The meditating effect of brand love in the relationship between brand experience and brand equity[1]

Marka deneyimi ve marka denkliği ilişkisinde marka aşkının aracılık etkisi

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine whether brand love has a mediating effect on the relationship between brand experience and brand equity. The research data were obtained from 503 participants between the ages of 18-24 in Istanbul. Face-to-face survey technique was used as a data collection method, quota sampling and convenience sampling methods were preferred as the sampling method. The collected data were tested using exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling analysis within the framework of the conceptual model of the research. According to the findings of the research, it has been determined that four dimensions of brand experience (sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral) have a positive effect on two dimensions of brand love (affection, passion) and four dimensions of brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty). However, it was concluded that brand love has no mediating effect on the relationship between brand experience and brand equity.

Keywords: Brand, Brand Love, Brand Experience, Brand Equity

Jel Codes: M30, M31

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, marka aşkının marka deneyimi ve marka denkliği arasındaki ilişkide aracılık etkisinin olup olmadığını incelemektir. Araştırma verileri İstanbul ilinde 18-24 yaş aralığında olan 503 katılımcıdan elde edilmiştir. Veri toplama yöntemi olarak yüz yüze anket tekniği, örnekleme yöntemi olarak da kota örneklemesi ve kolayda örnekleme yöntemleri tercih edilmiştir. Toplanan veriler araştırmanın kavramsal modeli çerçevesinde keşifsel faktör analizi, doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ve yapısal eşitlik modellemesi analizi kullanılarak test edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre marka deneyiminin dört boyutunun (duyusal, duygusal, düşünsel ve davranışsal) marka aşkının iki boyutu (sevgi, tutku) ve marka denkliğinin dört boyutu (marka farkındalığı, marka çağrışımları, algılanan kalite, marka sadakati) üzerinde olumlu etkisinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte, marka aşkının marka deneyimi ve marka denkliği arasındaki ilişkide aracılık etkisinin olmadığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka, Marka Aşkı, Marka Deneyimi, Marka Denkliği

JEL Kodları: M30, M31

Introduction

Today, due to the developments in technology, the functional features of the products have started to become similar. Therefore, to offer added equity to consumers, it is necessary to add experiential and sensory values as well as functional values to the brand (Erdem, 2019, p. 34). In this sense, the ability to have positive experiences and establish sensory relationships with consumers is increasingly important in developing brand-based differentiation strategies (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2018, p. 277). Brand experience can help consumers evaluate their learning processes and brand quality by acquiring brand knowledge (Erdem, Keane and Sun, 2008, pp. 1111-1123). Consumers can have a brand experience when searching for products, shopping, receiving services, and consuming products (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009, p. 52). Positive brand experience can strengthen consumer satisfaction, consumer-brand relationship quality and brand equity (Iglesias, Markovic and Rialp, 2019, p. 343). In addition, consumers' positive experiences with brands can create definite meanings and memories for brands (Rajumesh, 2014, p. 74). Brand love is a concept that defines the consumer-brand relationship based on sensory interpersonal relationships. Today's marketing and branding world advocate the importance of brands to establish sensory ties with consumers to gain and retain new consumers (Batı, 2015, p. 353). So much so that today's consumers can be more difficult to be convinced and satisfied than in the past, and they can easily change brands in the face of the smallest negativities they have experienced with brands. Businesses that want to prevent this situation have started to focus on creating customer masses that do not give up their brands (Moralıoğlu, 2014, p. 71). Opinions that consumers can develop love-like feelings towards brands are mainly based on research (Fournier, 1998; Fournier and Mick, 1999) on satisfaction, love and consumer-brand relationship (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006, p. 80; Filho, Monteiro and Souki, 2010, p. 5). In order for brand love to occur, the consumer must have a positive brand attitude and positive brand experiences, as well as a psychological sense of closeness to the brand (Karjaluoto, Munnukka and Kiuru, 2016, p. 527). Another concept that is as important as brand experience and brand love is brand equity. Brand equity is accepted as a relational marketing-based phenomenon created through the interactions and relationships between brands and their customers in brand management in both academic and managerial terms (Iglesias et al., 2019, p. 343). According to Quinn (2016, p. 1), brand equity can be formed due to positive interactions and transactions between the consumer and the brand, over time, between all contact points and all communication channels. The underlying importance of brand equity is that it increases the preferability of the brand, leads to brand loyalty and can protect the brand in competitive conditions (Pitta and Katsaniz, 1995, p. 56). While research on brand equity has a long history, research on brand experience and brand love is relatively new. According to Wani (2017, p. 86), brand experience and brand love are considered new marketing concepts in measuring brand equity. In the field of brand management in recent years, studies on the relationships between brand love and brand experience (Pauwels-Delassus and Zarantonello, 2016, Zhang, 2019; Joshi and Garg, 2021), brand experience and brand equity (Kumar, Dash and Purwar, 2013; Aboutalebi and Kouloubandi, 2016; Beig and Nika, 2019) and brand love and brand equity (Halilovic, 2013; Önen, 2018; Gómez and Pérez, 2018; Filho et al., 2010) are observed to increase in number. However, a few studies deal with the relationships between brand experience, brand love, and brand equity together in domestic and international studies (Baycur, 2015; Rodrigues, Rodriques and Costa, 2017). Studies on brand experience in the literature are predominantly on developed country (UK, USA and Italy) consumers (Hamzah, Alvi and Othman, 2014). Khan and Rahman (2015) emphasized in their study that more studies should be done on the consumers of developing countries. Within the framework of all these explanations, the problem sentence of the research was formed as "Is there a mediating effect of brand love in the relationship between brand experience and brand equity?". Within the framework of the conceptual model created in this direction, the following sub-goals have been tried to be achieved:

- It is determining the effect of brand experience on brand equity.

- It is determining the effect of brand experience on brand love.

- It is determining the effect of brand love on brand equity.

The study is expected to offer specific contributions to the practitioners through the sampling that it involves. First of all, young consumers comprise a necessary target mass for marketing and communication activities of today's enterprises. They insist on purchasing the same brands due to the brand awareness they have gradually gained since early ages. Therefore, they constitute a profitable market segment for electronics, cosmetics, food and beverages, and especially clothing (Ceritoğlu, 2004; Lazarevic, 2012). Moreover, they are also taken as an attractive group to shape the middle and advanced age markets of the future (İslamoğlu and Altunışık, 2013). In this context, it is thought necessary for the enterprises who would like to develop long-term relationships with the young consumers to determine

how their brand experiences affect their emotional attachment for the brands and the value they attribute to the brands.

Literature review on brand experience, brand love and brand equity

Experiences can occur when consumers search for products, shop, receive services, and consume products (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 52). Brand experience is accepted as an umbrella term encompassing all of the consumer's product, shopping, service and consumption experiences (Altaf et al., 2017, p. 220; Skard et al., 2011, p. 2). It refers to the internal and personal reactions to consumers' perceptions every time they come into contact with a brand (Chen., 2012, p. 84; Shim, Forsythe and Kwon, 2015, p. 56; van der Westhuizen, 2018, p. 174). Consumers' experiences with brands generally occur directly during shopping, purchasing and product consumption (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53). In addition, experiences can also occur through indirect interactions that consumers have with brands, such as word-of-mouth communication or advertisements (Meyer and Schwager, 2007, pp. 118-119). The brand experience is "subjective, internal, stimulated by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communication and environment (sensations, feelings and cognitive) and behavioral consumer reactions" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53). According to this definition, brand experience includes consumers' reactions to various stimuli related to a brand and occurs as a result of past interactions of consumers with brands (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 34; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013, p. 262). Brand experiences can affect the perceived equity of a brand by the consumer through sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral stimuli (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013, p. 261). Sensory experiences are the first level of experience based on consumers' sensory perceptions (Zhang, 2019, p. 899; Yoon and Youn, 2016, pp. 3-4). It shows the brand's influence on consumers' senses (Nejad, Samadi, Ashraf and Tolabi, 2015, p. 247). Emotional experiences include the positive feelings or strong emotions a brand evokes on consumers (Nysveen and Pedersen, 2014, p. 812; Beig and Khan, 2018, p. 264-265). Studies show that today's consumers are looking for sensory experiences in addition to purchasing products in their shopping (A-Qader and Omar, 2017, p. 27; Hultén, 2011, p. 258). Intellectual experiences are the cognitive thoughts evoked by brand-related stimuli in the consumer (Madeline and Sihombing, 2019, p. 94; Dalla Pozza, 2014, p. 122). It includes analytical and creative thoughts caused by consumers' interactions with brands (Iglesias et al., 2019, p. 344). In this respect, intellectual experiences show to what extent a brand stimulates the curiosity and thoughts of consumers (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010, s. 533; Brakus et al., 2009, p. 57; Lee and Kang, 2012, p. 90). Behavioral experiences are physical actions (e.g. purchasing, exercise), behaviours (e.g. lifestyle changes) and bodily experiences promoted by stimuli related to a brand (Dalla Pozza, 2014, p. 130; Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonello and Solerio, 2019, p. 355; Yang, Zheng, Zhao and Gupta, 2017, p. 583; Japutra and Molinillo, 2017, p. 2). Behavioral experiences can positively affect the brand's perceived quality, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013, p. 154).

In Turkish dictionaries, the word love is defined as "the feeling of excessive affection and devotion", and the word affection, which is used in a similar sense, "the feeling that leads a person to show close interest and devotion to something or someone" (TDK, 2019). According to Tarhan (2008), "love is the passionate and deep form of sympathy. The most important features of love are loyalty, devotion and compassion". In addition, the definition of love can vary from person to person and according to cultural differences, and the feelings of the person who is in love can sometimes even surpass his logic. Love, respect, trust and loyalty come to the fore in an ideal love relationship. The feeling of love develops over time in the form of admiration, affection and love. In marketing, the intense emotions that consumers feel towards brands for many years are explained by the concept of love (Ünal and Aydın, 2013, p. 77). The basis of research on brand love is the assumption that consumers can establish sensory bonds with brands, similar to interpersonal love relationships (Schmid and Huber, 2019, p. 305-306; Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2018, p. 277). Shimp and Madden (1988) are the first researchers to conceptualize brand love by adapting Sternberg (1986) "Triangle Love Theory" to the consumer-brand relationship (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2009, p. 300; Esteban, Ballester and Muñoz, 2014, p. 3; Huang, 2017, p. 917). According to Shimp and Madden (1988), consumers can develop relationships similar to those between brands and interpersonal love relationships. The first experimental study on brand love was done by Ahuvia (1993) (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Huang, 2017, p. 917). Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang (2004) stated that the theories of interpersonal love in psychology could explain the sensory attachment of consumers to objects. Fournier and Mick (1999, p. 11) state that love is an intense and sincere form of satisfaction in the context of consumption. In this sense, brand love expresses the most emotionally intense consumer-brand relationship (Langner, Schmidt and Fischer, 2015, p. 624). Brand love is the last stage in the consumer's brand perception. It can occur when the consumer establishes a sensory bond with a brand or feels close to it (Moralıoğlu, 2016, p. 1). Consumers can show stronger sensory loyalty to hedonic brands and brands they think to express themselves (Keh, Pang and

Peng, 2007, p. 87). In addition, consumers' perceptions of functional benefits such as the quality and reliability of brands can also affect the development of brand love (Schmid and Huber, 2019, p. 307). Roberts defined brand love as "the brand's ability to gain both love and respect in the eyes of the consumer"(Moralıoğlu, 2014, p. 76). According to Roberts (2006), brands that consumers fall in love with consist of elements of mystery, sensuality and intimacy (Roberts, 2006, pp. 76-77). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as "the passionate commitment a satisfied consumer has for a particular brand". Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) in their studies, conceptualized it as a structure consisting of seven dimensions depending on the experiences of consumers with brands: passion-oriented behaviours, self-brand integration, positive sensory connection to the brand, long-term relationship, concerns about being separated from the brand, general attitude valuation, attitude precision and power.

Brand equity is a marketing concept that has attracted the attention of both business managers and academics since the mid-1980s (Srinivasan, Park and Chang, 2005, p. 1433). It expresses the importance of focusing on the long-term customer-brand relationship in brand management (Wood, 2000, p. 662). It is generally defined as "the perception of the brand as an entity that can be converted into money in managerial terms"(Borça, 2003, p. 70; cited in Aktuğlu, 2014, p. 39). Although there is no complete consensus on the meanings attributed to brand equity, there are generally two different approaches. The first of these approaches is the financial-based brand equity, which expresses the economic equity of the brand. Another approach is consumer-based brand equity, where factors such as brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived equity are taken into account (Uzman, 2016, p. 36). Consumer-based methods measure consumers' thoughts, feelings and expectations about a brand (Yüksel and Yüksel-Mermod, 2005, p. 143-144). In measuring the brand equity on a consumer basis, the perception, knowledge and behaviour of the consumer about the brand are considered (Singh and Pattanayak, 2016, p. 1230; Tiwari, 2010, p. 421; Keller, 1993, p. 5). Measuring the process of creating brand equity for marketers from the consumer's point of view can help understand the brand's position in the consumer mind and design effective marketing programs to create brand equity accordingly (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010, p. 379). Models developed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) are the most widely used models in the measurement of consumer-based brand equity in the literatüre (Avcılar, 2010, s. 7; Papatya ve Papatya, 2013, p. 272). Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) defined brand equity based on memory-based brand associations in their study (Taşkın and Akat, 2008, p. 42). Brand equity is a multidimensional structure consisting of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty dimensions (Yoo and Donthu, 2001, p. 3). Brand awareness is the first step in creating brand equity and forms the basis of brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty in the process of brand equity creation (Spry et al., 2011, p. 885; Joshi and Yadav, 2018, p. 5). Aaker (1991, p. 109) defines brand associations as "everything connected with a brand in mind". According to Keller (1993, p. 3), brand associations contain "the brand's meaning" for consumers. The primary role of brand associations is to create meaning for the brand in the minds of consumers (Lu and Xu, 2015, p. 367). In terms of marketing, quality refers to the ability of a product to meet the needs and wishes of the target audience or meet their expectations (Tek and Özgül, 2013, p. 289). Accordingly, perceived quality is defined as "the consumer's judgment about the general excellence or superiority of a product" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). According to Yoo and Donthu (2001, p. 3), brand loyalty results from the consumer's intention to buy a brand as a priority option and the tendency to be loyal to the brand (Spry et al., 2011, p. 885). Brand loyalty can also prevent the consumer from switching to another brand as purchasing a particular brand becomes a routine purchase over time (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000, p. 197).

A limited number of studies have been found in the literature that examines the relationships between brand experience, brand love and brand equity. In these studies (Baycur, 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2017), positive relationships between brand experience, brand love and brand equity were revealed. In similar studies, relationships were found between brand experience and brand love (Madeline and Sihombing, 2019; Pauwels-Delassus and Zarantonello, 2016; Aboutalebi and Kouloubandi; 2016; Riivits-Arkonsuo and Leppiman, 2015), brand experience and brand equity (Chen, 2012; Kumar et al., 2013; Shamim and Butt 2013; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013; Beig and Nika 2019; A-Qader and Omar, 2017), brand love and brand equity (Filho et al., 2010; Gómez and Pérez, 2018). Aşkın and İpek (2016) determined that brand love has an intermediary role in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, while Iglesias, Singh and Batista-Foguet (2011) determined that sensory commitment has a mediating role in the relationship between brand experience and brand equity. In this context, it is thought that testing the mediating effect of brand love on the relationship between brand experience and brand equity, unlike existing studies, will also contribute to the studies in the literature on these variables.

Methodology

The population of the study consists of young consumers between the ages of 18-24 living in Istanbul. Consumers in this age range were preferred for three reasons. First, it is an influential target audience that businesses strive to establish a long-term consumer-brand relationship through their marketing activities (Lu and Xu, 2015, p. 368-369; Huang, 2017, p. 920). Second, it is a consumer community with similar attitudes and behaviours towards brands (thoughts, feelings, self-expression) (Riivits-Arkonso and Leppiman, 2015, p. 36; Ness, Gorton and Kuznesof, 2002, p. 506, Wood, 2004, p. 10; Sarkar, 2014, p. 484). The third is a consumer group with potential importance as consumers of today and tomorrow (Ünal and Erciş, 2007, p. 326-327). The study sampling is limited to the consumers aged 18 to 24 as some studies using variables of similar nature (Ishikawa, 2013; Sarkar, 2014; Turgut and Gültekin, 2015; Bıçakcıoğlu, İpek and Bayraktaroğlu, 2018; Akın, 2017; Gómez and Pérez, 2018; Phiri, 2018) mainly involve young consumers as sampling. Moreover, given the relationship between age and consumption-related assessments (Sarkar, 2014, p. 484), it was considered that sampling consisting of young consumers would be more fitting to analyze the concept of brand love. In addition, the fact that the study ''YOUTH, LOVE AND BRANDS: A Study of Love in the Case of Brands" (Kamiloğlu, 2017) conducted in Turkey involved consumers aged 18 to 25 was also taken into account as another source of literature when determining the age range.

The field application of the research was carried out in 12 districts of Istanbul province. The data of the research were collected between Jun and July 2018. Therefore, ethics committee permission is not required. In order to ensure representation, districts of Istanbul with different socio-economic and demographic characteristics were taken into consideration through the data of the TUIK Address Based Population Registration System. In calculating the number of samples and the districts, the database of the Turkish Statistics Institute was used. According to the data obtained from the TUIK (2017) address-based population registration system, it has been seen that the total population of Istanbul between the ages of 18-24 is 1.615.647. 50.41% of this population is male (814.202) and 49.59% (800945) is a woman. Due to the time and cost constraints of reaching 39 districts of Istanbul, the districts were analyzed in terms of demographic (gender) and the sample was formed over 12 districts. According to TURKSTAT address-based population registration system 2017 data of the 12 districts determined, the total population between 18-24 was calculated as 549.260. When we examine the distribution of these 12 districts by gender in the 18-24 age range (male 50.14%/78.056 and female 49.86/72.296%), there are similarities between 39 districts. The quota sampling method was used as the sampling method in the study according to the age and gender distribution of the districts. With the quota sampling method, young consumers between the ages of 18-24 were classified according to age and gender variables. The number of people to be included in the sample was determined according to the proportional distribution of the total population of the districts between the ages of 18-24 within the total population of 12 districts. Information on the sample table created within the scope of the field application is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Table

Districts	18-24 Age Range Population (Person)	Proportion within Population (%)	Gender		Number of Participants by Districts
			Female	Male	
Besiktas	16.691	3,0	8	8	16
Kadıköy	32.971	6.0	15	15	30
Bakırköy	17.909	3.3	8	8	16
Sisli	27.460	5.0	12	13	25
Basaksehir	42.865	7.8	20	20	40
Beylikdüzü	29.325	5.3	13	13	26
Kagıthane	49.954	9.1	24	23	47
Kartal	44.552	8.1	20	21	41
Güngören	34.026	6.2	17	15	32
Bagcılar	87.646	16.0	40	40	80
Pendik	70.310	12.8	32	32	64
Esenyurt	95.552	17.4	43	43	86
TOTAL	**549.260**	**100**	**251**	**252**	**503**

Source: Produced by the authors

It is accepted that the sample size of at least 383 people with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error is sufficient in terms of representation power for studies with a population of 100.000 and above. (Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan, 2004, p. 49-50). By the quota sampling, 503 questionnaires were applied to the

population in question. The survey study was carried out convenience sampling. All analysis and evaluations were made on 503 questionnaires. The conceptual model of the research was created based on the causal relationships between the variables of brand experience, brand love and brand equity. The conceptual model of the research is given in Figure 1.
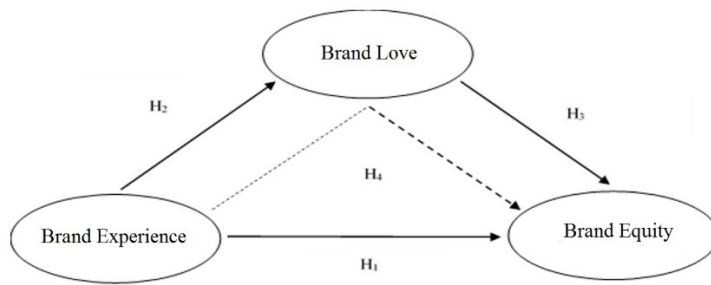
Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Research

Consumers' experiences with brands can affect the consumer-brand relationship in the long run (Dirsehan, 2012, p. 1). A strong consumer-brand relationship can develop depending on consumers' experiences with brands (Prentice, Wang and Loureiro, 2019, p. 51). In this sense, it is stated that brand experience has a vital role in creating brand equity over time (Kumar et al., 2013, p. 154). It has been shown in various studies in the literature that brand experience has a positive effect on brand equity (Shamim and Butt, 2013; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013; Abutalebi and Kouloubandi, 2016; Xixiang, Gilal and Gilal, 2016; de Oliveira Santini, 2018; Shahzad, 2019) and brand loyalty among the brand equity elements (Brakus et al., 2009; Başer, 2011; Jouzaryan, Dehbini and Shekar, 2015; Hussein, 2018). In this context, the first hypothesis of the study was established as follows:

H₁: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand equity.

It is about the experiential or hedonic aspect of brand love buying behaviour (Sarkar, Ponnam and Murthy, 2012, p. 334). Consumption experiences can create positive feelings towards certain brands in the minds of consumers (Iglesias et al., 2011, p. 572). This situation can lead to a sensory bond between consumers and brands in the form of brand love (Garg, Mukherjee, Biswas and Kataria, 2015, p. 186; Drennan, Bianchi, Cacho-Elizondo, Louriero, Guibert and Proud, 2015, p. 54; Pandowo, 2016, p. 182). In their study, Roy, Eshghi and Sarkar (2013, p. 330) state that the experiences of consumers with brands can affect brand love. In the literature, it has been supported in different studies that the brand experience positively affects brand love (Pawwels-Delassus and Zarontonello, 2016; Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2017; de Oliveira Santini, 2018). In this context, the second hypothesis of the study was established as follows:

H₂: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand love.

Brand love plays an essential role in creating brand equity (Filho et al., 2010, p. 14). Furthermore, Jouzaryan et al. (2015) and Akın (2017) determined that brand love positively affects brand loyalty, one of the elements of brand equity. In the literature, it has been supported by different studies that brand love has a positive effect on brand equity (Halilovic, 2013; Gómez and Pérez, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Baycur, 2015). In this context, the third hypothesis of the study was established as follows:

H₃: Brand love has a positive effect on brand equity.

Brand experience can affect brand love and brand equity (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018, p. 521-522). Ding and Tseng (2015, p. 1001) stated in their study that brand love might be the precursor to brand equity depending on a brand's long-term consumption experience. In the literature, it has been supported in different studies that brand love has a mediating effect on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty (Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Huang, 2017). In this context, the fourth hypothesis of the study was established as follows:

H₄: Brand love has a mediating effect on the effect of brand experience on brand equity.

The data used in the research were obtained by applying face to face questionnaire technique. The questionnaire form consists of two parts and 44 questions. The first part includes questions about gender, age, marital status, education level, monthly household income and demographic information about the duration of brand usage. The second part includes statements aiming to measure the research variables, brand experience, brand love and brand equity structures. Participants were asked to rate their 5-Likert scale expressions between strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) by stating a brand

name they think is special for them. The 12-statement scale on brand experience was adapted from the study of Brakus et al. (2009), and the 12-statement scale on brand love was adapted from the study of Albert and Valette-Florence (2010). Statements for measuring brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty of the brand equity scale consisting of 13 statements in total were taken from Yoo et al. (2000), and the statements for measuring perceived quality were taken from the study of Netemeyer et al., (2004).

Table 2: Scale Used in This Research

Scale	Number of Items	Authors
Brand Experience	12	Brakus et al., (2009)
Brand Love	12	Albert and Valette-Florence (2010)
Brand Equity	13	Yoo et al., (2000), Netemeyer et al., (2004)

Source: Produced by the authors

Three analysis methods were used in the study: exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling analysis. Excel, SPPS and AMOS package programs were used to evaluate the data. Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the dimensions of the scales. Finally, confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were performed within the AMOS program's scope of structural equation modelling. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique used to determine to construct validity when a scale is used for different samples with scale development or adaptation studies (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu and Büyüköztürk, 2014, p. 177). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) aims to create latent variables based on observable variables through a previously created model. CFA is used to verify whether the scale expressions contributing to the scale factor structure previously determined by EFA are adequately represented by the relevant factors (Aytaç and Öngen, 2012, p. 16). The acceptance or rejection of the research hypotheses is evaluated depending on whether the fit indices obtained by testing the conceptual model show whether there is a fit between the model and the data (Meydan and Şeşen, 2015, p. 5). SEM analysis was carried out in two stages. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement models created for each structure were examined to evaluate the relationships between variables with CFA. In the second stage, the research hypotheses were tested with path analysis within the scope of the structural model by using fit indices (Anderson and Garbin, 1988, p. 411; Avcılar, 2010, p. 193; Kaya, 2018, p. 108).

Analysis and findings

Demographic characteristics of participants and findings regarding the brands indicated

The distribution of the participants by gender (females 49.7% and males 50.3%) is close to each other. In the distribution by marital status, the rate of single people (97.0%) is higher than the rate of married (3.0%). This situation can be evaluated as the result of the main population of the study consisting of individuals between the ages of 18-24. The monthly household income of the participants, most of whom are primary and secondary education graduates (80.6%), is over 4000 TL (68.4%). In the study, the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire questions by stating a brand name that they thought was special for them and that they had experienced for many years without naming any product category or sector. This approach was used in similar studies in the literature (Baycur, 2015, p. 15; Garg et al., 2015; Uyar and Lekesizcan, 2017). Thus, in evaluating experiences with a private brand, the cumulative brand experiences created by sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral experiences based on stimuli related to a brand can be evaluated together (van der Westhuizen, 2018, p.174). This situation caused some clothing and electronics brands (Malik and Guptha, 2013; Garg et al., 2015) to come to the fore among the brands mentioned by the participants. One hundred twenty-eight brand names were specified by 503 participants who made up the sample of the study. Top 16 brands with a distribution ratio of 1% and above (Nike 15.1%; Samsung 9.3%; Adidas 8.3%; iPhone 7.0%; Apple 4.6%; Zara 4.4%; Koton 4% .0; Mavi 2.6%; Bershka 2.0%; LC Waikiki 1.8%; H&M 1.6%; Gratis 1.2%; Puma 1.2%; DeFacto 1.0%; LG 1%, 0; Mango 1.0%) constitute 66.1% of the brands with which participants have the most experience.

Findings regarding the descriptive statistics of the scales

In descriptive statistical analyzes, central tendency, deviation from the mean and standard distribution characteristics regarding the structure of the data obtained in the studies are examined (Çiçek, 2010, p. 51; Nakip, 2013, p. 330). Kline (2011) states that the distribution of the data has the characteristic of normal distribution in cases where the skewness and kurtosis values do not exceed ± five intervals (Küçükergin and Dedeoğlu, 2014, p. 104). The findings of the descriptive statistics obtained as a result of calculating the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis values of the expressions of the research scales are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Scales

Scales	Items	Average	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Experience	sensory1	4.00	1.143	-1.558	1.702
	sensory2	4.02	1.056	-1.479	1.712
	sensory3	4.04	1.173	-1.555	1.586
	emotional1	3.53	1.355	-0.726	-0.821
	emotional2	3.59	1.368	-0.736	-0.821
	emotional3	3.58	1.216	-0.711	-0.650
	behavioral1	3.70	1.057	-1.168	0.709
	behavioral2	3.63	1.125	-0.955	0.074
	behavioral3	3.26	1.219	-0.126	-1.157
	intellectual1	3.73	1.037	-1.030	0.242
	intellectual2	3.85	1.161	-1.028	0.047
	intellectual3	3.77	1.162	-1.236	0.633
Brand Love	affection1	4.20	0.823	-1.566	3.473
	affection2	3.76	1.161	-0.883	-0.314
	affection3	3.56	1.000	-0.780	0.323
	affection4	2.88	1.422	0.312	-1.374
	affection5	3.78	1.191	-0.880	-0.301
	affection6	3.61	0.874	-0.742	0.651
	passion1	3.13	1.047	0.043	-0.928
	passion2	3.01	1.183	-0.248	-0.853
	passion3	2.97	1.057	0.037	0.734
	passion4	3.08	1.122	-0.204	-0.761
	passion5	3.57	0.965	-0.541	-0.086
	passion6	3.51	1.002	-0.609	-0.123
Brand Equity	brand. awareness1	4.21	0.714	-1.422	4.122
	brand. awareness2	4.35	0.764	-1.692	4.237
	brand. awareness3	4.21	0.688	-1.332	4.057
	perception.quality1	4.17	0.923	-1.415	2.065
	perception.quality2	4.07	1.042	-1.573	2.242
	perception.quality3	4.09	0.990	-1.409	1.799
	perception.quality4	3.97	1.027	-1.376	1.766
	brand.associations1	3.83	1.129	-1.317	0.959
	brand.associations2	3.88	1.132	-1.327	1.002
	Brand.associations3	4.08	1.215	-1.433	0.997
	brand.loyalt1	4.12	0.869	-1.423	2.632
	brand.loyalt2	4.14	0.877	-1.405	2.416
	brand.loyalt3	4.20	0.820	-1.444	3.097

Source: Produced by the authors

The general averages of the scales were calculated as 3.72 for the brand experience scale, 3.42 for the brand love scale, and 4.10 for the brand equity scale. From the standard deviation values, it is understood that the distribution of the observation values is close to the average, and the deviation from the average is slight. Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis values show that the distribution of the data meets the standard distribution assumption before the exploratory, confirmatory and structural equation modelling analyses.

Findings related to the construct validity of the scales

Exploratory factor analysis findings

In exploratory factor analysis, the adequacy of the sample size is decided by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test value. The KMO test value greater than 0.50 is considered sufficient for the sample size (Kalaycı, 2010, p. 322). In addition to the KMO test value, Bartlett's test value, which shows the consistency of statements that make up a factor, should also be significant ($p < 0.05$) (Kalaycı, 2010, p. 322; Gümüş and Şerit, 2015, p. 119). In determining the factor structures of the scales, factors with an eigenvalue of at least one and expressions with factor load greater than 0.50 were included in the analysis (Ustasüleyman and Eyüpoğlu, 2010, p. 22; Seçer, 2015, p. 164). Exploratory factor analysis was performed using the principal components method. As the rotation method, the Varimax vertical rotation method was preferred due to its frequency of use and ease of interpretation (Kamat and Parulekar, 2007, p. 96; Karagöz, 2016, p. 880). The KMO and Bartlett's tests findings of the scales used in the study are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: KMO and Barlett's Tests Findings

		Brand Experience	Brand Love	Brand Equity
KMO Sampling Adequacy Test		0.867	0.909	0.883
Bartlett's Test	Chi-Square. (χ2)	4632.960	2489.905	4701.772
	df	66	66	78
	Sig. (p)	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Produced by the authors

When Table 4 is examined, KMO test values are above 0.50 for all scales, and Barlett's test values are also significant ($p<0.05$). The findings show that the consistency conditions between the sample size and scale expressions necessary for the application of exploratory factor analysis are met. After the KMO and Barlett's tests, determining the factor structures of the brand experience, brand love and brand equity scales used in the research was started.

According to the exploratory factor analysis findings applied to 12 statements in the brand experience scale, all statements were grouped under four factors: eigenvalues greater than one and a factor load between 0.897 and 0.661. These four factors explain 83.242% of the total variance. The first factor, the sensory experience sub-dimension, explained 22.369% of the total variance, the second factor, the sensory experience sub-dimension, explained 21.703% of the total variance, the third factor, the intellectual experience sub-dimension, explained 21.268% of the total variance, and the fourth factor, the behavioral experience sub-dimension, explained 17.902% of the total variance.

According to the findings of exploratory factor analysis applied to 12 expressions in the brand love scale, ten statements were grouped under two factors with eigenvalues greater than one and a factor load between 0.830 and 0.577. These four factors explain 55.146% of the total variance. The first factor, the passion sub-dimension, explained 29.638% of the total variance, and the second factor, the affection sub-dimension, explained 25.508% of the total variance. The statement "I would feel deep despair if this brand left me" in the passion sub-dimension and the statement "I think that this brand and I are quite similar to each other" in the affection sub-dimension were excluded from the analysis ($0.48<0.50$ /$0.45<0.50$) due to their low factor loadings. The Cronbach Alpha's coefficient of the scale, whose internal consistency was re-checked after the statements excluded from the analysis, was calculated as 0.878.

According to the findings of exploratory factor analysis applied to 12 expressions in the brand equity scale, all statements were grouped under four factors with eigenvalues of at least one and a factor load between 0.893 and 0.788. These four factors explain 81.800% of the total variance. The first factor, the perceived quality sub-dimension, explained 24.406% of the total variance, the brand association sub-dimension, the second factor, explained 20.282% of the total variance, and the brand awareness sub-dimension, the third factor, explained 18.900% of the total variance. Brand loyalty, the fourth factor, explained 18.212% of the total variance.

Confirmatory factor analysis findings

After CFA, the test of the construct validity of the scales used in the research with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was started. CFA is carried out to evaluate how well the expressions of the scale dimensions determined by EFA represent their basic structures and verify the measurement model of each structure (Awang, 2012, p. 46). In this context, the relationships between the implicit variables and the observable variables that make up the scale expressions in CFA and between the implicit variables themselves were examined (Çokluk et al., 2014, p. 275). CFA is applied as the first level and second level. With the first level CFA, it is evaluated whether the dimensions of the theoretical structure are explained by associating the statements in a measurement tool with the dimensions of the scale. In the second-level analysis, the validity of the theoretical structure as a whole is evaluated by connecting the first-order factors to a second-order higher dimension (Özçalık, 2017, p. 102). Brand experience, brand love and brand value scales used in the study are multidimensional structures. Therefore, all three scales will first be applied the first level CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis), followed by the second level CFA. Brand experience has been modelled as a second-degree variable comprising four first degree sub-dimensions; brand love is modelled as a second-degree variable comprising two first degree sub-dimensions; and brand value is modelled as a second-degree variable comprising four first degree sub-dimensions (Bush, Martin and Bush, 2004, p. 112; Çokluk et al., 2014, p. 280; Meydan and Şeşen, 2015, p. 25).

The compatibility of a model that is tried to be tested in structural equation modelling (SEM) applications with data is evaluated by examining some fit indices (Meydan and Şeşen, 2015, p. 31; Karagöz, 2016, p. 969). In the study for good fit $\chi^2/df \leq 3$, RMSEA ≤ 0.05, NFI ≥ 0.95, CFI ≥ 0.97, GFI $\geq$

0.90, AGFI ≥ 0.90 and for acceptable fit $\chi^2/df \leq 4$-5, RMSEA ≤ 0.06-0.08, NFI ≥ 0.94-0.90, CFI ≥ ≥ 0.95, GFI ≥ 0.89-0.85, AGFI ≥ 0.89-0.85 fit indices and limit values are used (Meydan and Şeşen, 2015, pp. 31-37). Within the scope of CFA, the composite reliability and explained variance values of each structure are recalculated (Demirer, 2010, p. 71). The composite reliability values should be greater than 0.70, and the variance value explained should be greater than 0.50 (Awang, 2012, p. 61; Iglesias et al., 2019, p. 348; Hair et al., 2010, p. 710). In addition, the construct validity tests include the calculation of the convergent and divergent validities of the structures (Fetscherin, Boulanger, Gonçalves Filho and Quiroga Souki, 2014, p. 82). Convergent validity shows that structures belonging to a scale are interrelated (Sin, Alan, Yau, Chow, Lee and Lau, 2005, p.189), while divergent validity shows how different a structure is from other structures (Brown, Churchill and Peter, 1993, p. 130). In order to provide convergent validity, the variance values explained for each structure must be greater than 0.50 (Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011, p. 146; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988, p. 80). In order to ensure the divergent validity, the explained variance value of a structure and the correlation coefficient values of the structure with other structures are compared (Filho et al., 2010, p. 12; Iglesias et al., 2019, p. 349). The confirmatory factor analysis findings of the scales are given in Table 5.

Table 5: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Findings Regarding the Scales

Scales	Scale Dimensions	Standardized Factor Load	CR	AVE	Cronbach Alpha's
Brand Experience	sensory1	0.913	0.928	0.810	0.903
	sensory2	0.875			
	sensory3	0.913			
	emotional1	0.903	0.938	0.834	0.927
	emotional2	0.911			
	emotional3	0.929			
	behavioral1	0.671	0.840	0.643	0.938
	behavioral2	0.983			
	behavioral3	0.723			
	intellectual1	0.898	0.910	0.771	0.906
	intellectual2	0.922			
	intellectual3	0.809			
Brand Love	affection3	0.790	0.721	0.564	0.716
	affection6	0.712			
	passion1	0.817	0.876	0.639	0.873
	passion2	0.872			
	passion3	0.745			
	passion4	0.748			
Brand Equity	brand.awareness1	0.924	0.914	0.781	0.912
	brand.awareness2	0.846			
	brand.awareness3	0.880			
	perception.quality1	0.829	0.907	0.710	0.906
	perception.quality2	0.867			
	perception.quality3	0.821			
	perception.quality4	0.848			
	brand.associations1	0.911	0.917	0.787	0.918
	brand.associations2	0.903			
	brand.associations3	0.855			
	brand.loyalt1	0.830	0.856	0.665	0.856
	brand.loyalt2	0.884			
	brand.loyalt3	0.735			

Source: Produced by the authors. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used in the calculation of standardized factor loadings. **Note**: C.R. values of all variables were statistically significant at a p<0.001 significance level.

Internal consistency coefficients for the scales were calculated as (α) = 0.903 for the brand experience scale, (α) = 0.870 for the brand love scale, and (α) = 0.899 for the brand equity scale. When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that all of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients belonging to the scales and their sub-dimensions are generally accepted to be reliable (Özdamar, 2017, p. 74). Reliability values (CR) of all structures are more significant than 0.70, and explained variance values (AVE) are more significant than 0.50. The findings show that all observable variables have sufficient power to explain the structure with internal consistency, and convergent validity is ensured. Before applying CFA, measurement models were created for the variables brand experience, brand love and brand equity. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used to calculate the factor loadings of the variables (Awang, 2012, p. 81-82; Lee and Kang, 2012, p. 93). Variables with a factor loading of 0,50 and above were considered for the measurement models (Yardımcı, 2016, p. 80).

Brand Experience Scale CFA Findings: The fit index values of the model as a result of the first level CFA applied to the brand experience scale; χ^2/df value was calculated as 2.848, NFI value as 0.971, CFI

value as 0.981, GFI value as 0.958 and AGFI value as 0.930. These values are within reasonable compliance limits. On the other hand, the RMSEA value was calculated as 0.061. This value is also within acceptable compliance limits. As a result of the second level CFA regarding the scale, the χ^2/df value was calculated as 3,052 and the RMSEA value as 0,064. These values are within acceptable limits of compliance. Again, the NFI value was calculated as 0.968, CFI value as 0.978, GFI value as 0.953 and AGFI value as 0.925. These values show that the measurement model has a good fit. When the CFA values of the brand experience scale are examined, the expressions most related to the sub-dimensions of the scale are sensory1 (0.913) and sensory3 (0.913); emotional2 (0.929) for the sensory experience dimension; behavioral2 (0.983) for the behavioral experience dimension and intellectual2 (0.922) for the intellectual experience dimension. According to the second-level CFA results, it was determined that the relationship coefficient between the brand experience variable and the sensory experience variable was 0.615, the correlation coefficient between the emotional experience variable was 0.811, the relationship coefficient between the intellectual experience variable was 0.647, and the relationship coefficient between the behavioral experience variable was 0.702.

Brand Love Scale CFA Findings: According to the first analysis findings of the brand love scale, the expression "affection1" belonging to the affection sub-dimension of the scale was excluded from the analysis because the factor load value (0.36) was below 0.50. In the second analysis made by rearranging the measurement model, it was seen that the factor load values of all variables were above 0.50. However, the fit index values of the proposed model showed that there was not enough fit between the model and the data. When the standardized residual covariance matrix outputs of the measurement model were examined, it was determined that the observed values of the expressions "affection2", "affection5", and "passion5" were values greater than 2.58. Therefore, these expressions are excluded from the analysis so that the fit index values of the proposed model have the desired limit values (Awang, 2012, p. 94; Yaşlıoğlu, 2017, p. 80). As a result of the first level CFA, the fit index values of the model were calculated as NFI equity at 0.978, CFI value at 0.983, GFI value at 0.980 and AGFI value at 0.948. These values are within reasonable compliance limits. On the other hand, the χ^2/df value was calculated as 3.829 and the RMSEA value as 0.075. This value is also within acceptable compliance limits. As a result of the second level CFA of the scale, the χ^2/df value was calculated as 3.829, the RMSEA value as 0.075, the NFI value as 0.978, the CFI value as 0.983, the GFI value as 0.948 and the AGFI value as 0.948. The fact that NFI, CFI, GFI and AGFI values are within the limits of a good fit, and the values of χ^2/df and RMSEA are within acceptable limits shows that the the measurement model has a good fit. When the first level CFA values of the brand love scale are examined, it is seen that the expressions most associated with the sub-dimensions of the scale are "affection3" for the affection dimension and "passion2" for the passion dimension. According to the second level CFA results, it was determined that the relationship coefficient between the brand love variable and the affection variable was 0.914, and the relationship coefficient between the passion variable was 0.678.

Brand Equity Scale CFA Findings: The fit index values of the model as a result of the first level CFA applied to the brand equity scale; χ^2/df value was calculated as 1.923, RMSEA value as 0.043, NFI value as 0.976, CFI value as 0.988, GFI value as 0.967 and AGFI value as 0.949. These values show that the measurement model has a good fit. As a result of the second level CFA of the scale, the χ^2/df value was calculated as 2.156, the RMSEA value as 0.048, the NFI value as 0.972, the CFI value as 0.985, the GFI value as 0.961 and the AGFI value as 0.942. These values are also within the limits of good fit, showing that measurement model is a valid model with a good fit. Furthermore, when the CFA values of the brand equity scale are examined, it is seen that the most related expressions with the scale sub-dimensions are "brand.awareness1" for brand awareness; "perception.quality2" for perceived quality dimension; "brand.associations1" for brand associations dimension and "brand.loyalt2" for brand loyalty dimension. According to the second-level CFA results, it was determined that the relationship coefficient between the brand equity variable and the brand awareness variable was 0.839, the correlation coefficient between the perceived quality variable was 0.663, the correlation coefficient between the brand associations variable and the brand loyalty variable was 0.559, and the correlation coefficient between the brand loyalty variable was 0.701. The findings obtained show that the structure of the brand equity scale, which consists of four factors determined by EFA, supports the brand equity implicit variable, a second-order superstructure.

Table 6: Divergent Validity

Correlations Between Structures			AVE	Correlation Squares
Sensory_Experience	<-->	Emotional_Experience	0.810 *	0.304
Emotional_Experience	<-->	Intellectual_Experience	0.834 *	0.303
Behavioral_Experience	<-->	Intellectual_Experience	0.643 *	0.268
Intellectual_Experience	<-->	Emotional_Experience	0.771 *	0.303
Affection.	<-->	Passion.	0.564 *	0.384
Affection.	<-->	Passion.	0.639 *	0.384
Brand_Awareness	<-->	Perceived_Quality	0.781 *	0.346
Perceived_Quality	<-->	Brand_Awareness	0.710 *	0.346
Brand_ Associations	<-->	Brand_Loyalty	0.787 *	0.232
Brand_Loyalty	<-->	Brand_Awareness	0.665 *	0.345

Source: Produced by the authors. **Note:** * Average Variance Extracted> Correlation Squares

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981, p. 46), the divergent validity is provided when the average variance extracted value" of a structure is higher than the square of the highest correlation coefficient value between the structure and other structures (Demirer, 2010, p. 72; Hair et al., 2011, p. 145). Another condition to ensure divergent validity is that the correlation coefficient value between the structures shall be less than 0.85 (Awang, 2012, p. 62). In Table 6, it is seen that the average variance extracted of all the structures belonging to the scales are higher than 0.50, and the correlation coefficient values between the structures are higher than the square. From the findings obtained, it is understood that all the structures belonging to the scales are a part of the scale, and they represent an independent structure from each other.

Structural equation model analysis findings

In this section, the causal relationships between SEM analysis and the latent variables included in the conceptual model of the research are examined (Awang, 2012, pp. 17-18; Woodrow, 2014, p. 122). Before the analysis, the averages of the observable variables representing the expressions that constitute each sub-dimension of the implicit variables of brand experience, brand love and brand equity were calculated. Thus, the multi-dimensional measurement was transformed into a one-dimensional one, enabling observable variables to represent many properties (Demirer, 2010, p. 88; Zarantonello ve Schmitt, 2013, p. 265; Sarkar, Sarkar and Bhatt, 2019, p. 177). In the conceptual model of the research, brand experience is defined as independent, brand equity as dependent and brand love as mediator variable. The testing of the structural model was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the effect of the independent variable brand experience on the dependent variable brand equity was tested. In the second step, the model was tested as a whole by including the brand love variable, which is the mediator variable (Yılmaz and İlhan Dalbudak, 2018, pp. 528-529). The maximum likelihood estimation method was used in testing all hypotheses (Awang, 2012, p. 81). Path analyzes were carried out using SEM. Mediator variable is the variable that explains whether there is an indirect relationship in the relationship between two variables or the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2015, p. 278; Meydan and Şeşen, 2015, p. 129). In order to be able to talk about the mediating effect of a variable in a structural model, some assumptions should be provided. These assumptions are explained as follows: Brand experience, the independent variable in the model, should significantly affect the dependent variable, the brand equity. Brand love, the mediator variable in the model, should significantly affect the brand equity's dependent variable. Brand experience, the dependent variable in the model, should significantly affect brand love, the mediator variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p. 1175). In testing the research hypotheses, firstly, the effect of the independent variable brand experience on the dependent variable brand equity was examined. The graphic output of the model obtained is shown in Figure 2.
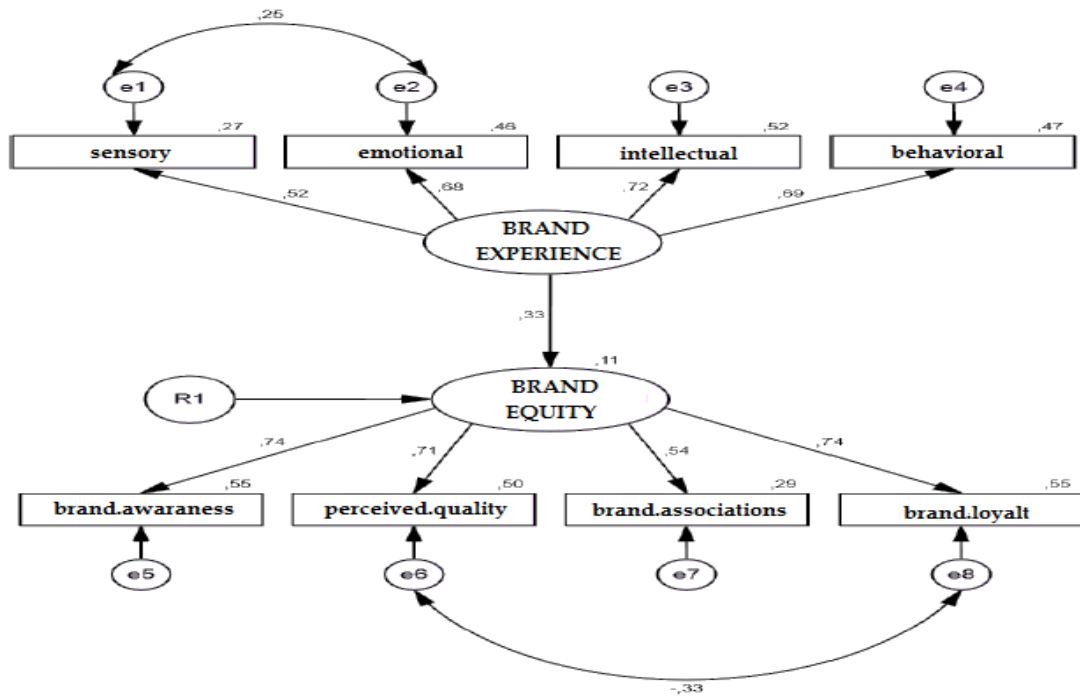
**Figure 2**: The Impact of Brand Experience on Brand Equity

The model's fit index values; the χ²/df value was calculated as 2.483, NFI value as 0.960, CFI value as 0.975, GFI value as 0.980 and AGFI value as 0.958. These values are within reasonable compliance limits. On the other hand, the RMSEA value was calculated as 0.054. This value is also within acceptable compliance limits.

Table 7: Path Analysis Regarding the Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Equity

Path Between Variables	Std. Path Coefficient. (β)	R²	C.R.	p
BRAND_EQUITY <--- BRAND_EXPERIENCE	0.327	0.107	5.029	***

Source: Produced by the authors.　**Note** : *** p <0.001

In Table 7, it is seen that the correlation coefficient between brand experience and brand equity is calculated as 0.327 C.R (Critical Ratio) value was found to be statistically significant at 0.001 significance level. The R² value means that the brand experience explains about 11% of the change in brand equity. It is understood from the predictive values of the model that the brand experience has a positive and significant effect on brand equity. According to the path analysis findings obtained, the H₁ hypothesis established as "brand experience has a positive effect on brand equity" was accepted. The conceptual model of the research was tested as a whole to test the H₂, H₃ and H₄ hypotheses after meeting the first assumption of the mediation effect. The mediating effect of brand love variable between brand experience, which is the independent variable, and brand equity, which is the dependent variable, was tested with the created model. Before evaluating the model's fit with the data, the correction was made between the error terms "e3-e4". The graphic output of the model obtained is shown in Figure 3.
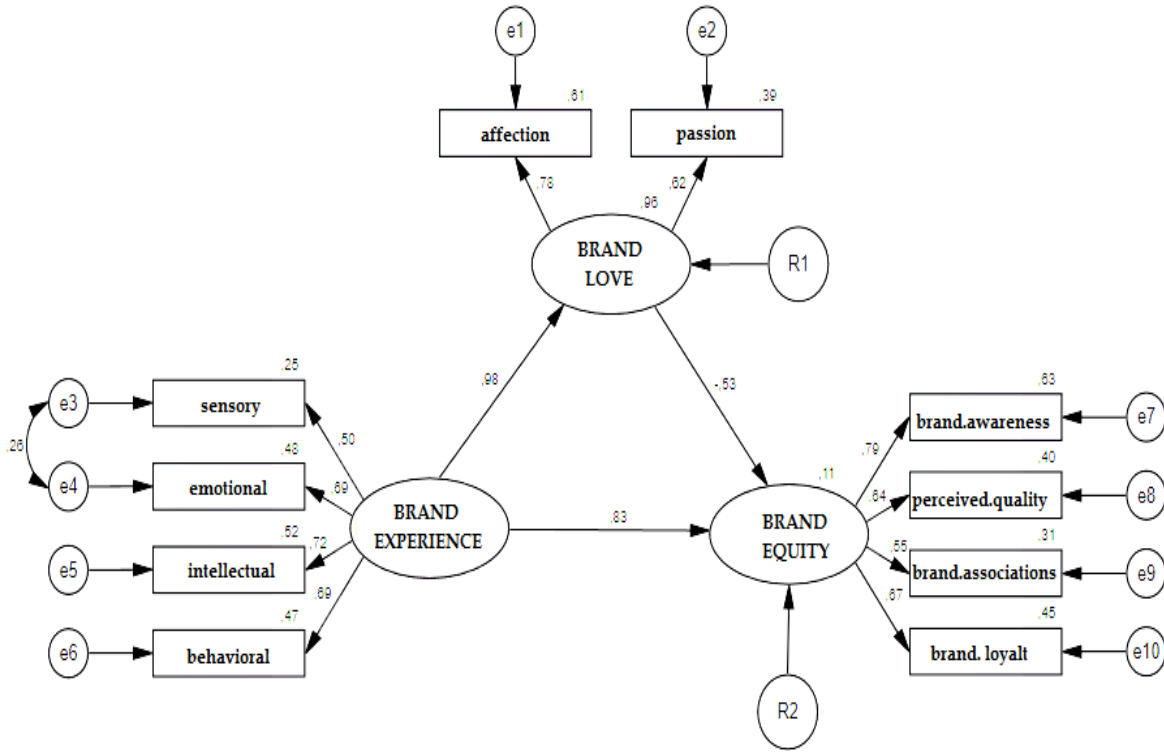
Figure 3: Path Analysis of the Conceptual Model of the Research with SEM

Fit values of the model; the χ²/df value was calculated as 2.743, NFI value as 0.945, CFI value as 0.964, GFI value as 0.967 and AGFI value as 0.941. It is seen that these values are within the limits of a good fit. On the other hand, the RMSEA value was calculated as 0.059. The fact that this value is within the acceptable fit limits shows that the conceptual model of the research is a model with good compliance. The path analysis values of the relationships between the variables in the conceptual model of the research are given in Table 8.

Table 8: Path Analysis Findings of the Conceptual Model of the Research

Path Between Variables	Std. Path Coefficient (β)	R²	C.R.	p
BRAND_LOVE <--- BRAND_EXPERIENCE	0.978	0.956	13.808	***
BRAND_EQUITY <--- BRAND_LOVE	-0.527	0.113	-0.392	0.695 *
BRAND_EQUITY <--- BRAND_EXPERIENCE	0.832	---	0.621	0.535 *

Source: Produced by the authors.   **Note:** *** $p < 0.001$; * $p > 0.05$

In Table 8, it is seen that the correlation coefficient between brand experience and brand love is calculated as 0.978. The C.R value was found to be statistically significant at a 0.001 significance level. The R² value means that the brand experience explains about 96% of the change in brand love. It is understood from the predictive values of the model that the brand experience has a positive and significant effect on brand love. According to the path analysis findings obtained, the H₂ hypothesis established as "brand experience positively affects brand love" was accepted. When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that the relationship coefficient between brand love and brand equity is calculated as -0.527. The C.R value was not found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. It is understood from the predictive values of the model that brand love does not have a negative and significant effect on brand equity. In addition, it is seen that the correlation coefficient (0.33) in figure 3, which shows the effect of brand experience on brand equity, increased compared to the correlation coefficient (0.832) in Figure 2 but became statistically insignificant. According to the path analysis findings obtained, the assumption that the mediator variable should significantly affect the dependent variable, which is one of the mediation effect assumptions, could not be achieved. Therefore, the H₃ hypothesis established as "brand love has a positive effect on brand equity" and the H₄ hypothesis established as "brand love has a mediating effect on the effect of brand experience on brand equity" were rejected.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study aimed to investigate how brand love and brand equity are affected by brand experience and the mediating effect of brand love on the relationship between brand experience and brand equity. EFA results revealed that the brand experience and brand equity scales consist of four dimensions, and the brand love scale consists of two dimensions. After CFA, the structure validity of the scales and the compatibility of the measurement models with the data were tested with the first and second level CFA. With the second level CFA, the sub-dimensions of the variables of brand experience, brand love and brand equity and their level of relationship were determined. In addition, it was concluded that the convergent and divergent validities of the measurement models were provided.

The second level CFA results for the brand experience scale showed that the brand experience variable is mainly associated with the emotional experience sub-dimension. Other sub-dimensions related to brand experience were determined as intellectual experience, behavioral experience and sensory, respectively. This result shows that young consumers care about emotional experiences in their brand experiences.

According to the second level CFA results made for the brand love scale, it was determined that the brand love variable mainly was associated with the affection sub-dimension. In other words, the dimension of affection contributes more to the explanation of brand love than the dimension of passion. This finding can be evaluated as young consumers having no strong desire and tendency to maintain their relationship with their brands, although they have an interest and loyalty.

The second level CFA results for the brand equity scale showed that the brand equity variable is mainly associated with the brand awareness sub-dimension. Other sub-dimensions related to brand equity were brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. This result shows that brand awareness is determinant in the brand equity perceptions of young consumers.

The effect of brand experience on brand equity was examined in the literature in various studies (Kumar et al., 2013; Shamim and Butt, 2013; Cleff, Lin and Walter, 2014; Aboutalebi and Kouloubandi, 2016). Based on these studies, the H_1 hypothesis was established. The path analysis results revealed that the brand experience has a positive effect on brand equity. This result supports the literature (Lin 2015; Baycur, 2015; Xixiang et al., 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Shahzad, 2019). In this context, in terms of the sample unit of the research, it can be said that the brand experiences positively affect the brand's equity in the eyes of consumers.

Another hypothesis of the research is the H_2 hypothesis, which claims that the brand experience positively affects brand love. The positive effect of brand experience on brand love was determined in the literature in various studies (Roy et al., 2013, p. 330; Garg et al., 2015, Garg, Mukherjee, Biswas and Kataria, 2016; Pandowo, 2016; Erdoğan and Enginkaya, 2018; Zhang, 2019). Rodrigues et al. (2007) determined in their research that brand experience in online shopping has no positive effect on brand love. Based on these studies, the H_2 hypothesis was established. The path analysis results revealed that the brand experience has a positive effect on brand love. This result obtained supports the literature (Pawwels-Delassus and Zarontonello, 2016; Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2018). In this context, in terms of the sample unit of the research, it can be said that consumers who have a positive brand experience with a brand can establish an emotional bond with that brand. Another hypothesis of the study is the H_3 hypothesis, which examines the relationship between brand love and brand equity. In the literature, the effect of brand love on brand equity and brand loyalty was examined in various studies (Filho et al., 2010; Jouzaryan et al., 2015; Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Akın, 2017). The path analysis results revealed that brand love has no positive effect on brand equity. This result supports some literature studies (Halilovic, 2013; Rodrigez, 2017; Baycur, 2015; Gómez and Pérez, 2018). In this context, it is possible to say that the emotional attachment that consumers can establish with brands does not affect the brand equity in terms of the sample unit of the research. The final hypothesis of the research is the H_4 hypothesis, which examines the mediating effect of brand love on the effect of brand experience on brand equity. Ding and Tseng (2015, p. 1001) state that brand love may be the precursor of brand equity in their study. In the literature, it has been determined in different studies that brand love has a mediating effect on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, one of the elements of brand equity (Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Huang, 2017). The path analysis results showed that the relationship between brand experience and brand equity and brand love and brand equity was not statistically significant. According to this result, the H_4 hypothesis was rejected. In line with these results, it is possible to say that the brand experience in terms of the sample unit of the research has a positive and direct effect on brand love and brand equity.

The affection dimension of the brand love scale measures the closeness between the brand and the consumer, and the passion dimension measures the difficulty of giving up the brand and the superiority of the brand in the consumer mind. The path analysis results showed that the affection dimension, one of the sub-dimensions of brand love, has a higher correlation coefficient than the passion dimension. In other words, the dimension of love contributes more to the explanation of brand love than the dimension of passion. This finding can be evaluated as young consumers having no strong desire and tendency to maintain their relationship with their brands, although they have an interest and loyalty.

Research findings reveal the importance of experiences in brand management from a managerial point of view. The research results show that, theoretically, the brand experience can be one of the precursors of brand love and brand equity. Therefore, it seems very important for brand managers to provide brand experiences that appeal to their senses, emotions, thoughts and behaviours at every point of contact where their brands meet with young consumers. This requires effective management of brand experiences in developing and maintaining brand equity.

When the findings of the study are considered as a whole, it is seen that the relationship between brand experience and brand equity is not realized through brand love. This situation can be interpreted as that although the sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral experiences of young consumers with brands contribute to the formation of brand love, they also consider other factors that affect the perceived equity of the brand.

The study has three main limitations. First, research results are limited to the sample from which the data were obtained. Thus, it is possible to obtain different analysis results to be made with samples to be selected from other provinces or regions. Second, the process of collecting research results data is limited to July 2018. Third, the research results are limited to the brands that the participants think are special for them and have used for a long time. Finally, since the study data were obtained from a sample between the ages of 18-24, the results cannot be extended beyond the current sampling frame.

In future research, the relationships between variables can be addressed through a product category, brand or industry. In addition, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods will provide more detailed and in-depth information about the impact of brand experiences on young consumers' relationships with brands. Different variables that are predicted to be related to the research variables can be included in the conceptual model developed based on the literature. For example, the effect of various variables such as self-brand image compliance (Albert and Merunka, 2013), willingness to pay a higher price for the brand (Kang, 2015; Sarkar, 2014), brand trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013), brand image, (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), brand quality (Batra et al., 2012) on brand love can be tested. In addition, it is seen in the literature that there are studies in which the positive effect of brand equity on brand love (Önen, 2008) and the mediating effect of brand loyalty in the relationship between brand experience and brand love (Nalbant, 2017) were determined. Therefore, testing the relationships between the research variables with possible alternative models may contribute to the relevant literature. The data of the study were obtained from a sample between the ages of 18-24. However, comparative studies between different age groups will provide the opportunity to make more generalizations. In addition, the effect of demographic characteristics such as income and education level of the participants and the regulatory effects of personality traits on the relationship between brand love and brand equity can also be tested.

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