

MACEDONIAN TWEENS' BRAND AWARENESS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON FAMILY PURCHASING

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Abstract: The tween marketing segment has been gaining in popularity as a topic of study due to its phenomenal growth and buying power. Tweens (8 -14 year olds) represent a serious opportunity for today's marketers and a new type of audience that expands on three markets – a primary, an influential and a future market. The aim of this study is to contribute to the existing research by providing a valuable insight into the brand awareness of Macedonian tweens and their influence on family decision making process. The study is based mostly on Piaget's theory of cognitive development and the theory of social development. The survey was performed in the Republic of Macedonia on two convenience samples: 120 children (age: 8-14) and their parents, also 120. This research paper reveals that tweens exert strong influence on family purchasing decision, especially for products for their individual use. It also provides marketers with information about: factors that have greatest impact on brand awareness, stages of the decision making process where tweens are most influential and it discloses the positive correlation between the level of brand awareness and tween's influence on family's brand choice. It also shows that older tweens are more influential than younger and that parental perceptions of tweens' influence on purchasing decision differ from tweens' perceptions.

Keywords: tweens, brand awareness, influence, family purchasing decision

Introduction

Tweens comprise a new type of audience that expands on three markets – they buy for themselves, they impact their parents' purchases and they represent the future market of grown-up consumers. According to the results of one of the world's most extensive studies of tween attitudes and behaviors, this increasingly powerful and smart consumer group, in only one year, spent and influenced an unbelievable US\$1.18 trillion across the globe. That survey, reveals that 67% of all products and brands purchased by parents are heavily influenced by their kids, including big ticket items like luxury cars, phones and fashion.

Today's tweens live in a world of consumerism, surrounded by commodities and services that cater to their every need, bombarded with branding messages on a daily bases. Exposed to more than 8,000 brands a day (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003) they became extremely aware of the various brands and conscious of the products they use or consume. Technologically savvy, with access to media in unprecedented ways, global and exposed since birth to local and international trends, today's tweens are perfectly able to form clear brand preferences and to influence their parents' spending. In fact, recent studies have revealed that a substantial number of brands purchased by parents are so influenced by tweens that in some

cases they can be characterized as the primary decision makers.

Generational differences have been commonly used in market segmentation and niche marketing. A generation is defined by certain determinations such as dramatic events or shifts which form a common set of values within the generation. This paper is focused on the Tween segment, as a subset of the Z Generation - people born from 1995 to 2010. They influence the way their parents spend, including over 70% of family food choices and 80% to 90% of items purchased for them.

In the academic world, most researchers have defined tweens as 8 - 12 year olds (Andersen, Tufte, Rasmussen, & Chan, 2007), but some describe them more widely as 8 – 14 year olds (Maughan, 2002; Lindstrom, 2004). The term refers to the concept of being in-between a child and a teen. Tweens are sizeable direct market and at the same time, a market which companies hope to start early with brand loyalty. As a matter of fact, tweens offer a triple opportunity to marketers – “a primary market, an influencing market and a future market” (Norgaard et al. 2007). They are described as hyper brand conscious and peer influenced. Experts agree that they have a high brand awareness due to the fact that they are adolescents who are in the formation stages of their own identity (Dittmar, 2005). Public surveys reveal that 71% of the parents in the US, say they

solicit opinions from their kids regarding purchases (White, 2013).

But in order to be able to function as influencer and consumer, a child must be brand aware, capable of both brand recognition and brand recall (Macklin, 1996). Brand awareness is “associated with the strength of a brand node in memory, as reflected in a consumer’s ability to identify the brand under different conditions” (Keller, 2003). It is widely accepted that brand awareness contains two dimensions and is hierarchical in nature. The first dimension, brand recognition, involves a one-step cognitive process involving simple retrieval, while the second dimension, brand recall occurs when a consumer describes a brand-stimulus that is not physically present. Brand recall requires a higher level of cognitive processing, as a consumer must first search through and then retrieve the appropriate information from his long-term memory (Anderson & Bower, 1974). Many studies have shown that children develop awareness of brands from a very young age. By the age of six child can recognize approximately 200 different brands (McNeal, 1999). Around the age of eight, kids start recognizing brands even more and making independent purchases. (Sutherland, 2003)

This study aims to contribute to the existing research by providing a valuable insight into the brand awareness of tweens, their influence on the family purchasing decision-making and how their awareness and influence are correlated.

Generally, analysis of children’s influence on the purchase decision-making are based on the standpoint of a child (Singh & Aggarwal, 2012), or disclose child’s influence from the standpoint of parents (Úlger & Ülger, 2012). In this survey I followed both routes, investigating and comparing parental perceptions of children’s influence and children’s perceptions of their own influence. Studies that have included both children and parents as respondents have generally found that children attribute more influence to themselves than their parents attribute them (Mangleburg, 1990).

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Several theories guide the current study of children’s brand awareness and influence on family purchasing.

Cognitive development theory

Research has shown that age is an important factor in building brand awareness and shaping the brand knowledge of children (Blades et al., 2002; Götz, 2002; Henke, 1995). The importance of age has been attributed primarily to the cognitive development of children. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and Vygotsky’s theory of social development are probably the most cited frameworks for characterizing changes in cognitive abilities and describing the age-related differences of children as consumers. Piaget’s theory (Piaget, 1970) identifies four major stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor stage (up to 2 years of age) - learning is through motor and reflex actions; preoperational stage (2-7 years of age) - the beginning of symbolic thinking; concrete operational stage (7-11 years of age) - abstract thinking and rational judgment are developed and formal operational stage (11 years and over) - abilities of more complex thoughtful analysis and hypothetical reasoning evolve.

According to Vygotsky, social interaction is crucial for cognitive development. Child’s learning always occurs in a social context in cooperation with someone more skillful. The theory of social development compliments Piaget’s by focusing on the child’s social activities. It suggests that every function of child’s development occurs on two levels, social and individual. According to Selman (1980), a child goes through five stages of social development: egocentric stage (age 3 – 6 years) when a child has only one perspective – his own; social information role taking stage (age 6–8) when understands that people have different opinions, but still hasn’t developed the ability to think from another person’s perspective; self-reflecting stage (age 8–10) when a child is aware of different perspectives of other people and has already developed skills to consider these perspectives, without being able to consider other’s opinions at the same time as his own; mutual role taking stage (age 10-12) - child has skills and abilities for simultaneous consideration of multiple points of view and finally, social system role taking stage (age 12 and older) - child is able to relate different perspectives to social groups and systems he belongs to.

These theories are widely used as a methodological tool for sample description and employ age and gender as proxy variables for a child’s development with an argument that these demographic factors are the main causes of the type and extent of children’s influence on family purchasing.

Consumer socialization

Children consumer socialization is a long-term process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers and it takes into account the content, the processes and the changes in children's learning about the marketplace. Moschis and Moore developed one model of consumer socialization which identifies five influencing variables: socialization agents, social structural variables, age/life cycle, learning processes and learning properties. According to it, the relationship between the learner and the agent (a child and a parent) is continuous, reciprocal and interchangeable (Ekström, 2007) and affected by cognitive and social learning.

Family decision-making

The basic premise of the theory of decision making is that given a set of possible alternatives, a rational person will attempt to make a decision that would lead to the best available outcome. In the decision making process, the decision-maker: defines and recognizes the problem; searches for the information; evaluates the alternatives; makes the final decision and performs an action. But the nature of family decision-making process differs from the individual decision making (Lackman and Lanasa, 1993), because family is a group where decisions are joint and depending on the situation, members of this group perform various roles: initiator, influencer, decision-maker, buyer and direct consumer (Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980), that vary depending on decision-making stage, life-cycle pattern, family communication style, cultural specifics and product category.

Purchasing decision-making process

The Five Stage Model initially proposed by Cox et al. (1983) is considered to be one of the most common models of consumer decision making process and involves five stages: recognition of need, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation. Studies vary on what stage of decision making tweens are most influential (Prince & Martin, 2012). According to some, the initiation stage, is where they dominate (Belch et al., 1985), while others believe that it is the choice stage (Lee & Beatty, 2002).

Product categories

When it comes to product category, several studies have found that children have significant impact on family decision-making across all product categories (Shergill et al., 2013; Martensen & Gronhøldt, 2008), but are more influential concerning less expensive products of which they are the prime users and are of their interest (Martensen & Gronhøldt, 2008; Aslan & Karalar, 2011; Dikčius et al, 2014), while the study conducted by Millward Brown, surprises us with the finding that close to 80% of all brands purchased by parents are controlled by their children and 67% of all car purchases are also determined by the children – not the parents. (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003).

With all this in mind, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1 aims to verify whether brand awareness rises with age.

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between the age of children and their level of brand awareness.

H2: Tweens are more aware of foreign than of domestic (Macedonian) brands.

Friends, parents, Internet and social media, TV ads and celebrities were identified as factors of tweens' brand awareness.

H3: "Internet and social media" is the factor with a greatest impact on tweens' brand awareness.

H4 investigates the differences between younger and older tweens' level of influence for both family-consumed and child-consumed products.

H4: Older tweens have stronger influence on family purchasing decision than younger tweens for both categories of products.

H5: There is a significant positive correlation between the level of tween's brand awareness and the strength of tween's influence on family's brand choice.

H6: Tweens' influence on family purchase decision-making is stronger for child-consumed than for family-consumed products.

H7: Tweens' influence is greatest in the problem recognition stage of the family purchasing decision making process.

With some exception (Moschis and Mitchell, 1986) that included the alternatives evaluation stage, earlier studies examining children’s influence

across decision stages have used a three-stage model: problem recognitions, information search and choice. In this study four-stage model was used.

H8 tends to verify if there is statistically significant difference between parents’ perception of tweens’ influence and tweens’ perception of their own influence.

H8: Tweens attribute more influence to themselves than their parents attribute to them.

Research methods

The survey was performed in the Republic of Macedonia on two purposive samples: 120 children (age 8-14) and 120 parents (one parent of each tween-respondent). The children sample was made up of 72 males and 48 females. Of them 56 younger (8 –11 year olds) and 64 older tweens (12 - 14 year olds). Tween’s questionnaire was separated in two parts, the first one regarding their brand awareness, the second one – their influence on family purchasing. To examine children’s awareness the first section of the first part of questionnaire included pictures of 50 foreign and

domestic brand symbols, logos, patterns and characters. Children were asked to mark the picture that looks familiar to them (brand recognition), than to write down the name of the brand and finally to write down brand names for every product category (brand recall). The second part asked respondents to indicate their influence on purchase decision for different product categories and stages, on a 5 point scale. Parents’ questionnaire consist of 19 questions on child’s influence on family purchasing, corresponding to tweens’ questions. Products were represented in two categories: family-consumed (for the use of the whole family) and child-consumed (for the individual use of the child).

Initial analysis showed satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha level 0.881.

Findings

It was expected that brand awareness would rise with the age. The bivariate analysis revealed significant positive correlation between tweens’ age and level of brand awareness (Pearson’s $r = .354$, $p = .000$).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.881	.876	19

Table 2: Correlations between tweens’ age and brand awareness

		age	awareness
age	Pearson Correlation	1	.354**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
brand awareness	Pearson Correlation	.354**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Paired samples t-test ($p = .095$) revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between tweens’ awareness of foreign and tweens’ awareness of domestic brands.

A repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction determined that mean level of influence differed statistically significantly between the different factors of influence on tweens' brand awareness ($F = 20.162, p = .000$). Post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that the Internet and social media have

stronger influence than the other factors ($M_{int.sm} = 3.92$ vs. $M_{TV.ads} = 3.13, M_{friends} = 2.99, M_{parents} = 2.78, M_{celebs} = 2.61$). The impact of TV-ads differs significantly from the impact of celebrities. There was no other significant difference among these factors.

Table 3: Tweens' awareness of foreign vs. domestic brands - Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	foreign brands awareness vs. domestic brands awareness	.87500	5.69470	.51985	-.15436	1.90436	1.683	119	.095

Table 4a: Factors influencing tweens' brand awareness - Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Measure: factors influencing brand awareness							
	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
factor	Greenhouse-Geisser	119.097	3.582	33.245	20.162	.000	.149

Table 4b: Factors influencing tweens' brand awareness- Pairwise Comparisons

Measure: factors influencing brand awareness							
(I) factor	(J) factor	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1.Internet and Social media	2	.931*	.133	.000	.551	1.311	
	3	1.310*	.159	.000	.856	1.765	
	4	1.138*	.169	.000	.654	1.622	
	5	.784*	.175	.000	.283	1.286	
2.Friends	1	-.931*	.133	.000	-1.311	-.551	
	3	.379	.158	.177	-.072	.830	
	4	.207	.163	1.000	-.259	.673	
	5	-.147	.159	1.000	-.602	.309	
3.Celebrities	1	-1.310*	.159	.000	-1.765	-.856	
	2	-.379	.158	.177	-.830	.072	
	4	-.172	.168	1.000	-.652	.307	

	5	-.526*	.171	.026	-1.015	-.037
4.Parents	1	-1.138*	.169	.000	-1.622	-.654
	2	-.207	.163	1.000	-.673	.259
	3	.172	.168	1.000	-.307	.652
	5	-.353	.136	.105	-.743	.036
5.TVads	1	-.784*	.175	.000	-1.286	-.283
	2	.147	.159	1.000	-.309	.602
	3	.526*	.171	.026	.037	1.015
	4	.353	.136	.105	-.036	.743

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Table 5: The influence of younger and older tweens for family-consumed and child-consumed products. Independent Samples Tests

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Tweens' influence for family-consumed products	Equal variances assumed	.040	.842	-3.013	118	.003	-.58036	.19260	-.96176	-.19896
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.976	107.345	.004	-.58036	.19498	-.96687	-.19384
Tweens' influence for child-consumed products	Equal variances assumed	3.499	.064	-2.969	118	.004	-.43304	.14587	-.72190	-.14417
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.903	97.612	.005	-.43304	.14915	-.72902	-.13705

The independent samples t-tests showed that there is statistically significant difference ($t = -3.01$, $p = .003$) between the influence of younger and older tweens on family purchasing decision for family-consumed products and also for child-consumed products ($t = -2.97$, $p = .004$).

The bivariate analysis disclosed significant positive correlation (Spearman's $\rho = .330$, $p = .000$)

between the level of brand awareness and tween's influence on family's brand choice.

Paired samples t-test discovered statistically significant difference ($t = 11.078$, $p = .000$) between tweens' influence on family purchasing decision for child-consumed products ($M_{child-cons.} = 4.39$) and tweens' influence on family purchasing decision for family-consumed products ($M_{fam-cons.} = 3.29$).

Table 6: Correlations between brand awareness and influence on family's brand choice

		brand awareness	influence on family brand choice
Spearman's rho	Brand awareness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	120
	influence on family brand choice	Correlation Coefficient	.330**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: Tweens influence for child-consumed vs. family-consumed products. Paired Samples Test

Pair		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1	Tweens' influence for child-consumed products vs. tweens' influence for family-consumed products	1.10000	1.08775	.09930	.90338	1.29662	11.078	119	.000

A repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction ($F = 7.004$, $p = .000$) determined that the strength of tweens' influence differed statistically significantly through the 4 stages of the decision making process. Post hoc test using Bonferroni correction revealed significant difference between the strength of influence in the

Purchase decision (choice) stage ($M_4 = 3.67$ vs. $M_1 = 3.3$, $M_2 = 3.4$, $M_3 = 3.42$). No other significant difference between the stages was detected. It has been disclosed that the problem recognition stage is not the one where children have the greatest influence. Purchase decision stage is where the tweens are most influential.

Table 8a: Tweens' influence in the stages of purchasing decision-making process. Tests of Within-Subjects Effects
Measure: influence

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
stage	Greenhouse-Geisser	9.367	2.618	3.578	7.004	.000	.056

Table 8b: Tweens' influence across the stages of purchasing decision-making process. Pairwise Comparisons
Measure: influence

(I) stage	(J) stage	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Problem recognition	2	-.117	.093	1.000	-.367	.134
	3	-.133	.095	.988	-.389	.123
	4	-.383*	.101	.001	-.653	-.114
Information search	1	.117	.093	1.000	-.134	.367
	3	-.017	.074	1.000	-.215	.182
	4	-.267*	.079	.006	-.479	-.054
Alternatives evaluation	1	.133	.095	.988	-.123	.389
	2	.017	.074	1.000	-.182	.215
	4	-.250*	.070	.003	-.439	-.061
Purchase decision	1	.383*	.101	.001	.114	.653
	2	.267*	.079	.006	.054	.479
	3	.250*	.070	.003	.061	.439

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

One way MANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between parents' and tweens' perceptions of tweens' influence ($F = 46.101, p = .000, \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = .720, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .280$). There is no significant difference between the perceptions of the influence on purchasing family-

consumed products and there is statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the influence on purchasing child-consumed products ($F = 74.843, p = .000$), but parents attribute more influence to the tweens than tweens attribute to themselves.

Table 9a: Parental vs. tweens' perception of tweens influence for child-consume and family-consumed products. Multivariate Tests^a

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^c	
Parent/child	Wilks' Lambda	.720	46.101	2.000	237.000	.000	.280	92.202	1.000

a. Design: Intercept + parent/child

b. Exact statistic

c. Computed using alpha = .05

Table 9b: Parental vs. tweens' perception of tweens influence for child-consume and family-consumed products. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^c
Parent/child	Tweens' influence for family-consumed products	1.067	1	1.067	.991	.320	.004	.991	.168
	Tweens' influence for child-consumed products	63.038	1	63.038	74.843	.000	.239	74.843	1.000

a. R Squared = .004 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)

b. R Squared = .239 (Adjusted R Squared = .236)

c. Computed using alpha = .05

Discussion

Analysis presented in this paper uses just a fraction of data collected by the author during a broader survey. The aim of this study was to investigate the level of tween's brand awareness and their influence on family purchasing decision making process. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, it was expected that there would be positive correlation between children's age and brand awareness, and a moderate positive correlation between the age and brand awareness was revealed. Taking in consideration the fact that today's children live in a digital world, spending hours and hours online, globally interconnected, exposed to international trends and brands, the author assumed that Macedonian tweens will have

higher level of awareness for foreign than for domestic brands, but the results showed no statistically significant difference and the hypothesis was rejected. As expected, Internet and social media was identified as a factor with greatest impact on tweens' brand awareness. The study also revealed positive correlation between the level of brand awareness and child's influence on family's brand choice. Again according to Piaget's theory and the theory of social development, H₄ was developed and it was confirmed that older tweens have stronger influence on family purchasing decision for both family-consumed and child-consumed products. The results revealed that tweens exert stronger influence when it comes to buying products for their individual use than when products for the use of the whole family are purchased. In this sense,

this study confirmed numerous previous studies. Interesting results were obtained in the analysis of tweens' influence in the stages of the purchasing decision making process. It was expected, as many previous studies have shown before, that the problem recognition stage would be the one where children are most influential and the influence would decline significantly by the choice stage. But the results disclosed that purchase decision (choice) stage is the one where Macedonian tweens' influence is greatest. Based upon a review of the literature, results on children's influence on family purchase decision were found to vary according to who is the respondent. Many studies have used only parents as respondents and provide only information about parental perceptions of children's influence. Those studies that have included children as well as parents as respondents, have generally found that children attribute more influence to themselves than their parents attribute to them (Belch et al., 1985; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988). This study investigated both parental and children's perception of the children's influence on family purchasing decision making process and contrary to the other studies, revealed that parents are those who attribute more influence to children, but only for child-consumed products. For family-consumed product there was no significant difference between children's and parents' perceptions.

This study has several limitations. First of all, the survey was conducted on purposive rather small samples, which cannot be seen as representative ones, although they were sufficient for the presented findings. Furthermore, a number of additional aspects of tween's influence on family purchasing decision making could possibly be disclosed if the study took consideration of some other concepts like family demographic characteristics and cultural context. Also, the analysis would be more revealing if smaller product groups and sub-decision stages of the purchasing process were included. All this, could lead to much deeper insights that this study is lacking and could be considered as a possible avenue for future research.

Conclusion

Tweens represent a serious opportunity for today's marketers. This marketing segment has been gaining in popularity as a topic of study due to its phenomenal growth and buying power. Tweens are a new type of audience that expands on three

markets – they buy for themselves, they impact their parents' purchases and they represent the future market of grown-up consumers. The importance of this study lies in the insight it gives into the Macedonian tween influential market: tweens' brand awareness and their influence on family purchasing decision - making process. It reveals that they exert very strong influence, especially for products for their individual use. The study also provides marketers with valuable information about factors that have greatest impact on brand awareness, the stages of the decision making process where tweens are most influential and it discloses the positive correlation between the level of brand awareness and the strength of tween's influence on family's brand choice.

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