From uniqueness to consumer behaviour: the mediating role of brand passion and brand addiction in masstige human brands

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to elucidate consumers' perceptions of celebrities as masstige human brands (Study 1) and to develop a novel comparative framework that incorporates two distinct mediating variables, brand passion and brand addiction (Study 2), which shape the relationship between human brands as masstige brands and key consumer behaviours, including loyalty and compulsive buying.

Design/methodology/approach – The qualitative study (Study 1) used Leximancer software to conduct content analysis of textual data from 42 interviews with consumers. In the quantitative study (Study 2), 365 valid responses were collected with a questionnaire, and the proposed conceptual model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling.

Findings – The analysis in Study 1 revealed that consumers perceive celebrities as both human and masstige brands. The results obtained in Study 2 confirmed that brand passion and brand addiction are mediators between the three dimensions of celebrity masstige brands and both loyalty and compulsive buying. The model with the brand addiction mediator is a better fit for the data than the brand passion model.

Originality/value – These studies offer new insights into human and masstige brands, showing that a masstige strategy can be implemented by celebrity human brands.

Keywords Human brand, Uniqueness, Masstige, Brand passion, Brand addiction, Brand relationship, Celebrity branding, Compulsive buying, Relationship marketing, Loyalty

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Human brands, often embodied by celebrities, have become a key focus in branding research because of their capacity to shape consumer perceptions and behaviours (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2018). These brands rely on the fame and talents of individuals to build credibility and connection with audiences across diverse sectors, including fashion (e.g. Calvin Klein), entertainment (e.g. Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen) and sports (e.g. LeBron James). Their influence also extends into lifestyle domains such as homemaking (e.g. Martha Stewart), food (e.g. Jamie Oliver) and travel (e.g. Rick Steves).

The growth of social media and the convergence of marketing with entertainment have amplified the visibility and emotional reach of human brands (Osorio *et al.*, 2020;

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Pomirleanu *et al.*, 2023). Consumers increasingly form strong attachments to these figures, often favouring the most prominent ones and contributing to high levels of demand (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021). In parallel, masstige strategies, those combining prestige with mass accessibility, have gained prominence in branding (Paul, 2019; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023).

Although both human brands and masstige branding have received attention individually, the way they intersect remains underexplored (Bilro *et al.*, 2022; Das *et al.*, 2021b; Park *et al.*, 2022; Paul, 2019; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023). Research tends to isolate luxury or mass-market contexts (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2018; Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Paul, 2019), leaving a gap in understanding how human brands operate within a masstige positioning. More specifically, there is limited insight into how emotional dynamics affect consumer perceptions of human brands that aim to balance exclusivity with accessibility.

This study responds to that gap by focusing on how human brands are perceived when framed as masstige entities and on the emotional mechanisms involved in these consumer–brand relationships. Human brands are often used to support masstige positioning through strategies involving pricing, distribution and aspirational messaging. Real-world examples include Cristiano Ronaldo's CR7 and Rihanna's Fenty Beauty. The former blends celebrity appeal with affordable products; the latter combines luxury-level branding with broad retail access, achieving over US$602m in revenue in 2023 (Francis, 2024).

There is growing scholarly interest in understanding how human brands function in such hybrid environments (Das *et al.*, 2021; Osorio *et al.*, 2020). Emotional factors like brand passion and brand addiction are particularly relevant. While brand passion is typically seen as a positive attachment, addiction may reflect excessive or dysfunctional engagement. Prior studies have not fully addressed how these emotions affect loyalty and purchasing behaviours in masstige settings. Gilal *et al.* (2023) call for deeper exploration of the emotional drivers behind consumer–brand ties, and Francioni *et al.* (2021) highlight the risks associated with maladaptive attachments.

This work builds on those concerns by connecting three areas: human brands, masstige strategies and emotional consumer–brand relationships. The context is especially relevant in light of the growing personalisation of branding and the increasingly emotional nature of consumer engagement (Bilro *et al.*, 2022; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b; Bazi *et al.*, 2023; Kumar *et al.*, 2021). A clearer understanding needs to include how celebrity figures navigate the masstige spectrum to gain a contemporary perspective on evolving branding strategies, especially in an era when brand relationships are becoming increasingly personal and emotionally driven (Moorlock *et al.*, 2023).

To fill the gaps identified, the current research pursued two goals: to investigate how human brands are perceived as masstige brands and to examine how brand passion and brand addiction shape loyalty and compulsive buying behaviours. These objectives address a need for clearer conceptualisation of emotional brand relationships in an environment where human branding and aspirational marketing increasingly overlap.

In this vein, this study sought to address three key research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What are the main dimensions of the human brand concept as perceived by consumers?

RQ2. Can human brands be perceived as masstige brands?

RQ3. Which construct, brand passion or brand addiction, can best explain consumers' perception of human brands as masstige entities?

The study offers a more integrated perspective on how consumers relate emotionally to human brands operating between exclusivity and accessibility, reflecting the evolving dynamics of branding in contemporary markets.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Consumer–brand relationship literature

The consumer–brand relationship literature (Fournier, 1998) provides a foundation for understanding consumer interactions with brands, positioning them as relationship partners that foster emotional connections (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2018). This literature emphasises that brand relationships evolve over time, shaped by factors such as uniqueness, emotional involvement and loyalty (Osorio *et al.*, 2020; Pomirleanu *et al.*, 2023). Past research provides a lens through which to examine how consumers establish and maintain emotional ties with brands, which ultimately influences their purchasing behaviours and brand loyalty (Junaid *et al.*, 2024; Mrad and Cui, 2017). The present study sought to expand the consumer–brand relationship literature by exploring how masstige human brands balance accessibility and exclusivity to foster these emotional connections with consumers.

2.2 Human brand

Human brands, often represented by celebrities, embody personal attributes that shape consumer perceptions and brand interactions (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2018; Osorio *et al.*, 2020; Thomson, 2006). Unlike conventional brands, human brands have the capacity for direct engagement, facilitating emotional connections and influencing consumer behaviour (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Hofmann *et al.*, 2021). Social identity theory supports this dynamic, suggesting that consumers align their self-identity with admired human brands, reinforcing loyalty (Escalas and Bettman, 2009). Research has demonstrated that human brands can effectively transfer their personality traits to associated products, enhancing brand credibility and perceived quality (Centeno and Wang, 2017).

The varied streams of brand personality research suggest that consumers assign human-like traits to brands, which then influence their preferences and behaviours (Aaker, 1997). This connection is particularly strong with human brands, which can evoke deeper emotional responses by embodying specific personality traits. Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2013) provides insight into how brand passion and addiction influence compulsive buying behaviour. When consumers perceive a human brand as fulfilling their psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, their attachment can intensify, leading to both positive engagement (e.g. brand passion) and more extreme behavioural patterns (e.g. brand addiction). As engagement deepens, compulsive buying behaviours may emerge as consumers seek continuous reinforcement of their connection to the brand (Mrad and Cui, 2017).

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This pattern suggests that customer–human brand emotional bonds can drive both sustained loyalty and excessive consumption and highlights the dual role of these brands in shaping consumer behaviour. The current study extended previous research by examining whether human brands can also be treated as masstige, that is, leveraging their distinctiveness to appeal to both mass-market and prestige-driven consumers.

2.3 Masstige brand

Masstige brands combine a unique position by blending prestige with mass-market accessibility, reshaping traditional branding strategies (Paul, 2019; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023; Chaurasia *et al.*, 2024). This approach democratises exclusivity through downward brand extensions, balancing perceived luxury with affordability via strategic alignment of product, promotion and distribution (Paul, 2018). By leveraging prestige associations while maintaining accessible price points, masstige branding cultivates aspirational consumption, broadening market reach and enhancing perceived value (Paul, 2015; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b).

The increasing prominence of masstige brands has intensified academic interest, particularly in evaluating their psychological impact on consumers (Das *et al.*, 2021a; Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Shahid *et al.*, 2024). These brands not only influence purchasing behaviours but also evoke strong emotional responses, fostering brand passion and, in some cases, brand addiction (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b). The incorporation of human brands, celebrities and public figures amplifies this effect, strengthening desirability and emotional bonds with consumers (Albert *et al.*, 2013; Cui *et al.*, 2018; Fournier and Eckhardt, 2018; Gilal *et al.*, 2024; Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023). Investigating the intersection of masstige branding, emotional attachment and behavioural outcomes is crucial to understanding how prestige and personality-driven branding shape consumer–brand relationships.

2.4 Brand addiction and brand passion

Brand passion, rooted in Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, conceptualises consumer–brand relationships as a fusion of passion, commitment and intimacy. This emotional intensity enhances brand relationship quality, fostering loyalty through deep personal connections (Fournier, 1998). Defined as an intense, positive emotional attachment, brand passion integrates brands into consumer identity, driven by admiration and enthusiasm (Hemsley-Brown and Alnawas, 2016; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Its outcomes extend beyond loyalty, influencing positive word-of-mouth and increased willingness to pay (Albert *et al.*, 2013; Das *et al.*, 2019; Gilal *et al.*, 2024). In masstige branding, attributes such as celebrity appeal intensify brand passion, reinforcing the latter's role in consumer engagement (Wong and Hung, 2023). The literature indicates that the extent to which brand passion translates into sustainable brand equity has still been insufficiently explored (Japutra *et al.*, 2025).

In contrast, brand addiction introduces a more complex dimension to consumer–brand relationships. Traditionally likened to substance dependency, it reflects obsessive behaviours and potential negative consequences (Fournier, 1998; Hirschman, 1992). Yet, alternative perspectives suggest addiction can be beneficial when voluntarily cultivated, aligning with Glasser's (1977) positive addiction theory (Mrad and Cui, 2017). Manifesting as an intense psychological state, brand addiction manifests as an intense psychological state, fostering habitual purchasing and reduced consideration of alternatives (Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Junaid *et al.*, 2024). This phenomenon is especially evident in fast fashion and luxury markets, where addiction fuels excessive spending and compulsive buying (Alvarez *et al.*, 2023; Mrad *et al.*, 2020). While addiction may enhance loyalty, its ethical implications and long-term sustainability warrant scrutiny.

Building on these concepts, this study positions brand passion and brand addiction as distinct yet complementary mediators of consumer engagement with masstige human brands. Unlike luxury or mainstream brands, masstige human brands balance exclusivity with accessibility, fostering both positive attachment (e.g. passion) and compulsive behaviours (e.g. addiction). Although passion's role in loyalty is well established (Das *et al.*, 2019; Gilal *et al.*, 2024), brand addiction remains underexplored (Junaid *et al.*, 2022). Examining their interplay within masstige branding provides insights into how emotional relationships influence consumer decision-making.

Ultimately, the contrast between passion and addiction highlights the dual pathways of consumer–brand engagement. Passion reflects voluntary, admiration-driven loyalty, while addiction introduces compulsive tendencies, potentially leading to excessive consumption (Sussman and Sussman, 2011). Understanding these dynamics is critical to navigating the ethical and strategic complexities of emotional brand engagement in masstige markets.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1 Uniqueness and brand addiction/passion

Consumers form emotional relationships with brands to satisfy psychological needs, particularly the desire for uniqueness (Hoyer and Macinnis, 2001). When a product lacks differentiation, engagement and emotional attachment decline, as consumers see little reason to connect with or prefer it (Armstrong *et al.*, 2014). Uniqueness, defined as the distinctive qualities setting a brand apart, emerges as a crucial driver of emotional brand relationships, reinforcing both brand passion and addiction (Bastos and Brucks, 2017).

Research highlights the direct influence of brand uniqueness on consumer–brand relationships. Distinctive brands foster passion and emotional commitment, as consumers internalise and admire their uniqueness (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). This attachment strengthens loyalty and willingness to engage with the brand (Rahman *et al.*, 2021). When emotional connection intensifies, brand addiction may develop, leading to compulsive engagement and reliance on the brand (Fournier, 1998).

This aligns with the stimulus-organism framework, where brand uniqueness acts as a stimulus triggering emotional responses (Rahman *et al.*, 2021). In the masstige and human brand context, uniqueness amplifies exclusivity and prestige, fostering strong emotional bonds (Gilal *et al.*, 2024; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b). Understanding this dynamic is crucial for managing brand passion while mitigating potential compulsive consumption. Therefore, we propose:

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H1a. Uniqueness has a positive effect on brand addiction.

H1b. Uniqueness has a positive effect on brand passion.

3.2 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty reflects a consumer's sustained preference and commitment to a specific brand, often reinforced by strong emotional connections (Steenkamp and Maydeu-Olivares, 2015). Brand passion plays a crucial role in this process, fostering long-term engagement by creating intrinsic attachment that persists despite available alternatives (Das *et al.*, 2019; Hemsley-Brown and Alnawas, 2016; Pourazad *et al.*, 2020). However, while passion enhances loyalty, its stability and external influences warrant investigation, particularly in the masstige brand context.

Brand relationships can evolve into deep emotional commitments, sometimes bordering on dependency (Fournier, 1998). Brand addiction, characterised by habitual reliance and emotional gratification through brand interaction, strengthens loyalty by reducing consideration of competing alternatives (Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b). This aligns with addiction theories, where compulsive engagement overrides rational decision-making (Sussman and Sussman, 2011). Research suggests that addicted consumers develop obsessive purchasing patterns, reinforcing habitual consumption even in the absence of necessity (Mrad and Cui, 2017).

For masstige human brands, brand passion and addiction operate as distinct yet interconnected drivers of loyalty. Passionate consumers seek identity expression and social status, while addicted consumers derive emotional and social fulfilment, perceiving these brands as irreplaceable (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2025). This dual pathway highlights the intricate nature of consumer attachment, emphasising the need for strategic brand positioning to balance aspirational engagement with potential compulsive consumption. Against this background, our next hypotheses are:

H2a. Brand addiction has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H2b. Brand passion has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

3.3 Compulsive buying

Compulsive buying is driven more by emotional distress rather than necessity, often leading consumers to purchase items they cannot afford or do not use (Sneath *et al.*, 2009). This behaviour stems from strong emotional attachments to brands, where passion, typically associated with positive engagement, can escalate into dependency, blurring the line between loyalty and compulsion (Fournier, 1998). When passion becomes excessive, consumers feel compelled to engage with brands beyond rational need, reinforcing compulsive buying tendencies (Japutra *et al.*, 2022).

Brand addiction intensifies this dynamic, creating emotional reliance that overrides rational decision-making (Fournier and Alvarez, 2013). Addicted consumers experience persistent urges to acquire brand-related products for emotional fulfilment, reinforcing habitual consumption patterns (Barrera and Ponce, 2021; Lyroni and Spais, 2024; Meijani *et al.*, 2023). This aligns with psychological theories of compulsive behaviour, where addiction manifests as an uncontrollable urge to engage (Egorov and Szabo, 2013; Sussman and Sussman, 2011).

In this context of masstige human brands, perceived uniqueness and social prestige amplify passion and addiction, intensifying compulsive consumption. These brands serve as identity symbols, becoming irreplaceable in the consumer's eyes and reinforcing compulsive buying behaviours (Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Mrad and Cui, 2017). We propose the following hypotheses:

H3a. Brand addiction has a positive effect on compulsive buying.

H3b. Brand passion has a positive effect on compulsive buying.

3.4 Mediation effects

Consumer–brand relationships function as an instrument linking brand uniqueness to behavioural outcomes. Environmental and marketing stimuli, such as brand uniqueness, can evoke strong emotional attachments, leading to relational constructs like brand passion and addiction (Bagozzi, 1986). These emotional connections act as mediators that shape consumer behaviours, either reinforcing loyalty or triggering compulsive consumption (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012). Brand passion, in particular, strengthens brand-related constructs, influencing consumer decision-making and behavioural responses (Alnawas *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, it serves as a key mediator in building loyalty (Hemsley-Brown and Alnawas, 2016), while brand addiction exhibits a strong mediating role in compulsive consumer behaviour (Junaid *et al.*, 2022). Within the masstige human brand context, these relationships likely act as behavioural bridges, translating brand uniqueness into consumer loyalty or, conversely, compulsive brand engagement, highlighting the importance of understanding emotional brand attachment. We suggest the following:

H4. Brand addiction has a mediating effect between masstige brand uniqueness and brand loyalty and compulsive buying.

H5. Brand passion has a mediating effect between masstige brand uniqueness and brand loyalty and compulsive buying.

The conceptual model is represented in Figure 1.

Testing these hypotheses using Model A and Model B separately is essential to distinguish the theoretical constructs involved. Model A examines brand addiction as a mediator in its relationships with brand loyalty and compulsive buying, while Model B focuses on brand passion as a mediator in the same relationships. This approach helps avoid multicollinearity issues, ensures a clearer analysis of each construct and allows the interpretation of their individual effects.

4. Study 1

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Design and participants

Study 1 collected qualitative primary data through structured face-to-face interviews guided by a predefined framework (see

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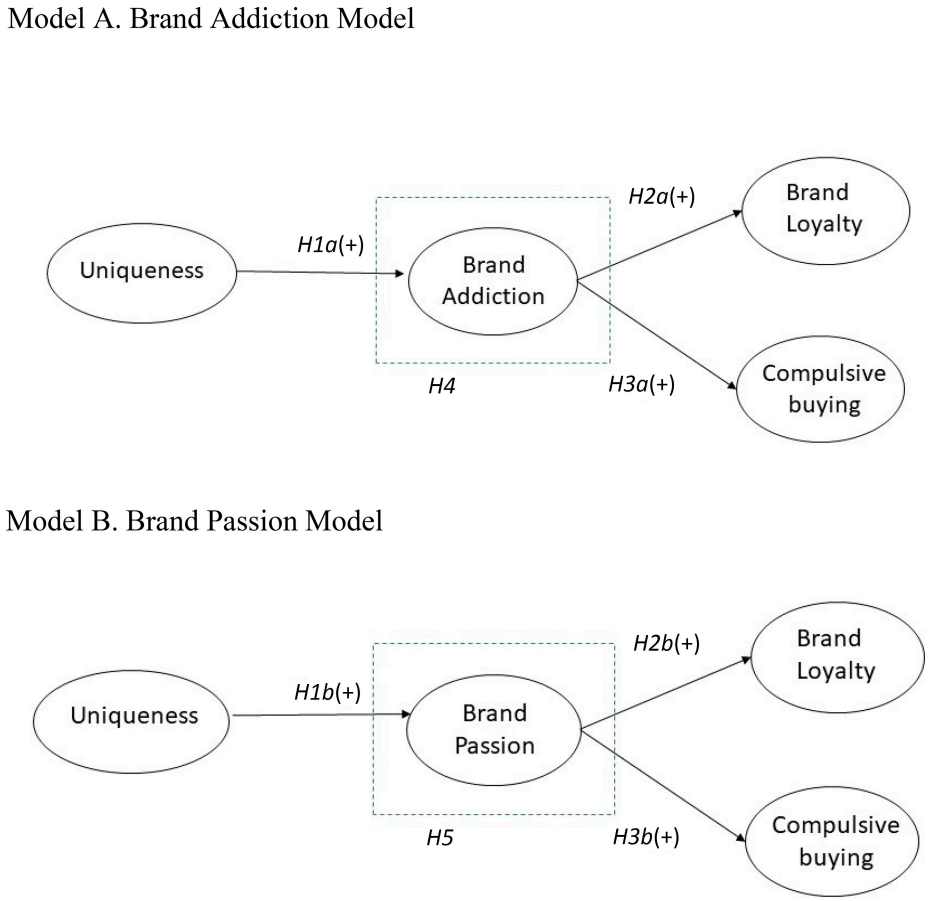
Figure 1 Conceptual model



Source: Authors' own work

Appendix 1). Participants were selected using convenience sampling via mall-intercept interviews conducted in a commercial area of Porto, Portugal. The final sample consisted of 42 consumers (22 females and 20 males), ensuring gender balance. The average age of participants was 31.4 years (standard deviation $n = 12.6$), with ages ranging from 18 to 60 years. All interviews were approximately 10 min long and were audio-recorded with participant consent. This sample size aligns with guidelines by Saunders *et al.* (2020) and was sufficient to reach data saturation.

4.1.2 Procedure

The data set comprised 39 participant responses, detailing human brands and their associated masstige commercial offerings (see Appendix 2). The final transcript data set contained 16,405 words (75,395 characters without spaces), serving as the basis for qualitative analysis.

To analyse the interviews, Leximancer was used as a semantic content analysis tool, offering two primary advantages: autonomous theme identification, mitigating researcher bias and data visualisation tools that reveal underlying conceptual relationships (Wilk *et al.*, 2019). This approach enables both descriptive (i.e. frequency-based) and relational (e.g. connectivity-driven) analyses, ensuring a robust examination of emergent themes.

Leximancer generates concept maps illustrating co-occurring relationships, clustering closely related concepts into ranked themes. Thematic importance is determined by frequency and connectivity, where higher connectivity reflects centrality within the data set. Themes are labelled based on their highest connectivity concept and refined through researcher interpretation (Santos *et al.*, 2023). To enhance analytical rigour, findings are presented based on raw data, aligning with methodological recommendations to minimise researcher influence (Smith and Humphreys, 2006).

Reliability was assessed by cross-validating manually coded data within Leximancer, tagging categories based on prior frameworks (Santos *et al.*, 2023). Researchers independently coded interviews using established human brand dimensions (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023), adding an additional dimension for credibility.

Dependability was addressed by optimising theme size (33%) and iterating re-clustering techniques. Confirmability was reinforced through interview excerpts aligned with key themes. To ensure transferability, human brand examples were removed, mitigating potential cultural biases in the concept map. These methodological steps collectively strengthen the findings, offering a reliable interpretation of consumer perceptions of masstige human brands.

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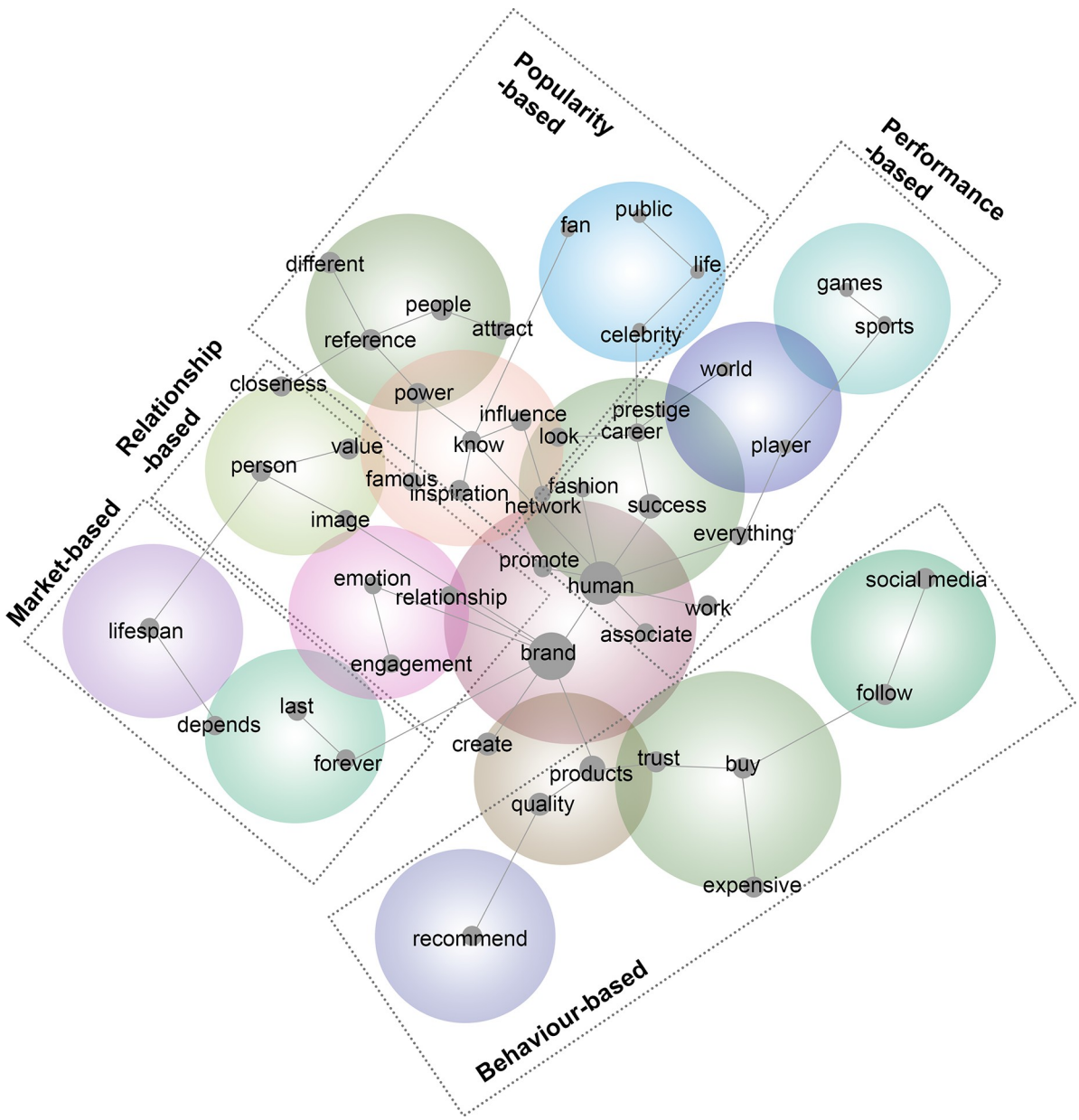
4.2 Results

The Leximancer analysis identified 15 themes, grouped in five dimensions: performance, popularity, relationship, market and behaviour-based. All themes relate to the central theme brand (Figure 2).

The central theme brand joins the concept's brand (hits = 468, connectivity rate = 100%), human (275.75%), associate (47.35%) and promote (27.26%). A human brand is when a person, like a celebrity, uses their reputation and associates their public image to promote their own products or projects. Human brands leverage their fame by promoting products and services. A participant mentioned that "A human brand is when a celebrity is considered a brand when celebrities start their own brands or businesses" (Interview = I3, Gender = Female [F], age = 41 years old). Participants considered that "[a]n human brand has a face" (I5, F, 52) and "that [p]roducts associated with human brands transmit their values, beliefs, opinions and passions" (I4, F, 19). Another customer stated that "[a] human brand is a brand created by well-known people, famous people, who use their image to sell products such as clothing, footwear, glasses" (I26, F, 30).

The performance-based dimension includes three themes: success, including the concepts of success (87.43%), career (20.19%), prestige (19.18%), work (19.19%), everything (15.14%) and fashion (12.11%); sports, comprising the concepts of sports (21, 20%) and games (15.14%); and world,

Figure 2 Concept map



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including the concepts of world (16.15%) and player (15.14%). This dimension highlights the career, prestige, work success and leadership associated with human brands, namely, in the field of arts and sports at the global level.

A customer recalled that "[t]he first human brand that comes to mind is Cristiano Ronaldo, a football star, a great athlete who has prestige, fame, money [. . .] and I met him by watching football games" (I5, F, 52). Another participant stated, "[I] really like de human brand [Roger] Federer because I'm connected to someone who really is an icon and who always shows great professionalism in what he does" (I10, Male [M], 45). A third customer argues that "[w]hat differentiates human brands is prestige; they are top of mind, well known and hold great success on a professional level and also exposure on a personal level" (I19, M, 35). A consumer listed a few examples in the field of sports "[i] know human brands such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Michael Jordan, LeBron James [. . .] they are the best" (I23, M, 21).

The popularity-based group comprises people, joining the concepts of people (108.50%), different (36.30%), reference (21.20%) and attract (15.14%); know, comprising the themes of know (94.47%), influence (24.22%), famous (22.21%), power (21.20%), inspiration (16.15%), network (15.14%) and look (12.11%); and public, including the concepts of public (14.13%), life (13.12%), celebrity (11.10%) and fan (9.10%). The participants mentioned that they learn about human brands from various sources like TV shows, the internet, journals, magazines and social media.

The narratives included in this dimension are linked with the popularity of the human brand, being famous, being well known by everyone and acting as having a reference power. Human brands are thus perceived as different from other brands.

An interviewee considered that "[h]uman brands are celebrities, public figures, well-known worldwide" (I1, M, 41). Another participant also associates celebrities with human brands". "A human brand is when a person themselves is perceived as a brand. For instance, this happens when celebrities create their own brands" (I3, F, 41). She added that "[b]rands associated with celebrities have an advantage over others because the celebrities who launch them attract their legions of fans" (I3, F, 41). A consumer highlighted that "[a] human brand is a point of reference; their ideas, lifestyle, economic power and appeal to the public make people follow them; [. . .] they have the power of attraction" (I10, M, 45).

The relationship-based dimension includes person, including the concepts of person (109.50%), value (20.19%), image (23.21%) and closeness (15.14%) and emotion, joining the concepts of emotion (15.14%), relationship (19.11%) and engagement (9.10%). Consumers are emotionally connected with human brands. Human brands foster relationships and consumer engagement and project human-like characteristics to their products.

A respondent maintained that "human brands closely align with consumers' emotions, desires and expectations, reflecting a person's image and values that profoundly impact consumers' lives; consumers feel connected to the brand when they purchase its products" (I37, F, 37). "A human brand's personality traits are transferred to the products and create empathy and a close relationship with the customer [. . .] the engagement with the human brand's products is strong" (I14, M, 22).

The market-based group comprises lifespan (27.26%), and last, joining the concepts last (23.21%), forever (21.20%) and depends (15.14%). The perception regarding the lifespan of the products of a human brand varies. "In the case of brands linked to personalities such as Michael Jordan, Cristiano Ronaldo or Messi, top sportsmen that have diversified their business areas, they [human brands] can last as long as they stay away from scandals" (I 27, M, 30). "I don't believe at all that a brand lasts forever. Human brands are related to fame and in their absence, they are no longer advertised; it all depends on each person's personal career" (I 29, F, 39).

The behaviour-based dimension includes: theme products, comprising products (139.53%), quality (54.39%) and create (35.30%); theme follow, joining the concepts follow (56.39%) and social media (32. 29%); buy, comprising buy (52.37%), trust (21.20%) and expensive (14.13%); and recommend (31.28%). This dimension comprises the behaviours regarding the human brand and its products. The consumers have a positive attitude towards the human brand and the corresponding brand offering, as they project the human brand image (e.g. trust, top quality, excellence and prestige) to the products. They also follow the products on social media and recommend them to others.

For example, a consumer replied that "[t]he Jordan sneakers I own [. . .] stand out for their durability and quality; [. . .] I used to dream of soaring to the basket like Michael Jordan [. . .] I follow the brand on social media" (I 27, M, 30). Another consumer stated, "[h]e [Roger Federer] inspires me to trust. That's why I think his products are of excellent quality. I follow this brand from the stores to everything, let's say, advertising, writing, and social media. I buy products [. . .] I undoubtedly recommend the products from this brand" (I10, M, 45).

Some consumers buy products from human brands, although they are perceived as expensive. A consumer reported that "when I played football, I was a fan of CR7 brand shoes. Human brands are quite good, but too expensive. I recommend this brand's products, I think they are the best, for now" (I25, M, 18). Another customer shared that "[I] follow this brand mostly through social media. I don't buy human brands because, honestly, I don't have money [. . .], but if I did, I would buy the make-up products from Kylie Jenner. The products are of good quality. [. . .] I would recommend it even because I may not use it, but I've seen it used, so I have strong points to recommend" (I4, F,19). A total of 35 participants follow the human brand/human brand products, mainly on social media, and 18 bought products (e.g. t-shirts, sneakers, make-up and fragrance).

4.3 Discussion

Regarding the first RQ – "What are the main dimensions of the concept of human brands perceived by consumers?" – the content analysis of the interviews identified four main dimensions – performance, popularity, relationship and market-based – that describe the consumer's view as regards human brands. The performance and popularity dimensions align with those previously identified by Rodrigues *et al.* (2023). The concept map adds novelty by emphasising the relationship-based dimension, highlighting human brands' ability to form emotional connections with consumers (Osorio *et al.*, 2020; Saboo *et al.*, 2016).

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The behaviour-based dimension helps address the second RQ: Can human brands be perceived as masstige brands? Most participants associated human brands and their products with masstige positioning. According to the concept map, a masstige human brand is a public figure or celebrity who leverages reputation, success and achievements (e.g. performance), emotional bonds with consumers (e.g. relationship) and widespread fame and influence (e.g. popularity) to promote products or services. These offerings combine prestige, such as quality, trust and exclusivity (Paul, 2018; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b), with broad accessibility. The market-based dimension reflects the variable lifespan of a human brand, shaped by public relevance and image. Participants recognised, recommended and purchased items such as fragrances, sneakers and apparel, demonstrating that consumer behaviour aligns with the aspirational yet accessible nature of masstige branding.

5. Study 2

5.1 Method

5.1.1 Design and participants

Data were collected for model testing via an online survey distributed from February to March 2022 across multiple social networks. A pre-test with 35 consumers identified potential ambiguities in the survey instrument. After assessing comprehension and response variability, minor revisions were made before administering the final survey through Google Forms.

This study sought to respect the Declaration of Helsinki, so the participants were apprised of the research objectives, and their informed consent was obtained before they completed the questionnaire. The survey also followed the host institution's ethical guidelines for research involving human respondents. As the study required only non-sensitive, voluntary participation with anonymised responses, no formal ethics board approval was necessary per this institution's regulations.

The questionnaire included two sections. The first gathered sociodemographic data and asked respondents to identify the human brand they most related to, emphasising that identification was with the celebrity, regardless of associated products or endorsements. The list featured ten human brands – Kylie Jenner, Kanye West, Roger Federer, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Tyler Perry, Neymar, Howard Stern, LeBron James and Dwayne Johnson – selected based on Forbes' 2020 ranking of the highest-paid celebrities. Respondents uninterested in any listed brand could select "I do not identify with any human brand", terminating their participation, and were excluded from the final data set. Section 2 assessed brand uniqueness, addiction, passion, loyalty and compulsive buying using validated scales, with responses anchored to the selected human brand.

The usable sample consisted of 365 respondents, described as follows: 48.2% were females, and 52.5% were males; 68.8% with ages below 25 years old, 18.6% were between the ages of 26 and 40, 11.8% were between the ages of 41 and 65 and 0.8% were above 65 years old; and 22.2% reported an income less than €1,000, 45.8% earned €1,001–€2,000, 17.8% earned €2,001–€3,000 and 14.2% earned more than €3,000 (see Table 1).

5.1.2 Procedure

To minimise the likelihood of common method bias (CMB), the questionnaire followed guidelines recommended by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), the survey used previously validated scales, items were randomised, and respondents were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of the study. We also applied Harmon's single-factor method to assess the presence of CMB. The results indicate that 41.68% (<50% cut-off) of the total variance was explained by a single constrained factor, suggesting that the instrument is free of any significant CMB. The degree of multicollinearity among the models' variables was examined through the variance inflation factor (VIF). According to Kock (2015), if all VIFs resulting from a full collinearity test are equal to or lower than 3.3, the model can be considered free of CMB. The analysis of the constructs returned values lower than 3.30 (ranging from 1.376 to 1.997, Model 1 – Brand addiction and 1.394 to 2.244, Model 2 – Brand passion).

5.1.3 Masstige mean score scale index

To evaluate if the selected human brands were perceived as masstige, Paul's (2019) 10-item mean score scale index (MMSSI) was included in the survey. Paul (2015) developed the MMSSI to measure the mass prestige value of brands, and this can be achieved by calculating the averages for each scale item and human brand (see Appendix 3). To calculate the

Table 1 Sample characteristic ($n = 365$)

Variable	Freq. (%)
Gender	
Male	51.5
Female	48.2
Prefer not to answer	0.3
Age	
Less than 25	68.8
26–40	18.6
41–65	11.8
More than 65	0.8
Monthly household income	
Less than €1,000	22.2
€1,001–€2,000	45.8
€2,001–€3,000€	17.8
More than €2,000	14.2
Of the following brands, please indicate the human brand with which you most identify with (choose only one):	
Kylie Jenner	20.0
Kanye West	3.8
Roger Federer	2.5
Cristiano Ronaldo	51.5
Lionel Messi	5.8
Tyler Perry	1.4
Neymar	2.5
Howard Stern	1.1
Lebron James	4.9
Dwayne Johnson	6.6

Source(s): Authors' own work

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human brands' masstige scores, the values of all 10 items were added up to form one score (Paul, 2019; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024a, 2024b). Based on a seven-point Likert-type scale, Paul (2015) determined that a minimum MMSSI of 50 out of 70 must be obtained for a human brand to be classified as masstige. This research used a five-point Likert-type scale, so the 50–70 range was transformed into a 35–50 score. Therefore, a human brand scoring over 35 is perceived as masstige. According to Appendix 3, from the evaluated ten human brands, six were considered masstige: Cristiano Ronaldo, Kanye West, Kylie Jenner, Neymar, Roger Federer and Tyler Perry.

5.1.4 Measures

The scale for the uniqueness construct is adapted from Bastos and Brucks (2017) using three items. The scale used for brand addiction is adapted from Mrad and Cui (2017) using 10 items, and the scale from Das *et al.* (2019) is adapted to evaluate brand passion with 14 items. The scale for the compulsive buying construct is adapted from Sneath *et al.* (2009) using five items, and the scale for brand loyalty from Steenkamp and Maydeu-Olivares (2015) is adapted to evaluate brand loyalty with five items. All items were measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5).

5.1.5 Data analysis

Partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses with the help of SmartPLS 3 software (Hair *et al.*, 2012; Ringle *et al.*, 2015). The research conditions supporting this methodological choice are related to the fact that when comparing PLS-SEM with covariance-based SEM, the former method overcomes the seeming dichotomy between confirmatory and predictive research, because researchers using the method expect their model to have high predictive accuracy while also being grounded in well-developed causal explanations (Hair *et al.*, 2017; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2018). Only human brands perceived as masstige by respondents were included, yielding 298 responses after excluding 67 linked to brands not perceived as masstige (e.g. Dwayne Johnson, Howard Stern, LeBron James and Lionel Messi).

PLS was applied in two steps: first, assessing reliability and validity of the general models, and then structural model analysis to explain relationships between latent factors (Chin, 2010). The brand addiction model had 23 items, of which four with factor loads of <0.70 were removed (e.g. two from the scale of brand addiction, one from the scale of uniqueness, and one from the scale of compulsive buying). The brand passion model had 27 items, with seven items removed for low factor loadings (e.g. five from the scale of brand passion, one from the scale of uniqueness and one from the scale of compulsive buying). Appendix 4 shows that composite reliability, Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A) and average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded recommended guidelines (Hair *et al.*, 2019) for both models, demonstrating convergent validity. Also, Cronbach's alpha values all exceed the 0.70 cut-off.

Discriminant validity was evaluated per the Fornell and Larcker criteria: the square roots of AVEs for the four constructs (Table 2, italic numbers) exceeded inter-construct correlations. The heterotrait–monotrait ratio criterion for assessing discriminant validity was also examined, and construct correlation values were all below 0.90 (Hair *et al.*, 2017), supporting discriminant validity for both models.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Hypothesis testing

The data analysis and hypothesis testing were performed using SEM and variance. Bootstrap resampling determined the significance of structural model paths. *H1* posits that uniqueness positively affects brand addiction and brand passion. Results support this for both models (Model A: beta [β] = 0.368, $p < 0.05$; Model B: $\beta = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$). *H2* posits that brand addiction and brand passion positively affect brand loyalty, supported by results (Model A: $\beta = 0.506$, $p < 0.001$; Model B: $\beta = 0.596$, $p < 0.001$). *H3* posits that brand addiction and brand passion positively affect compulsive buying behaviour, which is also supported (Model A: $\beta = 0.631$, $p < 0.001$; Model B: $\beta = 0.686$, $p < 0.001$) (see Table 3).

The model's explanatory power was evaluated via the coefficient of determination (R^2), reflecting explained variance (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Results indicate all the paths are statistically significant. Specifically, Model A explains 13.5% variance in brand addiction, 25.6% in brand loyalty and 39.8% in compulsive buying. Model B explains 30% variance in brand passion, 35.5% in brand loyalty and 47.1% in compulsive buying. In addition, *F*-square (f^2) effect sizes were estimated, as these are less affected by sample size and more reliable for large samples. According to Cohen's thresholds (≥0.02 small; ≥0.15 medium; ≥0.35 large), Model A shows a medium effect for uniqueness → brand addiction ($f^2 = 0.156$) and large effects for brand addiction → brand loyalty ($f^2 = 0.345$) and brand addiction → compulsive buying ($f^2 = 0.660$). Model B shows large effects for uniqueness → brand passion ($f^2 = 0.428$), brand passion → brand loyalty ($f^2 = 0.552$) and brand passion → compulsive buying ($f^2 = 0.890$). Predictive accuracy was assessed via Stone–Geisser's Q^2, indicating out-of-sample predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2017); both models showed $Q^2 > 0$ (Chin, 2010).

5.2.2 Mediation effects of brand addiction and brand passion

To test *H4* and *H5*, investigating whether brand addiction and brand passion mediate the relationships between uniqueness in masstige brands and brand loyalty/compulsive buying, Hayes's bootstrapping method was used to assess the significance of the indirect effects. Mediation is accepted when the indirect effect's confidence interval excludes zero (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Significance values and confidence intervals were computed using the Preacher and Hayes PROCESS macro. Table 4 shows the indirect effects, standard errors and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals derived from bootstrap estimation. All four indirect effects were statistically significant, confirming brand addiction and brand passion as mediators between uniqueness and brand loyalty and compulsive buying, supporting *H4* and *H5*.

5.3 Discussion

The SEM analysis confirms significant relationships between uniqueness in masstige brands, brand addiction, brand passion, brand loyalty and compulsive buying behaviour. The results confirm that uniqueness positively influences brand addiction and passion (e.g. *H1*),

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Table 2 Discriminant validity

	Mean	SD	Fornell–Larker criterion 1	2	3	4	Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) 1	2	3	4
Model brand addiction										
1. Brand addiction	2.252	1.170	*0.859*							
2. Brand loyalty	2.898	1.176	0.506	*0.853*			0.436			
3. Compulsive buying	2.025	1.130	0.631	0.513	*0.906*		0.661	0.455		
4. Uniqueness	3.275	1.128	0.368	0.412	0.654	*0.821*	0.310	0.265	0.632	
Model brand passion										
1. Brand addiction	2.898	1.176	*0.846*							
2. Brand loyalty	2.144	1.125	0.596	*0.918*			0.457			
3. Compulsive buying	2.025	1.130	0.524	0.686	*0.906*		0.455	0.707		
4. Uniqueness	3.275	1.128	0.383	0.548	0.595	*0.865*	0.265	0.549	0.632	

Note(s): AVE = average variance extracted; the diagonal elements (italic text) are the square root of the AVE; below the diagonal are the correlations among constructs
Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3 Results of structural equation model test

	Hypotheses			Model A Path estimate	*p*-value	Result	Model B Path estimate	*p*-value	Result
H1	Uniqueness	→	Brand addiction	0.368	0.025	Accept	0.548	0.000	Accept
H2	Brand addiction	→	Brand loyalty	0.506	0.000	Accept	0.596	0.000	Accept
H3	Brand addiction	→	Compulsive buying behaviour	0.631	0.000	Accept	0.686	0.000	Accept

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4 Mediation analysis

Mediation effect	Indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Conclusion
Total	0.4669	0.0471	0.3742	0.5595	
Uniqueness → brand addiction → brand loyalty	0.1496	0.0325	0.0902	0.2161	Full mediation
Total	0.5035	0.0474	0.4103	0.5967	
Uniqueness → brand addiction → compulsive buying	0.1614	0.0379	0.0955	0.2433	Full mediation
Total	0.4754	0.0422	0.3924	0.5583	
Uniqueness → brand passion → brand loyalty	0.1569	0.0281	0.1026	0.2131	Full mediation
Total	0.4712	0.0435	0.3856	0.5568	
Uniqueness → brand passion → brand loyalty	0.1555	0.0342	0.0935	0.2290	Full mediation

Note(s): SE = standard error estimate; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval
Source(s): Authors' own work

reinforcing the role of uniqueness in fostering emotional brand attachments (Gilal *et al.*, 2024; Rahman *et al.*, 2021; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2025). *H2*, which suggested that both constructs enhance brand loyalty, was also confirmed, highlighting the impact of emotional connections on habitual consumption (Das *et al.*, 2019; Mrad and Cui, 2017; Pourazad *et al.*, 2020). Support for *H3* shows that stronger brand addiction and passion increase compulsive buying, emphasising their role in impulsive purchasing (Barrera and Ponce, 2021; Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Japutra *et al.*, 2022; Meijani *et al.*, 2023). Finally, *H4* and *H5* confirmed the mediating effects of brand addiction and passion linking uniqueness to brand loyalty and compulsive buying (Alnawass *et al.*, 2022; Junaid *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the SEM results, Model B, focusing on brand passion, provides a more comprehensive understanding of human brands as masstige entities compared to Model A, centred on brand addiction. The data indicate that the impact of uniqueness on brand passion is notably stronger, reflecting the significance of emotional connections in consumer–brand relationships. Furthermore, Model B demonstrates greater explanatory power, suggesting that brand passion plays a more critical role in driving brand loyalty and compulsive buying behaviour, addressing RQ3.

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6. General discussion

This research produced complementary insights into consumers' perceptions and responses to brands from distinct yet interconnected perspectives. Study 1 identified four core dimensions of human brands – performance, popularity, relationship and market-based – which clarify how consumers attribute emotional and prestigious qualities to celebrities seen as masstige brands. The results underscore the emotional connections that define human brands and position them as entities that appeal to both luxury and mass markets.

Study 2 used SEM to examine the relationships between uniqueness in masstige brands, emotional brand attachment (e.g. brand addiction and brand passion), brand loyalty and compulsive buying (Japutra *et al.*, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2021). The findings confirm that uniqueness enhances brand passion and brand addiction, which subsequently drive loyalty and compulsive purchasing behaviours (Alnawas *et al.*, 2022). The mediating role of emotional brand attachment affects how masstige branding influences consumer behaviour. These results demonstrate that human brands, when perceived as masstige, foster strong emotional bonds that translate into both loyalty and excessive consumption.

Study 1 showed that masstige human brands combine prestige with mass appeal, which supports the Study 2 finding that uniqueness drives emotional engagement. Together, these insights provide a more holistic view of how human brands influence consumer behaviour in masstige contexts.

This study analysed data on specific human brands, Cristiano Ronaldo, Kanye West, Kylie Jenner, Neymar, Roger Federer and Tyler Perry, that illustrate the fusion of elite performance with broad accessibility. Consumer–brand relationships (Fournier, 1998) are fostered by, for example, the combination of Ronaldo's exceptional athletic achievements (e.g. exclusivity) and his social media presence and philanthropy (e.g. accessibility), which strengthen emotional bonds and fuel either brand passion or brand addiction. Varied streams of research on brand personality (Aaker, 1997) have explained how consumers attribute ambition, charisma and authenticity to Ronaldo, making him aspirational and relatable. Social identity theory (Escalas and Bettman, 2009) highlights that customers incorporate Ronaldo's image into their self-concept because they perceive him as a marker of status and affiliation. Finally, self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2013) suggests that his global reach and humanitarian efforts satisfy psychological needs for competence and relatedness.

The present findings advance theoretical understanding in two ways. First, the results provide empirical support for the conceptualisation of human brands as masstige brands, which fills a gap in the more recent literature (Das *et al.*, 2021; Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Gilal *et al.*, 2023; Osorio *et al.*, 2020). Second, the above analyses confirmed that emotional mechanisms, in particular, brand passion and brand addiction, mediate the relationship between consumers' perceptions of masstige human brands and behavioural outcomes. This dual-pathway model expands the available knowledge by showing not only how positive emotional attachments foster loyalty but also how maladaptive attachments can lead to compulsive buying behaviours. By addressing these gaps, the current study refined consumer–brand relationship theory and provided actionable insights for brand managers navigating the complexities of masstige marketing.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

These findings provide a deeper understanding of human brands within a masstige framework in which prestige intersects with mass appeal (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Osório *et al.*, 2020). The present study addressed three key RQs:

RQ1. consumer perceptions,

RQ2. classification of human brands as masstige, and

RQ3. the role of emotional brand attachment.

Four dimensions were identified as influencers of consumer attitudes: performance, popularity, relationship and market-based factors. This research focused on whether human brands can fit within the masstige paradigm and provided insights into how brand passion and brand addiction shape consumers' perceptions.

To extend the scope of this inquiry, the second study explored the psychological mechanisms underpinning consumer–brand relationships connected to masstige human brands. The analyses examined the influence of uniqueness, emotional attachment, brand loyalty and compulsive buying, confirming that uniqueness positively affects brand passion and brand addiction, which in turn drive both loyalty and compulsive behaviours (Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Junaid *et al.*, 2022). This integrated framework offers marketers actionable insights and expands the current theoretical perspectives on consumers' engagement with masstige brands.

The above research combined human brands, masstige branding and two forms of emotional attachment, brand passion and brand addiction, into a cohesive model. Unlike previous studies that examined these constructs separately (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Osório *et al.*, 2020), the present findings elucidate how celebrities (e.g. Cristiano Ronaldo) can simultaneously convey exclusivity and accessibility.

These results expand the masstige brand literature and reveal that perceptions of uniqueness evoke a large spectrum of emotions ranging from positive enthusiasm (e.g. brand passion) to problematic engagement (e.g. brand addiction). The findings thus challenge the traditional dichotomy of luxury versus mass markets. The study compared the mediating effects of these two emotional constructs on uniqueness and behavioural outcomes, which extends the consumer–brand relationship literature (Fournier, 1998) and highlights how compulsive consumption can coexist with brand loyalty (Francioni *et al.*, 2021; Junaid *et al.*, 2022).

The above results shift the focus from product endorsement to a conceptualisation of celebrities as brand entities and clarify the mechanisms by which masstige human brands foster loyalty and heighten compulsive behaviours. The insights gained underscore the strategic potential of balancing exclusivity and accessibility in contemporary branding.

In this vein, the present research makes two theoretical contributions. First, the results provide empirical evidence in favour of conceptualising human brands within a masstige framework, thereby responding to recent calls for explorations of how exclusivity and accessibility are combined in consumers'

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perceptions of brands. Second, this study integrated brand passion and brand addiction as emotional mediators into the conceptual model, which provides a clearer understanding of the dual nature of emotional consumer–brand relationships. The investigation addressed gaps in the literature and aligned its objectives with these lacunas, producing substantive advances in theoretical knowledge and strengthening the innovativeness of the outcomes.

6.2 Practical implications

From a managerial perspective, the results highlight the importance of fostering brand passion to encourage consumer loyalty while remaining vigilant about the potential for brand addiction to lead to compulsive buying behaviours. Managers can apply these insights by developing balanced marketing strategies that promote healthy, positive consumer–brand relationships.

The first study identified key dimensions shaping consumers' perceptions – performance, popularity, relationship building and market appeal – which offer strategic pathways for refining brand positioning. By leveraging human brands' distinct attributes, marketers can foster emotional connections and boost differentiation in competitive markets. The dual appeal of blending accessibility with prestige positions human brands as both aspirational and relatable, enabling them to attract diverse consumer segments. Influencer marketing emerges as a critical tool because collaborations with high-profile figures enhance brand credibility and trust and reinforce authenticity.

The second study underscored the role of uniqueness and emotional brand attachment in shaping consumer behaviour. Product differentiation and strong emotional engagement are pivotal drivers of loyalty that can mitigate the risks of compulsive buying. Brand passion and brand addiction act as psychological mechanisms that influence purchasing behaviours and that can guide targeted marketing strategies. Marketers need to capitalise on these insights by investing in loyalty programmes, brand communities and experiential marketing to foster sustained emotional connections. In addition, personalised advertising should align with individuals' emotional attachments to enhance engagement and long-term consumer retention.

An especially critical implication is the best way to develop strategically tiered product offerings and apply segmented marketing approaches. Celebrity-associated brands can maintain prestige through premium limited-edition collections even as these brands cater to mass-market accessibility. A prime example of this is Cristiano Ronaldo's CR7 brand, which integrates high-end fashion collaborations with mainstream apparel and fragrance lines.

Besides these opportunities, the above research underlined the potential risks of extreme brand addiction, especially compulsive buying, and the ethical and reputational challenges masstige human brands pose. Responsible brand management requires balancing consumers' enthusiasm by encouraging ethical consumption. Implementing corporate social responsibility initiatives that promote conscientious purchasing can mitigate these risks and enhance brand reputation. In addition, data analytics should be leveraged to monitor consumer sentiment so that brands are able to anticipate shifts in preferences and refine their strategies. This data-driven approach should strengthen marketers' understanding of emotional attachments and of ways to optimise brand loyalty while ensuring a competitive edge in masstige markets.

6.3 Limitations and future research

As with any academic research, both of the above studies had limitations. Study 1 relied on a specific consumer sample, which introduced demographic biases that could limit the generalisability of the findings. The respondents' examples of masstige products may reflect regional influences and affect cross-cultural applicability. Consumers' perceptions are also inherently subjective, and the first study captured a single moment without longitudinal insights. Social desirability bias can have an additional negative effect on response validity.

Study 1 further focused on a limited set of human brands (e.g. Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylie Jenner, Neymar and Roger Federer), which may not fully represent masstige branding across industries and cultural contexts. Future research could strengthen the validity of the results by exploring regional variations and examining non-celebrity human brands, such as digital influencers and business leaders.

Study 2 relied on SEM, thereby introducing assumptions that can oversimplify complex consumer behaviours. The cross-sectional design also limited causal inferences, while self-reported measures may have introduced biases. Researchers need to explore additional mediators, such as brand trust and brand identification, and conduct cross-cultural and longitudinal studies to enhance their understanding of consumer–brand interactions.

Credit Taxonomy

Paula Rodrigues, Ana Brochado, Ana Sousa, Muhammad Junaid and Ana Pinto Borges: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. All authors have contributed equally to this work and share responsibility for the content.

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Appendix 1

Introductory questions

Have you ever heard the term "human brand" before?

Can you think of any public figures, celebrities or influencers who can represent a brand in their own right?

I: Perception of the human brand concept

Q1 How would you define a human brand?

Q2 What sets human brands apart from others?

II: Knowledge and involvement with the human brands

Q3 Do you know any human brands? Do you identify with or particularly like any? Which brand?

Q4 Do you follow that brand? How?

III: Human brands commercial offering

Q5. Do you know any product offered by a human brand? Could you give an example?

Q6. Do you buy products promoted by human brands?

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Q7 How do you assess the quality of their products?
Q8. Would you recommend products from human brands?
Q9 How long do you think human brands last? Why?

Appendix 2

1. Anitta – fashion ($n = 1$)
2. Carolina Herrara – fragrance (1)
3. Cristina Ferreira – fashion and accessorize (5)
4. Cristiano Ronaldo/CR7 – fragrance, sneakers and hotels (30)
5. Elon Musk – Tesla automobiles (1);
6. Kim Kardashian – KKW Beauty, Skims (5);
7. Kylie Jenner – Kylie Cosmetics (5);
8. Kobe Bryant – Kobe Sneakers (1);
9. LeBron James – apparel and footwear (3);
10. Ludmilla – swimwear (1);
11. Rihanna – Fenty cosmetics (1);
12. Lionel Messi – apparel and accessories (5);
13. Michael Jordan – sneakers Air Jordan (7);
14. Patrizia Pepe – clothing (1);
15. Roger Federer – apparel and footwear (3);
16. Tiger Woods – sportswear (1)

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Appendix 3

Table A1 Masstige mean score scale index (MMSSI)

Items	Cristiano Ronaldo	Dwane Johnson	Howard Stern	Kanye West	Kylie Jenner	Lebron James	Lionel Messi	Neymar	Roger Federer	Tyler Perry
MMS1	3.34	2.88	1.25	3.79	3.29	2.78	3.38	3.33	3.22	4.60
MMS2	3.12	2.71	1.75	3.43	3.22	3.06	3.24	3.67	3.00	4.40
MMS3	4.19	2.71	2.00	2.57	3.90	2.72	2.90	3.33	3.11	3.80
MMS4	3.76	3.00	2.25	4.50	3.56	4.06	3.52	3.89	3.78	4.00
MMS5	3.52	3.08	2.50	4.00	3.41	3.72	4.19	4.11	3.89	4.00
MMS6	3.72	3.21	2.50	4.43	3.48	3.83	4.10	3.67	4.11	4.40
MMS7	3.72	3.08	2.50	4.36	3.67	3.83	3.38	3.78	4.44	4.40
MMS8	2.34	2.17	1.25	2.43	3.73	2.39	2.38	4.11	3.44	4.40
MMS9	3.86	2.67	1.25	2.50	3.52	2.22	2.57	3.33	2.78	4.00
MMS10	3.63	2.96	2.25	4.00	3.27	3.61	2.95	3.44	3.22	4.00
Score	*35.18*	28.46	19.50	*36.00*	*35.05*	32.22	32.62	*36.67*	*35.00*	*42.00*

Note(s): All items measured on Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5; according to Paul (2015), who used a seven-point Likert-type scale, brands need to have a minimum MMSSI score of 50 out of 70 to be considered masstige brands; in this study, human brands need to have a minimum MMSSI score of 35 out of 50 to be classified as masstige human brand and more than 42 to be considered top-of-mind masstige brands
Source(s): Authors' own work

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Appendix 4

Table A2 Measurements scales, reliability and dimensionality statistics

Measures	Model 1 (Brand addiction) Loadings	Mean value	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	CR (AVE)	Model 2 (Brand passion) Loadings	Mean value	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	CR (AVE)
Uniqueness (Model 1: $\alpha = 0.900$; Model 2: $\alpha = 0.789$)			0.900	0.928 (0.764)			1.275	0.854 (0.749)
I perceive this human brand as unique	0.999	3.33			0.970	3.26		
This human brand has different products than others I have had	0.592	3.58			0.746	3.29		
Brand addiction (Model 1: $\alpha = 0.949$)								
I try hard to get everything from my favourite human brand	0.861	2.09	0.957	0.957 (0.737)				
I often have difficulty controlling myself when buying products from my favourite human brand	0.832	2.02						
I often find myself thinking about my favourite human brand	0.931	2.64						
I tend to give up some activities and responsibilities in life, such as professional, academic and family life, to do activities related to my favourite human brand	0.885	1.76						
I tend to attribute a certain part of my monthly income to buying the products of my favourite human brand	0.865	2.12						
I usually remember my previous experience with my favourite human brand tenderly	0.799	2.77						
I feel a state of impatience immediately before I can access the products of my favourite human brand	0.851	2.05						
I usually plan when my next product purchase from my favourite human brand will be	0.838	2.57						
Brand passion (Model 2: $\alpha = 0.977$)							0.979	0.980 (0.843)
This human brand allows me to live a variety of experiences					0.900	2.67		
This human brand allows me to live a memorable experience					0.904	2.55		
This human brand is in harmony with the other activities in my life					0.911	2.84		
I cannot live without this human brand					0.939	1.83		
The impulse is so strong that I cannot help but consume products represented by this human brand					0.917	1.90		
I find it hard to imagine my life without this human brand					0.939	1.88		
I am emotionally dependent on this human brand					0.909	1.87		

(*continued*)

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Table A2

Measures	Model 1 (Brand addiction) Loadings	Mean value	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	CR (AVE)	Model 2 (Brand passion) Loadings	Mean value	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	CR (AVE)
I find it difficult to control my necessity to consume products represented by this human brand					0.923	1.94		
I have an almost obsessive feeling for this human brand					0.923	1.82		
Brand loyalty (Model 1: $\alpha = 0.918$; Model 2: $\alpha = 0.918$)			0.997	0.930 (0.727)			1.124	0.925 (0.715)
Once I get used to a human brand, I do not like to change	0.795	3.09			0.776	3.09		
I see myself as a person who is loyal to the human brand	0.958	2.83			0.947	2.83		
I feel really committed to the products/services I buy represented by the human brand	0.891	2.59			0.920	2.59		
Although different human brands represent certain products, I always tend to buy products described by the same human brand	0.724	3.07			0.705	3.07		
I prefer products represented by the human brand that I always buy, rather than trying something new that I am unsure about	0.877	2.91			0.856	2.91		
Compulsive buying (Model 1: $\alpha = 0.926$; Model 2: $\alpha = 0.926$)			0.936	0.948 (0.821)			0.942	0.948 (0.820)
I just want to buy things and do not care what I buy	0.948	1.73			0.947	1.73		
I buy things I cannot afford	0.865	1.62			0.880	1.62		
I go shopping to distract myself from things	0.835	2.66			0.819	2.66		
I buy things and keep them without ever using them	0.970	2.09			0.969	2.09		

Source(s): Authors' own work

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