

The Influence of Reference Groups on Branded Apparel Purchases Among Sabah Youth

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Information of Article	ABSTRACT
<i>Article history:</i> Received: Revised: Accepted: Available online:	The apparel industry is rapidly evolving due to changing consumer preferences, global influences, and increased media exposure, making brand image critical for business competitiveness. This study adopts a mixed methods approach to examine the influence of reference groups such as parents, siblings, peers, and celebrities on branded apparel purchase decisions among young adults in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey of 200 young adults aged 18 to 25, while qualitative insights were gathered from follow-up interviews with a subset of participants to explore underlying motivations and perceptions in greater depth. Findings from the survey indicate that parents, siblings, and especially celebrities significantly influence purchase behavior, while peer influence appears less prominent. Interview responses reveal that celebrity endorsements are associated with aspirational values and perceived authenticity, reinforcing their impact. The research also highlights increasing awareness of ethical and sustainable branding, with respondents valuing transparency and social responsibility. Generation Z participants, in particular, show stronger engagement with digital platforms and ethical messaging compared to Millennials. These results suggest that marketers should integrate celebrity partnerships, ethical branding strategies, and digital engagement tools to build loyalty.
<i>Keywords:</i>	
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1. Introduction

Branding has become a central pillar in contemporary marketing, shaping not only the identities of products but also the perceptions and choices of consumers (Kotler et al., 2005). A brand, defined as a name, phrase, design, symbol, or a combination of these elements, serves to distinguish a product from its competitors, imbuing it with unique identity, value, and meaning. The strategic management of brand meaning, which involves understanding, shaping, and adapting it to evolving environments, has become increasingly critical for marketers seeking to drive business growth (Jevons et al., 2005).

The branded apparel industry in particular has witnessed significant transformation in recent decades. This evolution is largely attributed to demographic shifts, increased globalization, and heightened brand awareness among consumers. As fashion becomes an essential medium for self-expression, apparel choices are increasingly influenced by the symbolic value of brands, with consumers often preferring products that visibly communicate status, group affiliation, or personal values (Holt, 2002; Kapferer, 2012). Lifestyle brands in this context have gained prominence by aligning their products with the interests, attitudes, and aspirations of specific consumer groups, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and identity (Solomon, 2017). These brands do not merely sell products; they offer a narrative or ideology that resonates with the lived experiences and aspirations of their target audience, often becoming powerful social phenomena in their own right.

The competitive landscape of the clothing sector has intensified, with firms vying for greater market share by leveraging brand equity and emotional resonance. Branded apparel in particular has shifted consumer preferences away from generic or private label clothing, as individuals seek to express their identity and values through their fashion choices (Kim & Ko, 2012). This trend is especially pronounced among young adults, who are at a formative stage of identity development and are more susceptible to social influence and trends (Chan et al., 2012).

In the context of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, these global trends are distinctly observable. The city has experienced rapid urbanization and economic growth, leading to increased exposure to global fashion trends and a burgeoning middle class with greater disposable income. The proliferation of luxury and branded apparel outlets in prominent shopping destinations such as Imago Shopping Mall, Suria Sabah, and One Borneo Shopping Mall reflects the growing demand for branded fashion among the local population. Young adults in Kota Kinabalu in particular demonstrate a heightened desire to appear fashionable and sophisticated, often regarding branded apparel as a marker of social status and modernity (Lee et al., 2021). The expansion of international and local fashion brands in the city underscores the significance of branding as a driver of consumer behavior and market dynamics.

Recent years have seen the influence of branding on young adults' apparel choices become even more complex, as digital transformation and shifting cultural values reshape the fashion landscape. The rise of digital media, social networking platforms, and omnichannel retail environments has fundamentally altered how young consumers in Kota Kinabalu discover, evaluate, and purchase branded apparel. Today's youth are not only exposed to a constant stream of fashion related content, trends, and endorsements from peers, celebrities, and digital influencers, but are also active participants in shaping brand narratives through user generated content and online communities (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

This digital transformation has broadened the reach of brands and intensified the role of reference groups, including parents, siblings, peers, celebrities, and digital influencers, in shaping consumer preferences, brand loyalty, and ethical consumption behaviors. Young adults increasingly look to their social circles and online networks for validation, inspiration, and guidance in their fashion choices, making social influence a central driver of apparel consumption in urban Malaysia.

Moreover, the growing emphasis on ethical and sustainable consumption is reshaping the branded apparel market. Young consumers are becoming more aware of the environmental and social impact of their purchases, and are seeking brands that align with their values of authenticity, transparency, and corporate social responsibility. This shift is reflected in both their stated preferences and, increasingly, their actual purchasing behavior, as ethical branding and sustainability initiatives become key differentiators in a crowded marketplace.

Generational dynamics further add to the complexity of the market. While Millennials and Gen Z share an affinity for branded apparel, they differ in their engagement with digital platforms, responsiveness to influencer marketing, and prioritization of ethical and sustainable values. Gen Z in particular is highly attuned to digital trends and expects brands to demonstrate genuine social and environmental commitments.

The branded apparel market in Kota Kinabalu represents a microcosm of broader global trends, where branding, social influence, and shifting cultural values converge to shape the consumption patterns of young adults. Understanding the interplay between these factors is essential for marketers, policymakers, and scholars seeking to navigate the complexities of contemporary consumer behavior. Understanding the interplay between these factors, including the influence of reference groups, the rise of ethical and sustainable branding, and the impact of digital and omnichannel retailing, is essential for marketers, policymakers, and scholars seeking to navigate the complexities of contemporary consumer behavior and to foster long term brand loyalty among the next generation of consumers.

2. Literature Review

The fashion industry has experienced a dynamic evolution driven by changing consumer behaviors and globalization. In contemporary markets, branded apparel is often perceived as a symbol of status, identity, and personal values. This literature review synthesizes findings from previous studies on the impact of reference groups, particularly parents, siblings, peers, and celebrities, on young adults' purchase behavior, with a specific focus on branded clothing.

Branded apparel provides more than just functional benefits; it represents symbolic value and emotional appeal (Workman & Johnson, 1991). As consumer preferences have evolved, branding has become a critical differentiator. Brands serve as communication tools, allowing individuals to project self-image and affiliation with specific social or lifestyle groups (Keller, 2003). In particular, young consumers are drawn to brands that align with their identity, aspirations, and values (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Social influence has long been recognized as a major determinant of consumer behavior. According to Bearden and Etzel (1982), reference groups impact consumer decisions in three ways: informational, utilitarian, and value expressive influence. Young adults are especially susceptible to such influence because they are in the process of forming their personal and social identities. Parents are often cited as primary influencers during adolescence, providing early exposure to consumption patterns, brand preferences, and purchasing behavior (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). Siblings also play a role through shared experiences and mutual influence, particularly in collectivist cultures where family ties are strong (Kim & Drolet, 2003).

Peers, however, become increasingly important as young people transition into adulthood. Friends can shape clothing choices by signaling group norms, approval, or disapproval. The desire for social acceptance encourages conformity, especially among college students and working youth (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). However, recent studies indicate that peer influence may be more nuanced and less impactful in contexts where individual preferences override social norms (Chan et al., 2012). This may explain the mixed findings on peer impact in different cultural and economic contexts.

Celebrity endorsement is another reference group that significantly shapes youth purchase behavior. Celebrities serve as aspirational figures who influence style, behavior, and consumption. According to McCracken (1989), celebrities carry symbolic meaning that transfers to the products they endorse. When a celebrity is perceived as credible, attractive, or similar to the consumer, their endorsements become more persuasive (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of branded clothing, celebrity influence is particularly effective in driving brand recall, admiration, and purchase intention (Atkin & Block, 1983).

Studies in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, reveal that celebrity endorsements have a strong impact on youth consumer behavior. Young Malaysians often associate international fashion brands with celebrity culture, especially through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Lim et al., 2021). The accessibility of celebrity lifestyles via digital media amplifies their influence, making them powerful agents in shaping fashion trends and brand perception.

Brand loyalty is a significant mediator in the relationship between reference group influence and purchase behavior. Keller (2003) emphasized that consistent positive brand experiences build loyalty, which reduces price sensitivity and increases repeat purchases. Reference groups can contribute to this loyalty by validating brand choices and reinforcing the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994). When parents or celebrities consistently favor certain brands, young consumers are more likely to adopt and remain loyal to those brands.

Ethical branding has emerged as a growing area of interest among young consumers. Research by Carrington et al. (2010) suggests that ethical considerations such as sustainability, labor practices, and corporate social responsibility are increasingly integrated into purchase decisions. Millennials and Gen Z consumers tend to favor brands that align with their values and demonstrate ethical commitments (Kim & Kim, 2021). This trend is particularly evident in the fashion industry, where fast fashion has drawn criticism for environmental harm and labor exploitation.

Digital engagement further influences young consumers' awareness and evaluation of brands. AI-driven advertising, social media algorithms, and influencer marketing provide curated brand content that resonates with youth audiences. Young consumers, especially Gen Z, respond positively to interactive campaigns that invite participation, such as brand challenges, digital try-ons, and personalized recommendations (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Online reviews, peer testimonials, and visual storytelling enhance brand transparency and credibility.

In the Malaysian context, cultural factors intersect with global trends to create a unique branding environment. Malaysian youths are exposed to a blend of Western and local influences, which shapes their fashion choices and brand perceptions. Cultural emphasis on modesty, family values, and collectivism may moderate certain forms of social influence, while the aspirational pull of global fashion remains strong. Studies by Aziz and Azmi (2020) highlight that Muslim youths in Malaysia navigate between cultural norms and modern trends by selectively adopting global brands that align with personal and religious values.

In conclusion, existing literature indicates that young adults' purchase decisions for branded apparel are shaped by a complex interplay of reference group influence, brand loyalty, ethical considerations, and digital engagement. Parents, siblings, and celebrities are prominent influencers, while peer influence varies depending on cultural and contextual factors. The rise of ethical and digital branding underscores the evolving expectations of youth consumers, who seek authenticity, social relevance, and technological alignment in the brands they support.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods research approach to investigate the influence of reference groups on the branded apparel purchase decisions of young adults in Kota Kinabalu. The reference groups explored included parents, siblings, peers, and celebrities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection enabled the researcher to capture both the statistical relationships among variables and the deeper, context-specific meanings participants assign to their purchasing behaviors. The approach was selected to enhance both the generalizability and depth of findings through triangulation and complementarity.

A concurrent triangulation research design was used. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same time frame, analyzed independently, and integrated during the interpretation stage. This design enabled the researcher to validate findings through cross-verification and provided a fuller understanding of the complex social and psychological factors that influence consumer decision making among youth. The population targeted for this research was young adults aged between 18 and 25 years who reside in Kota Kinabalu. This group was selected based on their significant exposure to digital media, fashion branding, and their evolving buying power within the consumer market.

Table 1: Cross Tabulation Age & Gender

Age		18-21	22-23	23-24	25-27	Total
GENDER	MALE	1	16	53	17	87
	FEMALE	6	26	72	9	113
Total		7	42	125	26	200

3.1 Data Collection Method

Quantitative data were gathered using a structured questionnaire distributed through various social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. A total of 200 respondents participated in the survey. The sampling method employed was simple random sampling, which ensured that each individual in the population had an equal chance of being included in the sample. The questionnaire included statements measuring the influence of parents, siblings, peers, and celebrities on branded apparel purchase decisions. Respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The instrument also included additional questions related to brand loyalty, ethical consumption awareness, and the frequency of branded apparel purchases. These variables allowed the researcher to assess moderating and mediating effects within the reference group influence framework. The instrument was adapted from previous studies and reviewed by experts in marketing and consumer psychology. A pilot study involving 20 participants was conducted to assess clarity and reliability. The results yielded a Cronbach's alpha of point eight three, indicating high internal consistency.

For the qualitative phase, in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 purposively selected participants. The selection criteria included strong interest in branded apparel, regular engagement with fashion-related content on digital platforms, and demonstrated awareness of social influence. The interviews aimed to explore participants' experiences and interpretations of reference group impact on their fashion choices.

The interviews were conducted in either English or Malay, depending on the preference of the participant. Each session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded with prior consent and transcribed verbatim. The questions were open ended, allowing participants to elaborate freely and to share insights that extended beyond the scope of the survey items.

3.2 Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize participant demographics and survey responses. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the strength and direction of relationships between each reference group and branded apparel purchase behavior. Multiple regression analysis was then performed to determine which reference groups significantly predicted purchase decisions. Results indicated that celebrities had the strongest predictive value, followed by parents and siblings. Peer influence showed a relatively weak correlation and was not statistically significant.

The qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis using the six-phase model by Braun and Clarke. The process began with familiarization, which involved reading all transcripts several times to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, initial codes were manually generated and later managed using a qualitative data analysis software program. These codes were grouped into themes that captured the key patterns in participants' narratives. The themes that emerged included emotional influence of parental guidance, aspirational behavior associated with celebrity figures, and minimal effect of peer suggestion on personal brand preferences.

Triangulation of the data occurred during the interpretation phase. The survey data provided quantifiable evidence of the influence of various reference groups, while the interview data offered explanations that contextualized and deepened those findings. For example, while the quantitative data revealed that celebrity endorsement had a statistically significant impact on brand selection, the qualitative interviews illustrated that this was due to admiration for public figures who promoted values such as sustainability, creativity, and authenticity.

This integration of both data types strengthened the overall credibility of the study. The results demonstrated that young consumers often navigate a complex landscape of social cues, emotional attachments, and aspirational motivations when making apparel purchases. The use of both data types enabled a more nuanced understanding of these decision-making processes.

4. Findings

The findings from the mixed-methods study examining the influence of reference groups on young adults' purchasing decisions regarding branded apparel in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Drawing on both quantitative data from 200 survey participants and qualitative insights from 12 semi-structured interviews, the analysis reveals how parents, siblings, peers, and celebrities affect consumer behavior among individuals aged 18 to 25. Furthermore, the study explores the mediating role of digital platforms and the growing importance of ethical consumption values.

Table 1: Summary of scale Reliability Analysis (n=200)

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Parents	4	0.783
Siblings	4	0.774
Peers	4	0.718
Celebrities	4	0.786
Purchase Decision	4	0.752

The survey results show that parents remain one of the most influential reference groups in shaping apparel choices. A large proportion of respondents indicated that they seek parental opinions before purchasing branded items, particularly when the product is of high value. Eighty four percent of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that their parents influenced their decisions, and this was echoed in the interviews. For example, several respondents shared that they continue to respect their parents' judgments on appearance, quality, and brand appropriateness. In many cases, parents are also financial supporters, especially for major purchases, which further cements their influence. One participant stated that although she earns her own income, she still consults her parents when buying high-end branded clothing, as their approval remains important.

Siblings also emerged as key influencers in brand decision making. The survey revealed that nearly eighty percent of young adults often rely on their siblings' opinions. Many participants described their siblings as fashion role models, with shared values and styles influencing purchase decisions. Interview data enriched this picture, highlighting how siblings are viewed as credible and relatable sources of advice. One participant described her older sister as her personal stylist, while another mentioned that shopping together often leads to shared brand preferences. Siblings not only influence choices directly but also introduce new brands or trends discovered through their own social circles.

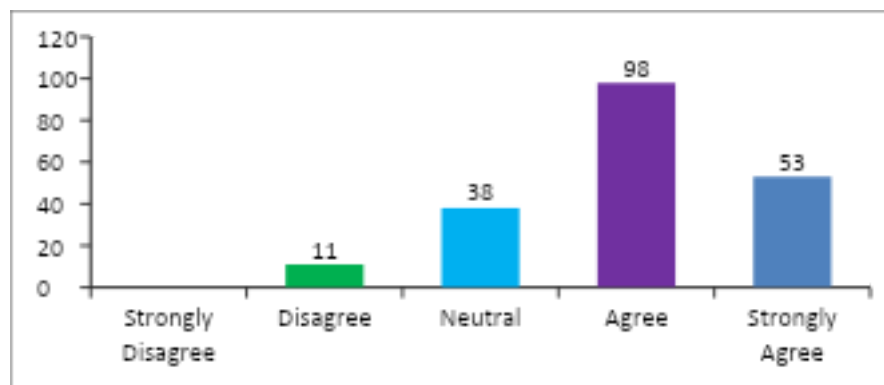
Interestingly, peer influence showed a less pronounced but still relevant impact. While sixty one percent of respondents agreed that peers played a role in their fashion choices, interviews suggested that the influence of peers is more passive and indirect. Many young adults reported that they observe their peers' clothing through social media or at university events but rarely seek direct advice. Instead, peers shape perceived trends and social expectations through modeling behaviors. Several interviewees mentioned that they do not ask their friends for opinions but feel pressure to conform to the dressing norms within their friend groups. This aligns with findings from the literature which suggest that peer influence may manifest subtly through imitation and social validation rather than explicit persuasion.

In contrast, celebrity influence was the most dominant among all reference groups. More than ninety percent of survey respondents admitted that their fashion preferences were shaped by celebrities, and this was strongly reinforced by the qualitative findings. Participants mentioned local and international celebrities, particularly K-pop idols and Instagram influencers, as powerful sources of inspiration. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were frequently cited as key channels where young adults are exposed to branded clothing worn by celebrities. One respondent stated that when a celebrity she follows endorses a product, it makes her feel more confident in trying the brand. Another explained that she often searches for affordable versions of outfits worn by her favorite influencers, indicating aspirational consumption behavior.

The role of digital platforms further amplifies the influence of reference groups. Visual content shared on social media allows young adults to continuously engage with fashion trends, celebrity endorsements, and peer styles. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram were frequently identified as main sources of inspiration. This digital engagement enables young consumers to visualize themselves in similar attire, while features like comments, shares, and hashtags reinforce the desirability of certain brands. Interviewees described behaviors such as saving posts, following fashion influencers, and joining brand giveaways. Digital media was shown to extend the influence of all reference groups by creating a constant stream of curated content that reinforces branding messages and social norms.

An emerging theme in the study was the integration of ethical and sustainable values in purchasing decisions. Sixty six percent of survey respondents agreed that they are more inclined to support brands promoted by reference groups that align with values such as environmental consciousness and fair labor. Qualitative data supported this trend, with several participants emphasizing that they prefer brands that disclose sourcing, labor conditions, and environmental practices. One interviewee mentioned that her sister convinced her to shift from fast fashion to sustainable local brands. Another shared that she follows celebrities who advocate for vegan materials and fair trade production, which influences her own purchasing behavior. These insights suggest that reference groups shape not only style preferences but also ethical evaluations of brands.

Table 2: Respondents' Agreement on Delaying Product Purchases Until Peer Approval is Obtained



The mixed-methods design of the study allowed for a deeper understanding of these dynamics. While survey data provided broad patterns and frequencies, interview data enriched the narrative with personal experiences, social contexts, and emotional motivations. For example, the lower percentage of peer influence in the survey was clarified through interviews that highlighted the subtlety of social observation rather than direct persuasion. Similarly, while the high influence of celebrities was statistically evident, the interviews illustrated how digital content creates emotional resonance and identity alignment. Participants repeatedly emphasized how social media creates a sense of connection and trust with celebrities and influencers, thus reinforcing the perceived authenticity of their endorsements.

Another notable finding was the contrast in preferences between Gen Z and Millennial respondents. Gen Z participants showed stronger sensitivity to ethical branding and digital engagement, whereas Millennials placed greater emphasis on quality and value. This generational distinction was reflected in how participants discussed brands. Gen Z respondents often used terms like “inclusive,” “sustainable,” and “authentic” to describe their preferred apparel, whereas Millennials were more likely to focus on durability, brand reputation, and cost effectiveness. This insight highlights the need for brands to differentiate their marketing strategies across age segments, emphasizing values and aesthetics for younger consumers while retaining practical messaging for slightly older cohorts.

Overall, the findings suggest that reference groups exert significant influence on branded apparel consumption among young adults in Kota Kinabalu. Parents and siblings remain powerful motivators, particularly in shaping values, aesthetics, and financial decision making. Celebrities hold the highest sway through aspirational and emotional appeal, especially via digital platforms. Peers, while less frequently cited directly, exert social pressure and trend awareness in more implicit ways. The increasing importance of ethical and sustainable branding further complicates the consumer landscape, as young adults seek brands that reflect not only style but also personal values and societal ideals.

Table 3: Result of multiple regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.375	0.085		4.406	0.000
PEE	0.089	0.043	0.104	2.050	0.042
SBB	0.387	0.039	0.397	9.983	0.000
CRR	0.676	0.031	0.724	22.073	0.000
PRR	0.238	0.053	0.257	4.485	0.000

R^2 : 0.930

Sig.F: 0.000

F-value: 644.669

These findings hold practical implications for apparel brands and marketers. To resonate with youth consumers in Sabah, brands must go beyond traditional advertising and engage meaningfully with reference groups across digital channels. Celebrity endorsements should emphasize authenticity and values alignment. Marketing campaigns can incorporate narratives around family and shared values to leverage the influence of parents and siblings. Social media strategies should prioritize storytelling, visual engagement, and ethical transparency to build brand trust and loyalty. By understanding the unique influence patterns within this demographic, brands can better position themselves to capture attention, build emotional connection, and foster long term relationships with the digitally connected, ethically aware youth market.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a focused understanding of how reference groups influence young adults in purchasing branded apparel in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The findings indicate that parents, siblings, and celebrities are the primary influencers, while peer influence appears to be less impactful. The research further explores emerging trends in ethical consumerism and the growing role of digital platforms in shaping brand engagement among younger demographics.

Young adults in this study were particularly influenced by family members, especially parents and siblings. This is expected, as many respondents are financially dependent on their immediate family. They often regard these individuals as role models, making their opinions and consumption habits influential in decision making. When choosing branded apparel, young adults tend to follow the purchasing patterns of those they trust and rely on,

especially those who contribute financially or offer approval for their choices. This dynamic suggests that familial influence continues to shape consumer behavior even in an era where media and digital platforms are prominent. A notable finding is the strong influence of celebrity endorsements. With the growing presence of celebrities on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, young adults are continuously exposed to the fashion choices of public figures they admire. These celebrities do not only promote clothing but also embody aspirational lifestyles and values that resonate with their audiences. As a result, brands that are associated with well-liked celebrities tend to gain positive attention and trust. The effectiveness of celebrity marketing in this context reflects the aspirational and image-driven nature of fashion consumption among youth.

Interestingly, peer influence is not as significant in this particular demographic. While peers are often considered a strong social factor in consumer behavior, this study indicates that for branded apparel, young adults in Kota Kinabalu place more weight on family members and celebrities. This may suggest a unique cultural context in which peers are viewed more as companions rather than decision shapers in fashion consumption. Another key insight is the increasing importance of ethical and sustainable branding. Participants expressed a growing interest in the values and practices of fashion brands. They are concerned with environmental impact, fair labor practices, and corporate transparency. Brands that show genuine commitment to social responsibility and environmental stewardship are more likely to earn the trust and loyalty of this segment. This finding aligns with global trends showing that Generation Z and Millennials are more conscious of their consumption and more willing to support brands that reflect their values.

Digital engagement emerged as a crucial factor in influencing purchase decisions. Young adults are digital natives who expect brands to be present and responsive across multiple platforms. Social media serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a source of validation, reviews, and inspiration. Visual content, influencer collaborations, interactive features, and behind the scenes content are among the strategies that drive engagement. Fashion brands that invest in quality digital presence and interactive storytelling are more likely to capture attention and cultivate brand loyalty.

Based on these findings, there are several practical implications for marketers and brand strategists. First, marketers should consider strengthening their celebrity endorsement strategies. Choosing public figures who are admired by the target audience and whose image aligns with the brand is critical. These endorsements should go beyond traditional advertisements and involve authentic collaborations such as co-designed collections or social cause campaigns. Second, ethical marketing practices should be embedded in branding strategies. Consumers are no longer just buying products; they are investing in values. Brands must demonstrate their commitment to ethical sourcing, sustainability, and social causes through transparent communication and visible actions. This can be done by sharing information about production practices, supporting local communities, and actively engaging in environmental initiatives.

Third, the role of family influence should not be overlooked. Since parents and siblings play a key role in shaping young adults' buying decisions, campaigns that highlight family connections or promote products as ideal gifts or shared experiences could resonate well with this demographic. Educational outreach and community-based promotions may also enhance brand visibility within family units. Fourth, digital strategies should be prioritized. Social media content should be consistent, authentic, and relatable. Influencer marketing must be carefully managed to ensure credibility. Brands should also explore interactive formats such as live streams, polls, and Q and A sessions to build engagement. Websites and online stores must be mobile friendly, informative, and secure, as digital convenience is a priority for young shoppers.

Finally, educational institutions and policymakers have a role to play in promoting ethical consumerism. Universities can incorporate awareness programs about responsible fashion, sustainability, and digital literacy. These initiatives can prepare young adults to become informed consumers who are able to navigate the complexities of modern branding and marketing.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into how reference groups influence young adults in their fashion apparel choices. While celebrity influence and family dynamics are strong motivators, there is also a clear shift toward conscious and value based consumption. Fashion brands aiming to reach and retain young

customers in Malaysia should invest in ethical branding, celebrity collaborations, and robust digital engagement strategies. By understanding the emotional, social, and technological dimensions of young adults' consumer behavior, marketers can craft effective and sustainable approaches that foster long term brand loyalty.

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