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THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS OF YOUNG ADULT CONSUMERS ON BRAND LOYALTY

Abstract

This study has investigated how social and individual factors of young consumers affect their brand loyalty to the garment they most commonly use. Data of the study has been collected through face-to-face meetings with 353 students from Gaziantep University. In this study, factor, correlation, reliability, and structural equation modelling analyses have been used. As a result of the structural modelling analysis, it has been found out that individual factors positively and significantly affects the brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Social Environment Factors, Individual Factors

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1. INTRODUCTION

Advancements in technology led to an increase of the product range in the same product group of producers. Also, quality of products started to become very close (Can, 2007:225). As a result of this situation, brands have much more importance today when compared to the past. Therefore, producers need to work to differentiate their products from the products of competing undertakings and to ensure preferability of their brand more than ever. Brand positioning works are important in this regard. Because social psychological, and individual factors have an important role in consumers' brand preference (Keskin & Yıldız, 2010:240) companies take these factors into consideration in their positioning strategies. Companies can gain a place in the market with a successful positioning strategy and make their consumers loyal to their brands (Baran, 2012:33).

Consumers often need to choose among brands of similar quality products as a result of having too much alternatives, and they usually decide by acting according to their own perception (H.D.Keskin & Yıldız, 2015:3). Also, consumers are under the influence of several factors such as socio-cultural and psychological factors while deciding to buy a product (Akkoç & Akkoç, 2012:198).

This study aimed to find out whether social factors such as close circle of friends, advertisements and culture, and individual factors as economic status, life style, habits and prejudices affect the brand loyalty of young adults, who are university students, to the garment they most commonly use.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

2.1. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is defined as a motive of consumers' buying their usual brand instead of the competing brand even though companies of competing brands have various promotions and a lower pricing than the pricing of the brand that they usually prefer (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000:116). According to Aaker (2007), brand loyalty refers to the degree of commitment and passion of consumers (Aaker, 2007:58). It is also defined as the power of consumers belief in the brand (Uztuğ, 2003:34).

Dick and Basu (1994) states that buying a brand over and over is not enough today for a consumer to say that he is loyal to a brand; he should also exhibit positive and strong attitude towards the brand (as cited in Devran, 2009:408).

Armutlu & Üner (2009) have found that self-image congruence has an indirect impact on the brand loyalty as a result of the study conducted with 320 post graduate students.

Akkoç et al. (2012) have detected that university students do not always prefer the same sneakers brand, but they try new sneakers in the market as a result of a research on sneakers preference of university student (Akkoç ve Akkoç, 2012).

Kutuldu & Çilingir (2013) states that consumers' expressing themselves has an impact on the brand loyalty in the light of their study in which they collected data from 400 people (Kutuldu ve Çilingir, 2009).

Türker & Türker (2013) conducted a research study on 952 university students, and this study shows that consumer satisfaction, perceived value and trust in the brand positively affect the brand loyalty (Türker ve Türker, 2013).

Devran (2009) conducted a study on working women, and his study states that brand reputation, competence and preference are the most important factors affecting working women's brand loyalty (Devran, 2009).

Çilingir and Yıldız (2010) indicate that brand involvement has a strong impact on the brand loyalty as a result of a study conducted on 400 consumers (Çilingir ve Yıldız, 2012).

Göksu (2010) conducted a study on 165 Physical Education students, and the results of the study show us that Physical Education students at universities have positive opinions about sports branded products as well as creating a individual commitment towards the brand, as these products are appropriate for their life styles, images and personalities (Göksu, 2010).

2.2. Social Environment Factors and Individual Factors

Social, psychological and individual factors are important factors affecting a person's decide on purchasing a product. To illustrate, if a person is a part of a social class, this can make a brand important for that person (Çakır et al., 2010:89).

Another factor affecting consumer behaviours is individual factors (Durmaz, 2008:36). Individual factors affecting consumer behaviours can be categorized as age, life cycle, life style, economic conditions, occupation, personality and health (Durmaz et al., 2011:118).

Social factors affecting consumer behaviours can be classified under 3 headings as advisory groups, family, and roles and status (Durmaz, 2008:36). In today's world, individuals are members of various social groups. In orders for a social group to become an advisory group, this group can have an effect on individuals' behaviours. For example, family is an advisory group. Similarly, professional associations, clubs and parties are advisory groups (Cömert & Durmaz, 2006:356).

2.3. Hypotheses of the Research

As a result of the theoretical framework and literature review, the hypotheses of the research study are as follows:

H1: Social environment factors have positively significant impacts on the brand loyalty.

H2: Individual factor have positively significant impacts on the brand loyalty.

3. METHODOLOGY

In today's world, just becoming a brand is not enough for companies; they also need to make the consumers loyal to their brands. Brand loyalty of consumers is affected by social and individual factors. This study investigates the impacts of social and individual factors of young adult consumers on their loyalty to garment they most commonly use. Analyses of the study were conducted via SPSS 21 and AMOS statistical package programs.

3.1. The Model and Variables of the Research

Social factors are chosen as independent variables and brand loyalty as dependent variable in the research.

In this study, consumers are firstly asked the garment brand they most commonly use, and then they are asked to answer the following questions about social factors, individual factors and brand loyalty.

Questions Regarding Brand Loyalty

BL1: Brand is very important while choosing clothing.

BL2: Brand is the first thing I look while buying clothes.

BL3: I think I'm loyal consumer to the garment I use.

BL4: I always prefer my usual brand among various brands in any case.

BL5: I feel unfaithful when I have to buy a brand other than the one I always buy.

BL6: I do not see following other garment brands as a need because I'm highly satisfied with the one I use.

BL7: I like and sympathize the garment brand I use.

BL8: The garment brand I use makes me feel good.

BL9: The products of the garment brand I use are fashionable.

BL 10: The products of the garment brand I use fit me.

Questions Regarding Social Factors

SF1: My family has an effect on my garment brand preference.

SF2: My close circle of friends has an effect on my garment brand preference.

SF3: My social environment (job, school etc.) has an effect on my garment brand preference.

SF4: Products in advertisements have effects on my garment brand preference.

SF5: Culture has an effect on my garment brand preference.

Questions Regarding Individual Factors

IF1: My economic status has an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF2: My life style has an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF3: The garment brand I use exactly reflects my individuality.

IF4: My age has an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF5: My occupation has an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF6: My habits have an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF7: I follow the fashion, and this has an effect on my garment brand preference.

IF8: My prejudices have an effect on my garment brand preference.

3.2. Research Sample and Some Demographic Features

The sample of the research study consists of 353 students studying at Gaziantep University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and Social Sciences Vocational High School.

The information about the participants' gender is represented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Gender Information

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Female | 231 | 65,4 | 65,4 |
| Male | 122 | 34,6 | 100 |

The information about the young adult participants' incomes is represented within the Table 2.

Table 2. Information about participants' income

| Monthly Income | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 0-450 | 108 | 30,6 | 37 |
| 451-900 | 109 | 30,9 | 74,3 |
| 901 and above | 75 | 21,2 | 100 |

The most commonly preferred garment brand that the participants use can be seen within the Table 3.

Table 3. The Most Commonly Preferred Garment Brand

| Brand | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| De Facto | 49 | 13,9 | 13,9 |
| Koton | 77 | 21,8 | 35,7 |
| LC Waikiki | 70 | 19,8 | 55,5 |
| Other | 157 | 44,5 | 100 |

The most preferred brands that the participants use are given as frequency information of preferred brands. Apart from these, participants stated the following brands as brands they prefer: HM (25), Mango (23), US Polo (21), Mavi (17), Loft (9), Armine (9), Adisas (6), Zara (4), Levis (3), Beymen (2), Hatemoğlu (2), Oxxo (2), Pierre Cardin (2), Süvari (2), Ada (1), Altınyıldız (1), Armani (1), Ekol (1), Flo (1), Herry (1), İmza (1), İpekyol (1), Jack Jones (1), Karaca (1), Kığılı (1), Lotto (1), Lufian (1), Nike (1), Park Bravo (1), Polo (1), Puma (1), Ramsey (1), Sarar (1), and Tommy Hilfiger (1).

*The numbers in parentheses represent the number of participants who stated that brand as their most preferred garment brand.

3.3. Model of the Research

The model of the research is represented with the Figure 1.

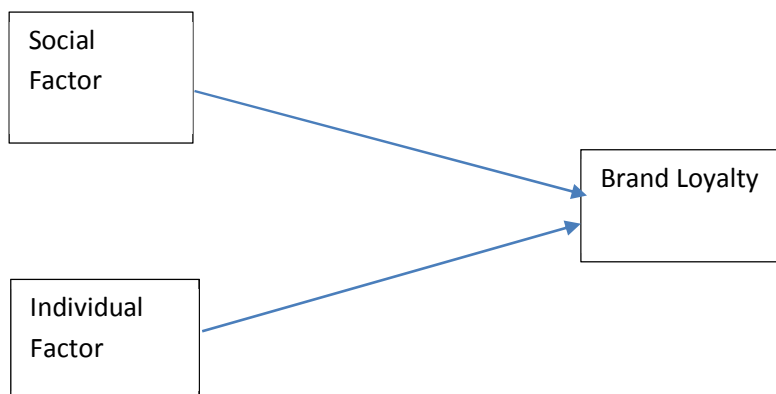


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the Research

3.4. Data Collection Method and Instrument

The questions used in the research about variables were prepared by adapting from Yıldız's (2007) dissertation study titled as "*A model proposal to define the brand equity in consumer preferences: Trabzon sample*", which he defended in USA (Yıldız, 2007). The same scale was,

then, used in an article study by Keskin and Yıldız (2015) titled as tarafından “*The Effects On The Brand Equity Of The Factors Which Are Effective On The Consumers’ Brand Preference And The Brand Image: A Study Of Trabzon*” (Keskin ve Yıldız, 2015).

In this study, approximately 500 students studying at Gaziantep University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and Social Sciences Vocational High School were asked to answer the questionnaire on a volunteer basis. The questionnaires of the participants who did not state the brand they most commonly use or who stated more than one brand were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, 353 questionnaire forms were found appropriate for the analysis, and the study was conducted by using these 353 forms.

All the data were collected in December 2015 and February 2016.

3.5. Analysis and Findings

Firstly, exploratory factor analyses of dependent and independent variables have been conducted. The results of exploratory factor analyses of independent factors (individual and social) are represented within the Table 4.

Table 4. Individual and social Factors Exploratory Factor Analysis

| Items | Individual Factor | Social Factor |
|-------|-------------------|---------------|
| IF2 | .801 | |
| IF3 | .762 | |
| IF4 | .753 | |
| IF6 | .662 | |
| IF7 | .535 | |
| SF1 | | .649 |
| SF2 | | .844 |
| SF3 | | .830 |
| SF5 | | .560 |

As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, individual factor items 1, 5 and 8 and social factor item 4 were excluded, because their item factor loads were low. Questions were analyzed using principal components method and Varimax rotation method. KMO value is ,741 and sample size is enough for the factor analysis. As a result of Bartlett’s Sphericity Test, we found chi square as 764.938, degree of freedom value as 36, and significance level as ,000. Also, data are from multivariate normal distribution and suitable for the factor analysis.

As a second stage, the exploratory factor analysis of the dependent variable (brand loyalty) was performed. As a result of the analysis, it has been found out that it can be gathered under 1 factor. Brand loyalty items 2, 5, 7, and 10 were excluded as a result of the modifications confirmatory factor analysis, because their factor loads were found low in the exploratory factor analysis. Results of the exploratory factor analysis can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Brand Loyalty Exploratory Factor Analysis

| Items | Brand Loyalty |
|-------|---------------|
| BL1 | .667 |
| BL3 | .630 |
| BL4 | .726 |
| BL6 | .508 |
| BL8 | .721 |
| BL9 | .637 |

All items were analyzed using principal components method and Varimax rotation method. KMO value is ,801 and sample size is enough for the factor analysis. As a result of Bartlett's Sphericity Test, we found chi square as 352.520, degree of freedom value as 15, and significance level as ,000. Data are from multivariate normal distribution and suitable for the factor analysis.

At the third stage, confirmatory factor analyses of variables were performed via Amos software. Goodness of fit values found as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis are represented within Table 6.

Table 6. Goodness of Fit Values

| Variables | X ² | df | CMIN/ DF≤5 | GFI ≥.85 | AGFI ≥.80 | CFI ≥.90 | TLI ≥.90 | RMSEA ≤.08 |
|------------------------------|----------------|----|---------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Individual– Social Factor | 68.837 | 26 | 2.648 | 0.957 | 0.925 | 0.942 | 0.92 | 0.068 |
| Brand Loyalty | 17.067 | 9 | 1.896 | 0.984 | 0.962 | 0.976 | 0.96 | 0.05 |

Note: Goodness of fit value range is organized according to ‘‘acceptable’’ standards.

As it can be seen from Table 6, it fits well.

At the fourth stage, normality test of the data were conducted. As a result of the analysis, the data has normal distribution as kurtosis and skewness values are between -1 and +1.

At the fifth stage, reliability analysis of variables was conducted. The results of the analysis can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Reliability Analysis

| Variables | Number of Questions | Alpha Coefficient |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Brand Loyalty | 6 | ,724 |
| Social Factor | 4 | ,710 |
| Individual Factor | 5 | ,748 |

The variables were found reliable, as Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are above ,70.

At the 6th stage, the correlations of variables were investigated, and the findings of these correlations are represented with Table 8.

Table 8. Correlation Analysis Results

| | Individual Factor | Social Factor | Brand Loyalty |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Individual Factor | 1 | | |
| Social Factor | ,189** | 1 | |
| Brand Loyalty | ,423** | ,195** | 1 |

**0,01 is significant at the importance level.

As a result of the correlation analysis, it has been found that there is significantly positive relationship between the variables.

Lastly, a structural model was created in order to test the hypotheses of the research. Structural model can be seen in Figure 2, and goodness of fit values of it are represented within Table 9.

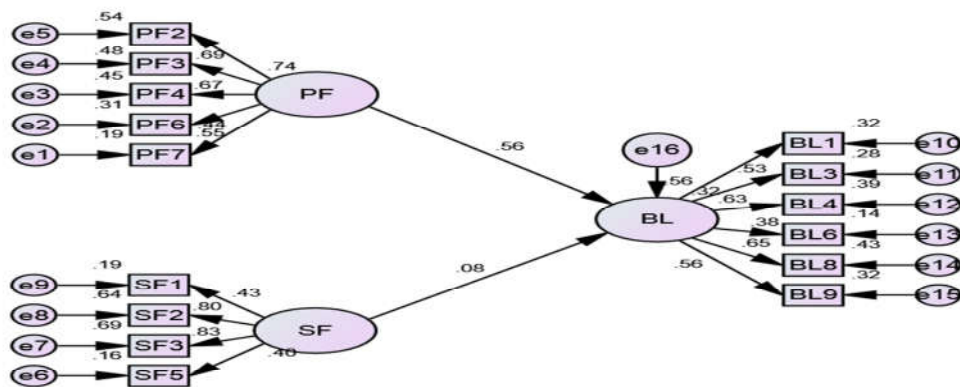


Figure 2. Structural Model

Table 9. Structural Model Goodness of Fit Values

| | X ² | df | CMIN/ DF ≤ 5 | GFI ≥ .85 | AGFI ≥ .80 | CFI ≥ .90 | TLI ≥ .90 | RMSEA ≤ .08 |
|-------------------------|----------------|----|-----------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Structural Model | 208.508 | 86 | 2.425 | 0.926 | 0.897 | 0.9 | 0.878 | 0.064 |

As a result of the structural model's test, it has been detected that the model fits well.

Tested regression weights of the structural model are given within Table 10.

Table 10. Structural Model Regression Weights

| The way of testing | | | Estimation | Standard Error | Critical Ratio | P |
|--------------------|------|------------|------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
| | | | n | | | |
| Brand | <--- | Individual | 0.676 | 0.124 | 5.44 | *** |
| Loyalty | | Factor | | | 9 | |
| Brand | <--- | Social | 0.075 | 0.094 | 0.80 | 0.422 |
| Loyalty | | Factor | | | 3 | |

As it can be seen in table 10, it has been found out that individual factor has a positively significant effect on brand loyalty, and this supported H2 hypothesis. However, H1 hypothesis was not supported because we could not find any sign for social factors' positively significant impacts on brand loyalty.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the results of the research, it is seen that the first 3 most commonly brand that young adults prefer are Koton, De Facto and LC Waikiki. This may be as a result of the fact that young adults prefer sportswear and cheap brands, because the sample of the research consisted of university students. Therefore, whether brands' price positioning affects young adults' brand preference should also be investigated separately.

As a result of the analysis of structural model, it has been found out that individual factors positively impact young adults' brand loyalty. This result shows that young adults are affected by their life styles, personalities, and habits while purchasing clothes.

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