



Who Are Fashion Brand Fans? An Investigation of Antecedents and Outcomes of Brand Commitment

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Introduction/Significance. Strong emotional bonds between consumers and brands lead consumers to be involved, committed, and dedicated to brands (Fournier, 1998). These involved and committed consumers exhibit an intense level of loyalty behavior that remains regardless of the brand's performance and/or situational influences (Oliver, 1999). Thus, manufacturers and retailers that provide consumers with self-reflective branded products (e.g., apparel, accessories) that enable consumers to develop affective bonds may garner more emotional loyalty than retailers and manufacturers that provide branded commodities (e.g., gasoline, bleach).

Pimentel and Reynolds (2004) used the term consumer devotion to describe an intense level of loyalty to brands that can be understood by examining the behavior of fans and the concept of fanaticism. Understanding fanatic consumers and their behavior toward brands is important because these consumers are unique in that their interest in a brand is self-sustaining (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004) and they are a consumer group that exhibits the ultimate level of brand loyalty.

Previous researchers' research efforts on understanding the characteristics of these consumers as well as the behaviors that these fans engaged in have revealed several proposed relationships that have not been tested on a large scale with diverse individuals. Thus, a model that proposes antecedents and outcomes of brand commitment as well as explains the behaviors of brand fans within a fashion brand context was developed. Specifically, the research objectives were to investigate 1) whether individual attributes (i.e., need to belong, materialism) and brand-related attributes (i.e., brand consciousness, brand engagement in self-concept, relationship investment) were related to a fan's commitment to a fashion brand, and 2) whether a fan's commitment to a fashion brand was related to behavioral outcomes (i.e., behavioral loyalty, consumer advocacy intention, personal obligation, and willingness to pay premium prices for a brand).

Conceptual framework. Commitment is a construct that has been used to understand employee dedication or loyalty to an organization in the areas of organizational behavior (Allen & Meyer, 1990) as well as consumer behavior and marketing (e.g., Story & Hess, 2006). Commitment has been identified as an important concept of fanaticism and in explanations of the behavior of fans (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004). Committed consumers put forth considerable effort to maintain relationships with specific brands and engage in behaviors beneficial to these brands.

Methods and Participant characteristics. Using an online questionnaire, data was collected from panel members (n = 418) obtained from a marketing research company who self-identified as fans of a specific fashion brand. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 82 with a majority of the participants between 26 and 65 years old (75.9%), were female (53.4%), Caucasian (79.4%),

and college graduates (55.5%). A majority of the participants indicated they were a fan of a clothing brand (68.2%), their fan level was big (37.6%), and that they have been a fan of their favorite brand for more than five years (58.4%).

Results. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. First, a measurement model was estimated to evaluate the appropriateness of item indicators. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the measurement model had acceptable construct validity and reliability. The χ^2 of the measurement model was 1769.26 with 944 *df*. The overall fit statistics ($\chi^2/df = 1.87$, CFI = .94, NNFI = .93, RMSEA = .045, and SRMR = .046) suggested that the measurement model had a good fit. All the factor loadings to their respected constructs were higher than 0.57. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were also supported by the findings that composite reliability for each construct exceeded .70 and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded .50. The results of a structural analysis performed using the maximum likelihood estimation method showed that the structural model exhibited a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 1995.86$ with 976 *df*, $\chi^2/df = 2.045$, CFI = .92, NNFI = .92, RMSEA = .050, and SRMR = .056).

Materialism was positively related to brand consciousness ($\beta = .07$, $t = 10.24$, $p < .001$) and to brand engagement in self-concept ($\beta = .08$, $t = 6.01$, $p < .001$). Need to belong was positively related to materialism ($\beta = .06$, $t = 9.73$, $p < .001$). Brand consciousness ($\beta = .04$, $t = 6.95$, $p < .001$) and brand engagement in self-concept ($\beta = .05$, $t = 15.20$, $p < .001$) were both positively related to relationship investment. Brand consciousness was also positively related to brand engagement in self-concept ($\beta = .07$, $t = 4.00$, $p < .001$). Relationship investment was positively related to commitment to the brand ($\beta = .04$, $t = 17.71$, $p < .001$). Brand commitment was positively related to personal obligation ($\beta = .05$, $t = 13.49$, $p < .001$), willingness to pay premium prices for a brand ($\beta = .05$, $t = 12.63$, $p < .001$), advocacy intention ($\beta = .04$, $t = 9.74$, $p < .001$), and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = .04$, $t = 6.39$, $p < .001$).

Conclusions and Implications. Our results added information relative to understanding the behavior of fans of fashion brands and their brand loyalty. The model also provides an explanation of whether consumers become brand fanatics due to unique personal characteristics which is outside the influence of brand managers or due to the relationships between consumers and brands which can be influenced by brand managers. Understanding fanatics will help brand managers develop improved relationships with their customers and inform the expansion of loyalty programs and other efforts designed to enrich their customers' experiences.

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