

## Adolescent's strategies and reverse influence in family food decision making

<sup>1</sup>\*Othman, M., <sup>1</sup>Boo, H. C. and <sup>2</sup>Wan Rusni, W. I.

<sup>1</sup>*Food Service and Management Department, Faculty of Food Science and Technology  
University Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Penang  
Branch, Jalan Permatang Pauh. 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

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### Abstract

The role of adolescents in family decision making related to food consumption in Malaysia has received comparatively little or no attention by researchers although there were evidences of differences in influences found in other countries. This study addressed the research gap by testing adolescents' bilateral strategies in influencing their family decision using family power theory. A survey of 500 adolescents from urban area was conducted to investigate their influence based on their involvement in family consumer tasks. Key findings include strong relationship between perception of influence and rewards thus indicate the existence of strategies in adolescents influence attempt.

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## Introduction

Studies on the children's roles in family decision making often use the term children and adolescent interchangeably. According to Oxford advanced learner's dictionary, the term children carry two meanings, the first meaning refer to a young human who is not yet an adult while the second meaning is used to describe a son or daughter of any age. The term adolescent is also used to define a human whose age is between 10 to 18 years old (Gentry and Campbell, 2002). Despite the term children is often used in this study, it does not necessarily referring to the young children aged below 10 years old because this term is also used to describe adolescent.

Children influence in family decision making has becoming one of the continuing important topics worldwide. Despite of the fact that children's influence in family purchasing behaviour were recognized since the 70's in other developed countries such as U.S., it is only recently that similar behaviour were investigated in Asian countries. In China for instance children known as "Little Emperors" were found to influence 68.7% of their parents' regular purchases and 23.3% of family durable goods purchases (Wimalasiri, 2004). Similar trend is also found in India and the influences of children are found to vary by the stage of decision making process (Kaur, 2006). Based on 1991 census carried out in Malaysia it has been estimated that the population of 15-24 years age

group has increased by 2.3% per annum from 3.97 million in 1995 and projected to reach 5.5 million in 2015 (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003). With the rapid growth in adolescents' population, the needs to further understand their influence in family decision becomes more significant. Children are often ignored by marketers as a consumer segment because their disadvantages in terms of monetary power, thus making them relatively unimportant segment to focus on (Sidin et al, 2008). Failure to understand this segment is a mistake which can cost a big loss for the marketers because these children are their future customers.

It is imperative for the marketers to understand the impact of children's influence in family food purchase decisions because failing to understand market needs will jeopardize retailers' bottom line. Despite the importance of such data, there is very limited information available on children's influence in Malaysian family (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003). Diverse ethnicities that make up Malaysian population not only makes Malaysia unique but also lead to difficulties in understanding Malaysian family food purchasing behaviour. Previous study on adolescents' influence found significant differences in persuasion strategies among adolescents from three largest ethnics in Malaysia namely Malay, Chinese and Indian (Fikry and Jamil, 2010). Changes in Malaysian household such as having fewer children, changing lifestyle and growing urbanization have

\*Corresponding author.  
Email: [mohhidin@gmail.com](mailto:mohhidin@gmail.com)

great impact on family purchasing behaviour (Fikry and Jamil, 2010). With smaller family, more money are spent on the children, thus more freedom are given especially to the adolescent to make their own consumption decisions and for that reason adolescents in Malaysia now are becoming one of the most lucrative market segments (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003). Studies on children's influence often focus on low involvement purchase because such purchase only involved low cost items such as stationeries, books or foods products. Surprisingly adolescents in Malaysia were also found to be highly influential in the high involvement products purchase such as the mobile phone (Fikry and Jamil, 2010). With very limited literature available on Malaysian purchasing behaviour especially on reverse influence, this study aim to investigate the relationship between bilateral strategies and perception of reward.

#### *Literature review and hypotheses development*

##### ***Adolescent influence in family purchase***

Past research has contributed greatly on understanding children behaviour however most of the studies on children influence revolved around children socialization which concern more on where children learn their consumer traits rather than how children influence the actual purchase. Reverse influence on the other hand try to investigate how children influence parents' decision. However understanding adolescents can become a challenging task because unlike their younger counterpart, adolescents are more creative in their persuasion attempt thus making them more influential in family purchase decision (Marquis, 2004; Ebster *et al.*, 2009). Constant exposures to media allow children to learn a great deal of products and services. Once they reached the age of adolescent, they have developed a sound knowledge on marketplace concept such as branding and pricing (John, 1999). The ability to utilize the information and abilities to manipulate parents to yield to their request often made adolescents more influential in family decision (Wimalasiri, 2004).

##### ***Adolescents strategies to influence parents***

One of the most profound characteristics between adolescents and their younger counterpart is the ability to strategize their move to ensure their influence attempts are effective. Similar traits were not found in younger children, thus suggest that younger children still do not really understand the importance of strategies in their influence attempt. John (1999) in her article review on consumer socialization study has identified the characteristic of children and she has classified aged between 11 and 16 as reflective

stage. Adolescents at this stage are very influential in family decision because they possessed higher ability to influence parents compare to those at younger age. These abilities are not learned in one day instead it is developed throughout their childhood and from there, they learned which influence does work and which does not. Once they learned that the strategies work for them, they are likely to feel empowered in the process (Palan and Wilkes, 1997). Testing each strategy one by one through trial and error process will lead to the discovery of effective strategies which make them more confident in their influencing skills (Bao *et al.*, 2007).

Cowan *et al.* (1984) (as cited in Bao *et al.*, 2007) suggested that strategies can be divided into two main categories which are bilateral strategies and unilateral strategies. Both are different in terms of approach and their effectiveness. Bilateral strategy is unique because this strategy emphasizes on softer approach in influence where it requires others' involvement for it to work. This strategy requires target person's cooperation and responsiveness where in this case adolescents require parents' cooperation and response on their demand. On the other hand unilateral strategy is more like pressure tactics to force parents to comply with the demand made. Studies on the strategies used by adolescents to influence their parents found consistent findings where bilateral strategies are more effective compared to unilateral strategies. Bargaining with parents to influence their purchase is also part of bilateral strategy, in fact this strategy was found to be utilized by Malaysian teenagers to influence high involvement purchase such as mobile phone (Fikry and Jamil, 2010).

##### ***Parents' reaction toward adolescent's strategies***

If adolescents use various tactics to influence their parents, why parents allow themselves to be manipulated? Is it because parents themselves do not realize that children can sometime be very manipulative? The success of the strategies relies very much on both sides; the children and their parents. Adolescents will stop using these strategies if there is no positive feedback from the parents. Therefore parents themselves play an important role in encouraging their children to develop such behaviour. Bilateral strategies are perceived more positively by parents because the positive interaction that occurs during purchasing process does not really show that the children are trying to manipulate parents for their own personal gain.

Children have been exposed to the role of consumer socialization at a very young age through advertisement. For most children they are exposed to

the marketplace as soon as they can be accommodated as a passenger in shopping cart at the groceries stores. The importance of co-shopping with children was viewed by parents as ways to develop children's consumer skills and it is also found that parents place more value on children's input especially those that frequently co-shopping with their parents (Grossbart *et al.*, 1991). Sometimes taking adolescents co-shopping is preferred by parents because their assistance is a need (McCullum and Achterberg, 1997; Chan, 2005; Larson *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand bringing younger children sometimes can be an unpleasant experience because instead of helping, they became a nuisance (Geuens *et al.*, 2003).

Psychologists suggest that competencies are achieved through personally or socially desired outcomes determined by an individual's ability to use two types of resources; those that are unique to the environment and those that are unique to the individual (John, 1999). Consumer expertise can be defined as the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully. These include information search, interaction with salespeople, choice, decision making and various tasks that involved in actual purchase (Mallalieu and Palan, 2006). Similar ideas were also proposed by John (1999) where as children grew older they learn on object of transactions knowledge and skill referring to product, brand knowledge and shopping skills. In many cases consumer competencies are shaped through direct involvement of children for instance in helping parents as co-shopper or simply finding new information through internet. Previous studies on this area also found adolescents with higher knowledge on the purchase are more influential in family decision (Foxman *et al.*, 1989).

In reality adolescents do help their parents in various tasks including household task and consumer task (Grossbart *et al.*, 1991; McCullum and Achterberg, 1997; Palan, 1998; Chan, 2005; Larson *et al.*, 2006). Parents see adolescents' involvement in these activities as part of the development process because this is the time to develop many life skills including decision making. Furthermore, this is their transition period to adulthood where it is the time to prepare them for independence and responsibilities in the future (Mann *et al.*, 1989; Brown and Mann, 1990). This notion is further supported by many scholars and they concur that parents are the one who are responsible in shaping children's competencies as consumers by allowing them to participate in decision making and purchasing tasks (Grossbart *et al.*, 1991; Turner *et al.*, 2006; Lanchance and Legault, 2007).

Since parents constantly need adolescents' help, therefore it is not impossible for adolescents

to capitalize the situation where they will demand something in return after helping their parents. Interestingly past studies have also suggested that this strategy is often used by adolescents because it does work (Palan and Wilkes, 1997; Wimalasiri, 2004). Bilateral strategies are often used by adolescents to influence their parents through reasoning and expressing their opinion about the purchase (Shoham and Dalakas, 2006). This strategy is quite popular among adolescents because parents sometime encourage adolescents to invest in this strategy because their input, knowledge and information are often welcomed by their parents (Thomson *et al.*, 2007). Parents sometimes rely very much on the information from their adolescents especially when it involves purchasing decision that they are not familiar with especially those related to technology (Götze *et al.*, 2009).

### **Family power theory**

Adolescents' influential power is derived from family power and according to McDonald (1980) this power is classified into five power domains and they are normative, economic, affective, personal and cognitive resources. These power domains are based on resource theory in Blood and Wolfe (1960). However, only three out of five powers can be utilized by adolescents. Normative power for instance is very similar to legitimate power that even adolescents themselves reported that they don't possess such power (Flurry and Burns, 2005). Very similar to normative power, economic power is only possessed by parents because they are the one who have direct control over family spending behaviour (McDonald, 1980).

### **Cognitive resource**

Despite the fact that children do not possess economic resource this doesn't mean that they are not influential in family purchase decision because there are other types of resources they can utilize. Cognitive and affective resources have becoming very important resources for children, in fact these resources are found to be the basis for a reversal of influence in family (Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Sheth and Mittal, 2004). Once children grow up and are exposed to new knowledge, their preferences differ from those of their parents; they are able to exercise their influence. Reverse influence occur because children possessed greater knowledge and expertise than their parents. Foa (1993) (as cited by Flurry, 2007) suggest that information such as advice, opinions or instruction is considered as social resources. The value of these resources has positive

relationship with the amount of power possessed by the individual thus it has direct effect on the influence a person may exert in decision making (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Hence, any traits or behaviour that is valued by others can always be used as resource to be exchanged for the influence (McDonald, 1980).

Consumer socialization theory suggested that as children reached the age of adolescents they have developed a sound knowledge on marketplace concept such as branding and pricing (John, 1999). Besides that, at this age children have also developed more sophisticated information processing and social skills. These information processing abilities include the ability to understand and detect ads manipulation and deception. Thus, at this age it is believed that adolescents have developed sceptical attitudes towards the ads. As their social skills increase, children become less dependent on parental role model as they learn many consumer traits from external agents. Dotson and Hyatt (2005) proposed that external agents such as mass media and peers are found to be the main socialization agents for children.

### **Social exchange theory**

Social exchange theory introduced by Homans (1958) (as cited in Cropanzano *et al.*, 2005) presented a concept of social behaviour that is based on the concept of exchange. This concept is built based on the theory that exchange requires bidirectional transaction. This means if something is given to someone then something is expected in return; a reciprocal exchange. Thus, as long as the activities yield reward, one will continue to invest in that activity (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2005). Reciprocal exchange is also culturally and norm related, one can be punished if one fails to follow the standard norm or on the other hand, can be rewarded if they obey the rules (McDonald, 1980).

This theory provides support on why adolescents use strategy to influence, because it is not wise to always ask something without offering something in return. Asking something from parents is very similar to unilateral strategy where children demand something through pestering or forcing technique without offering parents anything in return. On the other hand, social exchange strategy is similar to bilateral strategy where children still ask their parents to comply to their needs; however they give something in return through performing household chores or assisting parents with grocery shopping.

### **Hypotheses**

Demographic characteristics such as age has a

strong correlation with children's influence in family decision making and all previous studies agreed that children's age has direct relationship with their influence in family decision (Swinyard and Sim, 1987; Brown and Mann, 1990; Kaur and Singh, 2006). Besides age, family size also has strong relationship with children's influence in family decision where in a larger family with fewer resources to be distributed around, the family members have no choice but to share the limited resource. Therefore, children from this family rarely demand for something that they personally want as parents will decide what is more important (Lee and Beatty, 2002). Differences in influence strategies are found among three major races in Malaysia namely Malay, Chinese and Indian (Fikry and Jamil, 2010). Since Malaysian population consisted of various races and each race has their own unique sub culture, it is imperative for marketer to understand their differences in order to develop better marketing plan.

Malaysia is also characterized as high power distance index country thus indicates that children are expected to be obedient. Apart from that, the collectivist culture in Malaysian society also suggests that children are not encouraged to convey their personnel opinion and children who have repeatedly voicing opinions are deviating and often considered to have bad character (Hofstede, 1997). Pressuring parents by forcing them to comply with the children's demand is against this culture because children are expected to treat older people especially parents with respect. On the other hand bilateral strategies through sharing of information during shopping activities are more acceptable by parents because they are not forced to comply with the demand. Parent's cooperation is the key for this strategy to work. Previous studies suggest the utilization of this strategy is related to age where only adolescents use this strategy in their attempt to influence their parents (John, 1999).

In collective culture Hofstede (1997) has clearly mentioned that children's personal opinion is not always welcomed by parents especially when children repeatedly voicing opinions which are deviating from the parents' beliefs. However, studies also revealed that children also learned many traits from their parents including consumer traits. Therefore, children's behaviour as consumers has not much difference from their parents because in socialization process, parents are the first teacher and their influence remains dominant in their children's lives (John, 1999). In collectivist culture parents play significant roles in their children's lives and even after their marriage, parents' advice and opinions are still important thus suggesting children are expected to act

according to the role model who in this case is their own parents. Therefore information shared during co-shopping with parents is seen as more acceptable and this is the reason why sometime adolescents are often asked by parents to assist during shopping (Grossbart *et al.*, 1991).

Even adolescents themselves have learned through experience on things that they are allowed and disallowed to purchase (Bao *et al.*, 2007). Since there is no study conducted in countries with a culture similar to Malaysia, there is higher chances that there is a positive relationship exist in Malaysian setting. Hence, in collectivist culture it is also the obligations of the children to help their parents. From the discussion above, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H1: An increase in adolescent's age is positively related with the increase in influence in family decision making.*
- H2: Differences in ethnicity has positive relationship adolescents' involvement in food consumer task.*
- H3: Adolescents from smaller family size is positively related with strong influence in family decision making.*
- H4: Bilateral strategies have positive relationship with adolescent perception of influence.*

## Method

### Data collection and sample profile

Data collection was carried out in Klang Valley because this study measures variables that are only relevant in urban setting. Sidin *et al.* (2008) study on children's consumption behaviour in Malaysia only focused on urban setting because they believed that not all part of Malaysia is relevant to the study. The development of the area and the availability of the infrastructure will influence the consumption pattern of the children. Since this study also measure the influence of food co-shopping therefore it is imperative for this study to be carried out in urban setting. Secondary schools from the Klang Valley were chosen as data collection location because it allows researcher to collect a large amount of data in short period of time. Secondary school was selected from the school list obtained from the Education Department and schools that were not suitable for this study such as boarding schools are removed from the list. Certain school especially boarding school students do not meet this study criterion as this study's aim is to investigate Klang Valley adolescents' influence only. In fact similar practice was carried out by previous researchers who studied children and adolescents (Fikry and Jamil, 2010).

Adolescents from 13 to 17 year olds were selected as respondents for this study.

Questionnaire used was divided into three sections, the first section focused on the adolescent's involvement with consumer activities and their perception of reward. The second section was designed to investigate adolescent's perception of influence followed by demographic section as the last section. Bi-lingual questionnaire was developed to cater the adolescents from various ethnic backgrounds. This effort will ensure that all respondents really understand the questions asked thus provide accurate information. Pilot test was conducted and 50 questionnaires were administered in order to ensure the validity and feasibility of the instrument. Cronbach's Alpha for all the measurement in the pre-test were greater than 0.70, ensuring the consistency in measurement of each item in the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha value 0.70 is considered acceptable however the value that is lower regarded as problem related to reliability (Field, 2009). Five point likert scales was used because it is easy and quick to be constructed, more reliable and provide a greater volume of data than many other scales (Ary *et al.*, 2006).

Simple random sampling was used due to its simplicity, free from classification error and it only requires minimum advance knowledge of the population. Furthermore this type of sampling is a fair way to select sample and the results can be generalized to the population (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). 500 questionnaires were administered by the researcher the response rate was 100%. However only 456 samples are useable which consisted of 60.9 % female and 39.1% male adolescents. Majority of the respondents are Malays which consisted of 66.9 percent of total respondent, followed by the Chinese 21.9 percent and the Indian with only 9.2 percent. Half of the respondents are from single income family which consisted of 45.6 percent while the remaining 54.2 percents are from dual income family. Majority of the respondents are from large family where 44.7 percents are from family with more than four siblings.

## Analysis and Results

Pearson Correlation analysis in Table 1 was used to test the relationship between demographic and family consumer activities, however only family size was found to have positive correlation with suggesting product ( $r=0.93$ ,  $p=.023$ ). Although no correlation found between demographic and involvement in consumer tasks, analysis also revealed that perception of influence has substantial

Table 1. Pearson coefficient correlation

		Age	Race	Family Size	Perception of influence	Suggest Product	Suggest Store	Suggest Price	Suggest New Product	Perception of Reward
Age		1	.000	.093*	-.062	-.078	-.091	-.093*	-.048	-.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.993	.047	.188	.098	.052	.047	.303	.968
Race		.000	1	-.357**	-.017	.034	.000	-.018	.011	.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.993		.000	.719	.472	.995	.698	.816	.602
Family Size		.093*	-.357**	1	-.008	-.093*	-.029	.013	-.089	-.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.000		.872	.047	.534	.784	.059	.125
Perception of Influence		-.062	-.017	-.008	1	.707**	.648**	.599**	.567**	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.188	.719	.872		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Suggest Product		-.078	.034	-.093*	.707**	1	.660**	.655**	.735**	.609**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.098	.472	.047	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
Suggest Store		-.091	.000	-.029	.648**	.660**	1	.493**	.622**	.521**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	.995	.534	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
Suggest Price		-.093*	-.018	.013	.599**	.655**	.493**	1	.555**	.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.698	.784	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
Suggest New Product		-.048	.011	-.089	.567**	.735**	.622**	.555**	1	.596**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.303	.816	.059	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
Perception of Reward		-.002	.024	-.072	.494**	.609**	.521**	.462**	.596**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.968	.602	.125	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

relationship with suggesting product ( $r=.707$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Similar finding also reported that between perception of influence and suggesting store ( $r=.648$ ,  $p=.000$ ), perception of influence and suggesting price ( $r=.599$ ,  $p=.000$ ), perception of influence and suggesting new product ( $r=.567$ ,  $p=.000$ ), perception of influence and perception of reward ( $r=.494$ ,  $p=.000$ ) all produce moderate correlation thus indicate substantial relationship. Moderate correlation was also found between perceptions of reward and suggesting product ( $r=.494$ ,  $p=.000$ ) which revealed the existence of strategies in adolescents influence attempt. Apart from that, analysis also yield positive correlation between perception of reward and all family consumer tasks tested which are suggesting product ( $r=.609$ ,  $p=.000$ ), suggesting store ( $r=.521$ ,  $p=.000$ ), suggesting price ( $r=.462$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and suggesting new product ( $r=.596$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

Despite negligible relationship detected between demographic with other variables tested in this study, one-way ANOVA was still performed to determine whether the groups are actually different in the measured characteristic. Result in Table 2 revealed differences in perception of reward among adolescents from difference family size [ $F (4, 455) = 3.079$ ,  $p = .016$ ]. Analysis showed that adolescents with three to four siblings have more influence compared to adolescents from smaller family. Differences were also found between race and perception of influence

[ $F (3, 450) = 2.92$ ,  $p = .034$ ], suggesting store [ $F (3, 450) = 5.666$ ,  $p = .001$ ] and perception of reward [ $F (3, 455) = 4.364$ ,  $p = .005$ ]. Another difference among age group was also found in perception of reward [ $F (4, 450) = 3.668$ ,  $p=.005$ ] thus, indicated that adolescents among different age groups have different perception toward the effectiveness of the bilateral strategy and reward.

## Discussion

Even though many studies suggested that influence progressively increase with age, this study has proven that this may not be entirely true. Older adolescents for instance do not want to follow their parents around anymore instead they are more comfortable going out with friends which suggest decrease in influence over parents decision making. The evidence that showed older adolescents are no longer interested in food co-shopping with their parents lies on the finding that pointed out dramatic decrease in their involvement in family food consumer tasks. Main reason that leads to this dramatic decrease is simply because adolescents who live in urban setting are exposed to numerous opportunities where they can gain their own economic resources through part time work. If adolescents have the capabilities to purchase things that they want, there is no longer a need to influence their parents. According to Children and Young Person's Employment Act (1966) it is not

Table 2. One-Way ANOVA

Independent Variable	F	P-Value
<b>Age</b>	Perception of Influence	.669
	Suggesting Product	1.663
	Suggesting Store	1.190
	Suggesting New Product	1.936
	Suggesting Price	1.772
	Perception of Reward	3.668
<b>Race</b>	Perception of Influence	2.923
	Suggesting Product	1.082
	Suggesting Store	5.666
	Suggesting New Product	2.245
	Suggesting Price	2.306
	Perception of Reward	4.364
<b>Family Size</b>	Perception of Influence	1.368
	Suggesting Product	2.340
	Suggesting Store	1.225
	Suggesting New Product	2.118
	Suggesting Price	1.197
	Perception of Reward	3.079

illegal for Malaysian children as young as 12 years old to work, provided that these children are only allowed to involve with light work suitable to their capacity. With limited restriction on young people's employment in Malaysia, hence it is not a surprise that adolescents are using this opportunity to involve in part-time work.

Besides that, older adolescents learning process are no longer relying on their parents instead they learn many consumer traits from their peers and mass media. This will create differences in perspectives between adolescents and parents. Conflict in perspectives will definitely arise which lead to refusal of purchase from parents. Caution also need to be exercised when using younger age respondents because researchers argues the validity of using such sample is at stake because there is a potential of exaggeration when they are involved with self reported decision. Therefore when younger samples are utilized it is wiser to include parents as respondents (dyad) rather than self reported influence.

Despite older adolescent reported low involvement in family food consumer tasks, adolescents age 13 for examples reported high involvement over these activities. Surprisingly involvement in consumer food tasks and perception of rewards has inverse relationship. Even though younger adolescents reported higher level of involvement with consumer activities but they also reported low perception of reward. On the other hand, older adolescents believe in reward even though showing less involvement in the consumer activities. This suggests that older adolescents are familiar with how strategies and rewards works, however lack in involvement suggest the reward is no longer appealing to these adolescents. When the involvement is perceived as no longer rewarding, the involvement will decrease. This explains the low involvement in consumer

activities because adolescents are not around when the purchase is made. Despite inverse relationship found between age and perception, this study still reveals positive relationship between bilateral strategies and perception of reward thus indicating the utilization of such strategies to influence. Apparently the utilization of such strategies is more common among older adolescent, however it does not mean that younger adolescents did not utilize such strategies, the only different is younger adolescents might not realize that they are utilizing it.

Different from previous variables suggesting stores and perception of reward are related to ethnic background. Similar to performing and perception of reward, the Indian adolescents reported to have the highest influence followed by the Malay and Chinese. Even though Malaysia in overall is considered under collectivist culture, the differences in perception are found in different ethnic groups which suggest that Malaysian is not homogeneous after all. Differences in ethnicity also suggest that each race is exclusive and possess its own unique culture, thus assumption that all Malaysian who are under one collectivist culture behaving in similar ways is not entirely accurate. This finding was in line with previous study by Fikry and Jamil (2010) on adolescents influence on mobile phone purchase. Therefore using similar marketing program targeting different ethnics in Malaysia might not be effective after all.

Another unexpected finding was the perception of consumer activities and rewards where adolescents from small family have the least influence in the family decision (O'Dougherty *et al.*, 2006). Similar result in Malaysia was expected, however from the findings, it showed that a single child and two children in the family result in lesser influence over purchase. Instead, those with three and four children in the family reported to possess a very high influence. This consistent with previous studies that suggest children sometimes work together to influence parents. This strategy is often successful because parents believe that they yield to the majority rather than an individual request. Interestingly, culture also plays important roles, where sometime it is very difficult to influence others especially the parents. Surprisingly, even parents often opt for similar strategy, for instance when a mother and a daughter work together to influence others (John, 1999). On the other hand, those from larger family with more than five siblings reported that they have very little influence over family purchase. As the number of members in the family increase, every family member will receive lesser portion of the income thus their power to influence parents' purchase will also decreased.

This study also revealed the important of cognitive power among adolescents and how this power is being used to influence parents' decision. By listening to their children, parents showed that they valued input given by the children during food shopping. Therefore any effort to promote or to attract children does have significant impact towards business organization bottom line. For low involvement products such as foods where consumer decisions are not influenced by brand or previous experience, marketing effort such as in store stimulation will have strong impact on purchase decision. Certainly if food retailer can make their product appealing to children, there are high possibilities that they might be able to convince the parents too.

### **Limitation and future research directions**

The main limitation of this study is the inability to generalize the findings, as this study was only carried out in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Study shows that children from different cities in Malaysia have different consumption patterns. Since this study does not measure the influence from other cities in Malaysia thus this study cannot be generalized to the whole Malaysia. Apart from that, this study only focused on food decision and low involvement product decision making. Therefore the findings of this study might not be a representation of other products especially those involving high involvement purchase.

This study also revealed an important influence pattern in the family where adolescents from medium family size possessed more influence in family decision. This coalition pattern required further investigation to identify its effects on family decision. Furthermore, any future study also should focus on both parents and children perspectives rather than children self-reported influence because currently, there is no such study carried out in Malaysia yet.

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