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REFORMS IN CLOTHING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY TWEEN DUE TO THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN LIFESTYLE- AN INTEGRAL DESIGN APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an insight to the various literary works referring to the definition of “twens”, with a focus on the aspects affecting the tween’s behaviour. The paper would put forth various issues related to tween’s growth pattern, their choices and preferences and would also analyse the need to meet these preferences in clothing. Integral Design is a systemic approach where the solution is a part of the system and not on the surface. As the tweens reflect tomorrow’s society, this paper attempts to go deep into the system to widen the scope of inquiry and thus widen the scope of suggestive reforms in this direction. Keywords: tweens, behavior, consumer, self-perception, integral design



INTRODUCTION

The Indian society since time has followed a patriarchal family structure and many times, generations have stayed under the same roof. This family structure and the communication pattern between family members, has seen a paradigm shift in the past few decades. We now witness a nuclear family structure where each member is involved in individual activities with very little involvement of the other members of the family (M.Chaudhary, A .Gupta 2012). This segregation in activities reduces the communication time between family members which further affects the growth pattern of the tweens of today.

As the society formation transforms from a joint family to single parent or dual career families (Kaur & Singh, 2006), a lot of attention is given to children and a few researchers also title them as “dream children” and “trophy children” (Belch *et.al*,1985) This shift has further influenced the personal, emotional and psychological development amongst children (Sancheti. Y, 2009). As the children mature, influence from family reduces and affirmation from friends and peer group increases (Kernan,1973; Meyer and Andreson, 2000).

Over 50% of the population of India is below the age of 25 and over 65% is below 35 (census 2011, India). According to Census 2011, it is predicted that by 2020, the median age of an Indian citizen would be 29 years, in comparison to 48 in Japan and 37 for China. This surely gives a very strong direction to dwell into an indepth understanding of the cognitive growth pattern of young minds as that would lead to new product design thinking.

The purpose of this study is to decipher young minds and understand the multi-dimensional theories attached with self-perception and behaviour. The review has been further divided into the following key areas:

Origins of the word “tween”

Characteristics of “tweens”

Tween consumption

Origins of the word- “tweens”

Very often the term “generation” is used to distinguish or separate the cognitive and behavioural patterns of certain age groups from the others. In this reference, the “tween” segment, is marked as a subset of the X generation (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003).

The concept of subteen or preteen has its roots in the word teens (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). Teenagers, or the concept of teenage became popular in 1941 as a term coined by Madison Avenue (Quart 2003). This term encompassed a very vulnerable category, which grouped a cohort of individuals who were no longer children, but not reached adulthood (Hulan, 2007).

The next impact took place in late 1950’s when schools in United States added a “junior high” or “middle school” wing to separate the primary and senior high school (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). This social change contributed to the change in behaviours and further identification of the tweens age group (Hulan, 2007). The children in the “middle school” would attempt to differentiate themselves from the elementary schools and try to look more mature by impersonating their “high school” peers (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). Initially marketers and researchers used the



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word subteen/preteen. It was only in 1990s that people started considering the word “tween” (Cook and Kaiser, 2004).

Tweens are defined as “a person who is neither a young child nor an adolescent, one of an age in the range of 8-12 years (definitions.net) In the current scenario, the tweens of today are the first generation, who are born with a mouse in their hands and the numerous gadget screens as their window to the world (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003).

Characteristics of “tweens”

From the opportunists or marketers perspective, tweens have been categorised under four groups. This is in accordance to their product awareness and adoption. (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003)

Edges

Persuaders

Followers

Reflexives

Edges- these children hardly associate themselves as a part of being in the tween generation. They claim to be anti-fashion and have no particular brand following. They tend to be perceived as independent trendsetters. These children are the one’s who would recognise and use various products before everyone. (Horgan, 2005)

Persuaders- they are the most popular tweens. They are the one’s who have a constant urge to build their own identity (Siegal *et.al*, 2004) and thus adopt to new trends very fast (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003). They are the most sought after by the marketers in order to identify their needs.

Followers- They are the majority of tweens who follow the persuaders. They adopt to the styles that already exist and are very influenced by their peer group for various personal and psychological growth pattern.

Reflexives- This group of tweens are the ones who seek social acceptance (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003) and very often fail to gain popularity amongst peer group.

Tween consumption

Tweens of today have global address books and have their own parameters to decide private and public information (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003). Some have termed tweens as the V generation as they are so involved in technology (Fraser and Dutta, 2010). This generation is also described as an age group with the ideology-“I am what I consume and what I have ”(Gunter and Furnham,1998). Born with an exposure to at least 30,000 brands and having spent 20,000 hours in front of the TV, these children demand to be respected and be given enough freedom to make their choices (Lindstorm & Seybold, 2003)

Lindstorm and Seybold further shared the anagram KGOY- Kids grow older younger. This states that kids are maturing faster in term of physical and psychological aspects, in comparison to earlier decades. Some researchers believe that this theory is a result of change in lifestyle pattern and eating habits. A few also involve the role of television and media for information overload and adult imagery.

Tweens, are the first generation to practice independence on the internet and they do not need their parents or teachers for gathering information. This influx of free, convenient information has further boosted



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their confidence and independence. Tweens, not only govern their own consumption but also influence the family purchases directly or indirectly (Coffey and Livingston, 2004).

Way Ahead

Clothing, also referred as “second skin” (Horn & Gurel, 1981), is also a mode of expression and depiction of self identity, cultural influences, relationships and at times circumstances of life (Sancheti). When connecting clothing to tweens, it becomes a source of communication, differentiation, identity and peer acceptance (Lithel & Eicher, 1973).

This literature review, presents only a section of the review for tweens. There are many aspects that need further study in terms of understanding the tweens of India like their clothing behavior.

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