

Marketing to Teenagers: The influence of Color, Ethnicity and Gender

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Abstract

Teenagers currently make up about 10% of the U.S population and have strong buying power. They are the most multi-culturally diverse group of consumers. The teenager population is growing at twice the rate of the overall U.S. population and the rate of growth for Hispanic teens is three times the rate for non-Hispanics. These numbers represent incredible opportunity for marketers who must understand what drives teenagers purchasing decisions. Color is believed to be an important feature and characteristic that influences teen's product choices. This research shows that there is a difference in color choices for various products based on teen's gender and or ethnicity. For marketing to teens to be most effective, companies must be clear about who their target market is and tailor their products with respect to color.

Keywords: Marketing, Teenagers, Consumer Behavior, Product Color Choice, Ethnic Groups.

1. Introduction

The teenage market has become a very important consumer segment in the U.S. and global markets (Kotler and Keller, 2011). The teenage population is growing at twice the rate of the overall U.S. population. The number of American teenagers is over 32 million (Cohen, 2009). Globally, the number of teenagers is 1.3 billion (Keegan and Green, 2013). The Hispanic teen age rate is growing at three times the rate of non-Hispanic teens. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, one third of Hispanics are younger than 18, compared to one fifth of non-Hispanics. The 12 to 19 year old age group is more ethnically diverse than any other generation in U.S. history. The majority of teens are Hispanic, African American and Caucasian with a growth rate for teens of 17% over the past ten years. Roughly 15% of the 12 to 19 year old population are African American, 16% Hispanic and 4% are Asian American; the remaining two-thirds are Caucasian. The Hispanic teen population will be the fastest growing segment of population by 2020 and is expected to be about 8 million strong (U S Census; D'Souza, 2010; The Nielsen Company, 2012).

2. Marketing to Teenagers

Teenagers spend their free time doing a variety of activities including shopping online, using social media, technology, listening to music, participating in community activities, sports and watching TV. They appreciate current fashion, art, cultural and environmental efforts (Carter, 2011). The basic rules for marketing to teenagers are: to be authentic, honest, create a buzz about the company's product, offer cool products, keep your message simple, don't talk down to them, learn their language, offer something that they can use, engage with and solicit feedback from teenage customers (Schiff, 2007; Goodstein, 2007). Teens are realistic and quick to adopt new trends, and both male and female teenagers spend most of their money on clothes (D'Souza, 2010). According to one study, Hispanic teens resemble the general population of teens in many aspects, such as media consumption, internet usage, pop culture, music, past-times, brand ratings, role models and future plans. Their aspirations are nearly identical: they want to graduate from high school, go to and graduate from college. Teenagers look toward the future, are ambitious, opinionated, influential, and know more about technology than previous generations (Chaet, 2012). They spend more time on the internet, playing video games, social networking and surfing the web. Teenagers have significant buying power.

The average annual income of a 15-17 year old is \$4,023; and total U.S. spending on products bought by and for teens is \$208.7 Billion (Davis, 2011; D'Souza, 2010; <http://statisticbrain.com>). Marketers should understand teen purchasing behavior and what influences their purchasing decisions. Teens often have more discretionary income than adults who have mortgages, car payments and other necessary spending. Older teens spend their own money on clothes, jewelry, sports, entertainment, food, health and beauty products for a total \$91.1 billion spent in 2011. The annual amount of money families spend on teens for food, apparel, personal-care items, and entertainment is \$117.6 billion (<http://statisticbrain.com>). Teen's spending money is accumulated through paying jobs, allowances, or monetary gifts. Most teens say that the internet has changed the way they spend their free time and they have integrated technology into their lives (Helmrich, 2004). One out of three view the internet as their primary source of entertainment and 90% use a computer either at home or at school. Most teenagers shop in shopping malls/centers, discount stores, drugstores, electronic stores and department stores (Davis, 2011). According to Nielsen, teenagers average daily media consumption is widely different from any other group of consumers. They spend an average 200 minutes watching television, 52 minutes on a computer, 25 minutes playing video games and even more time talking on the phone and exchanging about 96 text messages per day. Marketers reach teenagers in many different ways, mostly through electronic mass media such as: TV, radio, magazines and product placement (Davis, 2011; Carter, 2011).

3. Literature Review

The teenage market is growing in the U.S. It is important to market to teens because of their large discretionary income and ability to purchase luxury items. The teen market has many opportunities for marketers, but there are also many challenges involved in the marketing process (Chaet, 2012). Their buying power is huge because most of their money is spent directly on themselves, as they usually do not have many financial responsibilities. But recent unemployment rates among teenagers have been increasing and have impacted their buying power. Teens tend to spend their money on clothes, food and candy, soft drinks and recorded music. They influence household spending of big and small purchases. Older teens have more influence on personal computers, cell phones and personal care products. Magazines have a huge influence on teenager's lives. They are bombarded with advertisements and they trust magazine advertising more than other media. Most teens consider themselves to be brand loyal and have an emotional connection with products (Carter, 2011). The products they feel a brand name is most important for are: computers, shoes, MP3 players, cell phone service and clothes. Some of their favorite brands are: Apple, American Eagle Outfitters, Face book and Abercrombie & Fitch (Hoffmann, 2012).

Apple was able to expand its market share among teenagers; iPhone adaptation hit 40% and iPad 31% recently in the U.S. (Campbell, 2012). There are many recommendations that marketers should pay attention to when they are trying to get teen's interest and awareness about their products and services. The most important are: enlisting social media (face book, MySpace and Twitter), knowing the audience and their parents influence. When advertising to teens, there are many strategies a marketer can utilize such as continuously updating advertisements, using catchy music, sexuality and comedy to attract them (Gill, 2012). One survey found that teenagers love Apple products, use them and intend to purchase them in the future (Golijan, 2012). Apple has proven to be one of the best marketers to teenagers through their many different campaigns and is at the top of teen's favorite brands. The company not only meets a need but also has good product design.

They keep marketing simple-letting the press and fans fill in the gaps with buzz marketing (Schiff, 2007). Marketers should focus on learning more about teenagers, not only from demographic and behavioral perspectives, but specifically about drivers of their attitudes. This level of insight will allow marketers to understand unmet needs and develop brands and store concepts that appeal to teenage consumers. In many ways male and female teens appear to have similar interests, desires and consumption behaviors (Schiffman, et al., 2010). Both genders shop and spend a significant amount of their time browsing malls and are influenced by friends, family and celebrities. Before they go to a mall, teens browse assortment, verify availability and check prices on line. Male teen shoppers are believed to buy brand; while female teens tend to buy style. Females prefer softer colors and males prefer brighter colors. Females are more likely than males to have favorite color (Khouw, 2003). There is a significant difference in spending habits between genders. According to a recent study, female teenagers bought twice as much as clothing as male teens. Male teenagers bought three times more video games than female. African Americans spend 6% more than average teenagers on clothing, computer software, athletic footwear, and music (Davis, 2011).

Color has strong influence on visual attributes, recognition, attention and identification of objects (Wichmann, et al., 2002). Product color has affected consumer product choice (Clarke and Honeycutt, 2000) and brand image. It can create a positive or negative image about products (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999; Singh, 2006). People of different age, gender and ethnicity perceive color differently (Silver, 1998; Crozier, 1996; Jemason, 2005; Boyatzis and Varghese, 1994, Krishna, 1972; Choungourian, 1968). Consumer color choice is a learned behavior and changes overtime (Adams and Osgood, 1973; Hupka, et al., 1997; Akcay, et al., 2012). Blue is a favorite color of both genders (Funk and Ndubisi, 2006; Khouw, 2003; Akcay, et al., 2011; Sable and Akcay, 2010) and among all ethnic groups in the U.S. (Paul, 2002). Perception and meaning of color differs in various cultures (Aslam, 2006; Madden, et al., 2000; Akcay, et al., 2011). Men and women prefer different colors in certain product categories (Akcay and Sun, 2012; Lee and Bernes, 1990). Marketers should understand color choice and the response of teenage consumers for different products which has become complicated recently. Teenage consumers have developed a wide range of color associations for various products (Akcay, et al., 2012; Ogden, et al., 2011; Akcay, et al., 2011). In general, color has the potential to affect consumer's perception of products, draw attention to and create purchase decisions (Bellizi, et al., 1983; Kerfoot, et al., 2003; Sable and Akcay, 2010).

4. Research Methodology

A survey was conducted at two high schools located in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. With the help of teachers, a total of 250 questionnaires were distributed to students during a class period. 210 usable questionnaires were returned and the response rate was 84%. Participants answering the surveys were high school students under 19 years old. The majority of respondents (120) were male and 90 of them were female. Ethnic background population was evenly distributed. The majority of students (155) were living in an urban area and the rest of them lived in suburbs and rural areas. Surveys were analyzed by using SPSS statistical software package. The questionnaire was designed to cover favorite colors for nine products frequently purchased and used by teenagers. The second part of the survey was a demographic profile of the students.

5. Hypothesis

- 1- Product color choice differs between genders
- 2- A teenager's ethnicity affects their product color choice
- 3- Teenagers color choices vary according to type of product.

6. Data Analysis

Here is the analysis of nine popular products frequently purchased and used by teenagers. Respondents were asked to choose their favorite color for the selected product from a list of eleven colors (red, blue, yellow white, green, brown, gray, black, orange, purple and others). The author listed the top three favorite color choices in the charts below, accompanied by analysis.

Table (1): African American Teenagers Product Color Choice

	Female		Male	
Clothing	OTHER	31.25%	RED	32.43%
	RED	18.75%	BLUE	18.92%
	BLACK	18.75%	BLACK	18.92%
Shoes or Sneakers	BLACK	50.00%	BLACK	32.43%
	WHITE	25.00%	RED	27.03%
	OTHER	25.00%	WHITE	16.22%
Cellphone	BLACK	37.50%	BLACK	70.27%
	BLUE	18.75%	BLUE	8.11%
	OTHER	12.50%	GRAY	5.41%
Backpack or Handbags	BLACK	31.25%	BLACK	70.27%
	OTHER	25.00%	OTHER	13.51%
	RED	12.50%	RED	8.11%
Ipod or MP3 Player	BLUE	31.25%	BLACK	48.65%
	BLACK	25.00%	RED	13.51%
	YELLOW	12.50%	OTHER	10.81%
Computer laptop or desktop	BLACK	43.75%	BLACK	29.73%
	BLUE	18.75%	WHITE	18.92%
	WHITE	12.50%	RED	16.22%
Game system	BLACK	43.80%	BLACK	43.20%
	WHITE	18.80%	WHITE	29.70%
	ORANGE	12.50%	OTHER	10.80%
Watch	BLACK	25.00%	BLACK	29.73%
	OTHER	25.00%	OTHER	18.92%
	WHITE	18.75%	WHITE	16.22%
School Supplies	OTHER	40.00%	BLACK	40.54%
	BLACK	26.67%	OTHER	24.32%
	ORANGE	20.00%	RED	10.81%

Black is a dominant favorite color for both genders. Red products are preferred more by males than females—especially for clothing, shoes/sneakers, backpacks, Ipod/MP3 players, computers and school supplies. White is preferred by both genders for such products as shoes/sneakers, computers, game systems and watches. Blue is popular with both genders. Females like blue cellphones, Ipod/MP3 players and computers. African American male teenagers often choose blue clothing and cellphones.

Table (2): Hispanics Teenagers Product Color Choice

	Female	Male		
Clothing	BLACK	21.28%	RED	37.31%
	OTHER	19.15%	BLACK	28.36%
	WHITE	12.77%	BLUE	14.93%
Shoes or Sneakers	BLACK	42.55%	BLACK	43.28%
	WHITE	23.40%	WHITE	22.39%
	OTHER	21.28%	RED	17.91%
Cellphone	BLACK	32.61%	BLACK	65.67%
	BLUE	15.22%	RED	13.43%
	OTHER	13.04%	BLUE	10.45%
Backpack or Handbags	BLACK	48.94%	BLACK	68.66%
	OTHER	10.64%	RED	11.94%
	PURPLE	8.51%	BLUE	7.46%
Ipod or MP3 Player	BLACK	31.91%	BLACK	52.24%
	RED	12.77%	BLUE	16.42%
	PURPLE	12.77%	RED	11.94%
Computer laptop or desktop	BLACK	53.19%	BLACK	49.25%
	OTHER	10.64%	RED	13.43%
	PURPLE	6.38%	WHITE	10.45%
Game system	BLACK	40.40%	BLACK	49.30%
	WHITE	19.10%	WHITE	22.40%
	GRAY	10.60%	OTHER	10.40%
Watch	OTHER	29.79%	BLACK	32.84%
	BLACK	21.28%	OTHER	20.90%
	WHITE	10.64%	RED	13.43%
School Supplies	YELLOW	17.40%	BLACK	28.40%
	BLACK	17.40%	OTHER	22.40%
	PURPLE	17.40%	RED	17.90%

Black is a popular product color for Hispanics of both genders-especially for clothing, shoes/sneakers, cell phones, backpack/handbags, Ipod/MP3 players, computers, game systems and watches. Red is very popular among male Hispanics for all selected products. Blue is preferred by male Hispanics for clothing, cellphones, backpacks, Ipod/MP3 players. White is more popular among female Hispanics than males for clothing, shoes/sneakers, game systems and watches.

Table (3): Caucasian Teens Product Color Choice

	Female		Male	
Clothing	BLUE	22.58%	BLUE	42.86%
	BLACK	19.35%	BLACK	17.86%
	GREEN	16.13%	GRAY	10.71%
Shoes or Sneakers	WHITE	41.94%	BLACK	48.28%
	BLACK	32.26%	WHITE	27.59%
	GRAY	9.68%	BROWN	6.90%
Cellphone	BLACK	43.75%	BLACK	72.41%
	GRAY	12.50%	BLUE	13.79%
	OTHER	12.50%	OTHER	3.45%
Backpack or Handbags	BLACK	43.75%	BLACK	51.72%
	PURPLE	12.50%	BLUE	13.79%
	OTHER	12.50%	OTHER	10.34%
Ipod or MP3 Player	BLACK	28.13%	BLACK	37.93%
	BLUE	15.63%	GREEN	17.24%
	GREEN	12.50%	WHITE	13.79%
Computer laptop or desktop	BLACK	37.50%	BLACK	45.90%
	GRAY	12.50%	GRAY	14.75%
	OTHER	12.50%	WHITE	9.84%
Game system	BLACK	45.16%	BLACK	41.38%
	GRAY	12.90%	WHITE	31.03%
	OTHER	12.90%	OTHER	10.34%
Watch	OTHER	35.48%	BLACK	44.83%
	GRAY	16.13%	OTHER	31.03%
	BLACK	16.13%	WHITE	10.34%
School Supplies	OTHER	34.38%	BLACK	24.14%
	BLACK	12.50%	OTHER	20.69%
	PURPLE	12.50%	GREEN	13.79%

For Caucasian teens black is very popular for all selected products among male and females. Blue is a popular choice for clothing for both males and females. White is more popular among females especially for shoes/sneakers, Ipod/MP3 players, game systems, watches and computers. Gray is very popular among females for shoes/sneakers, cellphones, computers, game systems, and watches. Males prefer gray clothing and computers.

Table (4): Overall Ethnic Teenagers Product Color Choice

	Female		Male	
Clothing	BLACK	20.22%	RED	27.73%
	OTHER	16.85%	BLACK	23.53%
	BLUE	16.85%	BLUE	22.69%
Shoes or Sneakers	BLACK	38.20%	BLACK	40.83%
	WHITE	30.34%	WHITE	21.67%
	OTHER	17.98%	RED	18.33%
Cellphone	BLACK	37.08%	RED	9.17%
	BLUE	14.61%	BLUE	10.83%
	OTHER	14.61%	BLACK	67.50%
Backpack or Handbags	BLACK	44.44%	BLACK	64.17%
	OTHER	13.33%	RED	11.67%
	PURPLE	8.89%	OTHER	9.17%
Ipod or MP3 Player	BLACK	30.00%	BLACK	45.83%
	BLUE	15.56%	RED	11.67%
	RED	11.11%	BLUE	11.67%
Computer laptop or desktop	BLACK	47.78%	BLACK	45.83%
	BLUE	8.89%	WHITE	11.67%
	OTHER	8.89%	RED	10.83%
Game system	BLACK	41.57%	BLACK	46.67%
	WHITE	16.85%	WHITE	24.17%
	GRAY	10.11%	OTHER	10.00%
Watch	OTHER	29.21%	BLACK	35.83%
	BLACK	21.35%	OTHER	20.83%
	GRAY	11.24%	WHITE	12.50%
School Supplies	OTHER	26.97%	BLACK	31.67%
	BLACK	15.73%	OTHER	21.67%
	PURPLE	12.36%	RED	13.33%

Overall, black is the predominant product color choice among all female and male teenagers of different ethnicities surveyed for selected products. Blue is the second choice for more males than females. White is also more popular for males than females. Teenagers prefer watches and school supplies in colors other than black, gray and purple.

7. Conclusion

Currently teenagers make up about 10% of the U.S. population and are the most multicultural, diverse group of consumers. They have significant buying power and are an increasing influence on household purchasing patterns. The majority of marketers can reach teenagers through social media because they spend a lot of time on line. Teens are also highly influenced by mass media; TV, radio, magazine advertising and product placement. Some basic guidelines for marketing to teenagers are to be authentic, honest, and to create a buzz about the company's products or services. Teenagers shop in shopping malls/centers, discount stores, drugstores, electronic stores and department stores. Teenagers are the future customers for most products and services. If companies offer good quality products, fair prices and build a trust with teens they will have customers for life.

This research shows that color is an important feature and characteristic for teenagers when they make purchasing decisions to buy clothing, electronics, shoes, backpacks/handbags, watches and school supplies. Gender and ethnicity influence product color choice and this needs to be studied by marketers to sell their product to teenagers. African American males prefer red more than females for certain products. Males also prefer blue clothing and cellphones. African American females prefer blue electronics. White is a preferred color for both genders. Hispanic male teenagers prefer red for all selected products. White is more popular for female Hispanics. Caucasian teenagers of both genders prefer blue clothing. White and gray are very popular with females. Males prefer gray clothing and computers. Overall, black is a dominant product color choice among both genders and ethnic groups. Blue is a second choice for many males and females of various ethnic groups.

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