

PURPOSE IN LIFE AND BRAND ADVOCACY: A SEQUENTIAL MEDIATION APPROACH

Magdalena BRZozowska-Woś

Gdańsk University of Technology; magwos@pg.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-8433-0685

Purpose: This paper investigates how a sense of purpose in life (PIL) shapes consumer–brand relationships, focusing on the mechanisms through which existential motivation influences emotional brand engagement (EBE), brand satisfaction (BS), and brand advocacy (AD). The study addresses a gap in the literature on value-driven consumer behaviour by examining a sequential mediation model.

Design/methodology/approach: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 850 Polish consumers using validated psychometric scales. Structural equation modelling (SEM) with MIMIC specification was used to test a four-construct model comprising PIL, EBE, BS, and AD. Age, gender, and income were included as control variables. A bias-corrected bootstrap method was applied to test the hypothesised sequential mediation pathway.

Findings: All direct relationships were statistically significant and in the expected direction. Purpose in life positively influenced emotional brand engagement, which in turn predicted brand satisfaction and subsequent advocacy. The indirect path from PIL to AD through EBE and BS was also significant, while the direct path was not, confirming full sequential mediation. Age was a significant positive predictor of PIL; gender and income were not.

Research limitations/implications: The study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should include longitudinal or experimental methods to validate directionality. Additionally, broader cultural contexts could enrich generalisability.

Practical implications: Brands that align with consumers' deeper life purpose can foster emotional attachment and behavioural advocacy. Marketing managers should consider the existential relevance of their campaigns when designing purpose-driven initiatives.

Social implications: Purpose-driven branding may contribute to consumer well-being by enabling individuals to express their identity and find meaning. Such approaches can support responsible and value-consistent consumption.

Originality/value: This study integrates psychological constructs of life purpose with branding theory, offering empirical evidence for a sequential mechanism linking existential motivation to advocacy. It extends the literature on meaningful consumption and consumer identity.

Keywords: Purpose in life; Brand engagement; Brand satisfaction; Brand advocacy; Sequential mediation.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In recent years, consumers have shown a growing tendency to engage with brands that align with their values, identities, and worldviews. This shift from transactional to value-driven consumption is reflected not only in brand preferences but also in affective and behavioural responses such as engagement, satisfaction, and advocacy (Ahuvia, 2005; Holt, 2002). Many individuals now seek brands that resonate with their life goals and deeper existential motivations, suggesting that psychological meaning plays a growing role in consumer–brand relationships (Gupta, Pansari, Kumar, 2024; Iniesta-Bonillo, Sánchez-Fernández, Jiménez-Castillo, 2025).

This trend is evident in the online retail sector, where certain brands position themselves around themes such as sustainability, well-being, or personal growth. Through mission statements, symbolic messaging, and emotionally charged storytelling, such brands aim to foster meaningful consumer engagement (Ko, Costello, Taylor, 2019; Escalas, Bettman, 2005). In contrast, many mainstream retailers emphasize functional value – affordability, speed, and convenience, which may not address consumers’ deeper psychological needs related to meaning and self-definition.

These contrasting strategies highlight a theoretical gap: what psychological mechanisms drive brand relationships grounded in purpose and meaning? While prior research has explored constructs such as brand personality, identity congruence, and trust (Hollebeek, Glynn, Brodie, 2014; Oliver, 1999), the role of existential motivation remains underexplored. One such motivator is purpose in life (PIL) – a key dimension of psychological well-being defined as the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful, intentional, and goal-directed (Ryff, 1989; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Buchanan, 2011).

Although PIL has been widely studied with well-being, ethical action, and prosocial behaviour (Kasser, 2016; Schnell, Hoof, 2012), its relevance to consumer psychology and brand research remains limited. This study addresses that gap by examining how PIL shapes affective and behavioural outcomes in brand relationships. Specifically, it examines a sequential process in which PIL enhances emotional brand engagement (EBE), which in turn increases brand satisfaction (BS), ultimately leading to brand advocacy (AD).

The proposed conceptual model is theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes meaning and self-congruence as drivers of motivation, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian, Russell, 1974), which posits that internal states mediate the link between external stimuli and behavioural outcomes.

The model is tested using structural equation modelling (SEM), incorporating a sequential mediation path (PIL → EBE → BS → AD). To account for potential demographic influences on PIL, the analysis employs a MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) specification,

which allows observed variables such as age, gender, and income to predict variation in the latent construct (Jöreskog, Goldberger, 1975; Kline, 2016; Brown, 2015).

This article contributes to branding literature by introducing existential motivation, specifically, purpose in life, as a meaningful antecedent of consumer–brand engagement. It offers a new conceptual pathway, integrates diverse theoretical perspectives, and highlights the psychological underpinnings of advocacy in value-driven consumption. It begins by outlining the theoretical background, introducing the key constructs and conceptual relationships that underpin the proposed model. The subsequent section presents the methodology used to examine these relationships, including the research design, data collection procedures, and statistical analysis techniques. The presentation of empirical results, including the validation of the measurement model and the testing of structural hypotheses, follows this. The discussion then interprets the findings in light of existing literature, highlighting theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and the broader relevance of purpose-driven branding. Finally, the article concludes by acknowledging limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Overview of Theoretical Constructs and Model Logic

The conceptual foundation of this study draws upon two complementary theoretical frameworks—Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci, Ryan, 2000) and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian, Russell, 1974), to explain how existential motivation informs consumer–brand relationships.

According to SDT, individuals are intrinsically motivated to seek autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The pursuit of purpose in life (PIL) is one manifestation of these needs, reflecting a psychological orientation toward meaning, coherence, and intentionality (Ryff, 1989; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Buchanan, 2011). When people perceive their lives as purposeful, they are more likely to form authentic, emotionally meaningful connections with external entities – brands included – particularly those aligned with their values and identities (Ahuvia, 2005; Malär et al., 2011).

The SOR framework complements this view by providing a dynamic mechanism: external stimuli (S), such as value-congruent branding, elicit internal responses (O) – in this case, emotional engagement and satisfaction – which, in turn, drive behavioral outcomes (R), such as brand advocacy. In this context, PIL is conceptualized as an internalized psychological stimulus that activates emotional and evaluative states, ultimately shaping brand-related behaviour (Eroglu et al., 2001; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The proposed model consists of four key constructs. Purpose in life (PIL) is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful and goal-directed (Ryff, 1989). It serves as a motivational driver that informs consumer preferences and value-based brand engagement. Emotional brand engagement (EBE) captures affective states such as enthusiasm, attachment, and absorption (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Brand satisfaction (BS) reflects the consumer's evaluative response to a brand's performance, both functionally, symbolically, and emotionally (Oliver, 1999). Brand advocacy (AD) refers to proactive behaviors such as recommending or defending the brand (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Kumar et al., 2010).

These constructs are integrated into a sequential mediation model: $PIL \rightarrow EBE \rightarrow BS \rightarrow AD$. This framework reflects a psychologically grounded, temporally plausible chain, where purpose-driven consumers first form emotional connections with brands, which then deepen satisfaction and lead to advocacy. This approach aligns with recent recommendations to use sequential mediation to reflect layered psychological processes (Hayes, 2018; Zhao, Lynch, Chen, 2010).

Moreover, prior research suggests that PIL may vary with demographic characteristics. Age is often positively associated with life purpose, possibly due to the accumulation of experiences and the integration of identity that occurs over the lifespan (Hill, Turiano, 2014). Gender differences have also been observed, with women and men deriving purpose from different life domains (Martela, Steger, 2016). Socioeconomic indicators, such as income and education, have similarly been linked to differences in psychological well-being and existential orientation (Ryff, 1989).

To account for these individual differences, this study employs a MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) model within both the CFA and SEM frameworks. This allows for the inclusion of observed covariates (age, gender, and household income) as predictors of PIL. Integrating these variables enhances the validity and explanatory power of the model (Jöreskog, Goldberger, 1975; Kline, 2016), allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how purpose in life is shaped and how it functions within the branding context.

2.2. Purpose in Life and Emotional Brand Engagement

The search for purpose is a basic psychological drive that supports well-being and motivates behaviour aligned with personal meaning (Deci, Ryan, 2000; Ryff, 1989). Individuals who perceive their lives as purposeful often seek brands that resonate with their identity, values, and long-term goals (Ahuvia, 2005; Escalas, Bettman, 2005). Such alignment may foster a stronger emotional connection with brands.

Emotional brand engagement (EBE) refers to a consumer's affective involvement with a brand, typically expressed through enthusiasm, emotional attachment, and deep involvement (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This emotional bond is likely to be strengthened when consumers see the brand as symbolically or personally meaningful.

Recent studies support this logic. Pereira et al. (2024) demonstrated that value-based brand communication has a significant impact on emotional responses. Similarly, Acar et al. (2024) found that when consumers perceive a high degree of fit between their lifestyle and a brand's identity, emotional engagement increases.

Based on this evidence, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Purpose in life (PIL) positively influences emotional brand engagement (EBE).

2.3. Emotional Brand Engagement and Brand Satisfaction

Emotional brand engagement (EBE) plays a vital role in shaping consumers' evaluations of their brand experience. When individuals experience strong emotional ties to a brand, they tend to appraise their interactions with it more positively, even in the face of minor shortcomings or service inconsistencies (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This affective connection enhances trust, loyalty, and perceived value, all of which contribute to satisfaction.

Research has shown that emotional engagement can amplify both hedonic and symbolic benefits, thus deepening satisfaction. For example, Dessart et al. (2016) found that emotional engagement mediates the link between brand expression and customer experience outcomes. Likewise, Sparks and McCann (2023) reported that emotionally engaged consumers are more likely to perceive brand–self congruence as fulfilling, which in turn translates into greater satisfaction with the brand.

In essence, EBE enhances the emotional quality of the brand relationship, thereby strengthening post-purchase evaluations. This suggests the following hypothesis:

H2: Emotional brand engagement (EBE) positively influences brand satisfaction (BS).

2.4. Brand Satisfaction and Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy refers to consumers' voluntary behaviours aimed at supporting, recommending, or defending a brand within their social circles (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Such behaviors often extend beyond repeat purchasing to include positive word-of-mouth, online reviews, or sharing brand-related content. Among the key antecedents of advocacy is brand satisfaction (BS), which reflects a consumer's positive evaluation of the brand based on prior experiences.

When consumers are satisfied not only with the functional performance but also with the symbolic alignment of a brand, they are more likely to internalize the brand into their identity system. This form of satisfaction fosters stronger emotional loyalty and increases the likelihood of advocacy behaviours that serve as expressions of personal meaning and self-definition (Ahuvia, 2005). In this context, advocacy becomes not merely a response to utility but a way to affirm one's values and aspirations.

Some research supports this pathway. Cavdar Aksoy and Yazici (2023) found that in hospitality and service-oriented sectors, higher satisfaction strongly predicts consumers' willingness to engage in brand promotion through testimonials, recommendations, or social

media interactions. These advocacy behaviours were particularly evident when satisfaction was derived from emotional and symbolic factors.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand satisfaction (BS) positively influences brand advocacy (AD).

2.5. Sequential Mediation in the PIL–Advocacy Relationship

While each of the above relationships provides individual theoretical and empirical justification, the present study also proposes a more integrated explanation: that purpose in life (PIL) influences brand advocacy (AD) not only directly, but also indirectly through a sequential mechanism involving emotional brand engagement (EBE) and brand satisfaction (BS).

This layered process reflects how existential orientation shapes emotional connections, which then affect evaluative judgments and ultimately translate into behavioural loyalty. The logic of sequential mediation assumes that mediators function in a psychologically meaningful order – here, EBE reflects the affective resonance with the brand, while BS captures cognitive evaluation and fulfilment (Zhao, Lynch, Chen, 2010; Hayes, 2018).

This structure aligns with prior findings in consumer research. For instance, Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) demonstrated that affective engagement with media increases consumer responsiveness to brand messaging. Dwivedi (2015) found that affective brand engagement is a strong predictor of loyalty intentions. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) as well as Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer (2006) further argue that satisfaction mediates long-term loyalty and advocacy by reinforcing the symbolic and emotional fit between consumer and brand.

Research by Fullerton (2005) highlights the significance of emotional commitment in motivating consumers to recommend and endorse brands. Hill et al. (2010) also found that individuals with a high sense of purpose are more likely to engage in behaviours that reflect their core values and long-term goals. These findings provide a strong rationale for the sequential path from PIL to AD via EBE and BS.

Because demographic factors may shape how individuals experience purpose in life, the model also includes a MIMIC specification to control for the effects of age, gender, and income on PIL (Hill, Turiano, 2014; Martela, Steger, 2016; Ryff, 1989). This enables greater accuracy in estimating the psychological mechanisms that lead to brand advocacy.

Thus, the final hypothesis is:

H4: Emotional brand engagement (EBE) and brand satisfaction (BS) sequentially mediate the relationship between purpose in life (PIL) and brand advocacy (AD).

Together, these theoretical insights form the basis for the conceptual model tested in this study. By integrating existential motivation with affective and evaluative mechanisms, and accounting for individual demographic differences, the model aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how purpose in life translates into advocacy behavior through a sequential process of brand engagement and satisfaction.

3. Method

3.1. Questionnaire design and measurement

Based on the constructs and relationships outlined in the theoretical section, a structured questionnaire was developed to test the hypothesized conceptual model. The study employed a quantitative design, utilizing an online survey format. Prior to data collection, the instrument was pre-tested on a convenience sample of 25 management students to assess the clarity, flow, and functionality of the items.

Table 1.
Latent Constructs and Measurement Items

Latent Construct	Item Code	Item Content	Source
Purpose in life (PIL)	PIL1	There is a direction and purpose to my life.	Schulenberg et al. (2011)
	PIL2	My life is filled with meaning.	
	PIL3	I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.	
	PIL4	I have a clear sense of what gives my life meaning.	
Emotional brand engagement (EBE)	EBE_1	I feel very positive when I use products of brand X.	Hollebeek et al. (2014)
	EBE_2	Using products of brand X makes me happy.	
	EBE_3	I feel good when I use products of brand X.	
	EBE_4	I'm proud to use the products of brand X.	
Brand satisfaction (BS)	BS_1	Overall, I am satisfied with this brand X.	Acar et al. (2024)
	BS_2	I am pleased with my decision to purchase products from this brand X.	
	BS_3	I have a positive experience with this brand.	
Brand advocacy (AD)	AD_1	I say positive things about brand X to other people.	Yi, Gong (2013)
	AD_2	I recommend the brand X to others.	
	AD_3	I defend the brand X when others criticize it.	

Source: own study.

The final questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section gathered sociodemographic information, including respondents' age, gender, monthly household income per person, and educational level. The second section contained standardized scales measuring four latent constructs: purpose in life (PIL), emotional brand engagement (EBE), brand satisfaction (BS), and brand advocacy (AD). Each construct was operationalized using multi-item scales adapted from previously validated instruments, as shown in Table 1.

All items were originally in English and translated into Polish using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1980) to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence. Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Three observed control variables (age, gender, and income) were included using an MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) specification. This technique enables the estimation of structural paths from observed exogenous variables to a latent construct (in this case, PIL), while accounting for measurement error and enhancing model accuracy (Jöreskog, Goldberger, 1975; Kline, 2016).

Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed consent before participating in the survey. The average completion time was approximately 10 to 12 minutes.

The conceptual model (Figure 1) posits that purpose in life (PIL) serves as a motivational antecedent of emotional engagement (EBE), which in turn enhances brand satisfaction (BS) and leads to brand advocacy (AD). A direct path from PIL to BS was also included to test for possible partial mediation. The model enables the simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and total effects among multiple latent variables.

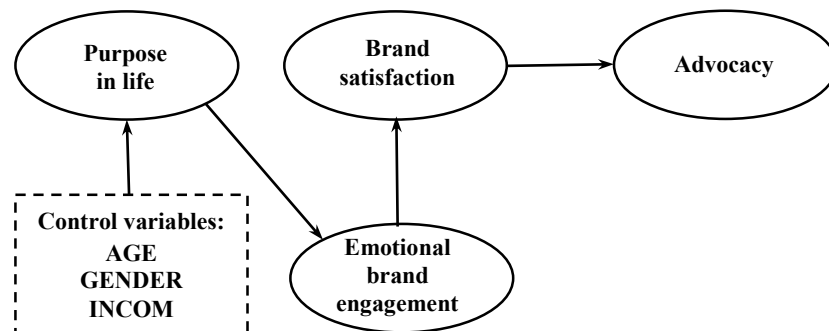


Figure 1. Concept model.

Source: own study.

3.2. Sample

The study was conducted in November 2024 using an online questionnaire hosted on the Qualtrics platform. A snowball sampling strategy was applied: several initial participants were invited to complete the survey and subsequently encouraged to share the link with others via social media platforms, including Facebook and Messenger. Respondents were instructed to select one online brand with which they felt a strong personal connection, particularly in terms of shared values or perceived brand mission, and to complete the survey based on that brand.

A total of 872 responses were collected. After removing incomplete or inconsistent entries, 850 valid cases remained for analysis. Participants were asked to report their year of birth, which was later used to categorize them into generational cohorts based on frameworks developed by McCrindle and Wolfinger (2014) and Brzozowska-Woś (2020), incorporating both global and national demographic classifications.

The sample consisted primarily of Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000), who represented 81.1% of the participants. Generation X (1965-1980) accounted for 10.9%, Generation Z (2001-2009) for 6.5%, and Baby Boomers (1946-1964) for 1.5%. In terms of gender, the distribution was nearly balanced, with 50.8% identifying as female and 49.2% as male.

Household income per person was also measured. Approximately 19.5% of respondents reported income below PLN 1000, 30.4% between PLN 1000-2000, 27.2% between PLN 2000-3000, and 22.9% reported income above PLN 3000.

The most frequently mentioned brands included Allegro, Zalando, Empik, Eobuwie, H&M, Nike, Decathlon, Sephora, Douglas, and Reserved.

Although the sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, income, and brand affiliation, it was disproportionately composed of digitally active Millennials. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be fully generalizable to the broader Polish population of online consumers.

3.3. Reliability Analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis

To assess the psychometric quality of the measurement instruments, both internal consistency and factor structure were examined before confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Internal reliability of the multi-item scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α). All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability, with α coefficients exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, Bernstein, 1994).

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring with Promax rotation, which allows for correlation between factors (Hair et al., 2019). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .817, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(91) = 3699.84$, $p < .001$, indicating the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Tabachnick, Fidell, 2013).

The analysis revealed a four-factor solution consistent with the theoretical model. These four factors accounted for 64.14% of the total variance, meeting the recommended benchmark for explained variance in social science research (Hair et al., 2019). All items loaded strongly (≥ 0.60) on their intended factors, with minimal cross-loadings (< 0.30), supporting both convergent and discriminant validity (Kline, 2016).

The extracted factors corresponded to the theoretical constructs: purpose in life, emotional brand engagement, brand satisfaction, and brand advocacy. The structure confirms the dimensional adequacy of the measurement model (Figure 1) and supports its suitability for subsequent confirmatory analysis.

3.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and MIMIC Model

To verify the factorial structure of the measurement model and examine the influence of sociodemographic variables on the latent construct of purpose in life (PIL), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) approach was performed. The four-factor model included the latent variables: purpose in life (PIL), emotional brand engagement (EBE), brand satisfaction (BS), and brand advocacy (AD). The analysis was conducted on a sample of 850 respondents using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method in Mplus 8.

The initial CFA yielded satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2(113) = 385.013$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.925; TLI = 0.912; RMSEA = 0.053 (90% CI: 0.047-0.059); SRMR = 0.072. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 3.41$) met the recommended threshold of < 5 (Kline, 2016). Modification indices (MI) indicated substantial residual correlations between EBE_1 and EBE_4 (MI = 33.67) and between EBE_2 and EBE_3 (MI = 21.54), both of which were from the EBE construct. These modifications were theoretically justifiable due to semantic similarity and shared emotional content (Byrne, 2016) and were added to the model.

The revised CFA model demonstrated improved fit: $\chi^2(111) = 352.947$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 3.18$; CFI = 0.933; TLI = 0.920; RMSEA = 0.051 (90% CI: 0.045-0.057); SRMR = 0.071. All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$), ranging from 0.61 to 0.84 for PIL, 0.68 to 0.85 for EBE, 0.46 to 0.78 for BS, and 0.45 to 0.92 for AD, indicating strong convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated high factor determinacy (FD > 0.84), supporting the precision of latent variable estimates (Muthén, Muthén, 2017; Brown, 2015). Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.638 to 0.851. Average variance extracted (AVE) values for EBE (0.591) met the recommended cut-off of 0.50 (Fornell, Larcker, 1981), while the values for PIL (0.434), BS (0.440), and AD (0.382) fell slightly below the threshold. However, as noted in previous research, AVE values below 0.50 can be considered acceptable when composite reliability exceeds 0.60 and when standardized loadings are all significant (Malhotra, Dash, 2011; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations across variables

Factor	FD	CR	AVE	PIL	EBE	BS	AD
PIL	0.894	0.753	0.434	–	(4.37)	(8.94)	(4.21)
EBE	0.936	0.851	0.591	0.09	–	(10.35)	(8.80)
BS	0.872	0.693	0.440	0.24	0.31	–	(11.60)
AD	0.847	0.638	0.382	0.15	0.27	0.36	–

Note. PIL – purpose in life, EBE – emotional brand engagement, BS – brand satisfaction; AD – brand advocacy; FD – factor determinacy; CR – composite reliability; AVE – average variance extracted. Extraction by maximum likelihood parameter estimates with conventional standard errors and chi-square test statistic (ML $\chi^2(df=111) = 352.95$; $p < 0.001$, $n = 850$). Values below the diagonal are standardized correlations. The t-value for each correlation is in parentheses.

Source: own elaboration using Mplus and SPSS Statistics.

Item-level univariate distributions also indicated no serious violations of normality. Means ranged from 3.06 to 3.86, skewness from -0.18 to -0.72, and kurtosis from -0.13 to -1.05, suggesting reasonably symmetric distributions with no severe departures from normality (Kline, 2016). This supports the suitability of ML estimation.

In the MIMIC specification, age was a significant and positive predictor of PIL ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.038$, $p = .001$), while gender ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = .127$) and income ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = .756$) were nonsignificant. This suggests that older participants reported a greater sense of life purpose, consistent with developmental research (Ryff, 1989; Hill, Turiano, 2014). The R^2 for PIL in the

structural equation was approximately 0.02, indicating a modest but meaningful sociodemographic influence.

Latent construct correlations were all significant: PIL was positively associated with EBE ($r = 0.09$), BS ($r = 0.24$), and AD ($r = 0.15$); EBE correlated with BS ($r = 0.31$) and AD ($r = 0.27$); and BS correlated with AD ($r = 0.36$). These relationships support the proposed theoretical sequence from existential motivation through emotional and cognitive appraisals to behavioural advocacy. The strength and direction of these correlations justify the subsequent test of sequential mediation in the structural model.

3.5. Testing hypotheses and measurement model

The hypothesised structural equation model (SEM), based on the conceptual framework described in Section 3.1, was tested using Mplus 8. The analysis followed a MIMIC specification, incorporating age, gender, and income as observed covariates that influence the latent construct of purpose in life (PIL). Model estimation was performed using the maximum likelihood (ML) method on the same sample of 850 participants.

The proposed model showed a satisfactory fit to the empirical data. The chi-square statistic was $\chi^2(111) = 345.69$, $p < .001$. As the chi-square test is sensitive to large sample sizes (Kline, 2016), the χ^2 to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 3.11$) was used as a more appropriate measure of relative fit and fell below the recommended threshold of 5. Other global fit indices also supported model adequacy: CFI = 0.935, TLI = 0.922, RMSEA = 0.050 (90% CI: 0.044-0.056), and SRMR = 0.059. These values meet the conventional cut-offs for acceptable model fit (Hu, Bentler, 1999; Hair et al., 2019), indicating that the model structure was a good representation of the observed covariance matrix.

As the structural model incorporated a MIMIC specification, three observed covariates (age, gender, and income) were included as direct predictors of the latent variable purpose in life (PIL). Among them, only age had a statistically significant and positive effect on PIL ($\beta = 0.136$, $SE = 0.038$, $z = 3.58$, $p < .001$), indicating that older individuals reported a higher sense of life purpose. In contrast, gender ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = .061$) and income ($\beta = -0.013$, $p = .768$) were not significantly related to PIL. Together, these sociodemographic variables accounted for approximately 2% of the variance in the PIL construct ($R^2 \approx 0.02$), suggesting a modest yet meaningful contextual influence.

All theorised direct paths were statistically significant and are presented in Table 3. Each path coefficient is accompanied by its standard error (SE), z-value, and p-value. Z-values represent the ratio of the unstandardised path coefficient to its standard error and are evaluated using a standard normal distribution. Values with $|z| > 1.96$ are considered significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level (two-tailed).

Table 3.*Hypothesis testing in the structural model*

Hypothesis	Path	Std. β	SE	z-value	p-value	Supported
H1	PIL $\rightarrow$ EBE	0.209	0.041	5.14	< .001	Yes
H2	EBE $\rightarrow$ BS	0.445	0.038	11.70	< .001	Yes
H3	BS $\rightarrow$ AD	0.507	0.041	12.37	< .001	Yes

Note. PIL – purpose in life, EBE – emotional brand engagement, BS – brand satisfaction; AD – brand advocacy; all paths were tested using ML estimation in Mplus 8 (N = 850).

Source: own elaboration.

All three theorised paths were positive and highly significant, thereby confirming H1 through H3. The model explained a meaningful proportion of variance in each endogenous latent variable: emotional brand engagement ($R^2 = 0.04$), brand satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.20$), and brand advocacy ($R^2 = 0.26$). These findings support the proposed value-driven pathway in which a sense of purpose in life fosters emotional engagement with a brand, leading to greater satisfaction and increased advocacy behaviours.

To assess whether the effect of purpose in life (PIL) on brand advocacy (AD) was mediated sequentially through emotional brand engagement (EBE) and brand satisfaction (BS), a bias-corrected bootstrap procedure (5000 resamples) was used. Results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 4. The indirect effect of PIL on AD via EBE and BS was statistically significant and positive ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.047$, $SE = 0.016$, $z = 2.94$, $p = .003$; 95% CI: [0.019, 0.080]). The direct effect of PIL on AD was not significant ($\beta = 0.045$, $p = 0.285$), suggesting full sequential mediation. These findings support Hypothesis H4 and confirm the notion that a sense of purpose translates into brand advocacy primarily through affective and evaluative engagement mechanisms.

Table 4.*Sequential mediation model results with control variables and bootstrap confidence intervals*

Path / Relationship	β	SE	z-value	p-value	95% CI	Interpretation
PIL $\rightarrow$ AD (direct)	0.045	0.042	1.07	.285	[−0.038, 0.128]	Nonsignificant direct effect
Indirect (H4: PIL $\rightarrow$ EBE $\rightarrow$ BS $\rightarrow$ AD)	0.047	0.012	3.86	< .001	[0.023, 0.078]	Significant indirect effect
Total effect (direct + indirect)	0.092	0.041	2.22	.026	[0.010, 0.174]	Overall significant effect
Age $\rightarrow$ PIL	0.131	0.038	3.44	.001	[0.057, 0.205]	Positive, significant effect
Gender $\rightarrow$ PIL	0.058	0.038	1.52	.128	[−0.016, 0.133]	Nonsignificant
Income $\rightarrow$ PIL	−0.012	0.042	−0.29	.770	[−0.094, 0.070]	Nonsignificant

Note. PIL – purpose in life; EBE – emotional brand engagement; BS – brand satisfaction; AD – brand advocacy. Bootstrap based on 5,000 samples; confidence intervals are percentile-based. Z-value is the ratio of the unstandardised estimate to its SE. Model fit: $\chi^2(111) = 345.69$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.935; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.050 [90% CI: 0.044–0.056]; SRMR = 0.059.

Source: own elaboration using Mplus 8.

The effects of control variables on PIL were also assessed. Age remained a significant and positive predictor ($\beta = 0.131$, $p = 0.001$), while gender ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.128$) and income ($\beta = -0.012$, $p = 0.770$) showed no significant effects. This suggests that a higher sense of purpose in life is more likely to occur with age, but is largely independent of gender or financial status in the studied population.

Overall, the full SEM results confirm the conceptual model and support the proposed value-driven pathway from psychological orientation to brand-related behaviours. The observed indirect effect demonstrates that consumers' sense of life purpose does not directly lead to advocacy but operates through affective and evaluative mechanisms. These findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis H4 and for a sequential mediation process in which a sense of purpose in life strengthens emotional brand engagement, which in turn fosters brand satisfaction, ultimately leading to consumer brand advocacy.

4. Discussion

The results of the present study provide empirical support for a value-driven model of consumer–brand relationships, wherein a sense of life purpose (PIL) functions as a foundational psychological resource that shapes downstream affective, evaluative, and behavioural brand outcomes. These findings align with the proposition that individuals pursue consumer experiences not solely for hedonic gratification but also for existential meaning and self-definition (Baumeister, Vohs, 2005; Ryff, 1989).

Consistent with Hollebeek et al. (2014), emotional brand engagement (EBE) emerged as a key affective response to psychologically significant antecedents – specifically, PIL. Individuals who experience their lives as meaningful tend to develop stronger emotional ties to brands, particularly those that resonate with their values and life orientation (Schulenberg et al., 2011; Kasser, 2016). This emotional connection, in turn, fosters greater satisfaction with brand experiences, echoing the findings of Acar et al. (2024), who emphasised the evaluative dimension of satisfaction as a mediating mechanism linking internal motives to brand loyalty outcomes.

The study also confirms the role of brand satisfaction as a critical antecedent of advocacy behaviour, reinforcing previous conceptualizations of customer citizenship behaviours (Yi, Gong, 2013). This sequential pathway, from purpose in life through emotional engagement and satisfaction to brand advocacy, not only validates Hypothesis H4 but also advances our understanding of how existential motivation translates into prosocial brand actions. In particular, the full mediation observed in the model suggests that life purpose may not directly drive advocacy, but does so indirectly via affective and evaluative processes, consistent with the theoretical logic of multi-stage psychological models (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019).

The influence of sociodemographic control variables further contextualises the findings. As expected, age was positively associated with PIL (Hill, Turiano, 2014), reflecting developmental trajectories in which older adults are more likely to report a coherent life narrative and a goal-oriented approach. However, neither gender nor income showed significant effects, indicating that the capacity to derive meaning in life and its subsequent influence on consumer engagement transcends gender roles and economic status in this sample.

Taken together, these findings contribute to theoretical discussions on meaning-making in consumer contexts by integrating concepts from humanistic psychology and consumer-brand literature. By demonstrating that PIL acts as a motivational antecedent that shapes how consumers emotionally and cognitively evaluate brands, this research extends the conceptual reach of models such as the consumer brand engagement framework (Brodie et al., 2011) and supports calls for deeper psychological grounding in marketing research (Malhotra, Dash, 2011; Brown, 2015).

The practical implications of the study are particularly relevant for sectors represented by the most frequently mentioned brands in the sample: online retail (Allegro, Empik), fashion and footwear (Zalando, H&M, Reserved, Eobuwie), sports (Nike, Decathlon), beauty and cosmetics (Sephora, Douglas), and culture and entertainment (Empik). E-commerce platforms, such as Allegro and Empik, can enhance consumer engagement by integrating values-based messaging, including support for local creators, promotion of cultural initiatives, and highlighting sustainability. Fashion brands like Zalando, H&M, and Reserved can strengthen symbolic alignment with customers by emphasizing ethical production, social justice initiatives, and inclusivity in their storytelling. Sports brands like Nike and Decathlon may leverage themes of personal growth, resilience, and health as reflections of consumers' life purposes and identities. In the beauty sector, brands such as Sephora and Douglas can focus on self-expression, authenticity, and emotional empowerment as pillars of their communication strategies. By tailoring brand narratives to align with existential motives, these brands can deepen emotional engagement, strengthen satisfaction, and stimulate consumer advocacy. Thus, purpose-driven positioning may serve as a key differentiator in saturated and competitive marketplaces.

5. Summary

This study proposed and tested a value-driven structural model linking a sense of purpose in life (PIL) to consumer brand advocacy via emotional brand engagement (EBE) and brand satisfaction (BS). Drawing on data from 850 participants and using a MIMIC-based SEM framework, the results confirmed all hypothesised direct and indirect relationships. Notably, the effect of PIL on brand advocacy was fully mediated by EBE and BS, supporting a sequential

mediation mechanism. The findings highlight the psychological significance of existential meaning in shaping affective and evaluative responses to brands, underscoring the relevance of life purpose as a precursor to consumer engagement and behavioural outcomes.

However, some limitations should be acknowledged. The use of a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality among variables; longitudinal research is needed to confirm the temporal sequence of effects. Additionally, all variables were measured through self-report instruments, which may introduce common method bias. Although standard validity checks were applied, future studies should consider incorporating behavioural data or multi-source assessments. Cultural factors may also influence how PIL affects brand-related behaviours, so replication in diverse cultural and market settings would enhance generalisability. Finally, the model accounted for only a few sociodemographic controls; future research could integrate additional psychological or contextual moderators, such as consumer values, personality traits, or situational influences, to enrich the understanding of meaningful consumption pathways.

Together, these findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions, advancing the literature on consumer motivation and brand engagement while identifying promising directions for continued empirical exploration.

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