



What Do Tweens Think about Fashion Apparel Brands?  
An Exploration of Tween's Perceptions about Brand Personality

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Introduction: When preparing advertisements directed towards consumers, it is imperative to know who the target market is and how they view specific brands. When targeting Generation Z tweens, it is crucial to understand who they are as consumers and what they look for in the products they purchase. The Generation Z segment can be described who was born from 1998 and will continue to be born until approximately 2018 (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2010). The word "tween" is a recent term defining the age gap between childhood and adolescence, ranging from ages 8 to 13 (Brock et al., 2010). Tweens, as they are referred to in the entirety of this study, have strong purchasing power for at least the next 50 years making them a desirable target market. Tweens are a large generation, with many opinions and ideas to share concerning what they think and how they feel, specifically about apparel brands.

With the ability to find many resources available to tweens through social media and internet, as well as, the desire to purchase, they are a viable market who needs to be understood by retailers and marketers. However, female tweens' perceptions' of specific brands is limited. There are limited studies focused on apparel brand image as interpreted by female tweens. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine how female tweens perceive specific apparel brands and if their perceptions affect their purchase intention at those apparel brands.

Literature Review: The term "tween" was created to pinpoint the age gap between children and teenagers (i.e., ages 8 to 13) in order to become a legitimate marketing segment (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1999). Tode (2001) describe tweens as a term related to young, pre-adolescent and adolescent tweens most often recognized as female. Boys are rarely described as being a part of the tween cohort and are marketed for different technologies or video games. Especially, female tweens want to be independent, yet desire to be dependent within a specific peer group or style tribe (Tode, 2001).

Brand personality has been researched by marketers for decades to understand how and why consumers purchase products. This concept of brand personality has been researched specifically with how brand personality affects a consumer's self, their ideal self and how consumers use specific brands (Klein, Klein, & Kernan, 1993). This concept comes from psychology explaining observers giving meaning to daily situations or occurrences.

Methodology: Qualitative inquiry allows for developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and is particularly useful when little is known about it (Hodges, 2011). In the case of this study, in-depth focus group interviews were the primary qualitative method employed in order to explore how tweens think and experience about apparel brands, and to better understand these experiences relative to behaviors (van Manen, 1990). Four apparel brands were chosen to

be discussed in focus group interviews. The study included three focus groups divided into more specific age cohorts. All participants were born from 2000 to 2005, aged from 8 to 13.

The three focus group interviews were both recorded and videotaped in order to let the researcher accurately transcribe the data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality. Transcriptions formed the basis of a thematic analysis of the interview data.

Interpretation: Five themes emerged from the tweens' responses based on the phenomenological interpretation of focus group interview data (van Manen, 1990). The themes include: *personifying brands with existing people, personifying brands who have opinions, dress as an outward expression of brand personality, connections to brands and age appropriation, and connections with brands' academic and work ethic.*

Discussion and Implications: This study found that female tweens have strong opinions when personifying apparel brands. Female tweens could assign characteristics and qualities from people they know and associate those towards different brands. In the focus groups, the tweens would talk about brands as a person and then relate the person to a friend they have at school or they know in their lives. Interestingly, female tweens will shop at brands to whom they feel they can relate. Another finding in the research was most female tweens believe apparel is an expression of personality. In the focus groups, tweens discussed how people with certain attitudes or characteristics dress a certain way.

This study is important to brands and marketers in order to understand how tweens personify brands and their assessment of the assigned personality characteristics. Tweens will shop at brands who they feel they can relate to on a friend and age appropriate level. An important finding came across in the research beneficial for brands and marketers aiming to target towards female tweens. Through personifying brands, it was found female tweens go through a mental process when deciding if they are loyal to a brand.

Suggestions for Future Research: A mixed method approach of qualitative and quantitative data could be useful and be able to have questionnaires with pre-mediated answers and to also hear feedback in person. Establishing a rapport prior to the research would also be useful in tweens feeling comfortable talking to the moderator and discussing different ideas regarding how they dress and why they dress a certain way.

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