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Importance of Clothing Brands in the Lives of Children-Challenge for Teachers

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This paper aims to determine how clothing brands affect children's peer relations. The study was carried out by surveying 145 students. The results indicate that children are familiar with different clothing brands but they prefer sports brands. Brands were not the most important decision factor in purchasing process. The brands like decision factor were more important for older children and boys. Older children are also more often associated possession of (non) appropriate clothing brands with negative responses from other children. The children who were afraid of ridiculing of another children also felt more self-confident wearing popular brands of clothing.

Keywords: *clothing brands, children, self-confidence, peer relations.*

Introduction

Children encounter brands at a very early stage in their childhood, which is not a coincidence, as marketers are aware of the fact that a significant share of buyers remain loyal to brands they have known since their childhood (Aledin, 2009). Not much research has been done on the role of clothing brands in children's lives. But existing results showed that an item of clothing is no longer only a nice, fashionable piece of clothing any child would want to have. Today clothing becomes the "*communicators of identity*" (Postre, 2003). An individual choose to wear clothing of a popular brand because they the best reflects their actual or desired identity (Guy & Banim, 2000) or because they give them a sense of belonging (Gregg, Gordon, 2000). In some cases "*branded clothes have become a tool for social survival among children and teenagers.*" (Piacentini and Miller, 2004).

M. Videčnik (2000) states that a child's learning of brands depends not only on the child himself or herself (age, interests), but predominantly on the child's parents. Parents are the first identification model (Rodhain, 2006). They can influence the child's attitude towards a certain brand through their own example; enable them to come into contact with a certain brand member through other agents of socialization (e.g. peers, media, etc.) and to learn about the basic aspects of consumption (Ji, 2008). Parents play an important role in the process of the child's identification with his or her peers, as they can refuse to purchase clothing of a certain brand, and provide an adequate justification for their decision (Rodhain, 2006). Brands worn by children can not only symbolize the child's own values and the values of the child's peers, but also the values and the social and material status of the child's parents (Martens, et al., 2004). As they enter school, children gradually become more independent in their purchase decisions. According to M. F. Ji (2008), parents have a greater influence than peers on the attitude of children (aged 12 years and below) towards brands, but parents' influence on the clothing brands of their children decreases during adolescence (Ghazali 2011 in Sharma, 2011). In adolescence children's understanding of brands qualitatively change – they are able to recognize abstract, intangible features of a brands (Achenreiner & John, 2003), what would be also the reason for »increase in the "demand" for brands (Keynote, 2002). Beside parents, peers and television are recognized as the main sources of interaction during adolescence in relation to the matter of opting for clothes of certain brands (Lachance, Beaudoin and Robitaille, 2003). Keynote (2002) claims that the "*demand" for brands increases through children's cognitive development"*. Adolescents already understand the symbolic significance of brands (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005) and use them as "*a tool for connecting with others*" (Ji, 2002), or as a "*way of identifying with a certain peer group*" (Rodhain, 2006) some of them also like as tool to avoid the ridiculing (Meyer, Anderson, 2000).

K. Lacković-Grgin (1994) explains that the status of a child within a peer group depends upon factors such as school performance, the level of social cognition, friendliness, willingness to cooperate and external appearance. Children, who nowadays spend a large amount of time at school, frequently develop their wishes under the influence of their peers (Reese, 1997). J. B. Schor (2004) noticed that "*Schoolyards have been transformed into brand showrooms and this have impact of highlighting social and economic divisions amongst groups.*" Children want to belong to a group in which they feel welcome and safe. So, the most distinct way for children to show that they belong to a group is by wearing clothing which is similar to that of the other children in the group, with which they also avoid bullying and humiliation (Meyer, Anderson, 2000). Children who dress like their peers will be more easily accepted in their social environment than those who express their individuality through their dressing style (Creekmore 1980, in Lachance, Beaudoin and Robitaille, 2003). Children who do not possess an adequate selection of brands can be exposed to insults and harassment (Roper and La Nice, 2009), or can even be labelled as "poor quality people" (Roper and Shah, 2007).

The importance of social identity in the formation of one's self-image has been proved by a study conducted by S. A. Aledin (2009), where teenagers refused to wear brands which would associate them with unpopular peer groups. Growing children, who are constantly striving for a balance between diversity and equality (Aledin, 2009), can thus develop completely inappropriate thoughts and behavioural patterns, as indicated by a study conducted by R. Elliot and C. Leonard (2004).

By means of observation, children learn of the symbolic significance of material objects and brands. Based on feedback, e.g. from parents and peers, they gradually realize that material objects symbolize the characteristics of their owner (Dittmar, 2008). According to R. Elliot and K. Wattanasuwan (1998), products and brands often become a symbolic source for the formation and preservation of identity. C. Campbell (2004) disagrees, as he claims that an individual's identity cannot originate from the products the individual buys, but from the reactions to the products consumed by the individual. But Väistö (2009) concludes that it is a fact that "*through symbolic consumption we show others and most importantly ourselves, who we are*".

Teenagers thus use brands in the formation and expression of their identity (Jezekova Isaken and Roper, 2002) and the desire to belong might be also the reason for children's materialistic orientation (Rose and DeJesus, 2007), which undoubtedly causes conflict in peer groups and one's personal development. This can especially be a problem for children from materially poor families. According to Jezkova Isaken and Roper (2008) a materially poor children are less clear in their self-concept, more susceptible to interpersonal influence and, as their inadequate financial capacity prevents them from following the current fashion trends, at higher risk of having a damaged self-concept. The "children with low self-esteem are more likely to be susceptible to peer-group purchase influence« (Achenreiner, 1997).

In this paper we consider the case of Slovenian primary students to provide evidence of the importance of clothing brands in children's lives. The study sample consists of two groups of students: a group of children aged 10–11 years and a group of children aged 12–14 years. This sample allows us to examine the impact of brands on the students peer relations and consumer behaviour according to Piaget's developmental stages. The research questions were as follows:

1) How (non)possessing clothes of popular brands affect children's peer relations?
2) Are children with low self-confidence more sensitive to the popular clothing brands?

Method
Data collection and sample

The survey-based research was conducted among primary school students aged between 10 and 14. The data were collected by means of an anonymous questionnaire. Table 1 presents the structure of our sample.

Table 1. **Structure of sample**

	Sex		Age				
	Girls	Boys	10	11	12	13	14
N	72	73	4	36	37	33	35
%	49.7	50.3	2.8	24.8	25.5	22.8	24.1
			Younger		Older		

Questionare

The question types were closed answers and offered a Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of the following sections:

- The student's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics

Respondents were asked about their age and gender.

- The student's actual consumer practices

Respondents were asked about their consumer behaviour:

– e.g. sources of information on clothing brands,

– importance of brands in the purchase process,

- The student's beliefs about clothing brands

Respondents were asked about their views on the meaning and importance of brands e.g. importancy of clothing brands in peer relations.

Data analysis

The data was statistically processed using Statistical Package for Social Science Version 18. Frequency counts were run on all items. Further analyses involved a chi-square where the significance level of $p < 0.05$ was considered.

Findings

The results showed that 117 (80.7 percent) of the children always participate in the process of shopping for clothing, 27 (18.6 percent) participate occasionally and only one of them does not participate at all. A total of 35.2 percent of the children had learned of their favourite brand from their parents, 32.4 percent had learned of it from their peers, 26.4 percent from their role models, 18.6 percent from TV, 15.2 percent from ads in printed media and 8.3 percent from other sources. The most commonly specified other sources were older sisters or brothers, as well as uncles and aunts, and salespersons in various shops. A comparison according to the children's ages (Figure 1) clearly showed the age differences in the influence of parents, peers and media what confirm results of Lachance, Baudoin and Robitaille (2003).
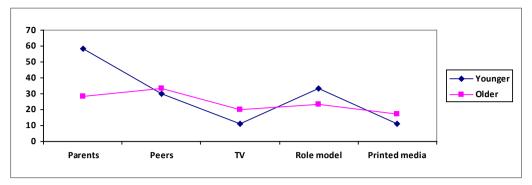
Figure 1. *Sources of Information on Clothing Brands*

Clothing brand as a purchase decision criterion

Purchase decision-making is a complex process, influenced by multiple factors. Gunter and Furnham (1998) discovered that the most important criteria for choosing a certain product are its price and its brand. The Slovenian children chose (Table 1) comfort as the most important purchase decision factor (the criterion being more important to girls), followed by colour, price and the ease of maintenance, which girls considered more important than boys did. It was also more important for girls like for boys that the product is somewhat special. The criterion that the product is made from natural material was placed last. The brand was placed fifth as a purchase decision criterion but the boys considering it more important than the girls, which confirms the findings of Harper, Dewar and Diack in 2003 (Gašperič, 2006, p. 65).

The children had to indicate the importance of individual purchase decision criteria on a five-point Likert scale (1-least mportant.....5-most important)

According to the children participating in the survey, the best brand is Nike (54.2 percent), followed by Adidas (24.2 percent). Results are consistent with the findings of international researches (Roper and Shah, 2007, Mintel, 2001). The test also showed that there was not a significant difference in relation to clothing brands as decision factor according to children's ages.

Table 1. **Important Children Decision Factors in the Purchase of Clothing (N = 145)**

Decision Factor	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Color	Girls	72	4,08	,765	2,760	124,062	0,007
	Boys	73	3,63	1,17			
Comfort	Girls	72	4,53	,903	0,471	143	0,638
	Boys	73	4,45	1,03			
Natural material	Girls	72	2,64	1,26	0,700	142,928	0,485
	Boys	73	2,49	1,25			
Brand	Girls	72	3,36	1,35	-1,331	142,934	0,185
	Boys	73	3,66	1,34			
Somewhat special	Girls	72	3,65	1,12	2,972	136,809	0,003
	Boys	73	3,03	1,40			
Rare	Girls	72	3,22	1,63	2,934	143	0,004
	Boys	73	2,47	1,47			
Ease of maintenance	Girls	72	3,81	1,36	1,525	143	0,130
	Boys	73	3,47	1,32			
Price	Girls	72	3,60	1,28	2,753	143	0,007
	Boys	73	3,59	1,29			

Clothing Brands and Peer Relations

Clothing brands serve as an indication of how children perceive themselves and how they wish to be perceived by others (Lachance, Beaudoin and Robitaille, 2003), as well as a criterion for judging whether someone belongs to a certain peer group or not (Jezekova Isaken and Roper, 2008).

The children was asked whether they consider to important that other children wear brands of clothing and footwear that they themselves like. 50.4 percent of the children stated that this is not important, 49.6 percent of children that this is important. There were no statistically significant differences between younger and older children (Table 2).

Table 2. **Identification and clothing brands**

It is important that other children wear brands of clothing that I like.		Yes	No	Total
Younger	N	23	17	40
	%	57.5	42.5	100
Older	N	49	56	105
	%	46.7	53.3	100
Total	N	72	73	145
	%	49.6	50.4	100

To indicate whether wearing brands of clothing which are popular among peers negatively affected children's interactions, children were asked to answer the question, "*If I do not wear brands of clothing which are popular among my friends/schoolmates, they do not* socialize *with me*". 11.0 percent of all children agreed with this statement, 89 percent of the participating children claimed that this was not the case at all (Table 3).

Table 3 . **Clothing brands as socialization factor**

If I do not wear brands of clothing which are popular among my friends/schoolmates, they do not socialize with me"	Yes	No
Younger	12.5%	87.5 %
Older	10.4 %	89.6 %
Total	11.0 %	89 %

With this statement agreed slightly more younger children. But when we asked children how would their schoolmates behave to them, if they don't don't wear popular brands of clothing, 6.2 percent of the children specified that their schoolmates would make fun of them if they did not wear certain brands of clothing, 76.6 percent of the children disagreed with this and 17.2 percent of the children was neutral. There were no statistical significant differences between older and younger children, but results indicated that older children more often expected unwanted negative behavior of other children to them, then younger children. A total of 89 percent of the children stated that they would not be excluded from the company of their schoolmates for this. 7.6 percent of the children was neutral and 3.4 percent stated that they would be excluded from the company of their schoolmates if they did not wear popular brands of clothing. The exclusion was more often expected by older children then by younger children. This difference was also statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 4. **Clothing brands and negative behavior among children**

If I don't wear popular brands of clothing my schoolmates would :	Age	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed
make fun of me (ridiculing)	Younger	40	1,55	1,176	-1,098	143	0,274
	Older	105	1,77	1,049			
excluded me	Younger	40	1,18	0,712	-1,684	91.404	0,031
	Older	105	1,50	0,952			

The children had to indicate the importance of kriterium on a five-point Likert scale (1-least mportant.....5-most important)

The results also showed connection between childrens fear of ridiculing of another children and their self- confidence connected with brands. The children who were afraid of ridiculing of another children also felt more self-confident wearing popular brands of clothing (r = - 0,170, p < 0.05). The results indicate that though children do not primarily build their friendships on the basis of brands, the influence of clothing brands is not completely negligible.

Conclusion

Clothing brands have not gone unnoticed in the lives of Slovenian children. The children choose clothing based to the greatest extent on whether it is comfortable, of a suitable colour or affordable. Clothing brands presents fifth (of the eight) purchasing decision factor; the boys and older children considering it more important. The results suggest that fashion brands influence life and image of children. Almost half of the surveyed children responded that:" it is important that other children wear brands of clothing that I like". Majority of children didn't have bad experiences with pears because clothing brands. However, the results indicate that being ridiculed and excluded from other children's company due to the fact that they do not possess the proper brand of clothing is predominantly expected by older children. Results also suggest that children who are not self - confident are more brand sensitive.

The fact is that children spend a lot of time in the school. So, it would be reasonable, also in this area, clearly explained to children that although brands can guarantee quality, they guarantee the quality of the product and not the value of the individual who has purchased a certain item of clothing. Children must be clearly told that by purchasing a certain brand of clothing, one does not purchase the attributes which are symbolized by the brand and which we may desire. It is not enough for one to buy a certain brand of clothing to become the person they wish to be. It would therefore be sensible to consider implementing different strategies (e.g. motivational and educational websites on modern information networks, motivational material in the form of picture books, eexpansion of active methods of work within the frame of the subject Home economic and other subjects etc.) within the context of both formal and informal education.

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Drabužių prekių ženklų svarba vaikų gyvenime – galvos skausmas mokytojams

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Santrauka

Šiuo straipsniu siekiama išsiaiškinti, kiek svarbūs yra prekių ženklai, kai vaikai priima vartotojiškus sprendimus, ir kaip jie keičia vaikų tarpusavio santykius. Nors buvo atlikta nedaug tyrimų apie drabužių prekių ženklų vaidmenį vaikų gyvenime, turimi rezultatai parodė, kad drabužis nebėra vien tik gražus, madingas apdaras, kurį norėtų turėti bet kuris vaikas. Šiais laikais drabužiai tampa tapatumo simboliais („Postre", 2003). „Keynote" (2002) teigiama, kad vaiko

poreikis turėti tam tikrais prekių ženklais pažymėtų daiktų auga kartu su pažinimu. Paaugliai jau supranta prekių ženklų simbolinę reikšmę (Chaplin ir Roedder-John, 2005) ir naudoja juos kaip priemonę ryšiams su kitais užmegzti (Ji, 2002) arba kaip galimybę parodyti, kokiai bendraamžių grupei priklausoma (Rodhain, 2006), o kai kurie juos vertina kaip priemonę, padedančią išvengti pašaipų (Meyer, Anderson, 2000).

L. Lacković-Grginas (1994) aiškina, kad vaiko padėtis jo bendraamžių grupėje priklauso nuo tokių veiksnių kaip gebėjimas mokytis, bendravimo įgūdžių lygis, draugiškumas, noras bendradarbiauti ir išvaizda. Vaikų, šiais laikais daug laiko praleidžiančių mokykloje, norams dažnai įtakos turi jų bendraamžiai (Reese, 1997). J. B. Schoras (2004) pastebėjo, kad mokyklų kiemai dabar prilygsta prekių ženklų parodoms, o tai skatina grupių socialinę ir ekonominę atskirtį. Vaikai nori priklausyti tokiai grupei, kurioje jie jaučiasi laukiami ir saugūs. O pats suprantamiausias būdas, kaip parodyti, kad jie priklauso grupei, – dėvėti drabužius, panašius į kitų tos grupės vaikų, su kuriais jie išvengtų patyčių ir pažeminimo (Meyer, Anderson, 2000).

Tyrimas buvo atliktas vertinant 145 mokinius. Iš rezultatų matyti, kad vaikai žino apie skirtingus drabužių prekių ženklus, bet jiems labiau patinka sportiniai. Prekių ženklai nebuvo patys svarbiausi veiksniai priimant sprendimą ką nors pirkti. Dauguma vaikų taip pat nesulaukė priešiškumo iš bendraamžių dėl prekių ženklų, bet rezultatai leidžia manyti, kad mados prekių ženklai turi įtakos vaikų gyvenimui ir įvaizdžiui. Beveik pusė apklaustų vaikų pareiškė: „Svarbu, kad kiti vaikai dėvėtų tokiais prekių ženklais pažymėtus drabužius, kurie patinka man.“ Prekių ženklai kaip apsisprendimo veiksnys buvo svarbesni vyresniems vaikams (berniukams). Vyresni vaikai taip pat dažniau susieja (ne)tinkamų drabužių turėjimą su neigiama kitų vaikų reakcija. Tie vaikai, kurie bijojo būti pašiepti kitų vaikų, taip pat jautėsi labiau pasitikintys savimi, kai dėvėjo drabužius su populiariais prekių ženklais. Taip pat galima spręsti iš rezultatų, kad vaikai, kurie nepasitiki savimi, jautriau reaguoja į prekių ženklus. Būtų prasminga pasvarstyti, kaip pritaikyti įvairias strategijas (pvz.: šiuolaikinių informacinių tinklų motyvacinius ir mokomuosius žiniatinklius, motyvacinę medžiagą, pateikiamą iliustruotose knygose ir t. t.) tiek oficialiame, tiek neoficialiame mokyme.