Full Length Research Paper

Relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption: A moderating effect of religiosity

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This paper aimed to explain the impact of American popular culture on Malaysian adolescents' behaviours and also tried to investigate the impact of popular music as the prominent source of American popular culture. This was done to understand the influence of American popular culture on Malaysian adolescents' consumption patterns. The research included conspicuous consumption as the dependent variable and the moderating effect of religiosity. A quota sample of 820 Malaysian late adolescents was used to access the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption with the moderating effect of religiosity. The results obtained show that role model, imitation and knowledge and consumerism are the dimensions of American popular culture and are related to conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, religiosity shows a significant moderating effect to the relationship.

Key words: American popular culture, adolescents, conspicuous consumption, religiosity.

INTRODUCTION

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 as early as the 1920s (Giles,1922; Hollander and Germain, 1992; Bennett et al., 2006). In fact, marketers have attempted to connect with the youth market as early as the 1920s (Giles, 1922; Hollander and Germain, 1992; Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). This segment of the public is important to the aforementioned groups for many reasons. The main reason may be that the creation of awareness among young people has the potential to produce a lifetime consumers' of products and services (Bennett et al., 2006).

Media consumption may give adolescents a sense of being connected to a larger peer network, which is united by certain youth-specific values and interests (Arnett, 1995). Arnett (1995) viewed that in a highly mobile society, the media provides common ground for all adolescents. He further pointed out that no matter where they move adolescents will find peers in their new areas who watch the same television programmes and movies, listen to the same music and are familiarized with the

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same advertising slogans and symbols. At the same time that media connects adolescents to other adolescents around the country and even around the world, the adults within their own families may be unfamiliar with many of the media products that provide the basis for youth culture identification. Roe (1985) quoted that music, particularly, is a medium for the expression of adolescents-specific value.

The research further argued that adolescents' identification may not be to youth culture as a whole but to a youth subculture. Media, particularly music, provides a way of defining and uniting the members of a youth subculture as well as expressing their shared views of the world (Roe, 1987; Willis, 1978).

Research objectives

The research objectives comprise of the following:

1. To explore the impacts of popular cultures on Malaysian adolescents' conspicuous consumption.
2. To investigate the moderating effect of religiosity between the relationship of American popular culture and conspicuous consumption.

The main focus for the popular culture in the research will be centred on sports figures and entertainers including actors, actresses or singers.

Research framework

The paper tries to investigate the determinants of American popular culture as the independent variable. The research paper indicates that American popular culture is posited to influence conspicuous consumption behaviour. In the present paper, the researcher anticipated that there is one dependent variable involved. The dependent variable involved is conspicuous consumption. It is also suspected that the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is moderated by the religiosity variable. The main focus for the popular culture in the research will be centered on sports figures and entertainers including actors, actresses or singers.

American popular culture

In this 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. In the following the study highlights the definition, dimensions of American popular culture and the role of popular music in adolescents' lives.

American popular culture penetrating the global market

Globalization enables foreign companies to distribute American cultural products including music, films, books and others. The spread of American consumer products worldwide is accompanied by the spread of American popular culture. Englis et al. (1993: 1) support the previous argument by quoting "icons of American popular culture are ubiquitous throughout the world". 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.

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 piece of 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 be exposed 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 purchase USD 300 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 release 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 (that is, '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 for 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).

Definition of American popular culture

Based on the preview of the past literature, the researcher has come to a conclusion of giving the conceptual definition to American popular culture construct as mentioned in the following:

"American popular culture is the influence of popular culture originated from United States and has a penetrating effect throughout the world".

The conceptual definition of the foregoing said construct was based on previous studies done by Harper (2000) and Jensen (2003) pertaining to the previous mentioned construct.

Role of popular music in adolescences' lives

Adolescence is the period of growth between childhood and adulthood with music functioning as "an important part of adolescent culture" (Rice, 1981: 268; Shuker, 1994). Adolescents cite music near the top of the list of things that make them happy (Ban, 1986). Pop music is a cultural space that belongs predominantly to young people (McRobbie, 1995; Thornton, 1995) in which 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). Earlier research has shown that music is important for two main reasons: "It is a means by which youth groups define themselves and a source for determining and achieving group status" (Frith, 1978: 46).

The importance of music is unsurprising, given the central role of music to youth culture. The most recent research conducted 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 this is because it allows them to portray an "image" to the outside world and satisfy their emotional needs for centuries. Music also has been known for centuries to have a powerful effect on human responses (Sweeny and Wyber, 2002).

From a developmental viewpoint, we again have to ask for reasons (to why adolescents like to listen to popular music, rather than classical music). This question has been addressed by Thompson (1993) and more extensively 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: tend to be something that parents do not like, and thereby may give adolescents a chance to form an identity of their own.

Dimension of American popular culture influences

Earlier, American popular culture was conceptualised as "the influence of popular culture originated from United States and has a penetrating effect throughout the world". The meaning of popular culture covers a set of generally available films, music records, clothes, television programmes, advertisements and other forms of media. It involves dimensions of role modelling and expression of idolization (Raviv et al., 1996; Harper, 2000; Hogg and
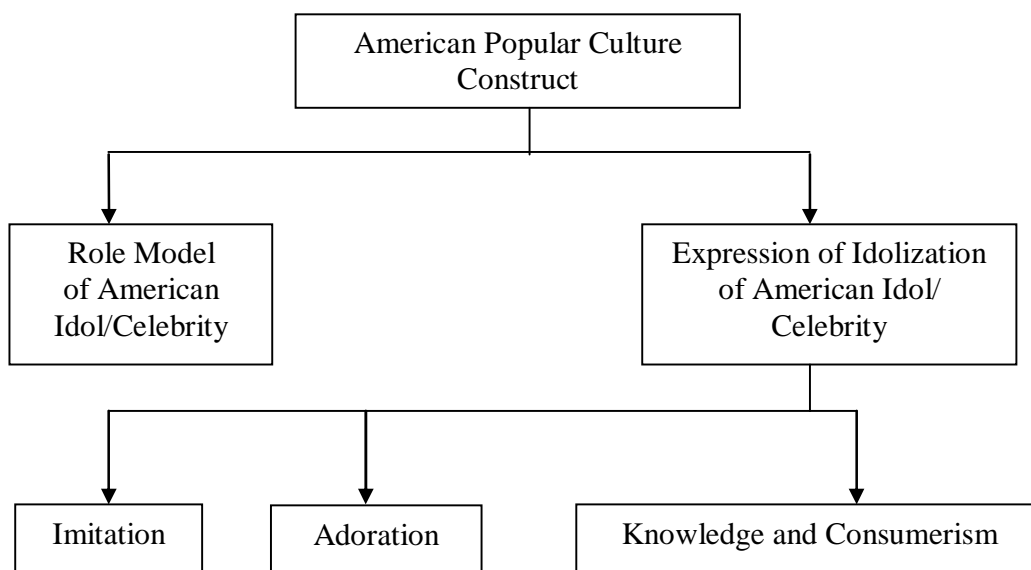
Figure 1. The Dimensions of American popular culture construct. Adapted from various sources (Raviv et al., 1996; Harper, 2000; Hogg and Banister, 2000; Martin and Bush, 2000; Bush et al., 2004).

Banister, 2000; Martin and Bush, 2000; Bush et al., 2004) as illustrated in Figure 1. The study will elaborate the conceptual foundation of the role model, namely, consumer socialization or consumer modelling. It explores further American popular culture dimensions that are, role model and expression of idolization.

(i) Role model of American idol/celebrity: The conceptual foundation of the role model is namely consumer sociali-zation or consumer modelling. Consumer socialization or consumer modelling is the process by which "young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974: 1). Consumer socialization emphasizes sources of influence or "socialization agents" that transmit norms, attitudes, motivations, and behaviours to the learner (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). A socialization agent may be any person or organization directly involved with the individual. Socialization agents com-monly used in the literature include parents, peers, mass media, school, and television viewing (Bush et al., 2004).

A multitude of studies has examined how individual consumers learn what to consume (Keillor et al., 1996; Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Ward, 1974). The concept of consumer socialization has been utilized to determine, among other things, how consumers learn thought processes and consumption behaviour through modelling (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Many of these studies are based on the foundation of social learning theory, which proposes that individuals learn general behaviour and attitudes from past experiences. Previous research has established that these learning experiences may be vicarious, indicating that consumers learn or model

behaviour, values, attitudes, and skills through the observation of other individuals, or through observations of electronic or print media (Bandura, 1977).

Attractive characters are potent role models that facilitate attention and emulation (Bandura, 1986). Icons of American popular culture are ubiquitous throughout the world (Englis et al., 1993). Hogg and Banister (2000) argued 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.

Scholars mentioned that gender role identity is an important aspect of identity formation, and one for which adolescents especially make use of media (Steele and Brown, 1995; Brown and Hendee, 1989; Greenberg et al., 1992; Arnett, 1995). While, another related study conducted by Frith (1987) claimed that the teenager consumes conspicuously particularly pop music as a means of expressing identity, of the socio-cultural values or beliefs that they adhered to. Besides, adolescents also take ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman partly from the media, which present physical and behavioural gender ideals in images through music (Ackerman, 1997), movies (Greenberg et al., 1986), television (Brown et al., 1990; Hogg and Banister, 2000) and magazines (Denski, 1992 in Hogg and Banister, 2000; Evan et al., 1991).

Past literature also suggested that even those who are not seeking such lifestyles may be influenced by the ubiquitous and apparently normal use of alcohol in most media content (Brown and Witherspoon, 2002). Stewart et al. (2003) also quoted that the research literature on
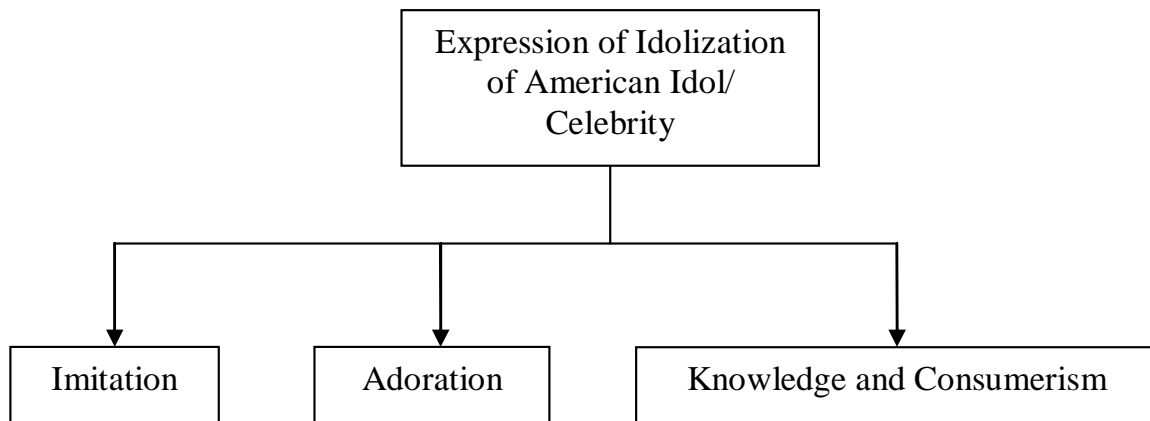
Figure 2. Expression of idolization dimensions of American popular culture construct.

female images in rock music and other popular music forms reveals mainly negative stereotypes of women. According to one study, this literature reveals three recurring images of women in popular songs: the ideal woman / Madonna / saint; the evil or fickle witch / sinner / whore and the victim (Butruille et al., 1987). In general, role portrayals are highly stereotypical; women are wives, sweetheart, mothers or wicked witches (Stewart et al., 2003). These stereotypical images of females can be found in all areas of popular music; including pop, country and rock.

(ii) Expression of idolization of American idol/celebrity: Previously, the researcher has illustrated role modelling and expression of idolization as dimensions of the American popular culture construct. In this sub section, the researcher will discuss further the sub dimensions of expression of idolization (one of American popular culture dimension). As seen in Figure 2, expression of idolization is further explained by three sub dimensions, that is, imitation, adoration and knowledge and consumerism (Raviv et al., 1996).

Raviv et al. (1996) argue that the phenomenon of idolization is a special characteristic of early adolescence. The phenomenon of idolization comes from various domains of life such as sport, entertainment, music, politics and religion. Thus, sport champions, movie actors/actresses, television personalities, pop star and political or religious leaders can all become idolized figures. In most westernized youth culture, the idolized figures come from sports, entertainment and music. These domains and the celebrities who excelled in them received wide exposure in the mass media and concerts (Raviv et al., 1996). Previous research argued based on the idolization of pop singers, the consumption and collection of music reflect a normal appreciation of music. Therefore, it is based mostly on two important components: worshipping and modelling (Raviv et al., 1995). Worshipping refers to an unusually intense admiration and reverence of an idol. This can be expressed in such behaviours 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. Thus, in general it can take different forms, and its expression depends on culture, age, gender and environmental conditions.

Earlier researches conducted by McCracken (1986) and O'Guinn (1991) supported the argument as quoted to mention that exchange, grooming, possession and divestment can be seen in the consumption rituals associated with fan behaviour. They further argued that spending money, collecting and swooping things were important aspects of the exchange, possession and divestment rituals. Fan behaviour also extended into other areas of activity such as imitation, e.g. supporting the same football team as the pop stars. In other cases, participants joined fan clubs to bring them into closer contact with their heroes that is, 'touching greatness' (O'Guinn, 1991). Most recent study done by Hogg and Banister (2000) further supported the argument by stating that the main incentive to buy magazines was to find out information about pop stars and obtain posters to put on the wall. Another scholar, Chiou et al. (2005) found that the effect of singer or band idolization on attitude of pirated music product purchasing was significant. They further argued that the effect of singer/band idolization on attitude of unauthorized music duplication/download was not significant. Research in sports marketing also suggested that fans become loyal to a particular team because of the sense of identity felt by associating themselves with a particular group (Wann and Branscombe, 1993).

Specifically, celebrity worship (adoration) in Malaysia appears to be driven by an admiration for the commercial and hedonic success of celebrities, shaped (in part at

least) by market and media forces (Yue and Cheung, 2000a). Another study conducted among university students in Malaysia by Swami et al. (2010) found that both Malay and Chinese participants (despite differences in religious affiliation) overwhelmingly selected pop stars and movie stars as their favourite celebrities. Different forms of celebrity worship (adoration) are congruent with the national orientations or values of a society (Swami et al. 2009). Indeed, this has been the suggestion of Cheung and Yue (2000), Yue (2000), and Yue and Cheung (2000a, b). As celebrities come to be a model of imitation, idolized singers' references to various topics and walks of life are very likely to serve as true knowledge for adolescents. As such, based on the study by Raviv (1997), we conclude that the sub dimensions, that is, imitation, adoration and knowledge and consumerism will help in explaining expression of idolization (one of American popular culture dimension).

Conspicuous consumption construct (Dependent variable)

Conspicuous consumption is regarded as a key to many consumer behaviours (Redding and Ng, 1983). Veblen (1899) was the first to coin the term conspicuous consumption to refer to people's prominent desire and visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods. In the same perspective, Belk (1986) quoting numerous empirical studies and journalistic accounts, found that yuppies not only view conspicuous consumption positively but they seem to be engaged in it. In another similar study conducted by O'Cass and McEwen (2004) supported the previous argument. In his study, the author mentioned that conspicuousness is essential if consumers want to gain recognition, approval or acceptance from their reference groups. Importantly, products and brands have the ability to communicate messages to others, in that product styles determine how consumers who own them are perceived by others (Holman, 1981; Belk, 1978; Solomon, 1983).

Conspicuous consumption is basically concerned with the ostentatious display of wealth (Md Nor, 1988; Marcoux et al., 1997). A conspicuous consumer is motivated by a desire to impress others with his material possessions. As Mason (1981) puts it, "It is a form of consumption which is inspired by the social rather than by the economic or physiological utility of product". The main purchasing decision is to show off. Conspicuous consumption is usually associated with status and socially-visible products (Mason, 1981). Piron (2000) referred conspicuous consumption to consumers' desire as to provide prominent visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods. After the overview of the past overwhelming literature pertaining to construct, the researchers of this paper have conceptually defined conspicuous consumption as:

"The excessive and lavish consumption with the intention of displaying wealth".

Specifically, the conceptual definition mentioned previously was integrated based on the two most related previous researches done by Md Nor (1988) and O'Cass and McEwen (2004).

American popular culture and conspicuous consumption

Despite the importance of relating the concept of American popular culture and conspicuous consumption, there is no empirical research or theoretical model on this nature being explored. However, recent empirical studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between role model (dimension of American popular culture) and conspicuous consumption (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). For instance, O'Cass and McEwen (2004) argue that factors like country of origin, media use, lifestyle, values, brand personalities and alternative consumption-relevant concepts could all realistically be tested to yield further insights into conspicuous consumption. In a way, the authors imply that brand personalities (e.g., Michael Jackson) play a significant role model (American popular culture dimension) in consuming products conspicuously.

Consumers acquire, own, use and display certain goods and services to enhance their sense of self, to present an image of what they are like, to represent what they feel and think, and to bring about the types of social relationships they wish to have (Goffman, 1959; Belk, 1988; Ewen, 1988; Braun and Wicklund, 1989). The previous mentioned researchers went on to argue that consumers might have a particular role model (American popular culture dimension) and wanted to show to others that they could afford the products.

Raviv et al. (1996) argue that adolescents are dependent on their peer group and conform to its values, attitudes, and pattern of behaviours that are typical of youth culture. Therefore, in order to conform to group norms, adolescents try to consume products conspicuously to indicate their belongingness to their peer group. This is where the situation permits conspicuous consumption to play its role. In a study done by Scitovsky (1992), he argues that sense of belonging to groups is both necessary and psychologically satisfying to humans.

Adolescents imitate (American popular culture dimension) group members in order to be accepted as group members themselves. Scitovsky (1992) goes on to argue that the desire for status involves more than assurance of group membership. The respondents also seek distinction and recognition within their groups and strive to gain this. Implicitly, saying that adolescents who share the role model (American popular culture dimension) due to peer group pressure will lead to

purchase product conspicuously to show their conformance to group norms.

Researchers argue that individuals use goods as materials with which to create, foster and develop their identity (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004; Lee, 1990; Erickson et al., 1984). The symbolic meaning of goods is used as an outward expression of their self concept and connection to society. This means that idolizing a role model (American popular culture dimension) will lead to usage of certain products as a means to create or foster and develop their identity. That may lead to consuming products or services conspicuously in order to show off to the public that he/she has developed their identity according to their idols (American popular culture dimension).

In another related study, Erickson et al. (1984: 694) argue that the image variable is defined as "some aspects of the product that are distinct from its physical characteristics but that are nevertheless identified within the product". The authors continue to argue that the image variables emerge from four cognitive represen-tations individuals have of their environment: the symbolism of advertising, the celebrity endorsement, the brand and the country of origin of the product. In other words, the authors suggest that the images from the role model (American popular culture dimension) may lead consumers to consume conspicuously, which will reflect their social standing.

Thus, it can be established that individuals with higher American popular culture influences will be more likely to have higher conspicuous consumption. Based on the previous discussion, we would like to suggest the following proposition: P1a = the higher the American popular culture influences on adolescents, the higher will be the conspicuous consumption.

The hypothesized relationship is investigated in this present study. Thus, it is expected that an individual with higher American popular culture influences will be more likely to have higher conspicuous consumption. The hypothesized relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption can be sum-marized as follows:

H$_1$: The higher the level of American popular culture, the higher will be the conspicuous consumption among Malaysian adolescents.

Religiosity as the moderating effect between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption

Few scholars have contributed their work to religiosity literature (Zaichkowsky and Sood, 1989; Wilkes et al., 1986; Delener, 1990; McDaniel and Burnett, 1990) but no research has been done trying to link religiosity as a moderating variable between American Popular Culture and conspicuous consumption.

Past literatures also show no research had linked the relationship between American popular culture and religiosity. However, there is a study trying to link lifestyle (American popular culture sources) and religiosity done by Sherkat (2002). A survey conducted in United States examined the religiosity commitment of hetero-sexuals, gays, lesbians and bisexuals (types of lifestyles in United States). They found that the non heterosexuals (gay men, bisexual and lesbian) will be less committed to religion. They also claimed that non-heterosexuals female (bisexual and lesbians) are less active in religious organizations when compared to their male counterparts (bisexual men and gay men). Therefore, the higher the influence of American popular culture (that is, lifestyle), the less religiosity values they possessed. In other words, the more the consumers are highly influenced by American popular culture, the consumers will have lower religiosity value.

Another related study by Strinati (2004) argued that the traditional sources of identity (that is, social class, the extended and nuclear family, local communities, the 'neighbourhood', religion, trade unions and the nation state) are said to be in decline as a result of tendencies in modern capitalism such as the rapid increase and wide-scale rates of social change. Therefore, the rapid increase and wide-scale rates of social change (e.g., American popular culture), the less religiosity values the societies will possess. In other words, the more the consumers are highly influenced by American popular culture, the consumers will have lower religiosity value.

In the related research conducted among Indians living in Britain, it suggests that conspicuous consumption is associated with social class, low religiosity and lower socio-economic classes (Lindridge and Dibb, 2003; Lindridge et al., 2004). Lindridge (2005) also believes that the decreasing religiosity among Indians living in Britain will lead to significantly greater conspicuous consumption when compared to Asian Indians.

Therefore, based on the arguments by Lindridge and Dibb (2003) and Lindridge et al. (2004) it is believed that a higher level of conspicuous consumption is associated with decreasing religiosity. However, the reviews of the literature showed no supporting research in determining the relationship between religiosity and American popular culture. As such, we speculate that there is a possibility that religiosity plays a significant role as a moderating variable between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption. Thus, it is expected that the positive relationship between American popular culture influences and conspicuous consumption is being moderated by religiosity. The hypothesized relationship can be summarized as follows:

H$_{1a}$: Religiosity moderates the relationship between American popular culture influences and conspicuous consumption.

The hypothesized relationship with moderating variable

was investigated in this paper.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Measurement of construct

Measurement for American popular culture constructs

The paper was based on the development and administration of a self-administration of a self-completion survey. Established scales were drawn from the literature to generate representative items that, collectively, tapped the domain and meaning of each construct. All construct in this study were measured using 7 Likert scale. For the data interpretation, the 7 Likert scales were (1) "strongly disagree", (2) "disagree", (3) "slightly disagree", (4) "neutral", (5) "slightly agree", (6) "agree", and (7) "strongly agree".

American popular culture construct was further explained by two dimensions (role model and expression of idolization). A total of 21 items were generated and later refined and edited for content validity by a group of four expert judges who are academicians with interest in marketing, media effect and psychology. The use of expert judges of a scale's domain has been commonly used in marketing (Zaickhowsky, 1989; Babin and Burns, 1998).

The measuring instrument for role model dimension was adapted from Martin and Bush (2000) and Rice (1997) which comprised of 5-items that were anchored by a seven point Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

In the expression of idolization dimension, the research further divided it into 3 main sub-dimensions. They were "imitation", "adoration" and "knowledge and consumerism". The measuring instrument was adapted from Raviv et al.(1995) which comprised of 16-items that were measured by a seven point Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Among the items involved in this dimension were 5 items for imitation, 5 items for adoration and 6 items for knowledge and consumerism. For the purpose of the present paper, the researcher has modified the items statement from the original scale developed by Raviv et al. (1995). This part intended to measure the various behavioural manifestation of idolization.

Measurement for conspicuous consumption and religiosity construct

The survey measured respondents' conspicuous consumption (Md Nor, 1988; O'Cass and Ewen, 2004) involved 10-items. While religiosity construct was measured based on previous researchers (Safiek, 2006; Md Nor, 1988; Wilkes et al., 1986) involved 10 items.

Sampling technique

Data collection took place via a non-probability sampling, specifically systematic cluster sampling or quota sampling of Malaysian adolescents. In the present study, the population was grouped based on several factors. There were five main factors involved which included gender, age, ethnicity, family income group and regional areas in Peninsular Malaysia. Based on the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006 to 2010 (2006), an equal percentage (50:50) of both gender and age group of 16 to 19 years old were taken into consideration. The ethnicity factor has been distributed according to Population and Housing Census of Malaysia (2000) that involved 50:35:15 for Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups. Income level quota was set at 50:50 for above average and below average household income of RM3000 per month (Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006 to 2010, 2006). The quota sampling was based on

regional areas in Peninsular Malaysia. The regional areas were divided into four main regions of Peninsular Malaysia which included northern (Kedah), southern (Johor), western Klang Valley) and eastern (Terengganu).

Data collection technique

The information on American popular culture effect towards Malaysian adolescents was obtained through a self-administered survey and with the voluntarily assistance provided by teachers from targeted state in Peninsular Malaysia who were able to liaise and interact directly with their students. In order to ensure that there were respondents from each targeted states in Peninsular Malaysia, the questionnaires were distributed based on the number of population in each state mentioned earlier.

RESULTS

A total 820 surveys were obtained. The sample was fairly representative to the population composition of Peninsular Malaysia. 54.3% of the respondents were female, while 45.7% were male. In terms of ethnic group, 56.7% of the samples were Malay, followed by Chinese at 33.2%, Indian at 8.3% and others 1.8%. The respondents varied in age ranging from 16 years old to 19 years old. The smallest proportion of the respondents fell into the "16 years old" age group. They accounted for 21.3% of the total respondents. This is followed by the "17 years old" age group (24.1%), the "18 years old" age group (29.5%) and the "19 years old" age group (25.1%). The results of confirmatory factor analysis, simple linear regression and hierarchical multiple regression were presented in this paper.

Confirmatory factor analysis

All items within each construct were then computed into composite variables to test the models. For the purpose of the present paper, the author chooses the option to test all dependent construct together at on time. Table 1 captures all the results of confirmatory factor analysis on the constructs in this study, Figures 1 to 3 exhibit the measurement models for the constructs of the study. From Table 1, results of the x^2 are significant with p value greater than 0.05. All the criteria for the incremental/ comparative fit yield results of above 0.90, indicating a fairly good fit model. All the GFI and AGFI yield results of more than 0.90 with RMSEA on average of 0.070 (Hair et al., 2006). This shows that RMSEA is a good indicator of the absolute fit of the model. All of these fit evidences suggest that convergent validity in this instance is established.

The majority of the values of $\chi^2/$ df are between 2.107 and 5.237, with RMSEA on average of 0.053. This shows that x^2 / df and RMSEA are good indicators of the absolute fit of the model. All of these fit evidences added to the fact that all average variance extracted (AVE) of

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

| x^2	df	p	x^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Independent variable: American popular culture (drop items AD_10_12 and AD_17_15 to get model fit)							
487.481	101	0.000	4.827	0.928	0.903	0.935	0.068
Dependent variable: conspicuous consumption							
2.107	1	0.147	2.107	0.998	0.990	0.995	0.037
Moderating variable: religiosity (drop items REG_46_26, REG_22_22 and REG_52_27 to get model fit)							
47.132	9	0.000	5.237	0.981	0.956	0.982	0.072
Measurement model: overall variables							
849.154	266	0.000	3.192	0.920	0.902	0.932	0.052
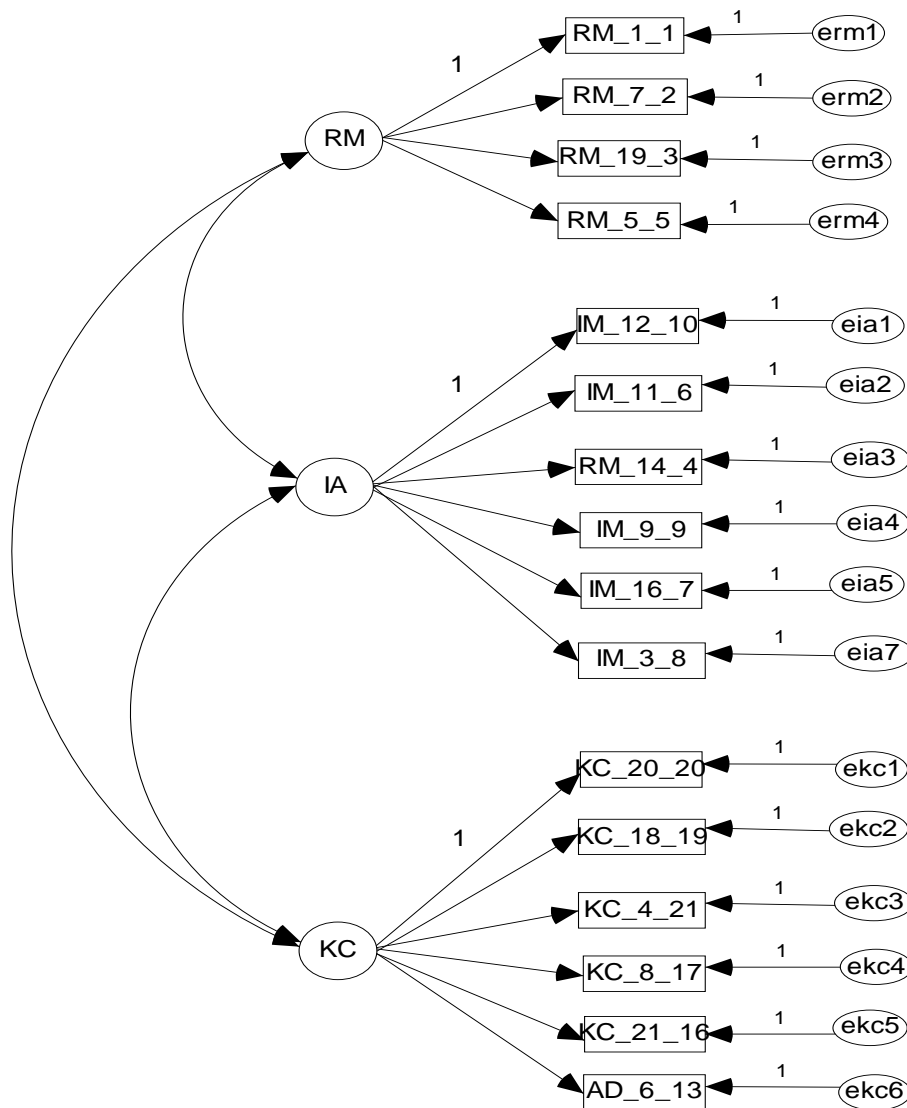
Figure 3. Measurement model for American popular culture (independent variable). x^2 (1) = 487.481, p = .000; GFI = .928; AGFI = 0.903; CFI = 0.935 and RMSEA = 0.068.
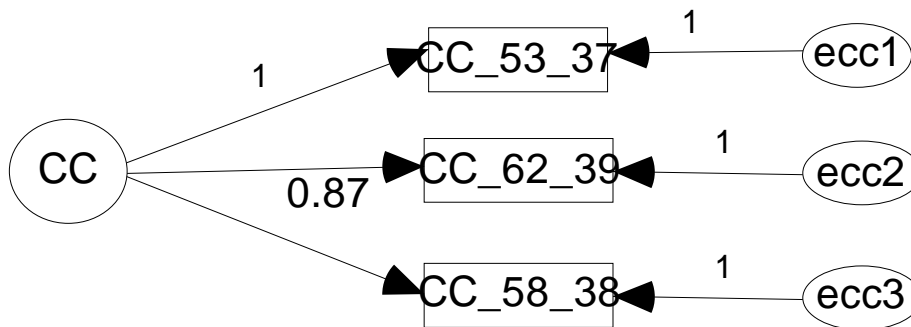
Figure 4. Measurement model for conspicuous consumption (dependent variable). χ^2 (1) =2.107, p = .147; GFI = 0.998; AGFI = 0.990; CFI = 0.995 and RMSEA = 0.037.

the constructs were greater than 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Smith and Barclay, 1997). This suggests that convergent validity in this instance is established.

CFA of the American popular culture (APC) scale

CFA for American popular culture (APC) resulted in a fairly good fitting model of scale where the examination of the standardized factor loading revealed that all items have a standardised loading above 0.50. However, an examination of MI suggests that items AD_10_12 and AD_17_15 from Imitation dimension were highly inter-correlated with each other and with other items in the scale. Therefore, these items were deleted and the model was re-estimated with the remaining sixteen items (Figure 3). CFA resulted in an adequate fitting model of x^2 (1) = 487.481, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.928; AGFI = 0.903; CFI = 0.935 and RMSEA = 0.068. The chi-square statistics were significant and other fit indices indicate a recommended level of indices, thus suggesting a fairly well-fitting measurement model. The analysis shows the finally-retained items with standardized loading above 0.50, variance extracted (0.7694) and the reliability (0.9800). The results from these models show that two items AD_10_12 and AD_17_15 from Imitation dimension were deleted to get the data fit with the model.

CFA of conspicuous consumption scale

CFA for conspicuous consumption resulted in fairly good fitting model of scale where the examination of the standardized factor loading revealed that all items have a standardized loading above .50. However, no item was deleted and the model was re-estimated with the re-maining 3 items (Figure 4). CFA resulted in an adequate fitting model of x^2 (1) = 2.107, p = 0.147; GFI = 0.998; AGFI = 0.990; CFI = 0.995 and RMSEA = 0.037. The chi-square statistics were significant and other fit indices indicate a recommended level of indices, thus suggesting

a fairly-fitting measurement model. The analysis shows the finally-retained items with standard-dised loading above 0.50, variance extracted (0.3174) and the reliability (0.562). The results from these models show that no item was deleted to get the data fit with the model.

CFA of religiosity (moderating variable) scale

CFA for moderating variables were resulted in fairly good fitting model of scale where the examination of the standardized factor loading revealed that all items have a standardized loading above 0.50. However, an examination of MI suggests that items REG_46_26, REG_22_22 and REG_52_27 from Religiosity scale were highly inter-correlated with each other and with other items in the scale. The items dropped were highly inter-correlated with each other and with other items in the scale. Therefore, these items were deleted and the model was re-estimated with the remaining 6 items (Figure 5). CFA resulted in an adequate fitting model of x^2 (1) = 47.132, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.981; AGFI = 0.956; CFI = 0.982 and RMSEA = 0.072. The chi-square statistics were significant and other fit indices indicate a recommended level of indices, thus suggesting fairly-fitting measurement model. The analysis shows the finally-retained items with standardized loading above 0.50, variance extracted (0.5201) and the reliability (0.8629). The results from these models show that 3 items of REG_46_26, REG_22_22 and REG_52_27 from Religiosity scale were deleted to get the data fit with the model.

CFA of overall variables scale

CFA for overall variables resulted in fairly good fitting model of scale where the examination of the standard-dized factor loading revealed that all items have a standardized loading above 0.50. However, no item was deleted and the model was re-estimated with the
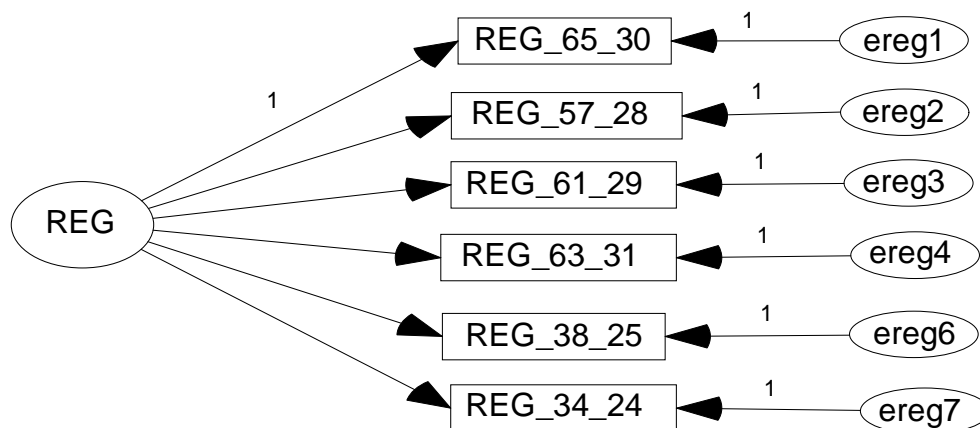
Figure 5. Measurement model for religiosity (moderating variable). x^2 (1) = 47.132, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.981; AGFI = 0.956; CFI = 0.982 and RMSEA = 0.072.

remaining of 25 items (Figure 6). CFA resulted in an adequate fitting model of x^2 (1) = 849.154, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.920; AGFI = 0.902; CFI = 0.932 and RMSEA = 0.052. The chi-square statistics were significant and other fit indices indicate a recommended level of indices, thus suggesting a well-fitting measurement model. The ana-lysis shows the finally-retained items with standardized loading above 0.50, variance extracted (0.4952) and the reliability (0.824). The results from these models show that no item was deleted to get the data fit with the model.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was then further tested using CFA. With CFA, the categories are predetermined by the researcher and the analysis determines how well each question within a factor correlates with that particular factor. To test for discriminant validity using CFA, the chi-square differences test is conducted by comparing the freely-estimated measurement model with a theoretical model where the correlation parameter is constrained to 1 (Joreskog, 1971). Discriminant validity of two constructs is achieved if the chi-square value for the unconstrained model is significantly lower than that of the constrained model (Bagozzi and Philips, 1982). Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step approach using confirmatory analysis and SEM was followed. In SEM, the measurement model was first tested to validate the measurement instruments used in the study. There are two methods commonly used by previous researchers in evaluating the validity of a measurement model: testing each construct separately, or testing all constructs together at one time (Cheng, 1999). However, the researcher of the present study decided to choose the option to test all construct together at on time.

Results of discriminant validity

Table 2 captures all the results of discriminant validity on the constructs in this study, Figures 7 to 10 exhibit the measurement models for the constructs of the independent, dependent and moderating variables. The summary results in Table 2 indicate that the present researcher compared a 5-factor Model with 1, 2 and 3-factor model.

In the 5-factor model, two constructs and three sub-constructs (American popular culture consists of three dimensions, role model, imitation and adoration and knowledge and consumerism) were treated as five inde-pendent factors. In 3-factor Model, all the three American popular culture dimensions (role model, imitation and adoration and knowledge and consumerism) were loaded on one factor. Conspicuous consumption and religiosity were loaded in separate factors in 3-factor model. In 2-factor model, the three American popular culture dimen-sions (role model, imitation and adoration and knowledge and consumerism) were loaded on one factor. The other variables (conspicuous consumption and religiosity) were loaded in another factor in 2-factor model. In the 1-factor model, all variables studied were loaded on one factor. As shown in Table 2, the fit indices revealed support for the hypothesized 5-factor model suggesting support for the distinctiveness of the constructs used in this study.

Test of hypotheses

As mentioned earlier, the main objectives of the present study was to identify the dimensionality of American popular culture construct, to examine the relationships between independent variable (American popular culture) and dependent variable (conspicuous consumption), and to examine the moderating effect of Religiosity. Thus, simple regression was employed to test the direct
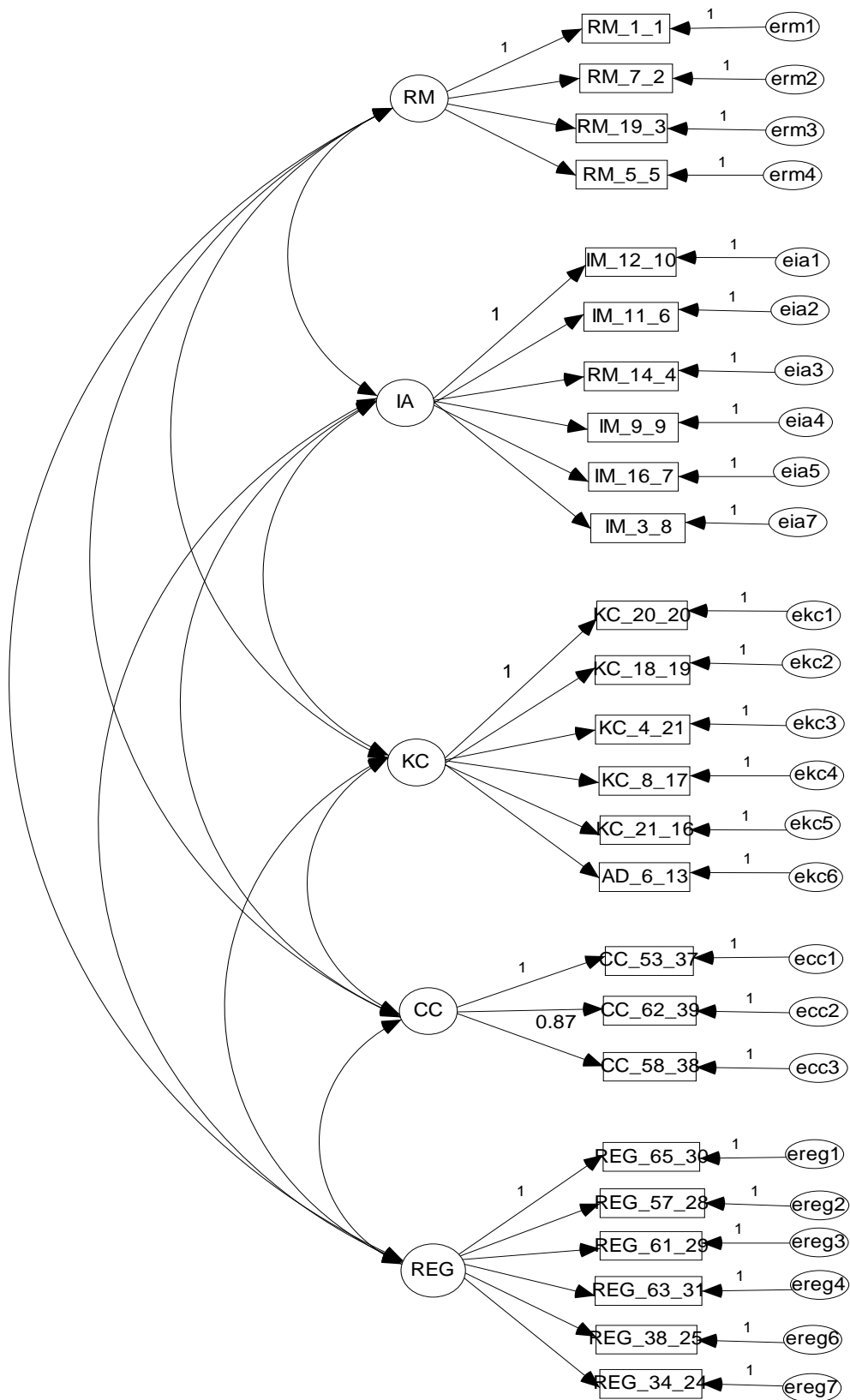
Figure 6. Measurement model for all variables. x^2 (1) = 849.154, p = .000; GFI = 0.920; AGFI = 0.902; CFI = 0.932 and RMSEA = 0.052.

Table 2. CFA results for discriminant validity.

Factor model	x^2	df	P	x^2 / df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
1	4770.614	275	0.000	17.033	0.588	0.513	0.489	0.140
2	2724.791	274	0.000	9.944	0.722	0.671	0.716	0.105
3	2502.621	273	0.000	9.167	0.736	0.686	0.742	0.100
5	849.154	266	0.000	3.192	0.920	0.902	0.932	0.052

relationship of a single independent variable to dependent variable (conspicuous consumption) involved in the present study. While hierarchical multiple regressions was performed to test the hypotheses for moderating effect of religiosity.

Simple linear regression

H_1: Level of American popular culture influences (conspicuous consumption)

The research hypothesis would be the higher the level of American popular culture influences among respondents, the higher will be the level of conspicuous consumption. The simple linear regression results shows that beta coefficient (β) of 0.208, t value of 6.091 and adjusted R Square of 0.042 was found for this hypothesized main effect at a highly significant level of 0.00. This means that the null hypothesis 1 can be rejected. The results strongly indicated that the higher the level of American popular culture influences among respondents, the higher will be the level of conspicuous consumption.

Hierarchical multiple regression (moderators effect - religiosity)

In this part of the study, we examined the moderating effect of religiosity on American popular culture and conspicuous consumption as suggested by the hypothesis as follows:

H_{1a}: Religiosity moderates the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption.

Tables 3 and 4 exhibit the summary results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis for the study. All the results have been discussed in detail in the above sections. Column (i) shows the values of R2, indicating how much of the variance in dependent variable (conspicuous consumption) is explained by the model, when American popular culture is used as the independent variable. Column (ii) of the same table shows the change in R2 with the interaction effect. This R2 multiplied by 100 will give the percentage of the variance that is accounted for by the interaction in terms of American popular culture and religiosity after both the individual variables of American popular culture and

religiosity are entered into the equation. Column (iii) shows the Beta (β) value, indicating the importance of the independent variable, that is, in terms of the contribution of American popular culture in explaining each dependent variable (conspicuous consumption), when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for. Column (iv) shows the significant value before introducing the interaction (moderating effect) in the relationship between American popular culture and dependent variable (conspicuous consumption). Lastly, column (v) shows the significant value when moderating variable moderates the relationship, as hypothesized.

With regards to religiosity as a moderating variable, the results have been divided into two main parts (that is, low religiosity and high religiosity). Tables 3 and 4 indicated the results of hierarchical multiple regression for testing the moderating effect of high and low religiosity between American popular culture and dependent variable (conspicuous consumption. This section examines the moderator effect of religiosity independent and dependent variable involved in the present study.

1. High religiosity as a moderating variable between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption: Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical multiple regressions for testing the moderating effect of high religiosity on the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption. The addition of high religiosity and the interaction terms increased R square from 4.0 to 4.7%. The beta value for conspicuous consumption in this model shows that this element contributed -0.088 in explaining American popular culture. When examining the significant value in column (iv), Table 3 shows that there was significant relationship between conspicuous consumption and American popular culture (P=0.000). The significant value in column (v) showed that when high religiosity was included as the moderator, the relationship become significant at P≤0.05 level (P=0.011).

2. Low religiosity as a moderating variable between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption: In this part of the study, we examined the moderating effect of low religiosity on American popular culture and conspicuous consumption. Table 4 shows the results of hierarchical multiple regressions for testing the moderating effect of low religiosity on the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption. The addition of low religiosity and the interaction terms
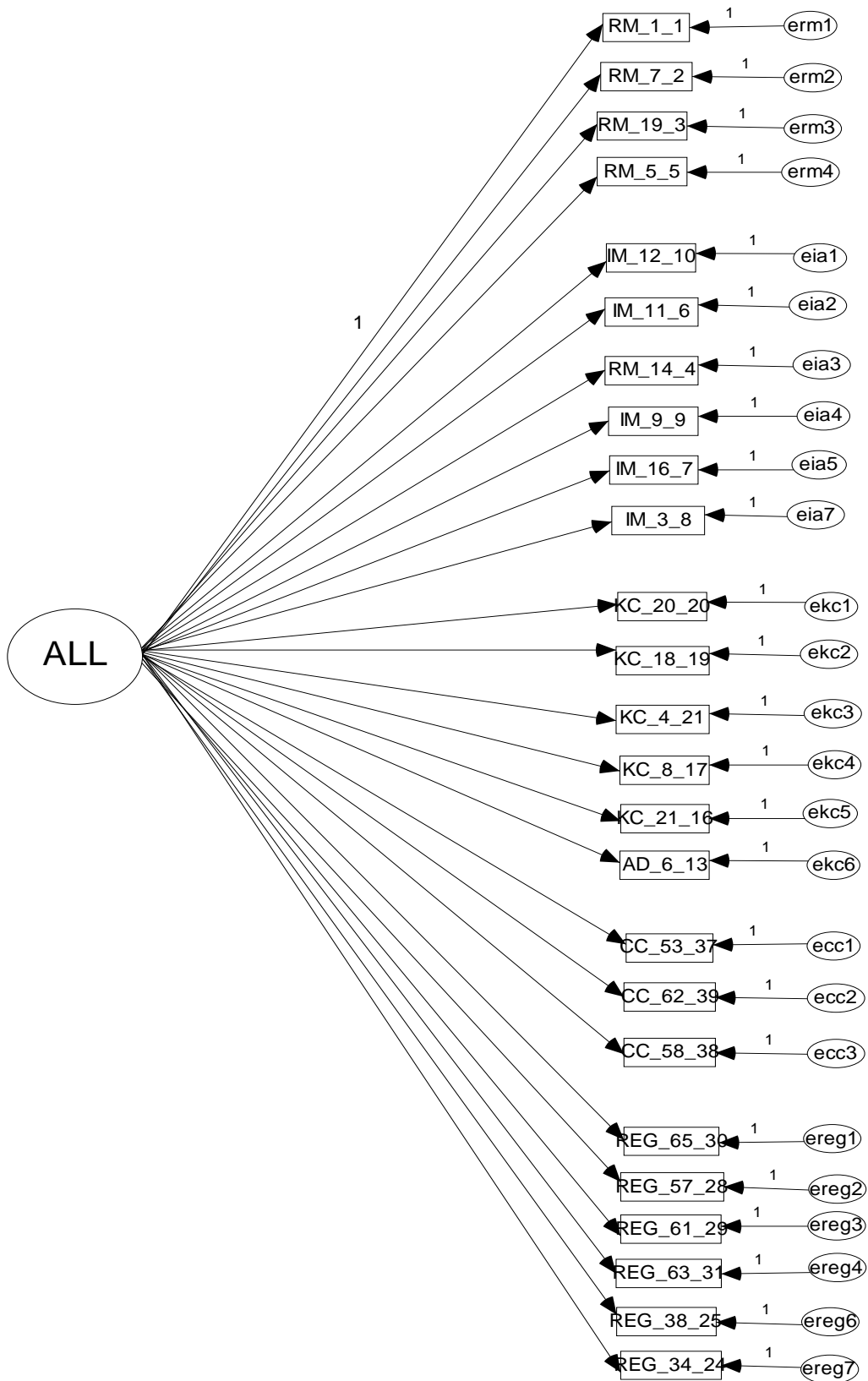
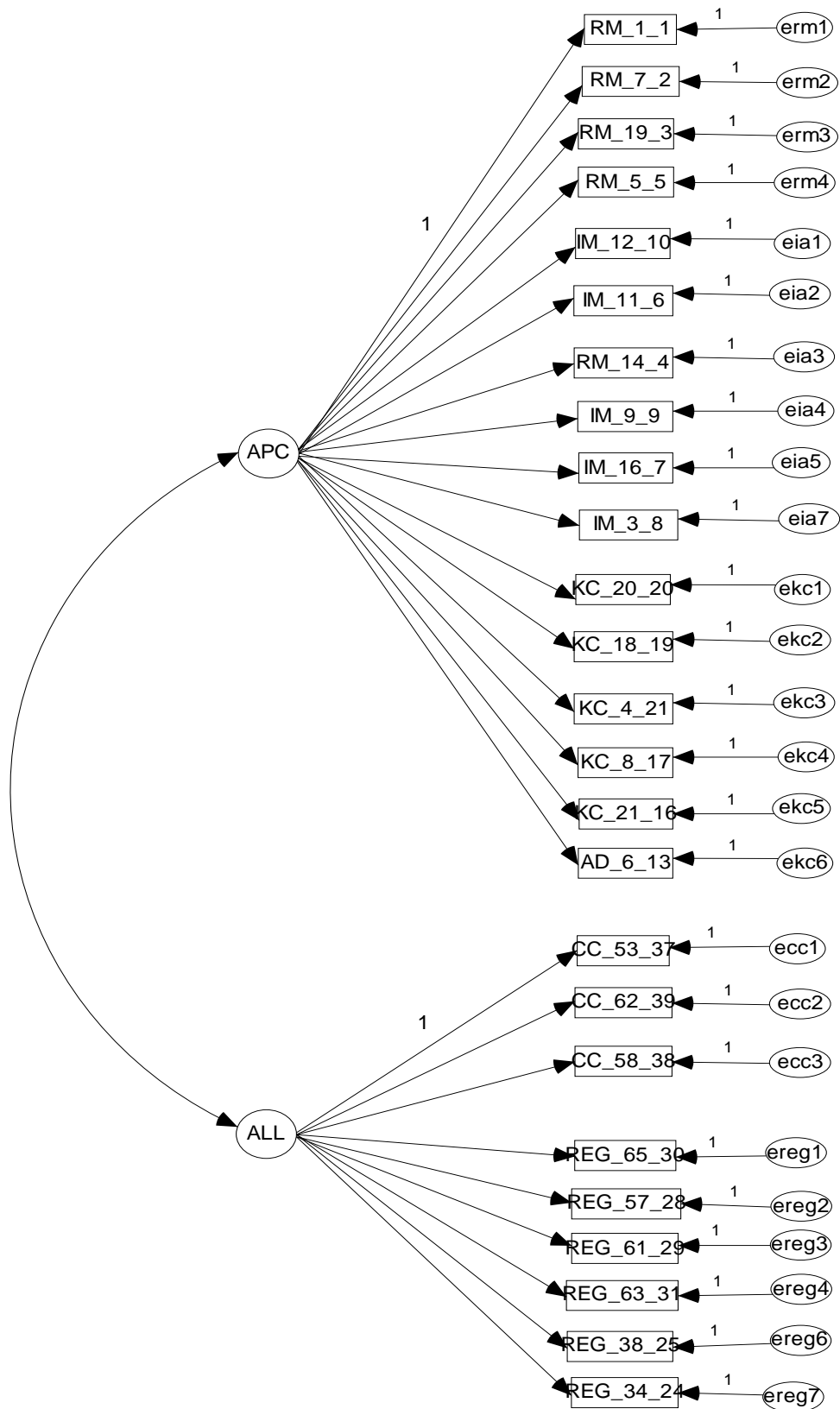**Figure 7.** 1-Factor model. x^2 (1) = 4770.614; p = .000; GFI = 0.588; AGFI =0.513; CFI = 0.489 and RMSEA = 0.140.

Figure 8. 2-Factor model. x^2 (1) = 2724.791, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.722; AGFI =0.671; CFI = 0.716 and RMSEA = 0.105.
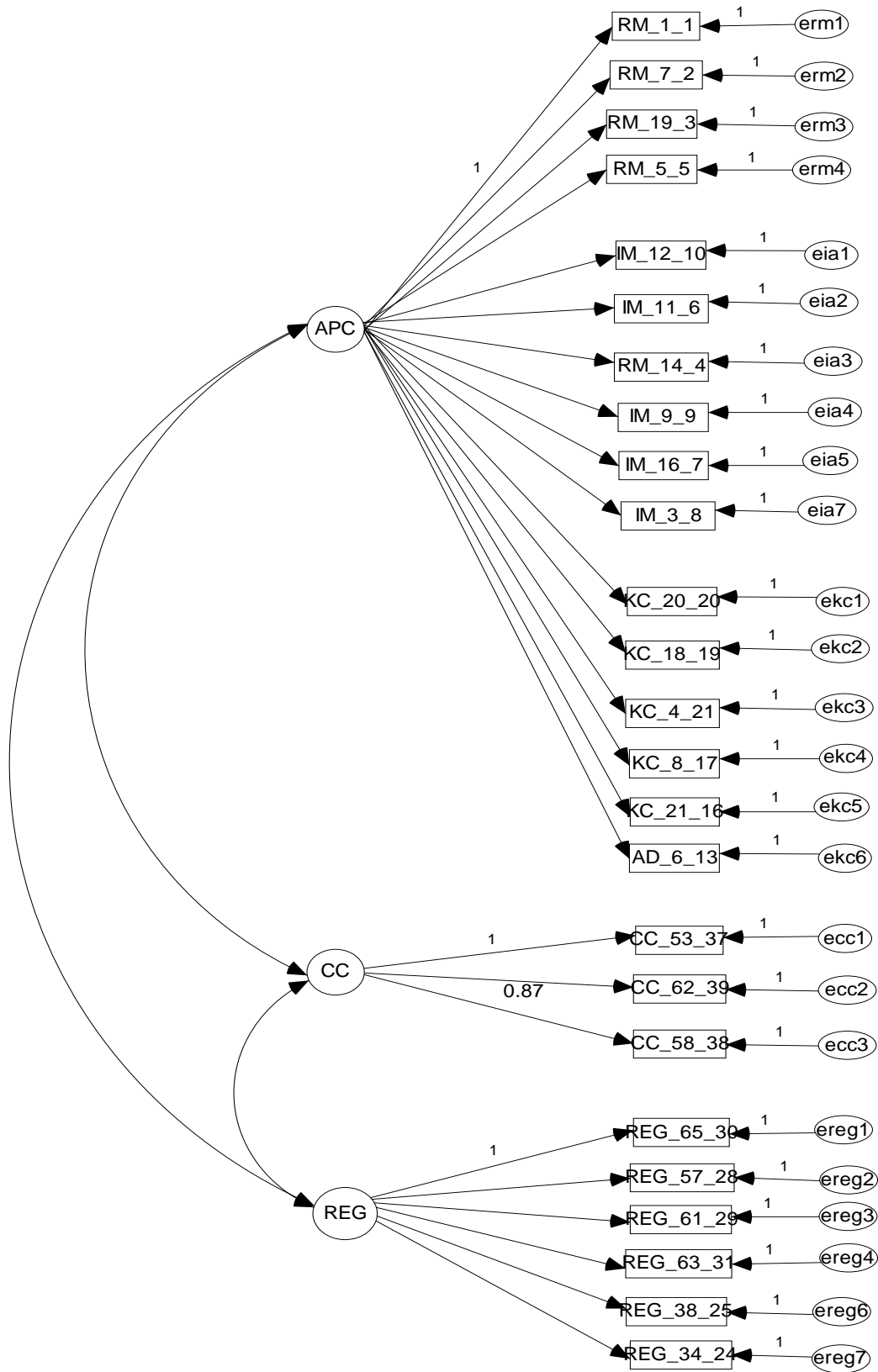
Figure 9. 3-Factor model. χ^2 (1) = 2502.621, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.736; AGFI =0.686; CFI = 0.742 and RMSEA =0.100.
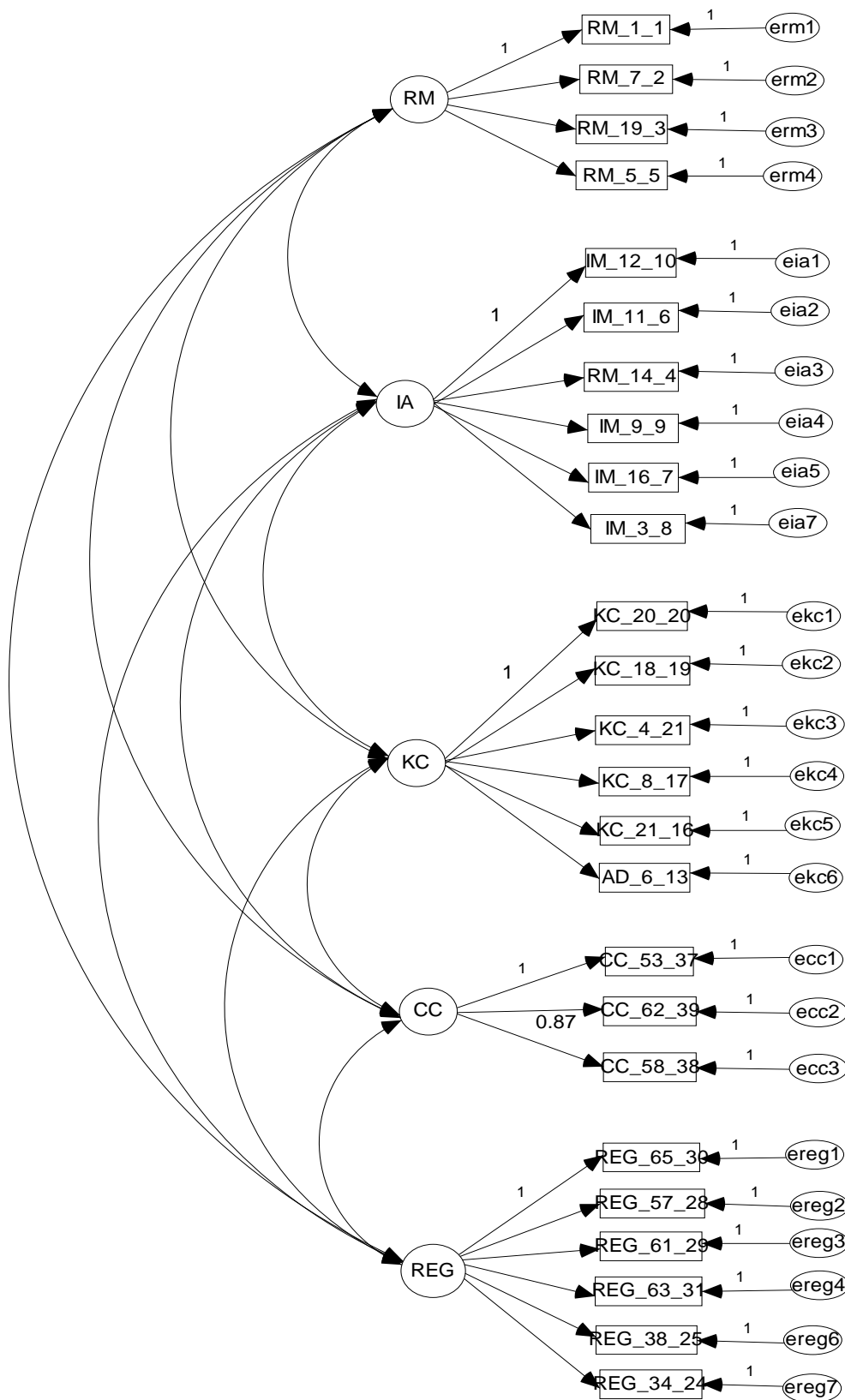
Figure 10. 5-Factor model. x^2 (1) = 849.154, p = 0.000; GFI = 0.920; AGFI =0.902; CFI = 0.932 and RMSEA = 0.052.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical multiple regressions to test the moderating effects of high religiosity.

American popular culture	R^2 (i)	ΔR^2 (ii)	Beta (iii)	Sig. (iv)	Sig. (Involved interaction effect of religiosity as the moderator) (v)
Conspicuous consumption	0.051	0.008	-0.089	0.000*	0.011*

*Significant at P≤0.05. Dummy variables (1 = High religiosity; 0 = Low religiosity).

Table 4. Results of hierarchical multiple regressions to test the moderating effects of low religiosity.

American popular culture	R^2 (i)	ΔR^2 (ii)	Beta (iii)	Sig. (iv)	Sig. (Involved interaction effect of religiosity as the moderator) (v)
Conspicuous consumption	0.051	0.008	0.094	0.000*	0.011*

*Significant at P≤0.05. Dummy variables (0 = high religiosity; 1= low religiosity).

increased R square from 4.0 to 4.7%. The beta value for conspicuous consumption in this model showed that this element contributed 0.094 in explaining American popular culture. When examining the significant value in column (iv), Table 4 shows that there was a significant relationship between conspicuous consumption and American popular culture (P=0.000). The significant value in column (v) showed that when low religiosity was included as the moderator, the relationship become significant at P≤0.05 level (P=0.011).

From the results, both high and low religiosity showed significant results as a moderator for the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption. However, the negative beta value for high religiosity changed the direction of the relationship. Thus, the Hypothesis 2a stated that religiosity moderates the relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption was accepted. However, no comparison could be made regarding this outcome due to no previous study have examined the issue.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our findings from this study suggest several interesting implications for marketing academicians and practitioners. Basically, this finding supports most recent empirical studies findings suggested that there is a positive relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). For instance, O'Cass and McEwen (2004) argued that factors like country of origin, media use, lifestyle, values, brand personalities and alternative consumption-relevant concepts could all realistically be tested to yield further insight into conspicuous consumption. In a way, the author implies that brand personalities (eg: Michael Jackson) play a significant role in consuming product conspicuously. Consumers acquire, own, use and display certain goods

and services to enhance their sense of self, to present an image of what they are like, to represent what they feel and think, and to bring about the types of social relationships they wish to have (Goffman, 1959; Belk, 1988; Ewen, 1988; Braun and Wicklund, 1989).

In another related study, Raviv et al. (1995) further argued that adolescents are dependent on their peer group and conform to its values, attitudes, and pattern of behaviour those are typical of youth culture. Therefore, in order to conform to group norms, an adolescent tries to consume product conspicuously to indicate his or her belongingness to his or her peer group. This is where the situation permits conspicuous consumption to play its role. A similar study done by Scitovsky (1992) discussed that sense of belonging to groups is both necessary and psychologically satisfying to humans. People imitate group members in order to be accepted as group members themselves. Previous research sheds the literature by arguing that the desire for status involves more than assurance of group membership. People also seek distinction and recognition within their groups and strive to gain this. Implicitly can be said that adolescents who share the role model due to peer group pressure will resort to purchasing product conspicuously to show their conformation to group norms. Owning the latest styles of clothing is one of the most common ways consumers have of gaining prestige among their peers. In other words, the authors are saying that the images from famous icon (e.g. Britney Spears) may lead to latest styles of clothing. By owning the latest styles of clothing, consumers have gained prestige among their peers (Goldsmith et al., 1996; Gould and Barak, 1988).

Researchers argued that individuals use goods as materials with which to create, foster and develop their identity (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004; Hwan, 1990; Erickson et al., 1984). The symbolic meaning of goods is used as an outward expression of their self concept and connection to society. This means that idolizing the role model will lead to usage of certain products as material to

create or foster and develop their identity that may lead to consuming products or services conspicuously. This is done to show off to the public that the person has developed his identity according to his idols.

In another related study, Erickson et al. (1984) argued that the image variable is defined as "some aspect of the product that is distinct from its physical characteristics but that is nevertheless identified within the product". The authors continued saying the image variables emerge from four cognitive representations individuals have of their environment: the symbolism of advertising, the celebrity endorsement, the brand and the country of origin of the product. In other words, the author is partly saying that the images from the role model may lead consumers to have consumed conspicuously which will reflect their social standing.

Perhaps the most interesting findings of the present paper is that it is predicted in the present study that religiosity moderate the relationships between American popular culture with dependent variables namely conspicuous consumption (hypotheses 1a). However, no comparison could be made regarding this outcome due to no previous study has examined on this issue.

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