



# CONTAGIOUS

Rolodex Teens /

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*Rolodex Teens / With no overarching trend to unite them, Rolodex Teens change their identity at a click of their MySpace page. Increased access to information means that they can research the most obscure bygone eras. Why stop at one? These youngsters chop and change their look and musical taste when they feel like it – just like flipping through a Rolodex / Report by The Future Laboratory's Priyanka Kanse /*



#### The Bluestreak generation

As the lifespan of fads shortens, the Bluestreak generation is looking less far back for cultural touchpoints, recycling trends from the last decade or even more recently. We have already seen the return of rave, grunge and metal, which had a first run in this generation's own lifetime. The idea of the Bluestreak generation has pushed into the mainstream, with UK high-street stores such as River Island, Topshop, Topman, Miss Selfridge and Urban Outfitters stocking neon colours and smiley faces, fashionistas clamouring for Chanel's Black Satin nail varnish and designers such as Marc Jacobs and Raf Simons featuring early 90s silhouettes.

Music artists such as Lily Allen, Amy Winehouse, the Horrors and Klaxons reference older music styles in their songs from reggae to Motown to 'old-school' dance, and this leads teen listeners to research the styles further. They strive to carve out their own identity by seeking out the underground – think Big in Japan rather than the Sex Pistols. Therefore the Internet is essential for the Rolodex Teen.

Never before have they been able to research these bygone subcultures in such minute detail. Original video footage is available on sites such as YouTube, Revver and AllHipHop. Old songs can be found on download sites such as iTunes or eMusic, P2P sites such as LimeWire and Soulseek, and audioblog amalgamators like The Hype Machine.

### The geekocracy

For the Rolodex Teen interested in disco, vaguely having heard of Studio 54 is not good enough. It's about knowing the roles of David Mancuso and Larry Levan in the early disco scene, why clubs such as the Gallery, Continental Baths and Paradise Garage were so important, what labels were worn and what drugs were taken.

Rolodex Teens use information as social currency and to assert their individuality from their peers. They use sites such as Wikipedia, Popurls, Google and Ask to start their search, scanning for key words, bands, brands and places. They enter these new terms into search engines to find images, audio and video to create an accurate picture of the era they're researching.

### The adaptive generation

Martin Lindstrom, *Contagious* columnist and author of *BRANDchild* and *BRANDsense*, notes that kids adapt trends substantially quicker than adults. This, he says, is because of one interesting fact. 'They obtain and decode data quicker. As part of the *BRANDchild* study we learned that adults are able to handle 1.7 channels at the same time, whereas kids can handle 5.4 channels at the same time (and still understand what they're reading, watching, playing or hearing). This is one of the main reasons why they adapt trends quicker – simply because they've established a hunger for trends (and news).'

### Seeking security

Rolodex Teens, born in the early 1990s, have in contrast grown up in the shadow of political unrest, terrorism and environmental disaster. A 2006 Energy BBDO survey showed that only 14% of global teens agreed with the statement, 'I think the world is becoming a better place', which is not surprising when you consider events such as 9/11, 7/7, the 2004 tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and turmoil in Iraq.

Security is paramount for Rolodex Teens, particularly financial security, as they see it as a way of protecting their families and guaranteeing their futures. For example, 72% of the 15-to-17 year-olds interviewed for a BBC global youth poll said they worry about finding a good job. We are seeing a rise in the number of children and teenagers learning Mandarin, because they have identified China as a nation whose influence will grow. The number of students studying Mandarin at UK colleges and universities doubled between 2002 and 2005.

### Generation self

Despite being aware of the world's problems and having opinions, they care most about how to improve their own lives. In the BBC global youth poll, of the 62% of global respondents who agreed with the statements 'I understand what climate change is' and 'I agree that climate change is man-made', only 35% would be prepared to lower their standard of living to help reduce it, with those in London, Jakarta and Moscow the least likely to change their lifestyles. 'Self' is the key word when describing this group. Rolodex Teens are looking out for number one.

### Private lives

The proliferation of social networking sites has created a culture where teenagers are readier than ever to bare their most private thoughts to massive audiences of complete strangers, and 44% of British teens admit to having communicated with people they don't know online.

This may seem shocking to older generations, but it is indicative of a shift in society. Many of us think nothing of giving our details to be used for market research or being constantly filmed by CCTV.

The UK government wants to bring in identity cards as well as 'black boxes' that track vehicles for tax and fine purposes. Rolodex Teens take this in their stride and find ways to play with the idea of surveillance culture. In New York City, one teenager has been covertly taking pictures of his friends as if he were a stalker or paparazzo and then posting them on his MySpace page.



Applications like Dodgeball, which allow groups to receive mobile notification when any of their friends are within a 10-block radius, have proven hugely successful. A 'crush' function even allows for the anonymous initiation of romantic relationships.

### Creative pressure

Constantly being on show drives Rolodex Teens to update their image faster. These teenagers have an acute understanding of life in front of the lens, partly owing to the proliferation of celebrity culture but mainly to the democratisation of technology. Everyone has a camera on their phone and digital photography is also more accessible as prices drop.

Being famous is now seen as a bona fide way of earning a living. Rolodex Teens are amongst the group who popularise MySpace artists by becoming their friends in numbers. They also use their social networking profiles and websites to publicise themselves, uploading their songs, short films or artwork.

This has become a global trend for teens in developed and developing countries. 'Being famous is very important to Latin American youth,' says Camila Piza of Brazilian trend agency Voltage. 'The internet provides an opportunity for the unknown to get known'.

### Fame for fame's sake

Rolodex Teens want, even expect, to be famous for something, not nothing. Even though reality television has dominated their media landscape, they do not see it as a legitimate route to fame. 'Among this group, the type of chavish, yobbish behaviour seen on *Big Brother* is unacceptable, as it smacks of insecurity,' says Fiona Jenvey, CEO of Mudpie Design and the online fashion information service MPDClick. 'This group is very well assured with a strong sense of self.' The celebrities they respect and aspire to be like are those with talent. A YouGov survey found that 32% of young people would like to be famous for starting a successful business, 28% for becoming a musician and 20% for becoming actors, compared to 7% wanting to use reality TV as their ticket to fame.

### Dedicated followers of fashion

As catwalk looks are copied faster and more faithfully by high-street brands such as Topman, Topshop, H&M, New Look, Zara and Primark, how teens dress is levelling out. The 'Topshop effect' means that suburban girls in Croydon and inner-city Liverpool dress in a similar way. Websites such as Shareyourlook on which users worldwide post pictures of their outfits, show just how high-street homogeneity has taken over.

Rolodex Teens rebel against this by putting together outlandish outfits in order to stand out. 'If the 80s and 90s were about brands, the 00s is about style,' says Sarah Bentley, the BBC's *Culture Shock* youth culture commentator and a member of The Future Laboratory's LifeSigns Network. 'The reasons why teens want to make a statement have not changed that much. They still want to assert their identity, attract like-minded people and distance themselves from their parents' generation.'

What they wear does not necessarily signify the music they are into, which sets them apart from the subcultures that went before them. We've spotted teenage girls in Bethnal Green, London, wearing pyjama bottoms while knocking about town. One of our case-study groups, the Super Super Kids, has taken to wearing retro calculators around their necks. We have noticed Oxford teenagers mixing scruffy tracksuit bottoms with cummerbunds.

### Mash platform

People who would never have crossed paths before now do so on the anonymous platform of the Internet. This is contributing to the mashed-up nature of youth culture, where teens borrow from different styles at the drop of the hat. 'You'll have a goth and a chav meeting on a Chelsea Football Club group,' says Quinn





PUNK DANDY /

Stainfield-Bruce, founding partner of youth creative consultancy the Youth Conspiracy. 'Whereas in a bar they would never have looked at each other, let alone spoken to each other, suddenly they have a platform to communicate across common ground, and their individual trends, maybe wearing [adidas] Stan Smiths or wearing trendier clothes, start blending.'

It is now more important than ever to be aware of what other subcultures are doing, as crossover defines new styles. As Max Fletcher, one of the Punk Dandies we interviewed, points out: 'It's important to talk to people who don't just agree with you on everything, otherwise you will never get introduced into new things. Talking to just people in your "group" is too limiting.'

#### Postcode teens

Rolodex Teens express pride in where they come from and revel in telling stories of their locale to the whole world via social networking. Brands and marketers need to address this ultra-local aspect of the youth market. Take RiUvEn, a rapper from Liverpool, who has almost 3,000 friends on his MySpace account. He raps about roads in Toxteth where he is from, typical Liverpool Saturday nights and his football club (LFC) in a strong Scouse accent, peppered with Liverpool slang.

In Essex and the London suburbs, Nike Air Max 95s are known as 'One Tens' because they cost £110. This rebranding of product is postcode specific. Ask about One Tens in Manchester and people will have no idea what you are talking about.

'We also see the reaction from certain youth segments away from globalisation, which in turn drives them to feel favourably toward local shops,' says Douglas Dunn, managing director of the research agency Tuned In. 'This extends within the segment to not wanting to wear the logo of a global brand, or at least not ostentatiously,

resulting in the recent success of companies like Topman and Topshop and H&M who feature, on the whole, unbranded ranges.'

#### Classic charts

As Rolodex Teens delve further back into history, they will push classic tracks back into the charts. Music downloads, their preferred mode of purchase (yes, some teens do actually pay for tracks), now outnumber sales of CD singles by four to one. Now that all downloads will be eligible for chart entry, experts predict that we could see artists such as the Beatles and Elvis Presley back in the top 10 again. But as teens become interested in more obscure artists and genres, who's to say we won't see blues and trance acts making top 100 appearances?

*The Future Laboratory is one of Europe's foremost trends, brands and futures consultancies.*

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