

Teens and Catalogs: Evaluations, Behavior, and Education

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Growth of sales in direct mail has been phenomenal. During the 1980s, direct mail captured a substantial share of the retail market, growing one-third faster than average retail sales, and the trend is expected to continue (Buying from non-stores, 1987; Sroge, 1991).

Other areas in marketing growing at the same time and continuing to grow are the children and teen market segments. These segments have become important in terms of absolute size, spending power, and purchase influence (McNeal, 1987). Tootelian and Gaedeke (1992) suggested that despite the 15.5% decline in the number of teenagers in the 1980s, their spending increased nearly 43%, growing from \$1,422 to \$2,409 per capita. As children and teen markets increase, catalog companies such as L.L. Bean, Eddie Bauer, and JC Penney, are catering more to these market segments by designing catalogs to be used by children, teens, and parents (Rosenberg, 1987).

Purpose of Study

Given continued popularity of mail order shopping, increased importance of teens as consumers, and increased mail order catalogs targeting teens, the purpose of this study was to determine (a) reasons why teens like and dislike shopping from a catalog and (b) shopping practices and payment methods used when they shop from a catalog.

Method

The researchers developed a self-administered questionnaire. Permission was obtained from parents/guardians of the students to participate in the research project. Questionnaires were delivered to the school systems and were completed by junior high and high school students (ages 12-18) enrolled in study hall and who had purchased clothing from a catalog during the past 12 months. The school systems were in two midwestern cities about 15 miles apart,

each with a population of approximately 20,000. Of the 1,929 students offered the questionnaire, 306 students indicated that they were catalog shoppers and 272 of these completed the questionnaire. Responses to questions indicated that respondents' grades were mostly As or Bs (74%), they planned to attend college (92%), and they currently earned some of their own money (88%).

Respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), why they like or dislike purchasing clothing from a catalog. Respondents also were asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), the payment and shopping practices most often used in purchasing their clothing from a catalog.

Results and Discussion

Reasons Teens Like Catalog Shopping

Table 1 shows the means for why teens like catalog shopping. The highest mean was for the reason, catalogs offer clothes that are not available in retail stores ($\bar{x} = 3.63$). Teens agreed with this reason more than the other reasons. Thus, finding clothing that is different is important. The lowest mean was for dislike in-store shopping ($\bar{x} = 2.12$). This indicates that teens disagreed that this was a reason for catalog shopping. This finding disagrees with previous research which suggests that catalog shoppers tend to have a negative attitude toward or a low opinion of retail shopping (Berkowitz, Walton, & Walker, 1979; Reynolds, 1974; Shim & Drake, 1990). However, respondents in these studies were adults. Respondents in this study enjoyed store shopping but used catalogs to purchase items that were unusual or that they could not find in local stores.

Reasons Teens Dislike Catalog Shopping

Reasons why teens dislike catalog shopping are listed in Table 2. The highest means were for: (a) cannot try on clothes ($\bar{x} = 3.89$) and (b) returning clothes is a hassle ($\bar{x} = 3.73$). Previous research also suggests that a disadvantage of catalog shopping is that the merchandise cannot be seen in advance, customers want to examine and try on the product, and returning merchandise is inconvenient (Kwon, Paek, & Arzeni, 1991; Mail order buying, 1983; Rucker, Ho,

Table 1. Reasons Teens Like Catalog Shopping: Means and Standard Deviations for Sample

Reasons	\bar{x}^a	SD	n
Because I am not satisfied with the local retail stores	2.73	(1.16)	262
Because I dislike in-store shopping	2.12	(1.22)	262
Because catalogs offer better merchandise quality than retail stores	3.02	(1.21)	261
Because catalogs offer more unique clothing than retail stores	3.33	(1.24)	262
Because catalog shopping saves time	3.31	(1.23)	260
Because I don't have to deal with salesclerks	3.14	(1.29)	262
Because catalogs offer quick deliveries	2.80	(1.21)	261
Because catalogs offer clothes that are more inexpensive than retail stores	2.68	(1.11)	258
Because catalogs offer more up-to-date fashions than retail stores	3.12	(1.22)	258
Because the image and appeal of catalogs is greater than retail stores	3.01	(1.14)	259
Because catalogs offer clothes that are not available in retail stores	3.63	(1.19)	259

^a5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree.

& Prato, 1989). Adults were the respondents in these studies. The lowest means were reported for (a) prices in catalogs are too expensive ($\bar{x} = 2.99$) and (b) catalogs do not describe the merchandise well enough ($\bar{x} = 3.17$).

Payment Practices

Table 3 reports payment practices. The most frequently used were (a) parent's check ($\bar{x} = 3.20$) and (b) parent's store charge ($\bar{x} = 3.20$). The least frequent payment practices were the teen's own check ($\bar{x} = 1.72$) and parents pay and then the teen pays them back ($\bar{x} = 2.31$).

Table 2. Reasons Teens Dislike Catalog Shopping: Means and Standard Deviations for Sample

Reasons	\bar{x}^a	SD	n
Because I enjoy store shopping	3.68	(1.23)	267
Because the prices in catalogs are too expensive	2.99	(1.21)	264
Because I cannot try on the clothes	3.89	(1.22)	265
Because I want to see, touch, and feel the clothes before I buy them	3.65	(1.25)	263
Because I have a problem with size and fit of clothing	3.46	(1.28)	265
Because returning the clothes if I don't like them is a hassle	3.73	(1.14)	264
Because I am uncertain of the merchandise quality of clothes in catalogs	3.53	(1.12)	264
Because I do not like to wait for the merchandise to be sent to me	3.57	(1.22)	263
Because the catalogs do not describe the merchandise well enough	3.17	(1.22)	263

^a5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree.

Shopping Practices

Look at each page before purchasing (\bar{x} = 3.63) and make comparisons within catalogs before purchasing (\bar{x} = 3.38) had the highest means among all catalog shopping practices (see Table 4). These findings imply that teens tend to shop carefully before making a final purchase decision. The lowest mean was for prefer to shop from a catalog rather than a retail store if similar clothes are available in both places (\bar{x} = 2.49). This indicates a preference for retail store shopping if similar clothes are available.

Implications for Consumer Educators

Previous research suggests that the growth of mail order shopping has been substantial, and there has been notable growth in the children's and teen's market segments. The growing acceptance of

Table 3. Payment Practices: Means and Standard Deviations for Sample

Practices	\bar{x}^a	SD	n
My own check	1.72	1.31	254
My parent's check	3.20	1.43	255
My parent's store charge card (e.g., JC Penney)	3.20	1.55	253
My parent's bank credit card (e.g., Visa)	2.89	1.56	253
My parents pay and I pay them back with my own money	2.31	1.31	253

^a5 = almost always; 1 = almost never

catalog shopping by the parents of teens, who may serve as their teen's role model for consumer behavior practices, may cause an even greater increase in catalog usage by teenagers. Catalog shopping is most certainly a different type of shopping than shopping in retail stores, largely because merchandise is not actually seen (only descriptions and photos provided) and cannot be tried on.

Catalog shopping requires increased knowledge and abilities in the following areas: (a) characteristics and performance of commonly used textile fibers, (b) comprehension of frequently used terminology, (c) importance of size information provided, (d) understanding of care requirements, (e) pricing, (f) correct completion of order forms, (g) correct information at hand if order is made by telephone, and (h) judgements regarding appropriateness of styles for different individuals. The trend toward increased catalog use should be acknowledged and discussed in classrooms in order to help students develop the skills necessary for them to make educated purchases.

A useful activity for junior high and high school students is for educators to provide each student with a clothing catalog. Based on this research, teens' main concerns may be that they cannot try on clothes and they expect returns to be inconvenient; therefore, attention should be drawn to the catalog's return policies as well as descriptions, size charts and information, and photos. Teens should be encouraged to read merchandise descriptions and/or study visuals, learn necessary terminology, and be able to compare

Table 4. Shopping Practices: Means and Standard Deviations for Sample

Practices	\bar{x}^a	SD	n
Make comparisons in prices, styles, etc. of clothing within a catalog before making a catalog purchase	3.38	(1.40)	252
Make comparisons in prices, styles, etc. of clothing between retail stores and catalogs before making a catalog purchase	3.25	(1.33)	252
Make comparisons in prices, styles, etc. of clothing between different catalogs before making a catalog purchase	3.12	(1.34)	249
See an item of clothing in a catalog but purchase the item of clothing in a retail store	3.22	(1.31)	252
Prefer to shop from a catalog rather than a retail store if similar clothes are available in both places	2.49	(1.28)	252
Look at each page and all the clothing in the catalog before deciding	3.63	(1.31)	251

^a5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree.

clothing within the catalog in relation to fabric, price, quality, and care instructions. They also should compare what they see in catalogs with what they find in local stores. Catalogs also can be used to provide information that students find on clothing labels in stores.

In this exercise, students may be given a maximum dollar amount available for them to spend to buy clothing for a specific function. Their assignment might be to select clothing appropriate for that function within the price range given and to properly complete the order form. While teens in this study suggested that they comparison shop, it is unknown what they consider when they make comparisons. In a recent study, teens indicated that they usually associated a "cool" brand with quality and the brands they considered to be the "coolest" were all perceived to be of high quality (Zollo, 1995). This suggests

that teens should be educated on brand name and quality relationships.

A helpful option that promotes the value of comparison shopping is to ask teens to select three outfits from a catalog for a specific function, compare them regarding specific attributes (which the teen might determine), and then select the most appropriate outfit. Students could explain why they selected the outfit they did.

Attributes teens might become more knowledgeable about and be encouraged to look for include fabric content, price, care requirements, shipping costs, and state sales taxes. It is useful to remind them that if they select a dry cleanable item they will have an added expense to care for that clothing. Similarly, they need to be aware that shipping and handling costs, as well as state sales taxes, will make a difference in total costs of the clothing ordered.

It also is important to discuss payment alternatives that may be used when catalog shopping. Although the results in this study indicate that parents more frequently pay for the teen's clothing than teens themselves, McNeal (1990) suggests that some sixth graders have checking accounts and credit cards. As credit becomes more readily available to teenage consumers, children and teens with credit cards and checking accounts undoubtedly will become more numerous. In any case, students can and should be required to calculate all costs, including total merchandise costs, applicable taxes, and shipping and handling charges.

The valuable information gained from catalog shopping exercises can extend to Internet and television shopping. These forms of non-store shopping are becoming increasingly popular. Similarities between forms of shopping include use of merchandise descriptions and visuals to evaluate the merchandise, inability to try on or feel the items, and inconvenience of merchandise returns. Extending lessons learned about catalog shopping to these other non-store shopping options will better equip students for non-store shopping.

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