



## Fashion Change Agent Qualities among Tweens

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Today, children are socialized as consumers at a younger age than any previous generation (Ekström, 2007). Dual working households and one-parent families can result in parents having less time, which creates a need for the child to play a larger role in household responsibilities, including making consumer decisions (Harper, Dewar, & Diack, 2003). The rapid pace of technological growth often leaves children savvier than their parents. It is becoming common for children to assist the family in making consumer decisions by gathering information and researching products (Ekström, 2007). The market of “sub- or preteens” as new group was first appeared in the 1950s and is referred to as “tweens” (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2009). Definitions of tweens vary in age range, but they are typically children from ages 7 to 12, sometimes as old as 13 or 14 (Brock et al., 2009). While the potential of this market has been undervalued, it has been found that tweens are aware of fashion trends, have money to spend, and feel confident about and enjoy making buying decisions (Grant & Stephen, 2005).

Fashions are adopted and diffused throughout a social system (Sproles, 1979). Based on their role in the adoption and diffusion process, consumer groups can be identified into four groups: fashion opinion leaders, fashion innovators, innovative communicators and fashion followers (Workman & Johnson, 1993). Opinion leaders, innovators and innovative communicators are the groups that encourage the diffusion process and can be referred to as fashion change agents (FCAs) (Workman & Johnson, 1993). A later study by Workman and Kidd (2000) added fashion innovativeness and need for uniqueness as qualities of FCAs.

Despite the media’s interest in and the recognition of tweens as future customers, there is limited research on the experiences and behaviors of tweens in relation to consumption and fashion (Harper et al., 2003; Picher, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine FCA characteristics among tween girls’ ages 8 to 12 and their brand commitment, interest in design involvement (mass customization) and internet innovativeness.

An instrument was created to measure fashion change agent qualities (Hirschman & Adcock, 1978), internet innovativeness (Park, Burns & Rabolt, 2007), interest in design involvement (Choy & Lokers, 2004), and brand commitment (Mittal & Lee, 1989). Participants were recruited through the local school system, Girl Scout troops and other community programs. With the response rate of 20%, 53 girls participated in the study. Cluster analysis was conducted to test *H1*: Tweens’ can be segmented into distinct groups of fashion change agents and fashion followers, Independent samples t-tests were used to test *H2*: The different consumer groups among tweens’ will differ in brand commitment, *H3*: The different consumer groups among tweens’ will differ in internet innovativeness, and *H4*: The different consumer groups among tweens’ will differ in interest in design involvement (mass customization).

Results revealed that tweens were segmented into two groups in regards to FCA qualities. The first group consisted of 22 (41.5%) participants and showed high levels of FCA qualities, while 31 (58.5%) participants showed low levels of FCA qualities. In addition, the t-tests supported H2 ( $t = -2.93$   $P=.00$ ), H3 ( $t = -2.98$   $P=.00$ ), and H4 ( $t = -2.01$   $P=.05$ ).

This study sought to gain information about tween-agers. The results suggest that there are clearly some tweens that are more interested in fashion than others. Though the sample was limited in size, the percentage of FCAs in this group is higher than several other groups studied (Goldsmith, Flynn & Moore, 1996; Workman & Kidd, 2000; Workman, 2009). Additionally, tween's influence in the market should be reflected with their growing economic power and the percentage of FCAs in the group. Finally, utilizing internet, design involvement, and brand commitment should be considered developing marketing strategies to reach tweens.

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