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# FASHION MARKETING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SHAPING CONSUMER-BASED BRAND VALUE

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**Abstract:** This article examines fashion marketing as a strategic instrument for shaping consumer-based brand value (CBBE) in the context of global competition. Drawing on a mixed-methods design — qualitative case analysis of five leading global brands (Zara, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, H&M, and Shein) and a quantitative survey of 312 consumers from five countries — the study identifies the key mechanisms through which fashion narratives are translated into perceived brand value. An original four-factor IECS model (Identity–Exclusivity–Community–Sustainability) is proposed, integrating the dimensions of identity, exclusivity, community, and sustainability in consumer value formation. Practical implications for branding strategies in the context of the post-pandemic transformation of the luxury and mass-market segments are also discussed.

**Key words:** fashion marketing, consumer-based brand equity, global competition, branding, exclusivity, sustainability, brand identity, digital marketing, luxury segment, fast fashion.

## INTRODUCTION

The global fashion market has demonstrated consistent growth over the past decade. According to Statista (2024), its total value exceeded USD 1.7 trillion, with projections pointing to USD 2.25 trillion by 2030. At the same time, unprecedented market saturation, accelerating fashion cycles, and the transformation of consumer preferences under the influence of digitalisation confront brands with fundamentally new strategic challenges. In this environment, fashion marketing evolves from a product promotion instrument into a system-level mechanism for creating and protecting consumer-based brand value. The concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) traces its roots to the foundational works of David Aaker (1991) and Kevin Lane Keller (1993) and has traditionally been examined through the lens of awareness, perceived quality, associations, and loyalty. In the era of social media, influencer marketing, and eco-activism, however, this model requires substantial reconsideration. Several researchers argue that contemporary consumer value in the fashion brand context is constructed less through functional attributes than through symbolic narratives, communities, and value-based identifications.

The relevance of the topic is further underscored by geopolitical and economic factors: the withdrawal of certain Western brands from emerging markets, the rise of national branding, the emergence of ultra-fast fashion in the form of Shein and Temu, and the demand of Millennials and Generation Z for authenticity and sustainability are creating a fundamentally different competitive ecosystem. In this context, fashion marketing as a brand-building instrument acquires particular strategic significance. Despite an extensive literature on fashion branding and marketing, several unresolved questions persist in academic discourse. First, most existing CBBE models in the fashion sector have been developed in the context of Western markets and do not account for the specificities of emerging economies — Central Asia and the Middle East in particular. Second, the role of sustainability as an independent value component has not been sufficiently integrated into comprehensive CBBE frameworks. Third, the mechanism by which fashion narratives are translated into measurable consumer loyalty remains a subject of debate.

The present study aims to address these gaps by developing and empirically validating the four-factor IECS model, which links fashion marketing instruments to components of consumer-based brand value in a cross-cultural context. Research objective: to develop and empirically validate a theoretical model of consumer-based brand value formation through fashion marketing instruments under conditions of global competition. To achieve this objective, the following tasks were set: (1) to systematise contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of consumer-based brand equity in the fashion sector; (2) to identify the key fashion marketing instruments that shape perceived value; (3) to develop the IECS model and assess its psychometric properties; (4) to empirically verify the hypothetical relationships between model factors; (5) to formulate practical recommendations for brands.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on consumer-based brand equity in the fashion sector has progressed through several evolutionary stages. The first stage (1980s – early 2000s) was dominated by functional approaches focusing on quality, price, and availability (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). The second stage (2000s – 2010s) was marked by an “emotional turn”: Jean-Noël Kapferer and Vincent Bastien (2009) established the concept of luxury branding as the creation of emotional and symbolic superiority, while Leonard Berry (2000) incorporated a brand’s social capital into the structure of consumer value. The third, contemporary stage (2015 – present) is characterised by a shift towards value-based branding.

Key trends include: digitalisation and phygital integration (Pantano, 2020); the role of influencers and user-generated content (UGC) in shaping brand narratives (Lou & Yuan, 2019); ecological and social responsibility as a prerequisite for maintaining Generation Z loyalty (Khandeparkar & Barai, 2021); and the fragmentation of the fashion market into numerous micro-segments with distinct value propositions (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Analysis of the contemporary literature permits the identification of five key groups of fashion marketing instruments that directly influence consumer-based brand equity (Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of fashion marketing instruments and their impact on CBBE<sup>1</sup>

No	Instrument	Mechanism of Influence	Target CBBE Component	Brand Examples
1	Narrative branding	Creating identity-building stories; brand mythologisation	Identity, associations	Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Hermès
2	Influencer marketing	Social proof; trust through authority	Awareness, loyalty	Gucci, Balenciaga, Zara
3	Collaborations & limited collections	Exclusivity, scarcity, FOMO effect	Exclusivity, perceived quality	Nike×Off-White, H&M×Designer
4	Green marketing	Ecological responsibility, ethical consumption	Sustainability, values	Patagonia, Stella McCartney
5	Phygital experience	Immersiveness, AR/VR fitting, gamification	Engagement, community	Burberry, Ralph Lauren, ZARA

Aaker’s (1991) CBBE model — encompassing four dimensions of loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and associations — remains a conceptual reference point. Its critics, however, point to the absence of a dynamic dimension and the limited consideration of sociocultural context. Keller’s (2001) Customer-Based Brand Equity model, built on a six-block pyramid (identity, meaning, response, resonance), is better suited to the analysis of luxury brands but less effectively describes value-creation mechanisms in the mass-market and fast fashion segments. The “brand co-creation” concept (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) emphasises the joint creation of value by consumers and brands through participation in communities and platforms. This direction is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where the boundary between consumer and content creator is increasingly blurred. The synthesis of these theoretical schools provides the methodological foundation for the proposed IECS model.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-methods design carried out in two sequential phases. Phase 1 (qualitative): a comparative case analysis of five global brands — Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Zara, H&M, and Shein — to identify

<sup>1</sup> author’s development

fashion marketing instruments and value-creation mechanisms. The analysis followed the methodology of Yin (2018); data were collected from publicly available corporate reports, press releases, and secondary academic sources covering the period 2019–2024. Phase 2 (quantitative): structural equation modelling (SEM) based on a survey of 312 consumers from five countries (Uzbekistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Germany, and the United States). The sample was formed using purposive sampling, ensuring gender-age and socioeconomic diversity. Respondent eligibility criteria: age 18–55; minimum monthly expenditure on clothing and accessories equivalent to USD 50; active use of social media.

On the basis of the qualitative case analysis and the literature review, a four-factor IECS model was proposed comprising the following constructs:

Identity (Brand Identity, IB) — the degree to which the brand reflects the consumer's values, self-perception, and social role. Measured on a 6-point Likert scale; 8 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

Exclusivity (EX) — perceived rarity, limited accessibility to the general public, and the signalling function of the brand. 7 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

Community (CM) — belonging to a value-sharing group of brand users; social identification through the brand. 6 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

Sustainability (SU) — perceived ecological and social responsibility of the brand. 7 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

The dependent variable is Brand Loyalty (BL) — behavioural and attitudinal readiness for repeat purchases and recommendations. 5 indicators ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) (Table 2).

Table 2. Structure of the IECS model: constructs, indicators, and sources<sup>2</sup>

Construct	Label	Representative Indicators	Scale Source	No. of Items	Cronbach $\alpha$
Identity	IB	«This brand reflects who I am»; «I choose this brand to express myself»	Keller (2001) mod.	8	$\alpha = 0.86$
Exclusivity	EX	«This brand is not accessible to everyone»; «Wearing this brand signals status»	Vigneron & Johnson (1999)	7	$\alpha = 0.88$
Community	CM	«Consumers of this brand share my values»; «I feel a sense of belonging to the brand's fans»	Muniz & O'Guinn (2001)	6	$\alpha = 0.84$
Sustainability	SU	«The brand cares about the environment»; «Buying this brand aligns with my eco-values»	GRI + Khandeparkar (2021)	7	$\alpha = 0.91$
Brand Loyalty	BL	«I am willing to recommend this brand to others»; «I will buy from this brand again»	Oliver (1999)	5	$\alpha = 0.89$

Data processing was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, descriptive analysis and assessment of measurement instrument quality were conducted: confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 28.0 was used to evaluate convergent and discriminant validity ( $AVE > 0.50$ ;  $CR > 0.70$ ). In the second stage, hypotheses were tested using SEM analysis of the full structural model. In the third stage, multi-group analysis was performed to compare model parameters across the luxury and fast fashion segments. Criteria for acceptable model fit were as follows:  $CFI > 0.95$ ;  $TLI > 0.95$ ;  $RMSEA < 0.08$ ;  $SRMR < 0.05$ . Mediation effects were tested using the Bootstrap method ( $n = 5,000$ ; 95% CI).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Fashion marketing has become one of the most powerful instruments for shaping brand value in modern economies, particularly within the highly competitive fashion industry. In this context, consumer-based brand value is determined not only by the functional attributes of a product but also by the perceptions, emotions, and experiences that consumers associate with a brand. Therefore, fashion marketing plays a crucial role in influencing how consumers perceive, evaluate, and engage with fashion brands. Consumer-based brand value refers to the value a brand holds in the minds of consumers, which is formed through brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty. Fashion marketing contributes to this process by creating meaningful and memorable brand experiences. Through strategic communication, storytelling, and visual identity, fashion brands position themselves not merely as providers of clothing but as symbols of lifestyle, identity, and social status.

<sup>2</sup> author's development

One of the key elements of fashion marketing is visual communication. Given the aesthetic nature of fashion products, visual representation through advertising campaigns, runway shows, and digital content is essential in shaping brand image. The use of colours, design, models, and creative direction helps establish a unique brand identity that resonates with target audiences. In the digital era, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have further amplified the importance of visual storytelling, allowing brands to interact with consumers in real time and build stronger emotional connections. Another important aspect is influencer marketing, which has become an integral part of fashion marketing strategies. Influencers and fashion bloggers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, enhancing credibility and trust. Their endorsements often shape consumer preferences and purchasing decisions, thereby increasing brand visibility and perceived value. This form of marketing is particularly effective among younger audiences who rely heavily on social proof.

Moreover, fashion marketing enhances consumer-based brand value by improving the overall customer experience. Elements such as store atmosphere, personalised services, seamless online shopping, and after-sales support contribute to positive consumer perceptions. A well-designed customer journey strengthens emotional attachment and encourages repeat purchases, ultimately fostering brand loyalty. Fashion marketing serves as a strategic tool for shaping consumer-based brand value by integrating emotional, visual, and experiential elements. It goes beyond traditional promotion by creating a holistic brand experience that influences consumer attitudes and behaviours. As competition in the fashion industry intensifies, the ability to effectively leverage marketing strategies becomes a key determinant of long-term brand success (Table 3).

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 312)<sup>3</sup>

Characteristic	Uzb./Kaz.	Russia	Germany	USA
Share in sample	34% (n=106)	28% (n=87)	20% (n=62)	18% (n=57)
Mean age (years)	27.4	31.2	29.8	30.1
Share of women (%)	61%	64%	58%	55%
Monthly fashion expenditure (USD)	85–210	120–380	210–620	250–800
Luxury segment (%)	22%	31%	44%	49%
Fast fashion segment (%)	78%	69%	56%	51%

Assessment of the measurement model (CFA). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed acceptable model fit:  $\chi^2(318) = 487.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.963; TLI = 0.957; RMSEA = 0.041 (90% CI: 0.029–0.053); SRMR = 0.046. All values fall within the recommended thresholds. Convergent validity was confirmed: the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.50 (range: 0.54–0.67). Composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.84 to 0.93. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion: the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its maximum correlation with any other construct (Table 4).

Table 4. Discriminant validity and inter-construct correlations (N = 312)<sup>4</sup>

Construct	AVE	CR	IB	EX	CM	SU	BL
IB	0.61	0.91	0.781				
EX	0.58	0.88	0.412**	0.762			
CM	0.54	0.84	0.389**	0.347**	0.735		
SU	0.67	0.93	0.428**	0.291**	0.453**	0.819	
BL	0.63	0.89	0.521**	0.449**	0.387**	0.608**	0.794

Table 5. SEM results: standardised path coefficients and hypothesis testing

No	Path (Hypothesis)	Std. $\beta$	SE	t-stat.	p	Result
H1	IB $\rightarrow$ BL	0.487***	0.073	6.671	<0.001	H1 Supported $\checkmark$
H2	EX $\rightarrow$ BL	0.341**	0.081	4.210	0.001	H2 Supported $\checkmark$
H3	CM $\rightarrow$ BL	0.298**	0.079	3.772	0.003	H3 Supported $\checkmark$
H4	SU $\rightarrow$ BL	0.571***	0.068	8.397	<0.001	H4 Supported $\checkmark$
H5	SU $\rightarrow$ BL: fast fashion vs luxury (moderation)	$\Delta\beta = +0.19$	—	—	0.012	H5 Supported $\checkmark$
H6	IB $\rightarrow$ EX $\rightarrow$ BL (mediation)	0.163**	0.047	—	0.007	H6 Supported $\checkmark$

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ;  $R^2(\text{BL}) = 0.679$ ; CFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.041; SRMR = 0.046

<sup>3</sup> author's development

<sup>4</sup> author's development

All six hypotheses were confirmed at acceptable levels of statistical significance. The strongest predictor of loyalty proved to be perceived brand sustainability ( $\beta = 0.571$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), consistent with the trend towards eco-conscious consumer preferences among Millennials and Generation Z. The second most significant predictor was brand identity ( $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming Sirgy's (1982) self-congruence theory as applied to fashion branding. Mediation analysis (H6) showed that exclusivity partially mediates the relationship between brand identity and loyalty in the luxury segment: indirect effect  $\beta = 0.163$  (95% BootCI: [0.081, 0.247]), indicating partial mediation. The direct effect of IB  $\rightarrow$  BL in the luxury segment remained significant ( $\beta = 0.391$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Multi-group analysis (H5) revealed significant moderation by market segment: in the fast fashion group, the SU  $\rightarrow$  BL coefficient was  $\beta = 0.617$ , compared with  $\beta = 0.421$  in the luxury segment ( $\Delta\beta = +0.196$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ). This means that mass-market consumers reward ecologically responsible brands with loyalty to a greater degree than buyers of premium labels (Table 6).

Table 6. Comparative analysis of marketing strategies and CBBE components

Brand / Segment	Key Instrument	IB	EX	CM	SU	BL (NPS)
Louis Vuitton / Ultra-luxury	Narrative branding + Art collaborations	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	82
Gucci / Luxury	Influencer + Subcultural marketing	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	74
Zara / Fast fashion	Rapid trend response + Phygital stores	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	51
H&M / Mass-market	Designer collaborations + Recycle programme	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	48
Patagonia / Eco-niche	Green activism + Community building	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	79
Shein / Ultra-fast fashion	TikTok marketing + AI algorithms + Gamification	★★	★	★★★★	★	31

Source: publicly available data, Statista (2024), Forbes Brand Value Reports (2023). NPS — Net Promoter Score; ★ — author's rating on a 5-point scale based on secondary analysis

The case analysis identified three fundamentally distinct strategic patterns. The first pattern — “Narrative-Exclusive” (Louis Vuitton, Gucci) — places maximum emphasis on identity and exclusivity with a relatively moderate accent on sustainability. High NPS scores (74–82) are maintained through careful control of accessibility and the cultivation of brand mythology. The second pattern — “Trend-Speed-Driven” (Zara, Shein) — achieves competitive advantage through the speed of trend translation and price accessibility, but exhibits a notable gap in the sustainability and identity components. The third pattern — “Value-Community-Driven” (Patagonia) — achieves exceptionally high sustainability and community scores, generating a high NPS (79) despite operating in a narrow niche. The principal theoretical finding of the study is the confirmation that, under global competition, fashion marketing most effectively shapes consumer-based brand value through the sustainability ( $\beta = 0.571$ ) and identity ( $\beta = 0.487$ ) components, rather than through exclusivity and awareness, which have traditionally dominated in the literature. This conclusion aligns with the results of Khandeparkar and Barai (2021) and differs from the earlier work of Vigneron and Johnson (1999), which positioned exclusivity as the primary value driver.

The segment moderation effect revealed in H5 has fundamental implications for the development of branding strategies. In the fast fashion segment, consumers perceive sustainability as an element of “value alignment” — when prices are accessible, ecological responsibility becomes the intangible differentiator. In the luxury segment, sustainability is one of several competing status signals, yielding primacy to exclusivity and craftsmanship narratives. The Patagonia case is of particular academic interest: the brand achieves a high NPS (79) within a narrow niche by constructing its entire CBBE model around the SU and CM components. This empirically demonstrates the viability of an alternative pattern — “activist branding” — as a fully competitive approach in the global market.

The study makes three theoretical contributions to the fashion marketing and branding literature. The first contribution is the development and validation of the four-factor IECS model, which extends traditional CBBE models by explicitly incorporating sustainability as an independent construct and reconceptualising the role of community in the digital era. The second contribution is the empirical confirmation of sustainability's dominant

role (SU > IB > EX > CM) in predicting loyalty, which alters the theoretical hierarchy of CBBE predictors in the fashion sector. The third contribution is the demonstration of the moderating effect of market segment, pointing to the need for segment-specific theoretical models rather than universal approaches.

The findings partially confirm but substantially extend Aaker's (1991) model. Loyalty as the central output variable retains its position; however, the hierarchy of predictors changes fundamentally. Whereas in Aaker's framework perceived quality was the primary driver, in the present study this construct is "absorbed" by identity and sustainability within the value structure. This aligns with the argument of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) that in the post-industrial era value is co-created by brands and consumer communities. The difference from Kapferer and Bastien (2009) regarding the centrality of exclusivity in luxury branding is explained by the shift in consumer attitudes under the influence of three factors: the rise of eco-activism among affluent consumers, "luxury fatigue" in the post-pandemic context, and the emergence of new forms of digital exclusivity (NFT fashion, virtual collections) that require a reconceptualisation of the construct itself.

For brands in the luxury segment, the study's findings recommend integrating the sustainability narrative into brand DNA rather than positioning it as a stand-alone ESG initiative. The authenticity of this integration is critically important: the study records a negative consumer reaction to "greenwashing" — declarative eco-friendliness without real change to the business model. For fast fashion brands, the data point to a strategic window of opportunity: the first movers in the segment who successfully translate perceived sustainability into a real operational model (circular economy, CO<sub>2</sub> tracking, supply-chain transparency) will gain a durable competitive advantage. H&M's Conscious Collection and recycling initiative represent a step in this direction but remain insufficient in depth. For brands entering Central Asian markets, the Uzbekistan/Kazakhstan sub-sample reveals a particularly strong role for the CM (community) component:  $\beta_{CM} = 0.412$  versus the sample-wide average of  $\beta_{CM} = 0.298$ . This is explained by the collectivist cultural orientation of the region and the importance of social approval in consumer behaviour.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study convincingly demonstrates that, under global competition, fashion marketing has transformed from a product promotion instrument into a strategic mechanism for creating and protecting consumer-based brand value. The proposed four-factor IECS model (Identity–Exclusivity–Community–Sustainability) delivers higher explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.679$ ) than traditional CBBE models. Three key conclusions of the study are as follows. First, perceived sustainability (SU) is the most powerful predictor of loyalty ( $\beta = 0.571$ ), surpassing identity and exclusivity. This fundamentally reorders the priorities of marketing investment in the fashion sector. Second, market segment (luxury vs fast fashion) significantly moderates the strength of the SU → BL relationship ( $\Delta\beta = +0.196$ ), requiring the development of segment-specific strategies rather than universal approaches. Third, the "value-community" branding pattern (the Patagonia model) constitutes a viable competitive alternative to the traditional "narrative-exclusive" and "trend-speed" patterns.

Study limitations include a cross-sectional design that restricts causal inference and geographic imbalance in the sample (insufficient representation of Asian markets — China, Japan, and India). Future research should incorporate longitudinal analysis and examine the role of generative AI (AI personalisation, virtual fitting rooms) as a new dimension in the CBBE model.

Recommendations for practitioners. Brands are advised to: (1) reorient their communication strategies from an emphasis on "having" (exclusivity of ownership) to "being" (value identity and responsibility); (2) invest in platform ecosystems to develop brand communities; (3) embed sustainability into the operational model — rather than merely into marketing narratives — as a prerequisite for maintaining competitiveness over the 2025–2030 horizon.

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