

Teen consumer patterns in China and Canada

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Most Canadian teenagers are expected to make their own decisions, while Chinese adolescents are still heavily influenced by their parents, according to a study published in the *Journal of Business Research*.

Led by Concordia University and the University of Texas at Arlington researchers, the investigation found child-rearing practices appear to impact teen outlooks and decision-making patterns differently across cultures. Why? Parenting varies in both countries, since Canada is an individualist culture and China is a collectivist society.

"Before this study, little was known about the impact of parental socialization on the development of self-concept among teens," says senior author Michel Laroche, who holds the Royal Bank Distinguished Professorship in Marketing at Concordia's John Molson School of Business. "We knew that Chinese adolescents tend to be interdependent, obedient and to conform to the group, while Canadian teens are more likely to be independent, autonomous, assertive and individualistic. We found parenting strategy is the key. It transfers core values from one generation to the next."

The study found Eastern teens look to others for guidance, while the majority of Western teens are self-reliant. "Chinese society expects adolescents to have a prolonged period of dependency on their parents," says first author Zhiyong Yang, a marketing professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. "Canadian society encourages teens to make decisions for themselves on a variety of issues, ranging from consumer

choices that affect [physical appearance](#) to [life decisions](#) such as the choice of a boyfriend/girlfriend, marriage and career. These distinct patterns are gradually developed and reinforced through day-to-day parent-child interactions."

A common pattern in both counties was that teens with [low self esteem](#) reported buying products to gain the approval of others. However, the way self esteem affects teen decision-making is by no means the same across these two cultures.

"Armed with a higher level of self-esteem, Canadian adolescents are less susceptible to the influence of others," says Laroche. "But this is not the case for Chinese adolescents with high self-esteem who can be more susceptible to the opinions of peers, friends, co-workers and parents."

The data was obtained from 1,289 Chinese and 305 Canadian high school students. Laroche and Yang say their findings could have implication in budget allocation for international marketers.

Each year, marketers in North America spend over \$1 billion on advertising to reach youth through television advertising, in-school marketing and product placements. While marketing can be effective in reaching North American [teens](#), says Yang, "In Eastern cultures, it may be more profitable to influence parents, who would in turn influence their [adolescents](#)."

More information: The paper, "Parental responsiveness and adolescent susceptibility to peer influence: A cross-cultural investigation," published in the Journal of Business Research, was co-authored by Michel Laroche of Concordia University and Zhiyong Yang of the University of Texas at Arlington.

Provided by Concordia University

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