

The Effects of Young Consumers' Love for Smart Mobile Phone Brands on Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the effects of brand love of young consumers towards smart phones on brand loyalty. The conceptual framework and hypotheses are analyzed by a sample of 500 young smartphones users. In the study, the brand love scale developed by Albert and Valette - Florence (2009) and the one-dimensional scale by Oliver (1999) in brand loyalty are utilized. According to the findings of the study, brand love consists of two main dimensions such as passion and love. Regarding the results of the research, it is seen that especially the passion dimension which constitutes brand love has a higher explanatory power over loyalty than the love dimension does. It is expected that consumers' brand loyalty would increase if managers attach more importance to the strategies which strengthen brand love for the target consumers.

Key Words: Love Concept, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty.

Introduction

By each passing day, new brands emerge in the market which make it increasingly difficult for the consumer's mind to differentiate among them. The differentiation of the brands within this density is based on the establishment of long-lasting, passionate, and strong emotional ties with the consumers. Thanks to these strong emotional ties of passion, they would turn into "lovemarks". Therefore, the new era in brand strategy is to create lovemarks (Robert, 2005). Only then they would be able to connect to the consumers with long, passionate and strong ties and in this respect, they would be able to gain an advantage over competitors. Otherwise, the consumer who encounters too many alternative brands would choose to satisfy this sentiment by turning to the brand that can bind this emotional tie (Yengin, 2012).

In a globalizing and crowded world, technological developments push the individuals away from the others, and then the consumers who become isolated try to fill the emotional gap with these technological products and brands. Smart mobile phones, which almost become addictive substances especially for young people, are among the best examples of this issue. The consumers who can experience this pleasure with smart mobile phones also believe that they should constantly be consuming and be happy as they consume. The consumer's ability to feel strong and passionate love towards his/her brand depends on the brand's ability to provide continuous innovation and trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Patwardhan, 2004; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013). Therefore, love brands should be able to go beyond meeting the individual's basic needs and be the product with the best design among others. Besides, it should encourage

enough confidence that no better design can be achieved in the future other than it would offer (Aydın, 2016). These emotional ties with the consumers would contribute to the consumers' willingness to pay more for the brands, and to purchase them repeatedly in the event of a similar need (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Fournier and Mick, 1999). In most of the limited number of studies on brand love in literature; the concept of love has been mentioned within such product groups as sports shoes and chocolate bars (Aydın, 2016). Nonetheless, there are not many studies about the emotional connection between today's consumer and technological products. It is disregarded that consumers are also in pursuit of abstract benefits such as love besides the concrete benefits that they would gain upon purchasing products (Aydın, 2016; Yengin, 2012; Pektaş *et al.*, 2015). Although there are many factors affecting brand love in the literature, there is a limited number of studies in which all of these factors are mentioned together (Fetscherin, 2014). Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) constructed a model scale proposal consisting of 56 variables and 13 dimensions, but it is difficult to adapt it into various areas since the scale is too long. Therefore, the authors developed three different scale proposals consisting of 26, 13 and 6 variables, respectively. Those developed scales stemmed from the former 56 variables. This study, in which the effects of young consumers' brand love towards smart mobile phones on their brand loyalties are examined, utilizes the scale proposals of Albert and Valette - Florence (2009) having 12 variables and two dimensions within consideration of brand love scales developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005).

Brand Love and Brand Loyalty

Social relations, and especially love relationships are the basis of human life and poets, writers, philosophers, theologians, and professional advisers have always been concerned with how love comes into existence (Myers & Shurts, 2002). Everywhere in the world, love is thought to be one of the most important emotions that human beings experience as it leaves an everlasting imprint in their social and psychological life (Akin *et al.*, 2015; Neto, 2005). Since Rubin's (1970) pioneering efforts to understand and conceptualize love, many studies have been carried out on various aspects of love (for example, Hatfield, 1988; Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986; Sternberg, 1986). However, in social sciences and especially in marketing, love has become an increasingly important issue (Argyle and Henderson, 1984; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Lovemarks or brand love is a concept first coined by Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bauer, Heinrich, and Albrecht, 2009). According to Roberts (2005); "As every brand expects to be loved, every consumer wants to have a brand he/she loves". Brand love is the concept brought out by that thought (Aydın, 2016). Brand love is a strong emotional connection between the brand and the consumer (Fournier, 1998; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) and lovemarks are the brands without which people cannot live in peace of mind (www.capital.com.tr, 2016). In another definition, brand love is defined as a passionate commitment to a consumer to a brand (Halilovic, 2013; Albert and Valette - Florence, 2010).

In today's world of consumption, the consumers are seen to be connected to their brands with an emotion beyond affection, which is "love". In addition, consumers who have introduced technology to all areas of their lives have begun to express their feelings with innovations. Some consumers even reflect their feelings along with brand-related expressions such as "techno-love" and "techno-romantic" (Yengin, 2012: 15).

The love that consumers have for the products and brands has recently become a very popular research topic (Ahuvia, Batra & Bagozzi, 2007) and the theme of brand love per se has attracted more attention (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005; Albert, Valette-Florence and Merunka, 2008; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005; Whang *et al.*, 2004; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Roy *et al.*, 2013). The early research studies conducted on brand love were concerned with its definition and

conceptualization (Ahuvia, 1993). Shimp and Madden (1988) adapted Sternberg's (1986) "triangular love theory" for interpersonal love on the consumer's brand love (Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006: 81; Shimp and Madden, 1988: 163; Thomson *et al.*, 2005: 77). As noted by Shimp and Madden; elements such as liking, longing, and decision/commitment that can arise in a relationship between the consumer and the brand are perfect counterparts for intimacy, passion and decision/commitment components of the interpersonal love relationship as described by Sternberg (1986) (Aşkın and İpek, 2016). There are studies that examined the positive and direct effects of brand love on consumer behaviors in the literature (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Bauer *et al.*, 2007). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined brand love as an emotional and passionate relationship between a satisfied consumer and the brand. These authors described brand love through emotion and passion. Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang (2004) stated that a passionate, emotional and romantic love between a consumer and a brand could develop over time. According to Sternberg (1986), romantic love consists of enthusiasm, sincerity, and passion. Based on these findings, it can be said that romanticism is inherent in brand love. There is also a strong relationship between love and loyalty (Sternberg, 1986; Shimp and Madden, 1988; Keh *et al.*, 2007). Brand love concept contains sincerity, passion, and commitment which are the antecedents of brand loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Keh, Pang and Peng, 2007). If loyalty is included in brand love, it would be difficult to differentiate between brand love and brand loyalty (Aydın, 2016). Therefore, in this study, brand love is conceptualized as a combination of love and passion. The remainder of this article focuses on determining the outcomes of relevant antecedents and brand love.

Consumers who are passionate about the brands are more eager to have an affirmative word-of-mouth about them, and Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Thomson *et al.* (2005) found that brand love has affirmative impacts on both interpersonal relationships and brand loyalty (Fehr, 1988). Consumers who feel love for the brands are also expected to remain loyal to these brands (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008a). Lau and Lee (1999) stated that consumers who are in love with the brands they use have more trust in these brands and that this trust is an important role in the formation of brand loyalty. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Sarkar (2011) stated that consumers who are satisfied with their brands tend to strengthen their ties with the brands along with positive experiences. They also asserted that the consumers' willingness to pay more for the brands with which they are in love might be increased by this situation. Heinrich *et al.* (2012) also indicated that brand love would result in the increase of the consumers' willingness to pay more as well as their ignorance of certain negativities. According to Sarkar *et al.* (2012), brand love consists of intimacy and passion dimensions, and it has a positive effect on the brand-buying attitude. Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2013) determined that there be a positive relationship between brand love and romance. Albert and Merunka (2013) detected that the affirmative impact of the brand love on both the brand's global identity and trust in the brand has a positive effect on both oral communication and willingness to pay more. Fetscherin (2014) found that brand love has a linear and strong association with commitment, repurchase intention, and oral communication. Kang (2015) determined that brand love has a significant effect on the consumer's loyalty, attitude towards the brand and the image of the brand (Aydın, 2016).

Brand loyalty can be defined as the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and being a regular customer (Bıçakcıoğlu and İpek, 2014). The concept of loyalty can be defined as the intention to purchase, the willingness of the consumer to pay more, and the advice they have made to their environment. Brand loyalty is a behavioral reaction. It occurs over a period and is realized by a decision-making unit in environments where multiple alternative brands exist. Decision-making is a situation that arises after evaluation processes (Öztürk, 2010; Kurtuluş and Sönmez, 2016).

In the literature, studies on the effect of brand love on brand loyalty are found (Aşkın and İpek, 2016; Aydın, 2016; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). It is possible to claim a strong relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in these studies (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2014; Langner *et al.*, 2014; Roy *et al.*, 2013). It is also stated in the literature that brand love is one of the antecedents of the brand loyalty (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Roy *et al.*, 2013).

In many empirical studies, there is a statistically positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Langner *et al.*, 2014; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Ünal and Aydın, 2013; Pektaş *et al.*, 2015). The hypothesis of the study within this context is as follows:

H₁: Brand love has an affirmative effect on brand loyalty.

Methodology

Objective

The widespread use of smartphones in Turkey and the increase in the number of users necessitate the measurement of the effect of consumers' brand love on their brand loyalty. In this study, it is aimed to measure the effect of the love for smart mobile phone brands on brand loyalty of the young people in Turkey.

Survey Design

University students have been identified as the statistical population of research on the assumption that young people tend to use mobile phones more frequently and more consciously. The study is conducted within the period of October - November 2016 using a survey method of a face-to-face interview with undergraduate and graduate students studying in Niğde.

Questionnaires are drawn up from the related literature. In this context, following the examination of scales developed by Şimşek and Noyan (2009), Back and Parks (2003) and Oliver (1999) for the determination of brand loyalty components, a unidimensional scale developed by Oliver (1999) consisting of four variables is adapted into this study. Although it is suggested that the concept of brand love may be different from the concept of interpersonal love, and therefore it is not right to directly relate theories based on interpersonal love to brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012) (Albert and Merunka, 2013, Ahuvia, 1993, 2005; Oliver, 1999, Shimp and Madden, 1988), brand love is tried to be measured in terms of the interpersonal love in this study.

Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) made a model scale proposal consisting of 56 variables and 13 dimensions, but they also admitted the difficulty of adapting it to many areas simply because the scale is too long. Therefore, the authors also proposed different three scales consisting of 26, 13 and 6 variables, respectively. Albert and Valette - Florence (2009) developed a new 2 dimensional (passion and affection) scale consisting of 12 variables by reviewing the brand scales developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) regarding interpersonal love.

The brand love scale developed by Albert and Valette - Florence (2009) is also utilized in the study. On both scales, a 5-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- undecided, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree) is prepared. The questionnaire consists of three parts; the brand love scale is used in the first part, and the brand loyalty scale is used in the second part. In the last part, both the demographic characteristics of the participants and the questions about the smartphone brands that they used are mentioned.

Sampling and Data Collection

Young people using smartphones are the statistical population this research study. Depending on the time and budget constraints of the study, convenience sampling is determined by the sampling method. Survey data are collected via face-to-face interview method within the period of October – November 2016. By using this method, 500 out of 518 questionnaires are found suitable for analysis following the exclusion of the questionnaires either carelessly filled and without significant data, and it is considered to represent the population sufficiently.

Upon examining the demographic distribution of the research sample, the age range of the university students is found to be between 18 and 23 years of age. It is seen that the students who participated in the research are distributed almost homogeneously in terms of gender, and the female students constitute 48.4% of the sample. When the income levels of the research sample are examined, it is seen that 73.4% of the participants' incomes range between 1,000 - 2,000 TL. The most commonly used smartphone brands preferred by the students who responded to the survey questionnaire are found as Samsung (26.2%), LG (21.6%), Apple (17.4%), Huawei (10.8%) and HTC (9%).

Analysis and Findings

The reliabilities of the two different measures used in the study are examined first, followed by the exploratory factor analysis for the brand love and the brand loyalty scales. The reliability and validity test results of the scales used in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Loadings, Variances, and Reliability of the Brand Love and Loyalty Scales

Factor	Items	Loading	Variance	Reliability
	Brand Love		71.179	0.940
Passion	There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with the brand.	.872		
	If I were separated from this brand for a long time, I would feel intensely lonely.	.831		
	Sometimes I feel I cannot control my thoughts; they are obsessively on the brand.	.807		
	I find myself thinking about this brand frequently during the day.	.787		
	If I could never be with this brand, I would feel miserable.	.701		
	I would sink into deep despair if this brand left me	.678		
			60.398	.921
Affection	I think that this brand and I are quite similar to each other.	.845		
	When I am with this brand, we are almost always in the same mood.	.805		
	There is something almost 'magical' about my relationship with this brand.	.804		
	I feel emotionally close to this brand.	.773		
	I experience great happiness with this brand.	.726		
	I feel tender toward this brand.	.669		
			10.782	.913
	N=500; KMO=.944. Bartlett Sphericity Test Chi-Square=4406.243, p= .000. Factor Loading $\geq .50$			
	Brand Loyalty		74.016	.876
Loyalty	This is the only brand of this product that I will buy.	.875		
	When I go shopping, I do not even notice the competing brands.	.865		
	If my store is out of this brand, I will postpone buying or go to another store.	.862		
	I will 'do without' rather than buying another brand.	.838		
	N=500; KMO=.816. Bartlett Sphericity Test Chi-Square=842.526, p= .000. Factor Loading $\geq .50$			

As a result of the exploratory factor analysis; the variables measuring the dimensions that make up brand love are categorized under related factors. Passion and affection are both identified as the dimensions that establish brand love. The passion dimension describes the highest variance with 60%. In order to evaluate the internal consistency of the variables included in the scales, Cronbach's Alpha values are estimated and the values of α are detected to be higher than the recommended value of .70 in Hair *et al.* (2006). α coefficients are calculated to be .94 and .876 for the brand love and the brand loyalty scales, respectively. The reliability of the sub-dimensions that constitute the brand love scale in the study is calculated to be .921 and .913 for the passion and love dimensions, respectively.

Accordingly, it is concluded that the scales are reliable. The brand love scale is comprised of the passion and love dimensions which represent the basic characteristics of the interpersonal relationships. While the passion dimension is at the expense of an emotional challenge because the consumer can not give up on the brand and is constantly in the consumer's mind; the dimension of love measures the psychological and sensorial proximity between the brand and the consumer. Many studies investigated the effects of brand love on brand loyalty (Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence, 2008b; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). By considering these studies, the influence of young consumers' love for the mobile phone brands on the brand loyalty is examined. Our hypothesis generated within this framework is tested by regression analysis.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.870 ^a	.757	.756	.522

a. Predictors: (Constant), Passion, Affection

As a result of the regression analysis performed, the regression coefficient is found to be .757. This indicates the explanatory power of the passion and love dimensions that constitute brand love over brand loyalty. Since this power alone does not make sense for neither rejection and nor acceptance of our hypothesis, so by looking at the ANOVA table, it is examined whether or not there is any significant effect of brand love on brand loyalty.

Table 3: ANOVA^b

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	421,919	2	210,960	775,365	.000 ^a
Residual	135,223	497	.272		
Total	557,142	499			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Passion, Affection

b. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty.

The table shows that our hypothesis is confirmed by the independent variables, passion, and love, which have a significant effect on brand loyalty. Regression analysis is not performed only to demonstrate effectiveness. Another purpose is to be able to make projections for the future. For this purpose, it is necessary to write down a mathematical regression model which will be formed by considering the coefficients of relations among the variables. The following table is used to create a mathematical model.

According to the Table 4, passion dimension is calculated as 0.853 in relation to love, while affection dimension it is found to be 0.343 in relation with love. Therefore, young people tend to feel passion, rather than affection, especially for their smartphones. This can be regarded as an indication of increasing dependency on smartphones in their lives.

Table 4: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.654	.023		156.642	.000
Passion	.853	.023	.807	36.536	.000
Affection	.343	.023	.325	14.692	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty.

The mathematical regression model to be formed is as follows:

$$\text{Brand loyalty} = 3.654 + .853 \text{ Passion} + .343 \text{ Love}$$

The mathematical regression model shows that estimation of the young people's loyalty to their smartphones would be possible when they have any knowledge about the dimensions. When the beta coefficients are considered, the passion dimension has a higher explanatory power over loyalty than the affection dimension that constitutes love brand does. Therefore, it also shows that the passion dimension constituting brand love better explains the consumers' repetitive purchasing behavior towards the smart mobile phones, whereas the affection dimension is weaker in explaining the loyalty. Despite the fact that the literature contains studies claiming that affection is more decisive on loyalty (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008a), passion appears to be more decisive on brand loyalty of the young consumers who participated in our research study.

Conclusion

The research study is conducted to determine the impacts of love that young consumers have for their smartphones on their brand loyalty. The reason why young consumers are determined as the statistical population of the research study is that the levels of smartphone usage and technological awareness are higher among the young people. Since convenience sampling is applied, the research findings are not generalized to the population. The scale used to measure brand love is a scale adapted from the scales of interpersonal relations, which is another constraint of our research.

As in the interpersonal relationship scales, brand love is divided into two main dimensions. With passion and affection dimensions, it is tried to determine whether or not young consumers' love for the smartphone brands have an impact on their brand loyalty, and positive effects of both passion and affection on brand loyalty are detected. In the literature, there are findings which support that these two dimensions have effects on loyalty also in interpersonal relations. This study confirms those findings. Nevertheless, the influence of the affection dimension on loyalty is emphasized in interpersonal relations, and it is observed that the passion dimension has a more decisive influence on loyalty and the effect of affection dimension is relatively limited. It is thought that it would be useful to compare the brand love with other relations and to experiment with other scales developed to measure love in future studies.

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