

# How can brands become central in the consumers' life?

Consumers'  
life

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39

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Brand centrality is a religion-like brand–customer relationship, which refers to the extent to which a brand is in the center or heart of a consumer's life. While its role in the fast fashion industry is prominent, its drivers and effects have not been comprehensively studied. This study aims to investigate the relationships between three psychological drivers (i.e. fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and self-esteem), one behavioral driver (i.e. the average frequency of shopping), brand centrality and relationship quality in the fast fashion industry.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A survey of 250 fast fashion consumers was conducted and partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data.

**Findings** – The study shows that fashion consciousness and chronic shopping orientation are positively related to brand centrality, whereas self-esteem is negatively related to brand centrality. The findings also show that shopping frequency moderates the relationship between fashion consciousness and brand centrality, and between chronic shopping orientation and brand centrality. *Post hoc* analysis indicates that brand centrality fully mediates the relationship between chronic shopping orientation and relationship quality.

**Originality/value** – This study is one of the first studies to investigate the psychological and behavioral drivers of brand centrality.

**Keywords** Brand centrality, Fast fashion, Psychological driver, Behavioral driver, Relationship quality

**Paper type** Research paper

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## ¿Cómo pueden las marcas ocupar un lugar Central en la vida de los consumidores?

### Resumen

**Objetivo** – La centralidad de la marca es una relación religiosa entre marca y cliente que se refiere al grado en que una marca está en el centro o corazón de la vida de un consumidor. Aunque su papel en la industria de la moda rápida es destacado, sus impulsores y efectos no se han estudiado exhaustivamente. El presente estudio investiga las relaciones entre tres impulsores psicológicos (la conciencia de la moda, la orientación a las compras crónicas y la autoestima), un impulsor conductual (la frecuencia media de las compras), la centralidad de la marca y la calidad de las relaciones en el sector de la moda rápida.

**Diseño** – Se realizó una encuesta a 250 consumidores de moda rápida y se utilizó (PLS-SEM) para analizar los datos.

**Resultados** – El estudio muestra que la conciencia de la moda y la orientación a las compras crónicas están positivamente relacionadas con la centralidad de marca, mientras que la autoestima está negativamente relacionada con la centralidad de marca. Los resultados también muestran que la frecuencia de compra modera la relación entre la conciencia de la moda y la centralidad de marca, y entre la orientación de compra crónica y la centralidad de marca. El análisis post-hoc indica que la centralidad de la marca media totalmente la relación entre la orientación a las compras crónicas y la calidad de las relaciones.

**Originalidad** – Este estudio es uno de los primeros en investigar los impulsores psicológicos y conductuales de la centralidad de marca.

**Palabras clave** Centralidad de marca, Moda rápida, Impulsor psicológico, Impulsor conductual, Calidad de la relación

**Tipo de artículo** Trabajo de investigación

品牌如何成为消费者生活的核心？

### 摘要

**目的** – 品牌中心性是一种类似于宗教的品牌-客户关系，指的是一个品牌在消费者生活中处于中心或核心的程度。虽然它在快速时尚行业中的作用很突出，但它的驱动和影响还没有得到全面的研究。本研究调查了三个心理驱动因素（即时尚意识、长期购物取向和自尊心）、一个行为驱动因素（即平均购物频率）、品牌中心性和快时尚行业的关系质量之间的关系。

**设计/方法/途径** – 对250名快时尚消费者进行了调查，并使用部分最小二乘法-结构方程模型（PLS-SEM）来分析数据。

**结果** – 研究表明，时尚意识和长期购物取向与品牌中心性呈正相关，而自尊心与品牌中心性呈负相关。研究结果还显示，购物频率分别调节了时尚意识以及长期购物导向对品牌中心性的影响。事后分析表明，品牌中心性在长期购物取向和关系质量之间具有完全中介作用。

**原创性/价值** – 本研究是最早研究品牌中心性的心理和行为驱动因素的研究之一。

**关键词** 。品牌中心性, 快时尚, 心理驱动因素, 行为驱动因素, 关系质量

**文章类型** 研究型论文

## 1. Introduction

Fast fashion brands (e.g. Zara, Hennes or H&M) have been characterized by the mass production of products that mimic luxury fashion trends with affordable prices (Mrad *et al.*, 2019). Very different from luxury brands (e.g. Channel, Gucci or Louis Vuitton), the market size of fast fashion brands is much larger than luxury brands. Although suffering from COVID-19 and the global industry revenue declined, the global fast fashion market reached a value of nearly AU\$68,634.9m in 2020 and is predicted to grow to AU\$163,468.5m in 2025 at a rate of 19.0% based on the Research and Markets report (PRNewswire, 2021).

Despite some negative brand images of fast fashion due to some sustainability concerns, fast fashion brands are still well accepted in the contemporary fashion market (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). In fact, luxury brands (e.g. British luxury brand Erdem and French luxury brand Balmain) have been collaborating with fast fashion brands (e.g. H&M)

to expand their profitability, which further enhanced the profitability and brand awareness of fast fashion brands (Mrad *et al.*, 2019).

The main reason for fast fashion brands' popularity is that their main buyers have a strong customer–brand relationship (Rese *et al.*, 2020). Fast fashion brands are attractive to them because of their ability to make dreams of luxury branded designs affordable with faster fashion turnover and a sense of scarcity (Cachon and Swinney, 2011). More importantly, these consumers have a strong religion-like customer–brand relationship (Loureiro, 2020).

Sarkar and Sarkar (2017) and Loureiro (2020) argued that the consumer–fashion brand relationship can be strong as a religion relationship. They used brand centrality (i.e. the perceived importance of the brand in consumers' hearts) to capture such relationships. Brand centrality is highly associated with consumers' positive brand experience (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017) and customer engagement (Loureiro, 2020). Unfortunately, fast fashion brand centrality has not been comprehensively studied, and it is urgent to understand its antecedents and outcomes (Loureiro, 2020).

The existing research on the brand centrality of fashion brands only studied its limited antecedents from the branding perspective such as brand love (Loureiro, 2020) and brand devotion (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017). As brand centrality is still a new construct in the brand relationship domain, further validation of the construct is needed, and more antecedents from other perspectives (i.e. consumers' perspectives) should be understood. To date, little is known about the drivers of brand centrality from the consumers' perspective such as their psychological and behavioral drivers. Research on the outcome of brand centrality is also very limited. Previous research measured the impact of brand centrality on customer engagement (Loureiro, 2020) and brand experience (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017). Little is known about how brand centrality impacts relationship quality. This study aims to investigate the psychological drivers (i.e. fashion consciousness, chronic shopping orientation, self-esteem) and a behavioral factor (i.e. purchase frequency) of brand centrality and how brand centrality impacts relationship quality.

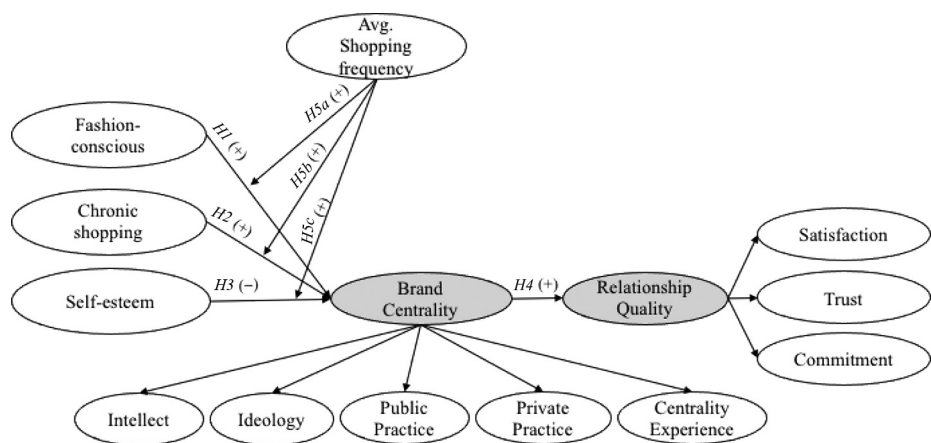
This study will contribute to the literature on branding, consumer psychology and relationship marketing. In the branding domain, the researchers explore the antecedents and outcomes of brand centrality or “centrality of brand” (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017), which was extended from the religion literature, “centrality of religiosity” (Huber and Huber, 2012). In the consumer psychology domain, the researchers enrich the theories on personal traits, regulatory focus and self-esteem by examining the psychological drivers of brand centrality. Adding to the relationship marketing area, consumers' behavioral driver (i.e. purchase frequency) of fast fashion brand centrality will be tested. The results will provide managerial implications in helping managers to create a religion-like customer–brand relationship, which will enhance customer-brand relationship quality.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Based on the research on brand centrality (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017; Loureiro, 2020), the consumer psychology theories such as regulatory focus (Avnet and Higgins, 2006) and self-esteem (Tiggemann and Andrew, 2012), and the theories in relationship marketing (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Palmatier, 2008), a conceptual framework was built to understand the relationships between three psychological drivers (i.e. fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and self-esteem), a behavioral driver (i.e. the average frequency of shopping), brand centrality and relationship quality. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework includes three psychological drivers that influence the formation of brand centrality. Fashion-conscious (*H1*) and chronic shopping orientation (*H2*) have positive impacts on brand centrality. However, self-esteem (*H3*) has a negative impact on brand centrality. Having a strong brand centrality will increase the relationship quality

Figure 1.  
Conceptual model



(H4). Brand centrality has five dimensions, including brand intellect, ideology, public practice, private practice and centrality experience. Relationship quality will be gauged in three dimensions, including trust, satisfaction, and commitment toward the fashion retailers' brands. The present study also examines a behavioral driver, the average frequency of shopping, as a moderator, which interacts with the three psychological drivers (H5a–H5c).

## 2.1 Fashion brands

**2.1.1 Categories of fashion brands.** Fashion brands are divided into three categories (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). The first concerns luxury brands (e.g. Channel, Gucci or Louis Vuitton), which value the exclusivity, image and quality of products. The second includes premium brands (e.g. Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger or Gant), which resemble luxury brands for the quality of their products, but the price is much more affordable. The last category is fast fashion (e.g. Zara, H&M or Mango), which are characterized by the mass production of products and affordable price.

**2.1.2 Fast fashion brands.** Fast fashion brands are known for their affordable costs, long-lasting range rotation and readily available products that mimic the most recent styles from luxury clothing companies (Mrad et al., 2019). Recognizing the advantages of a new technique for expedited production, a few merchants led the way for more innovations that would allow them to sell affordable, stylish clothing primarily to youthful customers in a worldwide market (Taplin, 2014). Companies like Zara, H&M and Uniqlo created their brands by focusing on young people who were interested in fashion but had limited financial resources.

The fast fashion business models included stocking affordable, trend-forward items in small numbers to promote frequent store visits and purchases. However, what distinguishes these businesses from others is their improved comprehension of the clothing chain's demand side. They are fashion-conscious and able to identify trends by seeing fresh designs from runways to produce clothing for their retail stores. Cachon and Swinney (2011) argued that fast fashion has two fundamental characteristics, such as quick response and refined design.

## 2.2 Brand centrality

Brand centrality refers to the brand being in the heart of the consumers, and they perceive the brand as having importance and meaning in their life (Huber and Huber, 2012). Individuals are devoted to brand in a similar way as they are believers in religion. Emotions

felt by individuals when they participate in religion community activities are similar to consumers' emotions toward the brands they devote to. This religion-like factor differentiates brand centrality from other customer–brand relationship constructs (e.g. brand love and brand loyalty). For example, brand love, defined from the brand management perspective, represents consumers' passionate emotional attachment level to a brand (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010). Differently, brand centrality describes a relationship like a religion, and consumers' level of emotional attachment is higher than brand love. Although researchers have been considering multiple facets of brand loyalty at both attitudinal and behavioral levels (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004), brand centrality considers more comprehensively in multiple dimensions based on religion-like relationships.

Sarkar and Sarkar (2017) initiated the conversation and argued that brand centrality aggregates five dimensions, including ideology, intellect, centrality experience, public and private brand-related practices. The ideology component represents consumers' irrational convictions for a brand compared to other brands that offer the same good/service. The intellect dimension concerns the knowledge about the brand, and it represents consumers' decisions and tendency to obtain more than basic knowledge about the brand (Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007). Centrality experience represents the emotional component, where devotee consumers think emotionally about the brand. Public practice means the consumers' intention to take part in rituals connected to the brand. Private practice represents the style of devotion to the brand that consumers demonstrate through private rituals (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010).

### 2.3 Fashion-conscious

Consumer consciousness has been studied as an important psychological driver in many domains such as brand consciousness (Workman and Lee, 2013), health consciousness (Rana and Paul, 2017) and fashion consciousness (Weller, 2007). Fashion-conscious refers to the constantly changing knowledge of new fashion trends (Weller, 2007). Fashion-conscious consumers seek to be up to date on style and feel fulfilled while buying new clothes (Gehrt *et al.*, 2007). These consumers highly value their image, value exclusivity and like to be always informed about trends through fashion magazines (Workman and Studak, 2007).

The preference for shopping fashion items frequently leads to expect that these consumers will also regard the fashion brands as central to their lives. High fashion-conscious consumers are more dedicated to fashion items and brands than low fashion-conscious consumers because they need to find the “best” fashion style to represent themselves (Kim *et al.*, 2018). They are more conscious of brands that are linked to their image, and they have positive responses toward prestige fashion brands (Casidy *et al.*, 2015). As a result, the centralization of brands from fashion-conscious consumers' minds is similar to religious rituals.

Similar to religions, consumers also have consumption rituals (McKechnie and Tynan, 2006) that bring pleasure to their consumption process (Vohs *et al.*, 2013). Consumption rituals, either involving multiple consumers (e.g. large in-store celebrations such as fashion shows) or personal/interpersonal (e.g. consumers go to shops to visualize, check, acknowledge and purchase fashion items), is one of the success factors in the fashion industry (Dion and Borraz, 2015). Fashion-conscious consumers are more likely to attend these consumption rituals and show their brand centrality. Workman and Cho (2012) found these consumers have fun in their shopping experience even if they do not buy anything. Given the preference of these consumers for frequent purchases, fast fashioning can satisfy this need by offering new products regularly:

H1. Higher fashion-conscious consumers are more likely to have higher brand centrality.

#### *2.4 Chronic shopping orientation*

Previous studies show that consumers see the shopping process as a task (e.g. grab-and-go in an efficient manner) to be done or as a stimulation/experience (e.g. taking time in the pleasure of the shopping experience) (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). However, the consumers may shift from task orientation to experience orientation (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). Consumers can have multiple goals when shopping, which means they can develop a stimulated process, but also a task orientation, and may occur as a stable consumer disposition (Higgins, 2008), i.e. a chronic shopping orientation.

Fast fashion consumers, having a stable consumer disposition that can be developed through multiple goals, including tasks and experiences (Higgins, 2008; Avnet and Higgins, 2006), will also see fast fashion brands as central. According to the regulatory focus theory (RFT), consumers are either promotion-oriented (i.e. aim at achieving their ideals) or prevention-oriented (i.e. aim at meeting their ought) in decision-making (Avnet and Higgins, 2006; Chen Idson and Higgins, 2000). Promotion-focused people, pursue an “ideal” goal and are more aware of the presence and absence of positive outcomes such as gains and non-gains, whereas prevention-focused people pursue an “ought” goal and are more aware of the presence and absence of negative outcomes such as losses and non-losses (Higgins, 2008). Roy and Ng (2012) argued that promotion-focused individuals are also more affectively driven, and prevention-focused individuals are more cognitively driven. Consumers with a stronger chronic shopping orientation tended to be more promotion-oriented, because of their experience orientation (Workman and Cho, 2012).

In line with the RFT that suggests promotion-focused people are more aware of the presence and absence of positive outcomes such as gains and non-gains (Higgins, 2008), consumers with a stronger chronic shopping orientation, who are more promotion-focus, may expect unique benefits from shopping clothes at a fast-fashion brand store (e.g. buy new fashion items that fits the fast-changing fashion seasons). These promotion-focus consumers may experience positive emotions more easily because they tend to be more satisfied with gain situations compared with prevention-focused people. On the other hand, customers with a prevention focus may worry more about expected risks (e.g. over-consumption and sustainability concerns). Therefore, we argue that a person with a chronic shopping orientation, who tends to be more promotion-oriented, is more likely to experience positive emotions with the brands, and specifically, develop a strong religion-like brand–customer relationship:

H2. Chronic shopping orientation is positively associated with brand centrality.

#### *2.5 Self-esteem*

According to the social identity theory, people work hard to develop or maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel *et al.*, 1979). Several scholars have shown a direct connection between a positive social identity and self-esteem, notably Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams (Ford *et al.*, 2020). Self-esteem is related to the physical appearance of individuals; consequently, consumers often use clothes to feel more comfortable with their bodies and express individuality (Tiggemann and Andrew, 2012). Feelings of self-esteem are momentary emotional states. A positive effect (e.g. a job promotion) generates high self-esteem, and a negative effect (e.g. the end of a love relationship) generates low self-esteem.

People with low self-esteem are more likely to feel a larger gap between their true selves and ideal selves (Higgins, 1987). Self-enhancement can help to narrow this gap (Malär *et al.*, 2011). According to the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), minimizing the discrepancy between actual and ideal selves (i.e. making efforts to get closer to the ideal self) may result in positive emotions. Clothing is an external factor that may help low self-esteem individuals to elevate their image; thus, getting closer to their ideal self. Clothing conveys plenty of information to others, including personality and social status (Joung and Miller, 2006).

In other words, for customers who are dissatisfied with their actual selves (i.e. low self-esteem), using fashion items from fast fashion brands that represent an ideal personality or taking part in various activities related to the fashion brand along with other users is a self-enhancement effort. This effort gives customers the impression that they are becoming closer to their ideal selves, which boosts their self-confidence and causes them to feel good about the underlying brand (Malär *et al.*, 2011). This will lead to positive emotions toward the brands. Low self-esteem consumers have a higher tendency to devote themselves to fast fashion brands and treat the brand as central to their life. In such a situation, consumers will tend to consider the brand as religious, with a certain ideology, and following public and private practices:

*H3. Consumers with lower self-esteem tend to have higher brand centrality.*

### *2.6 Relationship quality*

Relationship quality depicts a relationship that consumers highly rely on, which is established by the consumers' satisfaction with the providers' performance (Crosby *et al.*, 1990). Researchers have used a different combination of the facets/dimensions of this construct due to the differences in the nature of the relationship (Japutra *et al.*, 2019). However, the three dimensions that emerge more often in literature are trust, satisfaction and commitment (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Itani *et al.*, 2019).

Trust is consumers' feeling of security during their interaction with the brand (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003). Trust is based on customers' belief that the brand is trustworthy, and that the brand's actions will bring positive results for them. Previous studies found that one of the drivers of trust toward the brands is the brand experience. Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka (2019) found that brand experience, which includes intellectual experience and behavioral experience, positively impacts brand trust. Another study also shows that brand experience leads to an increase in brand trust (Francisco-Maffezzoli *et al.*, 2014). Consumers who have brand centrality tended to take part in various activities related to the fashion brand along with other users of the brand. They experience the brand both privately and publicly with other consumers. Therefore, we argue that brand centrality is positively associated with trust.

Satisfaction reflects consumers' belief that the provider meets their needs over multiple service encounters (Loureiro *et al.*, 2014). Several authors argue that customer satisfaction is one of the results of brand experience. In the context of product brands, Kim *et al.* (2015) showed that customers' sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral experiences with a brand positively influence their satisfaction with the brand. Similarly, in the context of retail, a consumer who enjoys brand experiences is found to be a highly satisfied consumer (Ha and Perks, 2005). Consumers who have brand centrality not only have behavioral experiences with the brand (e.g. taking part in various activities related to the fast fashion brand along with other users), but they also have intellectual experiences (e.g. keeping themselves informed about the fast fashion brand) and affective experiences (e.g. feel that the brand is sacred) with the brand. In line with the above literature review, we argue that

consumers who have brand centrality are more likely to have higher satisfaction compared to other consumers.

Commitment shows the very high-level relational bond between consumers and brands, which leads to a valued relationship and success (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Iglesias *et al.* (2011) showed that brand experiences positively impact customer affective commitment. Similarly, Jung and Soo (2012) also found that affective and behavioral brand experiences are the antecedents of customer commitment. As we have mentioned previously, consumers who have a religion-like customer–brand relationship experience the brand intellectually, affectively and behaviorally. Thus, brand centrality is positively associated with commitment:

*H4. Higher level of brand centrality leads to stronger relationship quality.*

### *2.7 The moderating role of the average frequency of shopping*

The average frequency of shopping represents the average number of fast fashion items in a certain period (i.e. one year in this study). This is also a measure of how frequently consumers do their personal/interpersonal consumption rituals (Dion and Borraz, 2015), which is an important aspect of brand centrality. The key consumers of fast fashion brands have been identified as having a higher purchase frequency and more positive attitudes toward fashion brands (Pentecost and Andrews, 2010). This behavioral factor, average shopping frequency, should interact with the psychological drivers (i.e. fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and self-esteem) in influencing brand centrality.

Fast fashion consumers are more experience-oriented or hedonic-oriented (Scarpi, 2006). Fashion-conscious consumers go to shops even if they do not have a purchase task (Workman and Cho, 2012). Therefore, fashion-conscious consumers with a higher shopping frequency should show a stronger brand centrality than those who have lower fashion consciousness with a lower frequency, because they show a higher level of consumption ritual to the brand at both psychological and behavioral levels. Similarly, consumers who have a higher chronic shopping orientation with a higher shopping frequency tend to show more consumption rituals, which leads to their brand centrality. Considering that shopping may enhance their self-esteem (Tiggemann and Andrew, 2012), consumers will tend to have a certain fast fashion brand as central and such centrality will increase as the number of times they go shopping and effectively buy fashion items. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H5. Average frequency of shopping moderates the relationship between brand centrality and fashion-conscious (H5a), chronic shopping orientation (H5b) and self-esteem (H5c).*

## **3. Research method**

### *3.1 Procedure*

Similar to Loureiro (2020), a field survey (self-administered written survey) was conducted and the data collection lasted for four weeks. The study was conducted in Portugal because it is said to be the next fashion capital of the world (Eytan, 2018). Besides, Portugal is also the home of high-quality fashion brands and is one of the largest textile exporters in Europe, from which fast fashion brands such as Zara, source their fabric (Binlot, 2015). The data was collected in September and October 2019, which were the Fall and Winter shopping season. The data collection locations were shopping malls in Lisbon, Portugal. The data collection

timing and location allow the researchers to reach more fast fashion brand shoppers. A convenience sampling method is used in this study. Trained research assistants needed to identify the potential participants by observing consumers' purchase behavior. The participants should have done certain shopping in a fast fashion brand store and prepared to leave the shopping center. Then, the research assistants approached the identified potential participants. Moreover, the research assistants visited the shopping center on different days and times, during the four weeks of data collection, to increase the variability of participants (mocking a random process). The research assistants only invited those who purchased fast fashion brands at least once a month to participate in the research.

Following Loureiro (2020), the translation (from English to Portuguese) and the back-translation process were implemented to ensure the accuracy of the measurement items. To further enhance the accuracy and clarity of the measurement items, a pilot test with 25 fast fashion consumers was conducted. The questionnaire was structured to avoid common method bias. Apart from concise and clear syntax, the physical distance between constructs and between the measurement items of the constructs was also considered. In total, the research assistants distributed 320 questionnaires. However, the researchers only received 250 valid and completed questionnaires, which means a valid response rate of 71%. Similar to Loureiro (2020), data from these valid respondents were used for analysis.

### 3.2 Variables and measurement

Measurements of the constructs have been well established in previous studies. The researchers adapted these measurements and adjusted them according to the current research context. Brand centrality is a second-order construct reflected by five dimensions, which are brand intellect, ideology, public practice, private practice and centrality experience (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017). Relationship quality is a second-order construct reflected by three dimensions in this study, namely trust, satisfaction and commitment (Fletcher *et al.*, 2000). Following Japutra *et al.* (2019), a seven-point Likert scale was deployed to the measurement items, where 1 denotes strongly disagree and 7 denotes strongly agree. To measure average shopping frequency, the participants were asked this question:

- Q1. On average, how many times within a year you shop this fashion brand?. Please see detailed items and references in Tables 1 and 2.

### 3.3 Demographic profile

In terms of the participants' gender, 51.6% were female (Table 3). This proportion is comparable to the proportion of the population in Portugal in 2020 – 4.82 million men and 5.37 million women (Statista, 2020). Regarding the level of education, 59.6% hold a bachelor's degree. Regarding the participants' favorite fast fashion store, Zara stands out as the most preferred store. Participants were born between 1980 and 1996 (mostly Generation Y). The birthday years range of the participants that showed the greatest representativeness was from 1991 to 1998. Generation Y consists of a group of consumers who are creative, social, willing to accept new ideas and adventures (Solomon, 2014) and have a higher propensity to spend (O'Cass and Choy, 2008). Solomon (2014) indicated five characteristics of Generation Y: does not live without technology; socializes while shopping; collaborates with each other and with brands; purchases for fun and pleasure; considers the values related to good citizenship. This generation enjoys shopping online and regarding fashion items, most fast fashion brands have a website and/or an online sales app where consumers can shop without leaving the house.

**Table 1.**  
Measurement items  
of first-order  
construct

| Construct and items                                                                                                     | $\beta$ | M    | SD   | CA   | CR   | AVE  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <i>Fashion-conscious (Workman and Cho, 2012)</i>                                                                        |         | 5.10 | 1.25 | 0.90 | 0.92 | 0.67 |
| I usually have one or more outfits of the very newest style                                                             | 0.74    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Fashionable, attractive styling is important to me                                                                      | 0.82    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I think I am a good clothing shopper                                                                                    | 0.73    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Dressing well is an important part of my life                                                                           | 0.86    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I like to be considered well-groomed                                                                                    | 0.89    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I try to keep my wardrobe up to date with fashion trends                                                                | 0.85    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Chronic shopping orientation (Büttner et al., 2014)</i>                                                              |         | 4.47 | 1.27 | 0.75 | 0.86 | 0.66 |
| When shopping, I often have fun                                                                                         | 0.80    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I like to kill time by shopping                                                                                         | 0.78    |      |      |      |      |      |
| When shopping, I like to browse around                                                                                  | 0.86    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965)</i>                                                                                    |         | 5.54 | 1.17 | 0.83 | 0.88 | 0.64 |
| I feel I do not have much to be proud of (reversed)                                                                     | 0.81    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others                                              | 0.72    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I wish I could have more respect for myself (reversed)                                                                  | 0.87    |      |      |      |      |      |
| All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (reversed)                                                        | 0.81    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Intellect (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017)</i>                                                                              |         | 3.05 | 1.36 | 0.86 | 0.90 | 0.70 |
| Most of the time I think about this fashion brand                                                                       | 0.79    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I am always interested in learning more about this fashion brand                                                        | 0.80    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I always keep myself informed about this fashion brand                                                                  | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |
| This fashion brand stimulates my curiosity                                                                              | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Ideology (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017)</i>                                                                               |         | 3.25 | 1.73 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| This fashion brand is sacred to me                                                                                      | 1.00    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Public practice (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017)</i>                                                                        |         | 3.21 | 1.56 | 0.89 | 0.93 | 0.82 |
| I strongly intend to take part in various activities related to this fashion brand along with other users of this brand | 0.87    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I want to show my association with this fashion brand to others                                                         | 0.93    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I want to interact with other users of this fashion brand                                                               | 0.92    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Private practice (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017)</i>                                                                       |         | 3.74 | 1.34 | 0.79 | 0.87 | 0.70 |
| Personally, I feel like worshipping this fashion brand                                                                  | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Personally, I convey my strong respect to the fashion brand                                                             | 0.89    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I devote myself to the fashion brand in my daily life                                                                   | 0.73    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Centrality experience (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017)</i>                                                                  |         | 3.02 | 1.36 | 0.80 | 0.88 | 0.72 |
| I feel that the brand intervenes in my life                                                                             | 0.87    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I feel that the brand wants to communicate something to me                                                              | 0.80    |      |      |      |      |      |
| The brand has a divine presence in my life                                                                              | 0.87    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Satisfaction (Loureiro et al., 2014)</i>                                                                             |         | 5.47 | 1.04 | 0.83 | 0.90 | 0.75 |
| Overall, this fashion brand satisfies my needs                                                                          | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |
| It is one of the best fashion brands comparing with others                                                              | 0.86    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Overall, this fashion brand delivers an excellent fashion product                                                       | 0.86    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Trust (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003)</i>                                                                           |         | 5.16 | 1.00 | 0.80 | 0.87 | 0.62 |
| With this brand, I obtain what I look for in a fashion product                                                          | 0.84    |      |      |      |      |      |
| This fashion brand is always at my consumption expectations level                                                       | 0.80    |      |      |      |      |      |
| This fashion brand gives me confidence and certainty in the consumption of a fashion product                            | 0.83    |      |      |      |      |      |
| This fashion brand never disappoints me                                                                                 | 0.69    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Commitment (Chang and Chieng, 2006)</i>                                                                              |         | 4.75 | 1.50 | 0.90 | 0.94 | 0.83 |
| I will stay with this fashion brand through good times or bad                                                           | 0.93    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I have a lot of faith in my future with this fashion brand                                                              | 0.89    |      |      |      |      |      |
| I feel very loyal to this fashion brand                                                                                 | 0.92    |      |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Average shopping frequency</i>                                                                                       |         | 8.56 | 4.10 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| On average, how many times within a year did you purchase from this fashion brand?                                      | 1.00    |      |      |      |      |      |

**Notes:** M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CA = cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability

|                                                                                                    |         |      |      |      |      |      | Consumers' life |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------------|
| Construct and items                                                                                | $\beta$ | M    | SD   | CA   | CR   | AVE  |                 |
| <i>Brand centrality (2nd order)</i>                                                                |         | 3.25 | 1.27 | 0.94 | 0.95 | 0.57 | 49              |
| Intellect                                                                                          | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Ideology                                                                                           | 0.80    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Public practice                                                                                    | 0.86    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Private practice                                                                                   | 0.88    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Centrality experience                                                                              | 0.90    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| <i>Relationship quality (2nd order)</i>                                                            |         | 5.13 | 1.05 | 0.92 | 0.93 | 0.58 |                 |
| Satisfaction                                                                                       | 0.87    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Trust                                                                                              | 0.92    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| Commitment                                                                                         | 0.89    |      |      |      |      |      |                 |
| <b>Notes:</b> M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CA = cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability |         |      |      |      |      |      |                 |

| Gender (%)   | Birthday year range (%) | Education level (%)     | Table 3.<br>Sample profile |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Female: 51.6 | 1980–1985: 20           | High school: 19.2       |                            |
| Male: 48.4   | 1986–1990: 23.6         | Bachelor's degree: 59.6 |                            |
|              | 1991–1998: 56.4         | Master's degree: 21.2   |                            |

## 4. Data analysis and results

### 4.1 Measurement reliability and validity

Following Japutra *et al.* (2019), partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was applied in this study using SmartPLS 3.2.8. PLS-SEM has strengths in solving a series of analytical problems (e.g. non-normal data, small sample size) in an efficient manner (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Japutra *et al.*, 2018). In addition, PLS-SEM has also been considered effective to test complex models and superior to regression in assessing mediation (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Several researchers have recommended a two-stage approach to analyze data using PLS-SEM, including analysis of the outer and inner model (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Japutra *et al.*, 2019). Following this approach, the outer model was developed first to assess the measurement validity and reliability. Subsequently, using a bootstrapping procedure, the inner model was used to test the paths between the constructs.

Next, the present study assessed the reliability and validity of the measures. The Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values of all constructs were above 0.60 (Tables 1 and 2); thus, reliability was established (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Convergent validity was also established (Tables 1 and 2) because all of the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested an evaluation of discriminant validity by having a higher square root value of the AVE than the value of inter-correlation (IC). Table 4 displays the correlation, squared AVE and HTMT ratio values. Discriminant validity was established because the square roots of the AVE scores were greater than the IC scores. It is important to note that the first-order factors of brand centrality and relationship quality have higher IC scores than the square root of AVEs when comparing them with the second-order factor. Nevertheless, discriminant validity was established among the first-order factors.

**Table 4.**  
Correlations,  
validities and HTMT  
ratio

|                              | 1           | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5           | 6           | 7           | 8           | 9           | 10          | 11          | 12          | 13          | 14          |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Fashion-conscious         | <i>0.82</i> | 0.62        | 0.15        | 0.39        | 0.42        | 0.24        | 0.29        | 0.32        | 0.39        | 0.51        | 0.31        | 0.32        | 0.38        | 0.47        |
| 2. Chronic shop. orientation | 0.50        | <i>0.81</i> | 0.16        | 0.44        | 0.36        | 0.27        | 0.39        | 0.32        | 0.45        | 0.45        | 0.35        | 0.28        | 0.43        | 0.30        |
| 3. Self-esteem               | -0.14       | -0.12       | <i>0.80</i> | 0.35        | 0.23        | 0.16        | 0.25        | 0.19        | 0.33        | 0.38        | 0.33        | 0.18        | 0.14        | 0.33        |
| 4. Brand centrality          | 0.37        | 0.37        | -0.35       | <i>0.75</i> | 0.62        | 0.29        | 0.99        | 0.82        | 0.93        | 1.03        | 1.03        | 0.39        | 0.58        | 0.74        |
| 5. Relationship quality      | 0.39        | 0.28        | -0.12       | 0.59        | <i>0.76</i> | 0.28        | 0.61        | 0.41        | 0.50        | 0.72        | 0.51        | 1.00        | 1.08        | 0.96        |
| 6. Avg. shop. frequency      | 0.23        | 0.23        | -0.17       | 0.28        | 0.27        | <i>1.00</i> | 0.22        | 0.23        | 0.24        | 0.35        | 0.30        | 0.16        | 0.31        | 0.31        |
| 7. Intellect                 | 0.26        | 0.32        | -0.22       | 0.88        | 0.55        | 0.21        | <i>0.84</i> | 0.71        | 0.67        | 0.93        | 0.87        | 0.35        | 0.60        | 0.72        |
| 8. Ideology                  | 0.30        | 0.27        | -0.20       | 0.80        | 0.41        | 0.23        | 0.66        | <i>1.00</i> | 0.69        | 0.71        | 0.82        | 0.30        | 0.38        | 0.47        |
| 9. Public practice           | 0.36        | 0.37        | -0.39       | 0.86        | 0.46        | 0.22        | 0.59        | 0.65        | <i>0.91</i> | 0.84        | 0.90        | 0.33        | 0.45        | 0.61        |
| 10. Private practice         | 0.43        | 0.34        | -0.35       | 0.88        | 0.62        | 0.31        | 0.76        | 0.62        | 0.70        | <i>0.84</i> | 0.85        | 0.44        | 0.71        | 0.86        |
| 11. Centrality experience    | 0.27        | 0.27        | -0.31       | 0.89        | 0.45        | 0.27        | 0.73        | 0.74        | 0.77        | 0.67        | <i>0.85</i> | 0.35        | 0.43        | 0.64        |
| 12. Satisfaction             | 0.27        | 0.18        | 0.11        | 0.35        | 0.87        | 0.14        | 0.27        | 0.29        | 0.29        | 0.36        | 0.29        | <i>0.87</i> | 0.90        | 0.73        |
| 13. Trust                    | 0.34        | 0.32        | -0.08       | 0.51        | 0.74        | 0.27        | 0.35        | 0.50        | 0.38        | 0.56        | 0.35        | 0.74        | <i>0.79</i> | 0.84        |
| 14. Commitment               | 0.42        | 0.25        | -0.31       | 0.69        | 0.89        | 0.30        | 0.63        | 0.45        | 0.55        | 0.72        | 0.55        | 0.63        | 0.72        | <i>0.91</i> |

**Notes:** The diagonal values in italic indicate the squared AVE. The scores in the lower diagonal indicate IC. The scores in the upper diagonal indicate HTMT ratio

Henseler *et al.* (2015) noted that there is a better tool to assess discriminant validity in PLS-SEM by using the HTMT ratio. They suggest that the HTMT ratio values should not exceed 0.90 to establish discriminant validity. This method was also widely used by previous researchers (Japutra *et al.*, 2018). Checking the HTMT ratio values (Table 4), discriminant validity was established. Similar to Fornell and Larcker's criterion, using the HTMT ratio, the present study also notes that the first-order factors, in relation to the second-order factor, have HTMT ratios greater than the threshold.

Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) suggested using the Harman's single-factor test method to check the potential common-method variance issues when an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results in one factor (e.g. a single unrotated factor). The unrotated factors and the covariance of the factors were examined. The EFA generates seven factors that account for 71.93% of the total variance (eigenvalues > 1). No single factor accounts for the majority of the total variance (the factor that accounted most was about 34.37%). Therefore, the common method variance issue is not a concern in this study. Nevertheless, Kock (2015) indicates that it is better to use a full collinearity test to assess common method variance when using PLS-SEM. The present study assessed both the vertical and lateral collinearity (Kock and Lynn, 2012). Based on the results, the VIF values were in the range of 1.04 to 1.87. All VIF values were under the threshold (i.e. 3.30), which means common method variance is not an issue (Kock and Lynn, 2012; Kock, 2015).

#### 4.2 Hypotheses testing

In the second stage, the inner model was used to assess the hypotheses. As suggested by Hair *et al.* (2014), a bootstrapping procedure of 5,000 subsamples was used. This is a non-parametric approach to understand the accuracy of the PLS results (Loureiro, 2020). See the results of the structural equation analysis in Table 5.

Following Japutra *et al.* (2021),  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  statistics are used to examine the predictive relevance of the model. The  $R^2$  values show that the model explained 35 and 39% of the variance in brand centrality and relationship quality, respectively. The  $R^2$  values indicate good predictive relevance. In addition to the  $R^2$  values,  $Q^2$  values (> 0) are used to assess the model's predictive capabilities. The  $Q^2$  values are both greater than 0 (i.e. 0.19 for brand

**Table 5.**  
Results of structural equation analysis

|            | Relationships                                                                | $\beta$ | $t$ -value         |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| <i>H1</i>  | Fashion-conscious → Brand centrality                                         | 0.24    | 4.00***            |
| <i>H2</i>  | Chronic shopping orientation → Brand centrality                              | 0.22    | 4.15***            |
| <i>H3</i>  | Self-esteem → Brand centrality                                               | -0.27   | -5.25***           |
| <i>H4</i>  | Brand centrality → Relationship quality                                      | 0.59    | 16.44***           |
|            | Average shopping frequency → Brand centrality                                | 0.20    | 3.00**             |
| <i>H5a</i> | Fashion-conscious * average shopping frequency → Brand centrality            | 0.29    | 3.51***            |
| <i>H5b</i> | Chronic shopping orientation * average shopping frequency → Brand centrality | -0.15   | -2.20*             |
| <i>H5c</i> | Self-esteem * average shopping frequency → Brand centrality                  | 0.06    | 0.81 <sup>ns</sup> |
|            | Variance explained ( $R^2$ )                                                 |         |                    |
|            | Brand centrality                                                             | 0.35    |                    |
|            | Relationship quality                                                         | 0.39    |                    |

**Notes:** \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>ns</sup> not significant

centrality and 0.22 for relationship quality); therefore, the model has good predictive relevance and capability.

*H1* is supported, higher fashion-conscious consumers are more likely to have higher brand centrality ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $t = 4.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). *H2* is supported, chronic shopping orientation is positively associated with brand centrality ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $t = 4.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). *H3* is also supported, consumers with lower self-esteem tend to have higher brand centrality ( $\beta = -0.27$ ,  $t = -5.25$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, *H4* is supported, higher level of brand centrality leads to stronger relationship quality ( $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $t = 16.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The moderation role of the average frequency of shopping was checked. Following Hair *et al.* (2019) recommendation, we checked the moderation effects using the two-stage approach. *H5a* ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $t = 3.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and *H5b* ( $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $t = -2.20$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) are supported and average frequency moderates the relationships. The average frequency of shopping strengthens the relationship between fashion-conscious and brand centrality. However, the average frequency of shopping attenuates the relationship between chronic shopping orientation and brand centrality. *H5c* is not supported ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $t = 0.81$ , n.s.), no interaction effect between the average frequency of shopping and self-esteem is found.

#### 4.3 Post hoc tests

Although the present study does not propose for mediating effects of brand centrality, to make a more robust analysis, mediating analysis was conducted. The mediating effects of brand centrality were checked by adding direct paths from consciousness, chronic, and self-esteem to relationship quality (see Table 6).

The results show that brand centrality mediates the relationships. The indirect effect of fashion-conscious on relationship quality through brand centrality is significant because the bootstrap CI does not include zero (95% CI [0.075, 0.207]). The direct effect of fashion-conscious to brand centrality is also significant ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 2.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, it is a partial mediation. Similarly, the indirect effect of self-esteem on relationship quality through brand centrality is significant (95% CI [-0.212, -0.090]). The direct effect of self-esteem to brand centrality is also significant ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $t = 1.86$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is a partial mediation. The indirect effect of chronic shopping orientation on relationship quality through brand centrality is significant (95% CI [0.062, 0.177]). However, the direct effect of fashion-conscious to brand centrality is not significant ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $t = 0.40$ , n.s.). Therefore, it is a full mediation.

Table 6.

Mediating effects

| Relationships                                                                                | Indirect<br>effect | Bias-corrected<br>bootstrap 95%<br>confidence level |        | Direct<br>effect   | Result            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                                              |                    | Lower                                               | Upper  |                    |                   |
| Fashion-conscious → Brand centrality → Relationship quality                                  | 0.128              | 0.075                                               | 0.207  | 0.19***            | Partial mediation |
| Chronic shopping orientation → Brand centrality → Relationship quality                       | 0.117              | 0.062                                               | 0.177  | 0.03 <sup>ns</sup> | Full mediation    |
| Self-esteem → Brand centrality → Relationship quality                                        | −0.149             | −0.212                                              | −0.090 | 0.09*              | Partial mediation |
| <b>Notes:</b> *** $p < 0.001$ ; ** $p < 0.01$ ; * $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>ns</sup> not significant |                    |                                                     |        |                    |                   |

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Different from other customer–brand relationship constructs, brand centrality depicts a strong religion-like relationship between consumers and brands (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017; Loureiro, 2020). Similar to religions, consumers also do rituals for the brands they love from their hearts. Consumption rituals have been studied for decades (McKechnie and Tynan, 2006). Consumers do rituals such as attending fashion shows or visiting brands’ retail stores more often when they have strong brand centrality (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017; Loureiro, 2020).

As expected, such a high-level customer–brand relationship is positively linked to consumers’ perception of relationship quality (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Itani *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, developing brand centrality will help brands to build strong customer–brand relationships (Palmatier, 2008). When consumers regard brands as being important in their lives, they develop a devotion to those brands, acting as if the brand has an ideology and taking part in rituals connected to the brands (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010). From this religion-like perspective, the current researchers explore potential psychological and behavioral drivers of brand centrality.

In the lives of certain consumers (i.e. more aware of fashion items, more shopping-oriented or less self-esteem), fast fashion brands are central like a religion (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017). Extending our knowledge on the impact of fashion consciousness on consumers’ positive attitudinal (Casidy *et al.*, 2015) and behavioral (Gehrt *et al.*, 2007) responses to brands, the researchers found that fashion consciousness is an important driver of brand centrality. This happens because high fashion-conscious consumers tend to do more consumption rituals (e.g. visit stores or browse brands) than low fashion-conscious consumers, which re-elect their brand centrality.

Highly linked to consumption rituals, consumers’ chronic shopping orientation is also a key driver of brand centrality. Supported by the RFT, fast fashion consumers who exhibit a chronic shopping orientation tend to be promotion-oriented. These consumers’ decision-making is driven by achieving their ideals (Avnet and Higgins, 2006; Chen and Higgins, 2000). Generation Y consumers enjoy their shopping experience of fast fashion brands with or without a purchasing task in mind. This is a vivid case of showing consumers’ in-depth relationships with brands in their hearts. Our findings are in line with Song and Qu (2018) that promotion focus consumers who had a dining experience at ethnic restaurants have a stronger positive emotion toward the restaurants, compared to prevention focus consumers.

They found that promotion-focused individuals are more likely to perceive both hedonic and utilitarian values, and as a result, experience positive emotions while dining at ethnic restaurants. In this study, we measured a stronger brand–consumer relationship, in which consumers develop a religion-like customer-brand relationship.

Self-esteem impacts brand centrality negatively in this study. Low self-esteem consumers would like to strengthen their bonding with the fashion brands (i.e. higher brand centrality or see brands as deeply important in their heart) and expect an enhancement in their appearance (Tiggemann and Andrew, 2012). Our findings are in line with the previous study, which found that consumers with low self-esteem (a large gap between actual vs ideal self) tend to do a self-enhancement effort such as using fashion items from brands that represent an ideal personality (Malär *et al.*, 2011). The study found that the self-enhancement effort resulted in the consumers feeling good about the underlying brand.

Behaviorally, consumers' average frequency of shopping in fast fashion stores is a reflection of their consumption rituals. Extending our knowledge on the positive impact of high shopping frequency on branding and purchase, the researchers find this behavioral factor interacts with and strengthens the positive influence of fashion-consciousness in enhancing consumers' brand centrality. Interestingly, the moderating effect of shopping frequency is not in the same direction as the positive influence of chronic shopping orientation on brand centrality. We argue that the reason for it is because of the nature of chronic shopping orientation that reflects fun and enjoyment during shopping. This type of fun and enjoyment would be very different between visiting a fashion brand outlet for the first time and frequenting the outlet over a period of time. A previous study showed that first-time visitors are more pleasantly surprised with the shopping experience than repeat visitors (Anwar and Sohail, 2004). These findings have significant managerial implications for marketers.

### 5.2 Theoretical contribution

The contributions of the study are mainly in the branding theories, consumer psychology theories and relationship marketing literature. In the branding theories, our study increases the knowledge about the religion-like nature of brand centrality in customer–brand relationships. Loureiro (2020) found that brand experience and brand love drive brand centrality. We examined more drivers from the consumer perspective. Fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and self-esteem are three important psychological factors contributing to develop the positioning of a fast fashion brand as central in the consumer lives. High frequency of shopping strengthens the psychological factors (fashion-conscious and chronic shopping orientation) to influence brand centrality.

Our study adds to the consumer psychology theories not only by suggesting psychological and behavioral drivers of brand centrality, but also by showing that fashion-conscious consumers may develop a religion-like brand–consumer relationship. Previous studies only examined the behavioral aspect of fashion-conscious consumers, such as higher intention to purchase (Michaela, 2015) and higher information search (Bertrandias and Goldsmith, 2006). In line with this, the study also extends the previous study, which found promotion focus consumers tended to develop a more positive emotion toward the brand (Song and Qu, 2018). This study shows that the psychological outcome is stronger than just positive emotions, the brand may become central in the consumer's life.

Our findings also add to the literature on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), by showing that consumers with low self-esteem (a large gap between actual vs ideal self) tend to have a higher brand centrality. This means that a self-enhancement effort (e.g. using fashion items from fast fashion brands that represent an ideal personality or taking part in

various activities related to the fashion brand along with other users) may not only cause the consumer to feel good about the underlying brand (Malär *et al.*, 2011), but further, may cause the consumers to develop a religion-like customer-brand relationship.

The study contributes to the relationship marketing literature by investigating relationship quality as an outcome of brand centrality. Previous research only measured the impact of brand centrality on customer engagement (Loureiro, 2020) and brand experience (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017).

Finally, the present study assessed the validity and reliability of the measurement of brand centrality. The present study shows that there was an issue with the factor loading of brand ideology. Two items of brand ideology had factor loadings below the threshold. The two items are “I believe that this brand will never do any unethical practice” and “I believe that the brand will never go out of market” (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017). One argument that could explain this is that the two items are very different from the other item (i.e. “This brand is sacred to me”) to measure brand ideology. Sacredness is related to conviction in the essence of the religion, whereas the two other items (i.e. unethical and never go out of market) are not related to that conviction.

### *5.3 Managerial implication*

The study shows that high brand centrality will lead to high relationship quality. Thus, managers and organizations should be aware of the psychological mechanism behind the development of brand centrality to build a strong consumer–brand relationship. We found that consumers with a higher awareness of fashion, more chronic shopping orientation and lower self-esteem are more likely to have higher brand centrality. Therefore, to create a strong brand centrality among the target markets, fast fashion brands should create more opportunities for consumption rituals to drive fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and low self-esteem consumers to their stores’ visit frequencies. For example, these brands can support their retailers to create vendor support programs such as inviting high fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and low self-esteem consumers to attend their new fashion release event with sales promotions. Aside from public events conducted offline, brands can also create online events such as digital fashion weeks and virtual shows. To identify the invitees, brands should fully use their consumer database, and potentially consumer surveys to understand their psychological factors. Brands should also try to create online and offline brand communities by identifying and engaging certain consumers (i.e. fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and low self-esteem consumers). Similar to religion communities, members’ brand centrality can be enhanced by community events and activities. Brands can also collaborate with consumers who have developed brand centrality to promote the brands to other consumers. These consumers can be the ambassadors of the brand as nowadays almost anyone can become an influencer.

The average frequency of shopping strengthens the relationship between fashion-conscious and brand centrality. However, the average frequency of shopping attenuates the relationship between chronic shopping orientation and brand centrality. Therefore, organizations should be careful in designing and targeting sales promotion programs. A marketing program that encourages a one-time bulk purchase (i.e. buy one get one free) is more suitable for consumers with a high chronic shopping orientation, while a marketing program that stimulates frequent store visits (i.e. loyalty stamp card) is more suitable for fashion-conscious consumers. Table 7 summarizes the conclusion, theoretical contribution and managerial implications.

**Table 7.**  
Conclusions,  
theoretical and  
managerial  
implications

| Conclusions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Theoretical implication                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Managerial implication                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For certain consumers (i.e. more fashion-conscious, more shopping oriented or less self-esteem), fast fashion brands are central like a religion</li> <li>The brand centrality is stronger for fashion-conscious consumers with high shopping frequency. However, the average frequency of shopping attenuates the relationship between chronic shopping orientation and brand centrality</li> <li>Consumers with strong brand centrality tend to have a high relationship quality with the brand</li> </ul> | <p>This study examined the antecedents of brand centrality from the consumer perspective (i.e. psychological and behavioral drivers), while previous research studied the drivers of brand centrality from the branding perspective</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fast fashion brands should create more opportunities for consumption rituals to engage with fashion-conscious, chronic shopping orientation and low self-esteem consumers</li> <li>Organizations should be careful in designing and targeting sales promotion programs as frequency of shopping has different impacts on the fashion-conscious consumers and consumers with chronic shopping orientation</li> </ul> |

#### 5.4 Limitations and future research

Although the study adds to our knowledge of brand centrality, it is not without limitations. First, this study includes a special consumer group Generation Y in a specific product category fast fashion. Although Generation Y is representative of the fast fashion market (Hill and Lee, 2015), it is important to study other generations in the fast fashion industry. Moreover, future researchers should expand brand centrality to industries more than the fast fashion industry, such as the services industry. Future research can explore other psychological factors that may be associated with brand centrality, such as personality traits or narcissism. Emotions and moods (e.g. pleasure, arousal or envy) are also recommended to be analyzed. Finally, a larger sample, considering other age segments and cultural differences will contribute to the generalizability of the findings.

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