



## Identifying Characteristics of the Tween Fashion Consumer Groups

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Twenty-one million tweens in the U.S. market account for \$43 billion in spending power. Apparel represents one of the primary purchase categories tweens want to spend their money (Cotton Inc., 2012). Tweens aged 7 to 14, especially girls, are very aware of fashion, enjoy apparel shopping, and feel confident in dressing themselves (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2010). While the tween market has been featured, the prevailing literature on tween consumers is limited, particularly information on tweens with regards to their fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership. Exploring characteristics of tweens' fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership would be useful to understand tweens' consumer profiles in this market. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine fashion innovativeness, fashion opinion leadership, Internet usage, interests in online co-design involvement, and brand awareness as key characteristics of the tween fashion consumer group.

Fashion adoption theory (Sproles, 1979) was employed to identify the tween fashion consumer group, because this theory emphasizes the role of awareness of new fashion and social issues in the decision-making process. Fashion consumer groups can be identified according to their role in adopting and diffusing new fashions: fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, innovative communicators, and fashion followers (Workman & Johnson, 1993). Based on the fashion adoption theory, it was hypothesized tween consumers, who exhibit fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership, may have relatively more knowledge and interests in fashion compared to others in their group; utilize more technology, especially Internet, for fashion information search and communication; prefer new products' innovativeness or have a stronger desire for new shopping experiences through sensory virtual product experience or co-designing in online apparel shopping; and possess an awareness of more fashion brands.

A survey was conducted with tween-aged girls in the Midwest region of the U.S., who were recruited through the snow ball sampling method. A total of 63 tween girls responded with a response rate of 30%. After cleaning the data, a total of 53 responses were deemed acceptable for data analysis. The mean age of the respondents was 9.96 years old ( $SD=1.20$ ). The majority of participants were European Americans (67.3%). The participants had an assent form signed by their parents prior to taking the survey, and were asked to evaluate fashion innovativeness, fashion opinion leadership, frequency of Internet usage, interest in online co-design involvement, and brand awareness. Established or modified scales from previous studies were utilized to measure the five variables. For example, the innovativeness and opinion leadership scale (Hirschman & Adcock, 1978) measured fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership. The internal reliabilities of the five variables were above .70, indicating a good reliability. A confirmatory factor analysis with a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure was conducted to test the hypothesized five factors, using LISREL 8.72. Utilizing PASW 19.00, a hierarchical

cluster analysis using Ward's method was also conducted to group the respondents into homogeneous sub-groups, based on their responses to the five variables. The squared Euclidian distance was chosen as the distance measure.

A model composed of 22 observed variables and five latent variables was tested. The test of the hypothesized five-factor model showed a satisfactory fit to the data within acceptable fit parameters:  $\chi^2(199, N=55)=227.00, p=.08$ ; RMSEA=.052; CFI=.95; NNFI=.94; IFI=.95. Results verified the five characteristics of the fashion group—fashion innovativeness, fashion opinion leadership, Internet usage, interests in online co-design involvement, and brand awareness—represented the tweens' fashion consumer group. Through cluster analysis, four tween fashion consumer groups were explored. Group 1, fashion innovator and opinion leader, accounted 26.4 % and exhibited the highest scores of all five characteristics. Group 2 (the largest, 37.7%), fashionable tweens, exhibited the second highest scores of the four characteristics, but not in interests in online co-design involvement. Group 3, fashion follower (20.8%), exhibited relatively high scores of three characteristics, but the lowest scores in fashion opinion leadership and brand awareness. Group 4, non-fashion innovator (15.1%), exhibited high scores in fashion opinion leadership and brand awareness, but the lowest scores in Internet usage and interests in online co-design involvement. According to a one-way between-groups analysis of variance, there was a statistically significant difference among the four groups on fashion innovativeness,  $F(3, 49)=21.05, p<.001, \eta^2=.56$ ; fashion opinion leadership,  $F(3, 49)=25.53, p<.001, \eta^2=.61$ ; Internet usage,  $F(3, 49)=13.46, p<.001, \eta^2=.45$ ; interests in online co-design involvement,  $F(3, 49)=20.99, p<.001, \eta^2=.56$ ; and brand awareness,  $F(3, 49)=25.14, p<.001, \eta^2=.61$ .

The findings explored the five characteristics, which may be applicable to determine the tween fashion consumer group in the context of online apparel shopping. This study also expands the application of fashion adoption theory to explain tween fashion consumers' adoption and diffusion of new innovative fashion. Additionally, this study highlights the role of tween consumers as fashion change agents, as well as provides an understanding of four distinctive groups among tween fashion consumers. This study suggests marketers and retailers for tweens' apparel market to develop more innovative, Internet-mediated, interactive, such as co-designing, and brand-oriented strategies for the tween fashion consumers.

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