

**SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES**Journal homepage: <http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/>**Exploring Influences of Consumer Socialization Agents on Branded Apparel Purchase among Urban Malaysian Tweens****Carol Boon Chui Teo<sup>1\*</sup>, Samsinar Md Sidin<sup>2</sup> and Mohd Izzudin Mohamad Nor<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia*<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia***ABSTRACT**

Tween consumers today interact with brands, television media and friends as their main agents of socialization. These agents have impacts on their consumption patterns. In the Malaysian market, the tween segment has emerged and also taken the retail trade by storm. Tweens are now able to influence their parents' purchasing decisions and this has changed the spending behaviour of their family. This paper seeks to examine consumer socialization sources for tweens and how these socialization agents can influence their preference for branded apparels. Data was collected using a structured survey questionnaire to elicit responses on the purchase preferences of branded apparels. The respondents comprised of 150 urban tweens between the ages of 8 to 12 years. Findings revealed that urban tweens had relatively high awareness on brand names and strong purchase preferences for branded apparels. Peer, parental and advertisement influences, combined with their obsession for television media, have significantly affected their purchase of branded apparels. Arguably, parental selective power still has some exertion on tween's purchase decisions although the influence is declining. Parents and tweens often wear apparels of the same brands. The findings of this study have several implications for marketers, consumers, and family policy makers.

*Keywords:* Tweens, consumer socialization, parental influence, peer influence, parental selective power

**INTRODUCTION***The Tween Market in Malaysia*

The "tween" concept originated in marketing and even though it is a widely used term in marketing and media research, the concept should not be taken for granted. The concept is based on being "in-be-tween" childhood

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and teen-hood (Cook & Kaiser, 2004) or pre-teens. Tweens or tweenagers are loosely defined by those at the ages of 8 to 12 years old, based on the Western context (Siegel *et al.*, 2004; Soltan, 2004). The tween market is an attractive market for retailers. These young customers are an important segment in the marketplace as they exert enormous influence on the allocation of spending power across a growing number of product categories.

Tweens in Malaysia are narrowly classified between the age of 10 to 14 years old and they make up about 10 percent of the total population (Euromonitor International, 2005). This is the age group where children grow to become individuals with the majority of influence coming from family and friends. This is also a moulding age for a wide range of consumer products such as branded fashion apparel, sportswear, and jewellery, fast food, entertainment and hair accessories (Euromonitor International, 2010). In recent years, new products such as handbags, cosmetics, electronic gadgets and mobile phones have been largely purchased by tweens. It appears that tweens today have more decision power than their older teenage counterparts and are often given more liberty to purchase anything they like. These tweens are likely to show brand loyalty as they grow older, as it is perhaps the first time they make decisions over which brands they buy (Martensen, 2007; Prince, 2011).

In the case of Malaysia, most of the marketers and consumer researchers have largely ignored these tweens as a consumer

segment because of their little disposable income or insignificant role in purchase decision making. However, a new trend has emerged. The modern tweens have more buying power because they receive more allowance and parents also allow them to handle their finances. For instance, a typical tweenager in Malaysia receives an allowance of between RM20 to RM50 per month. Most of them are highly susceptible to advertising as well as peer pressure and will most likely spend to look 'cool' (Euromonitor International, 2005).

As tweens increasingly evolve themselves into important consumers in today's consumer culture, it is deemed important to investigate their shopping behaviour, such as the motivations underlying the choices behind their purchases and also the places they frequent to shop these products. Thus, they certainly have an influence on their family's purchase decisions. Tweens are now able to influence their parents' purchase decision making and thus, affecting the spending patterns of their family. Recently, a large number of branded and luxury apparel outlets have mushroomed to cater to the tween markets. Some of the tween brands of apparels in the Malaysian retail market are 'Osh Kosh B'Gosh', 'Gap Kids', 'Miss Whatever, Girls', 'Guess Kids' and 'Seed and Padini Kids'. This signifies that wearing apparels with brand is a part of the lifestyle which is not only for adults but also for the tweens. As indicated, tweens' preferences for branded apparels are influenced by the major consumer socialization agents,

namely, television commercial exposure, as well as parental and peer influences (Calvert, 2003; Sancheti, 2009). The understanding of the socialization factors that influence tweens to purchase branded apparels has become significant, especially for marketers, as tweens are now regarded as an attractive market segment by itself with high profit potential. This study explored the phenomenon of preferences for branded apparels among urban Malaysian tweens. Notably, the effects of parental influence and parental selective power on tweens' purchases of branded apparels were measured. In addition, the roles of television media and peer influence were also studied to determine their influences on tweens' purchase behaviour.

#### *The Soaring Tween Consumer Segment*

Clothing is an essential part of our daily life; the importance of which varies among individuals. Determining the level of one's interest in clothing is an important practice in evaluating one's apparel attitudes and consumer behaviour. Some previous studies have shown that younger shoppers tend to be more involved in the purchase of apparel items relative to older shoppers (Fairhurst *et al.*, 1989; Drake-Bridges & Burgess, 2010). Generation Y consumers' choices and purchases of branded apparels are primarily meant to express their individuality, creativity, and uniqueness, as well as to maintain their social norms (Knight & Kim, 2007). Simpson *et al.* (1998) found the attributes of tweens' purchase of clothing are related to status; they are interested in

wearing the latest fashion, to be in-style, and gaining prestige of wearing branded clothing. The tween years are deemed a time whereby peer pressure and "fitting in" play a very important part of their childhood.

In light of the increasing role of young consumers' involvement in purchase decisions, recent studies have begun to examine the relatively under-researched but increasingly important tween market and their involvement in the purchase decision making of their family. Shoham and Dalakas (2006) and Tinson (2007) have highlighted how the adolescent children influence their parents to yield to their purchase requests. Although previous studies have noted that older teenagers have greater influence on family purchase, tweens have also exerted a significant influence over their parents' choices of product purchase.

Despite the tweens' increasing role in family decision making and spending power in the retail sector, there is a paucity of research into the buying pattern and behaviour of this consumer segment. Extensive research on adult consumers' brand recognition has not been paralleled by the same level of studies done on young consumers (Gregan & Roedder, 1995; Siegel *et al.*, 2001). Nonetheless, numerous studies have shown that children's unique shopping patterns are developed and affected by consumer socialization agents, which include family, peers, media and schools (Moschis, 1981; Shoham & Dalakas, 2006; Tinson & Nancarrow, 2010). These influences are critical consumer socialization agents among children and

adolescents, and more often than not, have an impact on the younger generation to buy certain products or brands. Recent studies have focused on environmental factors such as television, parents and peers mainly on children's brand awareness (Valkenburg & Bujizen, 2005; D'Alessio *et al.*, 2009), but little is known about consumer socialization sources for tweens.

In addition, some apparel marketers have taken the external factors that can affect the tweens' purchasing pattern for granted. Basically, tweens' unique shopping patterns are developed and affected by consumer socialization agents, which include television commercial exposure, parental and peer influences. Tweens' consumption and perception to advertising are differently motivated according to cultural differences and consequently, the tween segment is not globally homogenous (Andersen *et al.*, 2008). Hence, tweens' attitudes towards brands should be developed separately and marketers should certainly not assume that the findings derived from the Western research could be similarly applied to the Malaysian context. Similarly, the marketing tools that have been practiced in the West may not be effective in Malaysia due to the differences in terms of culture, beliefs, attitude and the general lifestyle.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate the underlying socialization characteristics of Malaysian tweens that could differ in terms of their perceptions and reactions. By ignoring the importance of studying the tweens' purchasing behaviours, marketers or apparel producers will miss the opportunity

to achieve the optimum revenue and market capacity. Exponentially, marketers will not be able to survive especially with the intense market competition. This study firstly sought to investigate the preferences of branded apparels among tweens and to identify the consumer socialization agents influencing their purchase preferences. In more specific, the influences of consumer socialization agents on the purchase preference for branded apparels were determined. Subsequently, ethnic and gender differences for these agents were also examined.

The significance of this study will provide marketers the opportunities to generate new marketing strategies in planning for the best promotional tools to capture this new consumer segment. Tweens' purchasing power in America was estimated at \$38 billion, and family expenditures on tweens were amounted to \$144 billion in 2007 (Sree, 2005). More importantly, the findings will have implications for marketing strategies that capture the interest of potentially money-spinning and lucrative tween segment in Malaysia. In the same vein, with the proselytisation of advertisement and Western media, marketers need to be sensitive to the burgeoning global tween's behaviour to spend on products.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed primary data collection using a survey approach. The necessary data was obtained mainly using personal interviews to guide the younger samples

of tweens to respond to the questions as they might have less experience in filling in the questionnaires. Hence, the questionnaires were only self-administered to older tweens. This method was vital to ensure high reliability and accuracy of the data collected. The target sample included tweens between 8 to 12 years of age. For the purpose of comparing with existing literature and past studies, this study utilized the more widely definition of 8 to 12 years of age. Previous studies in the tween Asian market have used both the younger (from 8 years old) and older tween segments (from 10 to 12 years old) (Tomari, 2008; Chan, 2011). Using convenience sampling, 150 tweens were selected from the urban areas of the Klang Valley and Kuala Lumpur to participate in the survey as these areas are representatives of the major urban young consumer markets in Malaysia. Moreover, the urban tweens were most likely to be exposed to branded apparels and tended to possess a certain level of awareness towards these brands. Using the shopping mall intercept method, the respondents were identified at fast food restaurants of major shopping malls in the city and the Light Rail Transit stations.

The research instrument comprised close-ended, structured questions, which had been adapted from the works of Dotson and Hyatt (2005) and Flurry and Burns (2005). Items tapped included their demographic profile, consumer socialization agents and how those agents might have an influence over the choices and preferences of branded apparels. Tweens' influence power towards

their parent's purchase decisions in branded fashion and clothing preferences was also surveyed. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree, the instrument measured the influences by peers (6 items), television (9 items), and parents (10 items) as independent variables, while brands (4 items) as the dependent variable. The 4 items in brand with the word 'clothes' were changed to 'apparels' to suit to the concept of fine and branded apparels as opposed to clothes which refer to formal clothing and other accessories. This was done to assist the young respondents to understand the content and to adapt to the Malaysian context.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic profile of the respondents in Table 1 shows that males (42%) and females (58%) are almost equally represented. Meanwhile, the age distribution indicates that 12 year old tweens as the largest group. The ethnic group, Malays (56.7%), accounts for more than half of the total respondents while Chinese and constitute 24% and 14%, respectively. The ethnic composition reflects the typical Malaysian urban population composition. The main household income group is from RM3001 to RM4000 per month (40.7%), whilst 22.7% are in the income group of RM4001 and above. These income groups are representatives of most urban families, with a relatively good social economic background. Most of the respondents have 2 to 3 siblings (82%), and this is an indicative of the nuclear family and

the small family size prevalent in modern urban households in Malaysia. In addition, most of the families surveyed have siblings, supporting the view that tweens' influence on family purchase in this study was not biased and not dominated by the decision of a one-child family.

*Tweens' Preferences towards Branded Apparels*

The preferences for branded apparels focus on how far the tweens are aware of fashion trends, and their ability to recognize and purchase branded fashion clothing. The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that

most urban tweens like to wear certain branded apparels ( $M = 4.19, SD = 0.61$ ). This means they are brand-conscious, paying particular attention to brand names when they go shopping ( $M = 4.00, SD = 0.78$ ). They also tend to wear apparels with the brand names displayed, indicating their strong preferences to purchase apparel from a particular brand ( $M = 3.91, SD = 0.86$ ). These findings are consistent to Sidin *et al.*'s (2008) study, where Malaysian children were found to show high preference ranking towards brand names by frequently choosing products with well-known brands. However, purchasing a particular brand of

TABLE 1  
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Gender		
Male	63	42
Female	87	58
Age		
8	13	8.7
9	10	6.7
10	30	20.0
11	29	19.3
12	68	45.3
Ethnicity		
Malay	85	56.7
Chinese	36	24.0
Indian	21	14.0
Others	8	5.3
Number of Siblings		
1 (Only child)	1	0.70
2 to 3	123	82.0
4 to 5	24	16.0
6 and above	2	1.3
Household Monthly Income		
RM1000 and below	2	1.3
RM1001 to RM2000	7	4.7
RM2001 to RM3000	46	30.7
RM3001 to RM4000	61	40.7
RM4001 and above	34	22.7

apparel is relatively important to them with a lower mean score than other items ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). This could be attributed to the fact that brands are more important than price and style when making apparel purchase. This is in line to the findings by Park (2005).

#### *Consumer Socialization Agents of Tweens*

Factor analysis using Principal Component with varimax rotation on the 25 scale items was performed on the entire sample of the respondents. Table 3 provides the results derived from the factor analysis. The study generated 5 socialization agents of tweens based on a cut-off factor loading of 0.45 for a sample size of 150 as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2006) and an eigenvalue greater than one. All the 5 factors had satisfactory reliability scores of 0.68 to 0.88 as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2006, p. 137), whereby the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.6 is acceptable for exploratory studies. The alpha values greater than 0.6 indicates a satisfactory internal consistency reliability (see Maholtra & Birks, 2007, p. 358-359). Total variance as explained by the 5 factors accounted to almost 60%. According to Hair *et al.* (2006, p. 120), the factor solution that accounts for 60% of the total variance

(and even less in in some cases) is regarded as satisfactory as information is often less precise in social science research.

Meanwhile, peer influence (with 6 items) accounted for 25.3% of the total variance appeared as the first factor. The second factor (namely, television commercial exposure) contained 5 items and it accounted for 13.64%. This was followed by obsession with watching television, which emerged as the third new factor, with 4 items and 9.41% of the total variance. The fourth factor, i.e. parental influence, comprised of 4 items which explained 5.87% of the variance. A new dimension, which is termed as parental selective power, appeared as the fifth factor with 2 items and accounted for 4.96% of the total variance.

As the reference group, peer group played a role in influencing the product choice among the tweens. They feel that it is vital for them to fit in with their peers and thus believe what their peers think is more important rather than what their parents think. They appear bothered when their friends possess something that they do not have. In other words, urban tweens like to wear what their friends are wearing and will most likely purchase the same brand too. Most significantly, these urban tweens

TABLE 2  
The Mean Scores of Tweens' Preferences for Branded Apparels

Preferences for Branded Apparels	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
I like to wear certain brands of apparels	4.19	0.61
I think having a name brand apparel is important	3.37	0.96
I pay attention to brand names of apparels when I go shopping	4.00	0.78
I like wearing apparels with brand name showing	3.91	0.86

believe that successful people wear brand names. These findings are similar to the work by Dotson and Hyatt (2005), whereby tweens reported peer and TV influence as their main consumer socialization agents. Children’s ability to recall brands and peer influence lead to brand recognition (Valkenburg & Bujizen, 2005). Similarly,

Ong and Chan (1999) showed peer group and media as the main sources of influence on purchases among Malaysians. Semuels (2006) observed that during the tween years, kids switch from being influenced by their parents and the brands they buy to being influenced by their peers and the brands they aspire to own.

TABLE 3  
Factor Analysis of Consumer Socialization Agents

	Mean Score	Factor Loadings				
		1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1: Peer Influence						
It is important for me to fit in with my friends	4.08	0.80				
I like to wear what my friends are wearing	3.78	0.79				
What my friends think is more important than what my parents think	3.07	0.78				
I buy the same brands as my friends	3.59	0.74				
It bothers me when my friends have something that I don’t have	4.17	0.74				
Successful people wear name brands	4.43	0.62				
Factor 2: Television Commercial Exposure						
I like commercials with celebrities	4.12		0.69			
I learn a lot about brand from watching TV	3.95		0.58			
Most TV ads are cool	3.97		0.56			
I make buying decisions on items for the whole family	2.79		0.54			
I value my parents’ opinion on what I buy	3.66		0.40			
Factor 3: Obsession with Watching Television						
Watching TV is an important part of my life	3.73			0.84		
I always watch TV after school	4.15			0.84		
Watching TV is fun	4.46			0.79		
TV ads tell the truth about products	3.25			0.47		
Factor 4: Parental Influence						
My parents and I agree on what I should wear	4.03				0.78	
I like to go shopping with my family	3.89				0.72	
My parents let me buy the brand of apparels that I want	4.14				0.57	
I talk to my parents about brands	3.67				0.52	
Factor 5: Parental Selective Power						
I buy the same brands as my parents	3.59					0.84
My parents choose the apparels they buy for me	3.25					0.75
Cronbach’s Alpha		0.88	0.68	0.77	0.73	0.68
% of Variance Explained		25.3	13.64	9.41	5.87	5.0



Tweens favour commercials which involve celebrities and agree that TV advertisements are cool. They learn brand names through advertisements as well as commercials and this has had some influence on their family buying decisions. However, some urban tweens do value and consider their parents' opinions on what they should buy.

The current study observed that Malaysian tweens are obsessed with watching television. In particular, they perceive TV media an important part of their life and watching TV is fun. They always watch TV after school and believe the advertisements shown on TV. This connotes tweens' TV culture and obsession with TV and its commercials. This cultural obsession is caused by the fact that some TV ads feature tween and teenage commercials. Tweens are influenced by imagery and assimilate information pertaining to certain products from this imagery. Asian children are more likely to be influenced by TV because of their obsession for it and brands exposure from TV commercials and therefore directly affecting their choices. They learn of brands from reality TV, celebrity personalities and idol emulation (Semuels, 2006). TV viewing is associated with desirable and undesirable consumer socialization (Shim *et al.*, 1995) and a source of information for new products (Fiates *et al.*, 2008). Another insight found tweens' attention style to a strong liking for advertisements, where the more stimuli, the better (Bergstrom & Bluementhal, 2001).

Parents today tend to agree with their children on what they should wear and allow them to buy the brand apparels of their choice. This socialization process between parent and tweens actively involves communication about brands and product choices. Children as young as nine have as much knowledge of advertising slogans as do their parents, even in product categories targeted for adults (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). As more parents now involve their children in shopping, the more conscious children reported being of brand, price, colours, peer, and style in buying apparels (Shim *et al.*, 1995). Among Malaysians, family consistently emerged as a great influence over purchase decisions on food and beverages, cosmetics and toiletries, as well as clothes (Sidin *et al.*, 2008).

Parental selective power revealed that ultimately urban parents still have some control over the choices of apparels suitable for their children. On one hand, the tweens seem to have some power to select their brand choices, although their preferences are likely to be influenced by their parents' decisions on type of apparels and brands. Some tweens and parents wear the same brand names. Both parents and their tweens are label-conscious, especially parents from the baby boomers era, who grew up in affluence. Parents want to show their status through their kids (Semuels, 2006). Parents do make decisions on the choice of branded apparels for their children and this is notably done amongst Asian families. These findings are consistent with Carlson

and Grossbart's (1988), whereby parental styles can influence children's product preference. Authoritarian mothers are active in shaping learning experiences and discussing their children's opinions and TV media mediation.

*Gender Comparison of Consumer Socialization Agents towards Tweens' Preferences for Branded Apparels*

In this study, gender and ethnicity comparisons on socialization agents of tweens were determined using independent sample t-test. Table 4 indicates that female tweens demonstrated a stronger preference in purchasing branded apparels ( $t=4.65$ ,  $p=0.0001$ ), influenced by television commercials ( $t=3.54$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and were susceptible to parental influence ( $t=3.38$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), as compared to male tweens. Grant and Stephen (2005) found that parental and peer group approval as key decision factors influencing tweenage girls' fashion clothing purchases. In contrast, Valkenburg and Bujizen (2005) found American boys to

have superior brand recognition and brand recall as compared to girls. Ozgen (2003), on the other hand, reported that gender on the relationship with parents and peers as socialization agents was insignificant. The findings are supported by Sidin *et al.* (2008), who found that female children showed high preference ranking towards brand names for food product purchases. Tweens' consumption differs in different countries and this could be explained by cultural factors, as echoed by Andersen *et al.* (2007) that the tween consumer segment is not a globally homogenous segment as many marketers would have thought it to be.

*Ethnicity Comparison of Consumer Socialization Agents towards Tween Preferences for Branded Apparels*

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that Chinese tweens were dominant in the preferences of branded apparels ( $F= 4.19$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), while Indian tweens were mostly influenced by their parents in purchasing branded apparels ( $F=4.20$ ,  $p=0.022$ ).

TABLE 4  
Gender Comparison on Consumer Socialization Agents

Variables	Means <sup>(a)</sup>		t-value <sup>(b)</sup>	Sig
	Male N=87	Female N=63		
Preferences of Branded Apparels Purchase	3.58	4.07	4.65	.0001*
Peer Influence	3.74	3.94	1.76	.081
Television Commercial Exposure	3.53	3.82	3.54	.001*
Parental Influence	3.75	4.07	3.38	.001*
Parental Selective Power	2.67	2.76	0.59	.554

\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ . <sup>(a)</sup>Mean score is based on a 5-point Likert Scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. The higher the mean score, the greater the respondent's presence towards the factor will be. <sup>(b)</sup>T-value using independent sample t-test between the male and female respondents

The differences could be explained by the cultural factors and parental styles. Bristol and Manglebury (2005) discussed permissive and authoritative parental styles in individualistic cultures found in the Western cultures, whereas protective and indulgent styles as prevalent in collective cultures as in Asian cultures. These could influence tween socialization patterns and consumption choice. These findings are supported by the studies on tween market in other Asian markets. In particular, TV commercials appear to have a large impact upon the brand preference and purchase behaviour of children in the Indian market (Khandai & Agrawal, 2012), and they are fully aware of the various advertisement dimensions that influence their desires to purchase (Razzaque, 2009).

#### *Consumer Socialization Agents on Tweens' Preferences for Branded Apparels*

The relationships between socialization agents and preference for brand apparels were evaluated using multiple regression analysis. Overall, the four socialization

agents explained 45.1% of the variance of branded apparel preferences. This shows a moderately acceptable result. In addition,  $F = 29.75$  was quite large and the corresponding p-value was significant ( $p=0.0001$ ). Based on the information given in Table 6, peer influence ( $\beta=0.33$ ) contributed the strongest in explaining the tweens' preferences for branded apparels, and this was followed by parental influence ( $\beta=0.30$ ) and TV commercial exposure ( $\beta=0.23$ ). On the contrary, parental selective power ( $\beta=0.16$ ) contributed the least in explaining the tweens' preference for branded apparels.

These results are in line with the study by Dotson and Hyatt (2005), which showed that peer and television influences were significant consumer socialization agents as opposed to the amount of television viewing acts which served as an insignificant predictor. Parental brand awareness was significantly related to children's brand recall, while peer influence significantly helped in predicting children's brand recognition (Valkenburg & Bujizen, 2005).

TABLE 5  
Ethnicity Comparison on Consumer Socialization Agents

Consumer Socialization Agents	Means <sup>(a)</sup>				F <sup>(b)</sup>	Sig.
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
Preferences of Branded Apparels	3.72	4.19	3.98	3.66	4.92	0.003*
Peer Influence	3.73	4.06	3.97	3.96	2.44	0.067
Television Commercial Exposure	3.66	3.78	3.76	3.55	0.80	0.495
Parental Influence	3.82	4.03	4.20	3.91	3.32	0.022*
Parental Selective Power	2.80	2.58	2.81	2.31	0.91	0.436

\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ . <sup>(a)</sup>Mean score is based on a 5-point Likert Scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. The higher the mean score, the greater the respondent's presence towards the factor will be. <sup>(b)</sup>F value using ANOVA between Malay, Chinese, Indian and "Others"

Ong and Chan (1999) found that young family members consistently emerged as a great influence over purchase decisions on food and beverages, cosmetics and toiletries as well as clothes. Peer groups were also found as the main source of influence for the purchases of books and magazines, while mass media was the main source of influence for electrical goods.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study have important implications for marketers as well as consumer and family policies. Understanding the influences of their socialization agents will provide invaluable insights into tweens’ mindset towards brands offering with new avenues for marketers’ thought into tween-oriented marketing and brand strategy. The findings of this study have implied that urban Malaysian tweens may be more effectively targeted by marketers using the strategies that can stimulate the word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer marketing strategies which encourage these tweens to talk about the brand name of apparels with their friends as this portrays a high tendency of social interactions in their daily life due to the collectivist Malaysian

culture that is strongly attached to reference groups. Meanwhile, advertisements and commercials developed by marketers should include elements of friendship and tweens’ lifestyle so as to capture the potentially lucrative tween market.

Thus, marketers can exploit the power of television commercials and ads that capture market potential among Malaysian urban tweens due to their obsession with watching TV. Walters (2009) calls for appropriate strategies to these preteens who are in a voracious search for self-image and identity which is often done through TV where fashion trends are set by celebrity icons. Urban tweens are more than likely to go shopping with their parents; therefore, the advertisements should not just attract and please tweens but they must also attract their parents’ interests. As the findings have indicated that urban Malaysian parents do, to some extent, allow their children to decide on their choice of branded apparel, the parents still ultimately play their roles in advising and giving opinions. In order to reduce the parents’ autocratic and selective power in purchasing apparels for their children, marketers may develop strategies that attempt to bridge the gap between

TABLE 6  
The Relationship between Consumer Socialization Agents and Preferences for Branded Apparels

Consumer Socialization Agents	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Peer Influence	0.33	4.393	0.01*
Parental Influence	0.30	4.064	0.01*
TV Commercial Exposure	0.23	2.970	0.01*
Parental Selective Power	-0.16	-2.251	0.03*

\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $F = 29.75$ ,  $R = 0.671$ ,  $R \text{ square} = 0.451$

children and parents, such as by creating events, activities or programmes that require the involvement from both parties to create a family-oriented atmosphere with activities for all ages that instil positive brand-oriented experiences in children.

Moreover, parents should also consider their children's interest in determining their image and appearance. Rationally, parents should give opinions and advice on the suitability of apparels that should be purchased by their children. In addition, parents should give their children clear guidelines as to what clothing is acceptable. According to Drake (1999), parents are responsible in choosing appropriate shopping formats for their children but at the same time, they should tolerate them by allowing some degree of authority in decision-making in order to provide freedom for them to explore and determine the kind of apparels they should like to wear.

The findings have also added to the understanding of tweens' consumption behaviours for marketers. Marketers have commonly regarded that tween consumers are a globally homogenous group. This tween segment has captured the attention of marketers and is reported to be the fastest growing market niche. In addition, the findings have highlighted the role of female tweens as the main influencers in the modern yet conservative culture of Malaysia.

Nevertheless, the present study has some limitations. In particular, it was based on a convenient sampling and this sample size was rather small and restricted to urban tweens only. Hence, there is a

limited representativeness of the results. This also means that generalization of the findings should be done with care. A larger sample could be tested over a wider range of urban cities in Malaysia so as to make generalization more meaningful. In addition, the present study dealt with branded apparels, thus, it may not be possible to generalize results to other product types. For this reason, future research is recommended to explore other product and service categories such as holiday travel, private education, meals out and entertainment services that tweens today have greater influence on.

The present study was confined to ad influence on TV media as the main socialization agent. Future research should extend to upcoming online social media such as Facebook and Twitter on product purchases among tweens and also extend to include the Facebook generation and Generation Z. The investigation towards tweens' influence power on family purchase decisions should be further studied in order to identify the strategies implemented by those who influence their parents in terms of branded apparel purchases. The strategies applied by the tweens in influencing their parents' decisions include bargaining, persuading, or adopting emotional strategies which for instance are pouting, sweet talking, or using guilt trips. Despite some limitations, the findings have provided richer insights for marketers and researchers into how tweens, especially those from a more Asian perspective, have an impact on family consumption behaviour.

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