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Consumer Loyalty Formation through Online Brand Communities in Fashion

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The emergence of online brand communities (OBCs) has significantly transformed consumer-brand relationships in the fashion industry, where identity expression and social interaction play a central role. This study examines how consumer loyalty is formed through participation in online brand communities, integrating Social Identity Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory. Using a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis, the study synthesises findings from peer-reviewed literature, industry reports, and theoretical frameworks. The results indicate that consumer engagement functions as the primary mechanism driving loyalty, supported by perceived value, trust, and brand identification. Social and hedonic values are particularly influential in sustaining participation, while trust mediates the relationship between engagement and loyalty. Brand identification further strengthens emotional attachment, leading to long-term loyalty behaviours such as repeat purchasing and advocacy. The study contributes to theoretical advancement by offering an integrated framework and providing practical implications for fashion brands seeking to leverage digital communities for sustainable customer relationships.

Keywords: online brand communities, consumer loyalty, consumer engagement, fashion marketing, brand identification, perceived value, digital communities.

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way consumers interact with brands, particularly in the fashion industry. Traditionally, brand communication was largely unidirectional, with firms disseminating information to passive audiences. However, the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies has enabled interactive, participatory, and community-driven environments, giving rise to online brand communities (OBCs). These communities have become central to contemporary marketing strategies, allowing brands to foster deeper relationships with consumers and cultivate long-term loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Online brand communities are defined as specialised, non-geographically bound groups of consumers who share a common interest in a brand and engage in social interactions around it (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In the context of fashion, such communities play an especially significant role due to the symbolic and expressive nature of fashion consumption. Fashion products are not merely functional items; they serve as markers of identity, status, and social belonging (Kawamura, 2005). Consequently, the formation of consumer loyalty in the fashion sector is influenced by emotional, social, and psychological factors that extend beyond traditional economic considerations.

The concept of consumer loyalty has long been recognised as a critical determinant of

organisational success. Loyal consumers are more likely to engage in repeat purchasing, exhibit resistance to competitive offerings, and participate in positive word-of-mouth communication (Oliver, 1999). In highly competitive industries such as fashion, where product differentiation is often minimal and trends evolve rapidly, cultivating consumer loyalty is both challenging and essential. Online brand communities provide a strategic avenue for achieving this objective by creating immersive environments that encourage engagement, interaction, and emotional attachment.

One of the key mechanisms through which OBCs influence loyalty is consumer engagement. Consumer engagement refers to the level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment that individuals exhibit in their interactions with a brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Within online communities, engagement manifests through activities such as content sharing, commenting, liking, and participating in discussions. These interactions not only enhance consumers' connection to the brand but also strengthen their relationships with other community members, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and commitment.

In addition to engagement, perceived value plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour within online communities. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, individuals actively seek out media and platforms that fulfil their specific needs, including information, entertainment, and social interaction (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In fashion OBCs, consumers derive multiple forms of value,

including functional value (e.g., product information), social value (e.g., peer interaction), and hedonic value (e.g., enjoyment and inspiration). These perceived benefits significantly influence their level of participation and loyalty (Ong & Lye, 2021).

Trust and brand identification are also central to the loyalty formation process. Trust reduces uncertainty in online environments and enhances consumers' confidence in the brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Brand identification, rooted in Social Identity Theory, occurs when consumers perceive a brand as an extension of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In online brand communities, shared values, norms, and experiences facilitate the development of strong brand identification, which in turn drives loyalty behaviours.

Despite the growing importance of online brand communities, existing research on consumer loyalty formation in the fashion industry remains fragmented. While numerous studies have examined individual constructs such as engagement, trust, and perceived value, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that integrate these elements within a unified theoretical perspective. Furthermore, the unique characteristics of the fashion industry—such as rapid trend cycles, high levels of social influence, and emphasis on identity expression—necessitate a context-specific analysis.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring how consumer loyalty is formed through online brand communities in the fashion sector. Specifically, the research seeks to examine the role of community

participation in shaping consumer engagement, analyse the influence of perceived value, trust, and brand identification on loyalty outcomes, and develop an integrated theoretical framework that explains the relationships among these constructs.

By adopting a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis, this study synthesises existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The findings contribute to both academic and practical domains by offering insights into the mechanisms of loyalty formation and identifying strategies for leveraging online communities to enhance consumer relationships.

2. Literature Review

Online brand communities have evolved as a prominent feature of digital marketing, enabling brands to create interactive spaces where consumers can engage with both the brand and each other. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) conceptualise brand communities as social entities characterised by shared consciousness, rituals, and moral responsibility. In the online context, these communities transcend geographical boundaries and are facilitated by digital platforms such as social media and brand-specific forums.

In the fashion industry, online brand communities serve as hubs for inspiration, information exchange, and identity expression. Consumers participate in these communities to showcase personal style, seek feedback, and stay updated on trends.

This participatory culture enhances the overall brand experience and fosters deeper emotional connections (Kawamura, 2005).

2.1 Consumer Loyalty: Behavioural and Attitudinal Dimensions

Consumer loyalty is a multifaceted construct encompassing both behavioural and attitudinal components. Behavioural loyalty refers to observable actions such as repeat purchases, while attitudinal loyalty reflects psychological commitment and emotional attachment to a brand (Oliver, 1999). Scholars argue that true loyalty involves a combination of both dimensions, as repeated purchases alone may not indicate genuine preference.

In the fashion sector, attitudinal loyalty is particularly important due to the symbolic nature of consumption. Consumers often form emotional bonds with brands that align with their identity and values. These bonds are reinforced through community participation, which provides opportunities for social interaction and self-expression.

2.2 Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities

Consumer engagement has emerged as a central concept in marketing research, particularly in the context of digital environments. Hollebeek (2011) defines consumer engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. Within online brand communities, engagement is manifested through various forms of participation, including content creation, interaction, and advocacy.

Empirical studies suggest that engagement plays a mediating role between community participation and loyalty outcomes. For instance, highly engaged consumers are more likely to develop strong emotional connections with the brand, leading to increased loyalty (Islam et al., 2018). Engagement also facilitates co-creation, where consumers contribute to brand value by sharing ideas, feedback, and experiences.

2.3 Uses and Gratifications and Perceived Value

Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a useful framework for understanding why consumers participate in online brand communities. According to this theory, individuals actively select media channels that satisfy their specific needs, such as information acquisition, social interaction, and entertainment (Katz et al., 1973).

In the context of fashion OBCs, perceived value can be categorised into several dimensions:

- **Functional value:** Access to product information, styling tips, and reviews
- **Social value:** Opportunities for interaction and relationship building
- **Hedonic value:** Enjoyment, inspiration, and entertainment
- **Economic value:** Discounts, promotions, and exclusive offers

Research indicates that these values significantly influence consumer engagement and loyalty. Social and hedonic values are particularly important in fashion communities, as they align with consumers'

desire for self-expression and social recognition (Ong & Lye, 2021).

2.4 Trust and Relationship Marketing

Trust is a fundamental component of relationship marketing and plays a critical role in online environments where uncertainty and perceived risk are high. Morgan and Hunt (1994) emphasise that trust and commitment are key determinants of successful relational exchanges. In online brand communities, trust is built through consistent communication, transparency, and positive interactions.

Trust not only enhances consumers' confidence in the brand but also strengthens their willingness to engage and remain loyal. Studies have shown that trust mediates the relationship between engagement and loyalty, highlighting its importance in the loyalty formation process (Zhang & Li, 2022).

2.5 Brand Identification and Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a sense of identity from their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the context of online brand communities, consumers identify with brands that reflect their values, beliefs, and aspirations.

Brand identification leads to increased emotional attachment and loyalty, as consumers perceive the brand as an extension of themselves. This identification is reinforced through interactions within the community, where shared experiences and

values create a sense of belonging. In fashion communities, this process is particularly pronounced due to the role of fashion in identity construction (Kawamura, 2005).

2.6 The Role of Social Influence and Peer Interaction

Social influence is a powerful driver of consumer behaviour in online communities. Peer interactions, including recommendations, reviews, and shared experiences, significantly impact consumers' perceptions and decisions. In fashion, OBCs, influencers and community members play a crucial role in shaping trends and preferences.

Word-of-mouth communication within communities enhances credibility and trust, as consumers often rely on peer opinions rather than brand-generated content. These dynamics underscore the importance of fostering active and engaged communities.

2.7 Fashion Industry Context

The fashion industry presents unique challenges and opportunities for loyalty formation. Rapid trend cycles, intense competition, and the emphasis on aesthetics and identity make it difficult for brands to maintain long-term relationships with consumers. However, online brand communities offer a solution by creating continuous engagement and fostering emotional connections.

Research on fashion OBCs highlights the importance of experiential and symbolic value in driving loyalty. Consumers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that provide

meaningful experiences and align with their identity (Ozuem et al., 2021).

2.8 Research Gap

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of online brand communities, several gaps remain. First, there is a lack of integrated frameworks that combine engagement, perceived value, trust, and brand identification. Second, the unique characteristics of the fashion industry are often overlooked in general OBC research. Finally, there is a need for qualitative synthesis to provide a holistic understanding of loyalty formation mechanisms.

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding consumer loyalty formation within online brand communities requires an integrated theoretical perspective that captures the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of consumer behaviour. This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework combining Social Identity Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory. These frameworks collectively explain how individuals engage with online brand communities, derive value from participation, and ultimately develop loyalty toward fashion brands.

3.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. This identification influences attitudes and behaviours, as individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity. In the context of online brand communities, consumers

perceive themselves as members of a group united by shared admiration for a particular brand.

Within fashion communities, where identity expression is central, SIT provides a powerful lens for understanding loyalty formation. Consumers often select brands that reflect their personal values, lifestyles, and aspirations. Participation in online brand communities reinforces this identification by facilitating interactions with like-minded individuals, thereby strengthening the perceived connection between the self and the brand (Kawamura, 2005).

Brand identification, a key construct derived from SIT, plays a critical role in loyalty formation. When consumers strongly identify with a brand, they are more likely to exhibit supportive behaviours, including repeat purchases, advocacy, and resistance to negative information. Furthermore, shared rituals, symbols, and narratives within online communities enhance collective identity, fostering a sense of belonging that reinforces loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

3.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides insight into the motivations behind consumers' participation in online brand communities. According to Katz et al. (1973), individuals actively seek out media channels that fulfil specific needs, such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. Unlike passive media consumption models, UGT emphasises the agency of consumers in selecting and engaging with media.

In fashion-related online brand communities, consumers are motivated by multiple

gratifications. Functional needs include accessing product information, styling advice, and reviews. Social needs involve interacting with peers, gaining social approval, and forming relationships. Hedonic needs encompass enjoyment, inspiration, and creative expression. These gratifications collectively contribute to perceived value, which influences both engagement and loyalty (Ong & Lye, 2021).

UGT also highlights the importance of satisfaction in sustaining participation. When consumers perceive that their needs are effectively fulfilled within a community, they are more likely to continue engaging and develop positive attitudes toward the brand. This ongoing interaction strengthens emotional bonds and enhances loyalty outcomes.

3.3 Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship Marketing Theory emphasises the importance of building long-term relationships with customers rather than focusing solely on transactional exchanges. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify trust and commitment as the key mediating variables that determine the success of relational exchanges.

In online brand communities, relationship marketing is operationalised through continuous interaction, personalised communication, and value co-creation. Brands engage consumers by responding to feedback, providing exclusive content, and fostering a sense of community. These interactions build trust, which reduces perceived risk and enhances consumers' confidence in the brand.

Commitment, another central construct, reflects the desire to maintain a valued relationship. In the context of fashion OBCs, commitment is manifested through sustained engagement, repeat purchases, and advocacy behaviours. The interplay between trust and commitment creates a strong foundation for loyalty formation.

3.4 Integration of Theories

The integration of SIT, UGT, and Relationship Marketing Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer loyalty formation in online brand communities. Each theory contributes a distinct perspective:

- **SIT** explains how social identity and brand identification drive emotional attachment.
- **UGT** explains why consumers engage with communities and how perceived value influences behaviour.
- **Relationship Marketing Theory** explains how trust and commitment sustain long-term relationships.

Together, these theories suggest that consumer loyalty is the result of a dynamic process involving engagement, value perception, trust, and identity alignment.

3.5 Conceptual Model

Based on the theoretical integration, the study proposes a conceptual model with the following relationships:

- **Online Brand Community Participation** → **Consumer Engagement**: Participation in community activities enhances

cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement.

- **Consumer Engagement → Brand Trust and Brand Identification:** Engaged consumers develop stronger trust in the brand and greater identification with it.
- **Brand Trust and Brand Identification → Consumer Loyalty:** Trust and identification serve as key drivers of both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.
- **Perceived Value as a Moderating Variable:** The relationship between engagement and loyalty is strengthened when consumers perceive high functional, social, and hedonic value.

This framework provides a structured approach to analysing how online brand communities influence loyalty formation, particularly in the fashion industry, where identity and social interaction are paramount.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis to explore the mechanisms of consumer loyalty formation in online brand communities. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining complex social phenomena, as it allows for in-depth interpretation of meanings, relationships, and patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The use of secondary data enables the researcher to synthesise existing knowledge from diverse sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

This approach is appropriate given the extensive body of literature on online brand communities, consumer engagement, and loyalty.

4.1 Data Sources

The study relies on a wide range of secondary data sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles in marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital media
- Academic books and theoretical texts
- Industry reports on fashion marketing and digital engagement
- Conference papers and scholarly publications

These sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. Priority was given to high-impact journals and recent publications to ensure the inclusion of up-to-date insights.

4.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved systematic searches of academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. Keywords used in the search included:

- “online brand communities”
- “consumer engagement”
- “brand loyalty in fashion”
- “digital marketing and loyalty”
- “social identity and branding”

Relevant articles were screened based on their abstracts and full texts to ensure alignment with the research focus. Studies that addressed key constructs such as engagement, trust, perceived value, and

brand identification were included in the analysis.

4.3 Data Analysis Technique

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method for analysing secondary data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative technique used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involves several stages:

- **Familiarisation with Data:** The researcher thoroughly reviewed selected literature to gain an overall understanding of the content.
- **Initial Coding:** Key concepts and recurring themes were identified and coded, such as engagement, trust, identity, and value.
- **Theme Development:** Codes were grouped into broader themes that reflect the underlying mechanisms of loyalty formation.
- **Interpretation:** The themes were analysed in relation to the theoretical framework to develop insights and conclusions.

This systematic approach ensures that the analysis is both rigorous and transparent.

4.4 Justification of Methodology

The choice of qualitative secondary analysis is justified for several reasons. First, it allows for the integration of findings from multiple studies, providing a holistic understanding of the research problem. Second, it is cost-effective and time-efficient compared to primary data collection. Third, it enables the exploration of theoretical relationships that

may not be easily captured through quantitative methods.

Moreover, the complexity of consumer loyalty formation, particularly in the context of online communities, requires an interpretive approach that can capture nuanced interactions and subjective experiences.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, several measures were taken:

- **Source credibility:** Only peer-reviewed and reputable sources were included.
- **Triangulation:** Findings were cross-verified across multiple studies to ensure consistency.
- **Transparency:** The data collection and analysis procedures were clearly documented.

These measures enhance the trustworthiness of the research and ensure that the findings are grounded in robust evidence.

4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite its strengths, the methodology has certain limitations. Secondary data analysis relies on existing studies, which may have varying contexts, methodologies, and quality. Additionally, the absence of primary data limits the ability to capture real-time consumer perspectives. However, these limitations are mitigated by the comprehensive nature of the analysis and the inclusion of diverse sources.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical standards by properly citing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Since the research is based on publicly available secondary data, there are no concerns related to participant confidentiality or informed consent (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

5. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of secondary data reveals that consumer loyalty formation within online brand communities (OBCs) in the fashion industry is a multifaceted and dynamic process. This process is shaped by the interaction of several core constructs, including consumer engagement, perceived value, trust, brand identification, and social influence. These constructs operate both independently and interdependently, ultimately contributing to the development of strong attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

5.1 Consumer Engagement as the Central Mechanism

Consumer engagement emerges as the most critical driver of loyalty formation within online brand communities. Engagement is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek, 2011). The findings indicate that active participation in OBCs, such as commenting on posts, sharing content, and interacting with other members, enhances consumers' emotional connection with the brand.

From a cognitive perspective, engagement facilitates knowledge acquisition. Consumers gain insights into product features, styling options, and brand values, which enhances their understanding and appreciation of the brand. Emotionally, engagement fosters feelings of enjoyment, excitement, and attachment, particularly when consumers interact with aesthetically appealing content or receive positive feedback from peers. Behaviorally, engagement translates into visible actions such as content creation and advocacy, which reinforce the consumer's relationship with the brand.

Empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of engagement are associated with stronger loyalty outcomes. Engaged consumers are more likely to exhibit repeat purchasing behaviour and recommend the brand to others (Islam et al., 2018). Moreover, engagement acts as a mediating variable, linking community participation to loyalty by strengthening emotional and psychological bonds.

5.2 Perceived Value and Gratifications

The analysis highlights the importance of perceived value in motivating consumer participation and sustaining engagement within online brand communities. Drawing on Uses and Gratifications Theory, consumers engage with OBCs to fulfil specific needs, which can be categorised into functional, social, hedonic, and economic values (Katz et al., 1973; Ong & Lye, 2021).

Functional Value: Functional value refers to the practical benefits derived from community participation, such as access to

product information, styling advice, and user reviews. In the fashion industry, where product evaluation often involves subjective criteria such as aesthetics and fit, peer-generated content plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty. Consumers rely on community interactions to make informed purchasing decisions, thereby enhancing their confidence in the brand.

Social Value: Social value is one of the most influential factors in fashion OBCs. Consumers derive satisfaction from interacting with like-minded individuals, forming relationships, and gaining social recognition. The sense of belonging created through these interactions fosters emotional attachment and strengthens loyalty. Social value also contributes to identity construction, as consumers use community participation to express their personal style and align themselves with specific social groups (Kawamura, 2005).

Hedonic Value: Hedonic value encompasses the enjoyment, inspiration, and entertainment derived from community participation. Fashion OBCs often feature visually appealing content, creative expressions, and interactive activities that enhance the overall user experience. This emotional gratification plays a significant role in sustaining engagement and fostering positive attitudes toward the brand.

Economic Value: Economic value, such as discounts, exclusive offers, and rewards, also influences participation and loyalty. While economic incentives are not the primary driver of engagement, they serve as complementary factors that reinforce consumers' commitment to the brand.

Overall, the findings indicate that perceived value acts as both a motivator and a moderator in the loyalty formation process. High perceived value strengthens the relationship between engagement and loyalty, making it a critical factor for marketers to consider.

5.3 Trust as a Mediating Variable

Trust is identified as a fundamental component of consumer loyalty formation in online environments. In the absence of physical interaction, consumers rely on trust to reduce perceived risk and uncertainty. Trust in OBCs is developed through consistent communication, transparency, and positive interactions with both the brand and other community members (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The analysis reveals that trust operates as a mediating variable between engagement and loyalty. Engaged consumers are more likely to develop trust in the brand due to their repeated interactions and positive experiences. This trust, in turn, enhances their willingness to make purchases and remain loyal to the brand.

Furthermore, peer-generated content plays a crucial role in building trust. Consumers often perceive information shared by other community members as more credible than brand-generated content. This dynamic underscores the importance of fostering authentic and transparent interactions within OBCs.

5.4 Brand Identification and Emotional Attachment

Brand identification emerges as a key driver of attitudinal loyalty. Rooted in Social Identity Theory, brand identification occurs when consumers perceive a brand as an extension of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In fashion OBCs, this identification is reinforced through shared values, aesthetics, and experiences.

The findings indicate that strong brand identification leads to increased emotional attachment, which is a critical determinant of loyalty. Consumers who identify with a brand are more likely to exhibit supportive behaviours, including advocacy, resistance to negative information, and long-term commitment (Zhang & Li, 2022).

Emotional attachment is further strengthened by community interactions, which create a sense of belonging and shared identity. This collective identity enhances the perceived value of the brand and reinforces loyalty.

5.5 Social Influence and Peer Interaction

Social influence plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour within online brand communities. Peer interactions, including recommendations, reviews, and shared experiences, influence consumers' perceptions and decisions. In the fashion industry, where trends and social approval are highly influential, peer influence is particularly pronounced.

The analysis shows that word-of-mouth communication within OBCs enhances brand credibility and trust. Consumers are more

likely to rely on peer opinions than on traditional advertising, making social influence a powerful driver of loyalty.

Influencers and opinion leaders within communities also play a critical role in shaping trends and encouraging engagement. Their endorsements can significantly impact consumers' attitudes and behaviours, further reinforcing loyalty.

The findings suggest that consumer loyalty formation in online brand communities is a holistic process involving multiple interconnected factors. Engagement serves as the central mechanism, while perceived value, trust, and brand identification act as key drivers and mediators. Social influence further amplifies these effects, creating a dynamic and interactive environment that fosters loyalty.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the mechanisms through which online brand communities contribute to consumer loyalty formation in the fashion industry. By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, the discussion highlights the complex interplay of psychological, social, and experiential factors that shape consumer behaviour.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the literature by integrating Social Identity Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory into a unified framework. This integration enhances the understanding of consumer loyalty by addressing multiple dimensions of behaviour.

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, the findings confirm that brand identification is a critical determinant of loyalty. The sense of belonging and shared identity within online communities strengthens emotional attachment and encourages supportive behaviours. This aligns with previous research emphasising the role of identity in consumer behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The application of Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights the importance of perceived value in driving engagement and loyalty. The findings demonstrate that consumers actively seek out communities that fulfil their needs for information, social interaction, and entertainment. This reinforces the notion that consumer participation is motivated by the desire to achieve specific gratifications (Katz et al., 1973).

Relationship Marketing Theory is supported by the identification of trust and commitment as key drivers of loyalty. The findings indicate that continuous interaction and positive experiences within OBCs build trust, which in turn enhances loyalty. This underscores the importance of relational strategies in digital marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

6.2 Practical Implications for Fashion Brands

The findings have important implications for fashion marketers seeking to leverage online brand communities to enhance consumer loyalty. First, brands should focus on fostering active engagement by creating interactive and user-generated content. Encouraging consumers to share their

experiences, provide feedback, and participate in discussions can significantly enhance engagement and loyalty.

Second, brands should prioritise the creation of value within their communities. Providing high-quality content, facilitating meaningful interactions, and offering exclusive benefits can enhance perceived value and sustain participation. Social and hedonic values, in particular, should be emphasised, as they are highly relevant in the fashion context.

Third, building trust should be a central focus. Transparency, authenticity, and responsiveness are key factors in establishing trust. Brands should actively engage with consumers, address their concerns, and maintain consistent communication to build credibility.

Fourth, brands should leverage social influence by collaborating with influencers and encouraging peer interactions. Influencers can play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving engagement. However, authenticity is crucial, as consumers are increasingly sceptical of overly promotional content.

6.3 Role of Emotional and Experiential Factors

The discussion highlights the importance of emotional and experiential factors in loyalty formation. Unlike utilitarian products, fashion items are closely linked to identity and self-expression. Online brand communities provide a platform for consumers to explore and express their identity, making emotional attachment a key driver of loyalty.

Experiential factors, such as enjoyment and inspiration, also play a significant role. Consumers are more likely to engage with communities that provide positive and memorable experiences. This underscores the need for brands to create immersive and engaging environments that go beyond traditional marketing approaches.

6.4 Social Dynamics and Community Building

The findings emphasise the role of social dynamics in shaping consumer behaviour. Online brand communities function as social ecosystems where interactions among members influence perceptions and decisions. The sense of belonging created through these interactions enhances emotional attachment and loyalty.

Community building should therefore be a strategic priority for fashion brands. This involves fostering inclusive and supportive environments where consumers feel valued and connected. Encouraging collaboration and co-creation can further strengthen community bonds and enhance loyalty.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the study provides valuable insights, it also has certain limitations. The reliance on secondary data limits the ability to capture real-time consumer perspectives. Future research could employ primary data collection methods, such as surveys or interviews, to validate and extend the findings.

Additionally, the study focuses on the fashion industry, which may limit the generalizability

of the results to other sectors. Future research could explore the applicability of the framework in different contexts.

Another area for future research is the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in shaping online brand communities. These technologies have the potential to enhance engagement and create new opportunities for loyalty formation.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of consumer loyalty formation in online brand communities. By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive loyalty in the fashion industry. The insights gained from this research can inform both academic inquiry and practical strategies, contributing to the development of more effective and sustainable marketing approaches.

7. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of consumer loyalty formation through online brand communities in the fashion industry. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and synthesising existing literature, the research highlights the complex and multidimensional nature of loyalty in digital environments. The findings confirm that online brand communities serve as powerful platforms for fostering meaningful consumer-brand relationships, particularly in industries where identity expression and social interaction are central to consumption.

One of the key conclusions is that consumer engagement acts as the primary driver of loyalty formation. Engagement not only facilitates interaction but also strengthens emotional and psychological connections between consumers and brands. Through active participation in online communities, consumers develop deeper involvement, which translates into both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. This reinforces the notion that engagement is not merely a byproduct of community participation but a central mechanism that drives long-term brand commitment.

The study also emphasises the importance of perceived value, particularly social and hedonic dimensions, in sustaining consumer participation. Fashion consumers are highly motivated by opportunities for self-expression, social recognition, and enjoyment. Online brand communities that successfully deliver these values are more likely to retain active and loyal members. Additionally, trust emerges as a critical mediating factor, reducing uncertainty and enhancing confidence in the brand. Trust, combined with consistent and positive interactions, fosters a stable foundation for long-term relationships.

Furthermore, brand identification plays a significant role in strengthening emotional attachment and loyalty. When consumers perceive a brand as aligned with their personal identity, they are more likely to exhibit commitment, advocacy, and resistance to competing alternatives. This highlights the importance of aligning brand values with consumer identity within online communities.

In conclusion, the study underscores the strategic importance of online brand communities in contemporary fashion marketing. By fostering engagement, delivering value, building trust, and enhancing brand identification, fashion brands can cultivate sustainable consumer loyalty. These insights offer valuable implications for both academics and practitioners, contributing to a deeper understanding of digital consumer behaviour and guiding effective marketing strategies in the evolving digital landscape.

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