



BRAND LOVE AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT'S ROLE OVER BRAND LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - In this study, we wanted to examine the role of brand love and customer engagement over brand loyalty whether they are differentiating by demographic or socio-economic factors or not. It is expected to make a contribution to the literature by expanding brand love and customer engagement by also relating it with brand loyalty.

Methodology – We collected data with survey method from 386 participants on internet by promoting it via social media advertisements. Data has been analysed with SPSS 23, using ANOVA, T-test and F-test.

Findings- Results seem to be proving that demographic and socio-economic factors are differentiating brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty levels and there are significant differences between some sub age groups, education levels and gender.

Conclusion- In consideration of the results, managers of retail clothing sector could benefit from those sub-group differences while positioning their brand or building their brands at first glance.

Keywords: brand love, customer engagement, brand loyalty, customer-brand relationships, brand relationship quality

JEL Codes: M30, M31, M39

1. INTRODUCTION

After the relationship between a brand and a customer has been grounded on relationship theories, customer-brand relationships and the measurement of this relationship's quality has gained importance. Referred as brand-customer relationship, brand relationship and consumer-brand relationship in various studies, has also attracted attention to its quality accordingly. Concepts like Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) and Brand Love have been emerged in order to measure this quality. On the other side, customer engagement has also emerged as a concept to examine the psychological state of a customer through co-created business relations. Even though it is a relatively new concept in marketing literature, it is getting an increased level of attention in the last few years. It is also viewed by the managers as a construct to enhance stable relationships with their customers and obtain sustainability in their commercial life.

Though brand loyalty has been studied for decades, there is still no consensus over the exact definition and dimensions of it. Its usage is so widespread that it has begun to lose its meaning (Demir, 2012). Some scholars are focused on the repeated purchases and some others are focused on cognitive or affective aspects of brand loyalty. There are also scholars arguing that a hybrid view on brand loyalty dimensions should be applied such as Dick & Basu (1994) and hence, we thought that it would be more beneficial to examine the sub-dimensions too.

Recent studies on brand love has been swarmed around sectors like smartphones however we thought that these studies should be also expanded to other sectors such as clothing. We made a pre-test with 58 participants to decide on which sector this study should be done besides smartphones. According to the pre-test results, we decided to make this study on clothing sector as participants claimed that they are connected to brands with love mostly on clothing after smartphones. Therefore, we decided to conduct the study on clothing sector.

*This study is derived from Berker Pandir's master's thesis titled as "Marka İlişki Kalitesi ve Müşteri Katılımının Marka Sadakatı Üzerindeki Rolü"(Turkish), accepted at Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences Department of Business in 2016.

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In this study, we aimed to measure brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty levels of the participants and wanted to examine if they significantly differ by the effect of demographic, socio-economic factors. That would give managers and other researches some hints over the process of these constructs. We defined three main research questions in this phase of the the study:

- 1) Does level of brand love differs by demographic and socio-economical state of an individual?
- 2) Does level of customer engagement differs by demographic and socio-economical state of an individual?
- 3) Does level of brand loyalty differs by demographic and socio-economical state of an individual?

In the light of these questions, our study was conducted and along with the relevant literature and findings are summarised.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Love

As derived from interpersonal relations area, brand love is "*the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name*"(Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). As Carroll and Ahuvia argue in the same article, it is should also includes an individual's statement's about a particular brand, signifying love. In the literature, brand love is somehow synonymous with brand-consumer relationships probably because of love is a relational concept and defines the quality of a relationship.(Kolodny, 2003)

Even though it has been derived from interpersonal love, not all of the aspects of interpersonal love is relevant with brand love as there are types of love and some dimensions are not related with brand love. For example sexual love is different from brand love and thus brand love is not totally the same with interpersonal love(Batra et al., 2012). Therefore, brand love should be seen as a different construct than interpersonal love however there are some similarities may be present and future research could be beneficial.(Batra et al., 2012) The construct which merges these love dimensions on marketing literature is considered as Shimp and Madden's study and Shimp and Madden(Shimp & Madden, 1988) calls these term as "consumer-object love", which is seen as more appropriate by Carroll and Ahuvia(2006), to marketing context.

Fetscherin and Heinrich's(2014) "Brand Feelings Matrix" defines brand love and brand passion as a state both signifies strong relationship with the brand and positive feelings toward the brand. Therefore, brand love can also be considered as a construct which signifies the level of brand-consumer relationship and brand relationship's quality. In some studies, brand love is seen synonymous with brand relationship quality.

2.1.1. Measurement of Brand Love

Considering that brand love is a recent construct, it can still be claimed that measurement of brand love is subject to debate. Developed scales are limited in number and their developers are in concensus that further research needed. Albert and Valette-Florence(2010) has summarised Carroll and Ahuvia's and Thomson et al.'s studies about brand love scales and proposed a new scale. These scale consists of two dimensions as Affection and Passion and higher values of R² compared to other two scales with a total of 10 items.

As stated before, brand love both needs definitional and quantitative support in future researches as interpersonal love items are subject to debate because of the difference of love.

2.2. Customer Engagement

Customer Engagement is defined as "*psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships*"(Brodie et al., 2011). Vivek et al.(2012) takes this definition beyond the brand by also underlining service aspects of the brand such as physical aspects and organizations around the brand. With these definitions, customer engagement differentiates itself from the kernel term engagement, by also extending its borders to the psychological state of an individual which interacts with the brand. It is also a bilateral term signifying the co-creative process of the relationship. It is relatively new construct amongst researchers and therefore it draws attention of scholars.

As these definitions underline strongly, CE is a state effected by the interactive experiences and thus, bilaterally considered and a step beyond Customer Relationship Management(CRM) viewpoint, which could be argued as inbalanced towards the

customer and company oriented. CE is about to balance this in favour of customers and this viewpoint can be seen more aligned with contemporary customer-brand relationship context.

On the other hand, when considered that customer engagement is a relatively new area of study, relevant literature is delimitative and needs to be broadened.

2.3. Brand Loyalty

Brand Loyalty(used synonymous in form of customer loyalty in brand context) is a famous construct in marketing literature and widely studied for more than 50 years. However, scholars still have not agreed on a single viewpoint and continuing to define brand loyalty from different viewpoints. These viewpoints have swarmed around cognitive, conative and affective aspects of brand loyalty. Even though a lot of contribution has been made to marketing literature, this dispute may make things more difficult when elaborating on this field for especially young researchers. These viewpoints on brand loyalty can be divided in two as: (1)behavioral and (2)attitudinal. However, there is also a hybrid viewpoint pointing to both intentions and behaviours should be seen to define brand loyalty.

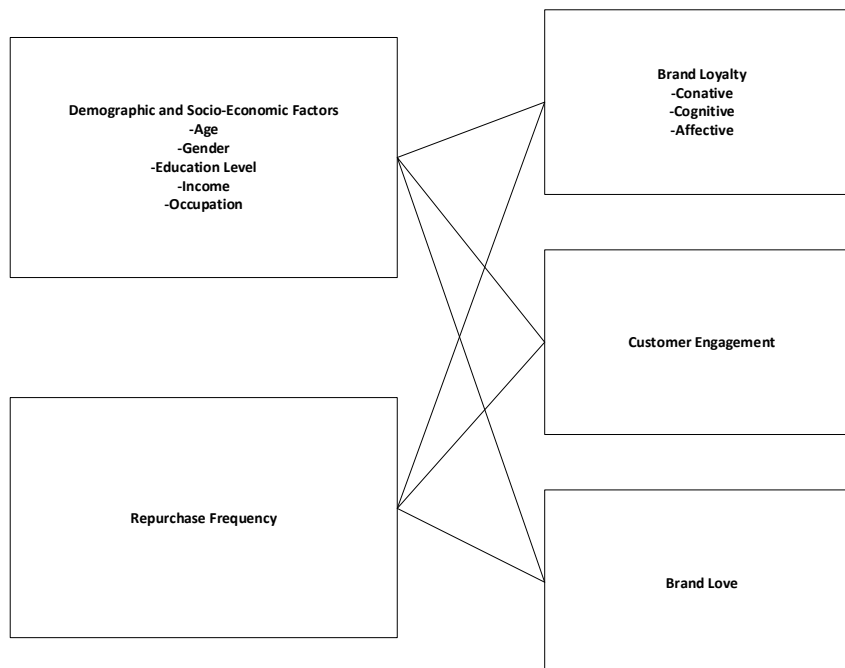
Tucker(1964) uses brand loyalty synonymous with repated purchases. He simply ignores any of the psychological processes in the brain and focuses solely on the repurchase. If an individual buys a specific product again, he/she seen as loyal to the brand. This definition also ignores substitute and rival products. 9 years later, Jacoby and Kyner(1973) has criticised this viewpoint with empirical support and also adding rival products to this equation by also expanding the scope to include attitudinal factors. This dispute can be seen yet in academic researches however it is gladsome that both viewpoints are to be included in various studies.

Dick and Basu(1994) revolutionarily merged these concepts in their framework and taken both viewpoints into account. Oliver(1997) has also underlined a rival product or brand's presence in order to claim that there is a loyalty and thus broadened the concept. It can be claimed that hybrid approaches in brand loyalty studies are showed contemporarily. Researchers in this study also wanted to examine the hybrid approach while measuring brand loyalty.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

In this study, researchers wanted to test whether brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty levels differentiating by demographic and socio-economic factors(age, gender, income, occupation, education) along with repurchase frequency and having made a purchase from specific brand in the last 3 months or not. Our theoretical framework could be summarised as in below:

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



According to the proposed framework, researchers have developed these hypotheses below:

H₁.Brand loyalty level change significantly by demographic and socio-economical factors.

H₂.Customer engagement level change significantly by demographic and socio-economical factors.

H₃.Brand love level change significantly by demographic and socio-economical factors.

H₄.Brand loyalty level change significantly by repurchase frequency.

H₅.Customer Engagement level change significantly by repurchase frequency.

H₄.Brand Love level change significantly by repurchase frequency.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sector Decision

At first step, we wanted to decide on which sector we should conduct our research. Previous researches on brand love are usually focused on smartphones and hedonic products, we decided to extend the scope of brand love researches to another field. Therefore, we made a pre-test with 58 participants to decide our sector by asking them if they claim themselves connected to a specific brand with love or not firstly. Then, we asked the participants to give the name of the brand which they feel they are connected with love. We evaluated the results and clothing sector was second behind smartphones. In order to make a different contribution to the literature, we decided to focus our research on clothing and apparel sector.

3.2. Sampling

In this study we defined people aged more than 18 years and defining themselves as they are connected to specific brand with love as our universe. There is no info known about the parameters of the universe, therefore, we took standard error as 0.5 and in convenience sampling, our sample was calculated as 384 at 95% confidence interval.

3.3. Data Collection and Questionnaire Design

Survey method was used in this study to collect data. As scale development process would take an enormous time, we decided to use statistically valid and reliable scales into consideration and used relevant scales in alignment with the present literature. We used following scales from the respective studies below:

- 1) Brand Love Scale(Albert & Valette-Florence, 2014), 2 dimensions and 10 items
- 2) Customer Engagement Scale(Vivek et al., 2014), 3 dimensions and 10 items
- 3) Brand Loyalty Scale(Quester & Lim, 2003), 3 dimensions and 16 items

As we decided to conduct our research in Turkey, scales were translated into Turkish by researchers. A pre-test with 5 academicians from Istanbul Technical University and Istanbul University was conducted and items were found meaningful in Turkish context. We also added socio-economic and demographic factors' questions, along with the repurchase frequency and built our questionnaire.

Our survey was conducted with more than 700 respondents from various cities of Turkey and they were gathered with help of Facebook and Google advertisements on an online survey platform. However, only 383 of them were appropriate for the research and they were taken into consideration.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Analysis of Results

As we wanted to test differences in these variables, we used IBM SPSS 23 program to use ANOVA, F and T tests to examine whether brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty differentiating by demographic, socio-economic factors and repurchase frequency. Test were conducted with means and means are summarised as below:

Table 1: Means Used in This Study

Variable	Mean
Brand Love	2.85
Customer Engagement	2.98
Cognitive Brand Loyalty	3.87
Affective Brand Loyalty	3.52
Behavioral/ Conative Brand Loyalty	3.07
Overall Brand Loyalty	3.47

4.2. Findings

As we conducted relevant tests, we have noticed that our hypotheses have been partially supported. In example, we found that none of the variables have differentiated by income level, marital status and occupation. However, we found that there are significant differentiations in some of the demographic factors such as age, gender, education level and made post-hoc tests afterwards. Researchers wanted to elaborate on these findings.

4.2.1. Age

After conducting ANOVA test, we found that customer engagement, affective brand Loyalty and overall brand loyalty significantly differantiates by age. In order to see which groups are creating the differences, we used Tukey test and found that affective brand loyalty differentiates between 18-25 age group and 36-45(Sig:0.032) age group. Overall brand loyalty differentiates between 18-25 and 36-45(Sig: 0.047) age groups and 26-35 and 36-45(Sig: 0.033) age groups. We finally found that customer engagement differentiates between 18-25 and 36-45(Sig: 0.004) and between 26-35 and 36-45(Sig: 0.002) age groups.

18-25 age group has a higher affective brand loyalty than 36-45 age group. In overall brand loyalty, 18-25 age group has a higher level than 36-45 and 26-35 age group has a higher level than 36-45. In customer engagement, 18-25 and 26-35 age groups have significantly higher level than 36-45 age group.

These age group differences brough generation differences on our minds. However, Gur(2012) argues that loyalty profiles of millennials and X generation is mainly similar. On the other hand, Lazarevic(2012) argues that Y generation customers generally present significantly low levels of brand loyalty. We want to underline that 18-25 age group's brand loyalty differs mainly on affective brand loyalty and overall brand loyalty of this age groups is higher than other two groups because of this and we argue that this should question the viewpoint of brand loyalty amongst the researchers.

Table 2: Tukey Test for Age Group Differences

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Customer Engagement	36 - 45	18-25	-,51942 [*]	,15235	,004
		26-35	-,55611 [*]	,15438	,002
		46+	-,40863	,19747	,165
Overall Brand Loyalty	36 - 45	18-25	-,36585 [*]	,14058	,047
		26-35	-,38950 [*]	,14245	,033
		46+	-,22093	,18221	,619
Affective Brand Loyalty	36 - 45	18-25	-,41188 [*]	,14997	,032
		26-35	-,38456	,15197	,057
		46+	-,08725	,19439	,970
Behavioural/ Conative Brand Loyalty	36 - 45	18-25	-,38503	,18108	,147
		26-35	-,48388 [*]	,18349	,043
		46+	-,46365	,23471	,199

4.2.2. Gender

Men are found to be cognitively more loyal to brand than women. This could be seen as men tend to give more importance to product charecteristics however, more research is needed on this area. Meyers-Levy and Sternthal(1991) argues that women's threshold for message cues are lower than men and it can be interpreted from this that men need more information to elaborate on characteristics of a specific product. However, researches on this differences is subject to debate.

Table 3: Tukey Test for Gender Differences

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.p.
Brand Love	Male	137	2,87	0,869	0,064	0,800
	Female	246	2,85	0,740		
Customer Engagement	Male	137	2,97	0,956	0,070	0,792
	Female	246	3,00	0,868		
Cognitive Brand Loyalty	Male	137	4,05	0,753	9,059	0,003
	Female	246	3,79	0,836		
Affective Brand Loyalty	Male	137	3,53	0,879	0,001	0,980
	Female	246	3,53	0,886		
Behavioural/Conative Brand Loyalty	Male	137	3,18	1,019	2,108	0,147
	Female	246	3,01	1,080		
Overall Brand Loyalty	Male	137	3,55	0,803	1,774	0,184
	Female	246	3,43	0,835		

Melnyk et al.(2009) argues that women are more loyal to employees whereas men are more loyal to companies and this signifies that women's loyalty could be depending on social aspects of the company, rather than men's loyalty to information oriented loyalty.

4.2.3. Education Level

We found that primary school and secondary school graduates' brand love, brand loyalty and customer engagement are significantly higher than individuals graduated from higher levels of education, except for Ph.D graduates as no significant difference with Ph.D has been found. We can interpret from this as much as education level increases, brand loyalty, brand love and customer engagement levels decrease. As a social class symbol, when an individual has higher level of education, brand loyalty level decreases(Kanwar & Pagiavlas, 2012). Kanwar and Pagiavlas interpret that with the increase of education level, sensitivity to marketing communication activities decrease.

4.2.4. Purchase Frequency

In this study we found that customers who made at least a single purchase from the brand they love has higher levels of brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty than customers who do not. We also found that customer who make repurchases in once a week and once in two weeks has higher levels of brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty than customers who make purchases less frequent than them. This also supports the repeated purchase on brand loyalty, aligned with previous studies on brand loyalty.

5. CONCLUSION

First finding points to the generation differences which is also proven by other researches. Generation Y loves brands, engages as a customer and more loyal to brands. Therefore, a specific company should concentrate on creating the brand that Generation Y loves because they are ready to love you if your company really deserve it. Lazarevic(2012) describes Y generation as "fickle" in this article's title, however, one should also interpret that their loyalty dynamics could be different than previous generations, rather than being "fickle". Researchers of this study believes that more research is needed on different generations' loyalty types.

As much as education level increases, brand love, customer engagement and brand loyalty levels decrease. That signifies that it is hard to achieve these if a company is serving to a group of highly educated consumers. If there is a low level of loyalty, a company's customers might be migrating to another company if they find a better set of offers. This can also be an opportunity for rival companies to attract new customers to their company, thus their brand.

Men are significantly more loyal to brands than women on cognitive perspective. Men are found to be in need of deep information about any product and technical aspects are very important for them. If a company is to attract men to their brand, you should be precisely informative. Recent studies on gender differences on information processing and loyalty have different results than another, therefore, further research on different contexts are needed.

Customers may be loving a specific brand but the love is at the strongest point if customers are buying from the brand at least one time in two weeks. Hereby, any type of brand love and customer engagement should be supported by frequent purchasing. Leading customers to frequent purchasing by promotion mix elements could be generating non-spurious loyalty to a specific brand in some contexts.

There are also a group of customers who are loyal to a brand and love the brand, however, did not purchase anything from this brand for a significant time. They should be triggered to purchase more frequently to ensure that it is not spurious loyalty, according to Dick & Basu(1994).

Considering that brand love and customer engagement are relatively fresh areas of study, more and more research is needed. As researchers, we believe that there is a lack of variety of scales in these areas even though present scales and valid and reliable.

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