



Research Article

ADOLESCENT PURCHASING INTENTIONS OF ATHLETIC APPAREL AND GOODS

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ABSTRACT

This research study focuses on some motivations of adolescents' purchasing intentions of athletic apparel and other athletic goods as it is hypothesized that they are brand conscious. The research looks specifically to adolescent, teen, and young adult markets between the ages of ten to nineteen years old in Guilford and Forsyth counties in North Carolina. This study aims to determine who or what persuades teenagers' decisions about purchasing athletic apparel and how brand name and perception may influence adolescents. Peer influence plays an important role in their choice of brands and help to determine their acceptability. In addition, advertising and celebrity endorsements are important variables in conferring brand values and establishing an image for the brand. The findings in this study suggest that quality of the product is the most important brand attribute and that the consumers are willing to pay more for a quality product. According to the research, females are a growing consumer of athletic apparel wearing it for daily fitness workouts and fashion. It is important for companies to understand their consumer wants and needs regarding brands and develop products that can be worn and used for multiple purposes.

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INTRODUCTION

Branding and marketing of athletic apparel companies has drastically evolved over the last decade, especially to adolescent, teen, and young adult markets. Before research can be conducted, it is important to understand some of the key terms used in the study. "Adolescents are children ages ten to nineteen, who are in a critical stage of life for physical, emotional, social, and behavior development" (Chen-Yu, Hong, and Seock, 2010.) Rhee and Johnson (2012) define brand as "a collection of consumer perceptions and a reason to choose between products." Brands include "everything publicly conveyed to consumers (e.g. name, logo) about the brand as well as all the beliefs, feelings, and expectations consumers associate with the brand" (Rhee and Johnson, 2012.) Fowler (1999) quoted the Sporting Goods Manufacturer's Association and defined sports apparel as "clothing designed for, or that which could be used in active sports." Athletic/sports apparel includes all clothing (t-shirts, yoga pants, sweat suits, shorts, jersey/uniforms) and shoes (for athletic/fitness participation as well as for pleasure or collections.) Previous research studies show that adolescents recognize brand names and begin to associate characteristics, expectations, and feelings about brands at a young age. Adolescents have more freedom and control managing money

giving them more purchasing power than ever before. As a result, "adolescents spend over \$189.7 billion a year" (Rhee and Johnson, 2012.) The apparel market has seen rapid growth of adolescent consumers (Chen-Yu, Hong, and Seock, 2010) and Rhee and Johnson (2012) concluded that the number one category of goods purchased by adolescents was apparel. So what motivates teens to purchase one brand name apparel over another?

Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers as they experiment and develop social groups. This is a time in their lives when every decision may determine whether or not they are accepted. Often times, adolescents and teens purchase athletic goods based on brand name because of its popularity and appeal. This research study will focus on some motivations of adolescents' purchasing intentions of athletic apparel and other athletic goods. Our overall research goal was to investigate who or what persuades teenagers decisions about purchasing athletic apparel and how brand name and perception may influence adolescents. We also hope to learn if demographics, including gender and school, change or influence adolescent purchasing behaviors.

The first hypothesis for this study is that brand name will have the most influence on adolescent purchasing habits and price will have the least influence. The second hypothesis for this study is that adolescents will favor Nike athletic apparel and shoes over other brands.

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Related Research

Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers as they experiment and develop social groups. This is a time in their lives when every decision may determine whether or not they are accepted. Although young adolescents are not the most brand-loyal market segment, research shows changes in the older adolescent group, (Toomey, 2013) most likely because of their increased purchasing power and peer influences. Often times, adolescents and teens purchase athletic goods based on brand name because of its popularity and appeal.

According to The Eriksonian Theory (Adams-Price and Greene, 1990), "a primary task of adolescence is the consolidation of ego identity." Teenagers often adopt the mannerisms, dress, and attitudes of celebrities as experimentation in their search for an identity (St. James, 2010.)

Chan (2008) explored the adolescents' engagement in social comparison of material possessions using qualitative inquiries. The products involved in social comparison were branded public goods that can be used to communicate ideal social self-image. This study speaks of how social self-image, social comparison, and peer communication influence adolescents. Another scholars (Benmoyal-Bouzaglo and Guiot, 2013) outlined coping strategies of adolescent consumers in the stressful consumption context being studied. They point out similar findings of adolescent behaviors and their need to identify with brands as a means of identity and belonging. In addition, adolescents look to their peers for acceptance and belonging. Criticism for not wearing the right brand leads to adolescent stress.

Rhee and Johnson (2011) identify three important components in influencing consumer's opinions and expectation of brands; brand positioning, brand personality, and brand affiliation. "Brand position is the process of identifying targeted users of the brand and defining how the brand is distinct from others. The adolescent is the targeted user for the athletic apparel. Athletic apparel companies must advertise what makes their brand stand out in various marketing ways including magazines, television, or on the internet to appeal to the adolescent to give them an edge as far as style, fabric or new colors.

Brand personality is a set of human characteristics that the brand is associated with, and brand affiliation is how brand users are perceived by others" (Rhee and Johnson, 2011.) Brands often endorse famous athletes and celebrities to help promote their brand, by endorsing those with similar principles and ideologies. "Individuals try to recreate themselves" (Adomaitis and Johnson, 2007) based on their favorite athlete's brand preference or in response to the images and advertisements, created by the brand. As stated earlier, adolescents are in a development stage and are trying to define themselves and advertisements (in magazines, on television, or on the internet) have tremendous influence on children.

Another motive for consumers is officially licensed merchandise for collegiate and professional sports teams. Earlier mention has been the findings that adolescents are in the development stage and are trying to define themselves. Advertisements have tremendous influence on children. Adolescents desire to be affiliated with champions. They want to be affiliated with a particular player or team. The most

obvious motivating factor of purchasing university licensed merchandise is the "desire to show support for the university as a whole" (Phillips, Roundtree, and Kim, 2014.) People often choose athletics and academics to show their affiliation and support, yet "not all consumers who purchase university licensed merchandise are students, alumni, faculty, or staff supporters of a university and/or its programs and purchase merchandise bearing university branded trademarks (Phillips, Roundtree, and Kim, 2014.) These affiliations confirm a sense of group belonging and develop a sense of self-image for individuals.

Over the past 15 years there has been a tremendous change in apparel and brand marketing strategies. Many brands have changed their official licensing apparel to accommodate a continuous growing female demographic of athletic apparel. One reason is the increase of female interest in sports and athletics. Females account for an increasing share of sport consumption dollars, and women are becoming sport consumers at rate similar to men in the 18-24 age category, thus changing the sport industry dynamic (Lough and Brann, 2011.) The demand of women's sport and fitness apparel has increased the amount of commercials catered towards women with a focus on fitness, as well as fashion trends of wearing athletic apparel as casual wear. The top athletic apparel brands and professional sports merchandising companies have adapted to this change in their marketing strategies. Many brands have changed their official licensing apparel to accommodate a continuously growing female demographic. According to Branch (1995), the female fan base for the professional sports is nearly equal to men. Women represent 43% of NFL fans and 46% of MLB and NBA fans (Branch, 1995) and have influenced the athletic apparel specifically designed for females who support these teams.

One study (Bsttstella and Radons, 2013) used small samples to measure how young consumers' behavior is influenced by sports idols and gender. This study focuses on young Brazilian consumers. The results showed that there is a relationship between idols or celebrities and influence on claim or return of products. It was however, more pronounced among women than in males. It directly showed the importance of female market as a growing power of sports appeals and goods.

Teens in the late 1990s represented the fastest growing population segment and the largest youth market since the Baby Boomers, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation (2004). This market (of 12-19 year olds) spends over 200 billion dollars annually and are avid readers of magazines, with one survey putting the number of 11-18 year olds reading magazines on a regular basis at 66% (St. James, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this survey was to better understand what influences adolescent consumers when purchasing athletic apparel and athletic goods. For this study, adolescents are defined as teenagers, ages 13 to 18 years old. Athletic apparel is defined as any wearable athletic clothing (i.e. t-shirts, shorts, jackets, pullover sweatshirts, sweatpants, tank tops, etc. and are often defined using words like "moisture wicking" or "dri-fit.") Athletic goods are defined as any other athletic gear including sneakers and tennis shoes for this study. A convenience sample of 100 high school students between the ages of 13 and 18 were collected from two local high schools; one public and one private. To recruit participants, contact

was made with administrators at both schools who then encouraged their students to complete the survey. The questionnaire was a modified version of Rhee and Johnson's (2012) instrument included items measuring respondent demographics and importance when making decisions about purchasing athletic apparels and goods. These factors are parental preference, school sponsored brand, endorsed by favorite player/athlete, brand name, price, official or licensed apparel, quality of product and promotional/sales. Demographic information, including gender, age, and ethnicity were measured in the survey. Last part of survey instrument asked questions related to respondents' favorite athletic brands and their purchasing behavior patterns. Volunteer participants completed questions online survey via an email or social media links. Results were analyzed using the SPSS and Survey Monkey®.

RESULTS

A total of 158 high school students, aged 13-18 were asked to complete our survey. We received 101 responses and an overall participation rate of 63.9%. Of those 101 responses, 49% were female and 51% were male. Sixty percent of respondents attend private school, while 40% attend public school. Quality was the highest ranked motive for purchasing intentions for both schools (in table 1).

Table 1 Purchasing Influences by Schools (1=least important; 5=most important)

Motivators	Private School		Public School	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Purchasing Influences	2.85	1.07	2.71	1.1
Parental Preference	2.94	1.13	2.54	1.2
School Sponsored Brand	2.82	1.24	2.88	1.33
Endorsed by Favorite Player/Athlete	3.98	1.15	3.97	1.26
Brand Name	3.9	1.33	4.04	1.37
Price	3.22	1.32	3.34	1.23
Official or Licensed Apparel	4.26	0.9	4.1	1.01
Quality of Product	3.74	1.3	3.3	1
Promotional/Sales				

A t-test of means revealed some significant differences existed in purchasing motivation across the schools. A look at the data shows that there are slight differences in the importance of different motivators. Specially, public school students appear to be less important in the school sponsored brand ($t=-3.91$, $p=.005$) and promotional/sale ($t=-2.84$, $p=.005$) than private school students. However, it should be noted that while certain purchasing motivation factors may be more important to one group than the other, this does not indicate that the factor is necessarily important in either setting. Respondents consistently rated the quality, price, and brand name as top motivator. The least important factors across the schools were parental preferences, school sponsored brands, and endorsed by favorite player/athletes. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses. The results indicate that there are demographic differences in the parental preference, school sponsored brand, endorsed by favorite player/athlete, brand name, official or licensed apparel, and quality of product. Specifically, independent variables "gender" and "school" affects the perceived influence of quality and price. Simply put, this means that respondents regardless of gender and school type are more likely to be influenced by the quality and price.

Table 2 Regression Results for Demographic Influences

Significant Demographic	Model R2	Sig.	Independent Variable		
			Variables	B	Sig
Motivator			Gender	0.09	0.025
Parental Preference	0.037	0.003	Race	-0.152	0.001
			School	-0.137	0.013
School Sponsored Brand	0.078	0.0001	Gender	-0.133	0.017
			Race	-0.084	0.039
Endorsed by Favorite Player/Athlete	0.56	0.0001	Gender	0.087	0.031
			Race	0.083	0.001
			School	-0.114	0.01
Brand Name	0.134	0.0001	Gender	0.093	0.001
			Race	-0.232	0.012
			School	0.141	0.005
Price		Not Sig.			
Official or Licensed Apparel	0.058	0.0001	Race	0.103	0.012
			School	-0.251	0.001
Quality of Product	0.094	0.0001	Gender	-0.099	0.006
			Race	-0.266	0.003
Promotional/Sales		Not Sig.	School	-0.095	0.002

Table 3 In the past 12 months, purchased athletic apparel brands

Brands	Response Percent	Response Count
Nike	93.10%	94
Adidas	53.50%	54
Jordan	37.60%	38
Under Armor	32.70%	33
Reebok	6.90%	7
Lululemon	24.80%	25
None of the above	1.00%	1
Others	7.90%	8

An astounding 93% of participants have purchased Nike products within the last 12 months (table 3); this is 40% more than the next closest brand. While athletic shoe/sneaker preference had the most variance between schools, Nike secured the top brand for both schools. Eighty-eight percent of students at private school selected Nike as their shoe preference (table 4). The second highest brand choice was Adidas with ten percent of votes. The public school had a closer percentage between brand preferences of shoes. Fifty-five percent of students at the public school ranked Nike as their preferred shoe brand, with Jordan coming in at 35% and a smaller variance between brands (table 4).

Table 4 Preferred shoe/sneaker brands

Brands	Private School		Public School	
	Response Percent	Response Count	Response Percent	Response Count
Nike	88.10%	52	55.00%	22
Jordan	1.70%	1	35.00%	14
Reebok	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Adidas	10.20%	6	10.00%	4
Under Armor	0.00%	0	0.00%	0

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From this research, we have concluded that Nike is by far the most popular brand. This was also supported in our related research. Nike is accepted as the sports apparel market leader based on the revenue, global penetration, and market share (Larson, 2010.) Nike bases its focus on young consumers by discovering the rebellious connection of young people to athletes continues to bond young people to Nike products (Larson, 2010.) Quality is the most important for the brand attribute. Consumers are often willing to pay more for a

quality product. Lastly, both boys and girls had similar preferences and motivations for purchasing athletic apparel and sporting goods.

Research has shown that teens are motivated by their peers, parents, brand names, and quality of products. As the demand for athletic apparel continues, it is important for companies to understand their consumer wants and needs regarding brands and develop products that can be worn and used for multiple purposes. Marketing to adolescents and women will continue to grow and develop as they have increased purchasing power in recent years. Since significant girls prefer female focused athletic/fitness brand "Lululemon" which account almost 25% respondents purchased this brand products before. Therefore, more marketing focus to female should be considered for athletic manufactures. Or launching separate female oriented brands might be another way to meet this trend of current market demand. Apparel brands endorse athletes and celebrities to promote their product and principles to create positive images and perceptions of the brand. Advertisements are influential components in persuading consumers purchasing intentions. Future research in this subject area is warranted for a better understanding of youth and their purchasing intentions of athletic apparel.

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