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BUILDING CONSUMER LOYALTY TO ECO-BRANDS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

The article explores the conceptual aspects of forming consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry. The study reveals that the formation of loyalty to eco-brands is not determined solely by the environmental characteristics of products, but is the result of a complex interaction of functional, reputational, digital, and value-based factors. It has been established that high product quality, positive customer experience, brand trust, and reputation remain the fundamental prerequisites for long-term loyalty, whereas eco-friendliness enhances consumer commitment only when supported by real sustainable development practices, business process transparency, and the credibility of marketing communications.

By synthesizing modern scientific approaches, the study systematizes the factors influencing consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry and justifies the expediency of viewing it as a multidimensional construct comprising functional, environmental, trust-based, digital, and value-oriented components. A conceptual function of loyalty formation is proposed, according to which its level is determined by the interaction of two integrated blocks: marketing value and ecological originality. Unlike existing approaches, the proposed concept operates on the premise that a brand's environmental characteristics cannot compensate for low functional or marketing value, and that sustainable loyalty is formed only through their synergistic combination.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in developing the conceptual approach to forming consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry by substantiating the interaction between marketing value and ecological brand authenticity as the key integrated components of this process, as well as in formulating principles that explain the mechanism of building long-term consumer loyalty to eco-brands. The principles of loyalty formation to eco-brands in the fashion industry include the principles of dual value, the indirect impact of eco-friendliness through trust, the interaction between marketing value and ecological authenticity, the continuity of loyalty formation, and the value-based identification of the consumer with the brand.

Keywords: digital technologies, fast fashion, social responsibility, marketing value, environmentally responsible brand activities.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ЛОЯЛЬНОСТІ СПОЖИВАЧІВ ДО ЕКОБРЕНДІВ FASHION-ІНДУСТРІЇ

У статті досліджено концептуальні аспекти формування лояльності споживачів до екобрендів fashion-індустрії. У результаті дослідження встановлено, що формування лояльності до екобрендів не визначається виключно екологічними характеристиками продукції, а є результатом комплексної взаємодії функціональних, репутаційних, цифрових та ціннісних чинників. Визначено, що базовими передумовами довгострокової лояльності залишаються висока якість продукції, позитивний клієнтський досвід, довіра до бренду та його репутація, тоді як екологічність підсилює прихильність споживачів лише за умов її підтвердження реальними практиками сталого розвитку, прозорістю бізнес-процесів і достовірністю маркетингових комунікацій. Узагальнення сучасних

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наукових підходів дало змогу систематизувати чинники формування лояльності споживачів до екобрендів fashion-індустрії та обґрунтувати доцільність її розгляду як багатовимірної конструкції, що включає функціональну, екологічну, довірчу, цифрову та ціннісну складові. Запропоновано концептуальну функцію формування лояльності, відповідно до якої її рівень визначається взаємодією двох інтегрованих блоків - маркетингової цінності та екологічної оригінальності. На відміну від існуючих підходів, запропонована концепція виходить із того, що екологічні характеристики бренду не здатні компенсувати низьку функціональну або маркетингову цінність, а стійка лояльність формується лише за умови їх синергічного поєднання.

Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у розвитку концептуального підходу до формування лояльності споживачів до екобрендів fashion-індустрії шляхом обґрунтування взаємодії маркетингової цінності та екологічної автентичності бренду як визначальних інтегрованих складових цього процесу, а також у формулюванні принципів, що пояснюють механізм формування довгострокової споживчої лояльності до екобрендів. До принципів формування лояльності до екобрендів fashion-індустрії віднесено принципи подвійної цінності, опосередкованого впливу екологічності через довіру, взаємодії маркетингової цінності та екологічної автентичності, безперервності формування лояльності та ціннісної ідентифікації споживача з брендом.

Ключові слова: цифрові технології, швидка мода, соціальна відповідальність, маркетингова цінність, екологічно відповідальна діяльність бренду.

Problem statement and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks. The fashion industry is one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, which at the same time ranks among the largest sources of negative environmental impact. Mass clothing production, characteristic of the fast fashion model, is accompanied by significant consumption of natural resources, high greenhouse gas emissions, the generation of textile waste, and a substantial anthropogenic footprint on ecosystems. According to estimates by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) [1], the fashion industry generates about 2-8% of global CO₂ emissions and is one of the largest consumers of water resources. Simultaneously, the development of digital technologies and social media has driven the spread of the ultra-fast fashion model, further accelerating production and consumption cycles.

Despite the growth of the global fast fashion market, an opposing trend is becoming increasingly prominent: the formation of demand for environmentally responsible consumption. Along with the functional characteristics of products, consumers are increasingly evaluating brands based on their environmental impact, ethical production, supply chain transparency, and social responsibility. In response to these shifts, eco-brands within the fashion industry are actively developing, integrating the principles of sustainable development, circular economy, responsible production, and ESG approaches into their marketing strategies. At the same time, despite their declared readiness to support sustainable brands, a significant portion of consumers continues to choose fast fashion products due to lower prices, a wider assortment, or rapidly changing collections. Under these conditions, investigating the marketing mechanisms of building consumer loyalty specifically toward eco-brands acquires particular importance.

Analysis of recent publications on the problem. The bibliometric analysis presented in study [2] has demonstrated a significant transformation in scientific approaches to understanding consumer loyalty. While previously the primary focus was on

repeat purchases as the main manifestation of loyalty, contemporary research increasingly centres on brand experience, consumer-brand identification, brand love, digital communications, and social networks as key prerequisites for building long-term relationships between a brand and a consumer.

The further development of this concept is linked to the spread of sustainable development principles and the formation of a distinct research area dedicated to green loyalty. The analysis in [3] indicates that in recent years, green loyalty research has established itself as an independent branch of marketing science. The authors have also systematized the main theoretical approaches underpinning modern research on loyalty to eco-brands, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, Signalling Theory, Social Identity Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Commitment-Trust Theory.

Within this domain, scientific interest has gradually shifted from analysing individual environmental characteristics of a brand to studying the mechanisms of building green brand loyalty. In particular, A. Uikey and R. Baber [4] proposed a model according to which green transparency and green perceived value act as prerequisites for the formation of green brand trust and self-brand connection, which, in turn, ensure the development of consumer loyalty. Thus, the authors prove that a brand's eco-friendliness influences loyalty primarily indirectly - through the formation of trust and perceived value.

Within this subject area, there are works dedicated to the implementation of eco-labeling standards and marketing communications for conveying ecological values to consumers, notably [5-7]. At the same time, A. Gaspar Ferreira and M. E. Fernandes [8] argue that consumer awareness of ecolabeling contributes to forming a positive image of a sustainable development brand and increases the level of environmental consciousness, whereas a company's expenditures on advertising communications do not yield a similar effect on their own. Furthermore, the authors established that it is environmental consciousness, rather than brand image, that directly influences loyalty formation, highlighting the importance of developing consumers' ecological culture.

Research on green loyalty has evolved significantly in the fashion industry, which is one of the most resource-intensive sectors of the global economy. For instance, A. Imdad et al. [9] prove that the integration of genuine sustainable development practices into the marketing activities and business processes of fashion companies ensures the creation of competitive advantages, enhances consumer trust, and contributes to the long-term profitability of brands.

S. Sarfraz et al. [10] empirically demonstrated that different components of sustainability influence loyalty formation in fast fashion in distinct ways. Contrary to common perceptions regarding the dominance of environmental initiatives, the authors found that social practices (ethical working conditions, fair labour relations, and responsible sourcing) have a stronger impact on loyalty than measures aimed at emissions reduction or materials recycling. This points to a holistic perception of sustainable development by modern consumers, who evaluate brands based on socio-ethical criteria alongside environmental ones.

In parallel with the development of the sustainable fashion concept, research on traditional marketing drivers of loyalty in the fashion industry continues to advance. Investigating the behaviour of young consumers, M. Simionescu and W. Strielkowski

[11] established that product perceived value, rational purchasing motives, and social status remain the determining factors in choosing a fashion brand, whereas income level positively influences brand commitment.

In Ukrainian scientific literature, the problem of loyalty to eco-brands is only beginning to emerge as an independent research area. O. Syvakova and O. Bolotna [12] substantiate the significance of loyalty as a prerequisite for the long-term development of enterprises, analysing consumer brand loyalty levels, the prevalence of ethical brands in Ukraine, and the impact of global companies' social projects on building consumer commitment. V. Shevchenko, T. Mishustina, and A. Bondarenko [13] examine consumer preferences and customer loyalty in the domestic fashion retail sector, defining their role in achieving the marketing objectives of enterprises. Ukrainian researchers V. Shcherbak and N. Svintsitska [14], analysing the specifics of client loyalty formation in the luxury segment of the fashion industry, note that repeat purchases do not yet signify true loyalty. The latter is formed under the condition of combining high perceived brand value, personalized service, emotional attachment, and active consumer-brand interaction. Nonetheless, the majority of current studies focus on analysing individual factors or mechanisms of building green loyalty, while the issue of their comprehensive integration into a single conceptual system adapted to the specific nature of eco-brands in the fashion industry remains insufficiently developed.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the conceptual foundations of forming consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry.

Presentation of the main results and their substantiation. Consumer loyalty is traditionally viewed as one of the key strategic assets of a brand, ensuring repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, sustainable competitive advantages, and the long-term growth of brand value. However, within the context of the evolving concept of sustainable development, the substance of loyalty has undergone a significant transformation. While product quality, price, and service levels remain decisive for traditional brands, for eco-brands, trust in environmental claims, alignment of corporate behaviour with declared values, transparency of production processes, and perception of the brand's social mission are becoming increasingly important. Research confirms that the mechanisms of building loyalty to sustainable fashion differ substantially from those characteristic of fast fashion, with brand trust and the perceived value of the ecological offering acting as key mediators [15].

At the same time, a brand's environmental orientation alone does not guarantee the formation of long-term consumer commitment. Despite the steady growth of environmental awareness among the population, there is a so-called "attitude-behaviour gap" between consumer intentions and their actual behaviour – a discrepancy between a positive attitude toward sustainable fashion and actual purchasing behaviour. Many buyers declare support for sustainable development principles, yet when choosing clothing, they prefer more affordable fast fashion products. Thus, only 13% do not buy fast fashion in the US and Italy, 16% in Germany and Austria, 18% in France and India, and 19% in the UK [16].

L. McNeill and R. Moore [17] explain this by the existence of three types of consumers: those oriented toward personal needs (Self), social approval (Social), and environmental responsibility (Sacrifice), each perceiving sustainable brands differ-

ently. This implies that a one-size-fits-all marketing strategy cannot be effective across all market segments.

Furthermore, studies [18, 19] demonstrate that a brand's eco-friendliness does not build loyalty on its own, but can become a competitive advantage only when the consumer's baseline expectations regarding product quality, brand stability, and the consistency of its market behaviour are already met (Table 1).

Table 1. Marketing prerequisites and risks of forming loyalty to eco-brands, formed on the basis of [18, 19]

Driver	Percentage of respondents	Destructor	Percentage of respondents
Product quality	57	Price increase	47
Long-term brand existence	40	Deterioration of service	45
Brand consistency	28	Deterioration of quality	44
Political neutrality	24	Negligence towards personal data	30
Brand status	23	Misleading advertising (green washing)	29
Positive experience	20	Inability to quickly contact a person	23

That is, environmental friendliness cannot compensate for the shortcomings of the basic marketing offer, but acts as a factor that enhances loyalty only if the brand has a high functional value. At the same time, the formation of loyalty to eco-brands occurs under the influence of a much wider range of factors than in traditional branding (Table 2).

Table 2. The main factors shaping consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry, formed on the basis of [4; 7; 11; 15; 17; 20-25]

Factor	Marketing content	Source
Environmental value of the brand	Perception of the brand's contribution to sustainable development	[15; 17]
Green Trust	Belief in the authenticity of environmental claims	[20]
Transparency	Transparency of information on product origin and ESG activities	[4; 21]
Perceived quality	Quality meets consumer expectations	[22]
Personalization	Personalized recommendations and digital customer experience	[7; 23]
Value alignment	Shared social and environmental values of the brand and the consumer	[11; 24]
Emotional attachment	Psychological connection with the brand	[25]

Consequently, eco-brands operate within a dual-value space: alongside functional advantages, they must substantiate their environmental responsibility and the credibility of their sustainable development claims. Furthermore, study [15] proves that for sustainable fashion, brand trust is a stronger factor in building loyalty than emotional attitude toward it. Taking this into account, along with the components of

loyalty synthesized in [13], we propose viewing loyalty to eco-brands as a multidimensional construct consisting of five interconnected components: functional, environmental, trust-based, digital, and value-oriented.

Functional loyalty reflects a brand's capacity to satisfy baseline consumer expectations regarding product quality, design, durability, comfort, and the value-for-money ratio. As previously noted, despite the rise in environmental consciousness, functional characteristics remain decisive in brand selection. Specifically, according to Statista [26], 91% of consumers primarily look for "value for money" and 90% focus on product quality, whereas a brand's low climate impact is important for 76% of respondents. In other words, eco-friendliness does not replace traditional choice criteria but rather complements them.

Environmental loyalty characterizes consumer commitment to the brand's ecological principles and its alignment with the concepts of sustainable development, circular economy, and ESG. This loyalty is what most distinguishes eco-brands from traditional fashion brands. At the same time, research demonstrates that even environmentally conscious buyers often prefer fast fashion if the eco-brand does not provide sufficient functional value or affordability [26].

Trust-based loyalty is formed based on consumer confidence in the credibility of the brand's environmental claims, the transparency of its operations, and the alignment of its declarations with real practices. Global statistics confirm the exceptional importance of trust: in 2024, 88% of consumers stated that brand trust is one of the key criteria for product selection, 86% emphasized the importance of brand reputation, while 82% considered trust in the brand's parent company to be fundamental [26]. Meanwhile, the spread of green washing practices significantly reduces trust levels and negatively affects consumer loyalty, as confirmed by modern empirical studies [20].

Digital loyalty reflects the level of commitment built through the brand's digital interaction with the consumer: personalized recommendations, mobile applications, social networks, digital loyalty programs, and an omnichannel customer experience. According to [26], 64% of consumers consider personalization important, with this figure rising to 65% among Generation Z and 62% among Millennials. Concurrently, 40% of buyers start searching for alternative products due to a lack of real-time personalization, and 30% switch to another brand.

Value-oriented loyalty (Community) represents the highest level of loyalty, characterized by the consumer's identification with the brand's social mission and their willingness to recommend the brand to others. An international study by SAP Emarsys showed that 59% of loyal consumers demonstrate their commitment through regular repeat purchases, while 47% recommend the brand to friends and acquaintances, effectively becoming its advocates [26].

Distinguishing these components allows for deepening the methodological approach to assessing loyalty, specifically focusing on eco-brands. Thus, for a conceptual description of the loyalty formation process for eco-brands in the fashion industry, a functional dependency has been proposed, according to which the level of loyalty is determined by the interaction of two integrated blocks: marketing value (functional brand value, digital interaction and personalization, engagement in the brand community, advocacy) and ecological authenticity (perceived ecological value, brand trust):

$$L = (FV + DE + CE) \times (EV + BT),$$

where L – level of loyalty to the eco-brand; FV (Functional Value) – functional value of the brand (quality, design, value-for-money ratio); DE (Digital Engagement) – digital interaction and personalization; CE (Community Engagement) – brand community engagement and advocacy; EV (Ecological Value) – perceived environmental value; BT (Brand Trust) – brand trust.

Marketing value is a necessary but insufficient condition for forming loyalty to an eco-brand. Similarly, ecological authenticity does not ensure a high level of loyalty without proper marketing value. Therefore, it is expedient to consider the overall level of loyalty as a result of the interaction between these two complementary blocks.

Thus, the formation of consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry occurs in accordance with several key principles. Firstly, this is the principle of dual value, according to which loyalty to an eco-brand is determined both by its environmental characteristics and by its ability to create high consumer value for the buyer. Despite the growing demand for sustainable products, consumers primarily evaluate quality, design, functionality, and the price-to-value ratio, and only then – the brand's eco-friendliness. Consequently, the environmental component does not replace traditional competitive advantages, but complements them, reinforcing the brand's overall value proposition.

The second principle is the indirect impact of eco-friendliness through trust. Product environmental characteristics do not form loyalty automatically. Their impact is realized through the formation of brand trust, which arises under the conditions of production process transparency, the credibility of ESG communications, the verification of environmental claims by international certificates, and the absence of green washing manifestations. It is trust that acts as the key mechanism for transforming the brand's ecological value into long-term consumer commitment.

The principle of interaction between marketing value and ecological authenticity means that loyalty formation is possible only under the condition of their simultaneous realization. A high level of marketing value in the absence of ecological authenticity can lead to short-term consumer commitment, yet it does not ensure sustainable loyalty to the eco-brand. At the same time, a brand's environmentally responsible activities without proper product quality, digital interaction, or a positive customer experience do not create sufficient prerequisites for long-term relationships with buyers either. It is the interaction of these two blocks that is laid at the foundation of the proposed conceptual function of loyalty formation.

According to the principle of the continuity of loyalty formation, it is not the result of a single purchase or participation in a loyalty program, but is formed throughout the entire customer journey. At every stage of interaction with the consumer – from the first contact with the brand to post-purchase service, participation in the brand community, and digital communications – the prerequisites for developing long-term commitment are either created or, conversely, destroyed.

The principle of value-based identification entails a transition from the traditional understanding of loyalty as a repeat purchase to viewing it as a result of the shared values of the brand and the consumer. The highest level of loyalty is achieved

when a consumer, while regularly choosing the brand, also shares its ecological and social mission, participates in the activities of the brand community, and acts as a brand advocate, spreading positive experiences of interaction among other consumers.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The conducted study has made it possible to substantiate the conceptual foundations of forming consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry under conditions of the growing significance of sustainable development and the digital transformation of marketing activities. It has been established that loyalty to eco-brands is not formed solely under the influence of the environmental characteristics of products, but is the result of a complex interaction of functional, reputational, digital, and value-based factors.

It has been established that product quality, positive customer experience, brand trust, and reputation remain the foundation of long-term loyalty, whereas eco-friendliness acts as a factor that enhances consumer commitment only when supported by real sustainable development practices, business process transparency, and the credibility of marketing communications.

The synthesis of modern scientific approaches has made it possible to systematize the main factors influencing the formation of consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry and to justify the expediency of viewing loyalty as a multidimensional construct consisting of five interconnected components: functional, environmental, trust-based, digital, and value-oriented loyalty. This approach expands the traditional interpretation of loyalty as a repeat purchase, supplementing it with environmental, digital, and behavioural aspects of brand-consumer interaction.

The main result of the study is the proposed conceptual function of loyalty formation, according to which its level is determined by the interaction of two integrated blocks: marketing value and ecological authenticity. Unlike existing approaches, the proposed concept operates on the premise that the environmental component cannot compensate for a brand's low functional or marketing value, and the formation of sustainable loyalty is possible only under the condition of their synergistic interaction.

The further development of the proposed approach resulted in the formulation of the core principles of forming consumer loyalty to eco-brands in the fashion industry, including: the principle of dual value, the principle of the indirect impact of eco-friendliness through trust, the principle of interaction between marketing value and ecological authenticity, the principle of the continuity of loyalty formation, and the principle of the value-based identification of the consumer with the brand. The proposed principles create a conceptual foundation for developing eco-brand marketing strategies oriented toward building long-term relationships with customers.

Prospects for further research should be linked to the empirical testing of the proposed concept, determining the quantitative contribution of individual loyalty components using methods of multivariate statistical analysis, and developing an integrated methodology for its assessment.

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