

THE EMERGING GENERATION:  
MEDIA PENETRATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
IDENTITY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN MALAYSIA

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**Introduction**

Malaysia's economic and social development progress over the past several decades has made it possible for the growth of a sophisticated multi-media landscape comparable to that of any developed nation. The dual success of stable leadership and pragmatic economic policies has resulted in a higher standard of living and thereby, making various forms of media an everyday experience for the common person. Today's local young adults between the ages of 13 to 25 were born into the era of economic boom and global connectedness that has presented them with a multi-media haven unlike that of their predecessors.

As it is, Malaysia has set the year 2020 as the date by which she will attain developed status. Thus, all policies and institutions are geared towards achieving the goal of Vision 2020 as it is popularly known. To achieve that Vision, there is a need to create an informed and knowledgeable society whilst retaining local values and spirituality. Also, there is a need to instill values that are deemed appropriate among the population especially among the young adults. Time-aged values such as tolerance of ethnic, religious and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, respect for the elders, discipline, good working ethics, and having religious and moral practices need to be sustained and inculcated in the face of newly emerging values.

Nonetheless, in the strive for material affluence some moral and social values appears to have been seriously displaced and challenged (Samsudin, 1994; Karthigesu & Ramanathan, 1997)

Among the local populace, young adults between the ages of 13 to 25 years will make up about 20 percent of the society by the year 200. They are considered by the government as the national asset and the future of the nation. Under the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000), the government has allocated RM 2.7 billion for activities related to the development of these young adults. Griffin (1997) considered young adults "as the key indicator of the state of a nation, it is expected to reflect the cycle of booms and troughs in the economy, shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality, and family life, concepts of nationhood, and occupational structures" (p.17)

The question then is; in view of the changing social and economic conditions what then would be the profile of this generation of future leaders and decision-makers? What would be the attributes and values that make up the composition of their cultural identity? Will it be a continuity of the existing characteristics or, has the change in media landscape created a varied identity and lifestyle peculiar to this generation of young adults? As it is, the current argument asserts that an increase in media penetration especially those laden with foreign materials will subsequently create a shift or transformation in local values and lifestyle. Furthermore, the internationalisation through globalisation makes the maintenance of national sovereignty and identity increasingly difficult as the composition of economic, cultural productions and consumption become increasingly transnational (Collins, Garnham and Lockleys, 1995). In addition, Sussman (1997) cautioned that without national identity, people in the developing countries cannot be "mobilised towards consensus on which to plan for the future. This paper seeks to address these questions and concerns by firstly, compiling a profile of attribution and values that make up the cultural identity and secondly, exploring the relationship between media penetration and the everyday lifestyle of these young adults. It will attempt to answer questions pertaining to media usage and access and its implications on existing norms and values.

## Media penetration and the changing local media landscape

Media penetration is the phenomenon that encompasses three

aspects namely, the media environment, use and content by members of society. In the 1990's Malaysians saw the advent and introduction of faster and cheaper computers in the market, facsimiles and photocopy machines that print pages by the seconds, cellular telephones, pagers and multi-speaker telephone lines that allow accessibility beyond the familiar spaces, VCD's, satellite TV as well as the ever popular Internet services that have encouraged and allowed mediated communication to be interactive. These media penetration into the local daily activities naturally have created rituals around which these young people structure their lives (Samsudin and Latiffah, 1999a).

In view of the higher concentration of media activities in the lives of the local young adults today (Samsudin and Latiffah 1999), one could attribute their construction of realities as partly and indirectly influenced by media images. It is undeniable that the media plays a central role in our understanding of civil society. Media is not only regarded as a space where information is circulated so that persons can be well-informed, but rather as a cultural space where actors and events become typified into more general codes and more generic story forms that resonate with the society's culture (Liebes and Curran, 1998). Furthermore, the authors asserted that media events are centrally involved in the construction of common identities and solidarities, and for this reason they are part and parcel of a civil society. They also inferred that the media could also provide common rituals, common symbols and cultural grounds for attachment to the "imagined communities" and the "invented traditions". Subsequently, creating new patterns of commonalities and differences in the forms of social experiences that could (re)constitute emerging conceptions of cultural identity among these young adults.

As it is, the development of the media industry in Malaysia in the 1990's, is reflective of the economic development and the social transformations that occurred within the Malaysian society in general. It is also a consequent of the impending trends in the global communication industry. The Malaysian vision to become an industrialised country and its active participation in international forums has somewhat influenced the development of the media industry especially those in broadcasting and Information technology. Thus, several policies that embody these goals were conceived and implemented in the local media practices. Here, was the beginning of the privatisation of the media that has encouraged the growth and expansion of various forms of print and electronic media as well as other supporting industries. In addition, the advancements in communication

technology have seen computer-related technologies making inroads into the Malaysian media scene. The inception of the Multi Media Supercorridor (an Information Technology zone comparable to the Silicone Valley in California) and the launching of Malaysia's own satellite is part of the overall effort to prepare Malaysia to be an active player in the global arena in the next millennium.

However, it is worth noting that the privatisation of the local media industry is a government initiated policy. While it is evident that the government has allowed the establishment of several commercial radio and television stations, nevertheless it will not allow such an important institution to develop without any government say in its management. Other than instituting regulatory controls, the government through its investment arm, Khazanah Nasional and through various "friendly" companies has at least a controlling share in the companies that operate the commercial broadcast stations.

### Cultural identity: Authority-defined versus lived-experiences defined

As it is, the of concept cultural identity can be a reference to the collective self-awareness that a particular group embodies and reflects." ... the cultural identity of a society is defined by its majority group" (Bochner 1973). The concept is liken to the idea of a national character that describes a set of attributes that members of a given community share with one another above and beyond their individual differences. These attributes include a set of values and attitudes towards life, death, family, kinship, god, nature and society. In its collective sense, the concept of cultural identity includes typologies of cultural conduct that is appropriate and inappropriate for various situations, values, beliefs and the daily patterning of activities.

In a study by the East Asian and Pacific Affairs division of the US Information Agency (Villegas, 1997), a comparison can be made between values that are given high priority by Eastern societies as opposed to Western societies. The six most important societal values in eastern societies include a) an orderly society, b) societal harmony, c) ensuring the accountability of public officials, d) being open to new ideas, e) freedom of expression, f) respect for authority. As for the Westerners (in this case the Americans), the six most important societal values are a) freedom of expression, b) personal freedom, c) rights of the individual, d) open debate, e) thinking for oneself, f) accountability of public officials. In the dimension of personal values,

Easterners gave emphasis to a) hard work, b) respect for learning and education, c) honesty, d) self-reliance and d) self-discipline. On the other hand, the Americans stressed personal values such as a) self-reliance, personal achievement, c) hard work, d) achieving success in life and e) helping others. The study also pointed out- that Malays in general assign the highest priority to smooth interpersonal relations in their daily lives. Hence, they would resort to great measures to avoid any form of confrontation with the other.

In Malaysia the process of mediating identities through national policies is an on-going process in an effort to consolidate and sustain harmonious relationships between the state, the institutions and the various ethnic groups that make up the populace. Various policies have been implemented since gaining independence in 1957 with a goal of achieving development and solidarity in the nation. These policies include the New Economic Policy (1970 to 1990 which has now been extended into the long term National Development Policy), the National Integration Policy, the Education Policy (that has restructured the curriculum to be based on local experiences and context), The Privatization Policy (for both the public sector and the media) and finally, the policy of VISION 2020 (with public campaigns to inculcate a caring society, develop a society of high achievers with high self confidence and moral and create a technologically literate society) that is aimed at mobilizing the emerging generation with the appropriate living skills and attitude into the coming millennium.

Hence, what exist as a social reality in Malaysia is the existence of parallel identities: one that is "authority-defined" (Shamsul, A.B., 1996) and the other that is "lived-experiences defined" (Cronen and Pearce, 1992). The authority-defined identity is created and perpetuated through various policies and institutions. This identity is based on the local culture and more so, Malay culture. While the "lived-experiences defined" is created through everyday interactions either interpersonally or via the media. It is undeniable that these two identities are intricately connected and continually (re)constitutes and impacts each other, yet they may and may not be similar. To an extent, the authority -defined identity forms the superordinate context by which all other contesting identities exist, competes, rivals and contrast with. Lately, in the post-New Economic Policy era the commitment towards achieving an industrialised nation that is marked by the National Development Policy have created a shift towards a concern for an identity that is of a broader conception as with the creation of a Malaysian nationhood (Ibrahim, 1996).

As such, cultural identity is socially constructed, bestowed and sustained (Adler, 1975; Berger, 1963). Indeed, as Hall (1996) suggests, "identities are about the using of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or 'where we came from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p.4)

## The Study

In view of the current societal transformations within the context of the various governmental policies and the changing media landscape, we embarked on a quest to compile a profile of this generations' cultural attributes and to gauge the relationship between media penetration: environment, use and orientation and cultural value orientations. This exploratory study was conducted in two sequential phases; the first was a focus discussion and the second was a survey. The underlying assumption of this study is that there exist a relationship between media use and media orientation with cultural value orientations. In addition, it is also assumed that the authoritydefined identity is the framework by which all other emerging identities are referred to.

The focus group session comprised of four groups totaling 48 respondents between the ages of 18-25 representing the three major ethnic groups namely, the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The discussions revolved around issues of values and media use. The framework for compiling cultural value orientations was based on Condon and Yollsef's value orientations. Subsequently, 1700 questionnaires were administered to three groups of young adults in the age groups of 13 to 15, 16 to 20 and 21 to 25. It was a nation-wide survey and every effort was made to ensure representation of the major ethnic composition, socio-economic background, and the urbanrural residence.

The findings from this study will in three parts. Part I, will reveal the patterns of media penetration: environment, use and orientation. Part II will present the composition of attributes and value orientation. Lastly, Part III presents an overview of their leisure and recreational tendencies.

### **I. Patterns of media penetration: environment, use an orientation**

Table 1 presents the distribution of media environment among the various categories of young adults. The data indicate that the

majority have access to terrestrial television, radio, newspaper, and comic / story books. However, access to satellite and other cable television services is relatively low that is ranging from 8 percent for those in the 13-16 age group to 15 percent among those in the 21-25 age group. On the other hand, access to personal computers at home is lowest among the 13-16 years (21 percent), and highest among the 21-25 years (35 percent). Meanwhile, access to personal computers among the 16-21 years is 30 percent. For those who do not have access to personal computers at home, the alternative is in the use of facilities at the cyber cafes. As it is, the current data indicate that there is a trend towards the use of such facilities especially among the older age group with 43 percent in the 21-25 age group as compared to 27 percent among the younger age group of 13-15 years and 36 percent among those in the 16-20 age group.

TABLE 1. Media Environment

Types of Media	OWNERSHIP / AVAILABILITY		
	13-15yrs	16-20yrs	21-25yrs
Terrestrial TV	96%	98%	98%
Satellite TV	8%	8%	15%
Video player	54%	62%	65%
Personal computer	21%	29%	35%
Video games player	29%	28%	31%
Radio	97%	98%	97%
Cassette player	51%	67%	74%
Newspaper / magazine	96%	96%	95%
Story book/comic	90%	90%	89%
Music's shop	52%	69%	76%
Video games arcade	34%	47%	54%
Cinema	18%	27%	44%
Computer shop	34%	43%	60%
Cybercafe	27%	36%	43%
Newspaper stall/bookstore	80%	89%	90%

As for media use, it can be observed that the young adults spend a considerable number of hours with one media or another. The average time spend with the various media range from 13 to 17 hours per day (refer to Table 2). Listening to the radio and watching television programmes seems to be the main preoccupation of the young adults. An emerging trend in media

use in Malaysia is the duration of time spend with computers and playing video games. When the duration of time spend with computers is taken collectively, it shows that the duration surpasses both television and radio. Those between the ages of 21-25 years spend the most time, about 26 hours per week utilizing the various software and facilities. The lower age category of 13-15 years spend 13 hours while those between the age of 16-20 years spend 19 hours weekly utilizing the computer.

Another emerging pattern in media use in Malaysia is the time spend playing video games either at the various video arcades or with the video game machines in their homes. The average time spend for all age groups is about 6 hours per week.

TABLE 2. Media Use

Types of Media	13-15yrs	16-20yrs	21-25yrs
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Terrestrial TV	13.3	18.2	19.0
Satellite TV	7.8	14.9	11.4
Watching video	8.9	6.8	8.0
Playing video game	6.1	6.3	6.5
Listening to radio	12.7	14.7	19.8
Listening to walkman	8.2	7.2	1.0
Reading newspaper / magazine	7.5	5.4	7.4
Reading short story / novel	7.8	5.3	5.8
Reading comic	7.8	3.7	4.9
Website	4.2	5.6	6.7
E-mail	4.3	7.4	6.6
Other computer uses	4.4	6.7	13.3

The data in Table 2 further reveals that the trend in media use is higher with the increase in age. The trend is noticeable most with regards to the use of electronic based media. The 21-25 age group spend an average of 19 hours per week watching terrestrial TV as compared to 13 hours among the 13-15 age group. It needs to be pointed out that although the access to satellite TV is relatively limited, yet among those who do have access it shows an increasing use of the media (7 to 11 hours per week).

The trend for print media is the opposite. Newspaper and magazine use ranges from 5 hours per week among the 16-20 age



group to 7 hours per week among the 13-15 and 21-25 age groups. In the case of reading short stories and novels, the duration of time spend range from 5 to 8 hours per week. In this particular case the young adults in the age group of 13-15 spend the most amount of time. As for the reading of comic books the 13-15 age group show the highest duration of time spend as compared to the 16-20 age group who spends an estimate of 4 hours a week.

Media orientation, which is the attention paid to the various media programmes / news items / software. Based on the findings, it is found that the young adults seemed to have paid considerable attention to entertainment (musical), sitcoms, health and educational based programme. Talk shows, political news and religious news receive minimal to moderate attention. They also paid considerable attention to sitcoms and least attention is paid to talk show programmes and political news. The data also indicates that the young adults do pay moderate attention to religious programmes/ news in the media.

TABLE 3. Media Orientation

Types of Media	13-15yrs	16-20yrs	21-25yrs
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Quiz show	2.4	2.3	2.4
Comedy	2.6	2.6	2.7
Science fiction	2.4	2.5	2.5
Documentary	2.5	2.5	2.6
Religious	2.2	2.2	2.3
Political	1.8	2.0	2.3
Educational	2.6	2.6	2.6
Health	2.6	2.5	2.6
Entertainment	2.7	2.7	2.7
Local singers	2.5	2.3	2.4
Foreign singers	2.6	2.6	2.6
Computer games	2.0	2.0	1.9

## II. Composition of attributes and values

In order to identify the various composition of attributes, disposition and orientations that make up the everyday norms, values and beliefs of the young adults, the value orientation taxonomy developed by Condon and Yousef's were used. This taxonomy allowed for the systematic study of the relationship between cultural values and

Communication behavior whereby the composition for both instrumental and terminal values were categorically classified into self, family, society, human nature, nature and the supernatural (Condon and Yousef, 1975). However, in this study only instrumental values pertaining to three categories namely, the self, family and society were used. A listing of terminal values reveal the prevalent tendencies and aspirations among the young adults.

**a). Instrumental values**

*personal attributes respected by peers*

Whereas the perceived attributes that are deemed most pertinent in themselves in relation to a peers mentioned are sincerity, good-hearted, respectful friendly, trustworthy. Trustworthy seems to be the quality that the older young adults preferred most.

*respected attributes in peers*

From the data gathered it was found that the attributes highly regarded in a friend, include trustworthiness, good-hearted, cooperativeness, respectful, friendliness and sincerity. Cooperativeness and friendliness are given more prominence among the 13- 15 age group (30%) but declined with the 21-25 age. However, with the 21-25 age group trustworthy appears to be the attribute most sought by their peers as compared to the 13-15 years (13%).

*Family - self*

As for their perception as to the most highly regarded attribute in a child-parent relationship, the attributes most notably mentioned include obedient, respectful, honesty, hardworking, successful in life and education. The attribute obedient was higher among 13-15 years (30%) and 16-20 years (29%), but not with the 21-25 years age group (16%). On the other hand, respectful is considered important by 19 percent of the older age group (21-25 years) as compared to 13% among the 13-15 years.

TABLE 4. Instrumental Values

peer-self	self-peer	parents-self	leaders
sincerety	trustworthiness	obedient	Uphold justice
Good-hearted	Good-hearted	respectful	Responsible
respectful	cooperativeness	honesty	Charasmatic and visionary
friendly	respectful	hardworking	transparency
trustworthiness	sincerety	Successful in life/ education	courageous

*leadership qualities*

The five main qualities that the young adults mentioned that they want their leaders to have are ability to uphold justice, responsible, charismatic and visionary, transparency, and courageous. Responsibility and upholding justice are the attributes that the 13-15 years age group prefer most but varies as the age group increases. The older age group of 20-25 years old give emphasis to the attributes of charismatic and visionary.

**b.) Terminal values**

From the data a listing of terminal values that refer to the end-states that members desire or "things to have or achieve" in order of priority includes; car/motorcycles, wealth, education, luxury homes, personal happiness. Ownership of computer and access to Internet, and successful life. However, when the data is analysed according to age grouping, there is a variation in the order of priority.

TABLE 5. Terminal Values

All ages	13-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years
Car/motorcycle	Car/motorcycle	Car/motorcycle	wealth
wealth	knowledge	knowledge	Luxury homes
knowledge	Computer/internet	Wealth	Car/motorcycle
Luxury homes	wealth	happiness	happiness
happiness	Luxury homes	Success in life	Happy family
Computer/internet	Success in life	Luxury homes	jobs
Success in life	happiness	Computer/internet	Success in life

It is interesting to note that while the younger age groups are in pursuit of the local social status symbols such as cars and motorcycles, they still regard having education as one their top priority. The data indicated that the 13-15 years old are interested to own computers and have access to the Internet. This is clearly a reflection of the times, that is, computers and Internet access is a novelty and the "in thing" to have and do. The other age groups have less priority for such ownership. The 21-25 years are into possession of materialistic goods such as luxury homes and automobiles.

### **c). Value orientations**

The three groups of young adults were asked to respond to 11 items that would reflect their values with regard to family, community and country. The responses were then analyzed to see if there is any differences between those with high and low media use.

In spite of the prevailing liberal attitude towards sex-related issues, a high percentage of the respondents would like the government to censor films that project explicit sexual scenes. An interesting point to note is that, the suggestion for the government to censor explicit sexual scenes in films comes across rather strongly from the older age group compared to the younger one. This contrasted with the higher tolerance shown by the older age group 21-25 years in their willingness to accept the gay group as part of the community. If we are to consider that sex related values are anchored in the young adult's religious beliefs, this study shows that a higher percentage of the young adults still think that religious teaching is an important aspects of their life.

With regards to the values towards the country, there is an indication that the young adults have a strong sense of patriotism. Across the age groups, more than 90 percent are willing to defend the country if attacked and to protest if foreigners are criticizing the country. Nevertheless, a small percentage of the young adults are planning to migrate to other countries given the opportunity. The desire to migrate is relatively higher among the 13-15 years age group (21%) compared to only 14 percent in the 21-25 age groups. This could be attributed to their exposure to foreign countries through the various media. Their limited personal travel experience naturally will make these foreign countries very desirable to them. The decline in such tendencies among the older age groups indicate greater knowledge and awareness of real living conditions in other countries. Only a small percentage of (7-8%) from all age groups seem to think that their future prospect in the country, in terms of educational and job opportunities are limited.

TABLE 6. Value Orientation and Media Use

	13-15 years		16-20 years		21-25 years	
	yes	Chi-sq.	Yes	Chi-sq.	yes	Chi-sq.
I am willing to defend the country if attacked	91%	.33	94%	.28	96%	.05
I will protest if the country is criticised by foreigners	84%	.59	90%	.01	93%	.10
Given an opportunity, I will migrate to other country	21%	.06	16%		14%	.05
There is no future for education or occupation in the country	8%	.51	7%	.08	8%	.64
I will take my parents to stay with me when they are old	100%	.30	82%	.00	98%	.70
Visiting my parents in the villages is an outdated practice	28%	.57	28%	.65	23%	.44
I am not afraid of those with HIV and AIDS	52%	.35	78%	.32	82%	.07
Sex education should be thought in schools.	64%	.98	82%	.00	92%	.32
The government should censor sexual scene in films	80%	.05	92%	.00	93%	.78
We must accept the gay group as part of the community	69%	.08	72%	.25	77%	.29
Following religious teaching is important for success	98%	.43	99%	.03	99%	.47

The family value that is highlighted in this study is relationship of young adults with their parents. It has been a tradition in the Malaysian society to take care of one's parents when they are old by having them stay with one of the children. Needless, to say parents do have a choice and often times they prefer to reside in their own homes. In such instances affection

appreciation to the parents, are shown by the obligatory and customary visits to their parents homes during religious and cultural celebrations. A high percentage in the 13-15 age group and 21-25 age groups seems do not have any problems in having their parents stay with them. The same is true with regard to visiting the parents. In all the age categories, they still consider visiting their parents in the outskirts of the big cities as an acceptable practice and that it is not outdated.

We now move on to the values that are related to sex-related behaviour. Among the young adults between 13-15 years, only 52 percent are not afraid of people infected with HIY. But the percentage increases with age. The same is true for the possibility of teaching sex education in schools. At the moment there is no policy yet on teaching of sex education in schools in Malaysia. Sex-related lessons are currently taught as part of the science or moral classes. Although only 64 percent of the 13-15 years agreed that sex education should be taught in schools, the percentage among those in the higher age increased much as 92 percent among those in the 21-25 years. This could be attributed to the tendency for young adults in this age group to begin initiating relationships and courtships. This age group is viewed as the marriageable age especially for young women (Karim, 1992). And thus, it is likely that they realised the necessity of being informed on relationships as well as sexual matters.

Data in Table 6 indicate that not all values are subject to influence by media use. However, several values show that they are subjected to the varying degree of media use. For example, there is a tendency for 16-20 years old who are exposed to low media use are willing to defend the country while those who are on high media use are not. For those in the 21-25 years with high media use are willing to migrate to other countries. With regard to film censorship, the 13-15 years and 16-20 years who are considered as high media user will not agree to such censorship. In relation to the sex education, the higher media user in the 16-20 years age group agrees that the subject should be thought in schools.

Discussions on media and cultural identity have always assumed that a high exposure to media especially if it is loaded with foreign programmes, will influence an individual values, norms, and practices. However, the active government social engineering measures through various policies and safeguards have somewhat thwarted the expected high negative effects of the media.

### III. Leisure and recreational activities

Leisure and recreational activities can be interpreted in several ways such as fulfilling residual time, activities people choose to participate or performing useful functions to achieve socially desired and approved ends (Haywood, et.al., 1995). Choice of leisure activities is circumscribed by a number acknowledged conditions such as time, money, individual capabilities and personal circumstances. Leisure activity is also related to the ways in which society is structured by social class, gender, age and race.

TABLE 7. Leisure and Recreational Activities and Media Use

Leisure activity	13-15 yrs		16-20yrs.		21-25yrs.	
	Yes (%)	Chi-sq.	Yes (%)	Chi-sq.	Yes (%)	Chi-sq.
Shopping complex	94	.31	93	.00	97	.17
Cinema	53	.30	58	.01	65	.15
Place of worship	89	.16	84	.64	89	.83
Restaurant	95	.21	95	.00	97	.08
Self-defense	38	.08	36	.4	26	.68
Uniform organ.	75	.42	62	.07	34	.18
Concert/theater	47	.03	51	.06	54	.36
Religious activities	79	.43	78	.09	79	.49
Charity work	76	.10	68	.57	63	.53
Karaoke/pub/disco	71	.70	54	.00	75	.08
Video center/cyber cafe	48	.16	54	.00	46	.18

In this study, leisure is associated with the young adults use of public spaces and involvement in leisure activities. With regards to the public spaces, the majority of young adults (more than 90 percent) spent their time at shopping malls, and food outlets such as fast food restaurants, hawkers stalls, and to a lesser extend at open spaces such as public parks, playing grounds etc.

The other three public spaces are associated with entertainment. Cinemas, which has been the traditional entertainment outlets for young adults, is not a popular place for the young adults to spend their free time. Slightly more than 50 percent of those in the 13-15 years age group frequent the cinemas as compared to 65 percent in the 21-25 years age group. The possible reasons for the lack of enthusiasm in going to the cinemas is probably due to the increase in ticket prices and the availability of VCD and videos with the latest titles in the market. Furthermore, these items are easily available and cheaper in cost.

The Karaoke lounge and pubs are the other entertainment public spaces frequent by the young adults in Malaysia. While pubs and discos have been around since the 1980s, the karaoke lounge is a recent phenomenon. The government has imposed restrictions on the age requirement to enter these premises. As such we see only a small portion of the young adults in the lower age groups who claimed to have been to such places. Yet, in the 21-25 years age group, 31 percent of them admitted to have been to such places during the last one month.

The video arcades and cyber cafes are becoming prominent features in the urban and suburban areas. These places have been the target of criticism by parents' as its clientele among students have resulted in higher incidences of truancy at these places. Meanwhile the Cyber cafes as the name implies is in line with the government policies to encourage computer literacy and creating an IT culture among the young. There is an increasing trend to frequent such places where 54 percent in the 16-20 years age group frequent such places compared to 48 percent in the 13-5 years age group and 46 percent in the 21-25 years age group.

The other aspect of leisure is the involvement in organized activities such as self-defence (e.g. karate, tae kwan do, silat), uniform bodies (e.g. red crescent, girl guides and boy scouts), and environmental and conservation activities. The involvement in the activities organised by uniformed bodies are more popular among the younger age groups (75 percent) but gradually lessening among the 21-25 years age group (36 percent). A similar pattern is also evident in leisure activity involving the self-defence. While there is a substantial involvement in such activities, nonetheless it dwindles as the age increases. Approximately 38 percent between the ages of 13-15 years are involved, and it dwindles to 26 percent among those young adults in the 20-25 years. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness among young adults in Malaysia on



environmental issues. Participation in conservation and environmental activities are becoming increasingly popular. About 47 percent of the 13-15 years age group are involved in such activities. The percentage increases to 54 percent among the 20-25 years age group.

In spite of the rapid development and industrialization in Malaysia, the interest in religious activities is still strong among the young adults. This is in line with the national philosophy, *Rukun Negara*, which among other things emphasizes the belief in God as its lead tenet. Involvement in religious activities is high, that is around 80% regardless of age groups. The high involvement in the voluntary activities are also high but reveals a decline with the increase in age. The involvement of the 13-15 years age group is 76 percent and dwindles to 69 percent for those between 16-20 years and 63 percent among those in the 21-25 years.

It is to be assumed that young adults will develop their political consciousness as their age matures. The government policies of not encouraging students in high schools and universities to be involved with partisan politics somewhat hinders their interest in political activities. This is evident in the high proportion of more 80 percent of the young adults never participated in political activities. The case is even notable among the 21-25 years where only 14% of them had participated in political activity

## Discussions and implications

The data on instrumental and terminal values reveal that the attributes that are reflected consistently throughout the three categories of self, family and society in all age groups are honesty, respectfulness and cooperativeness. Admittedly, these are traditionally inherent values that make up the backbone structure of the local values system. These values are practised in the homes and in everyday interaction. These are the values that every local born child is introduced to as his/her initiation into the local society through the various rituals, rules, taboos and language games that exist in the local social marketplace. As it is, these values have been strategically inserted and played out in the various public campaigns as reflected by the promotion activities towards the sustenance of a caring society, *Mesra* (Warmth), *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (Language is the soul of a Race), *Malaysia Boleh!* (Malaysia Can), and the IT Campaign just to name a few. Thus, the lexicographic ordering of those values in the hierarchy of their priority reveal a continuation of the prevalent value orientations

among the young. In addition, it reveals a conscious effort on the part of policy-makers to further the inherently valued orientations as part and parcel of the authority-defined identity. In a sense the authority-defined value orientations form the superordinate context by which all social values exist. At the same time, there is a reflexive and interactive relationship between the context (policies) and the lived experiences of the people. Thereby, creating an on-going symbiosis of values that make up the compositions of the current cultural identity of this generation of young adults.

Furthermore, in line with the study by the East Asian Pacific Affairs Division (Villegas, 1997), even though there may be some values such as hard work, loyalty, closeness to family ties and frugality that are universally well regarded, without a doubt this study has shown that they are attributes and values that are unique and common to this generation of young adults in Malaysia. The findings also show that there is a greater media penetration as a consequent of governmental policies that are aimed at promoting the media and IT industry. These policies have considerable implications on the living patterns of these young adults as indicated by their media use, recreational and leisure activities.

Nevertheless, the society especially the young adults are not expected to engage in the global media and IT age unprotected. Since the development and progress in the media and IT industry is a government sponsored project, there are already safeguards in place to minimise and brace for possible negative side effects. There is a call to all sectors involved to inculcate and nurture local traditional values and societal structures among the young for it is these values that can be the buffer against possible encroachment. Thus, the imagined phobias of cultural imperialism, loss of sovereignty and cultural identity is observed and checked through a concerted effort by the government and all supporting institutions.

## Conclusion

It is evident that this generation of young adults have been shaped by the social engineering process of the government. All policies created and implemented were an off-shoot of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1970. This Policy with its economic growth and restructuring of society as a thrust has been the mainstay for almost 29 years. This present group of young adults (13 to 25) were born into the socio-economic conditions that developed as a consequent of that master plan. Without a doubt, their lifestyle, education, attributes and values were created either

directly or indirectly by all that is made available or absent by the superordinate Policy. As such, this "emerging generation" of young adults can be called the "NEP generation". The challenge facing this generation is of course the growing interconnectedness and globalisation of the media, education and economic systems that may create tensions in their existing priorities and call for a reordering. However, the traditional core values have been deeply ingrained into their everyday practices and in the various policies that one wonders if at all, they can be reordered. After all, these values do have universal appeal and time lasting feature~ that can be shared by all human beings regardless of ethnicity or culture.

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