ISTANBUL TICARET UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOLS

A GUIDE FOR PREPARING

THESIS PROPOSAL

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Preface

This guideline has been prepared to define principles and guide students in writing their graduate thesis and doctoral dissertation proposals at the Istanbul Ticaret University graduate programs. Students who have completed their courses submit a thesis proposal to the Institutes together with the thesis form before starting their theses. After the thesis proposals are approved by the Institute, they proceed to begin their thesis studies.

There are several essential sections that must be included in a thesis proposal. These include the thesis topic, the scope and content of the study, the significance and originality of the topic, the main research questions, the hypotheses related to these questions, the research methodology to be employed, the literature review, and the limitations of the study. Each of these sections is written to clarify issues such as what the thesis topic is, why it has been selected, which questions it seeks to answer, and which gap in the literature it aims to fill. The thesis proposal demonstrates that the student has a thorough understanding of the subject, content, design, research problem, methodology, relevant literature, and the existing gap in the field.

Master's thesis proposals and doctoral dissertation proposals include the same sections and are prepared according to the same academic rationale. However, compared to doctoral dissertation proposals, master's thesis proposals are shorter and more limited in scope. A master's thesis proposal is expected to be approximately 7–10 pages in length (around 1,500–2,000 words), whereas a doctoral dissertation proposal is expected to be approximately 15–20 pages (around 4,000–5,000 words).

In addition to the issues outlined here, students should review the attached sample master's thesis and doctoral dissertation proposal templates.

SECTIONS OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL

1. Thesis Title

It is important that the thesis title be clear, precise, simple, plain, concise, and easily understandable. When a reader examines the title, they should be able to readily grasp the thesis's subject, scope, and overall focus. Unnecessary words and excessive detail should be avoided in the title. If the removal of a word from the title does not lead to a change in meaning, this indicates that the title has reached its optimal form.

The thesis title should not be normative; rather, it must be scientific and objective in nature. Expressions that convey interpretation, judgment, or definitive conclusions should be avoided in thesis titles. Abbreviations should generally not be used in titles, except in cases where they are widely recognized and commonly used in literature.

2. Subject of the Thesis

In this section, the student should clearly, precisely, and comprehensively explain the thesis topic. The subject of the thesis is not a section that can be addressed with a single sentence and passed over briefly. To ensure a full understanding of the topic, the themes and problems it encompasses must also be explained.

To make the topic engaging, the student may introduce it through an anecdote, a striking statement, an analysis of certain insights drawn from the literature, or by presenting a problem related to the subject. Subsequently, the student should outline the topic and its main dimensions.

3. The Purpose of the Thesis Subject

Any study has one or more purposes. Each research endeavor seeks to achieve a particular aim or to serve a specific objective. The selected thesis topic is likewise undertaken to fulfill a defined purpose. A thesis may pursue multiple objectives.

In this context, the student should clearly explain what he/she intends to accomplish by selecting the given thesis topic, which research question(s) the study aims to answer, and which practical problem(s) it seeks to address or illuminate.

4. The Scope and Content of the Thesis

This section provides a detailed description of the thesis. Here, the student should clearly explain the research design and the scope and content of the thesis topic in a precise and systematic manner. Issues such as which problem the thesis addresses, which research questions it seeks to answer, under what limitations the study will be conducted, and on which assumptions it is based should be clarified in this section. In addition, key concepts related to the topic and the specific meanings the student attributes to them should be explained.

Within this section, the student is also expected to specify the research questions the study aims to address. A thesis may include one or more main research questions, along with related sub-questions. It is important that these questions be presented in a clearly itemized format.

In addition, a corresponding hypothesis should be formulated and presented in this section for each research question. This is because the thesis research will test the hypotheses developed at this stage

5. Significance and Originality of the Thesis

The student should clearly explain the original value of the thesis topic in an understandable manner. This section should address issues such as why there is a need for this topic, which gap in the literature it aims to fill, what contributions it will make to the existing body of knowledge, how it will contribute to theoretical debates or methodological approaches, and which social problems it may help to illuminate or resolve.

What makes a thesis strong is not only the way it is written but also the originality and uniqueness of the topic it addresses. The originality of a thesis topic emerges from the identification of gaps in the literature. To establish this, prior studies on similar subjects should be reviewed, and the aspects that remain underexplored or unaddressed should be identified. It should then be convincingly demonstrated that the proposed thesis will fill this gap.

6. Research Methodology of the Thesis

One essential section of a thesis proposal is the research methodology to be employed throughout the research process. The student may adopt a research method appropriate to the topic, along with the techniques associated with that method. The research methodology comprises two main stages: data collection and data analysis.

In data collection, scientific research generally relies on two principal methodological approaches: qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods typically rely on data collection techniques such as literature reviews, document analysis, interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, are built upon numerical data collection techniques such as surveys and structured questionnaires. A mixed-methods approach, which combines data collection techniques from both qualitative and quantitative traditions, may also be preferred in a thesis study. The student should explain, in a scientifically grounded and persuasive manner, which method has been selected and the rationale behind this choice.

The methodology section should also include information on how the collected data will be analyzed. In qualitative research, phenomenological methods grounded in interpretive approaches are commonly employed. Such methods generally employ discourse or content analysis. In quantitative research, data are analyzed through statistical procedures. In this context, descriptive analyses, cross-tabulations, and various statistical tests (such as t-tests, analysis of variance [ANOVA], chi-square tests, factor analysis, and correlation analysis) are among the most frequently used techniques.

It is important to explain convincingly which analytical technique is most appropriate for the thesis data and why this particular technique has been selected.

7. Research Limitations

Every research study is conducted within certain limitations. First, because the study sample is confined to a specific time frame and a defined population, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Second, because the research data collection instruments rely on participants' self-reports, the accuracy of the collected information may be constrained by participants' perceptions and attitudes. Third, due to time and resource constraints, the study may focus only on selected variables, leaving other potentially relevant variables outside its scope. Finally, as

the research is carried out within a particular methodological framework, findings that could be obtained through alternative methods may not be included in the study.

All these and similar constraints may constitute the limitations of the research. Therefore, when preparing a thesis proposal, it is important to identify potential limitations and explain how they will be addressed or mitigated.

8. Literature Review Related to the Thesis Subject

One essential section of a thesis proposal is the literature review. In this section, the student seeks to justify the proposed research by identifying and demonstrating the existing gap in literature.

Three main components are expected to emerge from the literature review: the fundamental concepts of the subject, the major theoretical and methodological approaches, and the gap in the relevant body of literature. The literature review in a thesis proposal is not intended to cover the entire body of literature; rather, it should present an organized summary of the main works directly related to the topic.

For a master's thesis proposal, a literature review of approximately two to three pages is generally considered sufficient. However, in doctoral dissertation proposals, the literature review is expected to be more comprehensive and may extend to five to ten pages.

9. Design and Structure of the Thesis

In the thesis design section of the proposal, the thesis chapters are briefly introduced. The general framework of each chapter—excluding the introduction and conclusion— is outlined. If the student has already developed a preliminary draft of the thesis, this draft may also be presented under the heading of "Thesis Outline" within the proposal.

In such cases, each chapter in the draft should be presented not only with its main headings but also, where possible, with its subheadings. If the main and subheadings of the thesis have been clearly structured, it is appropriate to include a "Table of Contents" section at this stage.

10. Schedule of the Thesis Study

The thesis work schedule outlines how the time allocated to the thesis will be distributed across the various work packages and research process stages. The duration allocated for a master's thesis is 12 months, while the period allocated for a doctoral dissertation is 24 months.

However, depending on the student's performance, this period may be shortened or extended in accordance with the relevant Graduate Education Regulations.

Doctoral students are required to submit three progress reports to the thesis monitoring committee, each at six-month intervals. To proceed with the remaining stages of their dissertation studies, these progress reports must be approved by the monitoring committee.

11. Brief Bibliography Related to the Thesis Subject

The bibliography included in the thesis proposal consists primarily of the sources cited within the proposal text. In addition to the works directly used, several key references relevant to the thesis topic may be included to provide a broader intellectual context. However, it is not necessary at this stage to present all sources that may be used in the thesis at a later stage of the research process.

SAMPLE TEMPLATE FOR

MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL

ISTANBUL TICARET UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

MASTER'S PROGRAM IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

**SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF BEING VISIBLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA:
A STUDY ON PLACE PREFERENCES ON INSTAGRAM**

MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL

Student's Full Name

Istanbul, 2026

1. Topic of the Thesis

Rapid advances in communication technologies have transformed the nature of interpersonal communication and paved the way for new forms of technology-mediated interaction (McLuhan, 1964; Castells, 2013). One of the most visible arenas in which this transformation has unfolded is Instagram, one of the most popular social networking platforms in recent years, where a substantial portion of everyday life is now represented and shared. Individuals increasingly value not only existing in the physical world as a tangible living space, but also being present, socializing, and expressing themselves within the virtual worlds they construct on Instagram (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Binark, 2005).

The focus of this study is to examine the modes of existence of Instagram users, with particular emphasis on university students. The research centers on the problem of individuals distancing themselves from the real world and feeling more comfortable and freer within the allure of the virtual realm, while simultaneously constructing new forms of identity and selfhood through images they share as a declaration of "this is who I am" (Goffman, 2016; Hall, 2003). In this context, the use of place has become a crucial component of identity construction. The places users visit, see, or claim to have visited function as symbolic resources through which they present their social status, tastes, and identities to others (Göregenli, 2010; Robins, 1999). Accordingly, this thesis will explore how Instagram has become a "spectacle space" that enables new forms of identity and self-presentation, and it will investigate the role that place preferences play within this process.

2. Purpose of the Thesis

The primary aim of this study is to investigate in depth how the places individuals choose for visibility on social media shape their self-presentation and identity performance. Due to its visually oriented structure, Instagram allows users to construct and stage the person they aspire to be (Kara, 2018; Arık, 2013). Within this framework, the study seeks to understand how users reconstruct their identities and selves in the virtual realm and how they manifest their desire for visibility through the places they choose—or appear to choose.

In addition, the study aims to demonstrate how Instagram has evolved beyond a photo-sharing application and how it transforms people's lifestyles, consumption habits, and perceptions of place. Identifying the role of influencer culture and popular venues in individuals' efforts to

build an "ideal self" constitutes another central objective of the research (Baudrillard, 1997; Güçdemir, 2017).

3. Scope and Content of the Thesis

This thesis is situated at the intersection of communication studies, sociology, and social psychology, and aims to examine how Instagram use relates to university students' self-presentation, identity construction, spatial representation, and practices of visibility. Building on the premise that, in an increasingly digitalized world, the self is constituted performatively, the study will draw on Erving Goffman's framework of "self-presentation" and "dramaturgy," alongside Stuart Hall's approach to identity, which emphasizes that identity is not fixed but is culturally and contextually constructed as an ongoing process (Hall, 2003; Goffman, 2016). This framework will be further complemented by discussions of the fluidity of identity in late modernity and its rearticulation through individualized narratives (Giddens, 2014; Bauman, 2020).

Within this perspective, place will be conceptualized not merely as a physical location, but as a socially produced space imbued with symbolic meanings. Accordingly, the thesis will discuss how place on Instagram is instrumentalized as the "stage" of identity narratives and as an indicator of status and belonging (Göregenli, 2010; Castells, 2013). The dimension of visibility will be addressed as a key condition of social media existence, examined through the desire to be seen and liked, as well as through practices of impression management (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013; Arık, 2013).

Drawing on focus group interviews conducted with university students, the research seeks to reveal how users make sense of their practices of place selection, place sharing, and geotagging, and how these practices intersect with their visibility goals and self-presentation strategies.

3.1. Main Research Questions of the Thesis

The central research question of this study is how university students on Instagram use place-through place selection, place sharing, and geotagging -in line with their goals of self-presentation and visibility, and how these practices are reflected in processes of identity/self-construction. To elaborate on this overarching question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

Q1. *How does Instagram exert a transformative influence on users' processes of constructing a new identity and self?*

This question examines whether Instagram provides individuals with opportunities for "self-construction" and, through which practices this is realized (e.g., post selection, profile curation, representational strategies). The dramaturgical perspective on impression management (Goffman, 2016) and discussions of the fluidity of identity in late modernity (Hall, 2003; Giddens, 2014; Bauman, 2020) will constitute the principal interpretive framework for addressing this question.

Q2. *What is the relationship, within the context of visibility, between users' purposes for using Instagram and their social/emotional needs (e.g., being liked, receiving approval, belonging)?*

This question aims to discuss whether being visible is not merely a matter of technical reach but also relates to affective needs and self-evaluation processes. Focus group interviews will be used to make visible how participants interpret metrics such as likes and views, and how these interpretations shape their posting decisions (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013).

Q3. *How do places that become popular on social media (especially through influencers) shape users' real-world place preferences and consumption behaviors?*

This question investigates whether Instagram functions as a guiding force in everyday mobility and consumption. Its conceptual background is supported by the relationship between influencer dynamics, trend production, and status signalling (Arık, 2013); the role of place in the social production of meaning (Göregenli, 2010); and the transformation of spatial experience in the network society (Castells, 2013).

Q4. *Are place-related posts on Instagram directly tied to individuals' efforts to present an "ideal self" and to achieve visibility, or do they primarily function as a practice of accumulating memories?*

This question aims to differentiate the motivations behind place-sharing through participants' narratives. It asks whether the discourse of "collecting memories" coexists with that of "visibility/impression management," or whether one becomes dominant under conditions -an issue to be interpreted through the dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 2016).

Q5. *By geotagging places in their posts, what kinds of perceptions and status do users aim to construct in the eyes of their followers?*

This question examines the potential of geotagging to foster a sense of status and belonging in followers' eyes beyond its informational function. The transformation of place into a signifier on Instagram and its position within the economy of visibility will be evaluated through participants' accounts (Göregenli, 2010; Arık, 2013).

3.2. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this thesis have been formulated to explain how practices of self-presentation and visibility on Instagram relate to spatial representation (e.g., geotagging, placing the venue within the frame, constructing narratives through place) and to place preferences. Since the study will be conducted with a qualitative design, the hypotheses below will not be approached through a "statistical testing" logic. Rather, they will be evaluated and discussed in light of the narratives, justifications, themes, and patterns that emerge from the focus group interviews. The hypotheses will be assessed through the thematic analysis of focus group data, and the findings will be interpreted alongside the research questions. In this sense, the hypotheses presented in this section serve as an analytical framework that guides the inquiry in answering the research questions.

H1. Instagram users tend to develop a performance-based mode of self-presentation that reflects the "ideal self" they aspire to embody in online environments.

This hypothesis draws on the dramaturgical perspective, which emphasizes that the self is "staged" across contexts and that individuals present themselves through impression management (Goffman, 2016). The fluid and continually reconstructed nature of identity in late modernity (Hall, 2003; Giddens, 2014; Bauman, 2020) suggests that, on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram, self-presentation may be shaped in a more selective, strategically curated manner. In the focus group interviews, the analysis will examine how participants describe the tension between the "real self" and the "ideal self," and on what grounds they make choices about what to share.

H2. The primary motivation for sharing places on Instagram is not solely the accumulation of memories, but also the desire for visibility, social approval, and identification with a particular status/belonging group.

This hypothesis aligns with approaches suggesting that photo-sharing and visibility on social networking platforms are closely connected to strategies of self-presentation (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013; Arık, 2013). The study will discuss, through participants' narratives, whether place operates as a "signifier" on Instagram-producing implications related to lifestyle, status, and belonging. In the focus groups, the analysis will explore how the rationale of "preserving memories" is articulated in relation to the rationale of "visibility/reputation," and under what conditions each becomes more salient.

H3. Places made visible by influencers and popular accounts can shape users' real-world place preferences and consumption behaviours.

This hypothesis aligns with scholarship arguing that social media visibility and influencer dynamics can exert a guiding influence on consumption practices (Arık, 2013). The repeated visibility of venues on Instagram may reinforce practices such as "following trends," "going to experience," and "going to share." Focus group interviews will examine how influencer impact is reflected in decisions about place selection and how users interpret and negotiate this influence.

H4. Users tend to engage with physical places not only to experience them, but also to use them as a stage/set that strengthens self-presentation by signalling "I am there too" in the digital realm.

This hypothesis is grounded in the dramaturgical perspective, which conceptualizes self-presentation together with elements such as stage, setting, and performance (Goffman, 2016). The ways in which place is incorporated into the frame on Instagram, geotagging practices, and the production of "shareable experiences" may indicate a heightened emphasis on representing the experience itself. Accordingly, the focus groups will analyze how participants construct the relationship between "living" a place and "showing" it, and how they position place within their narratives of the self (Göregenli, 2010).

H5. Users aim to attain a certain status in their followers' eyes by tagging locations in the photographs they share.

On social media platforms, adding location tags to shared photographs does not merely convey geographical information; it is also seen as a symbolic indicator of status. In particular, tagging popular, luxurious, or prestigious venues enables users to communicate indirect messages to their followers regarding their lifestyle, socio-economic position, and cultural capital.

4. Significance and Contribution of the Thesis Topic

The relationship between social media and identity/self has been widely addressed in the literature. Research that conceptualizes identity in online environments as "presented" and "constructed" highlights the transformative nature of identity performances in virtual contexts (Armağan, 2013). Social media has also been discussed as a sphere that intensifies the desire to be visible and the ways in which this desire permeates everyday life (Eraslan, 2013). Self-presentation strategies through photo sharing constitute a key line of inquiry for understanding practices of "presenting the self" on social networking sites (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013). Regarding Instagram, content-based studies that make user practices visible (e.g., analyses of Instagram photographs) have revealed patterns of representation and sharing on the platform (Kara, 2018). Similarly, studies that discuss identity construction through specific content categories (such as food photography) demonstrate the link between consumption practices and identity narratives on Instagram (Demirel & Karanfiloğlu, 2020). Moreover, debates on social media fame and influencerization provide an important background for understanding how the desire for visibility is tied to status and recognition (Arık, 2013).

However, a substantial portion of existing studies either remain largely confined to self-presentation in relation to photo sharing (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013) or explain identity construction on Instagram mainly through content patterns (Kara, 2018), and often do not jointly and in depth discuss how place preferences -such as the selection of venues, geotagging practices, and the construction of place as a "signifier" within the frame- articulate with goals of visibility and self-presentation. Although studies address the place–identity relationship on Instagram, they often proceed through a single case or a single place type, limiting their ability to generalize how place becomes a marker of status and belonging across different user groups (Korkmaz, 2020).

The original contribution of this thesis lies in conceptualizing place on Instagram not merely as a "background" or "setting," but as a signifier that operates together with users' visibility goals-as a means through which belonging and status are produced. The study's significance can be

summarized in several respects. First, it brings the discussion of the "always visible" dynamic on social media (Eraslan, 2013) down to concrete micro-level practices by examining users' place selection and their practices of sharing places and geotagging. Second, it offers a platform-specific contribution by reading the literature on photo-based self-presentation (Şener & Özkoçak, 2013) together with forms of spatial representation on Instagram. In doing so, it extends the line of inquiry opened by studies that render content patterns on Instagram visible (Kara, 2018) as well as by research that discusses identity through specific content genres (Demirel & Karanfiloğlu, 2020), by integrating these perspectives with an analysis of place as a marker of status and belonging. Furthermore, by considering influencerization and social media fame debates (Arık, 2013) alongside place preferences and visibility practices, the thesis identifies a timely gap in the literature. Finally, it reopens the discussion on the changing nature of identity presentations in virtual environments (Armağan, 2013) by focusing on how place becomes articulated with digital representation.

In these respects, the thesis aims to address a gap in the literature not at the level of "identity in general," but by jointly theorizing and empirically examining -through qualitative depth- how place preferences, visibility, and self-presentation are intertwined on Instagram, based on contemporary user practices.

5. Research Method of the Thesis

In this study, a qualitative research approach has been adopted to analyze the research problem in depth and to uncover participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes. Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand social phenomena in their natural contexts and focuses on "how" and "why" questions.

5.1. Data Collection Technique

The study employs focus group interviews as the primary data collection technique. This method was selected because group dynamics enable participants to build on and respond to one another's ideas, thereby generating richer and more detailed data.

5.2. Sample

The study population consists of university students who use Instagram. Using purposive

sampling, three separate groups of five participants each have been formed. In total, interviews will be conducted with 15 participants **(**13 women and 2 men**).** Participants range in age from 18 to 46, and all are undergraduate or graduate-level students.

5.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained will be analysed through descriptive analysis and content analysis. Participants' statements will be interpreted within the framework of emerging themes (e.g., "The Relationship Between Self-Control and Performance," "Place Preferences," and "The Role of Social Media").

5.4. Ethical Principles

Throughout the research process, the principles of research and publication ethics will be strictly observed. To conduct the study, the necessary approval will be obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Ticaret University. Data collection will commence only after ethical approval has been granted.

Participants will be provided with clear, comprehensible information about the study's purpose, and it will be emphasized that participation is entirely voluntary. They will be informed that the data collected will be used solely for academic purposes, will not be shared with third parties, and will be stored in accordance with confidentiality principles. During the survey implementation, participants' identifying information will not be requested, and all procedures will comply with relevant legislation on the protection of personal data.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study entails certain limitations due to its qualitative design and its focus on a specific participant group. Because the research is restricted to university students who use Instagram, the findings may have limited generalizability to all social media users or to other age and education groups. In addition, because the data are based on participants' self-reports, responses may be affected by social desirability bias, leading some behaviours to be reported differently than they occur in practice. Moreover, certain influences (e.g**.,** influencer effects) may persist in everyday practices even when participants deny them in their verbal accounts. This should also be considered as a limitation of the study.

7. A Brief Review of the Relevant Literature

The study's theoretical framework is structured around the concepts of identity, self, place, and social media.

7.1. Concepts of Identity and Self

In the literature, identity is commonly defined as the individual's answer to the question "Who am I?" and as a sense of social belonging. Stuart Hall conceptualizes identity as "a process that is not fixed, but continuously shaped and transformed through historical and cultural conditions," thereby highlighting the distinction between the modern and the postmodern subject. While identity in traditional contexts was largely limited to family and immediate surroundings, in modern and postmodern contexts it has become fragmented, fluid, and increasingly "constructible" through consumption culture and technology.

The concept of the self will be addressed through Erving Goffman's (2016) dramaturgical approach. According to Goffman, life is akin to a theatrical stage and individuals are actors. While individuals perform in the "front stage" to influence an audience (i.e., other people), they prepare their roles in the "backstage." This theoretical lens provides a foundational basis for explaining forms of self-presentation on Instagram (e.g., filtered images, curated places, staged settings).

7.2. Place and Visibility

Place is approached not only in terms of its physical features, but as a phenomenon to which individuals attribute meaning and through which they express identity. The perspectives of theorists such as Lefebvre and Castells on place will be considered within the framework of the social production of space. In contemporary contexts, place also functions as a vehicle for "being visible." Baudrillard's theory of simulation will be discussed in relation to the way place presentations on social media can replace the real-producing forms of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1997). Rather than merely existing in the physical world, individuals may seek to gain symbolic status by appearing in popular places on Instagram.

7.3. Social Media and Instagram

Social media constitutes an interactive structure in which, with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, users become content producers. Instagram is distinguished from other social networking platforms by its visually oriented architecture. Studies in the literature frequently argue that Instagram fosters narcissism, intensifies a culture of comparison, and disseminates consumer culture (Kara, 2018; Güçdemir, 2017). Distinct from research that primarily focuses on "social media addiction" or "usage habits," this study aims to contribute to the literature by examining how place serves as a marker of identity.

8. Thesis Structure and Design

This thesis is designed to present -within a systematic and coherent framework- the processes of establishing the theoretical foundations, explicating the research design, and analyzing and discussing the findings. Including the introduction and conclusion, the thesis comprises **six** chapters in total. In line with the conventional expectations for master's theses, the chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion are organized around four core pillars: (i) the theoretical and conceptual framework, (ii) methodology, (iii) findings, and (iv) discussion**.** Within this structure, it is envisaged that the theoretical and conceptual framework will constitute approximately 25–30% of the thesis, while the methodology, findings, and discussion chapters will together account for roughly 70%**.**

In the Introduction, the topic, purpose, significance, and scope of the study will be outlined. The introduction will also justify the need to investigate the relationship between self-presentation and identity construction practices on Instagram, as well as the dynamics of spatial representation and visibility. In addition, this section summarizes the research questions, hypotheses, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 1 establishes the study's theoretical and conceptual framework. In this chapter, concepts such as identity/self, self-presentation and dramaturgy, visibility and social approval, the social meanings of place, and digital representations of space will be addressed in ways that support the thesis's central problematic. Key theoretical foundations - particularly Goffman's approach to self-presentation and Hall's discussions of identity- will be examined in a systematic manner. This chapter provides the theoretical backbone of the thesis and serves as a conceptual basis for the analyses developed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the research methodology. It describes the study's qualitative research design, the rationale for employing focus group interviews, the population and sampling strategy, participant selection criteria, the data collection process, the interview flow, and ethical principles. The chapter also details how the data will be analyzed (e.g., thematic analysis) and specifies the steps to be followed throughout the analytical process.

In Chapter 3, the findings from the focus group interviews will be presented systematically. Participants' accounts and emergent patterns will be organized under themes aligned with the research questions and hypotheses. Findings will be elaborated and supported with illustrative excerpts, focusing on dimensions such as ideal-self presentation on Instagram, motivations for visibility, the use of place as a marker of status and belonging, geotagging practices, and influencer effects.

Chapter 4 is the discussion chapter. Here, the findings will be interpreted in relation to the existing literature and the thesis's theoretical framework. The chapter will explain how spatial representation and visibility dynamics on Instagram relate to identity and self-presentation and will clarify where the findings support or differ from previous research. The sociological and communicative implications will also be evaluated to highlight the study's conceptual contribution.

Finally, the Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations section will provide an integrated summary of the main results. It will highlight the study's contribution to the literature and its potential practical and field implications. At the same time, limitations—such as the restricted sample and the self-report nature of the data—will be clearly stated, and recommendations for future research will be made, particularly regarding methodological approaches and increased sampling diversity.

9. Thesis Work Plan and Timeline

This master's thesis is planned to be completed within 12 months**.** The research process consists of the following stages: conducting the literature review and developing the theoretical framework; conducting qualitative fieldwork (focus group interviews); analysing the data through thematic analysis; and writing the thesis manuscript, followed by final revisions and editing.

Throughout the process, certain work packages may proceed in parallel -for instance, the literature review may continue to be updated during the analysis and writing phases. During the

focus group stage, planning steps such as identifying participants, managing invitation and communication procedures, and scheduling the interviews will also be conducted as integral components of the fieldwork process. The final stage will involve ensuring the overall coherence of the thesis and completing all formal formatting requirements in accordance with the Istanbul Ticaret University Thesis Writing Guidelines**.**

Table 1: Work Plan and Timeline

Work packages and thesis chapters to be written	Duration
Literature review and development of the theoretical/conceptual framework (writing the theoretical chapter)	3 months
Finalizing the research design, preparing the focus group questions, ethics/informed consent procedures, and pilot study	1 month
Conducting focus group interviews, including participant recruitment and scheduling/planning, and completing the data collection process	2 months
Data transcription, coding, and thematic analysis (categorizing the findings)	2 months
Writing up the findings and discussing them in relation to the literature	3 months
Comprehensive review of the thesis; final proofreading; formatting and formal editing (compliance with the Thesis Writing Guidelines), and submission	1 month
Total	12 months

References

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A SAMPLE TEMPLATE FOR

PhD DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

ISTANBUL TICARET UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT

THE EFFECT OF BRAND IMAGE ON BRAND LOYALTY IN THE FASHION RETAIL SECTOR AND SLOW FASHION INVOLVEMENT

PhD DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Student's Name and Surname

1. Subject of the Dissertation

In contemporary marketing literature, the ability of brands to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage has evolved into a multidimensional structure that cannot be explained solely through functional product attributes or pricing strategies. Particularly as consumer-oriented marketing approaches have strengthened, how brands are positioned in consumers' minds and emotional worlds has become a fundamental determinant of brand success. In this context, brand image emerges as a strategic concept encompassing consumers' perceptions, associations, emotional evaluations, and symbolic meanings regarding a brand (Rio et al., 2001).

Brand image shapes consumers' attitudes toward a brand; over time, these attitudes can transform into a more enduring, stronger attachment, defined as brand loyalty. Brand loyalty encompasses not only repeat purchase behavior but also positive attitudes toward the brand, emotional commitment, and a tendency to develop resistance to alternative brands (Oliver, 1999). Numerous studies in the marketing literature show that a strong, consistent brand image has a positive, significant effect on brand loyalty (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

The fashion retail sector is one of the industries where the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty is most evident. Fashion products go beyond merely satisfying physical needs; they are also regarded as reflections of individuals' identity construction, social status display, and lifestyle preferences. Therefore, in fashion retail, brand image occupies a central position in the symbolic and emotional bonds that consumers establish with brands (Kim & Kim, 2005). Consumers tend to develop greater loyalty toward fashion brands they believe express themselves and align with their personal values.

On the other hand, in recent years, the deepening of environmental problems, the rapid depletion of natural resources, and the growing societal awareness regarding ethical production conditions have brought about a profound paradigm shift in the fashion industry. While criticisms of the fast-fashion model have increased, the slow-fashion approach—centered on sustainability—has been gaining importance in both academic literature and consumer behavior. Slow fashion is defined as an approach that prioritizes quality, ethical values, environmental sensitivity, and a long-term usage perspective in production and consumption processes (Clark, 2008).

The slow fashion orientation leads consumers to consider not only aesthetic and price-related factors in their purchasing decisions but also value-based criteria such as environmental impact, ethical production, locality, and conscious consumption (Jung & Jin, 2016). In this context, the

brand evaluation criteria of consumers interested in slow fashion tend to differentiate: brand image is shaped not merely through style or prestige elements but also within the framework of sustainability and social responsibility. Therefore, slow fashion involvement emerges as a significant variable that transforms the nature of the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty.

The subject of this dissertation is to examine the effect of brand image on brand loyalty in the fashion retail sector and to analyze the role of slow fashion involvement in this relationship. Within the scope of the study, in addition to the direct effect of brand image on consumers' brand loyalty, how slow fashion consumer orientation—through its dimensions of conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity—shapes this relationship is also addressed. Particularly in the Turkish context, the limited number of studies that examine brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement within an integrated model in the fashion retail sector necessitates the academic investigation of this topic.

Accordingly, this dissertation is built upon a comprehensive research topic that aims both to contribute theoretically to the marketing literature and to provide implications for the development of sustainable brand strategies for brands operating in the fashion retail sector.

2. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this dissertation is to examine the effect of brand image on brand loyalty in the fashion retail sector and to analyze the role of slow-fashion involvement in this relationship. In contemporary marketing understanding, consumers' brand preferences are shaped not only by the functional benefits or economic advantages of products, but also by the values brands represent, their symbolic meanings, and perceptions of social responsibility, which play a decisive role in purchasing decisions. In this context, brand image is considered a strategic factor that shapes consumer behavior and plays a critical role in the formation of brand loyalty (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

The fashion retail sector provides a context in which brand image and brand loyalty relationships can be intensely observed due to its high level of symbolic consumption and rapidly changing trend structure. When evaluating fashion brands, consumers focus not only on product quality but also on the lifestyle the brand offers, its aesthetic stance, and its identity promises. This situation transforms the effect of brand image on brand loyalty into a more complex and multidimensional structure (Kim & Kim, 2005). One of the primary aims of this

dissertation is to empirically reveal this multidimensional relationship within the context of the fashion retail sector in Türkiye.

In addition, the growing societal sensitivity to environmental sustainability and ethical production has driven a significant transformation in consumer behavior. The slow fashion approach, as a concrete reflection of this transformation, encourages consumers to incorporate value-based criteria, such as conscious consumption, local production, and exclusivity, into their purchasing decisions (Jung & Jin, 2016). Within this framework, the dissertation aims to analyze how slow fashion involvement affects the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty, and whether it alters the nature of this relationship.

Another objective of the study is to address slow fashion involvement as a multidimensional construct and to examine separately the effects of its sub-dimensions—conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity—on brand loyalty. Although studies in the literature focus on slow fashion, empirical research that considers this concept as a mediating variable in the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty remains limited (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011). By addressing this gap, the dissertation aims to clarify the role of slow fashion within the marketing literature.

In addition, another objective of the study is to examine whether the variables of brand image, slow-fashion involvement, and brand loyalty differ across demographic characteristics. Findings suggesting that consumers' demographic attributes—such as age, gender, education level, and income—may influence sustainability perceptions and brand loyalty increase the significance of these analyses (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). Accordingly, the dissertation aims to provide both theoretical and practical implications.

In conclusion, the aim of this study is to analyze the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement within an integrated model and to generate guiding insights for brands operating in the fashion retail sector to develop sustainable brand strategies. At the same time, the study seeks to make original contributions to the marketing literature by drawing on evidence from the Turkish context.

3. Scope and Content of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement in the fashion retail sector. The scope of the study includes addressing brand-related constructs, which hold a significant place in explaining consumer behavior in the

marketing literature, alongside sustainability-oriented consumption tendencies. Accordingly, the dissertation is built upon a multilayered structure that incorporates both conceptual and practical dimensions.

The dissertation's conceptual framework primarily addresses the historical and theoretical foundations of fashion and fashion retailing, and examines their relationship with consumer behavior within the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of fashion. Within this scope, the definition of fashion, its historical development, theories of fashion adoption, and the structural characteristics of fashion retailing are discussed in detail. Subsequently, the slow fashion approach, which has emerged as an alternative to the fast fashion paradigm, is evaluated within the context of sustainability, ethical production, and conscious consumption, and is associated with consumer purchasing processes (Fletcher, 2010).

In the second stage of the study, the concept of brand and the fundamental elements associated with branding are examined comprehensively. In this context, the definition of brand, its historical development, the importance of branding, and brand-related constructs—such as brand identity, brand personality, brand equity, and brand awareness—are analyzed. In particular, the concept of brand image is elaborated within the framework of consumer perception, and its components and effects on consumer attitudes are explained. This section also addresses the concept of brand loyalty through its cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and discusses the factors influencing brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

Within the scope of the dissertation, the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty is evaluated specifically in the context of the fashion retail sector; how this relationship differs due to the sector's symbolic and experiential nature is also examined. It is emphasized that the bond consumers establish with brands in fashion retail does not rely solely on rational benefits, but is shaped by emotional, symbolic, and value-based elements (Büyükdağ & Kitapcı, 2021). Within this framework, the effect of brand image on brand loyalty is examined holistically.

The empirical scope of the study comprises a quantitative survey of consumers living in Türkiye. Within the research framework, measurement scales with established validity and reliability in the literature were employed to assess the variables of brand image, slow-fashion consumer orientation, and brand loyalty. Slow fashion involvement was addressed through its sub-dimensions—conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity—and the effects of these dimensions on brand loyalty were analyzed separately (Jung & Jin, 2016). In addition, the mediating role of slow fashion involvement in the effect of brand image on brand loyalty was tested within the framework of structural equation modeling.

The dissertation consists of five main chapters. The first chapter presents the conceptual framework related to fashion, fashion retailing, and slow fashion. The second chapter examines the concept of brand, brand image, brand loyalty, and the relationships among these constructs in detail. The third chapter includes the research methodology, research model, hypotheses, and the findings obtained from the empirical analysis. In the fourth chapter, the research findings are discussed in light of the relevant literature; and in the fifth and final chapter, conclusions, implications for the sector and academia, and the limitations of the study are presented.

Within this scope and content framework, the dissertation aims to contribute to the development of sustainable brand strategies that enhance consumer loyalty for fashion retail brands. At the same time, it offers an original contribution to the marketing literature through the Turkish context, addressing the relationship between brand image and slow fashion from a holistic perspective—an area that has been examined in only a limited number of studies.

3.1 Research Questions

This dissertation aims to explain the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement, which are among the key marketing variables shaping consumer behavior in the fashion retail sector. In this respect, the research seeks to answer how consumers form brand perceptions, how these perceptions transform into loyalty behaviors, and what role the slow fashion orientation plays in this process. Although the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty has frequently been addressed in the marketing literature, re-evaluating it in the context of sustainability and ethical consumption is the study's central focus (Oliver, 1999).

Five main research questions will be addressed in this study.

Q1. What is the direction and magnitude of the effect of consumers' perceived brand image on brand loyalty in the fashion retail sector?

Considering the high symbolic value of fashion products, it is assumed that consumers' perceptions of brands have a determining effect on their repurchase intentions and emotional attachment to the brand (Kim & Kim, 2005). Within this context, the study aims to empirically test the direct effect of brand image on brand loyalty.

Q2. What is the effect of brand image on slow fashion involvement?

The slow fashion approach leads consumers to evaluate brands not only through aesthetic and price-based criteria but also through value-based considerations such as environmental

sensitivity, ethical production, and conscious consumption (Fletcher, 2010). Within this scope, the research examines to what extent a strong brand image influences consumers' slow-fashion orientation and in which dimensions this effect is most pronounced.

Q3. Does slow fashion involvement have an effect on brand loyalty, and if so, what is the nature of this effect?

The literature indicates that sustainability-oriented consumers tend to develop deeper, more long-term commitments to specific brands (Joergens, 2006). Within this context, the study analyzes the effects of the sub-dimensions of slow fashion orientation—conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity—on brand loyalty separately.

Q4. Does slow fashion involvement play a mediating role in the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty?

Based on the assumption that the effect of brand image on brand loyalty may be strengthened or weakened in line with consumers' value orientations, this study examines slow fashion involvement as a mediating variable within a structural model (Pappu et al., 2005).

Q5. Do the variables of brand image, slow fashion involvement, and brand loyalty differ according to consumers' demographic characteristics?

Findings suggesting that consumers' demographic variables—such as age, gender, education level, and income—may influence sustainable consumption tendencies and brand loyalty make it necessary to investigate this question (Gam, 2011).

In line with these fundamental research questions, the dissertation aims to address the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty in the fashion retail sector not merely as a linear interaction, but as a multidimensional and dynamic process within the framework of slow fashion involvement.

3.2 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this dissertation aim to explain the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement in the fashion retail sector. In developing the hypotheses, theoretical approaches from the brand-based marketing literature, as well as studies on sustainable and ethical consumption behaviors, have served as a foundation. In particular, research examining the effect of brand image on consumer attitudes and loyalty behaviors has contributed to the formation of the hypothesis framework of this study (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

In the marketing literature, brand image is addressed as a holistic construct encompassing consumers' perceptions, emotional evaluations, and mental associations regarding a brand. There is substantial empirical evidence suggesting that a strong brand image provides a foundation for consumers to develop positive attitudes toward a brand and to demonstrate long-term commitment (Kim & Kim, 2005). Accordingly, the first hypothesis of the study tests the direct effect of brand image on brand loyalty.

H1. Perceived brand image in the fashion retail sector has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty.

In recent years, heightened societal sensitivity to sustainability and ethical production issues has significantly transformed the criteria by which consumers evaluate brands. The slow fashion approach enables consumers to incorporate value-based elements—such as conscious consumption, support for local production, and exclusivity—into their purchasing processes (Jung & Jin, 2016). In this context, it is assumed that brand image may affect consumers' involvement in slow fashion. A strong, credible brand image can shape consumers' perceptions of a brand within the context of sustainability and ethical values.

H2. Perceived brand image in the fashion retail sector has a significant and positive effect on slow fashion involvement.

Slow fashion involvement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct and is typically explained through its sub-dimensions of conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity (Jung & Jin, 2016). Accordingly, in order to examine the effect of brand image on each sub-dimension of slow fashion involvement separately, the following sub-hypotheses have been developed:

The literature frequently emphasizes that sustainability-oriented consumers develop stronger, more long-term loyalty toward brands they perceive as aligning with their values (Joergens, 2006). In this context, slow fashion involvement is expected to directly affect consumers' brand loyalty.

H3. Involvement in slow fashion has a significant, positive effect on brand loyalty.

In order to examine the effects of the sub-dimensions of slow fashion involvement on brand loyalty in greater detail, the following sub-hypotheses have been developed:

Finally, in this study, it is assumed that the effect of brand image on brand loyalty may also occur indirectly through slow fashion involvement. Consumers' value orientations and sustainability sensitivities may mediate the transformation of brand image perceptions into

loyalty behaviors (Pappu et al., 2005). Accordingly, the main mediation hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows:

H4. Slow fashion involvement has a significant mediating role in the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty.

In line with these hypotheses, the dissertation aims to test, through an integrated and multidimensional model, how the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty is shaped within the context of slow fashion involvement in the fashion retail sector.

H5. Brand image, involvement in slow fashion, and brand loyalty differ across consumers' demographic characteristics.

This hypothesis suggests that consumers' demographic characteristics—such as age, gender, education level, and income—may lead to significant differences in how they perceive brand image, engage with slow fashion, and develop brand loyalty. In other words, consumer responses to brands and sustainability-oriented fashion practices are not homogeneous but vary across demographic groups.

4. Significance and Contribution of the Study

This dissertation offers significant theoretical and practical contributions by addressing the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement within a holistic framework in the fashion retail sector. Although the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty has been widely examined in the contemporary marketing literature, studies that reassess it within the context of sustainability-oriented consumption remain limited. In particular, evaluating the slow fashion approach alongside brand-based marketing variables positions this study as an original contribution to the literature.

The theoretical significance of the dissertation stems from its inclusion of slow fashion involvement as a mediating variable in the model, rather than addressing the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty solely as a direct interaction. Although studies in the literature focus on sustainability and ethical consumption, a substantial portion of this research remains limited to consumer intentions or attitudes (Joergens, 2006). This dissertation, however, conceptualizes slow fashion involvement as a structural element that explains the effect of brand image on loyalty, thereby providing conceptual depth to the marketing literature.

The originality of the study also lies in its examination of slow fashion involvement as a multidimensional construct, encompassing conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity. This approach enables a more detailed analysis of the effects of sustainability-oriented consumption tendencies on brand loyalty. Accordingly, the dissertation stands among the limited number of studies that empirically test the value-based consumption perspective— frequently emphasized in the slow fashion literature—within the context of brand image and loyalty (Jung & Jin, 2016).

The dissertation's practical significance is particularly relevant to brands operating in the fashion retail sector. Today, consumers' heightened sensitivity to environmental and ethical issues makes it more difficult for brands to achieve a competitive advantage solely through aesthetic and price-oriented strategies. By revealing the effects of integrating brand image with sustainability and slow fashion values on brand loyalty, this study provides a strategic roadmap for fashion retailers. The findings are expected to offer guidance across a wide range of areas, from brands' communication strategies to product development processes (Fletcher, 2010).

Moreover, conducting the study within the Turkish context further enhances the dissertation's originality. The limited number of empirical studies in Türkiye that address the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty from the perspective of sustainability and slow fashion contributes to the dissertation's role in filling an important gap in the literature. In this regard, the study aims to provide original, Türkiye-focused findings to both the national and international marketing literature.

In conclusion, by readdressing the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty within the framework of slow fashion involvement, this dissertation makes theoretical contributions to the marketing literature and offers practical implications for the development of sustainable, long-term brand strategies for businesses operating in the fashion retail sector. In this respect, the study has high academic and sectoral significance and originality.

5. Research Methodology

In this dissertation, a quantitative research method will be employed in order to examine the relationships among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement in the fashion retail sector. The quantitative research approach is consistent with the study's aim, as it enables statistical testing of relationships among variables and the generation of generalizable results. In particular, the use of reliable and valid measurement scales designed to assess abstract

constructs such as brand image and brand loyalty has been a determining factor in the preference for the quantitative method (Pappu et al., 2005).

5.1. Population and Sampling

The study population will consist of consumers living in Türkiye who shop with brands operating in the fashion retail sector. Since fashion retailing serves a broad, heterogeneous consumer base, it is not feasible to reach the entire population. Therefore, a sampling method will be employed in the study.

The study sample will consist of approximately 400 consumers, to be reached via an online survey. The sample size is considered sufficient to meet the minimum sample size criteria recommended in the literature for the application of multivariate statistical techniques such as structural equation modeling and mediation analyses (Hair et al., 2014). Participation in the study will be voluntary, and it is aimed at reaching individuals from different age, gender, education, and income groups. In this way, it is intended to enhance the representativeness of the findings obtained.

5.2. Data Collection Techniques

In the study, the survey method will be used to collect data. The questionnaire form will be structured into four main sections. The first section will include questions to identify participants' demographic characteristics. The second section will contain statements designed to measure perceptions of brand image. The third section will consist of scale items measuring slow fashion consumer orientation, while the fourth section will include statements intended to assess brand loyalty.

To measure brand image perception, scales with established validity and reliability in the literature will be used (Pappu et al., 2005). Slow fashion involvement will be measured using the scale developed by Jung and Jin (2016), which encompasses the dimensions of conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity. Brand loyalty, on the other hand, will be evaluated through scales covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The statements included in the scales will be measured using a five-point Likert-type rating format.

5.3 Data Analysis

Statistical software will be used to analyze the data collected during the research. Initially, missing data analysis, normality tests, and descriptive statistics will be conducted to assess the suitability of the data for further analysis. To test the construct validity of the measurement scales, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will be conducted. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients will also be calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scales.

Relevant statistical tests—such as correlation analysis, chi-square tests, t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression analysis—will be employed to test the research hypotheses. The relationships among brand image, slow fashion involvement, and brand loyalty will be examined; and structural equation modeling (SEM) will be utilized to test the mediating role of slow fashion involvement in the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. The significance of the mediation effects will be evaluated according to the procedures recommended in the literature (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

5.4. Ethical Considerations

During the research process, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics will be strictly observed. To conduct the study, the necessary permissions will be obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Commerce University. Data collection will commence only after the ethics committee approves.

Participants will be provided with clear, comprehensible information about the research's purpose, and it will be explicitly stated that participation is entirely voluntary. They will also be informed that the data obtained will be used solely for academic purposes, will not be shared with third parties, and will be stored in accordance with confidentiality principles. During survey administration, participants' personal information will not be requested, and all procedures will be carried out in compliance with regulations governing the protection of personal data.

6. Summary of the Literature Review

The relationship between brand image and brand loyalty has long been a central research domain in the marketing literature. Brand image is a holistic construct encompassing

consumers' perceptions, associations, and emotional evaluations of a brand; these perceptions are widely acknowledged to play a decisive role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors (Rio et al., 2001). Particularly in highly competitive industries, a brand's ability to achieve sustainable success depends on its capacity to build a strong and consistent brand image.

A substantial body of literature demonstrates that brand image has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty. Yoo and Donthu (2001) argue that a strong brand image enhances both attitudinal and behavioral commitment toward a brand. Similarly, Pappu et al. (2005) emphasize that brand image is a critical component of brand equity and that this value directly influences loyalty behaviors. Oliver (1999) defines brand loyalty as the consumer's tendency to consistently prefer a particular brand and states that this process is shaped not only by satisfaction but also by emotional attachment.

6.1. Brand Image in the Fashion Retail Sector

Studies focusing specifically on the fashion retail sector indicate that the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty is stronger and more complex than in other industries. Because fashion products carry symbolic meanings beyond their functional benefits, consumers' relationships with brands are often emotional and identity-based (Kim & Kim, 2005). Büyükdağ and Kitapçı (2021) reveal that brand image plays a decisive role in shaping consumer perceptions in fashion retail, and that these perceptions support long-term loyalty.

The fashion retail sector stands out as a distinctive marketing field in which consumption practices are shaped not only by functional needs but also by identity construction, social status signaling, and the production of symbolic meaning. The dynamic nature of this sector compels brands to establish competitive advantage not merely through product quality but through the perceptual positioning they create in consumers' minds. In this context, brand image constitutes a strategic asset in fashion retail.

Brand image refers to the entirety of cognitive associations, emotional evaluations, and perceptual representations that consumers form in their minds about a brand (Keller, 1993). According to Keller's customer-based brand equity model, brand image emerges when strong, favorable, and unique associations are embedded in consumer memory, thereby becoming a primary determinant of brand equity (Keller, 2013).

Aaker's brand personality approach demonstrates that brand image contains not only cognitive but also emotional and symbolic dimensions. Within this framework, brands may be perceived

as sincere, innovative, sophisticated, or environmentally conscious, and such personality attributions enable emotional bonds to develop between consumers and brands (Aaker, 1996; 1997). In the fashion sector, this personality dimension becomes even more salient, as brands are positioned as representatives of particular lifestyles and ideological stances. Consequently, the brand becomes an extension of consumers' self-presentation and identity performance.

The elements shaping brand image in fashion retail possess a multidimensional structure. In addition to functional factors such as product design, perceived quality, and pricing strategies, store atmosphere, window displays, visual merchandising techniques, and sales experiences also play decisive roles in image formation. Experiential retailing practices deepen consumers' emotional interaction with the brand and strengthen brand memory. Moreover, social media platforms have become critical communication arenas in brand image construction. Visual aesthetics, storytelling, and value-oriented communication strategies constitute the core components of digital brand image.

In recent years, sustainability discourses have also become central elements of brand image construction. The use of recyclable materials, carbon footprint reduction, and ethical production emphasize generating positive brand associations in consumers' minds. This demonstrates that brand image is evaluated not only through aesthetic dimensions but also through ethical and environmental considerations. Indeed, empirical findings increasingly show that sustainability practices strengthen brand perception and enhance brand value.

Empirical studies further support the impact of positive brand image on consumer behavior. A strong brand image creates perceptions of quality and trust in consumers' minds, increases purchase intention, and makes the brand more preferable (Han & Hyun, 2012). Additionally, a favorable image reduces perceived purchase risk and accelerates decision-making processes. This effect is stronger in sectors such as fashion, where symbolic and experiential consumption is intense.

6.2. The Relationship Between Brand Image and Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is defined as consumers' consistent purchasing behavior and psychological commitment toward a particular brand (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). However, contemporary marketing literature conceptualizes loyalty as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional attachment, brand advocacy, and word-of-mouth recommendation behaviors rather than merely behavioral repetition. Oliver (1999) explains loyalty through a hierarchical process

model consisting of cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioral stages. This model demonstrates that loyalty is a dynamic process evolving from rational evaluations to emotional commitment.

Brand image plays a decisive role particularly in the cognitive and affective stages of this process. A positive brand image shapes consumers' initial trust evaluations toward the brand and facilitates satisfaction formation. Therefore, a strong and positive relationship exists between brand image and brand loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2012).

The deepening of loyalty is often made possible through emotional bonding. Park et al. (2006) argue that the psychological bond between the consumer and the brand can be explained by the concept of "brand attachment," which represents one of the strongest forms of loyalty. In the fashion sector, this bond is directly related to consumers' self-presentation and the construction of social identity. Consumers develop greater loyalty toward brands that represent them, reflect their values, and foster a sense of belonging.

Brand loyalty is also associated with mediating variables such as trust, perceived quality, and satisfaction. A strong brand image enhances perceived quality and lowers consumers' risk perceptions, thereby indirectly reinforcing loyalty. Furthermore, corporate social responsibility initiatives create significant effects on loyalty (Loureiro & Lopes, 2019).

Digitalization has restructured the mechanisms through which loyalty is formed. Online brand communities enable consumers to interact with brands and develop collective identities. These communities generate social bonds around the brand and strengthen loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Thus, loyalty transforms from an individual preference into a social belonging practice.

6.3. Slow Fashion Involvement

Another prominent research domain that has gained attention in recent years is the slow fashion approach, which has emerged within the context of sustainability and ethical consumption. Slow fashion developed as an alternative to the fast-fashion paradigm and is defined as an approach centered on environmental sensitivity, ethical production, and principles of conscious consumption (Clark, 2008). This perspective leads consumers to make purchasing decisions based not only on price and style but also on value-based criteria.

Studies examining slow-fashion consumers indicate that these individuals develop a deeper, longer-term commitment to brands. Jung and Jin (2016) conceptualize slow fashion

involvement through dimensions such as conscious consumption, locality, and exclusivity, demonstrating that this orientation significantly affects consumer attitudes. Joergens (2006) and Niinimäki and Hassi (2011) similarly report that consumers sensitive to sustainability exhibit higher loyalty toward brands they perceive as aligned with ethical and environmental values.

However, a review of the literature reveals that studies addressing the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty within the context of slow fashion involvement—particularly from a mediating variable perspective—remain limited. In Türkiye especially, empirical research examining these three variables within a holistic structural model in the fashion retail sector is scarce. This thesis aims to fill this gap by comprehensively analyzing the relationships among brand image, slow fashion involvement, and brand loyalty.

The environmental and ethical impacts of the fashion industry have been widely debated in both academic literature and public discourse. Criticisms of the fast-fashion model—such as overproduction, waste accumulation, and labor exploitation—have paved the way for alternative production and consumption models. Foremost among these alternatives is the slow fashion approach. Fletcher (2010) defines slow fashion as a systemic transformation call grounded in sustainable material use, ethical production processes, and long-lasting design principles.

The slow-fashion perspective also shifts consumers' purchasing motivations. Consumers tend to buy fewer but higher-quality products, use them longer, and consider environmental impacts in their decisions (Jung & Jin, 2016). This sharpens the philosophical consumption divide between fast fashion and slow fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

In this context, slow fashion involvement emerges as a critical variable that reflects consumers' knowledge, sensitivity, and levels of participation in sustainable fashion practices. Highly involved consumers evaluate brands not only on aesthetics and price but also on sustainability performance (Kim & Damhorst, 1998; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

There is substantial evidence that sustainability practices strengthen brand image. Corporate social responsibility initiatives and environmentally friendly production processes generate positive brand associations (Loureiro & Lopes, 2019). Ethical fashion practices have also been empirically shown to influence purchase behavior (Shen et al., 2012). Even within luxury fashion, sustainability discourse has been found to enhance brand image (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013).

Slow fashion involvement shifts brand loyalty onto a value-based foundation. Consumers with

high ethical and environmental sensitivity develop stronger commitment toward brands with which they experience value congruence (Chan et al., 2018). The influence of ethical labeling practices on consumer preference supports this argument (Dickson, 2001). Moreover, sustainable consumption behaviors—such as recycling and extending product life cycles—reinforce brand perceptions (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012).

Within this framework, slow fashion involvement can be positioned as both a mediating and moderating variable in the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. As involvement levels increase, the impact of sustainability-based brand image on loyalty becomes stronger.

7. Structure and Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in a systematic, integrated structure that presents the theoretical foundations of the subject, its empirical analyses, and the evaluation of the findings. The dissertation consists of five main chapters, including the introduction and conclusion sections.

In the Introduction chapter, the subject, purpose, significance, and scope of the research are explained in general terms, and the reasons why the relationship among brand image, brand loyalty, and slow fashion involvement warrants investigation are presented.

The first chapter provides the conceptual framework related to fashion, fashion retailing, and slow fashion. In this chapter, the definition of fashion, its historical development, theoretical approaches to fashion, the structural characteristics of fashion retailing, and the concept of slow fashion are discussed in detail.

The second chapter is devoted to the concept of brand and the key variables associated with branding. Within this scope, brand image, brand loyalty, and their effects on consumer perception are examined, and the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty is discussed in the context of the fashion retail sector, drawing on relevant literature.

The third chapter presents the research methodology. In this chapter, the purpose of the study, research model, hypotheses, population and sample structure, data collection instruments, and the statistical analysis methods employed are explained in detail. The empirical findings obtained from the research are also included in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the research findings are discussed by comparing them with prior studies, and the theoretical and sectoral implications of the results are evaluated.

In the Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations chapter, the main findings of the

research are summarized; recommendations for the fashion retail sector and future academic studies are presented; and the study's limitations are stated.

8. Work Plan and Timeline

The dissertation is planned to be completed within 24 months. During the first six-month period, the theoretical framework will be developed. The second six-month period will be devoted to fieldwork and data collection. In the third six-month period, the collected data will be analyzed. Finally, in the fourth six-month period, the dissertation report will be written and finalized. The proposed dissertation timeline is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Work Plan

Progress Report Period	Work Packages and Chapters to be Written	Duration
First progress report period	Literature analysis and writing of the theoretical framework	6 months
Second progress report period	Completion of fieldwork and reporting of findings	6 months
Third progress report period	Data entry, analysis, classification, and dissertation writing	6 months
Fourth progress report period	Writing the dissertation report in accordance with academic writing guidelines and submission	6 months
Total		**24 months**

Although specific work packages are projected for each progress report period, certain chapters of the dissertation will progress in parallel throughout all periods. However, the harmonization of all chapters, the refinement of sections and subsections, and the final formatting of the dissertation in accordance with the Istanbul Commerce University Thesis Writing Guidelines will be completed during the final progress report period.

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