

**A COMPARISON OF FASHION-BUYING BEHAVIOR
BETWEEN TEEN-AGE GIRLS AND MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN**

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by

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BACKGROUND

This paper is based on research sponsored by Research Group B of the Bureau of Business Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Michigan.

A group of department stores from seven midwestern states provides financial and logistical support to basic research into consumer behavior. This paper is one in a series of reports on this behavioral research.

ABSTRACT

This paper compares the personal shopping and buying behavior of teen-age girls and middle-aged women. The conclusion is that there are major differences between the generations, especially in the number and type of stores shopped, the predispositions brought to the market place, and the influence exerted on the purchase by both sales clerks and shopping companions. Both generations have a fashion awareness which is created by a diversity of stimuli. Newspapers play a significantly greater role in maintaining the fashion consciousness and in affecting the actual purchase of the middle-aged woman.

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Introduction

An observer of the American scene is well aware of the highly publicized generation gap. Certainly there has been an abundance of analysis and discussion concerning the philosophical and political differences separating those of the "Pepsi generation" from their parents. However, from a marketing viewpoint there are other important distinctions--including the differences in shopping and purchasing behavior. This paper examines those generational differences and similarities which were uncovered in a recent study of women fashion consumers.

The Study

The study consisted of two surveys conducted in four southwestern states. The first survey, which included a series of 75 in-depth interviews with retail sales personnel, management officials, and consumers, served as a guide to a mail survey of women consumers. The mail survey examined the differences and similarities between generations, with particular emphasis on comparing girls under 18 with women between the ages of 30 and 50. The responses of 355 consumers were analyzed, and all differences cited were tested at the customary .05 level of significance.^{1/}

^{1/} Samuel Richmond, Statistical Analysis (2nd ed.; New York: Ronald Press Co., 1964), pp. 205-7.

The Results

Fashion awareness

Both generations show a high degree of fashion awareness or consciousness--the teen-ager to a slightly higher degree--although the difference between the generations is not significant (Table 1). However, the methods used by the two generations to acquire that fashion awareness are very different (Table 2). Teen fashion consciousness is strongly influenced by fashion magazines, such as Seventeen. The older consumers (henceforth labeled "matrons") place far more importance on in-store shopping and newspaper advertisements or editorial content.

Influence of newspapers and shopping companions

The newspaper is a dominant force in shaping the fashion consciousness of the older woman and is also an influence in her personal shopping. The matron places a higher value on a store's newspaper advertising and makes more use of the newspaper in her purchase decision than the teen-ager does (Table 3).

In-depth discussions with teen-age girls revealed that 50 per cent discussed their shopping and purchasing plans with a friend--a member of their peer group--and 38.9 per cent discussed the purchase with their mothers. This latter response shows some prepurchase parental influence on the teen-age buying pattern. However, shopping companions exert much more influence among teen-agers than among matrons. The majority of teen-age girls regularly or often shop with another person; in contrast, the older consumer is decidedly a loner (Table 3). And the data shows that the teen-ager shops consistently (83.3 per cent) with a member of her peer group.

Stores shopped in

Each respondent was asked about her most recent purchase of one of several categories of clothing: pants suits, dresses, skirts, pants, blouses, or sportswear coordinates. She was asked how many stores she had visited before deciding to purchase one of these items. She was also asked to say how many stores were visited on the particular day of purchase. Responses indicated that the teen-age girl shops in more stores before coming to a purchase decision than does the older woman. However, she tends to spread out her shopping over a longer period of time; most teens shop in only one store the same day that the buying decision is made (Table 4). As reported earlier, though the teen-ager shops in more stores, she places far less value on in-store shopping as an influence on her fashion awareness (Table 2).

Matrons tend to focus shopping activity on two types of stores: the high-fashion women's specialty store and the full-line department store. The young shopper visits more stores, and more types of stores influence her decision-making process (Table 5).

A majority of both age groups report that they enjoy shopping for their clothes, but many more teen-agers indicate a high degree of shopping enjoyment (Table 6).

Influence of sales clerk

There is a major difference between the generations in our study when it comes to the influence exerted by the sales clerk. The teen-age girl is considerably less influenced by the sales clerk in her purchase decision than her older counterpart. She is also less influenced by the clerk's evaluation of the style and fit of the garment (Table 7).

The older group had a greater tendency to seek out a particular sales clerk before making a purchase decision although neither group does this habitually (Table 7).

Purchase preplanning

When questioned about her most recent clothing purchase, the teenager reported much less specific preplanning than the matron (Table 8). There is more of a tendency toward a generalized purchase plan, or even "impulse" buying, on the part of the teen-age buyer.

Correlated to this difference in preplanning is the diversity of predispositions brought to the market place (Table 9). The biases for or against specific colors is one aspect of the generational differences. The teen-age girl has a predetermined color preference--that is, having a specific color in mind--less frequently and exhibits less negativism toward any particular color. Middle-aged women definitely indicate colors they will not purchase.

The older group also have a stronger predisposition concerning the fabrics they have purchased most recently and the fabrics they will purchase in the future. The matrons come to the market place with a marked preference for specific fabrics and permanent press treatment of the fabric. The teen-ager, almost unanimously, will purchase clothing for herself that is not permanent press.

The in-depth interviews showed that teen-age girls tend to make their purchase decisions more on the basis of style and fit than on the utilitarian properties of a garment. However, teen-age purchases are exchanged more often after they have been re-evaluated by parents.

Most of the matrons and teen-agers did enter the market place with a predisposition toward matching accessories in their current wardrobe.

Indeed, significantly more teen-agers reported this predisposition, and those who did purchase clothing to match current accessories, especially shoes, did so mainly because of budgetary restrictions.

Pricing constraints and payment methods

An apparent contradiction exists in the consumer behavior of the teen-ager. First, she reports being under economic pressure and responds by matching some of her purchases to her current accessory wardrobe. However, when questioned about the economic constraints--specifically whether there was an upper price limit on the purchase--fewer teens reported such a restriction than did the older group. (Table 9).

Table 10 compares the payment methods used by teen-agers and matrons. Teen-agers pay cash for their purchases more often and use charge accounts less than their elders do. In spite of economic constraints, the teen-age girl uses the layaway method to circumvent pre-set price limits.

Finally, the teen is less influenced by having a charge account at the store where she makes her final purchase. Boutiques, which are frequented by the younger group, are less likely to have charge accounts than are other types of retail stores.

Point of purchase

Although the teen-ager visits many different types of stores, she makes most of her clothing purchases in only two types of stores--the fashion boutique and the discount house. The older group concentrates its shopping and buying in two types of stores also--the high-fashion women's specialty store and the full-line department store (Table 11). The fashion boutique is a new kind of retail store, located principally in shopping centers, which aims its merchandise, promotion, and décor toward the younger market. Though the teen-age girl does not shop solely

in the boutique, the youthful consumer has contributed significantly to their sales success.

Summary and Conclusions

There are notable differences in the purchasing and shopping behavior of teen-age girls and middle-aged women. The teen-ager shops for clothing in more stores and in more different types of stores. She enters the market place with less preplanning and fewer predispositions and relies less on newspapers and sales clerks in her decision process and more on her peer group. The teen-ager's fashion awareness is shaped primarily by fashion magazines, and she tends to shop with others.

The sales success of the boutique with the youthful consumers significantly affects competing retailers. A comparison of Tables 5 and 11 shows that other retailers get the teen-age girl inside their stores but are not very successful in selling to her.

The newspaper has little influence on the teen-ager's purchase decision; nor does it contribute to her fashion consciousness. Evidence also indicates that selling to the teen-age girl is not accomplished by sales clerks or fashion shows, but (judging from the shopping enjoyment) by point-of-purchase displays aimed at her specific tastes. Certainly she is different from the older woman--she is a more active shopper, she is more aware of current fashion, and she enters the market place with less predisposition toward either the place of purchase or the merchandise to be sold.

TABLE 1
Fashion Awareness
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Which of these statements best describes your fashion awareness?		
I read fashion news regularly and try to keep my wardrobe up to date with fashion trends	11.1	12.3
I keep up to date on all fashion trends although I don't always attempt to dress according to these changes	72.2	63.2
I check to see what is currently fashionable only when I need to buy some new clothes	5.6	6.1
I don't pay much attention to fashion trends unless a major change takes place	11.1	15.8
I am not at all interested in fashion trends	.....	2.6

TABLE 2
 Method of Fashion Maintenance
 (Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Method of keeping up on current fashions in women's clothing:		
Going to fashion shows	. . . .	.9
Reading fashion magazines	72.2	9.6
Reading other magazines	5.6	9.6
Reading fashion articles in newspapers	5.6	13.0
Looking at newspaper ads	. . . .	9.6
Going shopping	11.1	32.2
Discussing fashions with other women	. . . .	. . . .
Observing what other women wear	5.6	11.3
Asking a man what he likes	. . . .	2.6
Watching TV	. . . .	8.7
Listening to radio	. . . .	2.6

TABLE 3

Newspaper and Shopping Companion Reliance
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
How often do you look at store ads for women's clothing in newspapers?		
Regularly	38.9	50.4
Fairly often	16.7	19.1
Once in a while	22.2	27.8
Never	22.2	2.6
How helpful do you find newspaper ads when buying your clothes?		
Very helpful	5.6	23.5
Somewhat helpful	44.4	40.9
Of little help	11.1	26.1
Of no help	38.9	9.6
How often do you go shopping with others for clothing?		
Regularly	11.1	8.7
Fairly often	66.7	20.9
Once in a while	22.2	60.0
Never	.....	10.4

TABLE 4
Comparison of Stores Shopped In
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
<u>Total Stores Shopped In</u>		
1	27.8	31.5
2 or 3	16.7	36.9
4 or 5	22.3	18.9
6 or more	33.4	12.7
<u>Stores Shopped in on Day of Purchase</u>		
1	55.6	42.7
2 or 3	5.6	41.9
4 or 5	5.6	10.0
6 or more	33.4	5.4

TABLE 5

Type of Stores Shopped In
(Percentage of Consumers)

Type of Store	Teen-Agers	Matrons
J.C. Penney store	44.4	15.7
High-fashion women's specialty store	50.0	55.7
Fashion boutique	50.0	6.1
Independent department store	38.9	42.6
Discount house	33.3	13.0
Sears store	11.1	7.8

TABLE 6
Shopping Enjoyment
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Is shopping for your own clothes something you enjoy?		
Very much	88.9	40.9
Somewhat	11.1	35.7
Not much	....	16.5
Not at all	....	7.0

TABLE 7
Sales Clerk Reliance
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Helpfulness of sales clerk's evaluation of style:		
Very	22.2	42.1
Some	27.8	27.2
Little	5.6	11.4
None	44.4	19.3
Helpfulness of sales clerk's evaluation of fit:		
Very	27.8	40.2
Some	26.4	30.4
Little	1.4	8.0
None	44.4	21.4
Specifically sought out the clerk that sold her garment:		
Yes	5.6	21.9
No	94.4	78.1

TABLE 8
Purchase Preplanning
(Percentage of Consumers)

Which of the following describes your purchase?	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Planned to buy this garment before starting my shopping trip.	44.4	63.7
Had in mind the purchase of "something new to wear"--but not the particular type of garment I bought	27.8	15.9
Pure impulse purchase--did not plan to buy before starting out.	27.8	20.4

TABLE 9

Purchase Predispositions
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
Had a specific color in mind before starting shopping	22.2	35.1
Would not purchase certain colors	41.2	73.2
Had a specific fabric in mind before starting shopping	27.8	65.2
Garment purchased was permanent press	55.6	83.3
Would have bought if garment had to be dry-cleaned	38.5	32.0
Would have bought garment if washable, but not permanent press	93.3	34.3
Garment purchased did match accessories in wardrobe now	88.9	79.1
Had an upper price limit for purchase	55.6	69.0

TABLE 10
Method of Payment
(Percentage of Consumers)

	Teen-Agers	Matrons
How did you pay for this garment?		
Cash or check	66.7	57.0
Charge account	22.2	41.3
Other--layaway	11.1	1.8
Did you have a charge account in the store where you made the purchase?		
Yes	27.8	56.6
No	72.2	43.4

TABLE 11

Type of Store Where Purchase Was Made
(Percentage of Consumers)

Type of Store	Teen-Agers	Matrons
J.C. Penney store	11.2	7.6
High-fashion women's specialty store	11.2	43.0
Fashion boutique	33.4	6.4
Independent department store	10.0	29.1
Discount house	33.4	8.8
Sears store	1.2	5.1