It's Not Just Fashion, it's Feeling: What Drives Brand Loyalty in Specialty Fashion Brand Lovers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological and emotional factors influencing brand loyalty in the specialty fashion sector, focusing on three primary determinants: self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification. The research aims to understand how these variables shape loyalty among style-conscious consumers, particularly in the Malaysian context where cultural and religious values intersect with fashion choices. A quantitative approach was adopted, utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed via convenience sampling in three major shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur. The study gathered data from 391 qualified respondents primarily female, aged 31–50, and from the Malay ethnic group. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS for structural equation modeling, ensuring robust measurement and validity of constructs. The results confirmed that all three hypothesized factors significantly affect brand loyalty. Among them, self-narrative emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the role of identity alignment in fostering emotional attachment to brands. Acquisitive behavior followed ($\beta = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting the influence of status-driven consumption and social prestige. Personal gratification, though statistically significant, had the smallest effect ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.005$), suggesting that emotional satisfaction reinforces but does not dominate loyalty formation. The study concludes that specialty fashion loyalty is not merely transactional but is deeply rooted in symbolic, identity-driven, and emotional engagement. These findings offer valuable insights for marketers aiming to build authentic, enduring brand relationships and emphasize the need for culturally sensitive, ethically sound branding strategies. The research also supports future exploration of demographic and cultural moderators to further enrich the loyalty model.

Keywords: fashion, brand loyalty, specialty, self-narrative, acquisitive, personal gratification.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion has long been a conduit for self-expression, but for today's style lovers, it also embodies emotional resonance, psychological meaning, and identity construction. In the increasingly saturated and competitive fashion industry, specialty fashion brands face the challenge of cultivating enduring customer loyalty among consumers who do not merely buy products but engage with them as tools of self-expression and emotional fulfillment. Traditional notions of brand loyalty revolving around price, convenience, or product quality are insufficient to explain the complex emotional investments that many style-conscious consumers form with their favorite brands.

In the global specialty fashion industry, those that focus on a niche market or unique product offerings face numerous challenges that impact their market position and consumer loyalty. One of the key issues is sustainability. Consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental and ethical implications of their fashion choices, which puts pressure on brands to adopt sustainable practices. However, many specialty brands struggle with the high costs of sustainable materials and production processes, which can lead to higher prices for

consumers, affecting demand. This also could lead to switching brands among customers. McKinsey & Co (2020) in their research showed that global consumers switching brands at unusually high rates due to response to economic pressure, store closings and changing priorities. In addition, they also reported that 72% of consumers will leave a brand they had been loyal after two or three bad customers service experiences.

Moreover, global competition in the fashion industry has grown stronger. Although specialty fashion brands often try to stand out through uniqueness, the easy access to international markets and the rise of online shopping give consumers more choices than ever. This has increased competition, especially from low-cost or fast-fashion brands that can quickly copy trends and sell similar items at lower prices. According to Julia Faria (2023), a report on Statista.com showed that in February 2022, 66% of customers who switched brands in the past year did so mainly because they found better deals and higher quality.

In Malaysia, cultural and demographic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for specialty fashion brands. While brands can appeal to various ethnic groups and personal styles, they must also manage cultural sensitivities, which require careful research and product customization. For example, Muslim consumers prefer halal materials and reject cruelty to animals (Ahmad et al., 2023; Randeree, 2019). The halal fashion segment is growing in Malaysia, aligning with the global trend toward ethical fashion (Alitakrim et al., 2021; Imam, 2020 & Mubarok). Millennials seek better lifestyles and prefer well-known brands, yet they also value halal products and a positive Muslim image, often showing competitive and status-driven behavior (Bagheri, 2014).

This study explores the psychological and emotional factors that influence brand loyalty in specialty fashion. It focuses on how self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification shape loyalty among style-conscious consumers. Specialty fashion brands typically niche and independent attract customers through unique, expressive products that align with their values and identity. By understanding these deeper motivations, marketers and designers can better build lasting customer relationships. This study proposes a model where brand loyalty is influenced by identity alignment (self-narrative), desire for ownership (acquisitiveness), and emotional satisfaction (personal gratification).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Specialty Fashion Brands and Loyalty Concept

Specialty fashion brands are recognized for their exclusive offerings that not only represent a high level of quality but also convey social status, wealth, and prestige to consumers. These brands often leverage unique design, exceptional craftsmanship, and strong marketing narratives to position themselves as aspirational symbols. Jain (2021) defines specialty fashion brands is garments, accessories, purses, shoes, watches, jewelries, handbags and perfume which carries well-known brand names while brand loyalty indicates the frequency and quantity of consumer purchase (Keller, 2001). The relationship between specialty fashion brands and customer loyalty is intricate, as consumers are often drawn to these brands not solely for their products but for the emotional and social benefits they promise. A study by Ghosh and Bhattacharya focuses specifically on the factors driving specialty brand loyalty among Generation Z consumers in India. Their research demonstrates that understanding the motivations and desires of this consumer segment is crucial for specialty brands aiming to secure loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. They identify emotional connection, brand perception, and uniqueness as key components influencing loyalty Ghosh & Bhattacharya (2022). Therefore, specialty brands must engage with this generation meaningfully to foster lasting loyalty. The concepts of specialty fashion brands and customer loyalty are increasingly prevalent in current academic literature. Specialty fashion brands often focus on targeted niche markets, promoting unique qualities or values that resonate with specific consumer segments. Understanding how these brands develop customer loyalty is critical for sustaining competitive advantage in the volatile fashion industry landscape. A brand loyalty model tailored to halal fashion brands, elucidating how elements like quality, religiosity, and information sources contribute to brand loyalty in this niche market (Rafdinal et al., 2024).

Effect of Self-Narrative on Brand Loyalty

Self-narrative refers to the story that individuals construct about themselves, shaping their identity and guiding

their actions and decisions (Leuenberger, 2023). In the context of fashion, this narrative often revolves around how individuals perceive themselves and wish to be perceived by others. Clothing choices become an extension of this self-concept, serving as a form of self-expression. Consumers use fashion to communicate values, beliefs, and aspirations, which are deeply embedded in their personal stories. Self-narratives play a crucial role in establishing deep emotional connections with brands, especially in fashion. When a consumer identifies with a fashion brand, they are not just buying products; they are engaging in a process of self-expression. The brand serves as a means for them to express their identity, which in turn strengthens their emotional bond to it. This connection is often intangible, rooted in how the consumer perceives the brand as aligning with their personal values, lifestyle, and social image. For instance, fashion brands resonate more with consumers when they provide a sense of comfort and match the consumers' personalities, reinforcing their self-image, which ultimately enhances loyalty (Khoirunnisa & Sulistiobudi, 2024). Fashion brands that evoke excitement and sophistication are particularly successful in appealing to millennial consumers, resulting in increased brand loyalty as these consumers seek to express their energized and fashionable identities (Zainudin et al., 2019). This sense of belonging or alignment fosters a sense of attachment and loyalty to the brand, leading to repeat purchases and long-term commitment (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

H1: Self-narrative on specialty fashion brand positively influences brand loyalty

Effect of Acquisitive on Brand Loyalty

Acquisitiveness refers to the desire for ownership, status, and exclusivity that consumers experience when they acquire products, particularly those that symbolize prestige. In the fashion industry, acquisitiveness is often tied to the notion of owning items that signify wealth, success, or social status. This desire is frequently nurtured by brand positioning, specialty appeal, and scarcity of the product. Acquisitive consumers are motivated by the prestige and status that comes with owning a brand's products. For instance, the USA consumers often rent specialty fashion goods to signal their economic success and status to others, thereby demonstrating the interpersonal motivations underpinning specialty consumption (Baek et al., 2023). This research aligns with the understanding that not only purchases but also rental behaviors reflect a desire for prestige and acknowledgment from one's social circle. In specialty fashion brands, where exclusivity is often a key selling point, acquiring items from these brands can enhance a consumer's social standing and signal their belonging to a certain elite group. When consumers perceive the brand as a symbol of social success, they are more likely to exhibit brand loyalty, not just due to product satisfaction, but also because of the emotional and social benefits derived from owning the brand (Kashif et al., 2021). Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

H2: Acquisitive on specialty fashion brand positively influences brand loyalty

Effect of Personal Gratification on Brand Loyalty

Studies indicate that when consumers self-reward their achievement with specialty items, they are more likely to cultivate long-term loyalty to a brand. Emotional branding engages consumers by responding to their diminishing connections to brands, suggesting that brands that evoke positive emotional responses are more likely to maintain customer loyalty (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). The relationship between personal gratification and brand loyalty is further supported by Mandung (2023) who examine in the fashion segment, impact consumer loyalty through feelings of belonging and satisfaction. As consumers seek brands that reflect their preferences and satisfaction due to their great achievement, emotional factors in purchasing decisions grow increasingly important. Brands must understand these emotional drivers from the joy of self-expression to the self-esteem gained through fashion alignment (Kashif et al., 2021). For instance, the consumers like to spend money on specialty products like fashion items as appreciation for self-reward on their achievement. Ultimately, fostering personal gratification through emotional engagement is key to building brand loyalty and long-term relationships. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

H3: Personal gratification has a positive effect on brand loyalty in specialty fashion brands.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed model hypothesizes that brand loyalty among style lovers is influenced by self-narrative,

acquisitive behavior, personal gratification, these variables are expected to influence brand loyalty, conceptualized as a combination of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty.
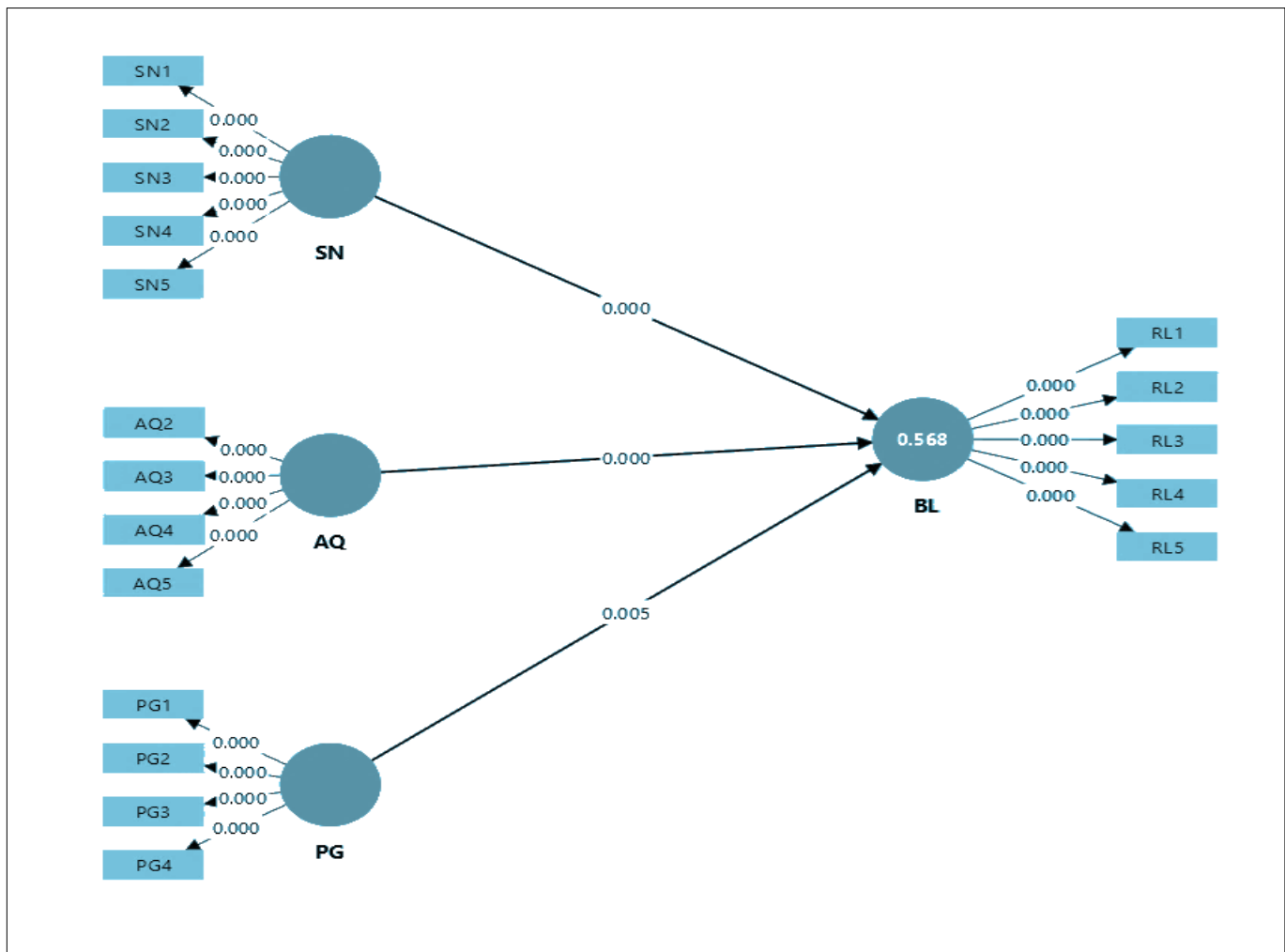

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework examines the relationships between three internal factors Self-Narrative (SN), Acquisitive (AQ), and Personal Gratification (PG), and their effects on Brand Loyalty (BL).

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design and utilized a convenience sampling method to collect data from a total of 413 respondents and only 391 respondents are qualified to participate. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, with items adapted and adopted from validated instruments in previous studies to ensure relevance and reliability as follows: Self-narrative: 5 items adapted from (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019, Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2019, Richins, 2004), Acquisitive behavior: 5 items adapted from (Kapferer & Valette-Florence 2019; Loureiro et al., 2020: Richins, 2004), Personal gratification: 5 items adapted from (Kapferer & Valette- Florence, 2019; Kim et al., 2011; Loureiro et al., 2020), Brand loyalty: 5 items adapted from (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Keller, 2001). A 5-point Likert scale was used (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This improves response quality, increases the completion rate, and reduces response error. Besides, the 5-point Likert scale offers a statistically sound, respondent-friendly, and analytically flexible tool, making it the preferred choice for many social science researchers and statisticians.

Data Collection and Analysis

By using convenience sampling techniques, the distribution of questionnaires took place at three major shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur TRX Exchange, Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, and The Gardens Mall at Mid Valley City selected due to their high foot traffic and the presence of multiple specialty fashion boutiques, which align with the focus of the research. The questionnaires distributed among individuals who has the criteria of specialty

fashion-conscious consumers or "specialty fashion style lovers." The data collected was analyzed using Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS), a powerful statistical tool particularly suited for structural equation modeling (SEM). SmartPLS enables the estimation of complex cause-effect relationship models involving latent constructs, making it ideal for examining the interactions between the independent variables self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification and the dependent variable, brand loyalty.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Respondent's Demographic data

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	129	33.00
	Female	262	67.00
Age	31-40	179	45.78
	41-50	126	32.23
	51-60	84	21.48
	61 & above	2	0.51
Race	Malay	379	96.90
	Chinese	6	1.50
	Indian	3	0.80
	Others	3	0.80
Education level	SPM	20	5.12
	STPM	6	1.53
	Diploma	63	16.11
	Bachelor	151	38.62
	Masters	100	25.58
	PhD	47	12.02
	Others	4	1.02
Marital Status	Single	83	21.23
	Married	298	76.21
	Divorced	6	1.53
	Others	4	1.02

Table 1 show the comprised of 391 qualified respondents, predominantly female (67%), suggesting a higher representation of women in the population of specialty fashion consumers. The largest age group was 31–40 years (45.78%), followed by 41–50 years (32.23%), indicating a sample dominated by middle-aged adults who likely have higher purchasing power. The age over 30 years old as supported by previous studies targeted to higher income level which affordable to purchase specialty fashion brands (Erikson, 1951; Schade et al. 2016; Srinivasan et al., 2014). The pre-qualification question for T20 income (>RM11,820 per month) included in questionnaires. Ethnic distribution was skewed, with Malay respondents comprising 96.9%, which reflects the local demographic composition in Malaysia but limits generalizability to other ethnic groups. Education levels were diverse, with the majority holding a bachelor's degree (38.62%), followed by master's degree holders (25.58%), suggesting a relatively educated sample. Most respondents were married (76.21%), further underscoring the mature demographic profile.

Measurement Model Assessment

The values of Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability were above the recommended threshold of 0.7, confirming the constructs' reliability. Additionally, all AVE values exceeded 0.5, supporting convergent validity (Hair, 2021).

Table 2: Reliability and Convergence of the Item.

Construct/ Associated items	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Acquisitive (AQ)		0.885	0.916	0.685
AQ1	0.834			
AQ2	0.783			
AQ3	0.842			
AQ4	0.836			
AQ5	0.842			
Personal Gratification (PG)		0.890	0.924	0.752
PG1	0.830			
PG2	0.884			
PG3	0.876			
PG4	0.876			
Self-Narrative (SN)		0.900	0.926	0.714
SN1	0.829			
SN2	0.837			
SN3	0.830			
SN4	0.861			
SN5	0.868			
Brand Loyalty (BL)		0.933	0.949	0.789
BL1	0.881			
BL2	0.890			
BL3	0.848			
BL4	0.901			
BL5	0.920			

The measurement model assessment confirmed the reliability and validity of all constructs where the Confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) a method similar to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for CB-SEM. This method is better option to access the model through item loading, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity (Hair, 2021). As depicted in Table 2, the result for Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.885 to 0.933, exceeding the 0.708 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency. While Composite Reliability (CR) values also ranged from 0.916 to 0.949, surpassing the recommended 0.70 level (Hair et al., 2021, 2019). Moreover, the result for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This demonstrates that each construct; - acquisitive, personal gratification, self-narrative, and brand loyalty) was measured accurately and

consistently, supporting the robustness of the instrument used.

Table 3. Discriminant validity analysis – Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT)

	AQ	BL	PG	SN
AQ				
BL	0.772			
PG	0.696	0.636		
SN	0.891	0.779	0.754	

After deleting AQ1 - SN change from 0.931 to 0.891

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values for all construct pairs were below the critical threshold of 0.90, suggesting adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). For instance, SN–AQ = 0.891, SN–PG = 0.754 and AQ–BL = 0.772. A modification was noted where AQ1 was deleted, which reduced the SN–AQ HTMT value from 0.931 to 0.891, improving discriminant validity between constructs. This is a statistically sound approach, ensuring that constructs represent distinct theoretical concepts.

Structural Model Results

SmartPLS software estimates path relationships and computes significance through bootstrapping procedures, ensuring robust and reliable results in exploratory and confirmatory studies (Hair et al., 2019). The path coefficients and statistical significance of the relationships were examined. All direct paths were significant, with p-values less than 0.05.

Table 4. Path Coefficient

Path	Path coefficient	Sample mean (m)	Standard deviation (stdev)	T-value	P-value	VIF	Result
AQ → BL	0.316	0.315	0.062	5.096	0.000	3.903	Supported
PG → BL	0.130	0.131	0.051	2.563	0.005	3.503	Supported
SN → BL	0.379	0.380	0.061	6.218	0.000	3.503	Supported

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model, assessing the hypothesized relationships between the three independent variables: - Self-Narrative (SN), Acquisitive Behavior (AQ), and Personal Gratification (PG) and the dependent variable, Brand Loyalty (BL). All three hypothesized paths were statistically significant, with p-values below 0.05, supporting the theoretical framework proposed in this study. Self-narrative → brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.379$, t = 6.218, p < 0.001) emerged as the strongest predictor of brand loyalty was the construct of self-narrative, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.379. This supports H1, which indicates a positive and substantial effect, confirms that consumers who perceive a fashion brand as congruent with their personal story and identity are significantly more likely to remain loyal. This supports past findings from Khoirunnisa and Sulistiobudi (2024) and Nyadzayo et al. (2020), who emphasized the pivotal role of identity congruence in fostering long-term brand relationships. The high t-value (6.218) reinforces the robustness of this relationship. On top of that, acquisitive behavior → brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.316$, t = 5.096, p < 0.001). H2 is accepted as the second strongest effect was from acquisitive behavior, with a path coefficient of 0.316, suggesting that consumers' motivation to acquire items as symbols of success, exclusivity, or status significantly influences their loyalty. This finding aligns with Baek et al. (2023) and Kashif et al. (2021), who highlighted that specialty brand consumers often engage in consumption as a way of reinforcing social identity and perceived prestige. The significant t-value (5.096) provides further statistical support for the path. personal gratification → brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.130$, t = 2.563, p = 0.005). While H3 is accepted as personal gratification had the smallest path coefficient

(0.130) among the three, it still demonstrated a significant positive effect on brand loyalty. This indicates that emotional satisfaction derived from consumption such as joy, pleasure, or self-esteem plays a role in fostering loyalty, though less intensely than identity alignment or status motives. This result supports the arguments by Kim and Sullivan (2019) and Mandung (2023), who observed that emotional branding and gratification from fashion purchases encourage repeat behavior and attachment. On the other hand, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) ranged between 3.503 and 3.903, which are below the conservative threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model. This ensures that the estimated path coefficients are stable and not inflated due to high correlations among predictors. The findings from Table 4 reinforce a growing body of research that explores the emotional-symbolic dynamics of consumer-brand relationships in the fashion sector. The clear significance of self-narrative supports the emerging literature on identity-driven branding, where brands act as narrative tools for consumers to express, shape, and project their personalities (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019; Leuenberger, 2023). Similarly, the role of acquisitive behaviour aligns with the material, in which possessions serve as external representations of internal values (Richins, 2004). The impact of personal gratification reflects the importance of emotional fulfilment in consumer decision-making (Kim et al., 2011).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification on brand loyalty among specialty fashion consumers. Based on the analysis, all three proposed relationships were statistically significant, thus confirming the hypothesized model. This section discusses the theoretical implications and aligns the results with prior studies. The results show that self-narrative had a significant effect and strongest positive influence on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the H1. This indicates that when consumers perceive a brand as part of their personal identity, they are more likely to remain loyal. When the brand aligns with their identity, it strengthens emotional attachment and commitment. Consumers who see their preferred fashion brand as an extension of their identity and values tend to exhibit long-term loyalty especially in the case of Muslim consumers, whose fashion preferences must align with Islamic values. Similarly, the findings of Leuenberger (2023) and Nyadzayo et al. (2020), argue that brands functioning as storytelling agents can foster emotional bonds through symbolic alignment. This finding supports the idea that specialty fashion brands go beyond aesthetics, they facilitate personal storytelling and self-expansion. Consumers seek brands that "speak" their identity narratives. Such symbolic interaction reinforces emotional attachment and encourages repeat purchases. As Khoirunnisa and Sulistiobudi (2024) observed, brand–self congruence is a major loyalty determinant, especially in fashion contexts where personal image is central.

Acquisitive behavior showed the second strongest positive influence on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This finding emphasizes the role of status-seeking motivation in driving brand allegiance. Consumers tend to be loyal to specialty fashion brands that project exclusivity, wealth, or prestige traits that enhance their social image. This supports earlier work by Baek et al. (2023) and Kashif et al. (2021), who described acquisitive tendencies as expressions of material self-worth and social signaling. These results also echo Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2019), who noted that specialty fashion brands function as "badges" of success. Consumers derive emotional and interpersonal gratification from being associated with symbols of refinement and distinction. In line with material value theory (Richins, 2004), the ownership or even rental of high-status fashion items fulfills a psychological need for recognition and group belonging. H3 is also supported, as personal gratification had a significant though smaller effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.005$) even though smaller than the other two. This suggests that emotional satisfaction such as pleasure, comfort, or confidence gained through fashion consumption also plays a meaningful role in building brand relationships. These results are consistent with the findings of Kim and Sullivan (2019) and Mandung (2023), who found that emotional branding and feelings of belonging enhance loyalty.

Personal gratification, though subtler than identity or status factors, provides essential reinforcement in the consumer-brand relationship. It reflects hedonic consumption to self-reward of achievement, where the purchase is not only rational but emotionally fulfilling. The findings imply that specialty brands that create pleasurable, affirming experiences are more likely to develop long-term consumer loyalty. Together, these findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of brand loyalty in the specialty fashion domain. The interplay between identity alignment (self-narrative), prestige motivation (acquisitive behavior), and emotional satisfaction (personal

gratification) reflects a multi-layered loyalty mechanism. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing, forming a comprehensive picture of consumer-brand attachment. Furthermore, the model's high statistical validity is supported by strong reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, and low multicollinearity (VIF < 5) indicates that these constructs are both empirically robust and theoretically distinct. This lends further credibility to the claim that brand loyalty in lifestyle categories is emotionally and symbolically driven, a conclusion echoed by Ghosh & Bhattacharya (2022) in the context of specialty fashion consumers.

Theoretical, Practical and Policy Making Implications

This study makes a significant contribution to consumer behavior literature by empirically validating the roles of self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification in shaping brand loyalty. Thus, it reinforces theoretical frameworks related to symbolic interactionism, and psychological and emotional drivers in branding. Practitioners can apply these findings to refine branding strategies by developing compelling brand narratives that align with consumers' aspirations, self-concept, and cultural identities. This is particularly crucial in markets like Malaysia, where cultural sensitivity and identity expression intersect. Given the influence of acquisitive behavior on brand loyalty, brands should prioritize designing limited-edition, rare, or prestige-oriented products. The exclusivity factor triggers social signaling, thus reinforcing consumer attachment. Visual cues of uniqueness (packaging, premium displays) should be emphasized at the point of sale. Although personal gratification showed a smaller effect size, it remained statistically significant. Fashion retailers should invest in creating emotionally gratifying experiences on self-rewards evoking consumer delight and loyalty.

In term of policy making Malaysian government and fashion industry strengthen the religious compliance in production and advertisement to enhance Muslim consumer awareness and ensure respect for Islamic values. Besides, policymakers should consider reinforcing regulations that ensure transparency in branding such as labeling accuracy, ethical sourcing disclosures, and truthful brand narratives should be mandated to prevent exploitation of consumers' psychological attachment. Lastly, the government and industry regulators should offer incentives for brands that adopt environmentally friendly and social responsibility fashion practices. This approach would also help combat unethical branding practices and reduce this brand enter to local market.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it does not include potential moderating or mediating factors like religiosity, income level, or cultural identity, which could provide a deeper understanding of what drives brand loyalty. Second, the sample was collected through convenience sampling in Kuala Lumpur, with most respondents being Malay, which limits the ability to generalise the findings to other ethnic or income groups. Finally, the study used a cross-sectional design, so it cannot track changes in consumer behavior over time or confirm cause-and-effect relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketers should tailor their strategies to different consumer groups based on age, gender, and lifestyle. For example, younger consumers may respond well to identity-focused branding, while older or married consumers may prefer brands that highlight status and exclusivity. In predominantly Muslim markets, brands should also ensure cultural and religious alignment through halal certification and ethical practices. Using consumer values like self-expression or achievement to guide marketing messages can make them more relevant. Finally, marketers should use the right channels such as social media for younger audiences and in-store experiences for premium consumers to build stronger and longer-lasting brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the psychological and emotional determinants of brand loyalty in the context of specialty fashion brands, focusing on three central variables: self-narrative, acquisitive behavior, and personal gratification. The findings revealed that all three factors significantly influence brand loyalty, with self-narrative emerging as the most potent predictor. These results underline the symbolic, identity-driven nature of brand

attachment in style-conscious consumers, supporting the notion that brand loyalty in fashion extends far beyond product quality or price considerations. The implications of this research span theoretical advancement, strategic marketing, and public policy formulation. For theory, the study contributes a validated model that merges identity, materialism, and emotional fulfillment into a unified framework of loyalty formation. Practically, it offers actionable insights for marketers on how to craft more resonant brand experiences that tap into consumer identities and emotional needs. At the policy level, it highlights the importance of regulating branding ethics and encouraging culturally sensitive and sustainable business practices. In essence, brand loyalty in the specialty fashion context is not merely transactional, it is a profound psychological engagement where fashion becomes an extension of the self. Brands that understand and honor this depth of connection will be best positioned to thrive in an increasingly complex and emotionally driven consumer landscape. For future research, we can build upon this model to explore further how identity alignment evolves across different demographic and cultural settings. Some more, this research could be extended by putting mediation or moderation for further impact.

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