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THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE THREE NEEDS THEORY TO BRAND LOVE FOR FASHION BRANDS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

[1]Qundeel Nasir Bhatti
[1]Faculty of Communication and Design, Department of Media Studies and Design, Indus University, Karachi, Pakistan
[1]qundeelnasir050@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Abstract

Brand love is a comparatively recent construct in the marketing literature, describing the passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer holds for a particular brand. Although the antecedents of brand love have attracted growing attention, the psychological motives that drive consumers toward emotional bonds with brands remain underexplored, particularly in the fashion category and in emerging-market settings. This study examines the relationship between McClelland's three needs the need for power, the need for affiliation, and the need for achievement and brand love for fashion brands. Using a structured, 46-item questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale, data were gathered from 160 respondents through convenience sampling in Karachi, Pakistan. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .916$). Three simple linear regression models were estimated in SPSS. All three needs exerted a positive and statistically significant effect on brand love ($p < .001$). The need for power was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .553$, $R^2 = .306$), followed by the need for achievement ($\beta = .482$, $R^2 = .233$) and the need for affiliation ($\beta = .398$, $R^2 = .158$). Consequently, all three hypotheses were supported. The findings indicate that attending to the symbolic, self-expressive, and social dimensions of a brand allows consumers to enhance their social image and express their actual self, producing durable brand-love relationships. Implications for fashion-brand strategy are discussed, alongside limitations and directions for future research.

Keywords: *Brand love; three needs theory; need for power; need for affiliation; need for achievement; fashion brands; consumer–brand relationship*

1. Introduction

Brands play a central role in shaping customer relationships and the emotional bonds that influence commercial performance. The more emotionally involved a consumer is with a brand, the more readily that consumer becomes satisfied and loyal, and the more willing they are to pay a price premium. The highest level of commitment is reached once brand love is established. In markets crowded with functionally similar offerings, the surplus of options has made consumer choice increasingly emotional rather than purely rational. Even satisfied consumers may drift toward a competitor's brand over time, so loyalty endures only when satisfaction remains stable or deepens. Brand love therefore mediates the connection between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, and it sits alongside antecedents such as brand experience, materialism, customer delight, and romanticism (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

These antecedents are themselves driven by underlying motivators that differ from person to person. McClelland's theory of human motivation proposes that, regardless of culture, gender, or age, individuals are driven by three learned needs the need for power, the need for affiliation, and the need for achievement whose relative strength varies across people (Rybnicek et al., 2019). Fashion products are especially suitable for examining how these motives translate into emotional attachment, because apparel brands carry unusually strong symbolic meaning and communicate the identity of the wearer. Consumption of fashion brands symbolizes the pursuit of status and self-fulfilment, and consumers have become more fashion-conscious and eager to keep pace with current trends (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Mandhachitara & Piamphongsant, 2016).

Within this context, brand love has emerged as an influential concept describing consumers' passionate and satisfied feelings toward the brands they consume. A brand that customers love is not merely their first choice but frequently their only choice, and one they recommend to others (Thomson et al., 2005). Brand love thus explains how people relate to a brand that aligns with their self-concept, forging an emotional association that can lead to commitment and loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) were among the first to define brand love as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name, and they showed that brand love is stronger for self-expressive brands and for brands high in hedonic and symbolic meaning. A sense of community is a further antecedent, reflecting the affiliation a consumer feels with others associated with the brand (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

The fashion sector offers a particularly instructive setting for examining these dynamics. Apparel is worn in public, changes rapidly, and carries dense symbolic meaning, so the way a consumer relates to a fashion brand is bound up with self-image, group membership, and social standing to an unusual degree. In fast-growing consumer markets such as Pakistan, where the present data were collected rising incomes, expanding retail, and intense competition have made fashion brands increasingly central to everyday identity work, yet most brand-love research has been conducted in Western contexts. There is, moreover, a conceptual gap: while the antecedents and consequences of brand love have been mapped in some detail, the motivational roots of the construct the specific psychological needs that predispose a consumer to love a brand in the first place have received comparatively little empirical attention. Linking McClelland's three needs to brand love directly addresses that gap and helps explain why some consumers, but not others, form intense attachments to the same brand.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite extensive attention to how brands build and sustain consumer relationships, there is limited

agreement on how brand love actually manifests among consumers, and comparatively little work links brand love to the psychological needs that motivate it. The central problem addressed by this study is to determine how, and to what extent, the three needs theory relates to brand love for fashion brands that is, how consumers' needs for power, affiliation, and achievement shape the emotional attachment they form with apparel brands, and how that attachment in turn influences buying behaviour.

1.2 Objectives and Significance

The primary objective of the study is to analyse the relationship between the three needs theory and brand love for fashion brands, and thereby to identify the psychological factors that lead consumers to develop love for these brands. By connecting brand love to the need for power, affiliation, and achievement, the study contributes to an understanding of why consumers form emotional relationships with non-human entities such as brands, and why they tend to humanize and ultimately fall for their favourite brands. The findings are significant for the fashion industry, which can use them to relate more effectively to the emotional feelings customers hold toward the brands they love and to design strategies that strengthen those bonds.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on brand love, fashion-brand relationships, and the three needs theory, and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 details the research design, sample, instrument, and analytical technique. Section 4 reports the descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and regression results. Section 5 discusses the findings, and Section 6 concludes with implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

Changing lifestyles have brought sweeping shifts in consumer needs and demands. As competition intensifies and brand performances converge, fashion products increasingly serve as vehicles of brand communication and brand relationship. Brands help define consumers' lives and play a central role in consumer behaviour, and the emotional affection consumers hold toward brands supports brand sustainability in the market. Yet, although brand love has emerged as a marked intensification of the consumer–brand connection, relatively little is understood about how this bond of love is generated and what its behavioural consequences are (Turgut & Gultekin, 2015).

2.1 Fashion Brands and Consumer–Brand Relationships

Fashion is recognized by everyone, yet it resists precise definition. The label applies not only to clothing, shoes, and bags but to any category associated with novelty, added value, and change; fashionable merchandise is understood informally as being trendy, popular, and "in." Even when consumers broadly agree that one brand is more fashionable than another, the perceived fashionability of a brand is ultimately the way an individual consumer sees it, so different consumers reach different judgements about the same brand. A related construct is fashion consciousness the degree of a person's involvement with current styles and the desire for frequent wardrobe change. Consumers vary in this consciousness: some pay close attention to the fashionability of clothing and are eager to keep themselves updated with the latest trends, while others do not (Mandhachitara & Piamphongsant, 2016).

Because acquiring new customers is more costly than retaining existing ones, firms rely on brands to maintain lasting relationships with consumers. Within consumer–brand relations, brand love is among the most intense and deepest relationship types, resting on love and passion as its essential elements. Brands oriented toward the brand-love concept are better positioned to build long-standing relationships and, ultimately, brand loyalty (Turgut

& Gultekin, 2015). Consumers tend to love fashion brands that make them feel and look good and that suit them, because of the enthusiasm those brands inspire. Such relationships are built on trust: where trust is absent, the relationship is fragile. Studying the psychological factors behind these bonds reveals a genuine emotional connection between consumers and brands, in which a newly formed close relationship is accompanied by the development of positive, strong feeling toward the brand (Islam & Rahman, 2016).

2.2 Brand Love

People apply the word "love" not only to other people but also to objects and brands, expressing an optimistic sensation. Brand love can sustain consumer enthusiasm to the point that the brand becomes integrated into the consumer's identity: consumers who love a brand infuse it into their sense of self, much as they would a loved one, and the brand comes to shape a personality consistent with what the brand is perceived to be. Brands that are lovable are therefore likely to enjoy competitive advantage and stronger loyalty (Anggraeni, 2015).

Following Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), brand love is defined as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer holds for a particular brand. Because such love, unlike momentary liking, endures over time, several studies treat it as a relationship encompassing long-standing emotional, behavioural, and cognitive conditions. Researchers have proposed varied dimensional structures for the construct: Kamat and Parulekar (2007) advance five dimensions satisfaction, longing, commitment, friendship, and admiration while Bagozzi et al. (2017) later developed and validated a practical, higher-order scale organized around core elements such as self–brand integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, and anticipated separation distress. Some scholars situate brand love within interpersonal theories of love, applying the triangular theory of love to consumer–object relationships, although others caution that such frameworks are only partly adequate for brands, since consumer–brand love is less reciprocal than interpersonal love (Batra et al., 2012).

The construct is important largely because of what it predicts. Brand love has been linked to a cluster of valuable downstream outcomes: heightened brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, resistance to negative information, and positive word of mouth (Anggraeni, 2015; Batra et al., 2012). On the antecedent side, scholars have identified brand experience, self-expressive and hedonic brand meaning, brand identification, and a sense of brand community as conditions that foster love (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Islam & Rahman, 2016). What unites many of these antecedents is that they allow the brand to become part of the consumer's identity project; where a brand helps a consumer express who they are or aspire to be, love is more likely to follow. This identity-based reading of brand love is what makes the three needs theory a natural explanatory lens, since each need corresponds to a distinct identity motive that a fashion brand can help satisfy.

2.3 The Three Needs Theory

Needs refer to internal states of tension that energize and direct behaviour through cognitive processes. Three needs are especially prominent in organizational and motivational research: the need for power, the need for affiliation, and the need for achievement, and consumers differ in the strength of each. The need for achievement expresses a desire to accomplish through individual effort and to attain excellence; people high in this need show a strong wish to perform at a superior level, and consumers high in achievement motivation tend to regard high-competence brands as more effective and more satisfying. The need for affiliation refers to belonging and to building close relationships with others family, friends, and colleagues and reflects a desire to

participate in cooperative and interactive activity; people high in affiliation give more favourable firm ratings and identify more strongly with the company. The need for power concerns prestige and influence, and the desire to acquire social authority and status symbols; those high in power seek status-driven, competitive situations (Rybnicek et al., 2019).

The need for achievement, drawn from McClelland's work on acquired or learned needs, is understood as a favourable orientation toward competition against a standard of excellence; people high in this need pursue realistic yet challenging goals (Moore et al., 2010). The need for power is often distinguished into personalized power the desire to control or dominate others, sometimes toward antisocial ends and socialized power, which is expressed through helping, supporting, and guiding others; socialized power is positively associated with prosocial and collectivist orientations. The need for affiliation reflects a yearning for connection and social interaction, and the reward that comes from feeling close to others; a high need for affiliation entails a strong desire to love and be liked, whereas people low in this need are more inclined to see themselves as self-determining. In consumer–brand settings, consumers high in affiliation are more likely to view brands as social groups to which they can belong, interacting with a broader range of brands and forming meaningful relationships with them (Marín & Ruiz de Maya, 2013).

Because implicit and explicit measures of these motives often diverge, researchers stress the importance of measuring them carefully and of recognizing that most people display a combination of all three needs rather than a single dominant motive (Köllner & Schultheiss, 2014). Taken together, this body of work implies that the strength of a consumer's need for power, affiliation, and achievement may shape the emotional attachment the brand love that the consumer develops toward fashion brands.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

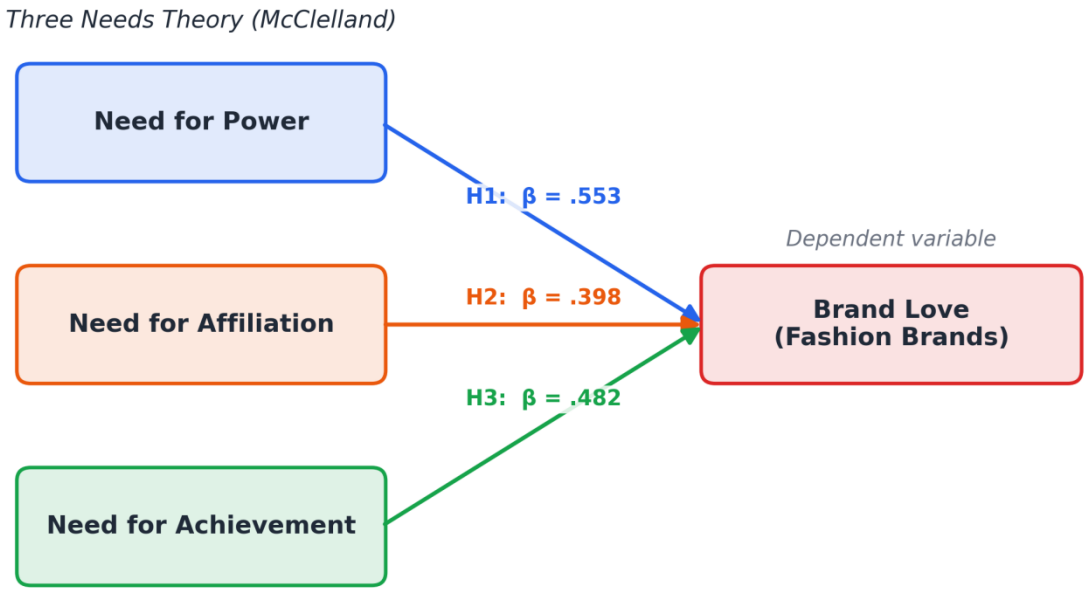
Building on the reviewed literature, the study proposes that each of the three needs exerts a positive influence on brand love for fashion brands. The following hypotheses are tested:

H1. The need for power has a positive impact on brand love for fashion brands.

H2. The need for affiliation has a positive impact on brand love for fashion brands.

H3. The need for achievement has a positive impact on brand love for fashion brands.

Figure 1: Empirical research model relating the three needs to brand love for fashion brands.



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The study adopts a quantitative, one-time exploratory design intended to analyse the relationship between the three needs theory and consumers' brand love for fashion brands. Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary information was gathered from research journals, published articles, and other scholarly sources to develop the conceptual framework.

3.2 Sampling and Sample Size

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents drawn from different age groups, education levels, and backgrounds, who were approached at various locations and asked to complete the instrument on the basis of their own views and experience. In total, 160 questionnaires were distributed and returned as valid, yielding an effective sample of N = 160. Respondents included students, employees, and faculty; their identities were kept confidential and ethical considerations were observed throughout.

3.3 Instrument and Measurement

The measurement instrument comprised 46 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items captured four constructs: brand love for fashion brands (the dependent variable) and the need for power, the need for affiliation, and the need for achievement (the independent variables). Items were adapted from established scales in the brand-love and motivation literatures. The closed-ended format facilitated efficient and reliable data capture across respondents.

3.4 Reliability

Responses were entered into SPSS and screened for validity and reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. As Table 1 reports, the 46-item instrument returned an alpha of .916 across the 160 valid cases well above the conventional .70 threshold indicating excellent reliability and confirming that the scale was suitable for the subsequent analysis. Content validity was supported by adapting items from previously published and validated scales, and by wording each item to correspond directly to its intended construct. The high alpha across a lengthy 46-item instrument

further indicates that the items cohered as intended, giving confidence that the measures captured the underlying constructs of brand love and the three needs.

Table 1: ***Case processing summary and reliability statistics.***

Statistic	Value
Valid cases (N)	160 (100.0%)
Excluded cases	0 (0.0%)
Number of items	46
Cronbach's alpha	.916

Note. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. α = .916 indicates excellent internal consistency.

3.5 Analytical Technique

The empirical model treats brand love for fashion brands as the dependent variable and the three needs as independent variables (see Figure 1). To test each hypothesis, simple linear regression was estimated in SPSS, with a separate model relating each need to brand love. The regression output including the Pearson correlation, coefficient of determination (R^2), F-statistic, unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) coefficients, t-values, significance levels, and the Durbin–Watson statistic was used to determine the acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

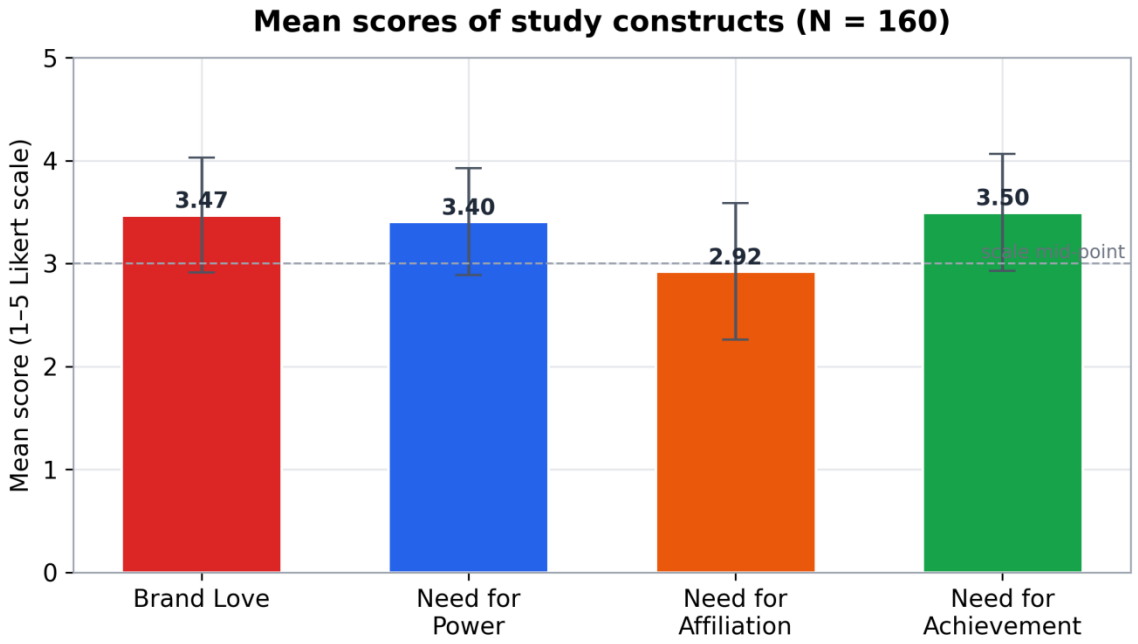
Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the four constructs. On the five-point scale, brand love recorded a mean of 3.47 (SD = 0.56), indicating a generally positive orientation toward loving fashion brands. Among the predictors, the need for achievement was highest (M = 3.50, SD = 0.57), closely followed by the need for power (M = 3.40, SD = 0.52), while the need for affiliation was lowest and the only construct below the scale mid-point (M = 2.92, SD = 0.66). Figure 2 displays these means with their standard deviations. The pattern suggests that, in this sample, achievement- and power-related motives were more salient than affiliation motives in the context of fashion consumption.

Table 2: ***Descriptive statistics for study constructs (N = 160).***

Construct	Role	Mean	SD
Brand love	Dependent	3.470	0.559
Need for power	Independent	3.405	0.519
Need for affiliation	Independent	2.923	0.663
Need for achievement	Independent	3.496	0.569

Note. All constructs measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Figure 2: Mean scores of study constructs with standard-deviation error bars.

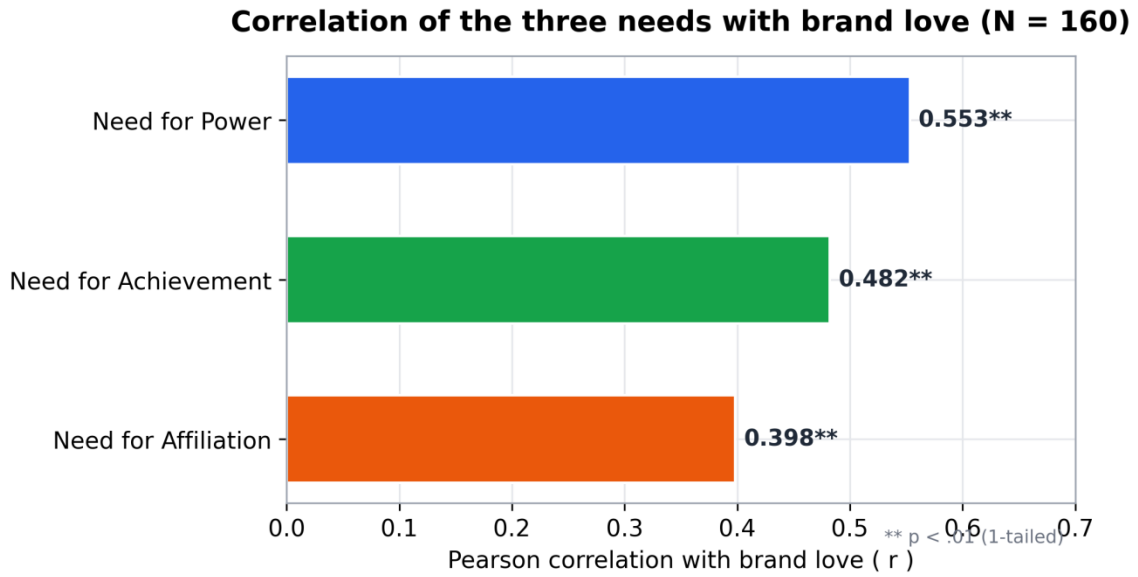


Note. Error bars represent ± 1 SD. The dashed line marks the scale mid-point (3.0). N = 160.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Each need was positively and significantly correlated with brand love at the .01 level (one-tailed). As shown in Figure 3, the need for power exhibited the strongest association (r = .553), followed by the need for achievement (r = .482) and the need for affiliation (r = .398). The consistently positive correlations provide initial support for the hypothesized relationships and motivate the regression analyses that follow.

Figure 3: Pearson correlations of the three needs with brand love.



Note. All correlations significant at p < .01 (one-tailed), N = 160.

4.3 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Three simple linear regression models were estimated, one per hypothesis. Table 3 consolidates

the key output. In every model the F-statistic was significant at $p < .001$ and the Durbin–Watson statistic fell within an acceptable range (approximately 1.9–2.0), indicating no problematic autocorrelation of residuals.

For H1, the need for power explained 30.6% of the variance in brand love ($R^2 = .306$), with $F(1, 158) = 69.51$, $p < .001$; the predictor was positive and significant ($B = 0.596$, $\beta = .553$, $t = 8.34$, $p < .001$) with a Durbin–Watson of 2.031. For H2, the need for affiliation explained 15.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .158$), with $F(1, 158) = 29.74$, $p < .001$, and a positive significant coefficient ($B = 0.336$, $\beta = .398$, $t = 5.45$, $p < .001$; Durbin–Watson = 1.960). For H3, the need for achievement explained 23.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .233$), with $F(1, 158) = 47.93$, $p < .001$, and a positive significant coefficient ($B = 0.474$, $\beta = .482$, $t = 6.92$, $p < .001$; Durbin–Watson = 1.891). Accordingly, all three null hypotheses were rejected and H1, H2, and H3 were supported.

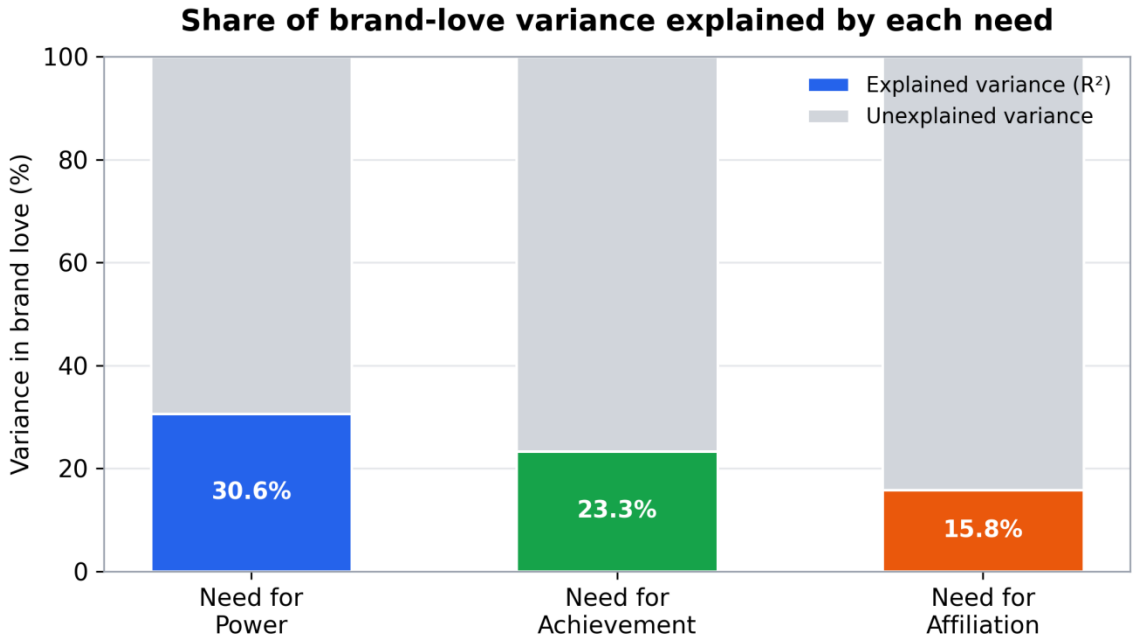
Table 3: *Summary of simple regression results for the three hypotheses (N = 160).*

Predictor	r	R^2	B	β	t	F	p	D–W
Need for power	.553	.306	0.596	.553	8.34	69.51	<.001	2.031
Need for affiliation	.398	.158	0.336	.398	5.45	29.74	<.001	1.960
Need for achievement	.482	.233	0.474	.482	6.92	47.93	<.001	1.891

Note. Dependent variable: brand love. B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; D–W = Durbin–Watson. df = (1, 158) for each F-test.

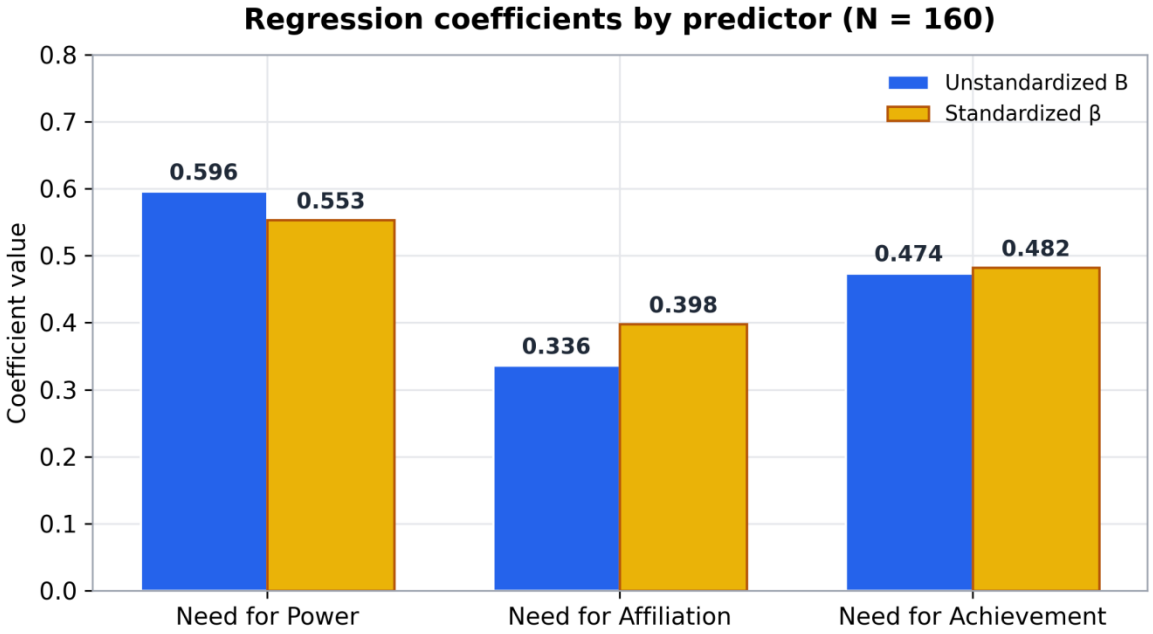
Figure 4 illustrates the share of brand-love variance explained by each need, and Figure 5 compares the unstandardized and standardized coefficients across predictors. Figure 6 plots the model-fit F-statistics, underscoring that the need-for-power model achieved the strongest fit. Together, the figures show a consistent ordering: power exerts the largest effect on brand love, achievement the second largest, and affiliation the smallest though all three remain positive and significant.

Figure 4: *Share of brand-love variance explained by each need (R^2).*



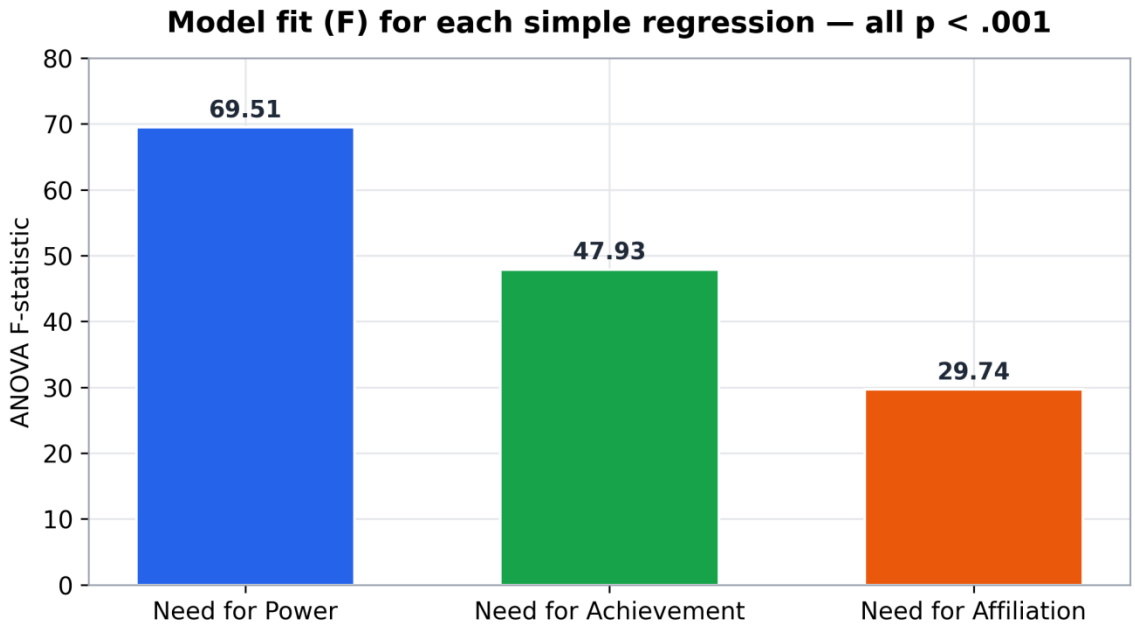
Note. Coloured segments show explained variance (R^2); grey segments show unexplained variance. N = 160.

Figure 5: Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression coefficients by predictor.



Note. All coefficients significant at p < .001. N = 160.

Figure 6: Model-fit F-statistics for the three simple regressions.



Note. All models significant at p < .001, df = (1, 158). N = 160.

4.4 Hypothesis Assessment Summary

Table 4 summarizes the outcome of hypothesis testing. On the basis of the significant F-statistics and coefficients reported above, all three hypotheses were accepted, confirming that the need for power, the need for affiliation, and the need for achievement each has a positive and significant impact on brand love for fashion brands.

Table 4: *Hypothesis assessment summary.*

Hypothesis	Statement	F	p	Conclusion
H1	Need for power → brand love	69.51	<.001	Accepted
H2	Need for affiliation → brand love	29.74	<.001	Accepted
H3	Need for achievement → brand love	47.93	<.001	Accepted

Note. Dependent variable: brand love for fashion brands. All hypotheses supported at $p < .001$.

5. Discussion

The results provide clear evidence that consumers' psychological needs relate positively to the love they feel for fashion brands. All three needs power, affiliation, and achievement significantly predicted brand love, and together the analyses paint a coherent picture of motivation-driven emotional attachment. The need for power emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for roughly a third of the variance in brand love. This is consistent with the symbolic and status-signalling character of fashion: apparel brands are highly visible markers of identity and prestige, so consumers motivated by influence and social standing may find in fashion brands a particularly effective means of self-presentation (Mandhachitara & Piamphongsant, 2016; Thomson et al., 2005).

The need for achievement was the second strongest predictor. Consumers oriented toward excellence and accomplishment appear to channel that orientation into a preference for brands perceived as high in competence and quality, deriving satisfaction from owning and using them (Moore et al., 2010). The need for affiliation, though the weakest predictor and the only construct scoring below the scale mid-point, remained positively and significantly related to brand love. This aligns with the view that consumers high in affiliation treat brands as social groups to which they can belong and through which they connect with like-minded others (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Marín & Ruiz de Maya, 2013). Its comparatively smaller effect may reflect the fact that fashion consumption in this sample was driven more by self-expression and status than by social belonging.

Theoretically, the study extends the brand-love literature upstream, toward the motivational origins of the construct. Much prior work has concentrated on defining brand love, measuring it, and tracing its consequences for loyalty and word of mouth (Bagozzi et al., 2017; Batra et al., 2012). By showing that all three of McClelland's needs predict brand love, the present findings suggest that emotional attachment to a brand is anchored in stable individual differences in motivation, not merely in situational brand experiences. The results are consistent with the identity-based account of brand love: consumers appear to love brands that help them enact the very motives mastery, status, and belonging that define their sense of self (Marín & Ruiz de Maya, 2013). This positions the three needs theory as a useful complement to experience- and community-based explanations, and it offers a parsimonious way of segmenting consumers by the motive a brand most helps them fulfil.

Overall, the findings reinforce the argument that brand love is not a purely rational outcome but a psychologically motivated one. Attending to the tangible and symbolic aspects of a brand allows consumers to enhance their social image and express their actual self, which in turn produces lasting brand-love relationships (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). For fashion marketers, the practical message is that emotional strategy should be grounded in the specific motives that animate their target consumers rather than in generic appeals.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research

6.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between McClelland's three needs theory and brand love for fashion brands using survey data from 160 respondents. The analysis concluded that the three needs significantly and positively influence brand love: the need for power was the strongest driver, followed by the need for achievement and the need for affiliation. Consumers purchase products and avail services that meet their needs and derive satisfaction from the value fashion brands provide; the emotional attachment they form is meaningfully shaped by the psychological motives underlying their consumption. The study thus offers deeper insight into the personality of brand lovers and into the interaction between social relationships and consumer–brand relationships.

6.2 Practical Implications

Because a loved brand converts more readily into loyalty, premium-price intentions, and positive word of mouth, fashion firms should formulate strategies that build genuine emotional appeal rather than functional parity alone. The evidence that power and achievement motives dominate in this market suggests that brand communication emphasizing self-expression, status, and competence is likely to resonate strongly. At the same time, the significant role of affiliation supports the value of community-building brand communities, personalized offers, and relational touchpoints that give customers a sense of belonging. Personalized offers, in particular, can deepen the personal connection between a brand and its customers and thereby improve retention, so firms in the fashion sector should strongly consider adopting them.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings and point toward future work. The study relied on convenience sampling within a single urban setting, which constrains generalizability; probability sampling across regions and consumer segments would strengthen external validity. Each need was tested in a separate simple regression; future studies could estimate a single multiple-regression or structural model to assess the joint and relative contribution of the three needs while controlling for their intercorrelation. Brand love also has broad applicability beyond apparel, so comparative work across product and service categories (including durable goods) would clarify whether the observed ordering of motives is specific to fashion. Because the factors that generate brand love may differ across consumer groups, researchers could examine variation by age, gender, lifestyle, values, and personality to profile the psychographic characteristics of consumers who love a brand. Finally, future work might explore additional psychological constructs such as anxiety or fear of rejection that may further illuminate the interplay between social relationships and consumer–brand relationships.

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