

Following the leader: Social networks of schoolchildren

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Kids always seem to be ahead of trends, and marketers realize the importance of new products and services taking off with the younger set. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* helps identify which children might be the trendsetters of their generation.

Authors Jan Kratzer (Berlin University of Technology) and Christopher Lettl (University of Aarhus, Denmark) examined the attitudes and networks of children who are "lead users," people who are most likely to develop and disseminate commercially attractive innovations.

"Lead users not only develop novel concepts but also use new prototypes and products before others do." the authors write. They are similar to "opinion leaders," innovative people who are more familiar with products than the average person.

"This study reveals that lead users are positioned as 'boundary spanners' between different social clusters or groups," write the authors; whereas "opinion leaders" tended to be influential in more local terms.

The researchers gathered data from nine randomly selected public schools in the Netherlands (537 pupils in 23 classes.) They chose to study children ages 9 to 11 because of their importance in the marketplace and the cognitive and social research demonstrating this age group to be significant. The [children](#) completed surveys that determined whether they might be "lead users" or "opinion leaders" and then completed a matrix to indicate the frequency of contact with classmates.

"We think it is important to better understand how consumers actually become lead users. The angle of looking at their social networks proved fruitful," write the authors. "In an era where [online communities](#) are a major cultural phenomenon the perspective of social networks will be even more relevant to identify leading-edge consumers."

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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