, brand 9 %, and color 4%. Results were the same as college students in that fit was the main factor for both generations in making decisions to select or reject purchasing apparel. However, teens expressed more concern about fit around the waist (18%) and thigh (10.3%) compared to college students (chi-square value of 23.622 with P-value of 0.001).

In conclusion, the characteristics of current teens are very similar to college students in that they use Internet social media for resources related to trends and fashion. However, Internet social media does not impact teens' or college students' decisions to select or reject buying apparel and current fashion. We found that the most important factor in determining preference was "fit". While there were small variations in decision-making influence between teens and college-age participants, both groups identified "fit" as the most important factor when purchasing denim jeans. Thus, denim manufactures may benefit from focusing on quality of fit, social media influences and purchasing power of the population.

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