

8-10-2010

Primary Factors in Generation Ys Cotton Clothing Purchase Decisions

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**PRIMARY FACTORS IN GENERATION Y'S COTTON CLOTHING
PURCHASE DECISIONS**

**A Research Paper Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of STEM
Education and Professional Studies
Old Dominion University**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Science in
Occupational and Technical Studies**

**By
Karen Eagle and Marla Winslade
August 2010**

SIGNATURE PAGE

Karen Eagle and Marla Winslade developed this research study under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies, at Old Dominion University. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies.

Approved by: _____ Date: _____

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Generation Y's (Gen Y) behavior and buying patterns have been studied because it is the second largest demographic group or cohort, following the Baby Boomer generation. Understanding Gen Y's awareness of available products and its buying habits is the current *Holy Grail* for marketers as these 14-31 year olds are an elusive group to reach. This cohort has larger purchasing power than its predecessors had at the same age and Gen Y has a higher disposable income compared to other groups because many still live with their parents (Sheahan, 2005). Although it is price conscious, Gen Y loves fashion and trendy products, status brands, and shopping (Tran, 2008). This generation has grown up on the internet and is not only quite tech-savvy, but it is also used to rapid-fire communication (Greene, 2003). Therefore, this group is considered a "moving target" when it comes to reaching it with marketing efforts (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi, & Gill, 2008).

How do we reach these young customers? What features do the Gen Y shoppers look for? Businesses are scurrying to discover the drivers leading Gen Y in its purchase decisions. Compared to participants from previous generations, Gen Y is described as having the lowest interest in making purchase decisions based on product labeling and fiber content (Cotton Inc., 2001). To what extent does Gen Y look at labels when buying fashion apparel? Are these consumers aware of cotton as a durable, comfortable, and versatile fiber? What drives their fashion purchase decisions?

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing for enhanced product marketing.

Research Goals

The following were the four research questions used by the researchers to guide the formulation of this study:

RQ 1: Does Gen Y consider fiber content when making clothing purchases?

RQ 2: What influences Gen Y's awareness of the clothing they choose to wear?

RQ 3: Does Gen Y have an understanding of cotton as a durable, versatile, and comfortable fabric?

RQ 4: With ever-changing technology, what types of marketing influence Gen Y's clothing purchase decisions?

Background and Significance

Because Gen Y is one of the largest statistical groups since the Baby Boomers and many are now coming of age, numerous studies are being conducted to understand this demographic as a group and define its buying motives. Research conducted by Cotton Inc. (2001) found that girls in this age group are the most interested in shopping and fashion compared to other age groups. But do these consumers have awareness of the clothes that they wear? Does the generation that is the most comfortable with technology have an understanding of cotton as a versatile, comfortable, and durable fabric?

With 64 million individuals in this savvy group, Gen Y is the largest group for researchers to study since the Baby Boomers and is quickly becoming the target for marketers of all products. Yet, very little research has been conducted beyond the studies

that defined Gen Y's preferences for brands and its interest in social issues. Producers of cotton apparel are interested in gaining insight into Gen Y's understanding of cotton as a fiber in the clothing it loves to wear and also how to reach this group with marketing efforts.

Limitations

There were four limitations identified by the researchers in this study, and they were:

- The study was limited to Generation Y, ages 18-24 years old.
- The study was limited to clothing made with cotton fibers.
- The study was limited to strategies used in product marketing.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions made in this study. They were as follows:

- The participants of this study were members of Gen Y, ages 18-26 years old.
- The participants of this study considered certain buying decision factors before making a final purchase decision.
- The participants of this study purchased cotton products.
- The participants of this study were influenced by marketing when they make clothing purchase decisions.

Procedures

There were several methods used to gather the research and evidence required to complete this study. First and foremost, an extensive review of literature regarding Gen Y, marketing efforts to Gen Y, and cotton as used in fabrics and apparel was conducted.

A survey was created and developed by the researchers for the study to support evidence found in the review of literature. One hundred sixty-three individuals completed the survey posted online and hosted by *Survey Monkey*. Questions were designed to answer the research questions of the study. The researchers created survey questions following a 5-point Likert scale.

The data compiled from the literature reviews and surveys were used to determine the primary factors in Gen Y's cotton clothing purchase decisions. Once those factors were identified, the information was used to make recommendations for marketers to reach Gen Y through marketing efforts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were identified to clarify their meaning and relate their significance to the outcome of the study:

Brand: A name, term, design, or symbol that identifies the goods, services, institution, or idea sold by a marketer. It is everything that is known and felt about a product or service or organization, from its recognizable name, logo, slogan, and packaging, to the power it holds in peoples' minds (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi, & Gill, 2008).

Comfort: Describes the way a textile product affects heat, air, and moisture transfer and the way the body interacts with the textile product (Kadolph, 2010).

Consumer Purchase Decision Process: The moment a medium delivers an advertising message, a person's "mental computer" runs a rapid evaluation called the *consumer purchase decision process* (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011).

Cotton: Refers to several fibers belonging to the genus *Gossypium* used to produce commercial and craft textile products. Cotton, wool, flax, and silk are *natural fibers* as

they grow or develop and come from animal, plant, or mineral sources. Cotton is a *seed fiber* because it grows within a pod or boll from developing seeds (Kadolph, 2010).

Durability: Describes how a product withstands use or the length of time the product is considered suitable for the use for which it was purchased (Kadolph, 2010).

Fast Fashion: These retailers introduce new designs to the racks two to three times *per week* versus just 10 to 12 times per year in traditional stores. Fast fashion converts consumers by creating a “buy it now” mentality (Miller, 2006).

Generation: A *generation* is usually defined as 30 years and extends past a single decade. The group has shared attitudes, a common history, and formative experiences (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011).

Generation Y (Gen Y): The group of people born between 1980 and 1997. This group is important to marketers because it is next in size to the *boomer* generation (*Baby Boomers* are people born between 1946 and 1963). It is also described as the *digital generation* because it grew up with computers and is seen as more technologically savvy. This group is now the youth and young adult market that marketers want most to reach because members are in the formative years of their brand relationships. They are prime targets for technology, travel, cars, homes, and furniture. The youngest segment of this group is also known as the *Millennials* (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011). People in this cohort are also known as *Echo Boomers* (Reisenwicz & Iyer, 2009), the *Connected Generation* (Johnson, 2008), the *Millennium Generation*, *Generation Next*, and the *Net Generation* (Tyler, 2008).

Market: A market describes an area of the country or a particular group of buyers (i.e., Gen Y, youth market, car market, etc.) (Moriarty, Mitchell, & Wells, 2009).

Marketing: Business activities that direct the exchange of goods and services between producers and consumers (Moriarty, Mitchell, & Wells, 2009).

Target Market/Customer: The market segment(s) of potential customers who share similar lifestyles and preferences to which the marketer wants to sell a product and focus his marketing efforts (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi, & Gill, 2008).

Versatile: Having many uses or serving various functions (Webster's II, 2001).

Overview of Chapters

Chapter I was an overview of the study regarding purchase decisions of Gen Y and how reaching this elusive group was a challenge for marketers, advertisers, and retailers. The problem was introduced and divided into sections according to the goals, limitations, assumptions, background and significance, and procedures. By understanding why the researchers chose the topic and discovered its significance, the audience gained an insight into the rest of the study.

The review of literature was contained in Chapter II. The researchers conducted the study to understand the characteristics of Gen Y and ways that businesses are marketing to this segment. This chapter provided a deeper understanding of this demographic and insight on influences to their purchase decisions.

In Chapter III, the researchers used information gained through the research to develop a survey that would answer their research questions and they detailed the methods and procedures undertaken for the successful completion of the study.

Chapter IV contained the results and findings identified by the researchers with regard to the problem. Chapter V was comprised of a review of the conclusions derived from the study and recommendations for further research or uses for the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Coined in 1993 by *Advertising Age*, the term, *Gen Y*, refers to the generation born near the end of the twentieth century; the group is also known as *Echo Boomers*, (Reisenwicz & Iyer, 2009), the *Connected Generation* (Johnson, 2008), the *Millennium Generation*, *Generation Next*, and the *Net Generation*. (Tyler, 2008). Although different researchers do not agree on the birth date years for Gen Y (Reisenwicz & Iyer, 2009), most researchers agree that this group will outnumber *Baby Boomers* in 2010 (Zeller, 2006). With numbers of 64 million to 80 million nationwide, depending on the years designated, Gen Y is a powerful consumer group (Tran, 2008; Tyler, 2008). It has been described as the most consumptive of all generations, and it is idealistic, socially conscious, individualistic, and anti-corporate (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). Members of Gen Y's idealism and inclination to value tradition make them more similar to Baby Boomers than Generation X, the group that preceded Gen Y (Reisenwicz, 2009).

Because they have been accustomed to the highest amount of disposable income as a group, Gen Y will have unprecedented purchasing power as members come of age, and about one-half of the females in this group pursue quality, even at higher prices (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). According to Yarrow and O'Donnell (2009), the struggling world economy has had no effect on spending by Gen Y through this recession; the only non-discounters doing well in the spring of 2009 were the ones catering to Gen Y.

Gen Y's Fiber Content Choice

“You might just call them the *cotton-picking generation*. Generation Yers live in cotton. This generation is on the go constantly and cotton is the perfect everyday wardrobe item, not to mention the most cost effective” (Cotton Inc., 2008, para. 4). Cotton is the go-to choice of this group for casual, sporting, and dress clothing.

Gen Y considers fiber content when making clothing purchases because according to the Cotton Incorporated:

Younger consumers aged 16 to 24 are more likely than their older siblings and parents to say all-cotton is a better choice. Their feelings are also reflected in their purchasing behaviors: 61% of the apparel purchases by respondents aged 16 to 24 are 100% cotton. (Cotton Inc., 2008, para. 1)

This is important to marketers as Gen Yers make the move from school to work and they wear clothing made of cotton not for casual and sporting wear, but also for business attire. These consumers will spend more disposable income on cotton clothing because they do not have families yet and can spend more money on themselves and their wardrobe.

Generation Y is also a group of thoughtful shoppers. These shoppers choose cotton because they are looking for a good deal and for something practical; they want to purchase items they will give them a lot of use.

Influences to Gen Y's Purchases

Members of Gen Y love to shop with clothes ranking higher than everything else; and they are influenced by their friends and parents in their purchase decisions (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009). As much as they love to shop, teens look for approval before they

buy; the majority of teens shop with other people at least half of the time (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009). The New York marketing firm, *Trendwatching*, coined the term, *twinsumer*, to describe someone who shares your interest and deserves your trust. Gen Y consumers look for recommendations from celebrities they admire, popular bloggers, and “friends” on Facebook (Johnson & Hanson, 2006).

With its deep connection to the internet, Gen Y has embraced social networking sites where members can share ideas with their friends and get opinions and advice before making purchases. Suspicious of typical push campaigns, the Next Generation gravitates to offerings that emerge from trusted friends and members of its networks (Johnson & Hanson, 2006). A full 60% of Gen Y gets its advice from friends when shopping (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009).

According to Tran (2008), members of Gen Y are hooked on technology and covet status brands although they are also price-conscious. Their interest in fast-moving trends is making retailers rethink their strategies and compelling established brands to adjust to appeal to this key group of consumers who change their minds quickly about things. While some conventional brands like Old Navy and Gap are struggling with their message, fast-fashion firms like Forever 21, H&M, and Zara are thriving with this demographic (Tran, 2008). These consumers are risk-takers when it comes to brands; they are not afraid to try something new. They do not consider themselves to be brand loyal, but they exhibit loyalty to higher priced items that they buy, like laptops and MP3 players (Lodes & Buff, 2009).

Ertekin (2007) concluded that Generation Y is more brand loyal to apparel brands that reflect how it lives and in order to keep consumers loyal to their brands. Marketing managers must replace the traditional notion of fashion with the concept of lifestyle.

Gen Y is more environmentally conscious than previous generations. Members concern for the environment translates to their choice in clothing and they are willing to pay more for natural fibers such as cotton. They also choose cotton because it is easier to wash; therefore, it is easier on the environment (Cotton Inc., 2008). For Gen Y:

Cotton translates into beloved garments of denim, khakis, tees, sweaters, and dresses. It serves a busy but casual lifestyle, it is a natural fiber, it is low maintenance, it is relatively easy on one's wallet and the environment, and it may be dressed up or down. Any or all of these factors combined make it understandable why younger consumers nominate cotton as their choice when shopping. (Cotton Inc., 2008, para. 2)

Gen Y's Understanding of Cotton

“Generation Yers live in cotton because they are on the go constantly and cotton is the perfect everyday wardrobe item, not to mention, the most cost-effective” (Cotton Inc., 2008, para. 3). There are many wardrobe options for today's young shopper and the versatility of cotton is apparent with their wide variety of cotton clothing purchases:

Cotton is not just a casual fiber to this consumer. Clearly she has jeans, tees, and sweaters, but she also has plenty of cotton dresses that she is wearing for interviews, to work, or out to dinner. She grew up with cotton and now she is taking it into her working life. The reason the modern young working woman centers her wardrobe around cotton and denim is the fact that they are made from

natural fibers and feel both comfortable and fresh because the garments breathe.

They are easy to wash and wear and maintain their appearance after many washes.

(Cotton Inc., 2008, para. 5)

“Cotton jeans are an important fashion item for Gen Y consumers. This group has strong brand preferences for jeans and perceives them to be versatile, well suited for their leisurely lifestyles, and reflective of individual taste and status” (Hyllegard, Ogle, Yan, & Attmann, 2010, p. 21).

Marketing to Gen Y

According to Greene (2003), the most defining characteristic of this group is that members are used to being bombarded with information because they have always taken the desktop computer for granted and are a product of the internet. Their proficiency in technology makes them skilled at filtering information, selecting only what they need (Wyld, 2005). “The Internet has become a powerful information-gathering and communication tool, affecting a fast-growing population of online shoppers and markets. As consumers’ acceptance of online shopping has grown, retail e-commerce has evolved to encompass a wide variety of goods and services” (Oh, Yoon, & Shyu, 2008, p. 143). However, online retailers have found that time-related information such as availability of preferred products and the status of orders enhanced Gen Y’s perceptions of the Internet shopping environment and influenced repeat purchase behavior.

Therefore, with Gen Y consumers’ Internet savvy, their ability to find the clothing they want to purchase is almost infinite. Keeping their business and knowing which items and brands to always have available can be tricky. Delays in product availability will cause half of the internet shoppers to switch brands rather than wait for a backorder

(Park & Kim, 2007). Gen Y consumers are also increasingly seeking information about products from manufacturers' Web sites. This provides opportunities for manufacturers, allowing them to give not only greater product information and price comparisons, but special promotions as well (Fiore, 2008).

Often called the *Linked Generation*, Gen Y embraces technology, never having known a world without digital media (Swanson & Everett, 2007). Because of this generation's sophistication and technology skills, advertising and promotion to it should also be smart and sophisticated (Arens, Weigold, & Arens, 2009). To reach these consumers, marketers need to address them by using strong graphics and colors that reflect popular culture and deliver the unexpected (Greene, 2003). Having grown up with the Internet, they have also sometimes been referred to as *The Internet Generation* (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011), because they report spending more time using the Internet than watching television. They are multi-taskers and are better than other generations at taking in information from different sources at once (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011). This ability to multi-task poses many challenges to marketers trying to reach Gen Y; the marketing industry needs to adapt and change its approach to meet this customer in new forms of media that are comfortable to Gen Y (Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011).

Gen Y embraces and thrives on technology. "Technology is like a secret handshake to Gen Y; those who know it and use it well are in the club, and those who don't are—well, too old to listen to" (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009, p. 186). Even though new technology creates challenges to marketers in reaching this elusive group, it also offers a wide variety of marketing opportunities, too. Today, media choices are endless and consumers have control of their input; Gen Y has high expectations for state-of-the-

art technology. Retailers and manufacturers who want to reach this market segment or cohort need to integrate and constantly improve technology, making its experiences more interactive. “If your website stinks, for example, so does your store” (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009, p. 23).

Gen Yers love their mobile phones, which they view as “life’s remote control” (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009). They are twice as likely as their elders to use their phones, to view ads on their phones, and make purchases with their devices (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009). According to Sarkar (as cited in Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011), mobile phones are “the new powerful medium, with more than 12,000 print vehicles accessible on your phone. User-generated content such as blogs and social networks represent a growing opportunity for marketers” (p. 401).

Social networking sites such as *Facebook* have become potent influencers and have changed the rules of commerce. Unlike their parents, who start the day with the newspaper, Gen Yers check their Facebook accounts for news; plus, meeting new people who share their interests and passions is rewarding (Johnson, 2006). With over four hundred million users (Facebook, 2010), Facebook is a favorite for Gen Y and acute advertisers are finding ways to use this network to reach this generation. Although some marketers are reluctant to give up control of their message to others, messages displayed on Facebook are effective for reaching Gen Y and carry exponential power because they are not only perceived as more genuine, but advertisers can engage in dialogue by responding to customer concerns and complaints, bringing the message to a higher level (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009).

“If you’ve got a new product and want to get buzz, Facebook allows retailers to create a more *viral experience* than by using email” (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009, p. 188). Gen Y yearns for purpose, and while shopping is the glue that links its members together, it views its involvement in causes as rising above the superficiality of society; brands’ support for causes help Gen Yers to rationalize their love for shopping. Gen Y craves authenticity and wants a relationship with its brand, giving an edge to businesses that support causes and convey social consciousness (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009).

Some of the key points in marketing and advertising to the youth market, specifically Gen Y, were technology, the future, and new advertising. Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2009) noted the following:

Electronic media, such as the Internet and wireless communication, are changing the media landscape and making more intimate, interactive, and personalized forms of communication much more important to marketers and advertisers. This “new advertising” challenges the mass orientation of older forms of marketing and advertising even as it opens up new business opportunities. (p. 24)

Communication and media technology are growing and changing so rapidly; a relevant and important question would be if the marketing and retail industries can keep up with the rate of growth and change. With marketing, advertising, and retail concepts and definitions evolving and the focus changing over the years, the motivation to better understand how marketing and advertising works will continue. Moriarty et al. (2009) fittingly stated that, “How people come to know about a product or service, how they feel and think about a brand, and how they develop loyalty to favorite brands – continues to drive professionals, students, and scholars” (p. 8).

Summary

Gen Y does not know a life without “dress-down Fridays”, and its casual lifestyle is reflected in its preference for cotton clothing. Cotton, Inc. predicts that Gen Y’s love for cotton is not just a passing trend. Cotton, Inc. (2008) went so far as to suggest “This generation will influence younger generations into similar behaviors over time as their habits are extraordinarily powerful and important. Consider it Gen Y’s legacy of encouraging future generations to stay *in their cotton-picking minds*” (para. 13).

Marketers must fine-tune their strategies to reach this new cohort. Gen Y’s short attention span and quest for variety makes for “closet turnover”, putting *fast-fashion* ahead of traditional retailing, in terms of sales. Being more media savvy than brand savvy, Gen Yers reject brands that try to court them. Brands that are thriving today are more than “well-performing” products; they inspire and unite their owners. Unlike the past where companies developed great magazine and television ads, today, companies are getting ahead by connecting with the customer.

Just twenty years ago, most of America was only able to tune in to three television networks and purchase a few newspapers and magazines. The modern media landscape has dramatically changed and now includes hundreds of television channels, many special interest publications, cellular phones, millions of Web sites, and social networking sites that were not even imagined just twenty years ago. Technology will continue to drive marketing and advertising to engage in increasingly innovative uses of communication beyond the traditional mass media and it will inevitably be more personal, interactive, and exciting (Moriarty, Mitchell, & Wells, 2009).

To reach members of this convoluted group, we must meet them “on their turf” by using the technology which they are so fond of and familiar with. In order to find out more about the buying motives and shopping preferences of Gen Y, the researchers will conduct a survey using the social networking sites that it visits regularly, with members of Gen Y asking their “friends”, and subsequently, their “friends” and so on, to complete a survey on Gen Y’s Clothing Purchase Decisions. In Chapter III, the researchers present the methods and procedures used in order to collect data to further examine the research problem established.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The problem of this study was to determine Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing for enhanced product marketing. In this chapter of the study, the researchers explain the methods and procedures used in obtaining information sought to generate findings about the apparel purchase decisions of Gen Y. The population used in this study is described as well as the instrument designed for the study. The methods of data collection and statistical analysis are presented.

Population

The sample of this study included members of Generation Y; the participants sought were individuals approximately 18-26 years old, many of them students. The researchers utilized a popular social network, Facebook, to obtain a diverse sample including participants from different areas of the country. The survey was posted and "friends" were asked to participate and/or send the survey to their "friends". The survey was also electronically mailed (e-mailed) by the researchers to members of Gen Y and forwarded on to other potential participants.

Instrument Design

The instrument used to obtain data for this study was an anonymous survey created by the researchers. Structured using closed-form questions, the survey measured clothing preferences. Participants were asked about their preference for cotton in apparel purchases and their influences on purchase decisions. Questions were designed to answer these research goals. A Likert scale was used in the survey to measure the responses of participants regarding their influences on apparel purchases. The numerical scores of 5-1

were assigned to the possible answers of strongly agree – strongly disagree in order to achieve a nominal value mean. Additional questions gathered information about participants’ ages, gender, and regions of the country where they live. See Appendix A.

Methods of Data Collection

The survey created for this study was the method used for data collection. With the understanding that Gen Y is most comfortable using technology, the researchers chose to invite members of Gen Y to participate in the survey through their network of “friends” on Facebook. The participants completed a survey by visiting a link to a document on Survey Monkey. The survey was anonymous as no personal data was recorded or collected. A random sample of Gen Y was obtained by using this social network, which reached participants in different areas of the country. A cover letter accompanied the survey. See Appendix B.

Statistical Analysis

The data were used to determine the primary factors in Gen Y’s cotton clothing purchase decisions and marketing influences. The number and frequency for each choice was recorded and the mean was calculated for each forced-choice response to determine the participant’s level of agreement with each statement.

Summary

In Chapter III, the researchers explained the methods and procedures used in determining the primary factors of Gen Y’s cotton clothing purchase decisions. The population used to obtain the data was described and the instrument designed for the study by the researchers was detailed. The methods of data collection and the statistical analysis procedure to be used in tabulating the data were outlined. Chapter IV reported

the results of the data findings of the research to determine cotton apparel purchase influences on Gen Y.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing for enhanced product marketing. This study provided information on the clothing purchase decisions of Gen Y. In this chapter, the researchers present the findings of the research. The survey data were reported in terms of agreement or disagreement with the survey statements. The findings were presented in four sections: fiber content in clothing, clothing choice, understanding of cotton, and marketing influences on clothing purchases.

Overview of Responses

The participants of this study were members of Generation Y, ages 18-26. Hosted by Survey Monkey, an anonymous survey was distributed to members of Gen Y via electronic mail and postings to Facebook. One hundred and sixty-three surveys were completed. All questions had 100% response rate; the survey was designed to require participants to answer all the questions in order to submit the survey. One hundred thirty-five participants (82.9%) were female, twenty-eight (17.2%) were male. One hundred thirty respondents reside in the Southeast (79.8%), twenty eight (17%) were from the Northeast, two were from the Midwest (1.2%), and one participant each was from the West and Southwest United States (0.6%, each).

Data Analysis

The survey was created to answer the research goals of the study. The survey presented 19 statements and the participants were asked to rate their responses as follows: 5: strongly agree; 4: agree; 3: neutral; 2: disagree; and 1, strongly disagree. The mean for

each statement was calculated. The results of the survey were then analyzed further and were divided into a percentile analysis.

Fiber Content in Clothing

The first Research Goal, “Does Gen Y consider fiber content when making clothing purchases?”, was addressed in survey Question one and two. Twenty-two individuals, or 13.5% of those surveyed, strongly agreed with statement one, “I am aware of the fiber content (type of fabric) in my clothing purchases”, 59 (36.2%) agreed, 33 (20.2%) were neutral, and 16 (20.2%) strongly disagreed, establishing a mean of 3.20; with a mean of 3.02, fifteen people (9.2%) agreed with the second statement, “Fiber content (type of fabric) influences my clothing purchases”. Fifty-three people agreed (32.5%), twenty-nine were neutral (17.8%), fifty-three disagreed (32.5%), and thirteen people (13%) strongly disagreed. See Table 1 for summary of Questions 1 and 2.

Table 1

Awareness of Fiber Content in Clothing

| Statement | Mean | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| I am aware of the fiber content (type of fabric) in my clothing purchases. | 3.23 | 13.5% (22) | 36.2% (59) | 20.2% (33) | 20.2% (33) | 9.8% (16) |
| Fiber content (type of fabric) influences my clothing purchases. | 3.02 | 9.2% (15) | 32.5% (53) | 17.8% (29) | 32.5% (53) | 8.0% (13) |

Clothing Choice

The second group of questions sought to determine influences on clothing choice among Generation Y and sought to answer the Research Goal, “What influences Gen Y’s awareness of the clothing they choose to wear?” Question 3 asked participants to respond to “Brand names influence my clothing purchases”. Thirty-two people strongly agreed

(19.6%), 71 (43.6%) said they agreed, 23 were neutral (14.1%), 26 (16.0) disagreed, and 11 (6.7%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 3.53. When asked whether “price influences my purchases”, Question 4, 106 people (65%) strongly agreed, 42 agreed (25.8%), 12 were neutral (7.4%), 26 disagreed (16%), and zero people (0%) strongly agreed; the mean was 4.54. Question 5 was, “What my friends wear influences my clothing purchases”. To that statement, 10 people strongly agreed (6.2%), 65 people agreed (40.4%), 20 were neutral (12.4%), 46 disagreed (28.6%), and 20 people strongly disagreed (12.4%), making the mean 2.99. See Table 2 for a summary of Questions 3-5.

Table 2

Influences on Clothing Choice

| Statement | Mean | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Brand names influence my clothing purchases. | 3.53 | 19.6% (32) | 43.6% (71) | 14.1% (23) | 16.0% (26) | 6.7% (11) |
| Price influences my clothing purchases. | 4.54 | 65.0% (106) | 25.8% (42) | 7.4% (12) | 1.8% (3) | 0.0% (0) |
| What my friends wear influences my clothing purchases. | .2.99 | 6.2% (10) | 40.4% (65) | 12.4% (20) | 28.6% (46) | 12.4% (20) |

Understanding of Cotton

The third group of questions addressed Research Goal 3, “Does Gen Y have an understanding of cotton as a durable, versatile, and comfortable fabric?” The first statement in this group, Question 6, was “I prefer cotton as the fabric of my clothing”. To this statement, 24 people agreed (14.7%), 72 agreed (44.2%), 61 were neutral (37.4%), 4 disagreed (2.5%), and 2 people strongly disagreed (1.2%). The mean was 3.69. Respondents were asked if they “purchase cotton because it is comfortable”, Question 7. To this statement, 35 people (21.5%) strongly agreed, 89 (54.6) agreed, 31

(19%) were neutral, 5 disagreed (3.1%) and 3 strongly disagreed (1.8%), making the mean 3.91. When presented with Question 8, “I wear cotton because it is versatile, 20 people (12.3%) strongly agreed, 61 (37.4%) agreed, 68 (41.7%) were neutral, 10 people disagreed (6.1%), and 4 strongly disagreed (2.5%). The mean was 3.54.

Question 9 was “I purchase cotton because it is durable”. To this statement, 22 people (13.5%) strongly agreed, 62 (38%) agreed, 64 (39.3%) were neutral, 12 (7.4%) disagreed, and 3 people (1.8%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 3.51. Question 10 was “I purchase cotton because it is affordable”, and was strongly agreed to by 29 people (17.8%), 80 people (49.1%) agreed, 39 (23.9%) were neutral, 11 (6.7%) disagreed, and 4 people (2.5%) strongly disagreed; the mean was 3.73. See Table 3 for a summary of Questions 6-10.

Table 3

Awareness of Cotton in Clothing

| Statement | Mean | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| I prefer cotton as the fabric of my clothing. | 3.69 | 14.7% (24) | 44.2% (72) | 37.4% (61) | 2.5% (4) | 1.2% (2) |
| I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is comfortable. | 3.91 | 21.5% (35) | 54.6% (89) | 19.0% (31) | 3.1% (5) | 1.8% (3) |
| I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is versatile. | 3.54 | 12.3% (20) | 37.4% (61) | 41.7% (68) | 6.1% (10) | 2.5% (4) |
| I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is durable | 3.51 | 13.5% (22) | 38.0% (62) | 39.3% (64) | 7.4% (12) | 1.8% (3) |
| I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is affordable. | 3.73 | 17.8% (29) | 49.1% (80) | 23.9% (39) | 6.7% (11) | 2.5% (4) |

Marketing Influences on Clothing Purchases

The fourth group of questions asked participants about marketing influences on clothing purchases and addressed Research Goal 4: “With ever-changing technology,

what types of marketing influence Gen Y's clothing purchase decisions? Question 11 asked whether television advertisements influenced clothing purchase decisions. To this statement, 6 people (3.7%) strongly agreed, 64 (39.3%) 27 (16.6%) agreed, 27 (16.6%) were neutral, 47 (28.8%) disagreed, and 19 (11.7%) strongly disagreed; the mean was 2.94.

Question 12 was "Radio advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions"; two people (1.3%) strongly agreed, 15 people (9.4%) agreed, 31 (19.4%) were neutral, 78 (48.8%) disagreed, and 34 (21.3%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 2.21. Question 13 asked whether "internet advertisements influenced clothing purchases" and six people (3.6%) strongly agreed, 61 (37.7%) agreed, 30 (18.5%) were neutral, 45 (27.8%) disagreed, and 20 (12.3%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 2.93. Question 14 asked whether "magazine advertisements influenced clothing purchase decisions" and 22 people (13.5%) strongly agreed, 86 (52.8%) agreed, 18 (11%) were neutral, 23 (14.1%) disagreed, and 14 (8.6%) strongly disagreed; the mean was 3.48.

Question 15 asked participants to state their agreement to the statement "posts by my friends on Facebook influence my clothing purchase decisions". To this statement, three people (1.8%) strongly agreed, 25 (15.3%) agreed, 32 (19.6%) were neutral, 65 (39.9%) disagreed, and 38 (23.3%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 2.33. Next, the researchers asked question 16: "clothing manufacturers Twitter postings influence clothing purchase decisions", and two people (1.2%) strongly agreed, 12 (7.4%) agreed, 27 (16.6%) were neutral, 76 (46.6%) disagreed, and 46 (28.2%) strongly disagreed; the mean was 2.07.

Question 17 asked whether “clothing manufacturers Facebook pages influenced clothing purchase decisions” and six people (3.7%) strongly agreed, 23 (14.1%) agreed, 21 (12.9%) were neutral, 75 (46.0%) disagreed, and 38 (23.3%) strongly disagreed; the mean was 2.29. Question 18 asked if “clothing manufacturers’ websites influence clothing purchase decisions”, and 22 people (13.6%) strongly agreed, 57 (35.2%) agreed, 28 (17.3%) were neutral, 33 (20.4%) disagreed, and 22 (13.6%) strongly disagreed. The mean was 3.15. See Table 4 for a summary of Questions 11-18.

Table 4

Marketing Influences on Clothing Purchases

| Statement | Mean | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Television advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 2.94 | 3.7% (6) | 39.3% (64) | 16.6% (27) | 28.8% (47) | 11.7% (19) |
| Radio advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 2.21 | 1.3% (2) | 9.4% (15) | 19.4% (31) | 48.8% (78) | 21.3% (34) |
| Internet advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 2.93 | 3.7% (6) | 37.7% (61) | 18.5% (30) | 27.8% (45) | 12.3% (20) |
| Magazine advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 3.48 | 13.5% (22) | 52.8% (86) | 11.0% (18) | 14.1% (23) | 8.6% (14) |
| Posts by my friends on Facebook and Twitter influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 2.33 | 1.8% (3) | 15.3% (25) | 19.6% (32) | 39.9% (65) | 23.3% (38) |
| Clothing manufacturers’ Twitter postings influence my clothing purchase decisions | 2.07 | 1.2% (2) | 7.4% (12) | 16.6% (27) | 46.6% (76) | 28.2% (46) |
| Clothing manufacturers’ Facebook pages influences my clothing purchase decisions | 2.29 | 3.7% (6) | 14.1% (23) | 12.9% (21) | 46.0% (75) | 23.3% (38) |
| Clothing manufacturers’ websites influence my clothing purchase decisions. | 3.15 | 13.6% (22) | 35.2% (57) | 17.3% (28) | 20.4% (33) | 13.6% (22) |

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of Gen Y’s awareness of cotton in clothing and the influences on clothing purchases. This was accomplished by an anonymous

survey distributed via electronic mail and Facebook. One hundred and sixty-three surveys were submitted by the participants; each question had 100% response rate. The researchers recorded and summarized the data collected from the surveys, input it into tables, and described it. The findings were used to draw conclusions and make recommendations in Chapter V. Chapter V includes a summary of the study, the conclusions made from the data, and the researchers' recommendations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter comprises a summary of the researchers' study. Conclusions were drawn based upon the findings. Recommendations were made based upon the conclusions presented in this chapter.

Summary

Generation Y is the largest demographic group since the Baby Boomers and this consumer group is expected to outnumber Boomers by the end of this year (2010), making it a powerful population to watch. Yarrow and O'Donnell (2009) report that the 84 million members of Gen-Y will have more spending power than Baby Boomers by 2017. Described as the most consumptive of all generations, Gen Y is in some ways different from previously studied groups because members grew up with the Internet, making them very "tech-savvy" and giving them a love for gadgets. "These consumers may be the most savvy and demanding about the Internet, the latest apps, video and social media" (Tran, 2010, para. 3). "Although they love fashion and brands, they admire individualism, and they have a strong sense of social responsibility; the digital revolution has given this group unbelievable access to information" (WWD, 2010, March 17, para. 4). Its command of technology and high expectations from businesses, have made Gen Y a difficult group for marketers to reach.

The problem of this study was to determine Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing for enhanced product marketing. In order to reach this objective, four research goals were established:

RQ 1: Does Gen Y consider fiber content when making clothing purchases?

RQ 2: What influences Gen Y's awareness of the clothing it chooses to wear?

RQ 3: Does Gen Y have an understanding of cotton as a durable, versatile, and comfortable fabric?

RQ 4: With ever-changing technology, what types of marketing influence Gen Y's clothing purchase decisions?

The participants of the study were members of Gen Y, ages 18-26 years old. The participants were primarily from the Southeast U.S. (79 %) and female (85%). The researchers designed and created a survey to gather data for the study. The questions on the survey were developed to answer the research goals. A Likert scale was used to measure the awareness and opinions of Gen Y based on the statements created by the researchers.

The data were collected for this study through the survey created and administered by the researchers. The anonymous survey was distributed through electronic mail and postings to Facebook. Participants logged on to *Survey Monkey* to record their responses. No personal data were collected from the participants. Once the submitted surveys were received by the researchers, the results were tabulated and placed into tables for easier reference. The statistical analysis methods used were measures of central tendency, including number, percentage, and mean.

The study was significant because by identifying the factors that influence Gen Y's clothing purchase decisions, marketers can use the information to better reach a generation that is known as a "moving target". The study was limited to Gen Y, its perception of cotton, and marketing strategies used to reach this demographic.

Conclusions

The research determined Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing, and the influences of marketing on clothing purchases. Data were further gathered in relation to the four research goals of this study. The data were used to draw conclusions for the following research goals.

The Research Goal 1 of the study was to determine whether Gen Y considers fiber content when making clothing purchases. Two survey questions addressed this goal: "I am aware of the fiber content (type of fabric) in my clothing purchases" and "Fiber content (type of fabric) influences my clothing purchases". Although the modes for both questions fell in the *agree* column, the total responses were evenly split with means of 3.23 and 3.02, respectively; many respondents felt *neutral*. Therefore, the researchers concluded that fiber content is not a significant consideration in clothing purchase decisions for Gen Y.

Research Goal 2 was to determine what influences Gen Y's awareness of the clothing it chooses to wear. Statements regarding brand names, price, and what friends wear were asked to be rated. Most people (63.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that brand names influence their purchase decisions; the mean for this statement was 3.53, which indicated some level of agreement among the group. This result supported previous findings citing that brand names were important to Gen Y (Ertekin, 2007; Tran, 2010).

With a mean of 4.54, the most significant agreement was found in the question about price influencing purchases. Over ninety percent (90%) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that price affected their decisions; zero (0%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Although Gen Yers have been identified as the most consumptive

demographic group and they love fashion, it was obvious that they considered the price of an item before making a purchase. They were “surprisingly prudent when it comes to spending money on apparel and “like women of all ages, price is their primary consideration when apparel shopping” (Cotton, Inc., May 6, 2010, para. 4).

Because this demographic is thought to care about peer approval, the researchers asked “What my friends wear has influence on my clothing purchases”. Although *agree* was the most common answer, cited by 65 respondents, the mean of 2.99 indicates a feeling of neutrality and makes this statement insignificant as a motivator for clothing purchases. We concluded that brand names are important to Gen Y and that the price of clothing is the most significant factor in their purchase decisions.

Research Goal 3 sought to discover whether Gen Y had an understanding of cotton as a durable, versatile, and comfortable fabric. While 58.9 people agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred cotton as the fabric of their clothing, the majority of those selecting cotton chose it for being comfortable (76.1% agree/strongly agree) and affordable (66.9% agree/strongly agree). Only six people disagreed that cotton was a comfortable fabric. The respondents did not feel as strongly toward the statements *cotton is durable* and *cotton is versatile*, but the means for those responses were slightly in the agree value with values of 3.54 and 3.51, respectively. The researchers concluded that Gen Y has an understanding of cotton as a comfortable fabric; it prefers cotton as the fabric of its clothing, and it feels that cotton is affordable. To a slightly lesser degree, this demographic feels that cotton is durable and versatile. According to Cotton Inc. (2008), Gen Yers “live in cotton” and find it affordable, comfortable, and easy-care.

Research Goal 4 was to determine what types of marketing influence Gen Y's clothing purchase decisions. The participants were asked to what degree did the following forms of marketing affect their clothing purchase decisions: television, radio, Internet, and magazine advertisements, posts by friends on Facebook, and clothing manufacturers' Twitter posts, Facebook pages and websites. Overall, the mean ratings for most of the marketing media were low (under 3.0) indicating that Gen Y is an uncertain customer.

Rising above 3.00 (but still indicating a neutral response) with scores of 3.48 and 3.15 respectively, were magazine advertisements and clothing manufacturer's websites. Even with the digital boom, the improving economy has given fashion magazines a slight return of advertisers; "fashion magazines are one of the few places where the ads are just as important as the editorial" (Lockwood, 2010, para. 19). Websites have gained increasing importance, though some fashion brands are reluctant to advertise online. Lockwood (2010) states that "It's a 'generational thing' with 90% of the fashion companies run by people in their 50s and 60s. The younger generation has 'checked out of print' and if the target market is 'tweens to college age', it is necessary to be online with advertising" (para. 27-28).

The researchers' findings supported these findings; the group that participated in the study was influenced by both magazine advertisements and by manufacturer's websites. Only 28.8% of the population *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that radio ads affect its clothing purchase decisions, indicating that either Gen Y is not listening to the radio with so many other music choices available, or it is just not drawn to radio advertisements. Television ads and Internet ads scored slightly higher, but were still

neutral (rated 2.94 and 2.93, respectively). The Millennials grew up with the Internet and are comfortable with all things *tech*; it appeared that older, more traditional forms of push advertising did not appeal to this group. Apparently, some advertisers appeared to understand this trend, because “for the first time, digital spending is expected to eclipse print ad spending this year” (Lockwood, 2010, para. 13).

The results for *influence of social network sites* were low: only 17.8% (strongly agree-agree) were influenced by manufacturer Facebook pages, and 8.6% (strongly agree-agree) were influenced by Twitter postings. Although social networking sites have been around for a few years, marketing products through these venues is relatively new; “social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, which may have sounded foreign to many just a year or two ago, exploded in ’09 as the tools to help retailers both increase sales and leverage brand awareness” (Cotton, Inc., 2010). According to Tran (2010, May 24), “Gen-Yers are forcing the (fashion) industry to push the digital envelope”, and successful retailers are progressive, making their “digital footprint diverse” by experimenting with different media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) to find what works best for their brand.

The findings of this study support previous researchers who have called Gen Y a “moving target” and “hard to reach” with advertising. Although the modes for many of the statements fell in the *agree* column, the mean statistics for most of the survey questions were in the *neutral* category, which showed uncertain attitudes among Gen Y.

Recommendations

The researchers developed recommendations based on conclusions drawn from the research performed. The recommendations were as follows:

1. Members of Gen Y are very comfortable using the Internet, and they have a preference for branded merchandise. Marketers should capitalize on this by having dynamic websites that develop their brands and create desire for the products.
2. Social networking media is gaining importance as a form of communication. Further research should study the effectiveness of marketers' use of Facebook pages and Twitter posts.
3. Millennials love the newest gadgets; a future study could determine marketing uses of mobile devices and the new iPad to reach Gen Y.
4. Generation Y includes individuals from 14 to 31 years old. This study could be repeated to target either an older or younger sample set to further pinpoint marketing efforts that will reach this elusive consumer.
5. This study could be repeated in different geographical regions as the findings would change with varying climate zones, buying patterns, and socioeconomic factors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER

Appendix A

Survey

Primary Factors in Generation Y's Cotton Clothing Purchase Decisions

The purpose of this study is to determine Generation Y's awareness of the use of cotton in fabrics and clothing for enhanced product marketing.

Directions: Choose a number that corresponds with the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements.

| | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly Agree = 5 | Agree = 4 | Undecided = 3 | Disagree = 2 | Strongly Disagree = 1 |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|

1. I am aware of the fiber content (type of fabric) in my clothing purchases.
2. Fiber content (type of fabric) influences my clothing purchases.
3. Brand names influence my clothing purchases.
4. Price influences my clothing purchases.
5. What my friends wear influences my clothing purchases.
6. I prefer cotton as the fabric of my clothing.
7. I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is comfortable.
8. I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is versatile.
9. I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is durable.
10. I purchase clothing made of cotton because it is not expensive.
11. Television advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions.
12. Radio advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions.
13. Internet advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions.
14. Magazine advertisements influence my clothing purchase decisions.
15. Posts by my friends on Facebook and Twitter influence my clothing purchase decisions.
16. Clothing manufacturers' Twitter postings influence my clothing purchase decisions.
17. Clothing manufacturers' Facebook pages influence my clothing purchase decisions.
18. Clothing manufacturers' websites influence my clothing purchase decisions.
19. Please indicate your gender: ___ male ___ female
20. Please indicate your age: ____
21. In what area of the country do you live? ___Northeast ___Southeast ___Midwest
___Southwest ___West

This survey is completely voluntary and anonymous. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER

Karen Eagle
Marla Winslade
Old Dominion University
228 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
Spring 2010

Dear Participant:

Your voluntary participation in this survey will aid in the completion of our research requirement for the masters program at Old Dominion University within the department of STEM Education and Professional Studies. As a member of Gen Y, this survey will measure your awareness of the clothes you wear and if you have an understanding of cotton as a versatile, comfortable, and durable fabric, as well as which marketing efforts influence your purchase decisions.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and confidential. Disclosed information will not be shared or linked to the participation. To further protect your identity, it is important that you don't place your name or any identifying markings on the survey.

There are no known risks to this study. The survey does not ask for the names of any participants. All data collected will be kept confidential. The information will be used for educational purposes.

Your participation and honesty are greatly appreciated and will add to the general knowledge concerning purchase patterns and marketing preferences of Gen Y. Please follow the instructions provided.

Thank you,

Karen Eagle
Marla Winslade
Investigators
Masters Students, ODU
STEM Education and Professional Studies