

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter commences by presenting the background of the study. The background outlines the overview of the youth market, research background, problem statement, research questions, research framework, research objectives, significance of the study, definitions of the main terms and the organization of the report.

### 1.1 Overview of the Youth Market

The youth market around the world represents a tremendous opportunity for marketers. Perceived as the most valuable asset, they are the successors and upon which a country depends for the continuity of development. According to the United States Census Bureau 2008, United States teenagers' population aged between 16 to 19 years old is 17.7 million.

Based on the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), teenagers fall into the youth category. In the Malaysian context, the government has made an attempt to implement various development programmes with the objective of moulding and developing a resilient youth community that is able to contribute positively to nation building. However, greater attention by the government is still needed to equip the youth with the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills to enable them to rise to the challenge and cope with the effects of rapid economic development and globalization.

The definition given by the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 is that the youth population comprises those in the 15 – 39 age-groups. Recent figures by the same source recorded that this group increased at an average rate of 2.4 percent per annum from 9.85 million in 2000 to 11.10 million in 2005 and 11.65 million in 2010 (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1**  
**Population by Age Group, 1995 – 2005 (Million)**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 14	8.00	34.0	8.72	32.6	9.18	31.7
15 – 39	9.85	42.0	11.10	41.5	11.65	40.2
More than 39	5.64	24.0	6.93	25.9	8.13	28.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23.49</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26.75</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28.96</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010, p. 296 (2006).

As shown in Table 1.2, the comparative data of three countries, namely, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the United States is taken from the CIA Website based on July 2008 estimation. Among the important social indicators is that Malaysia's total population is 25,274,133 as compared to the United Kingdom 60,943,912 and the United States 303,824,646. The age structure of the 10-14 years old category in Malaysia is 31.8% whilst the United Kingdom and the United States recorded a lower percentage of 16.9% and 20.1%, respectively.

This indicates a huge potential market for the teenage population in Malaysia. This is further supported by the population growth rate and birth rate whereby Malaysia recorded a higher percentage of 1.742% and 22.4 births per 1,000 populations, respectively. The comparative data also indicates that Malaysia comprises a multiracial society as does the United Kingdom and the United States.

**Table 1.2**  
**Comparative Data between Malaysia, United Kingdom and the United States**  
**According to Social Indicators**

<b>Social Indicators</b>	<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>United States</b>
Population	25,274,133 (July 2008 estimation)	60,943,912 (July 2008 estimation)	303,824,646 (July 2008 estimation)
Age structure	0-14 years old: 31.8% (male 4,135,013; female 3,898,761)  15-64 years old: 63.3% (male 8,026,755; female 7,965,332)  65 years old 4.9% (male 548,970; female 699,302)	0-14 years old: 16.9% (male 5,287,590; female 5,036,881)  15-64 years old: 67.1% (male 20,698,645; female 20,185,040)  65 years old 16% (male 4,186,561; female 5,549,195)	0-14 years old: 20.1% (male 31,257,108; female 29,889,645)  15-64 years old: 67.1% (male 101,825,901; female 102,161,823)  65 years old 12.7% (male 16,263,255; female 22,426,914)
Median age	Total: 24.6 years old Male: 24 years old Female: 25.3 years old	Total: 39.9 years old Male: 38.8 years old Female: 41 years old	Total: 36.7 years old Male: 35.4 years old Female: 38.1 years old
Population growth rate	1.742%	0.276%	0.883%
Birth rate	22.44 births/1000 population	10.65 births/1000 population	14.18 births/1000 population
Ethnic groups	Malay 50.4%; Chinese 23.7%; Indigenous 11%; Indian 7.1%; Others 7.8%.	White (of which English 83.6%, Scottish 8.6%, Welsh 4.9%, Northern Irish 2.9%) 92.1%; Black 2%; Pakistani 1.3%; Mixed 1.2%; Others 1.6% (2001 census).	White 81.7%; Black 12.9%; Asian 4.2%; Amerindian and Alaska native 1%; Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander 0.2%.

Source: CIA Website, July 2008 estimation.

## 1.2 Research Background

In the marketing literature, youth culture has been held up as the prototypical example of a global segment (Hassan and Katsanis, 1991). The basis for the excitement about the youth segment (under various names such as the “teen segment”, “baby buster”, the “MTV Generation”, etc.) largely stems from the allegedly uniform consumption habits of young people all over the world – their clothing, music tastes and media habits. Members of this generation have also been called Echo Boomers (Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999; Rosenthal, 1998; Stapinski, 1999; Wellner, 1999), Nexters (Hatfield, 2002), Digital Generation (Bradish et al., 2001) and the Millennials (Hatfield, 2002; Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999).

The youth market has been an elusive and hard to reach segment for marketers, advertisers, public relations firms and corporations. In fact, marketers attempted to understand the youth market as early as the 1920s (Giles, 1922; Hollander and Germain, 1992; Wolburg and Pokrywczyński, 2001). The youth segment is important to the aforementioned groups for many reasons. However, the main reason may be that the creation of awareness among young people has the potential to produce a lifetime consumer of products and services (Bennett, et al. 2006).

According to Zollo (1995a:2), teens are extremely important targets for marketers because:

- a. They influence their parents’ spending
- b. They will spend a lot of money in the future
- c. They are trendsetters

In 1998, teen market experts estimated that American teens spend about \$94 billion a year of their own (earned) money, an average of about \$50 per week per teen, and they have a significant influence on other things that their families buy ranging from food to cars. As the teen population swells over the next decade, marketers will focus even more closely on how to persuade this group to buy their products and be loyal to their brands (Zollo, 1999). A similar study by Dolfsma (1999) mentions that youngsters have more money to spend in whatever way they please. Gen-Y is a high-spending group with discretionary income (Cheng, 2001), an estimated spending power of \$60 billion (Leand and Walzer, 2001), and an incredible influence over the purchasing habits of their parents – also known as “pester power” (Hogg et al., 1998; Rummel et al., 2000; Stone et al., 2001).

Youth are more involved with trends than probably any other age group. They are not only trend setters for one another, but are also trendsetters for the population at large. However, in the discursive construction of the ‘global youth segment’, the role of the local space in which young people conduct their everyday life is largely ignored. In reality, globalization enables foreign companies to distribute American cultural products including music, films, books, food etc. The spread of American consumer products worldwide is accompanied by the spread of American popular culture. Englis et al. (1993) supported the above argument by quoting “icons of American popular culture are ubiquitous throughout the world” (p.1). Many forms of media broadcast information about the latest United States fashions and celebrities, movies and music, products and services. Another evidence of American popular culture spreading rapidly throughout the world is its discussion from the global entertainment perspective in the book titled “The Global Jukebox: The International Music Industry” by Burnett (1995). The global entertainment industry thrives on producing global stars to expose across a wide range

of media: film, music, videos, television, books, magazines and advertising included. Burnett argues that the music industry is obviously an important link in this process as nothing crosses borders and cultural boundaries easier than music. In fact, Burnett believes that one could argue quite persuasively that music is perhaps the essential component in linking the different sectors of the global entertainment industry.

The entertainment industry generates billions of dollars a year in revenues worldwide and is rapidly growing (Blakley, 2001). PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Entertainment and Media Outlook (2008) claim in their report for year 2008 to 2012, the highly anticipated annual report pegs global compound annual growth rate at 6.6% for the entertainment industry, anticipating it will reach USD 2.2 trillion in 2012. Geter and Streisand (1995) claim that adolescents cruise the streets in vehicles with pounding subwoofers, 25,000-seat concert stadiums sell in minutes and billions of dollars are spent each year on tapes and compact discs. St. Petersburg Times reported that the American Idols live concert in Tampa, Florida, United States pulled crowd of 16,534 and creating a spectacular befitting of entertainment unstoppable machine (American Idol Worship Website).

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century consumers began to use computers and computer networks as the primary means to record, store, distribute and play music. By 2001, the cost of hard drive space had dropped to a level that allowed pocket-sized computers to store large libraries of music. The iPod and iTunes system for music storage and playback became immensely popular, and many consumers began to transfer physical recording media (such as CDs) onto computer hard drives. The iTunes music store offered legal downloads beginning in 2003, and competitors soon flowed, offering a variety of online music services, such as internet radio. Digital music distribution was

aided by the widespread acceptance of broadband in the middle of the decade (Palmer, 2008).

Another indicator of the global demand for United States cultural products can be seen through the foreign sales that amount to 70% of the USD20 billion in annual revenues realized by the American music industry (Huey, 1990). The International Federation of Phonographic Industries (2001) found that in spite of the alleged “crisis” phenomena, the global pop music industry grew by 35% during the last decade, with the annual turnover increasing from USD 27 billion to USD 37 billion. Even if a handful of major United States-based record companies and publishing houses dominate the global industry, local firms in virtually all European and Asian countries are profit earners in their own right and serve an important role by creating a continuous stream of artistic inputs to the global players (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002).

To date, there are very limited studies that indicate the components of American popular culture and its effect on five selected aspects of consumer behaviour. In this sense, it is difficult to derive a coherent and consistent framework explaining American popular culture and its effect on consumer behaviour aspects. As a result, this study attempts to close the gap in this area by developing an American popular culture model and address the issue of how American popular culture affects five selected aspects of consumer behaviour, namely, conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music television exposure. It is also a first attempt to investigate the moderating effects of religiosity, gender, ethnicity, family income level and education stream at primary level on American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour.

### **1.3 The Influence of American Popular Culture throughout the World**

In this sub section, the researcher will discuss how influential American popular culture is penetrating the global market space. A variety of evidence has been discussed in portraying the impact of American popular culture on global society. The following sub section highlights the role of popular music in adolescents' lives.

#### **a. American Popular Culture Penetrating the Global Market**

Globalization enables foreign companies to distribute American cultural products including music, films, books, etc. The spread of American consumer products worldwide is accompanied by the spread of American popular culture. Englis et al. (1993) support the above argument by quoting "icons of American popular culture are ubiquitous throughout the world" (p.1). They quote that few scholars argue that the US is a net exporter of popular culture. Many forms of media broadcast information about the latest United States fashions and celebrities, movies and music, products and services. For instance, girls worldwide are imitating Lady Gaga's trademark thunderbolt streak (down the forehead and cross one eye), fingerless gloves, big black shades, long light blonde locks and wacky, three-dimensional structured clothing (Fashionstyleme Website).

There are clear implications flowing from this study. The most important implication of this study is the three dimensions of American popular culture, namely, role modelling, imitation and admiration and knowledge and consumerism that influences five selected aspects of adolescents' consumer behaviour. This finding will enable the retailers to manipulate these three dimensions to create a more refined marketing strategy to meet



adolescents' basic needs and desires. The findings of the study suggest that role modelling, imitation and admiration, and knowledge and consumerism help the retailers to further understand about the influence of American popular culture. Retailers could construct marketing strategies concerning role modelling, imitation and admiration and knowledge and consumerism to choose a suitable brand endorsement or usage of spokesperson for their products or services to maximise the promotional activities.

Thus, the present study's findings can be operationalized by understanding the latest youngsters' trend and consumption patterns of adolescents. Furthermore, the marketers are able to offer differentiation to their products in order to compete in the market. Therefore, the most popular icon (e.g. Lady Gaga) would be the most suitable spokesperson for most products or services that targeted on adolescents group.

These consumption data are hungrily absorbed by consumers – both American and foreign who are motivated to emulate an “American lifestyle” (Greenhouse, 1989). Englis et al. (1993) also believe that this symbolism is eagerly sought by many consumers, who have learned to equate Western lifestyles, in general and the English language in particular, with modernization and sophistication. MTV – Europe was launched in 1987 and is a powerful vehicle for the export of popular culture. By 1991, MTV was available in 27 countries, including Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the USSR and was watched by an estimated 30 million viewers (Englis et al., 1993).

Another evidence that American popular culture is rapidly spreading throughout the world is being discussed from the global entertainment perspective in the book titled “The Global Jukebox: The International Music Industry” by Burnett (1995). The global entertainment industry thrives on producing global stars to expose across a wide range

of media including: film, music, videos, television, books, magazines and advertising. Burnett argues that the music industry is obviously an important link in this process as nothing crosses borders and cultural boundaries easier than music. In fact, Burnett believes that one could argue quite persuasively that music is perhaps the essential component in linking the different sectors of the global entertainment industry.

The entertainment industry generates billions of dollars a year in revenue worldwide and is rapidly growing. Every year consumers around the world buy USD300 billion worth of movie tickets, compact discs and other entertainment products (Burnett, 1995). Compact discs and computer games account for the greatest revenue worldwide followed thereafter by television, sound recordings, books and magazines, and then films (Bernstein, 1990 quoted by Burnett, 1995). In the same sense, Geter and Streisand (1995) claim that adolescents cruise the streets in vehicles with pounding subwoofers, 25,000-seat concert stadiums sell in minutes and billions of dollars are spent each year on tapes and compact discs. PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Entertainment and Media Outlook (2008) claimed in their report that the highly anticipated annual report pegs global compound annual growth rate at 6.6% for the entertainment industry, anticipating it will reach USD 2.2 trillion in 2012.

According to an article written by Nicole Sperling in Hollywood Insider Website, the Toy Story 3 has dominated the box office for a second straight weekend during summer 2010. The film's ten-day come now stands at \$226.5 million, making it the quickest Pixar movie to cross \$200 million. In her article, she added that the Toy Story 3 is likely to topple Pixar's highest grossing flick, Finding Nemo, which topped out at \$340 million back in 2003. The Karate Kid continues to draw audiences. In its third weekend in release, the film earned another \$15 million, pushing its total gross to \$135.6 million.

However, Nicole Sperling concluded in her article that the three movies (i.e. Toy Story 3, Knight and Day and Grown Ups) combined did not do enough to combat, when Transformers 2 bowed to \$109 million during summer 2009 (Hollywood Insider Website).

Another indicator of the global demand for United States cultural products can be seen through the foreign sales that reached 70% of the USD20 billion in annual revenues realized by the American music industry up to year 1990 (Huey, 1990). The International Federation of Phonographic Industries (2001) found that in spite of the current alleged “crisis” phenomena, the global pop music industry has grown by 35% during the last decade, with turnover rising from USD 27 billion to USD 37 billion. Even if a handful of major United States-based record companies and publishing houses dominate the global industry, local firms in virtually all European and Asian countries are profit earners in their own right and serve an important role by creating a continuous stream of artistic input to the global players (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002).

### **b. Role of Popular Music in Adolescents’ Lives**

Adolescence is the period of growth between childhood and adulthood with music functioning as an important part of adolescent culture (Shuker 1994). Pop music is a cultural space that belongs predominantly to young people (McRobbie, 1995; Thornton, 1995) and where they have historically been the major consumers. Pop music is viewed as an avenue for creative expression and excitement, which is not available within the confines of home and school (Lull, 1992).

The importance of music is unsurprising, given the central role of music to youth culture. The most recent research done by Piancentini and Mailer (2004) revealed that adolescents do not choose friends based on their clothes, but do make judgments about musical taste on the basis of clothes. The study done by North et al. (2000) on the importance of music to 2465 adolescents in England found two main findings. The results of their study indicate that music is important to adolescents, and that this is because it allows them to portray an “image” to the outside world and satisfy their emotional needs.

From a developmental viewpoint, we again have to ask for reasons (i.e., why do adolescents like to listen to music, popular music to be more precise, not classical music). This question has been addressed by Thompson (1993) and more extensively in a book by Christenson and Roberts (1998). Thompson (1993) comes to the conclusion that there is little empirical evidence on which to base an answer to the issue. Nevertheless, it can be summarised that two directions to an answer have been suggested. One is sensation seeking, Christenson and Roberts (1998) speak of mood management: Listening to music, in general, gives you good feelings (Prinsky and Rosenbaum, 1987). The other one is counter or sub cultural identification (Willis, 1978), or in the broader sense of Christenson and Roberts, the “social uses” of music: current popular music – especially in its “harder” varieties: tends to be something that parents do not like, and thereby may give adolescents a chance to form an identity of their own.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

People's consumption patterns are subject to a range of influences and youth are no different from other people in this respect. Globalization is creating an explosion of products and images from which consumers can choose and permits the distribution of American cultural products including music, films, books, food etc (Englis et al., 1993 and Burnett, 1995). A few scholars believe that adolescence is the period of growth between childhood and adulthood with music functioning as "an important part of adolescent culture" (Rice 1981, p.268; Shuker 1994).

Previous research demonstrates the importance of music in adolescents' lives by mentioning music as top of the list of things that make them happy (Ban, 1986), a cultural space that belongs predominantly to young people (McRobbie, 1995; Thornton, 1995) and determining or/ and achieving group status (Frith, 1978, p.46). Consequently, the importance of music is unsurprising, given the central role of music in youth culture. Piancentini and Mailer (2004) reveal that adolescents make judgments about clothes based on musical taste. Music has been known for centuries to have a powerful effect on human responses (Sweeney and Wyber, 2002).

Music has also long been considered as an efficient and effective means for triggering moods and communicating nonverbally. Listening to music is preferred to television, according to Rice (1981) and Willis (1990). In fact, in the social science context, music is particularly known for its effectiveness in triggering moods (Bruner, 1990). In the marketing domain, music has been shown to affect consumer behaviour, particularly shoppers behaviour (e.g., Gulas and Schewe, 1994; Herrington and Capella, 1996; Milliman, 1982, 1986; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990, 1993, 2000), consumption

behaviour (e.g., Areni and Kim, 1993), as well as emotional responses (e.g., Baker et al., 1992; Hui et al., 1997; Kellaris and Kent, 1991).

Although past research has helped our understanding the importance of music and how it affects adolescents' lives, and the process of how music functions as one of the main sources of American popular culture needs further research. Based on the evidence pointing to the importance of music in adolescents' lives, the present researcher feels the necessity to enrich the literature by understanding the dimensions involved in American popular culture. Therefore, special attention is given to the development of the newly constructed American popular culture measurement.

A variety of evidence has been discussed in portraying the impact of American popular culture on global society. For instance, girls worldwide are imitating Lady Gaga's trademark thunderbolt streak (down the forehead and cross one eye), fingerless gloves, big black shades, long light blonde locks and wacky, three-dimensional structured clothing (Fashionstyleme Website). In the same sense, Geter and Streisand (1995) and PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Entertainment and Media Outlook (2008) claim that adolescents cruise the streets in vehicles with pounding subwoofers, 25,000-seat concert stadiums sell in minutes, billions of dollars are spent each year on tapes and compact discs and annual growth rate at 6.6% for the entertainment industry, anticipating it will reach USD 2.2 trillion in 2012. The above illustrated examples are consistent with the literature on role modelling and expression of idolization (Raviv et al. 1996, Harper, 2000; Hogg and Banister, 2000; Martin et al. 2000 and Bush et al. 2004). Based on these evidences, the present researcher feel the need to study American popular culture focusing on popular music.

Previous literature showed that role model, imitation, adoration and knowledge and consumerism being studied separately to consumer behaviour areas (i.e. conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and music television exposure). To fill up this gap, scholars from both psychology and marketing have attempted to understand what are the dimensions for American popular culture and its effects to consumer behaviour areas.

Little commonality exist among the scales developed for measuring American popular culture. Some scales focus exclusively on role model, imitation, adoration and knowledge and consumerism while others attempt to study on the particular sources of American popular culture. Importantly, many of the currently published research failed to adequately define American popular culture (Flint, 2000 and Storey, 2009); rather, the tendency to explain the dimensions for American popular culture and then show its effects towards consumer behaviour aspects.

Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the effect of American popular culture using three dimensions simultaneously. Furthermore, there are also lack of exploration pertaining to the moderating effects of religiosity, gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education stream between the relationships mentioned earlier. Thus, the gap of the study is in line with the research questions and objectives of the present study.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The following are the key research questions the present study attempts to answer:

**Research Question 1:** Is there a relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption?

**Research Question 2:** Is there a relationship between American popular culture and price sensitivity?

**Research Question 3:** Is there a relationship between American popular culture and brand sensitivity?

**Research Question 4:** Is there a relationship between American popular culture and fashion consciousness?

**Research Question 5:** Is there a relationship between American popular culture and American music television exposure?

**Research Question 6:** Does religiosity have a moderating effect between American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour?

**Research Question 7:** Does gender have a moderating effect between American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour?

**Research Question 8:** Does ethnicity have a moderating effect between American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour?

**Research Question 9:** Does family income level have a moderating effect between American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour?

**Research Question 10:** Does primary education streams at primary streams have a moderating effect between American popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour?



## 1.6 Research Framework

It is hoped that the current study will strengthen the existing theory and provide a greater understanding of the relationship between the tested variables. First, it is apparent that American popular culture is a dimensional construct. Raviv et al. (1996) argued the sources of American popular culture (i.e., pop singers) are likely to be based on role modelling and the expression of idolization.

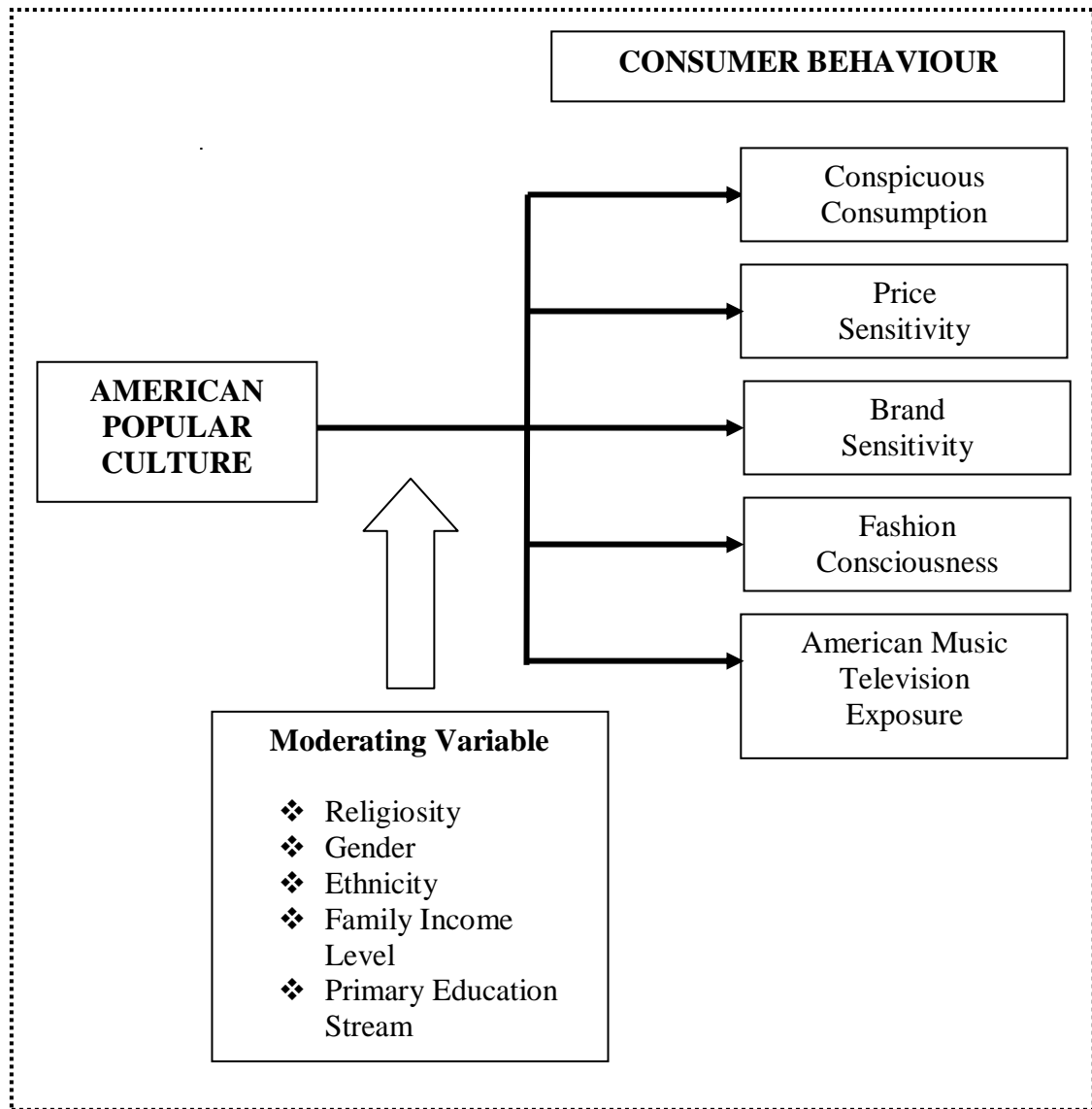
Role models of American popular culture are ubiquitous throughout the world (Englis et al., 1993). Bandura (1986) believes that attractive characters are potent role models that facilitate attention and emulation. In westernized youth culture, most idolized figures come from sport, entertainment and music. These domains and the celebrities who excel in them receive wide exposure in the mass media and concerts (Raviv et al. 1996). A study done by Hogg and Banister (2000) mentioned that one of the most important instruments for the transferral of meaning and imagery from the pop star to adolescents is fan behaviour – being a fan involves liking, fancying or being influenced by the pop group, but does not require liking all the songs in the album.

In terms of the expression of idolization, Raviv et al. (1996), based on the idolization of pop singers, the excess consumption of music and its collection reflects a normal appreciation of music, is based mostly on two important components: worship and modelling. Worship refers to an unusually intense admiration and reverence of an idol. This can be expressed in such behaviour as actively collecting information and artefacts related to an idol or trying to meet him/her personally. Modelling refers to the desire to be like an idol, which may involve imitation of the idolized figures by, for example, copying their dress, hairstyle, speech, activities and any other social behavioural

patterns. This, in general, can take different forms, and its expression depends on culture, age, gender and environmental conditions. Earlier research by McCracken (1986) and O'Guinn (1991) support the argument as quoted, mentioning that exchange, grooming, possession and divestment can be seen in the consumption rituals associated with fan behaviour. They further argue that spending money, and collecting and swapping things are important aspects of the exchange, possession and divestment rituals. Fan behaviour also extends into other areas of activity such as imitation, e.g., supporting the same football team as the pop stars. In other cases, participants join fan clubs to bring them into closer contact with their heroes i.e., 'touching greatness' (O'Guinn, 1991). Further elaboration of American popular culture variable will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The present study has developed a framework investigating American popular culture as an independent variable is presented in Figure 1.1. The model indicates that American Popular Culture is posited to influence several aspects in the consumer behaviour area. In the present study, the researcher anticipates that there are five dependent variables involved. The dependent variables involved are conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music television exposure. It is also suspected that the relationship between American popular culture and the five dependent variables are moderated by several variables. There are five moderating variables examined in the current research. They are religiosity and four demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams).

**Figure 1.1**  
**Basic Research Model**



### **1.7 Research Objectives**

The research objectives comprise the following:

1. To develop a measurement for the American popular culture constructs.
2. To explore the impact of American popular cultures on conspicuous consumption among Malaysian adolescents.
3. To explore the impact of American popular cultures on price sensitivity among Malaysian adolescents.

4. To explore the impact of American popular cultures on brand sensitivity among Malaysian adolescents.
5. To explore the impact of American popular cultures on fashion consciousness among Malaysian adolescents.
6. To explore the impact of American popular cultures on American music television exposure among Malaysian adolescents.
7. To investigate the moderating effects of both religiosity and demographic aspects in terms of gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams on each possible relationship between American Popular Culture with five aspects of consumer behaviour (i.e., conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music television exposure).

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The aim of the study is to examine the dimensions of American popular culture and how American popular culture affects selected aspects of consumer behaviour. A variety of evidence has been discussed in portraying the impact of American popular culture on global society. Mowen and Minor (1998) quote that popular culture or pop culture is the vernacular (people's) culture that prevails in a modern society. Harper (2000) argues that popular culture as the shared norms that provide young people "with a deep sense of belonging and often with a strong preference for behaving in certain ways" (p. 2).

Although there is evidence supporting American popular culture (in specific approach) there is still no research that studies American popular culture (in general approach) and its effect on the proposed five selected aspects of consumer behaviour, namely,

conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music television exposure. Most of the previous studies involved the effect of specific sources of American popular culture elements on conspicuous consumption (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004), price sensitivity (Martin and Bush, 2000; Wakerfield and Inman, 2003), brand sensitivity (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Bush et. al, 2004), fashion consciousness ((O’Cass and Ewen, 2004; Hogg and Banister, 2000; Strinati, Dominic, 2000) and music television exposure (Brown, Campbell and Fisher, 1986); Sun and Lull, 1986). Therefore, this current study tries to fill this gap by looking at the effect of American popular culture as a general approach to five selected aspects of consumer behaviour.

Secondly, the modification of measurement scales is another significant theoretical contribution of this study. Newly modified measurement scales for constructs of conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music television exposure are developed based on the related conceptual studies. In terms of measuring the above mentioned constructs, three new items developed for measuring conspicuous consumption, two items for price sensitivity, six items for brand sensitivity, two items for fashion consciousness and five items for American popular music television exposure.

Thirdly, the usage of moderating variables, i.e., religiosity, gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams, is another theoretical contribution. In fact, no past study has looked at moderating factors in the relationship between American popular culture and five selected areas in consumer behaviour. Thus, this study attempts to examine the effect of religiosity, gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams as the moderating variables in the relationship between American

popular culture and five selected aspects of consumer behaviour. Further elaboration pertaining to the issue above will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the literature on factors influencing teenagers' purchase behaviour and will shed light on the new influencing factor, American popular culture in the literature. It is anticipated that this study will also stimulate others to conduct further research on popular culture and the buying behaviour of youth as at present there is a lack of research in this area.

### **1.9 Implications for Business/Marketers**

The present study provides a number of contributions to practice. The first contribution concerns the three dimensions of American popular culture, namely, role modelling, imitation and admiration, and knowledge and consumerism, which influence five selected aspects of adolescents' consumer behaviour. This finding will enable retailers to manipulate the dimensions to create a more refined set of strategies to meet basic adolescents' needs and desires in the globalization era. The findings of the study will also help retailers gain a fuller understanding of the influence of American popular culture. This will enable them to develop marketing strategies concerning role modelling, imitation and admiration, and knowledge and consumerism, to choose a suitable brand endorsement or usage of spokesperson for their products or services to maximise the promotional activities.

The second practical contribution will be the direct effect of American popular culture on five selected aspects of consumer behaviour, namely, conspicuous consumption, price sensitivity, brand sensitivity, fashion consciousness and American music

television exposure. As such, the findings of the present study will provide some motivation to retailers to formulate suitable marketing strategies for different consumer segments such as the price sensitive or conspicuous type of consumer.

Finally, the moderating effect of religiosity, gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams on the direct relationship will further enrich the marketing strategies to tackle different sets of segments. These findings will be most useful for retailers targeting their merchandise at a specific age, gender, ethnic group, family income level or primary education streams. In addition, retailers may also be interested in focusing and manipulating the variables that moderate the relationships.

#### **1.10 Definition of the Main Terms**

The proposed research framework of this study consists of eleven variables. Upon examining the various definitions provided by the existing literature, the following variables in this study are defined:

- i. American Popular Culture: The tendency for people to love or like popular culture derived from the United States. The culture involves dimensions of role modelling and expression of idolization (adapted from Storey, 1998; Mowen and Minor, 1998; McCarthy, 1998 and Harper, 2000).
- ii. Conspicuous Consumption: The excessive and lavish consumption with the intention of displaying wealth (adapted from Veblen, 1899; Brook, 1981, Othman, 1988; Piron, 2000; Blackwell et al., 2001 and Arnold et al., 2004).
- iii. Price Sensitivity: The extent to which individuals perceive and respond to changes/differences in prices for products or services (adapted from Monroe,

1973; Othman, 1988; Wakerfield and Inman, 2003, Hsieh and Chang, 2004 and Shimp et al., 2004).

- iv. Brand Sensitivity: The degree to which the brand name plays a key role in the choice process of an alternative in the buying decision (adapted from Kapferer et al. (1983) and (1992); Lachance et al., 2003 and Nelson and Devanathan; 2006).
- v. Fashion Consciousness: The extent of an individual's interest in and attention to the latest fashion trends, the degree to which the individual dresses in style and is up to date with what is new in the market (adapted from Wells and Tigert, 1971, Manrai et al., 2001 and Nam et al., 2007).
- vi. American Music Television Exposure: Frequency of exposure to American music television programmes (adapted from Greenberg et al., 1969; Gensch and Ranganathan, 1974; Goodhardt et al., 1975; Frank and Greenberg, 1980; Palmgreen et al., 1981; Webster and Wakshlag, 1982; Robinson et al., 1998 and Van den Bulck and Beullens, 2005).
- vii. Religiosity: Degree to which individuals' show commitment to a particular religion (adopted from Wilkes, Burnett and Howell, 1986).

### **1.11 Organization of the Report**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the overview of the youth market, research background, problem statement, research questions, basic research framework, research objectives, theoretical underpinning employed, contributions and definitions of the main terms in the present study. Chapter 2 reviews past theoretical and empirical works within the variables involved in the study. It reports on the various definitions, theories and findings pertaining to American Popular Culture as well as its determinants. Further discussions regarding five dependent variables are also discussed.



The approaches taken by this study and finalized research framework are presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology for the study, which includes the research design, instrument development, method of data collection and plan for data analysis. Chapter 4 reports on the results of the data analysis. The first part describes the sampling results, validity and reliability test results and the distribution of the study variables. The chapter then reports on the results of correlation analysis as well as the test of significant differences. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis results are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, the results of hypotheses testing are presented.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study as well as the implications of the findings from managerial and theoretical perspectives. This chapter also reports on the contributions and limitations of this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with some directions for future research.

## **1.12 Chapter Summary**

The youth market around the world represents a tremendous opportunity for marketers. However, not much empirical research has been conducted on the impact of American Popular Culture on adolescents' consumption behaviour. This present study attempts to address "the impact of American Popular Culture on the consumption behaviour of Malaysian adolescents".

This study also posited that the relationships between American Popular Culture and the five consumer behaviour concepts are moderated by religiosity and demographic

variables (gender, ethnicity, family income level and primary education streams). The theories employed to develop the framework of this study were adopted mainly from the marketing and psychology areas. This study is expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical aspects of consumer behaviour and psychology disciplines.