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## Exploring the Factors that Encourage Tweens to become Individual Consumers: A Qualitative Study of Parent Perspectives in Egypt

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the factors that encourage tweens to become individual consumers. This study was a conclusive research, with a cross-sectional design and an exploratory purpose. The variables were identified through the use of semi-structured interviews with parents. Fifteen interviews were conducted. The findings indicated that tweens are starting to develop their sense of identity and behaviors; new interests in various merchandise and hobbies. In addition, tweens consumption is influenced by various factors found in their environment and upbringing. Analysis indicated that the major factors that impact tween-purchasing behaviors are their individual personas, parents, peers, and media. Parents initiate family consumption and are swayed by their children to purchase certain products; peers help tween gain awareness and knowledge regarding various merchandises, services, activities, and manners; media opens their eyes to new viewpoints and perspectives that are controlled globally and locally; in addition, the children's demographic, psychographic, and behavioral traits impact the way they consume in the market. This study contributes on the theoretical level in the following ways: by adding to the field of tween and consumption in the Middle East context; and by establishing a proposed conceptual framework concerning the factors leading to their purchasing behaviors.

**Keywords** Buying behavior, Consumption, Interpersonal ties, Mass media, Tweens.

**Paper type:** Qualitative

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## **1. Introduction**

Egypt is one of the most populous countries in the Middle East, containing a youth bulge and a growing population segment of tweens (El-Bassiouny, Taher, & Abou-Aish, 2008). The tween sector formulates an average of eight million individuals from the total population (CAPMAS, 2012). Youth and adolescence are considered significant consumers and leading shoppers (El-Bassiouny et al., 2008). Therefore, the “tween” segment is an appealing group of individuals in the marketplace and an interesting focus for researchers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

Tweens are an important target group of purchasers (Kümpel Nørgaard, Bruns, Haudrup Christensen, & Romero Mikkelsen, 2007). They get to know new trends and “brands” while browsing the shops and sometimes buying products, increasing their knowledge about merchandises and consumption on their own (Tufté, 2007). Moreover, they begin to effect and sway their parent’s purchases (Kümpel Nørgaard et al., 2007). Thus, tweens are independent consumers as well as influential when it comes to the family’s consumption (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009). There has been an increase interest regarding this population fragment among advertisers, marketing and media specialists (Swain, 2010) since they can be a triple opportunity: “a primary market, an influencing market and a future market” (Kümpel Nørgaard et al., 2007).

Consumption research, in relation to children, is rather new (Swain, 2010). The focus on “consumer socialization, which is the process of: “learning consumer-related skills, knowledge and attitudes” (Ward, 1974), is limited when concerning tweens (Tingstad, 2007). Prior research has focused on children’s development in terms of cognitive structures (Solomon, Dahl, White, Zaichkowsky, & Polegato, 2014). These studies focused on how children develop into competent grown-ups with assistance from social influence, a concept known as a “social becoming” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Accordingly, this study tries to identify a link regarding how social learning can impact tweens’ consumption. It tries to describe internal and external factors as a function of environmental influences applied to the person. Such patterns and external influences are important to identify since it can aid in giving a more complete picture of how consumption interconnects with everyday life for children.

Today, the term tweens means being young, having an opinion about various goods, and dressing like the celebrities or adults that they admire. This transformation among this age group can be due to various media usage (Fraser & Dutta, 2010), a trend related to watching television, listening to the radio, going online and surfing the web, reading magazines, etc. These mass media gears are seen as the creator of the "global phenomenon", globalization of tween buying; and the global trend, "McDonaldization" effect (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009). For these reasons, tweens are a powerful generation then past generations.

Besides the media factors, social interaction processes and negotiation practices that occur among their peers, family, and other close adults concerning consumption help in emboldening purchasing behaviors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Socialization allows young people to receive knowledge, attitudes, and abilities, which are essential in their function as consumers in the marketplace (Solomon et al., 2014). Adolescents are perceived as a competent actor, who in dialogue with his or her interpersonal ties impacts their behaviors (Tufté, 2007).

It is important to study the characteristics, values, and attitudes of the "tween" segment in order to understand how these values influence purchasing decisions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Several prior researches have begun to acknowledge a number of aspects that are significant for the process (Swain, 2010). Furthermore, there has been a shift from looking at children as easily influenced consumers to knowledgeable consumers (Tufté, 2007).

The aim of this study is to explore the factors that encourage tweens to become individual consumer. It is a direct endeavor to gain insights into the decision making process and the driving factors that influence tween buying behavior. This paper tries to find out if the influential means (family, peer and media), actual impact the tween to make a choice purchase. The main objectives of this research study is: to examine the perspectives that influence products/ service cognitive level of the tweens; and to identify factors that play the key role in the purchase behavior of the tweens. This study is based on parents' perspectives because they are the ones who witness the tweens in action regarding spending behaviors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The notion of tweens (children between seven to twelve years old) originated from the word "between" (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009). It indicates the life period where children

are neither youngsters nor teenagers; a dramatic stage in a person's existence where new interest develops and peer influence becomes more critical (Solomon et al., 2014). Tweens are preadolescents who are in a somewhat awkward, in-between stage of life. They left childhood but have not yet become teenagers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). According to research, during this transition, youths begin to grow and mature (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009). This stage has them reanalyzing themselves, redefining their personalities and developing identities (Solomon et al., 2014). Clothing, appearance, and acceptance by peers become so essential that tweens may look to interpersonal ties and media diffusion to gain social cues and behaviors, especially during purchasing various items (Swain, 2010). These knowledge-gaining influencers help them develop into independent consumers, with their own needs and priorities (Solomon et al., 2014). Furthermore, they become effective when it comes to the family's consumption (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). The following paragraphs illustrate what prior studies have identified regarding the factors that impact tween consumption behaviors.

### **2.1 Media and its impact on tweens' consumption**

Prior studies indicated that media is a significant source of influence on individuals and their consumption behaviors, especially tweens (Solomon et al., 2014). Today, children are exposed to various media communication tools, which made children's usage of media common (Fraser & Dutta, 2010). Children often have electronic media in their rooms; having power to choose what they want to watch or listen on the television, Internet, mobiles, radio, etc. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). The study of Hansen, Halling, and Carsten Nielsen (2004) and (Swain, 2010) showed that TV, computers, and mobile phones are common features in everyday life for children.

Kotler and Armstrong (2013) suggested that the media (to a large extent) influences children to a great extent, attracting them to various merchandises. The use of media is the most extensive leisure activity for children; and children can control their use of different media, making it influential (Fraser & Dutta, 2010). According to Solomon et al. (2014), most children often watched TV. Davis and James (2013)'s research showed that the most popular medium is still TV although the use of the Internet is increasing dramatically. Children use the Internet for sending emails, chatting, playing games, socializing through virtual communities (Facebook, twitter, etc.), and doing homework (Hansen et al., 2004). In regards to mobiles (relatively new

media among children), Swain (2010) stated that it allows youth to establish communication with their friends and to gain usage of Internet access everywhere they go, receiving knowledge, which is essential in impacting purchasing behaviors (Swain, 2010).

The media is a tool that communicates to the public various matters, such as products, services, ideas, philosophies, etc. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Accordingly, it motivates individuals and converts them into customers because these tools are powerful in engaging the audience fully and triggering conversation among people, inspiring them to advocate on the company's behalf (Solomon et al., 2014). Thus, influencing tween consumer's purchasing decisions is about making emotional connections through positive costumer experiences, exceptional service and engaging conversations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

## **2.2 Families and consumption**

Recently, more interest has been put on social interactions that take place between children and adults in relation to consumption (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Prior research shows that children are competent actors, creating discussions with various social ties in order to create meaning and interpretation (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). In modern childhood sociology, children are considered social beings (Solomon et al., 2014) that gradually develop into competent grown-ups, with assistance from parents and teachers (Fraser & Dutta, 2010).

Youngsters often played an important role when consumption decisions were taken in the family (Solomon et al., 2014). Many parents initiate consumption and take their children to help them shop; commodities like clothing, food, toys, hygiene products, and educational merchandises (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Prior studies indicated that taking part in decisions about food purchase was the most common effect that children had on household consumption (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). In general, as children become older their influence increases (Tufte, 2007). According to Brusdal (2006), it is important for children to have their opinion input regarding their computers, sport equipment, and leisure activities because it is seen as necessary for children's development and social life.

### **2.3 Peers and consumption**

Social influence has been stated by prior studies in having a major influence when it comes to purchasing behaviors (Solomon et al., 2014). People whether they are adults or adolescents want to belong in various social communities. They urge group acceptance and collective fitting (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Therefore, identity and group belonging could be expressed through, for example, clothes, hairstyle, and technology devices (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009). Trendsetters in a peer group often affected these expressions. At the same time, the expressions show the uniqueness of each child (Tufte, 2007).

According to previous research regarding tween consumption, looks were important for their social relations (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). The consumption of the “right” possessions and looks gives youth the feelings of protection from social exclusion (Solomon et al., 2014). Therefore, one consequence of commercialization and pressure on consumption is that some children can experience rejection when they lack things that are seen as a standard package among youth (Brusdal, 2006).

Some prior studies declared that tweens believe that the most recognized way to be popular, besides personal qualities, is having the “right” clothes; it could protect against being excluded from the group (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). When children dress in certain ways or take part in activities, it gives the tweens a sense of community and membership of specific groups (Solomon et al., 2014). Thus, possession and knowledge of products is important social capital for children (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). To sum up, the collected studies shows that consumption effect relations with peers. Consumption can be used both to express identity and to express group belonging. In addition, consumption can be protection against exclusion (Tufte, 2007).

### **2.4 Tween consumption**

Consumption is often used to express identity development, from being a small child to becoming older (Solomon et al., 2014). During this lifecycle transition phase, children could refuse certain toys and entertainment in favor for new interests that resemble mature teens (Fraser & Dutta, 2010; Tufte, 2007). Children begin to be attracted to sport, reading, computer/video games, fashion, music, friends, and teenage-programs on TV (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013).

Children's purchases are strongly influenced by their own wishes. Children sometimes use their allowance money to purchase things that their parents did not want to buy or could not afford (Brusdal, 2006). Besides the adolescents' own interests, commercial also affect their purchase behaviors. Children's understandings of commercials increase, as they get older. It is around the years 10 to 12 that children often develop a critical ability to process communicated messages and therefore, affect their wishes and purchases (Martensen, 2006).

In conclusion to the assorted literatures, media to a large extent influence everyday life for tweens and their consumptions (Fraser & Dutta, 2010). In addition, media affect children's social life with peers and parents (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013; Tufte, 2007). Parents worry about the commercial youth that is compressed by the media (television, radio, internet, mobile phones, magazines, etc.); but initiates at the same time certain consumption to their children; parents have large impact concerning purchasing behaviors among tweens, but the tweens also act as influencers to their parents (Brusdal, 2006; Solomon et al., 2014). Consumption in general effect the relation with the tween's peers. Various purchases and shopping of certain goods can be used both to express identity and belonging; it can likewise be a protection against exclusion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013; Tufte, 2007).

### 3. Methods

To gain further understanding and insights on the topic of tween consumption, a mono method of qualitative techniques was used. Qualitative research is the *"process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, as means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the events, using induction to derive possible explanations based on observed phenomena"* (Gorman & Clayton, 2004 p.3). Semi-structured interviews were casted to collect the data. This type of interviews ask questions that focus on a specific topic and consequently to draw insightful causal inferences. It is flexible in its nature, the method makes it possible to reorganize interview questions and adjust the process to different situations and interviewees (Sekaran, 2006).

The sampling method was based on nonprobability sampling (according to convenience). Fifteen interviews were conducted until saturation level of data (no new insights were emerging

and the information is becoming repetitive among the interviewees) was met. The respondents were parents of children ranging from the age of 7 to 12 years. The parents were of different socio-demographic backgrounds (age, gender, marital status, career, and income) in order to ensure a large enough variety in the studied population. Yet the focus was on middle to upper class citizens. The motive for choosing this segment is that Egypt's middle-income households represent the greatest portion of the total household expenditure (CIA World Factbook, 2013). This segment is able to afford various different merchandise and leisure activities that are considered to a certain extent to be expensive compared to basic consumption goods. The researcher interviewed all the respondents and recorded the discussion, with their permission. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into computer files. Once the transcription was composed, the researcher began the analysis.

#### 4. Findings

The fifteen interviews included participants who were parents to tweens. The following Table is the illustrations of the respondents' traits.

Table 1: Frequency of the respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristic	%	Demographic characteristic	%
Age:		Gender:	
25 less than 30	26%	Female	60%
30 less than 35	53%	Male	40%
35 and above 40	21%		
Job Status:		Level of Education:	
Manager/ Executive	12%	College	66%
Clerk	16%	Post graduate	34%
Academic	20%		
Self employed	39%		
Laborer	3%		
Other	9%		

#### Section A: Leisure activities for tweens

The interviews began by asking the parents how their children spend their spare time at home (leisure activities). The replies were similar among the parents; among tweens, to a large extent, the activities were connected to using various media instruments. It was common that



children spend several hours a week watching TV, playing with their computers or iPads, listening to music, competing in video games, or using their mobiles to chat or surf the net. Most of their children are very interested in music, and when they listen to the radio it is mainly music they listen to (not talk shows). Nevertheless, the most popular medium is still TV; although to an increasing degree, they are using the Internet. All the participants in the study indicated that their children watched TV almost every day; most of them watched because they were bored and had nothing to do once they finish their homework, their outdoor sports activities, and their house-chores. The parents commented that their children have their own electronic media in their rooms and can, thereby, choose for themselves what they view or use. They remarked that the increasing number of electronic media at home became their kids' media, offering them “free” access at any time (with parents' approval).

The parents positively looked and approved of computer usage among youth. The believed it was a supportive tool for academic learning. The respondents in the interview stated that their children use computers to be on the Internet, send emails, chat, play games, and do homework. These activities are also done on their mobile phones. According to the interviews, all the children have their own individual mobile phones that were purchased by the parents. However, the reason why children own mobile phones varied. Some parents brought their youngsters phones because they want to reach their children anywhere at any time; to make their kids have the same technological devices as their friends or classmates; to make the children familiar with the evolution of mobiles; and for entertainment purposes so they have something to play with when they get bored and are unable to go out for various reasons, such as bad weather, cancellation of play-dates, or the parent feels tired or exhausted.

Based on the parents' dialogs regarding how their children spend their spare time at home (leisure activities), the researcher concluded that the Egyptian middle-income households who live in big cities (metropolitan cities) are oriented toward new technology. The use of media tends to be the most extensive leisure activity for middle-class children in Egypt; and children to a higher extent control their use of different medias. TV, computers, and mobile phones are common features in the children's' everyday life. Media tended to take up more instances during the adolescents' leisure time. Hence, media to a large extent influence everyday life for children.

Section B: Media, personal factors, and tween consumption

Subsequently, the researcher asked the parents for their opinion regarding whether media exposes their children to globalized ideas. According to the parents, television and the Internet are the main media that exposes their children to globalized ideas and sophistication. Currently on TV there are many westernized shows that air on the local channels. Furthermore, with the satellite, viewers have access to international channels. The parents in this study provided the following supporting quotes to back up these outcomes: *“my children love to watch the programs on the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon more than any Arabic show on TV or Arabic channel like Space-toons”* (Mother of a 10 year old girl); *“my children love to watch Hanna-Montana show. She dresses like her and sings her songs. She even wanted me to dye her hair blonde”* (Mother of an 11 year old girl); *“my son loves rap music. He learned it from MTV. This impacted his preferences in by favoring the Arab rappers like Ahmed Mickey instead of the other Arab singers”* (Mother of a 13 year old boy).

With the globalized images, values, and language that are transferred through the media, children want to adopt the westernized culture. The Egyptian tweens are more of *“imitators of the foreign society”*, said a parent in the interview (Father of a 10 year old girl and a 13 year old boy). Other parents also provided some supporting quotes to back up these outcomes: *“through globalization, Egypt now has various American francizes. For example MacDonald’s is my sons’ favorite fast food place that he likes to eat in. Every time he sees their ads on TV, he would ask for a happy meal”* (Father of a 9 year old boy); *“my children want all the products that they see with other kids in family sitcoms. It is as if they want whatever is seen with kids on their favorite shows”* (Father of a 10 year old girl and a 13 year old boy).

Based on the parents’ comments, the researcher concluded that the media that are visible in Egypt assist in increasing tweens’ connection of the world and their sense of identity. Youth are alert, sensitive, and receptive to foreign cultural practices. Through the media, children engage in a process of cultural borrowing that can be sometimes disruptive to the traditional cultural practices, such as the styles of dressing, language, aesthetics, music, ideologies, etc. Therefore, the age of globalization is an age that exerted great effects upon adolescents.

Furthermore, besides the power of globalization, the parents also think that the Egyptian culture and society also controls children's way of behavior. Most of the parents believed that in the course of a person's social development, behaviors and identities would empower according to certain circumstances and preferences in society. A specific parent stated that: *"No matter what my children see on TV, they know that as Muslims we have to behave a certain way"* (Mother of a 13 year old boy). Thus, a person's own culture is a major drive in a person's existence. A person's identity is always multi-dimensional; culturally specific assumptions, contained within a diverse range of interrelated practices (language, religion, sexuality, traditions, etc.). The researcher assumed that culture creates identity as it opens up gaps and breaks between the way in which a community might perceive itself and the way it is perceived by others. Physical characteristics, way of dressing, language and dialect accents, and other distinguishing factors, act as triggers in practices of cultural interpretation.

Succeeding, the interviews moved to the next topic regarding commercials (advertisement seen when using media) and consumption in general. When the researcher began to specify that marketing toward tweens increased considerably, selling "teenage products", such as clothes, magazines and music videos, to children, all the parents agreed. A specified interviewee stated: *"commercials have a strong effect on children purchasing demands"* (Father of a 10 years old and a 5 years old) Concurring to the discussions, many parents worry about consequences from the commercials that target children. When asked about the reasons for their fears, anxieties, and cares they stated the supporting quotes: *"Commercials could make my children unsatisfied with their looks because they would want to look like their favorite actors or models. Hence, they would want to purchase countless merchandise to look like them"* (Mother of a 10 year old boy); *"children became spoiled. They nag for everything that is promoted on TV"* (Father of a 10 years old girl and a 13 years old boy).

Based on the parents' comments, the researcher concluded that the parents in the interviews experienced frustration over the unnecessary products that surround the youngsters through their commercial exposure. These products or services were not seen as harmful, but the parents assumed that they were useless to the mind; a waste of money and effort to purchase; not progressive or edifying at all; and without the potential to teach their children something valuable in life. Furthermore, many of the parents considered their children as vulnerable and shouldn't be targeted as independent consumers. They believed that their youngsters are in need

of protection, wisdom, maturity, and education, rather than as competent consumers. However, contrary to these negative opinions, the parents correspondingly expressed that children need to have the same things as their peers in school or as their teammates in sports group or club. All the parents agreed that their children must have toys, cloth, accessories, technological devices, etc.; but the limitation of these products was seen as problematic.

During the discussions, the parents stated that tweens initiated consumption in the family, especially commodities that were seen as household's basic essentials, subsistence that are significance in society, and educational. The respondents believed that their children played an important role when consumption decisions were taken in the family. Taking part in purchase decisions about food, clothing, and certain technological devices (such as mobile phones, electronic games, and computers) are the most common effect that children have on family consumption. Some supporting quotes were: *"I like to take my kids' opinions about what foods they want to eat for dinner so they can eat properly without giving me a hard time regarding finishing their meals"* (Mother of a 13 years old and a 5 years old boy); *"I like to take my children's opinion about the clothing I purchase for them in order to develop their personalities"* (Mother of a 13 years old boy and a 10 years old girl).

If it was up to the parents they would buy their children: *"anything they want as long as it is not harmful and can help them grow into mature, prosperous, successful, and respectful adults"* (Mother of a 10 years old boy). However, this is not the case as indicated by most parents. Financial factors play a major role in controlling purchasing decisions. The parents indicated that a stable economic situation assists in creating a larger scope of influence for children. The parents wanted to buy their children the stuff they ask for if it is reasonable, essential, and in their budget. Based on the parents' remarks, the researcher understood that the costs in upbringing could be a lot thus the parents often try to prioritize the needs of their children. Some supporting quotes that were mentioned by the parents were: *"If I can afford to buy the products they ask for, I would buy it and tell them they are getting this product because they were good"* (Father of a 10 years old boy); *"when I do not have the money currently to purchase a product that my child wants, I would promise them that I will save money and buy it for them later on"* (Father of a 9 years old boy). Thus, the tweens do get what they ask for (if it is approved by parents), but sometimes not right away (only when there is extra money saved to spend). A specific parent indicated that: *"I don't want to deprive them of anything that can*

*benefit them*” (Mother of a 13 years old boy). As a result, they purchase the merchandise that the children ask for to keep them content and fulfilled. The parents wanted to give their children optimum activities and finest commodities.

The parents in this study believe that such consumption communicates their status and competence. Expensive technological equipment or brand-name clothing can indicate they have enough money to give their children the “right” things; and it can express responsible parenthood. For example, a parent indicated that: *“When my children wear name brands or hold the latest gadgets, I feel like I am not denying my children of anything and that people around me can see how I am a thoughtful and affectionate parent”* (Mother of a 10 years old boy). Thus, consumption of certain products reflects a person’s financial and social status.

In conclusion, the researcher concluded that parents worry about the advertisements that are targeted to tweens; at the same time, they initiate certain consumption that was promoted through the media to their children. The parents have large impact on consumption among children, but children also influenced their parents. Moreover, degree of consumption depends on the parents’ financial ability and priority. Purchasing high end products is favorable to parents because it can exemplify their wealth and prestige.

### Section C: Interpersonal influence and tween consumption

The researcher wanted to explore the parents’ opinions about the tweens’ peers’ role in consumption. According to the respondents, consumption is an important part in children’s communities. When talking to their children, the parents have discovered that looks are important to their kids; it is a critical factor for their social relations. The parents stated that their children had explained to them how appearance is everything; and the parents agree with them 100 percent as long as they dress their age and maintain their innocence. Friends, classmates, and team members in sports, impact the way they dress and the products that they purchase. A specified interviewee stated that: *“the right merchandises and appearances attract other children to their kids. It allows them to be popular among their social group”* (Mother of a 10 years old girl). Hence, the researcher determined that some children could experience exclusion when they lack things that are seen as a standard package among youth.

The parents agreed that social influence impacts the way their children thinks and behaves. Their children spend long hours in school and afterschool programs that they are influenced to a great degree by their mates. The researcher concluded that through socialization and sharing of information, they begin to think outside beyond their family's standpoints. Friends and schoolmates impact and alter tweens personal qualities and preferences. Some supporting quotes stated by the parents were: *"my children come back from school learning new slang languages or songs that I haven't heard before"* (Mother of a 10 years old girl); *"my children would ask me to buy certain toys that their friends have purchased"* (Father of a 13 years old girl); *"my daughter dress and take part in specified activities like her best friends"* (Mother of a 10 years old girl); *"my children love to bring to school their new toys to show it off to their friends"* (Mother of 13 years old boy and 10 years old girl).

The picture that the researcher drew up by these outcomes is that consumption effect relations with peers. Furthermore, peers such as classmates or teammates in sports have impact on each other. The sharing of products, ideas, and thoughts allows them to learn new materialistic gains. Consumption among children especially tweens can be used to express identity, gain friendship and admiration, and to belong to various crowds and afflictions. Hence, consumption can be a source of protection against social exclusion.

#### Section D: Tween consumption

The researcher began to investigate the purchases that were made among the Egyptian tweens. The parents in this study indicated that their children's purchases were strongly influenced by their own wishes. As far as their disposal of money is concerned, their kids are still dependent on the parents and grandparents. However, they are trying their best to be independent. One parent stated: *"My daughter started asking me for a weekly stabilized allowance. She never asked this of me before. When I asked her why she wanted the money, she replied that she wanted to purchase her own playthings"* (Mother of a 10 years old girl). Nevertheless, sometimes their children would save their allowance, birthday money, or holiday gifts to purchase things that the parents did not want to buy or could not afford at the time of wanting. The respondents mentioned that the main goods that children bought were *"candy, magazines, coloring books, stickers, games for their PlayStation, and specific clothes."* The

respondents in the study believed that this behavior, the consumption, was used to express identity development, from being a small child to becoming big child.

The researcher thereafter began to question about gender differences when it came to consumption. The parents agreed that there are gender differences in consumption, which tend to develop at an early age among children. A specified interviewee stated: *“some obvious distinctions in consumption are that boys in general favor music, sports, computer games and action movies, while girls showed more interest for fashion, magazines, celebrity news, and spending time with friends.”* Concisely, the researcher established that girls concentrated their consumption around clothes and fashion- *“Purchases of clothes and make-up are key factors for my girls”* (Father of a 13 years old girl); and friends and celebrity gossip - *“Girls are more oriented towards media that encourage social relations and friends, such as mobiles”* (Mother of a 10 years old girl). Boys, on the other hand, request computer kits, games, and sports equipment. Some parents of tween boys stated that: *“Boys around 12 years old often had expensive media equipment in their rooms such as PlayStation, Nintendo, iPads, etc.”* (Mother of a 13 years old boy). *“My boys are beginning to focus on sports and outings with friends”* (Mother of a 10 years old girl).

At the tween phase of life the parents have witnessed that their children would reject certain toys and entertainment in favor for new interests and activities, which resemble teenagers and young adults. Thus, the researcher concluded that the respondents' tweens tended to spend their money on simple commodities. Furthermore, it seemed usual that children begin to learn the value of money and have their own savings. Consumer behavior seems to vary between different age groups and between boys and girls.

When discussing the level of child's consumption independence, the parents had different opinions. According to the interviews, some parents describe their children as autonomous consumers while others perceive them as dependent consumers. The parents who recognize their children as autonomous consumers stated that their kids have their own needs and wishes. In addition, when children have more financial resources from both parents and work, it encourages the development of independent consumers. However, the parents that emphasized children as dependent consumers stated that grownups are best suited to know how children should spend. Furthermore, they stated that their adolescents often are not active consumers in terms of

spending money. A specified interviewee stated: *“the amount of money that children can spend by themselves is limited”* (Father of a 13 years old girl). Another interviewee mentioned: *“Children often are forced to report their consumption to their parents”* (Mother of a 9 years old girl). Furthermore, the parents who believed that children are dependent consumers decided that pocket money to children is not the same extent as the level of consumption among adults. Furthermore, parents are the one who gives their children money that for specific purchases.

Based on these inferences regarding parents considering their children either as autonomous consumers or as depending consumers, the researcher indicated that tweens, to a certain degree, could be considered the start of being independent consumers; however, they are still dependent consumers. This paradox is present as the children move from being small children to almost being teenagers. Children at the tween age are more self-directed consumers than before because they can control their own media consumption; they affect their parent’s purchasing behavior; to a certain degree, they have their own money and sometimes make their own purchases. Besides these factors though, children are to a high degree reliant on their parents, especially during early childhood.

## **5. Discussion – Proposed conceptual framework**

The interviews were conducted in this study to gain rich insight regarding the influential means (family, peer and media) that impact tween to make purchasing choices. The interviews helped the researcher to explore the perspectives that influence products/ service cognitive level of the tweens; and to identify factors that play the key role in the purchase behavior of the tweens. With the help of the parents’ perspectives, the researcher used the qualitative outcomes to develop a proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) concerning the factors leading to tween purchasing behaviors. The respondents in the interviews provided several pieces of knowledge related to children and consumption in the Egyptian market.

Looking at the findings, the parents spoke about their children as a consumer. The investigation emphasized that consumption is important for children in general. Children of the ages of 7-12 year old, to a slight degree, have become more independent and self-directed consumers. They are in the lead of being existent shoppers because nowadays adolescents have their own financial resources; they reflect upon and are aware of various merchandises and



shopping stores; and they develop new interests and start to purchase new products. This study regarding tweens segment and consumption gives a depiction of the middle class Egyptian children as belonging to families with a huge variety of media. These children have leisure time in which they use various technological devices for entertainment and edification.

Based on the interviews, *the media is a vital independent variable that impacts tween consumption*. Both girls and boys are critical towards advertising. The parents mentioned that they agree that their children are unique in many ways from previous generations; and the most influencing on their young children is television advertisements; exposing and displaying globalized and national values and ideas (making them antecedents in creating influential media messages). There are different types of advertisements that are existent to children. Marketers choose children because they can easily lure them in and can ask their parents to purchase what they see or hear on television. Children influence their parent's purchases. Furthermore, besides having their parents buy them toys, children make their own purchases. Media impacts children the most. Many children recognize brand named merchandises and clothing. When children watch television, go online, play with their mobiles, listen to the radio, read magazines, etc. they cannot help but be influenced by it. These children become possessed with what they see on television and request from their parents until they get it. Some parents may even have trouble keeping up with the amount of money their child thinks that they need so they may have the newest products out there. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) mentioned that the media is a very powerful institution that impacts every aspect of peoples' lives (overwhelming them with various messages) especially, youth since they are more vulnerable and easier to manipulate.

Nevertheless, this study shows that tweens' *personal identity and characteristics impact their consumption, making it a significant independent variable* to be placed in the proposed conceptual framework in the study. Behavior is a channel through which an individual expresses himself or herself. Consumption can be used both to express identity and to express group belonging. Thus, tween purchasing and consumption depends on their personae, individual characteristics, personal quality, way of thinking and identities. Depending on the person's personality, they have fixed habits and preferences. Furthermore, depending on how the tween wants to be perceived, they should look and act in a specified manner. In this study, the parents indicated that tween consumption reflects their demographic traits (gender, income, and religion) and their psychographic traits (lifestyle and personality). According to Solomon (2013),

possession and knowledge of products is important social capital for children (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Hence, when children dress in certain ways or take part in activities, it gives them a sense of community and membership of specific groups.

Moreover, how children experience consumption is essentially related to their social relations. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be mentioned that peers, school, parents, and leisure activities are common features in developing tweens as consumption. Thus, *the final independent variable in this study that impacts tween consumption is interpersonal social factors (parents, relatives, and friends)*. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2013), social interactions with various interpersonal ties can impact tweens attitudes and behaviors in various contexts, especially in purchasing decisions.

In this study, parental influences impact the progress of the purchase behavior of children and their development as consumers. Family teaches a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes). Their socialization with kids involves teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas. The 10-12 years old are generally not extremely interested in consumption, although advertising and shopping is a part of their daily life with their help of their families. The parents initiated consumption of commodities that were seen as household's basic essentials and other exceptional subsistence; affecting consumption behavior among children. As children become older their influence increases. The parents understood that their children share opinions about the products that they purchase. Taking part in purchase decisions about food, clothing, and certain technological devices (such as mobile phones, electronic games, and computers) are the most common effect that children have on family consumption.

In this study, peers are significant in tween consumption; people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests. Socialization with friends and classmates, and sport-team members begins in the earliest years. As children grow, this process continues. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. Additionally, peers provide their own opportunities for socialization since kids usually engage in different types of activities. With peers children learn, adopt and change in the interests and purchasing behaviors. Furthermore, with their peers than they do with their families. Peer groups provide adolescents' first major socialization experience

outside the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents' priorities, this is balanced by parental influence. Children spend long hours in their school and afterschool programs that they are influenced to a great degree by their mates. Through socialization and sharing of information, they begin to think outside beyond their family's standpoints.

Due to all these outcomes, the researcher concluded that tweens are both knowledgeable and vulnerable. Tween educate themselves as consumers through shopping, websites, TV, friends and family. Consumption is part of the social relations that tweens usually experience, relations with parents and peers. Based on these finding a proposed conceptual framework was developed. Figure one illustrates the findings of the analysis accordingly in the proposed research model.

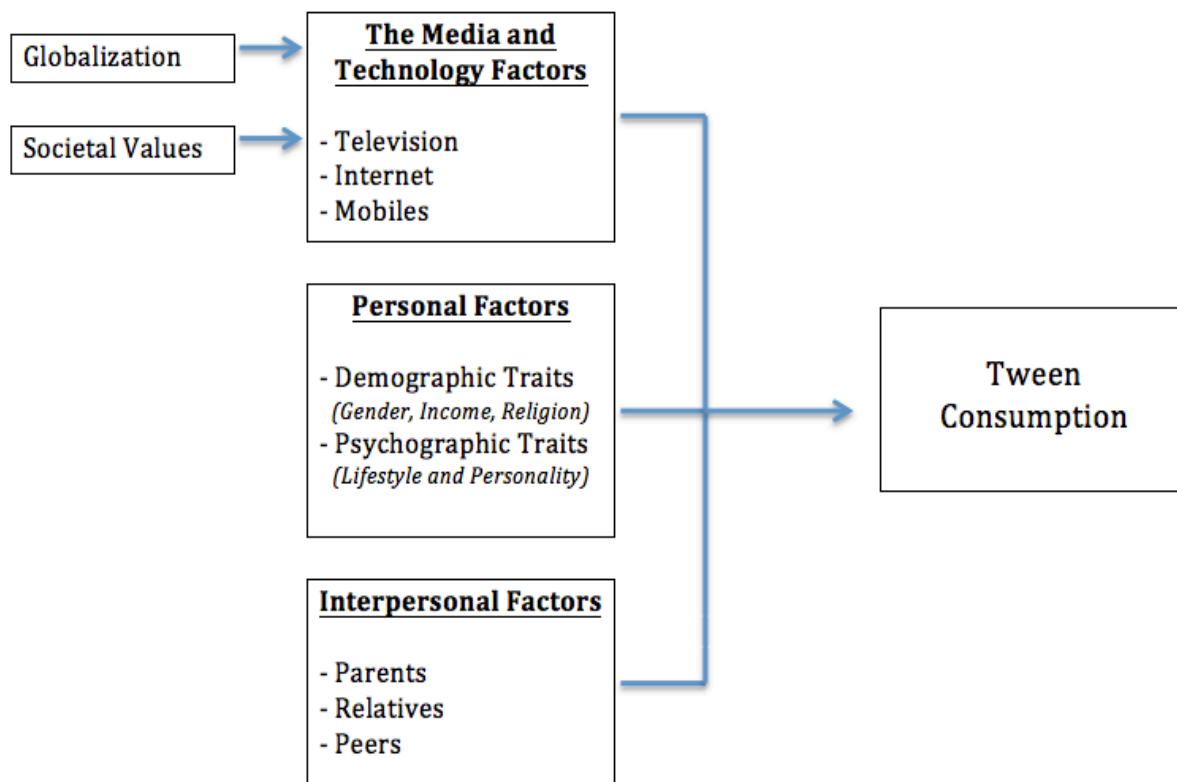


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

## 6. Conclusions

Various researches have been conducted in the American and European context on tween and consumption (Tufte, 2007). Few works have been done in reference to any Middle Eastern/Arab country. Study on the parents' perspectives on their attitude formation towards tween consumption can aid in offering a valid and working outline for a theoretical framework for Middle Eastern countries. Tween and consumption is a complex area; and that consumption to a high degree links with everyday life for children. The interviews were beneficial in providing valuable and rich insight into the subject matter. With the use of the interviews' findings, a proposed conceptual framework was developed for future researches to use and build upon.

The study provides some useful insights for practitioners in the field of tween consumption (purchasing behaviors). This study illustrates that interpersonal social influence (family and peers) plays a vital role in encouraging children to take part shopping and the usage of various merchandise and services. Consumption is part of social dealings and acquaintance that tweens usually experience; relations with parents and peers. Furthermore, this paper concluded and pointed out the fact that during the tweens life phase, the popularity of the media during the youngsters' leisure time is a daily part of their life. Furthermore, tweens personal identity and character begins to develop and influences consumptions. This study had several limitations. The first was the small size of the sample and the fact that participants were in a single area. The present study needs to be supported by quantitative research that assesses the range of suggested antecedents as well as the overall model that was suggested. Finally, this study only focused on the receivers' viewpoints not the influencer. For future research, it would be interesting to take a more accumulated grip of the area and to investigate how different pieces, such as family, peers and media are connected, interact and affect each other; intensify and proceed in a quantitative method; and increase sample size.

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