

Assignment #2 – Cultural Influences

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Generation Z, today's teenagers, present unique interests, desires, and shopping sensibilities. Born between the late 1990s and early 2010s (Solomon, 2017, p. 382), they are digital natives who do not know a time before the Internet. They are highly influenced by it in their shopping (Vox), and stores courting teens should consider this, even with the in-store experience. 95% of teens have smartphones and 45% are online "almost constantly". (Lesonsky, 2019).

Teens' shopping may be influenced online, but they still enjoy an in-store experience. Refinery29 reports that a majority of teens "prefer to shop in-store," but are selective about the stores they visit. Girls spend about 20% of their disposable income on apparel and boys 15% (Refinery 29), and discounts, coupons and loyalty rewards impact store choice (Lesonsky).

Indeed, Vox found a common thread in interviews with high school students, who prefer thrift store shopping for stylistic, budgetary and environmental reasons. Sales, coupons, and store incentives such as Old Navy Cash were cited. Products spied on social media created desire, which some followed through on purchasing. In these cases, function, fashion, and quality were still stated as considerations.

Nordstrom and The Bay, both attached underground to Vancouver's Pacific Centre mall, present two very different shopping 'personalities.' Both offer youthful options, though neither offers clear appeals to teens. To illustrate the facets of the two stores as they relate to Gen Z:

Consideration	Nordstrom	The Bay
Store design: teen appeal?	"Young Contemporary" (YC). Back corner, 2 nd floor. Unique soundtrack. Young clerks.	None dedicated. Topshop, courts Gen Y; some brands with Gen Z models floor 2 & 3.
Celebrate their uniqueness	No obvious calls for teen participation or interaction Known brands; little uniqueness for teens to discover	No obvious calls for teen participation or interaction Known brands; little uniqueness for teens to discover
Retail basics & relatability	Salespeople in YC– early 20s. Cosmetics and shoes staff – late Gen Y, early Gen X.	Salespeople hard to find, but generally 40+. Cosmetics salespeople older Gen X.
Offer value,	None obvious – high prices.	None obvious – moderate to high

impulse buys?	No impulse buying opportunity observed.	prices. No impulse buying opportunity observed.
Aesthetics	Appealing, interesting, shiny, carefully considered No “selfie” backdrops, but many ad-hoc opportunities	Plain, drab. Dull lighting (except in the high-end section) No opportunities for interesting selfie backdrops
A social experience?	Café, licensed bar (not for teens, but social) Deejay in NE entrance one visit Trendy music in YC section; unique from rest of store	No social experiences around food or beverage Canned music; not memorable No noted in-store events or other engagements
Age of shoppers	Mainly Gen X. Some Gen Z and Boomers accompanying.	Mainly Boomers. Rarely other ages, except Gen Y in Topshop.
Overall	Aspirational; glitzy	Drab, dull, dowdy

Neither store appeals to the teen market overtly. There are no digital or social media integrations, no exciting or edgy new brands to discover, and most certainly no value discounts to be found.

The mother of a Gen Z revealed that her daughter and the daughter’s friends prefer thrifting in stores like Value Village. They are motivated to find both a bargain and unique pieces that express their individuality. It is also fun for groups of teens to participate in together (Gunn, Nov. 10, 2019). Asked how department stores appeal to teens, she stated, “they don’t.” The department stores visited confirm that sentiment. When this author was in her teens 20 years ago, the local Bay store carried unsold old stock in the basement, where bargains could be found. This department no longer exists.

Nordstrom and The Bay appear to cater to an older, a more moneyed market. Yet failing to build loyalty in a generation with a longer lifetime value may be to their detriment.

Recommendations

Department stores are wise to court a younger shopper for the lifetime value they represent. To better reach today’s teens, Nordstrom’s and The Bay should consider the following:

- Leverage digital media to entice shoppers to the store, and to enhance their in-store experience. Harness the power of influencers and peer influence in social networking platforms.
- Provide a creative, attractive ambiance that allows teens to shop as a group, and to share status and photo updates from in-store. Incentivize use of brand hashtags to reach teens' own networks and interact digitally and gratefully with them (online and in-store).
- Celebrate their individuality. Encourage their self-expression by way of attainable, interesting product selection. Allow co-creation, where teens can customize a product for themselves. Leverage the opportunity to get them meaningfully and emotionally involved.
- Source unique and upcoming lines so they can feel on the cutting edge.
- Ensure strong omnichannel shopping options, whether purchasing online or instore, and whether picking up in person or enjoying delivery.
- Provide a sense of value, with financial incentives for shopping. Loyalty rewards, discounts, and small ticket "impulse" purchases can create loyalty.

Lesonsky reports that, "department stores are...out of fashion" with Gen Z, with Nordstrom an exception. Indeed, Nordstrom better appeals to teens, with its enticing ambiance, social spaces, and its beautiful if aspirational (rather than value-oriented) lines.

Perhaps both stores could take a note from Selfridge's. That UK retailer's Miss Selfridge's line is recalled by the author, who lived in London, as exceptionally teen-oriented. The website clearly appeals to teenage girls (if not boys), with models of that demographic showing clothing, accessories and makeup – a complete and desirable look. Selfridges pioneered the "fun" shopping experience (Wikipedia), and appears to continue to lead the way by responding to the needs and interest of Generation Z, building emotional connections with them that stand to last over time and as teenage years are left behind.

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