

Consumer socialization, social structural factors and decision-making styles: a case study of adolescents in Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the process of consumer socialization will determine adolescents' decision-making styles. Eight decision-making styles were conceptualized as outcomes of the socialization process, which is acquired via interaction with socialization agents, namely parents, peers, printed media, television commercials and in-school education. The study also proposed five social structural variables (social class, gender, ethnicity, residence and religion) as being associated with the socialization agents and decision-making styles. The study sample consisted of 934 adolescents between the ages of 16 and 19 years. The data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analysed with the SPSS computer program. As a result of regression analyses, significant relationships were found between social structural factors and socialization processes, suggesting that the influence of socialization agents on adolescents may vary according to certain demographic characteristics. Significant relationships were also found between social structural factors and socialization processes. Peers appeared to be the most important agents of consumer socialization, contributing to a variety of desirable as well as undesirable consumer decision styles. Printed media and television commercials were also found to be significant sources of the acquisition of both desirable and undesirable decision-making styles. Parents and in-school education, however, were insignificant in the acquisition of any decision-making styles among adolescents. Information obtained from this study could be useful to government agencies and consumer educators. The most revealing finding of this study is that parents did not

contribute to the formulation of decision-making orientation for adolescents. This points to the need for consumer educators to take steps in designing programmes that will involve parents as primary socialization agents at home; this may be facilitated via printed materials. Apart from this, the information can also be helpful in enabling marketers to be more effective in targeting various adolescent markets by formulating marketing strategies according to demographic factors, socialization process and decision-making styles.

Keywords Socialization, consumer behaviour, decision-making, social factors.

Introduction

Adolescents in Malaysia have rapidly come to represent one of the most lucrative market segments as this population shows a positive indication in recent decades. The 1991 Census showed that 6.7 million of the Malaysian population were below the age of 14 years, while another 3.5 million was in the age group 15–24 years.¹ It has been estimated that the population in the age group 15–24 years has increased by 2.3% per annum, from 3.97 million in 1995 to 4.45 million in the year 2000.² Yet, as the standard of living among Malaysians has improved significantly, further stimulated by changing lifestyles, adolescents today are granted greater freedom from their parents to make their own shopping and consumption decisions. As a result, adolescents' buying power has increased rapidly as more of them enter the marketplace. This is not surprising when considering that shopping has become one of the leisure activities most often participated in by young Malaysians.³

Adolescents' eagerness to undertake an active role as consumers is evidenced by their greater participation in purchasing a wide range of consumer products such as

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clothes, make-up, food, sports equipment and entertainment, which in turn has led to the increasing phenomenon of conspicuous consumption behaviour among young Malaysians.⁴ Apart from this, it is widely believed that the adolescent period is the life stage in which an individual's consumption leverage increases very rapidly in terms of financial resources and decision-making discretion.⁵ Hence, with an expanding young population and the strong marketing impact that they have created, marketers and consumer researchers have become increasingly interested in exploring the shopping approach and decision-making of adolescents. However, little academic research has been conducted in this area in Malaysia.

Understanding adolescents' shopping behaviour should be of interest to consumer educators in their efforts to educate adolescents on shopping strategies; most adolescents were found to be ill-prepared to make many critical purchasing decisions.⁶ Hence, within the Malaysian context, the objective of this paper is to investigate two issues: (1) the influence of consumer socialization agents and social structural factors on adolescents' decision-making styles; and (2) the influence of social structural factors on adolescents' consumer socialization processes.

Consumer decision-making styles

The consumer literature suggests that examination of the decision-making construct can be categorized into three major approaches: the psychographic/lifestyle approach, the consumer typology approach and the consumer characteristics approach. Psychographic research postulates that a consumer's activity, interest and opinion statements can be very effective in measuring consumer personalities and predicting consumer behaviour because they are closer to the marketing function.⁷ Investigation using this approach has identified more than 100 characteristics relevant to consumer behaviour.⁸ The consumer typology approach attempts to define specific aspects of consumers' shopping motives and attitudes by classifying consumers into a limited number of types, which differ from each other.⁹⁻¹¹ On the other hand, the consumer characteristics approach focuses on cognitive and affective orientations that relate specifically to consumer decision-making.¹²⁻¹⁴

Among these three approaches, the consumer characteristics approach has been widely acknowledged by consumer researchers as the most explanatory and powerful construct because it focuses on a cognitive and affective aspect of consumer behaviour. This approach deals with consumers' general predisposition towards the act of shopping and describes mental orientation of consumers in their decision-making process.¹⁵ Sproles and Sproles^{13,p.268} defined consumer decision-making style as 'a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making choices'. The consumer style concept represents a cognitive and affective aspect of consumer behaviour, and it is closely linked with various personality traits, similar to the concept of personality in psychology. Psychologists suggest personality traits as one of the general factors that have a tremendous impact on many human behaviours.

The origin of the characteristics approach began with several researchers who were particularly interested in profiling consumer decision-making styles.^{16,17} The later exploratory study by Sproles¹² identified 50 items related to a consumer's cognitive and affective orientation towards shopping and buying. This author believes that measuring consumers' general orientations towards shopping and buying can identify their decision-making styles. The underlying assumption in their study is that all consumers are thought to approach the market with certain fundamental decision-making styles. Sproles and Sproles¹³ refined this inventory and accordingly developed a more parsimonious scale consisting of 40 items. The Consumer Style Inventory (CSI) that they have developed consists of eight decision-making styles. Table 1 depicts the characteristics of the eight consumer decision-making styles.

For the purpose of our study, we conceptually classified these eight constructs into three types of decision-making: (a) desirable; (b) undesirable; and (c) social and hedonistic; this is similar to the study done by Shim and Gehrt.⁵ The first two decision-making styles (quality-conscious and price-conscious) represent desirable consumer styles because price and quality are emphasized. The next two styles (impulsive and confused by overchoice) represent undesirable consumer styles because adolescents may make poor decisions because of impulsiveness and confusion about consumption. Finally, brand-conscious, novelty/fashion-conscious,

Table 1 Consumer decision-making styles¹³

Decision-making styles	Characteristics
A. Desirable decision-making styles	
High-quality conscious	Consumers who search carefully and systematically for the best quality in products. Often, they are not satisfied with the good-enough products.
Price-conscious	Consumers who are particularly conscious of sale prices and lower prices in general and, more importantly, are concerned with getting the best value for their money. These consumers are likely to be comparison shoppers.
B. Undesirable decision-making styles	
Impulsive	Consumers who tend to buy on the spur of the moment and to appear unconcerned about how much they spend or about getting best buys.
Confused by overchoice	Consumers who perceive too many brands and stores from which to choose and who are likely to experience information overload in the market.
C. Social and hedonistic decision-making styles	
Brand-conscious	Consumers who are oriented towards buying the more expensive, well-known national brands, believing that a higher price means better quality. They also prefer best-selling, advertised brands.
Novelty/fashion-conscious	Consumers who like new and innovative products and gain excitement from seeking out new things. Keeping up to date with styles and variety seeking are important aspects of novelty and fashion-conscious consumers.
Recreational	Consumers who view shopping as recreation and entertainment. These consumers find shopping a pleasant activity and shop just for the fun of it.
Habitual, brand-loyal	Consumers who have favourite brands and stores and have formed habits in choosing these repetitively.

recreational and brand-loyal represents their social motivations for consumption. Consumers with these orientations are characterized as seeking well-known brands or expensive products and as being drawn to the recreational aspects of shopping.

The theory of consumer socialization

Consumer socialization refers to 'the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their effective functioning as consumers in the marketplace'.^{18,p.2} Previous research has generally acknowledged that parents, peers, printed media, television and in-school education are the most important agents of consumer socialization, contributing to a variety of desirable as well as undesirable consumer behaviour.¹⁹ Using a Singaporean sample of 359 respondents, Mehta and Keng²⁰ found that frequency of communication with parents has an important impact on consumer activism in adolescents and the extent to which they hold economic motivations for consumption.

Peer group communication was associated with adolescents' brand consciousness,²¹ materialistic attitudes, consumer affairs knowledge and social motivations for consumption.²⁰ Newspaper readership was found to correlate with consumer competency such as consumer affairs knowledge, consumer role perceptions, ability to manage consumer finances and propensity to perform positive consumer activities.²² In another study, it was found that newspapers have a major impact on consumer affairs knowledge in adolescents.²⁰ Television viewing likewise led to the acquisition of a wide variety of desirable and undesirable consumer orientations such as the development of materialistic values,²³ social motivations for consumption and consumer affairs knowledge among adolescents.²⁰

Only a few studies have been done on in-school education related to consumer behaviour and consumer socialization. A study by Moschis and Moore²⁴ found that formal consumer education at school did not contribute to the acquisition of consumer competencies. In summary, there is reasonably good supportive evidence

that parents, peers, printed media and consumer-related education at school appeared to have positive influences on adolescents' consumer style. On the other hand, peers and television commercials may be related to a variety of consumer orientations that are both desirable and undesirable. Based on this observation, the following two hypotheses were developed:

H1 – Adolescents who interact more frequently with their parents, read printed media materials and are more receptive to in-school education are more likely to demonstrate desirable decision-making styles (H1a) and less likely to have undesirable (H1b) and social/hedonistic decision-making styles (H1c).

H2 – Adolescents, who interact with their peers and watch television commercials more frequently are more likely to display a combination of desirable (H2a), undesirable (H2b) and social/hedonistic (H2c) decision-making styles.

Social structures are the antecedent variables that refer to the social environment within which a person's learning takes place.²⁵ Female adolescents were more likely to participate in family purchase decisions and engage in more overt consumption-related communication with their peers than were male adolescents.²⁶ Almost no previous studies focusing specifically on consumer socialization can be found that explore the effect of religion and geographical subcultures on the process of consumer socialization. However, Moschis²⁵ speculated that both religion and geographic factors are likely to exhibit different patterns of consumer behaviour and affect individual's interactions with various socialization agents. Hence, the following hypothesis was constructed:

H3 – The influence of socialization agents and their communication process will be associated with social class, gender, ethnicity, residence and religious group affiliations.

Although much research has demonstrated how teenagers' consumer behaviour is influenced by social structural factors, very little speculation is possible about the effects of these variables on their consumer styles, because of a lack of relevant research investigating the

association between social structural and decision styles. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H4 – Adolescent consumer decision-making styles are associated with social class, gender, ethnicity, residence and religious group affiliations.

Methodology

Measurements

Decision-making styles inventory

Given adolescents as a unit of analysis, a total of 32 statements of Consumer Style Inventory (CSI) to measure adolescents' decision-making styles were adapted from the study by Sproles and Sproles,¹³ which has been validated from a target population of 482 high school students. Instead of using 41 statements of CSI by Sproles and Sproles,¹³ the study adopted the four-item subscales for each of the eight consumer style scales because they appeared to have greater reliability compared with the results obtained by previous authors. Table 2 provides sample statements and standardized alpha coefficients for each scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of agreement with each of these statements as a description of themselves as consumers of products such as food and clothes on a five-point Likert-type scale. The alpha coefficient of these eight shopping orientation scales ranged from 0.43 to 0.80.

Consumer socialization agents

A total of 43 statements sought to measure the interaction between adolescents and socialization agents about consumption matters. Most of the items used in this section are taken from previous research regarding adolescent interactions with four socialization agents, i.e. parents, peers, mass media and in-school education on consumption matters.^{23,25,27,28} Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statements on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Labels and a sample statement for each factor are as follows: (a) interaction with parents (e.g. 'I often discuss my purchase plan with my parents'); (b) interaction with peers (e.g. 'I often get information about a product from

Table 2 Consumer decision-making style scales and reliabilities

Consumer decision-making styles	Sample statements	Sproles and Kendall (1986)	Current study
High quality-conscious	Getting very good quality is very important to me. When it comes to purchasing products, I try to get the very best or perfect choice.	0.69	0.75
Price-conscious	I buy as much as possible at sale prices. The lower price products are usually my choice.	0.48	0.57
Impulsive	I should plan my shopping more carefully than I do. I am impulsive when purchasing.	0.41	0.43
Confused by overchoice	There are so many brands to choose from that I often feel confused. Sometimes it's hard to choose which stores to shop at.	0.51	0.7
Brand-conscious	The well-known national brands are best for me. The more expensive brands are usually my choices.	0.63	0.72
Novelty/fashion-conscious	I usually have one or more outfits of the very newest style. I keep my wardrobe up to date with the changing fashions.	0.76	0.7
Recreational	Shopping is a pleasant activity to me. Going shopping is one of the enjoyable activities of my life.	0.71	0.78
Habitual, brand-loyal	I have favourite brands I buy over and over again. Once I find a product or brand I like, I stick with it.	0.54	0.69

friends before I buy'); (c) printed media reading (e.g. 'I only buy those products that are advertised in a magazine'); (d) exposure to TV commercials (e.g. 'I watch TV advertisements to find out how good a product is'); and (e) in-school education (e.g. 'My teachers talk about how to manage money wisely').

Social structural variables

Social structural variables included social class, gender, ethnicity, residence and religious group affiliation. All variables were measured by categorical format questions.

Data collection and sample profiles

Following a pilot study with 46 respondents, a survey was carried out covering two states in Malaysia with a total of 1080 students from secondary schools using a seven-page Malay-version questionnaire. The schools were selected based on an area sampling procedure where the representation of east coast and west coast regions and also urban and rural schools is used. Adolescents between the ages of 16 and 19 years were included for the purpose of the study and, therefore,

only students in Secondary Four, Five, Lower Six and Upper Six were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The data were entered into the computer for statistical analysis with the SPSS computer program.

Out of 1080 sets of questionnaires distributed, 934 sets were completed and usable for data analysis, yielding a response rate of 86.5%. The sample consisted of 42.8% male and 57.2% female. The Chinese constituted the largest ethnic group, accounting for 46.9% of the respondents, followed by Malays (43.1%) and Indians (9.7%). A large proportion of the respondents reside in urban areas (57.8%), followed by 25.1% respondents from suburban areas, and another 17.1% are from rural areas. The majority of the urban respondents are Chinese, whereas mainly suburban and rural respondents are Malays. Some 44.5% of the respondents fell into a lower social status category. The next largest are the upper class, which constituted 28.3%, whereas the middle class made up 27.2% of the respondents. In terms of religious affiliation, non-Muslims formed 56.7% of the respondents, whereas Muslim respondents comprised 43.3%. In terms of age, the majority group is 17 years old (30%), followed by 16 year olds (31.4%), 19 year olds (23.1%) and 18 year olds (15.5%).

Data analysis and results

The data were entered into the computer for statistical analysis with the SPSS computer program. To test for the possible presence of intercorrelations among independent variables, a correlation matrix was run among the eight independent variables. It was found that the intercorrelations among the eight independent variables were rather low, ranging from 0.01 to 0.37. Thus, it was concluded that there were no reasons to be concerned as no high intercorrelations existed among these variables. However, the absence of high bivariate correlation does not imply lack of collinearity because the correlation matrix may not reveal collinear relationships involving more than two variables.²⁹ Therefore, the tolerance values of the independent variables were

assessed further while the multiple regression analyses were run using the conventional tolerance value of 0.1 as the cut-off point for high multicollinearity, as recommended by Hair *et al.*³⁰

Relationships of socialization agents with adolescents' decision-making

The summary test results of Hypotheses 1 and 2 are presented in Table 3. All eight *F*-test statistics were significant ($F = 39.238$, $P < 0.001$ for brand-conscious; $F = 37.047$, $P < 0.001$ for novelty/fashion-conscious; $F = 11.608$, $P < 0.001$ for recreational; $F = 25.953$, $P < 0.001$ for brand-loyal; $F = 8.854$, $P < 0.001$ for impulsive; $F = 31.093$, $P < 0.001$ for confused by overchoice; $F = 14.333$, $P < 0.001$ for quality-conscious; and $F = 6.704$,

Table 3 Relationships of socialization agents with decision-making styles

	Desirable		Undesirable	
	Quality-conscious	Price-conscious	Impulsive	Confused by overchoice
Parents	NS	NS	NS	NS
Peers	0.123***	0.073*	0.134***	0.159***
Printed media	NS	-0.112***	-0.066*	NS
TV commercials	NS	0.095**	NS	0.143***
In-school education	NS	NS	NS	NS
R^2 (adjusted R^2)	0.015 (0.014)	0.012 (0.018)	0.019 (0.017)	0.063 (0.061)
<i>F</i> -value	14.333	6.704	8.854	31.093
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
Tolerance range	1	0.793–0.860	0.956	0.868

	Social and hedonistic			
	Brand-conscious	Fashion-conscious	Recreational	Brand-loyal
Parents	-0.06*	-0.109***	NS	NS
Peers	0.176***	0.22***	0.085*	0.15***
Printed media	0.232***	0.133***	0.078*	0.146***
TV commercials	0.108**	0.154***	0.095**	NS
In-school education	NS	0.097**	NS	NS
R^2 (adjusted R^2)	0.145 (0.141)	0.166 (0.162)	0.036 (0.033)	0.053 (0.051)
<i>F</i> -value	39.238	37.047	11.608	25.953
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
Tolerance range	0.782–0.983	0.765–0.964	0.793–0.873	0.956

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

NS, not significant.

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (beta weights).

$P < 0.001$ for price-conscious). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was rejected, which indicates that adolescent's interaction with parents and in-school education did not relate significantly to any of the two styles under the desirable category. This finding suggests that parents and in-school education apparently contribute little to the acquisition of desirable decision-making styles.

Hypothesis 1b was partially supported in that socialization agents were found to affect several adolescent decision-making styles under the social and hedonistic category. Parents were revealed to be negatively related to brand-conscious ($\beta = -0.060$, $P < 0.05$) and fashion-conscious ($\beta = -0.109$, $P < 0.05$) adolescents, implying a positive outcome of interaction with parents. This means that the more adolescents interact with their parents, the less they demonstrate social and hedonistic decision-making styles. Printed media were positively related to all criterion variables under the social and hedonistic category. More specifically, printed media are related to brand-conscious ($\beta = 0.232$, $P < 0.001$), novelty/fashion-conscious ($\beta = 0.133$, $P < 0.001$), recreational ($\beta = 0.095$, $P < 0.01$) and brand-loyal decision styles ($\beta = 0.146$, $P < 0.001$). It should be noted that the beta coefficient of the influence of printed media on brand consciousness is much higher than those of the other variables, implying a high level of impact of printed media on adolescents' brand consciousness.

The results also indicate that in-school education is positively related to novelty/fashion-conscious decision-making styles ($\beta = 0.097$, $P < 0.01$). No concrete reason could be given for this finding, as we would expect a positive outcome of in-school education. Perhaps consumer-related education offered at school may provide some information concerning the positive aspects of being aware and keeping up with new and innovative products available in the market. It was found that printed media readership is negatively correlated with impulsive ($\beta = -0.066$, $P < 0.001$) behaviour, suggesting that the more adolescents read printed media materials, the less likely they are to display impulsive decision-making styles.

Hypothesis 2a was accepted. As hypothesized, the statistical results with peers functioning as a predictor variable indicate significant findings for all variables under the social and hedonistic category tested in this study. Peers are positively related to brand-conscious

($\beta = 0.176$, $P < 0.001$), novelty/fashion-conscious ($\beta = 0.220$, $P < 0.001$), recreational ($\beta = 0.085$, $P < 0.001$) and brand-loyal attitudes towards consumption ($\beta = 0.150$, $P < 0.001$). In general, these four decision styles characterize consumers as oriented towards buying well-known brands, gaining excitement from seeking out new fashion, enjoying shopping as a recreational activity and repetitively choosing the same brands and stores. Television commercials are positively correlated with brand consciousness ($\beta = 0.108$, $P < 0.01$), implying that mere exposure to the product brands advertised on television may be sufficient to create favourable attitudes towards the brand, as suggested by Moschis.²⁵ In addition, exposure to television commercials was found to be positively associated with novelty/fashion-conscious ($\beta = 0.154$, $P < 0.001$) and recreational styles ($\beta = 0.095$, $P < 0.01$).

Peers appeared to be a positive predictor of impulsive ($\beta = 0.134$, $P < 0.001$) and confused by overchoice ($\beta = 0.159$, $P < 0.001$) decision-making styles (H2b). This suggests that the more adolescents interact with their peers, the more likely they are to demonstrate undesirable decision-making styles. Hypothesis 2c was confirmed, as interaction with peers and exposure to television commercials contribute to the acquisition of desirable decision-making styles. Interaction with peers is positively associated with quality-conscious ($\beta = 0.123$, $P < 0.001$) and price-conscious ($\beta = 0.073$, $P < 0.05$) decision-making styles, implying that interaction with peers tends to facilitate the development of desirable consumption behaviour. This finding showed that the more adolescents interact with their peers, the more likely they are to be concerned about getting high-quality products and the best value for their money. Finally, the data suggest that television commercials are associated positively with price-conscious style ($\beta = 0.095$, $P < 0.01$), meaning that, with increasing exposure to television commercials, adolescents are likely to be more conscious of prices in their purchasing decisions.

Relationships of social structural variables with socialization agents

The results of the stepwise multiple regression analyses using socialization agent as the criterion variable and

Table 4 Relationships of social structural variables with socialization agents

Social structural variables	Beta (β) coefficients				
	Parents	Peers	Printed media	TV commercials	In-school education
Social class	NS	NS	NS	NS	-0.120***
Gender ^a	0.162***	-0.079**	NS	NS	NS
Ethnicity1 ^b	-0.098**	-0.183***	NS	-0.192***	NS
Ethnicity2 ^c	0.130***	-0.093**	NS	NS	0.072*
Residence1 ^d	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Residence2 ^e	NS	NS	0.084**	NS	NS
Religious ^f	NS	-0.208***	NS	NS	-0.246***
R^2 (adjusted R^2)	0.048 (0.045)	0.158 (0.154)	0.007 (0.006)	0.037 (0.036)	0.061 (0.058)
F -value	15.689	43.423	6.583	35.799	20.207
Sig. F	0.000***	0.000***	0.010**	0.000***	0.000***
Tolerance range	0.978–0.99	0.296–0.983	1	1	0.911–0.967

^a 0 = male; 1 = female.^b 0 = Malay and Indian; 1 = Chinese.^c 0 = Malay and Chinese; 1 = Indian.^d 0 = rural and urban; 1 = suburban.^e 0 = rural and suburban; 1 = urban.^f 0 = Muslim; 1 = non Muslim* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

NS, not significant.

social structural as the predictor variable are presented in Table 4. All five F -test statistics were significant ($F = 15.689$, $P < 0.001$ for parents; $F = 43.423$, $p < 0.001$ for peers; $F = 6.583$, $P < 0.01$ for printed media; $F = 35.799$, $P < 0.001$ for television commercials; and $F = 20.207$, $P < 0.001$ for in-school education). Hence, Hypothesis 3 was accepted. Social class emerged as a significant predictor of receptiveness to in-school education ($\beta = 0.120$, $P < 0.001$). There is a negative relationship between social class and adolescent's receptiveness to in-school education. It means that adolescents from higher social class families are less receptive to in-school education compared with lower socioeconomic status respondents. Gender is related to the influence of parents and peers. Male youngsters are more likely to interact with their peers ($\beta = -0.079$, $P < 0.01$) about consumption matters than female adolescents. In contrast, female adolescents are more likely to interact with parents regarding consumption matters ($\beta = 0.162$, $P < 0.001$).

From the perspective of ethnicity, Chinese youngsters, compared with Malays, are less likely to interact

with their parents ($\beta = -0.098$, $P < 0.01$) and peers ($\beta = -0.183$, $P < 0.001$). In addition, they are less receptive to television commercials ($\beta = -0.192$, $P < 0.001$). On the other hand, Indian youngsters, compared with Malays, are more likely to interact with their parents ($\beta = 0.130$, $P < 0.001$) and are less likely to interact with peers regarding consumption matters ($\beta = -0.093$, $P < 0.01$). However, they believed that in-school education is a good source of consumer education ($\beta = 0.072$, $P < 0.05$). Finally, religious group affiliations are found to correlate with the influence of peers and in-school education. Muslim adolescents are more likely to interact with their peers regarding consumption matters ($\beta = -0.208$, $P < 0.001$) and perceived in-school education as a source of consumer-related education ($\beta = -0.246$, $P < 0.001$).

Relationships of social structural variables with decision-making

Table 5 summarizes the results of stepwise multiple regression analyses showing the relationships between

Table 5 Relationships of social structural variables with decision-making styles

	Desirable		Undesirable	
	Quality-conscious	Price-conscious	Impulsive	Confused by overchoice
Social class	0.086**	-0.099**	NS	NS
Gender ^a	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ethnicity1 ^b	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ethnicity2 ^c	-0.079*	NS	-0.085**	NS
Residence1 ^d	NS	NS	NS	NS
Residence2 ^e	NS	NS	NS	NS
Religious group ^f	NS	-0.067*	-0.145***	-0.208***
<i>R</i> ² (adjusted <i>R</i> ²)	0.013 (0.011)	0.012 (0.01)	0.034 (0.032)	0.043 (0.042)
<i>F</i> -value	6.237	5.688	16.53	42.048
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.002**	0.004**	0.000***	0.000***
Tolerance range	0.999	0.971	0.942	1

	Social and hedonistic			
	Brand-conscious	Fashion-conscious	Recreational	Brand-loyal
Social class	0.073*	0.089**	0.087**	NS
Gender ^a	-0.089**	NS	0.294***	NS
Ethnicity1 ^b	-0.226***	-0.108*	-0.079*	NS
Ethnicity2 ^c	NS	NS	NS	NS
Residence1 ^d	0.092*	0.092*	NS	NS
Residence2 ^e	0.176***	0.178***	NS	NS
Religious group ^f	NS	-0.133*	NS	NS
<i>R</i> ² (adjusted <i>R</i> ²)	0.076 (0.071)	0.071 (0.066)	0.095 (0.092)	NE
<i>F</i> -value	15.248	14.095	32.586	NE
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	NE
Tolerance range	0.502–0.937	0.362–0.948	0.958–0.989	NE

^a 0 = male; 1 = female.^b 0 = Malay and Indian; 1 = Chinese.^c 0 = Malay and Chinese; 1 = Indian.^d 0 = rural and urban; 1 = suburban.^e 0 = rural and suburban; 1 = urban.^f 0 = Muslim; 1 = non Muslim.* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

NS, not significant. NE, not entered because of an insignificant result.

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (beta weights).

social structural variables and decision-making styles. Hypothesis 4 was accepted as the seven *F*-test statistics were significant ($F = 15.248$, $P < 0.001$ for brand-consciousness; $F = 14.095$, $P < 0.001$ for novelty/fashion-consciousness; $F = 32.586$, $P < 0.001$ for recreational; $F = 16.53$, $P < 0.001$ for impulsiveness; $F = 42.048$, $P <$

0.001 for confused by overchoice; $F = 6.237$, $P < 0.01$ for quality-consciousness; and $F = 5.688$, $P < 0.01$ for price-consciousness). However, the *F*-test statistics on brand loyalty are not significant.

Both male and female adolescents demonstrated social and hedonistic decision-making. Male adoles-

cents are found to be associated with brand-consciousness ($\beta = -0.089$, $P < 0.01$). Female adolescents, on the other hand, are more associated with recreational style ($\beta = 0.294$, $P < 0.001$), suggesting that female adolescents are consumers who treat shopping as a pleasant activity and would shop around just for the fun of it. In terms of ethnicity, Chinese adolescents, compared with Malays, are less likely to display social and hedonistic decision-making. The finding suggests that Chinese adolescents are less brand-conscious ($\beta = -0.226$, $P < 0.001$), less fashion-conscious ($\beta = -0.108$, $P < 0.05$) and less recreational-oriented towards shopping activities ($\beta = -0.079$, $P < 0.05$) than their Malay counterparts. On the other hand, Indian adolescents are less likely to display impulsive ($\beta = -0.085$, $P < 0.01$) and quality-conscious ($\beta = -0.079$, $P < 0.05$) styles of behaviour.

Residence is revealed as an important predictor of brand-consciousness and fashion-consciousness under the social and hedonistic category. Adolescents who live in suburban areas are more likely to display brand-consciousness ($\beta = 0.092$, $P < 0.05$) and novelty/fashion-consciousness ($\beta = 0.092$, $P < 0.05$) compared with adolescents in rural areas. Similarly, adolescents residing in urban areas are more likely to demonstrate brand-consciousness ($\beta = 0.176$, $P < 0.001$) and novelty/fashion-consciousness ($\beta = 0.178$, $P < 0.001$) than adolescents in rural areas. These differences characterize suburban and urban adolescents as consumers who are concerned with lifestyles, oriented towards buying well-known brands, keeping up to date with styles and gaining excitement from seeking out new things.

Conclusions and implications

The most revealing findings of our study are that each of the social structural factors exerts a strong influence on the interaction process between Malaysian youngsters and their socialization agents. The findings suggest that the influence of socialization agents on adolescents may vary according to demographic and social characteristics. However, it should be kept in mind that demographic characteristics other than those examined in this study might also affect adolescents' socialization process and their decision-making styles. Peers emerged as the most important agents of consumer socialization, contributing to a variety of decision-making styles.

Likewise, printed media and television commercials were also found to be significant sources of the acquisition of both desirable and undesirable decision-making, but were more likely to direct youngsters towards undesirable decision-making. Parents and in-school education, however, played an insignificant role in the acquisition of decision-making styles.

To government officials and consumer educators, the insignificant role of parents and in-school education in educating adolescents on utilitarian decision making should be a primary concern for them. Necessary steps should be taken by designing programmes that will involve parents as primary socialization agents, which may be facilitated by printed materials. Hence, it seems clear that a formal consumerism education should be introduced in secondary schools. This subject should build a foundation upon which knowledgeable, responsible and efficient consumption behaviour among adolescents can be developed. Teaching young people to be wise consumers should begin at an early stage in their lives. Perhaps the biggest task for government officials and non-government organizations (NGOs), such as consumer associations, is to foster interest in consumer education among teenagers.

To marketing practitioners, the role of printed media and television commercials in the formation of social and hedonistic decision making is a useful finding. By tailoring their communication strategies according to these values, it can create more involvement in advertisements, which in turn will elicit positive emotional responses among the audience. For example, to form brand loyalty among adolescents, it is more effective for marketers to use printed media advertisement rather than television commercials as a medium of communication. However, marketers need to exercise caution because they could be blamed for stimulating conspicuous consumption behaviour among young consumers through their aggressive advertising campaigns. Marketers might also benefit by applying a more information-based advertising strategy for communication purposes, especially via television. For example, marketer's communication can be designed to stimulate product discussions by portraying peers in the act of informal communication, suggesting the need to discuss a particular subject or product. By showing this message repeatedly, it can create a positive feeling towards the

product. Whenever adolescents interact with their peers, they will remember to talk about the product.

Finally, it should be noted that, even though this study showed that many of the relationships are statistically significant and conform to previous findings, the R^2 values in the regression models were very low. Hence, the goodness-of-fit is very low, suggesting caution in interpreting the results. Moschis and Moore³¹ argued that a small amount of variation in the equation is accounted for by the presence of relatively few independent variables, whereas socialization outcomes (i.e. consumer learning) may be affected by a large number of variables within the context of the general conceptual framework of consumer socialization. The situation here is very much like that in previous studies of adolescents' consumer socialization where predictor variables are able to explain only a small portion of the variance in the criterion variables.^{25,31} Hence, it should be a concern for future research to identify and explore the influence of more diverse variables on the process of consumer socialization.

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