Purchasing Designer Label Apparels: The Role of Reference Groups

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Abstract

Luxury brands have a growing market in Asia, and with the enormous contribution of Asian market to the growing global luxury brands market, it is imperative to understand the roles of key reference groups (peers, siblings, parents, and celebrities) in the purchase of designer label apparels. The increased consumption of luxury products can be attributed to the rapid economic growth in China and other Asian countries. Prior studies indicate that Asian consumers maintain conspicuous appreciation for designer products. In this paper, the roles of reference groups in a purchase decision for designer label apparels, were explored. The data analysis was based on 248 valid responses generated through personal administration. The findings reveal that the four hypotheses were supported. The findings would enable marketing and business strategists in building grounds in focusing on important variables in the context examined. Several implications for research and practice including suggestions for future studies were highlighted.
Keywords: Reference groups, designer label apparel, purchase decision, consumers, Malaysia

Introduction

Clothing, generally, is a basic need for humans, but today has become a product that could express different dimensions of culture, social class, and identify the characteristics of the consumers. Designer clothes particularly are apparels that carry the logo of a well-known fashion designer. The term designer label usually refers to clothing and other merchandise, usually named after its designer. The designer label is often categorised within the luxury products. Examples of designer labels include Armani, Calvin Klein, Cartier, Dolce and Gabbana, DKNY, Kenneth Cole, Gucci, Tommy Hilfiger, Louis Vuitton and many more.

Some firms use the names of designers who have succeeded in couture on their label because such designer products are normally perceived as prestigious and exclusive (Chang, 2006). Consumers would perceive designer apparels to be of good quality, and embody status and prestige. The designer-label apparel market is growing rapidly. According to a global survey by Nielsen (2008), one-sixth of the world's consumers claim to buy designer brands, while one-third claim to know a designer label buyer. The survey also indicates that more than half (52%) of the consumers believe that people buy designer brands in a bid to project their social status. Luxury branded products, according to Bain and Company (2011) are a US$195 billion global industry. JP Morgan analysts suggest a higher figure of about US$210 billion. Datamonitor (2011) that takes a broader definition suggest the market size to be US$1,439.7 billion. In addition, Datamonitor (2011) suggest that the market size for the whole of Asia Pacific region to be 27%. As the Asian economy grew, the industry for luxury brands expanded (Kim, Kim & So, 2007). As the Asia-Pacific luxury brand market represents about one-third of the world's luxury brand market, the interest and influencing factors for consumers in this industry within the region becomes pertinent. The luxury brands industry, seen as a major market in Europe and North America, has a new growth landscape with the expanding Asian market (Kim et al., 2007). The significant increase in the consumption of luxury brands can be attributed, in part, to the rapid economic growth in Asia and the interpersonal influence within the culture.

Moschis (1976) indicated that consumers use reflective and comparative appraisal to choose their products. A subsequent study by Bearden and Etzel (1982) suggested that consumers would not only apply direct and verbal interactions to obtain evaluations from reference groups (such as friends, peers, siblings, and parents), but also observe reference group members' behaviour to make a purchase decision. Evidence from Park and Lessig, (1997) findings indicate that college students are more likely to be influenced by reference groups compared to housewives in their purchasing decision, and that advertisement and promotion using reference groups are more effective on consumers' final decision. In addition, interdependent culture such as the cultures in Japan, Korea, China and South East Asian countries, emphasize conformity to groups' norms and social acceptance unlike most western cultures (Zhou & Hui, 2003; Han & Schmitt, 1997; Shukla, 2010). Findings from prior studies also reveal that Asian consumers have the tendency to buy luxury brands conspicuously to express their social status and wealth (Phau & Prendergast, 2001; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), consequently, making it easier for the luxury brands business to be successful (Ustuner & Holt, 2010).

Over the last decade, Asian countries have enjoyed enormous economic growth, wealth, and information. Asian countries, especially, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea and Taiwan, are swiftly morphing into brand conscious societies. This type of lifestyle is also reflected in the younger generation, especially among older teens and young adults. Akin to their western counterparts, the young adults of today tend to enjoy more financial independence to make their own consumption and purchase decisions. Hence, the increase in purchasing power, which enables the purchase of a wide range of consumer products including clothes, entertainment, and technological gadgets. This has also contributed to the increasing phenomenon of conspicuous purchasing behaviour among the Asian young-adult

community. In Malaysia, it is common for citizens to crave for designer labels. High-end brands have the potential to grow in Malaysia, given the increasing awareness of and appreciation for more creative and stylish fashion items as well as increased spending power, especially among young executives. The mushrooming of malls, which cater exclusively for luxury label such as KLCC, The Pavilion, Starhill Gallery and 1 Utama Highstreet section also signifies the appetite for designer products in the country. According to Official Portal Economic Planning Unit (2010), approximately 34% of the Malaysian population is between the ages 15-34 years old, which indicates a lucrative market segment for companies.

This study examines the influence of reference groups on the purchase decision for designer label apparel. A reference group (e.g., peers, siblings, parents, and celebrities) is a person or group of people that significantly influences an individual's behaviour (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1997; Shukla, 2011). The data analysis was based on 248 valid responses collected in Malaysia through personal administration. The findings reveal that the hypotheses developed based on the conceptual framework were supported. The findings will be useful to marketing strategists and business practitioners on the specific importance of the respective variables in this study. We also outlined several research contributions of this study, including suggestions for future research based on the limitations identified in this paper.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

While marketing models assert that a consumers' purchasing attitude relates to how a product/service satisfies one's needs, findings from studies on consumers' social and interpersonal environment indicate that consumers' decision to buy a particular brand could be affected by reference groups (such as friends, family, celebrities, and work associates). Social and interpersonal research could be traced back to the study by Hyman (1942), who first discussed the term reference group. Subsequently, studies by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), and Kelman (1961) elaborated on several types of influence to include informational, utilitarian, and value expressive influences. Informational influence is based on the interest to make informed decisions and choices. In periods of uncertainty, consumers tend to seek information, from many sources, and consumers would accept those sources considered genuine (which include referents with expertise). The utilitarian reference group influence reflects the attempts to follow the wishes of others to achieve rewards or avoid punishments (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Childers & Rao, 1992). The value expressive is described by the identification process in which people are willing to express themselves to the society by making themselves appear similar to the group that they want to belong (Kelman, 1961; Mangleburg, Doney & Bristol, 2004). These three types of influences require the opportunity for social interactions. Seeking information, complying with the preference of others, and adopting values of others would involve communication and/or observation of decisions, opinions, and behaviours.

Bourne (1957) studied the roles of refernce groups in marketing and behavioral research, and concluded that the concept of the reference group has a pervasive influence on overall marketing research. Studies on reference groups have been used as bases for a variety of applications in different fields. For example, the reference

group concept has been applied in studies of specific groups, such as: farmers, scientists, alcoholics, mentally ill patients, and different segments of consumers (Hyman & Singer, 1968, pp.7). In subsequent studies, the reference group theory was applied to more groups including physicians (Coleman, Katz & Menzel, 1966), auto owners (Grubb & Stern, 1971), cosmetic users (Moschis, 1976; Chao & Schor, 1998), religious change and alcohol use (Beeghley, Bock & Cochran, 1990), and students and housewives (Park & Lessig, 1977; Bearden & Etzel, 1982). In the business world, marketers apply the concept of reference groups to products consumed in social settings, which tend to involve invitions of prominent/attractive spokespersons as endorsers of the products (Yang, He & Lee, 2007).

This paper is developed based on the belief that the trait of susceptibility to interpersonal influence varies across individual consumers. However, the literature on Sourtheast Asian consumers' susceptibility to social influence appear limited. In order to be a successful competitor in a global marketplace, firms would need to apply effective marketing plans and strategies that are sensitive to consumers' preference and dynamics, with speciifc focus on the roles of their referents. Hence, this paper is an attempt to address the above issue within the designer label apparels industry.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework for this paper. It illustrates four independent variables (parents, peers, celebrities, and siblings) and the dependent variable (purchase decision for designer label apparel). Based on the framework, we developed four hypotheses. As noted earlier, the hypotheses were developed based on extensive literature review within the domain of this paper. The arguments and hypotheses for the variables are discussed in the following section.
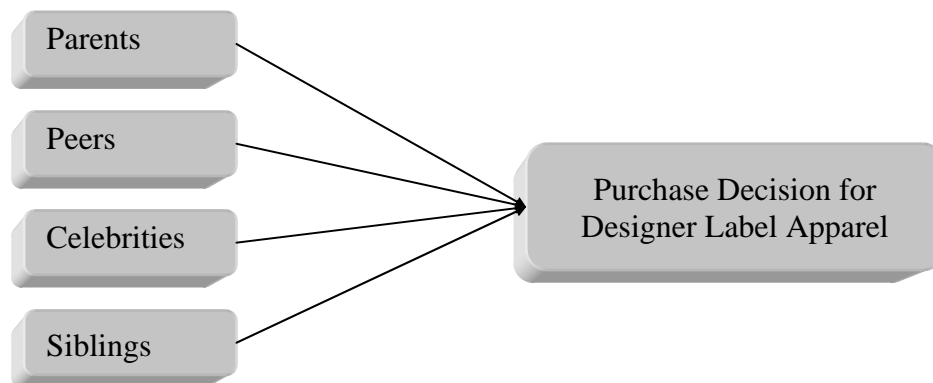

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Parents

A parent is someone who begets, gives birth to, or nurtures and raises a child; a father or mother. According to Yoh (2005), interactions with parents tend to influence

young consumers' fundamental knowledge of their behaviour. Young consumers would seek information about products from their parents, from whom they develop specific buying behaviour. Hence, parents play an important role in their conversations and provide guidance whenever necessary (Bearden et al. 1989; Childers & Rao, 1992; Lachance, Beaudoin & Robitaille, 2003). Children's identities were shaped by family pressure, usually through communication and observational learning and this intergenerational influence will continue to influence children even as young adults. It was also revealed that parents' influence on children reduce as they grow older (Moore, Wilkie & Lutz, 2002). Moschis (1976) has proposed that family parental influence on consuption patterns and attitudes often overrides any other form of influence (see also Basow & Howe, 1980).

Based the foregoing, we developed the following hypothesis:

H1: Parents' will have a positive influence on the purchasing decisions of generation-Y for designer label apparels.

Peers

Peers are persons who appear to be equal to another in abilities, qualifications, age, background, and social status. Peers are considered key elements in most decision-making processes, especially the buying decision process. Consumers would, to some degree, depend on the views, attitudes, thoughts, and actions of their peers to enable specific decision-making process to buy a product (Makgosa & Mohube, 2007). Park and Lessig (1977) noted in their research that young adults are most likely to be vulnerable to the pressure of their peers since they have limited capacity to cope with risk and uncertainness than more mature individuals. One of the reasons peers are able to influence purchasing decisions emanate from the fact that some young adults often feel less confident to evaluate their buying decisions, and would rather rely on their peers to enhance this process. In another study, peers emerged as the most important reference group in a purchase decision process (Kamaruddin & Mokhlis, 2003), consistent with the findings of Yoh (2005). In addition, the importance of peers is reinforced by the findings of Khan and Khan (2005), which concluded that friends tend to be dominant informational reference group. Based on the preceding analysis, we develop the following hypothesis:

H2: Peers will have a positive influence on the purchasing decisions of generation-Y for designer label apparels.

Celebrities

A celebrity is a person who has a prominent profile and commands a great degree of public fascination and influence in day-to-day media. Celebrities are renowned personalities, who enjoy public recognition by a large groups of individuals (Schlecht, 2003). They usually enjoy high public acknowledgment, and often have great influence upon endorsing products. They appear on television as spokespersons on behalf of the advertised brand, or ordinary users of such brand. In either way, they often convey a convincing message. Celebrities help boost awareness of advertised brands and generate positive feelings towards the brands (Solomon, 2002). Consequently, these positive feelings towards a product tend to influence consumers' behaviour, which may affect consumers' brand choices.

Findings from prior studies indicate positive effects of celebrities on consumer buying behaviour, such as the adoption styles of clothing, product choice, and health behaviours (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011; Till, Stanley & Priluck, 2008). Evidence suggests that the perceived image of celebrity endorsers has a positive impact on product buying decisions (Seno & Lukas, 2007; Jo, 2007). In contrast, some studies appear to be critical about the use of celebrity endorsement. For instance, White, Goddard and Wilbur (2009), indicated that many consumers were sceptical of celebrities who were paid to provide negative information about a brand. On the other hand, past research indicated that celebrities exert influence on consumers purchase intentions and decisions (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Consumers have also bought products due to celebrity endorsement and physical attractiveness (Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Celebrities were also found to enhance persuasiveness of messages, which enables actual purchases (Money, Shimp & Sakano, 2006). Based on the aforementioned, we developed the fourth hypothesis:

H3: Celebrities are likely to have a positive influence on generation-Y's purchasing decision for designer label apparels.

Siblings

Siblings play a vital role as a reference for comparison and modelling for adolescence (Pechmann & Knight, 2002). A sibling (brother or sister) is one with whom an individual shares the same biological parents. Siblings are in fact sometimes similar, although the correlation may not be strong. Findings from prior research indicate that siblings exhibit more similarities on attitudes and interests compared with their general personality attributes (Hoffman, 1991). Prior research on siblings' roles in a purchase-decision process, are mixed. For instance, Schacter and Stone's (1987) revealed that siblings were found to be different from their parents, which is consistent with the findings of Festinger's (1954). Based on the family traits and structure, the roles of siblings in key decisions in the family are becoming more apparent. In addition, with the growing application of social networks, there are possibilities for siblings to acquire critical information about specific products and may have access to critical information that enables informed decision. Siblings, therefore tend to play key roles on purchase decisions. Hence, the following hypothesis:

H4: Siblings' will have a positive influence on generation-Y's purchasing decision for designer label apparels.

Table I: Summary of Variables, Descriptions, and Sources

Variable	Descriptions	Sources
1. Parents	A parent is someone who begets, gives birth to, or nurtures and raises a child; a father or mother. The influence of parents as consumer socialization agents is reported to be mostly instrumental in the development of children's consumer skills and in the basic rational aspects of consumer behaviour.	Lachance et al. (2003); Bearden et al. (1989); Childers and Rao (1992)
2. Peers	Peers are persons who appear to be equal to another in abilities, qualifications, age, background, and social status. Peers may be one of the earliest groups by which individuals learn to deal with the world outside the family.	Yoh (2005); Khan and Khan (2005)
3. Celebrities	Individuals whom are well known to the public for their advertisements in areas other than product class endorsed, and who symbolise an idealisation of life.	Lear, Runyan and Whitaker (2009); Money et al. (2006); Eze, Chin and Lee (2011)
4. Siblings	A sibling (brother or sister) is one with whom an individual shares the same biological parents. Siblings can serve as an important source of emotional support and act as a relevant peer group for comparison and modelling which may be distinct from other social resources such as parents, friends and lovers.	Pechmann and Knight (2002); Bearden et al. (1989); Khan and Khan (2005)

Table I provide the list of variables, descriptions for the variables, and selected sources for the descriptions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The primary data for this study was collected through a questionnaire survey. Questionnaire approach was used because it is considered appropriate for gathering relevant data for studies of this nature, based on prior research, (Bearden et al. 1989; Lee, Eze & Ndubisi, 2011; Eze, 2008). It is also considered ideal for studies involving large sample sizes from a wide geographical area. Prior related studies that used questionnaire to collect data include studies by Yang et al. (2007), Khan and Khan (2005), and Mangleburg et al. (2004). In addition, we employed convenience-sampling method to select the participants in this study. We considered this method appropriate because there was no existing population frame for the potential

participants. This sampling method is often used in social science and studies. For example, Chang (2006) used convenience sampling method in his study on the choice of apparel brands. In addition, Makgosa and Mohube (2007) chose convenience sampling method in their study of peer influence on young adults' purchasing decisions (see also Eze, Tan & Yeo, 2012).

Questionnaire Design, Item Selection and Development

The questionnaire used in this study comprised two parts: A and B. Part A solicited responses on the demographic profile of the participants, including such items as the participants' gender, age, ethnicity, profession, and economic status. Part B solicited responses on the key constructs of the research framework: parents, peers, siblings, celebrities, and the decision to purchase designer label apparel. A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of the conceptual variables (Eze, Yap & Lee, 2010). The scale consisted of five levels of agreement from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree ("1"=Strongly Disagree, "2"=Disagree, "3"=Neutral, "4"=Agree and, "5"=Strongly Agree) (see examples Mourali, Laroche & Pons, 2005; Eze, 2008; Poong, Eze & Talha, 2009). In addition, items for each construct were adapted from prior research as indicated in Table I. We adapted the items to take into account the context of study and to ensure adequate level of understanding by the participants. Key sources of the items and materials used to develop the items include the works of Bearden et al (1989), Khan and Khan (2007), Lachance et al. (2003), Money et al. (2006), and Yoh (2005). Appendix A provides the list of items for each construct.

Pilot Survey

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) the main purpose of a pilot survey is to measure the face validity of the survey questionnaire to ensure that the items are suitable for the constructs assessed (Eze, Kwan & Wamala, 2011; Lee, Wahid & Goh, 2012). Once the draft questionnaire was completed, we selected a sample of 50 participants to complete the questionnaire. A cover note providing instructions, and advising that the participants' involvement is considered voluntary, and a pledge for confidentiality for information provided, was attached to the questionnaire. The participants were given 2 weeks to complete and return the questionnaires. After one week, we sent a reminder to the participants. By the end of two weeks, we were able to collect 45 completed questionnaires, 3 of which were invalid due to uncompleted sections of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback from the pilot testing, we updated the questionnaire and revised questions and statements that appeared confusing, poorly structured, and ensured that the content, coverage, and relevance of the questions were acceptable. The revised questionnaire was further reviewed by 3 industry experts and 3 academics to ensure and enhance content validity. Subsequently, the questionnaire was updated based on the expert reviews, and was then distributed to the participants.

To establish the absence of nonresponse bias, it is desirable to collect data from a set of nonrespondents and compare them with data supplied willingly. For a meaningful number of surveys and for all survey items, this method is rarely achievable. A practical preference that has been argued to provide reliable results is to compare the mean values of responses for earlier returns with the means from later returns

(Compeau, 1995). This approach has the capacity to reveal any differences between early and late responders who required prompting. Tests were conducted on the first week responses and responses after 5 weeks, and the differences between the two groups were insignificant (two-tailed t-test $P<0.05$), indicating that time had no apparent effect on the perceptions and that nonresponse bias was remote.

Data Analysis and Findings

We distributed 350 questionnaires and 253 completed questionnaires were returned. Out of the 253 completed returned questionnaires, 5 were invalid due to incomplete data, accounting for 70.9% response rate. Majority (54.4%) of the respondents were female. Most of the respondents are from the age group of 19-22 years (73.8%). About 86.3% of the respondents are Malaysian. Majority (97.2%) of the respondents are single. In terms of education level, most of the respondents are Diploma holders or undergraduates (85.1%). Majority (71%) of the respondents earn monthly income ranging from RM0 to RM500. In addition, the same group of respondents indicated that they would normally receive a monthly stipend of between RM500-1500 from their parents or guardians. Besides that, 47.2% of total respondents shop once in a year, with reference to designer label apparels. Lastly, most of the respondents (62.1%) spent RM0 – RM500 per shopping trip within the past 3 months, 85% of the respondents spent between RM200-600 in the past 6 months.

Table II: Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability Value of Variables

Variables	Mean (n=248)	Std. Deviation	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Parents	2.432	0.721	8	0.856
Peers	2.677	0.642	10	0.854
Siblings	2.873	0.722	5	0.801
Celebrities	2.932	0.773	7	0.870
Purchase Decision	2.963	0.725	4	0.685

We assessed construct reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. Nunnally (1978) suggests that the ideal alpha for scale reliability is 0.70 and the results obtained met this condition. A reliability analysis of the entire questionnaire revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.911. The scale reliability for parents = 0.856, peers = 0.854, siblings = 0.801, and celebrities = 0.870 (see Table II). Lastly, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for purchasing decision is 0.685. Hence, the Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables except purchase decision exceeded the scale of 0.70. The Cronbach's Alpha value for purchase decision appear slightly low, however, very close to 0.70, and could be considered acceptable (Broekhuizen & Huizingh, 2009).

Blaikie (2003) suggests that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy should be conducted before conducting Factor Analysis (FA) to ensure that selected items are suitable for further analysis. KMO values over 0.70 are considered sufficiently high and values over 0.90 are considered impressive for further analysis. Items in this study achieve KMO of 0.778, which is considered suitable for further analysis. In addition, we conducted FA using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Maximum Variance Extraction (VARIMAX) rotation method from the variables (Pavlou, 2003).

Table III: Factor Analysis for Each Item

	1	2	3	4
Par1	0.721			
Par2	0.589			
Par3	0.621			
Par4	0.743			
Par5	0.722			
Par6	0.588			
Par7	0.631			
Par8	0.620			
Pee1		0.723		
Pee2		0.624		
Pee3		0.573		
Pee4		0.565		
Pee5		0.607		
Pee6		0.645		
Pee7		0.670		
Pee8		0.608		
Pee9		0.616		
Pee10		0.587		
Sib1			0.772	
Sib2			0.796	
Sib3			0.705	
Sib4			0.781	
Sib5			0.516	
Cel1				0.619
Cel2				0.671
Cel3				0.620
Cel4				0.730
Cel5				0.793
Cel6				0.612
Cel7				0.611

During factor analysis, items were retained according to the following criteria: (i) factor loadings greater than 0.5 and (ii) no cross-loading of items. In other words, items were dropped if they have loadings that are less than 0.5 or where their loadings are greater than 0.5 on two or more factors. The result indicates that there were four factors extracted (see Table III). The analysis shows no cross construct loadings above 0.50. This indicates good discriminant validity (Klopping & McKinney, 2004). Each item loads to its designated factor (variable), which indicates strong convergent validity. FA shows items' consistency with the instrument's underlying structure and reflects the factors identified from prior literature (Bagozzi, Yi & Phillips, 1991; Klopping & McKinney, 2004; Eze, 2008; Jayasingh & Eze, 2012).

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual provide a visual examination of the assumptions of normality between the predicted dependent variable scores and the errors of prediction. The primary benefit is that the assumptions can be viewed and analysed in one glance; therefore, any violation can be determined quickly and

easily. Figure 2 shows the Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual of this research. The 45-degree diagonal line represents the normal probability line. The dots represent the actual residual, if the residuals are normally distributed the values should fall on the diagonal line of identity. It shows that the value of observed cum prob are near to expected cum prob. It implies, therefore, a linear relationship between the variables. Hence, the data collected could be considered as normally distributed for a sample $N = 248$ derived from the normal population.
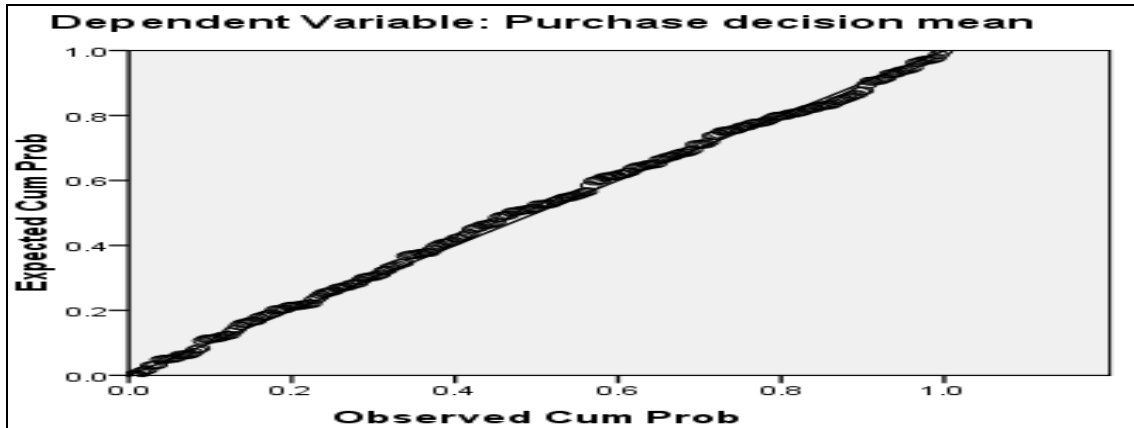

Figure 2: Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Common Method Variance (CMV) was assessed to check whether the variance in the data could be largely attributed to a single factor, using Harman's (1967) single-factor analysis. The unrotated factor analysis shows that the cumulative percentage of initial eigenvalues is 40.53%, which is less than 50%, indicating no obvious common method bias. In addition, common latent factor in structural modelling reveals that regression weight of a common factor on each construct is 0.23, which is equivalent to about 4.80% variance explained by the common factor. This result indicates no perceived issues of common method variance with the data. Although this test is popular in assessing CMV, it is argued that the test could be insensitive and likely to under-identify the sources of CMV (Podaskoff et al., 2003). A more robust assessment would be to estimate the method bias at the measurement level and control the measurement error based on recommendations by Podaskoff et al. (2003), and applied by Sharma (2010).

Subsequently, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated to measure constructs variance explained by the underlying indicators. To evaluate AVE, the sum of squared standardized loading was divided by the sum of squared standardized loading plus the sum of measurement error. The results in Table IV indicate that celebrity has the lowest AVE, which is 0.499, slightly lower than the recommended cut-off value of 0.5, and peers achieved the highest AVE of 0.843. These results indicate that the scale used exhibited reasonably adequate convergent validity (Wang, 2004). In addition, construct validity assessment was conducted. Discriminant validity was assessed by examining the square root AVE of a construct. If this value is greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs, then satisfactory discriminant validity is achieved. Square root AVEs are depicted in Table IV. The results indicate that the square root AVEs are greater than the cross-construct correlations, suggesting satisfying degree of discriminant validity.

Table IV reveals the correlation matrix of the conceptual variables. A two-tail test at 0.05 significance level, indicates that there are positive relationships among the dependent variable and the independent variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to assess the relationships among the variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Based on the results in Table IV, the highest correlation value is 0.512 between dependent variable (purchase decision) and celebrities. In other words, purchase decision will increase or appear favourable, if there is an increase in celebrity endorsement/usage of designer label apparels because a positive sign indicates that as one variable gets larger the other variable appears to get larger as well. However, the lowest correlation value is 0.143, between celebrities and peers. The nearer the correlation value is to zero; the weaker the relationship is between the two variables.

Table IV: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Matrix

	AVE	Parents	Peers	Siblings	Celebrities	Purchase decision
Parents	0.778	1.000				
Peers	0.843	0.296[**]	1.000			
Siblings	0.783	0.358[**]	0.361[**]	1.000		
Celebrities	0.633	0.143[*]	0.512[**]	0.301[**]	1.000	
Purchase decision	0.721	0.426[**]	0.485[**]	0.518[**]	0.532[**]	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression analysis procedure is used to establish patterns of relationships between a set of predictor (independent) variables and an outcome (dependent) variable. Multiple Regression analysis would help to identify how the changes in value of independent variables would affect the dependent variable. It is used when independent variables are correlated with one another including the dependent variable (Coakes, Steed & Ong, 2010). Therefore, this analysis is vital in this study.

Table V: Multiple Regression Analysis (ANOVA Test)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	64.285	4	16.071	59.572	0.000[a]
	Residual	65.557	243	0.270		
	Total	129.842	247			

According to Field (2009), ANOVA test is necessary to know whether the model is significantly better at predicting the dependent variable than using the mean as a "best guess". The F-value represents the ratio of improvement in prediction, which is labelled "Regression" and the inaccuracy of the model is labelled "Residual". In Table V, the F-value (59.572) is considered large based on the p-value = 0.000 < 0.05. This indicates that, at least, one of the eight-predictor variables can be used to model purchasing decision for designer label apparels.

Table VI: Multiple Regression Analysis (Regression Coefficients and R^2)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	0.216	0.183		1.183	0.238			
Parents	0.237	0.050	0.236	4.733	0.000		0.838	1.194
Peers	0.156	0.063	0.138	2.473	0.014	0.495	0.665	1.504
Siblings	0.281	0.052	0.280	5.438	0.000		0.781	1.280
Celebrities	0.322	0.050	0.343	6.386	0.000		0.721	1.388
Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision Mean								

Multicollinearity refers to high correlations among the independent variables. It is an often-encountered statistical phenomenon in which two or more independent variables, in a multiple regression model, are highly correlated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). A common measure for identifying multicollinearity is, therefore, the Tolerance Value and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Tolerance value that is close to 1 represents little multicollinearity, whereas tolerance value close to 0 indicates the presence of multicollinearity (Field, 2009). The tolerance values among independent variables in Table VI are all above 0.6, representing little multicollinearity. The reciprocal of the tolerance is called the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The VIF indicates how much the variance of the coefficient estimate is inflated by multicollinearity. VIF tells how much larger the standard error is, compared with what it would have been if that variable were uncorrelated with the other independent variables in the equation. When VIF value is 9, this represents high standard error, but if VIF value is 1, it indicates low standard error. For instance, if the VIF for a variable is 9, its standard error would be three times as large as it would be if its VIF was 1. In such a case, the coefficient would have to be 3 times as large to be statistically significant. In this instance, VIF values are all below 2. Therefore, we can conclude that a little change in the cases would not completely invalidate the independent variable effects on the dependent variable (see Table VI).

Table VI indicates the results of regression of reference groups' influence on consumers' purchasing decision. The results point out that 49.5 percent (R^2=0.495) of the variance in purchasing decision is explained by the combined reference groups. The strongest predictor for purchasing decision is celebrities, attaining a β of 0.322, followed by siblings (β=0.281) and parents (β=0.237). The least factor influencing customers' purchasing decision towards designer label apparel is peers (β=0.156). The results, therefore, indicate that celebrities, siblings, parents, and peers play significant roles in predicting the purchase decisions of designer label apparel among young adults in Malaysia.

Discussion and Research Implications

The findings of this study revealed that the reference groups have significant effects, although at varying degrees, on consumers' purchasing decision for designer label apparels. The most influential factor would was the star power of the celebrities, followed by siblings, parents, and peers. Therefore, it is critical for marketers and

managers in charge of designer labels' to focus on the avenues and approaches to prioritize these factors to enhance the success of their marketing campaign to attract young adults in Malaysia. In contrast, previous studies revealed that peers influence tend to be considered as the most important factor in the decision to purchase designer label apparels (Kamaruddin & Mokhlis, 2003; Yoh, 2005). The industry, therefore, should take into account the findings in this study in order to ensure that they gain some insights about the dynamics of the key factors to consider within the designer label apparels market in Malaysia.

This paper serves as a frame of reference on reference groups' and their roles in purchase-decisions for designer label apparels, particularly to researchers interested in conducting studies in related field. There are many studies on reference groups' influence on products, but this paper is one of the few focusing on designer label apparels in Malaysia (de Run, Butt & Chung, 2010; Waller & Fam, 2000). Prior works in this area, as indicated were studies conducted mainly in Europe, North America, and some in Asian (Feltham, 1998; Bush & Martin, 2000). Consequently, this study provides an opportunity to understand the empirical perceptions of consumers in Malaysia on the roles of reference groups in the buying processes for branded clothing. This study provides a strong theoretical contribution with respect to literature on branded product, and advancement of research in reference groups, particularly as it concerns Malaysia and the Asian region.

Another important point to note is that the variance explained in the dependent variable by the predicting variables tends to be low (49.5%). This finding indicates that the four independent variables appear not to provide significant explanations of the purchase decisions for designer label apparels in Malaysia. About 50.5% of the variations in the decision to purchase this branded product may be explained by variables or buying situations not considered in this paper. This finding is not surprising because in most buying situations there tends to be other factors that may affect a specific decision to buy a product. Such factors may include the price of the product, the shopping environment, the personality of the store attendance, and more. However, this indication does not diminish the significant roles played by reference groups. Forty-five percent may not be that high, but these factors to account for about 50% of the variations in the purchase decision explains how importance of these set of factors in designing research frameworks for similar circumstances.

Implications for Business Marketing Practice

The findings in this study indicate the susceptibility of consumers' purchasing decision to the four major reference groups with respect to designer label apparel. The findings, therefore, provide some insights into the social factors that affect profitability of those in the designer-label apparel industry. By manipulating the identified reference group factors that affect purchasing decision, marketers would be able to design marketing plans, and strategies that could help spur sales of their products, based on the findings in this paper, particularly with reference to the most important factor, celebrities. Marketing professionals could infer from this finding that the star power of celebrities and their roles in the society are strong drivers for young adults. Consequently, this implies that these young adults would be attracted to specific designer label apparels that these celebrities choose to wear or endorse.

Business marketing professionals may consider designing marketing campaigns that showcases top celebrities in Malaysia, the regional countries, or other parts of the world, where possible, to be able to mount a competitive drive to gain the interest and loyalty of the consumers within the Generation-Y category.

The findings in this study could also assist business-marketing professionals in the fashion industry in promoting their products to the relevant parties, and in creating effective value propositions and attractions in their promotional efforts for designer labels apparels. For instance, in developing advertising messages, relevant business marketing professionals should continue to feature celebrities, but must not overlook the roles of siblings, parents, and peers. In the past, business-marketing professionals of designer label products have targeted mainly the baby boomers generation. The findings in this study provide an opportunity for business-marketing professionals to expand their market segments to include the generation-Y segment. This will of course depend on the specific industry, the business direction and the overall social structure within a country.

In addition, business-marketing professional should understand that family structure and the roles of parents and siblings are equally critical in the decision to buy designer label apparels. The findings in this study indicate that parents and siblings play critical roles as their β-values indicate, although not as strong as the role of celebrities. Business-marketing professionals should not neglect these findings as they indicate how much influence family members could have in decisions to buy products, particularly those examined in this paper.

Although this study examined the influence of the factors influencing purchasing decisions of designer label apparel, it could be adapted to understand the various issues associated with social factors that motivate specific a purchase decisions outside this domain in this paper. Issues that are socially motivated, for example, include smoking, alcohol consumption, and indulgence in illicit drugs the consequence of which could be very damaging to the Malaysian society. Since the findings indicate that celebrity appears to be the most important factor among the participants, celebrities or persons with celebrity figures that portray an image of smoking-dangerous substances, a drunk, or being involved in social vices, maybe considered unhealthy for a society as these could create added pressure for the young generation, especially,

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Further research is essential to provide additional insights into reference groups' influence, which could be complementary to the findings in this study. Several possibilities for extensions could be considered. First, future research could include more coverage of generation-Y because this study did not cover the whole of Malaysia. A sample of about 2000 from major cities in Malaysia may provide additional information on the constructs examined and probably more relevant findings for practice and research implications. This would also enable a more robust representation of the population and a more solid basis for generalisation. In addition, another interesting avenue for research would be to consider a study that examines differences across various groups of celebrities (entertainers, fashion models, and

athletes) in comparison with the general classification of celebrities, and to see if there would be any differences. Future research could also broaden this study with the aim of replicating the findings in this study using other product categories. In addition, future studies should consider including other variables such as indicated earlier in this paper. Other variables that may be considered as moderators include perceived risk, prior knowledge and other attitudinal or socioeconomic variables. In addition, we used the terms siblings and parents in this paper, which may appear less scientific. Future research should consider more scientific terms, such as primary, secondary, or tertiary (aspirational) to enhance the quality of the constructs and item development. In addition, most of the participants in this study were students, whose purchasing power may be weak. We suggest that future research considers more participants who tend to have more earning and spending power, for a more robust outcome. This could also enable applications of analytical tools for indirect analysis and comparison. Finally, future research should consider checking for CMV during item measurement development to control measurement errors (see Podaskoff et al., 2003).

Conclusion

The roles of reference groups in purchase decision processes, and how these roles affect information processing through evaluation of options to eventual decision to buy a specific product will continue to attract intense academic attention. The findings in this paper provide evidence that reference groups appear to be key factors in young adults' decision to buy designer label apparels. Celebrities appear to be the most important factor in the buying decision followed by siblings. This indicates that marketers may need to design marketing and promotion campaigns that observe these dynamics to enable a more effective marketing strategy. The reference group framework initiated by Hyman (1942), developed by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), enhanced by Bourne (1957) and Kelman (1961), and expanded by Bearden and Etzel (1982) appears very useful in the study of reference group. There is the need to continue to expand on this framework to be able to address situational dynamics and variations and their roles in the complex structure of reference group effect on purchase decisions.

Finally, findings from this study reveal crucial insights considered useful to firms in related business and to knowledge development. The findings should, however, be interpreted within the context of the data set and the sample selected for this study. In addition, it would be important to assess the extent to which the findings in this study apply across different cultures within Malaysia, and among countries within the region.

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Appendix A: Items List for the Constructs

Parents

A1	I never buy any new product until my parents and I have discussed it
A2	When I do not understand the designer label prices, I consult my parents.
A3	I often discuss my purchase plans with my parents.
A4	I always follow my parents' decisions by buying the same products or brands.
A5	My parents accompany me when I purchase designer label apparels.
A6	What brand I buy is affected by my parents' interest.
A7	I always shop with my parents.
A8	My parents decide all my shopping needs.

Peers

B1	I regularly ask my friends regarding the latest fashions.
B2	I always talk to friends about prices and quality before I buy
B3	To make sure I buy the right product, I often watch my friends buy.
B4	I rarely purchase the latest products until I am sure my peers approve of them.
B5	It is important that my peers approve of the store where I buy.
B6	I am very loyal to stores where my peers shop.
B7	If I want to be like my peers, I always buy the brands they buy.
B8	I work long hours and save to afford the designer labels that my friends buy.
B9	I achieve a sense of belonging by buying the designer brands my peers buy.
B10	My peers very much influence the choices of my shopping.

Siblings

C1	It is important that siblings like the products and brands I buy.
C2	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same brands that my siblings purchase.
C3	I often ask my siblings about the product for products that I have little experience.
C4	I frequently gather information from my siblings about a product before I buy.
C5	I often identify with my siblings by purchasing the same brands they purchase.

Celebrities

D1	To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what celebrities are using.
D2	I often try to buy designer labels to be like celebrities.
D3	I frequently gather information from celebrities about a product before I buy.
D4	I like seeing advertisements of what brands celebrities use.
D5	Celebrities help me to be more confident in the products I buy.
D6	I can get ideas about fashion from seeing celebrities.
D7	Celebrities show me that people, like myself, who use similar products.

Purchase decision for designer label apparel

E1	I buy designer label apparel
E2	Having the resouces enables me to buy designer label apparel.
E3	I enjoy buying designer label apparel.
E4	It is easy for me to decide on buying a designer label apparel.