

A Different Approach to the Automotive Brand Experience: Brand Respect, Brand Love, Brand Fidelity

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Research Article

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Abstract

The impact of brand experiences on customers' purchasing decisions is becoming increasingly significant. Emotional factors, in particular, are emerging as central drivers in shaping these experiences, profoundly influencing consumer choices and fostering deeper brand connections. Thus the main purpose of the study is to determine the importance of emotional elements in consumer experiences in the automotive industry and to investigate the direct and indirect relationships between brand respects, brand love, brand fidelity by blending lovemark and attachment theories. To test the research model, partial least squares path modeling (PLS) was used with a sample of 283 experiencing any automobile brand. In this context, an outcome-oriented approach adds the dimension of brand fidelity to the theory previously explored in the areas of brand respect and brand affection. The findings reveal that brand respect is an important antecedent of brand love. Furthermore, the study identifies a partial direct effect of brand respect on brand loyalty, supported by the mediating role of brand affection. These critical findings contribute to filling an important gap in the literature, given the limited existing research in this area.

Introduction

The automotive industry stands out as one of the most fiercely competitive sectors among brands in contemporary markets (Caridade et al., 2017). Globally, this industry boasts approximately 61.6 million passenger cars, generating a substantial revenue of 2.52 trillion US dollar (Carlier, 2023), with an estimated 29 million registered motor vehicles as of 2023. Given the diverse array of brands operating within this market (Dierks, 2024), intense competition prevails. Amidst this competitive milieu, brands deploy various strategies, with experience-based approaches assuming paramount importance. Brands increasingly leverage consumers' emotions and adeptly orchestrate their emotional encounters (Khamitov et al., 2019). This strategic orientation engenders a profound and irreplaceable affinity between consumers and brands (Batra et al., 2012), signaling a departure from traditional, rational decision-making processes toward experiential decision-making paradigms in the 21st century (Sarkar, 2014). The automotive industry, known for its cutthroat competition among brands in today's markets (Caridade et al., 2017), is deeply intertwined with the psychological underpinnings of consumer behavior.

Recent studies underscore the significance of emotional elements in brand-consumer relationships, often drawing parallels with attachment theory (Bidmon, 2017; Madadi et al., 2022; Moussa, 2015; Shimul & Phau, 2023). Originating from the seminal work of Bowlby in his book "*Attachment and Loss*" published in 1969 and updated in 1982, attachment theory posits that emotional bonds between individuals play a central role in shaping behavior and relationships. Bowlby's pioneering research delved into the ontogenetic processes of early attachment formation, highlighting the intricate interplay of psychobiological mechanisms in human development. However, Bowlby cautioned against limiting attachment theory solely to individual perspectives, advocating for an interdisciplinary approach to fully comprehend its complexities (Bowlby, 1982). This interdisciplinary lens has since permeated various academic disciplines, including marketing, where attachment theory has emerged as a pivotal

framework. The theory's relevance in marketing is evident across different epochs: from the 1970s, characterized by a focus on the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction a precursor to attachment to the late 1980s and early 1990s, marked by the conceptualization of branding and brand value, centered on consumer-company relationships. As we transition into the 2000s, attachment theory assumes paramount importance for brands, guiding strategies that aim to foster emotional connections with consumers. In the automotive industry, where brands vie for consumer loyalty amidst intense competition, leveraging emotional experiences becomes imperative (Khamitov et al., 2019). Thus, understanding and applying the principles of attachment theory offer brands a strategic advantage in navigating the evolving landscape of consumer preferences and behaviors.

As the discourse around brand-consumer interaction expanded, an array of concepts gained prominence within marketing literature, reflecting the shifting dynamics of consumer behavior and preferences. Academics, from the fervent discussions on brand loyalty (Chen et al., 2020; Khamitov et al., 2019; K. Kim & Kim, 2024), and brand satisfaction (Dirsehan & Cankat, 2021; S. Hwang et al., 2021) to explorations of brand image (Anbumathi et al., 2023; Hamzah et al., 2023; Nilashi et al., 2023) and brand evangelism (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Nobi et al., 2022), brand equity (Keller & Brexendorf, 2019; Yuce et al., 2019), brand trust (Sohaib & Han, 2023) and brand awareness (M. B. Rodrigues et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2021) scholars have delved deep into understanding the intricate relationships between brands and their consumers. The current focus of their study is on the emotional aspects of brand experiences. Building upon the evolving landscape of consumer-brand relationships, these emotional dimensions have come to be associated with critical elements such as brand love (Anbumathi et al., 2023; Joshi & Garg, 2022; Quezado et al., 2022), brand respect (Jacob et al., 2020; Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021), and brand fidelity (Grace et al., 2018; Joshi & Garg, 2022; Junaidi, 2022; Quezado et al., 2022). In the pursuit of identifying a research gap, the exploration extended to the relatively trendier and niche topic of brand respect. With a thorough review of the literature on this subject, an extensive examination of various scholarly works and theoretical frameworks has been conducted.

The significant academic interest in the subject of brand respect is evidenced by the diverse array of studies conducted across various industries. These studies have explored the multifaceted nature of brand respect and its implications for consumer behavior and brand outcomes. For instance, Fortezza, Checchinato, and Slanzi (2023) delved into the relationship between brand respect, brand identification, and crowdfunding intention within the context of universities. Kim et al. (2021) focused on eco-friendly restaurants, investigating the interplay between well-being perception, brand respect, and behavioral intention. Jahanvi and Sharma (2021) examined the impact of brand respect on brand loyalty and word-of-mouth in a broader consumer context. In the banking sector, Amegbe et al. (2021) scrutinized the effects of brand respect on satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Hariandja and Suryanto (2021) explored the influence of online shopping customers' brand respect on brand equity within an e-commerce context. Furthermore, studies have examined brand respect in relation to specific industries such as tourism (Chen et al., 2020), luxury brands (Jacob et al., 2020), airlines (Han et al., 2020), coffee shops (Song et al., 2019), and wireless-enabled computing devices (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018). These studies have investigated various factors influencing brand respect and its subsequent impact on consumer

perceptions and behaviors, ranging from in-flight product performance to environmental corporate social responsibility. Moreover, Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa (2018) and Eisingerich, MacInnis, and Park (2018) explored the relationships between brand respect, trust, brand identification, and brand loyalty, contributing to a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving consumer-brand relationships and loyalty. Overall, the breadth and depth of research on brand respect underscore its significance as a key dimension in understanding consumer-brand dynamics across diverse industries and contexts.

Upon examining the data presented above, a notable research gap emerges: the absence of studies investigating the relationship between brand respect, brand love, and brand fidelity within the automotive sector. This gap signifies an opportunity for further exploration in understanding the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships in the automotive industry, particularly in terms of emotional connections and loyalty. By addressing this research gap, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into how brand respect, love, and fidelity intersect and influence consumer behavior and brand outcomes within the context of automotive brands. Filling this void not only enriches the academic literature but also provides practical implications for automotive marketers striving to cultivate strong emotional connections with consumers and foster brand loyalty. Thus, conducting a study to explore these relationships in the automotive sector holds the potential to advance our understanding of consumer-brand dynamics, while also offering actionable strategies for automotive brands to enhance their market positioning and competitive advantage.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

The contemporary marketing landscape underscores the paramount importance of emotions in shaping consumer decision-making processes, with brands serving as significant vehicles for emotional connections (Joshi & Garg, 2022; Levy & Hino, 2016). Within this context, the focus on relationship-based phenomena between consumers and brands has gained prominence, emphasizing the pivotal role of consumers' brand experiences (Fournier, 1998). At the core of this discourse lies the Lovemark theory, which elucidates the emotional bond between consumers and brands, encapsulating the notions of "brand love" and "brand respect" (Pawle & Cooper, 2006; Roberts, 2005). According to Roberts (2005), a brand must evoke both respect for its functional and performance attributes and love for the emotional connection it fosters with consumers. This highlights a critical gap in traditional marketing paradigms, which often overlook the nuanced interplay between consumer perceptions, brand emotions, and brand outcomes. To address this deficiency, the concept of brand fidelity, representing the emotional loyalty of customers, is integrated into the model (Grace et al., 2018). Thus, the study is structured around the comprehensive examination of brand respect, brand love, and brand fidelity, recognizing their interconnectedness in shaping consumer-brand relationships and driving brand success in the dynamic marketplace.

The elucidation provided underscores the pivotal role of respect in the foundation of consumer-brand relationships, aligning with the core tenets of the Lovemark theory. Brand respect, as a critical

determinant of the emotional connection between consumers and brands, encompasses various functional aspects of the brand, including trust, performance, reputation, and acceptance (Han et al., 2020; Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). Brand trust, as an internal attribute formed through social interaction, serves to instill a sense of security and reliability in consumers, fostering a trusting relationship with the brand (Song et al., 2019). Similarly, brand performance pertains to the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the brand's ability to fulfill its objectives and deliver value within a specific timeframe (Unurlu, 2019). This includes aspects such as perceived quality, functionality, and effectiveness, all of which contribute to the market success of the brand (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021; Wong & Merrilees, 2008). Brand reputation reflects customers' overall evaluations and judgments about the brand, encompassing its evolving and intangible presence over time (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). On the other hand, brand acceptance pertains to how customers embrace a brand, influenced by social factors and perceptions of belongingness (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). In essence, these functional aspects collectively contribute to the perception of respect consumers have towards a brand, shaping the foundation of their emotional relationship and influencing their attitudes and behaviors. As such, examining brand respect as a determinant of consumer-brand relationships is essential for understanding and effectively managing brand success in today's dynamic marketplace.

Indeed, the assertion that without respect, love is meaningless underscores the foundational role of respect in nurturing enduring and meaningful emotional connections between consumers and brands. This perspective aligns with the notion that respect forms the bedrock upon which love flourishes, especially in the context of long-term relationships (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021).

As such, it is fitting to formulate H1 to reflect this critical relationship:

H1: Brand respect positively affect brand love

This hypothesis posits that the extent to which consumers perceive and value a brand's functional aspects, including trust, performance, reputation, and acceptance, will positively impact the emotional attachment and passion they feel toward the brand. By empirically testing this hypothesis, researchers can deepen our understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving consumer-brand relationships and inform strategic marketing initiatives aimed at fostering enduring brand loyalty and advocacy.

The evolution of the concept of brand love has indeed been significant, stemming from the broader understanding of love as a complex interplay of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional experiences between individuals (Fournier, 1998). Initially introduced by Shimp and Madden in 1988, brand love has garnered increasing attention and research interest over the years, becoming a central topic in contemporary marketing literature. Brand love represents a deep and passionate emotional attachment that consumers develop towards a brand, extending beyond mere liking or preference for a product or service (Palusuk et al., 2019). This emotional bond is characterized by feelings of affection, connection, and loyalty towards the brand (Huang, 2017).

The elaboration on brand fidelity as a key emotional element in brand experiences sheds light on its significance in consumer-brand relationships. Brand fidelity, defined as the behaviors exhibited by consumers to maintain the continuity and stability of their relationships with the brand, represents a deeper and more profound emotional connection compared to mere brand loyalty (Grace et al., 2018). Although often synonymous with brand loyalty, brand fidelity entails a stronger emotional bond that transcends mere habitual purchasing behavior. Rooted in the Lovemark theory, brand fidelity emphasizes the active role of consumers' emotional attachment and love for the brand in driving their purchasing decisions (Roberts, 2006). Unlike conventional brand loyalty, brand fidelity is characterized by consumers' willingness to forgive mistakes or shortcomings in the brand's offerings, reflecting a deeper emotional commitment and connection. This emotional bond engendered by brand fidelity leads consumers to overlook alternatives and supports the cognitive aspect of brand loyalty, as consumers prioritize their emotional connection with the brand over rational considerations (Grace et al., 2018). In essence, brand fidelity represents a loyalty beyond logic, where emotional elements play a central role in shaping consumers' behaviors and preferences (Roberts, 2005). Given the pivotal role of emotional experiences in shaping consumer-brand relationships, brand love emerges as a concept of critical importance. Brand love signifies consumers' passionate emotional attachment to a brand, where emotions take center stage in driving brand relationships (Vernuccio et al., 2015). In this context, brand love serves as a fundamental tool in understanding consumer behaviors and motivations.

Building upon this understanding, H2 has been generated for the study to explore the relationship between brand love and brand fidelity, recognizing the central role of emotional attachment in driving enduring consumer-brand relationships.

H2: Brand love positively affect brand fidelity

The acknowledgment of emotional elements' crucial role in shaping consumer tendencies aligns with the evolving dynamics of the market, where brand loyalty emerges as a prominent trend. Indeed, brand loyalty remains a focal point in contemporary marketing literature, as evidenced by the studies conducted by Hwang et al.(2021), Kim & Kim (2024), Sohaib & Han (2023), and Wongsansukcharoen (2022). Within this context, the impact of brand respect on brand loyalty emerges as a critical factor for business success. When customers perceive a brand with respect, it cultivates admiration and fosters a sense of loyalty towards the brand. This admiration serves as a significant precursor to brand loyalty, as customers are more inclined to repeatedly choose and advocate for brands they respect (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). Furthermore, the emotional dimension of brand loyalty finds contemporary expression in brand fidelity, emphasizing the deeper emotional connection that transcends mere habituation. Studies by Grace, Ross, and King (2018), Joshi and Garg (2022), Junaidi (2022), and Quezado, Fortes, and Cavalcante (2022) underscore the importance of this emotional bond in driving enduring consumer-brand relationships.

In light of these insights, H3 has been formulated to explore the relationship between brand respect and brand fidelity, recognizing the pivotal role of emotional attachment in fostering enduring brand loyalty.

This hypothesis aims to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying consumer-brand connections and inform strategic marketing efforts aimed at cultivating brand loyalty in today's

H3: Brand respect positively affect brand fidelity

The consideration of the mediating effect between variables adds another layer of depth to the study, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play in consumer-brand relationships. As previously mentioned, brand love serves as a powerful emotional bond between customers and brands, influencing both brand trust and brand loyalty (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016). Given that respect is identified as a significant precursor to love (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021; Roberts, 2005), and brand love is a strong emotional driver of loyalty (Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022), it is imperative to explore the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between brand respect and brand fidelity. This direction H4, has been developed.

H4: Brand love plays a mediator role in the brand fidelity affect of brand respect.

This hypothesis suggests that the emotional bond fostered by brand respect leads to the formation of brand love, which, in turn, influences consumers' commitment and loyalty to the brand. By examining this mediating effect, the study aims to unravel the intricate interplay between these variables and shed light on the underlying processes shaping consumer-brand relationships. Overall, H4 represents a critical avenue for investigation, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms through which brand respect engenders brand loyalty via the intermediary role of brand love.

Methods

Sample

The research data for this study were gathered through a random sampling approach from consumers who have experienced any car brand in Turkey. To collect the data, a quantitative data collection technique was employed, specifically utilizing a questionnaire survey administered via Google Forms. At the outset of the survey, participants were queried about whether they owned an automobile. Those who responded affirmatively were directed to proceed with answering the subsequent questions. This step ensured that the participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study, focusing specifically on individuals with direct experience with automotive brands. To validate the questionnaire and ensure its effectiveness, a pilot test was conducted with 30 participants. Their feedback and opinions were gathered and carefully evaluated to refine the questionnaire and address any potential issues or ambiguities. Subsequently, data were collected from a total of 283 participants who met the criteria outlined in the survey. However, to enhance the robustness and reliability of the analysis, the dataset was augmented using the "bootstrapping" method, resulting in a final dataset comprising 5,000 observations.

Measures

The survey utilized in the research comprises two main sections, each addressing distinct aspects relevant to the study’s objectives. *Demographic characteristics section* is dedicated to gathering demographic information about the participants. It includes questions related to various demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, income, occupation, and any other relevant characteristics deemed pertinent to the study. *Brand experiences section* focuses on participants’ brand experiences with their vehicles. It incorporates three scales: *Brand respect scale* developed by Jahanvi and Sharma (2021), this scale assesses participants’ perceptions of brand respect across four sub-dimensions: brand trust, brand performance, brand reputation, and brand acceptance. The scale comprises a total of 18 statements, with each sub-dimension consisting of a different number of items (brand trust: 5 statements, brand performance: 5 statements, brand reputation: 4 statements, and brand acceptance: 4 statements). *Brand love scale* utilized from Cho et al. (2015), this scale measures participants’ levels of brand love. It consists of five items designed to gauge the emotional attachment and passion individuals feel towards their automotive brand. *Brand fidelity scale* developed by Grace et al. (2018), this scale evaluates participants’ brand fidelity, encompassing four dimensions: performance forgiveness, price forgiveness, cognitive interdependence, and derogation of alternatives. The scale comprises a total of 18 items, distributed across these dimensions (performance forgiveness: 4 items, price forgiveness: 4 items, cognitive interdependence: 6 items, and derogation of alternatives: 5 items).

Participants are asked to respond to each item in these scales using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This standardized response format allows for the quantification of participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding brand respect, brand love, and brand fidelity, facilitating subsequent statistical analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Analysis and findings

In the analysis stage of the study, first, the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined. In this regard, an investigation was conducted on the participants’ personal features such as gender, age, marital status, monthly income, and education level. The data related to the demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Please insert Table 1

Upon examining the demographic data, it is observed that nearly half of the participants are females. The average of about one-third falls in the age range of 34-41, another one-third falls in the age range of 26-33, and about one-fifth falls in the age range of 42-49, with a significant portion in other age groups. The majority of participants are married, and most of them have a monthly income exceeding 15,000 TL. Furthermore, it is noted that the majority of participants have completed bachelor or graduate degree education.

Please insert Table 2

When examining the data related to automobile usage, that the majority of participants have been using the automobile brand for 1-6 years. Additionally, the fact that participants use 21 different automobile brands operating in Turkey and express their attitudes and intentions towards these automobile brands is highly valuable.

Data Analysis and Results

The study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis technique utilizing the PLS-SEM interface. In contemporary marketing research, this technique is frequently employed for identifying cause-and-effect relationships among latent constructs (Hair et al., 2011). The foundation of the model is based on the measurement of two fundamental constructs. These constructs are classified as the “structural model” and the “measurement model.” (Ringle et al., 2014; Samsa, 2023; Samsa & Yüce, 2022; Yeo et al., 2017)

Measurement Model

Data regarding the construct validity and reliability of the measurement model are presented in Table 3, and Table 4.

Please insert Fig.1

The critical value that needs to be examined for the measurement model is the indicator loading. It is expected that this value should be greater than 0.708. A value exceeding 0.708 indicates that the indicators of the items explain more than 50% of the variance in the construct and ensures the reliability of the items (Hair et al., 2019). In this respect, it is observed that the model ensures item reliability. For more details, see Fig 1.

Another factor that needs to be examined in the measurement model section of the study is the construct reliability and validity. In this stage of the study, Cronbach’s alpha, CR (Composite Reliability), and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) have been scrutinized.

Please insert Table 3

Jöreskog (1971) emphasized the key role of Cronbach’s alpha in assessing the internal consistency of compound reliability. A Cronbach’s alpha value between 0.70 and 0.90 indicates satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, it is observed that all dimensions of the study have satisfactory compound reliability. Additionally, it is known that CR values are essential for internal consistency reliability of the structure, and AVE value is crucial for convergent validity of the structure. Similar to the Cronbach’s alpha value, the CR value is considered satisfactory when it falls between 0.70 and 0.90. The AVE value is expected to be higher than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). The findings highlight that the study meets these conditions. For more details, see Table 3. In the study, another variable examined in relation to reliability and validity is the values related to discriminant validity. One of the most important criteria for discriminant validity is the Fornell-Larcker criteria. The basis of these criteria involves examining the

correlation between the square root of the AVE values for each construct and the square root of the AVE values for other constructs. In this regard, the criterion is based on the requirement that the correlation values should be greater than the correlation values with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results underscore that the study fulfills these criteria. Refer to Table 4 for further information.

Please insert Table 4

In light of these data, it has been determined that the conditions are met in the measurement model stage of the study, and the analysis has proceeded to the structural model stage.

Structural Model

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) - path analysis was employed to test the hypotheses of the study related to the research. The study results revealed that H2 hypothesis is supported, while H1, H3, and H4 hypotheses are largely supported. For additional information, consult Figure 2 and Table 5.

Please insert Fig 2

Please insert Table 5

Table 5 illustrates that brand performance has a significant positive effect on cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.151$, $p < 0.01$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.114$, $p < 0.01$), performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.01$), and price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, brand reputation has a significant positive effect on cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.01$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.01$), performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$), and price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, brand trust has a significant positive effect on cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.01$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.01$), performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$), and price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, brand acceptance has no effect on cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.023$, $p > 0.05$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.017$, $p > 0.05$), performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.021$, $p > 0.05$), and price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.024$, $p > 0.05$). In addition, the structural model results show that brand performance ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.01$), brand reputation ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < 0.01$), and brand trust ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.01$), have significant and positive effects on brand love, but brand acceptance ($\beta = 0.036$, $p > 0.05$) has no significant effect on brand love. Additionally, brand love has a significant and positive effects on cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.01$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.01$), performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.01$), and price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.01$).

A critical aspect of the study is the mediation analysis. The mediation analysis reveals that brand love acts as a mediator in the impact of brand trust on performance forgiveness: ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$), price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.01$), cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.01$) derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, brand love acts as a mediator in the impact of brand performance on performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.01$), price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.01$), cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.151$, $p < 0.01$), and derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.114$, $p < 0.01$).

Furthermore, brand love acts as a mediator in the impact of brand reputation on performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$), price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < 0.01$), cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.01$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.01$). However, brand love does not mediate the interaction between brand acceptance and performance forgiveness ($\beta = 0.021$, $p > 0.05$), price forgiveness ($\beta = 0.024$, $p > 0.05$), cognitive interdependence ($\beta = 0.023$, $p > 0.05$), derogation of alternatives ($\beta = 0.017$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's overarching findings are contextualized within the theoretical framework of attachment theory, which posits that consumers establish relationships with brands akin to human connections (Ittefaq et al., 2024). In the realm of marketing, brands navigate their trajectories based on these human-like associations. The contemporary landscape of marketing underscores the prominence of emotional dimensions intertwined with brands, as individuals attribute distinct emotional significance to products and brands alike. This emotional paradigm finds elucidation in the tenets of the Lovemark theory, which advocates for the incorporation of a results-oriented dimension alongside the emotional facets encapsulated by brand "respect" and "love". This additional dimension, known as brand fidelity, represents the emotional culmination of these elements. It is evident that emotions wield substantial influence over brand experiences. Notably, the automotive industry emerges as a domain where emotional connections to brands reach their zenith. This study delves into the direct and indirect interrelations among brand respect, brand love, and brand fidelity within the automotive sector. Subsequent sections detail the findings derived from this investigation.

The research has determined, in its initial stage, the critical role of brand respect in the formation of brand love. The findings of the study underscore the pivotal significance of the perspective that "*Love cannot exist without respect*" for brands. The study identifies three fundamental elements of brand respect contributing to the establishment of brand love: brand trust, brand performance, and brand reputation. Conversely, the acceptance of the brand has been concluded to have no discernible impact on the creation of brand love. One of the critical factors exerting a significant influence on consumer attitudes is brand trust (Konuk, 2021; Sohaib & Han, 2023). In the conducted research, it has been emphasized that this result is evident in the automotive sector, highlighting the significant role of brand trust in fostering the creation of brand love. A specific finding of the study reveals the critical role of brand performance in the creation of brand love. While a conclusive evidence regarding the relationship between these two variables is lacking in the literature, evidence from the study by Jeong et al. (2023), indicating that performance affects customer perceptions, has been considered. The research findings also demonstrate the active role of brand reputation in the establishment of brand love. This outcome is further supported by evidence from Iqbal et al. (2021), suggesting that brand reputation is deemed an essential prerequisite for the creation of brand love. The validation of these results in the automotive sector holds critical importance.

Another significant finding of the research is that brand love influences all dimensions of brand fidelity. It is well-established that positive emotions shape loyalty (Loureiro & Roschk, 2014). At this juncture, it is expected that the powerful emotion (love) plays an active role in emotional loyalty behavior. In this study specifically conducted on automotive brands, it has been concluded that brand love has an impact on what is referred to as brand fidelity, the emotional loyalty towards brands. Norrie (2018) has asserted that love is the key to the psychology of moral forgiveness. According to the author, forgiveness is metaphysically acknowledged as a concept associated with love at an ontological foundation. Based on this, the study has found that the manifestation of forgiveness in brands leads to the undeniable impact of brand love on forgiveness. Another significant result is that brand love reduces the inclination towards alternative brands. Indeed, individuals who feel a high degree of commitment in their emotional relationships tend to display a derogatory attitude towards attractive alternatives (D. Rodrigues et al., 2017). This finding aligns with the conclusion that brand love in the study influences the intention to derogate alternatives. Another result of the study is that brand love affects cognitive interdependence. These results can be explained by the theory of interdependence, which relies on explaining the most crucial aspects of interpersonal situations (Woide et al., 2023). Another finding related to the study is that brand love influences cognitive interdependence. As far as we have examined, there is no study in the literature specifically addressing the relationship between brand love and cognitive interdependence. However, there is evidence that brand love can lead to emotional intensity and emotional obsession (Le, 2023). In the study, this emotional condition has been addressed in relation to the cognitive interdependence element, and it has been determined that brand love creates cognitive interdependence in the automotive sector.

One of the critical findings of the study is that brand respect influences brand fidelity in various aspects. While the elements of brand trust, brand performance, and brand reputation within brand respect affect all dimensions of brand fidelity, brand acceptance does not influence any of these dimensions. The study results indicate that brand trust, brand performance, and brand reputation are significant antecedents of forgiveness. Strelan et al. (2017) have grounded the impact of individuals' close relationships on forgiveness in the literature. They argue that trust plays a key role in the influence of these close relationships on forgiveness. In the study, forgiveness was examined in two main categories related to brands: performance forgiveness and price forgiveness. It was observed that brand trust plays a significant role in both performance and price forgiveness. In contrast to the findings of Sohaib and Han (2023), who emphasized the strong influence of trust in building loyalty, the study has revealed a unique result by suggesting that brand trust creates cognitive interdependence in the context of brands.

The research reveals another critical finding, indicating that brand trust leads to the dismissal of alternative brands. Mortimer et al. (2020) have emphasized the critical impact of risk factors on shaping customer behaviors. When customers trust brands and perceive them to be less risky, they are more likely to stay with them for the long term (Lin et al., 2017). In this respect, it is evident that trust, conversely, can lead to the disregard of alternatives. In the study, consumers, parallel to this, exhibit a reduced need to evaluate alternatives when they trust brands and believe in the brand's promises. Another aspect of brand respect examined in the study considers brand performance as a significant

precursor to brand forgiveness (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019). Although there is no existing research on the impact of brand performance on brand forgiveness, evidence suggests that brand performance has an effect on behavioral elements like brand loyalty (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). In the study, a specific finding indicates that brand performance has a positive influence on both price forgiveness and performance forgiveness. Additionally, Unurlu and Uca (2017) have identified the importance of brand performance in building brand loyalty. One of the fundamental requirements of loyalty is shaped around the brand being chosen again in future purchases and feeling dependent on the brand (Zhang et al., 2017). Considering the data, the study concludes that the two elements of brand fidelity, cognitive interdependence, and the reduction of alternatives, play an effective role in brand performance. Another crucial dimension of brand respect in the study is brand reputation. It is observed that brand reputation has a positive impact on brand fidelity. Brand reputation is considered a critical precursor for customer behavioral intentions, such as brand loyalty (Vernuccio et al., 2015). The study introduces a different perspective to this relationship, suggesting that brand reputation positively influences all dimensions of brand fidelity in the automotive sector. Considering the unique perspective brought by the study to brand loyalty, it can be deemed as providing an original viewpoint to the literature. Another aspect of brand respect examined in the study is brand acceptance. Brand acceptance signifies a brand being embraced by other individuals in society and individuals identifying with the brand. Previous research has shown that brand acceptance has a positive impact on brand loyalty (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). However, the results of this study present a new perspective to the literature by indicating that brand acceptance does not affect any dimension of brand fidelity. A unique finding of the study is that brand love significantly mediates the interaction between brand respect and brand fidelity. It has been concluded that there is no mediation effect between brand acceptance and brand fidelity.

Contributions to theory

This study presents a novel empirical perspective on the emotional dimensions inherent in consumer-brand relationships. While prior research has predominantly concentrated on the elements of love and respect within the framework of Lovemark theory (Amegbe et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020; Roberts, 2005, 2006) significant gaps persist in comprehending the contextual nuances underlying the examination of emotional facets within a brand experience-oriented framework. The incorporation of brand fidelity as a results-driven emotional component has introduced a fresh angle to the existing literature. The longstanding Lovemark theory has been reevaluated through the lens of attachment theory, thereby offering a novel perspective. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of studies revealed a notable absence of similar research endeavors in the extant literature. Consequently, this study is poised to address a significant theoretical void. The distinctiveness of this study lies in its investigation of the emotional dimensions of consumers' automotive experiences, along with its emphasis on relatively niche subjects within the scholarly discourse, namely brand fidelity and brand respect.

Contributions to practice

The study presents significant implications for both automotive manufacturers and sellers, emphasizing the paramount importance of emotional factors in shaping brand experiences for consumers. A key revelation from the research underscores the indispensable roles of brand love and brand respect in cultivating brand fidelity, a cornerstone of consumer experiences within the automotive domain. Notably, individuals engaging with automotive brands prioritize emotional dimensions, with brand respect and brand love emerging as pivotal drivers of brand fidelity. It becomes evident that individuals who harbor respect towards automotive brands are predisposed to develop brand love, thus fostering emotional connections. Moreover, the linkage between brand respect and brand fidelity is predominantly mediated by the presence of brand love. Consequently, consumers who cultivate respect towards automotive brands are more likely to subsequently develop brand love, a sentiment that significantly contributes to the establishment of brand fidelity.

The study advocates for companies seeking to cultivate loyal customers to prioritize the emotional aspects inherent in their brands. Key emotional elements, including brand trust, brand performance, brand reputation, and brand love, emerge as pivotal factors in this endeavor. Particularly within the automotive sector, consumers exhibiting respect and affection towards the brands they encounter demonstrate tendencies such as forgiveness towards the brands' shortcomings, a propensity to overlook alternatives, and the establishment of cognitive interdependence. As such, companies aspiring to secure enduring customer loyalty must prioritize emotional engagement strategies, leveraging elements such as trust, performance, reputation, and love to forge lasting connections with consumers within the automotive realm.

Limitations and future research

The study offers a fresh perspective on the emotional attachment individuals develop towards automobiles and automotive brands, presenting a unique examination of the Lovemark theory. Future researchers have an opportunity to delve deeper into this theory, exploring its trends and various aspects in greater detail. By conducting similar studies across different industries, scholars can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the concept and its implications. While the research focuses on automotive brands in Turkey, the presence of diverse automotive brands and consumer profiles across different regions suggests the potential for extending the study to various geographical locations. Future investigations could explore how cultural nuances and consumer preferences influence emotional brand attachment in different contexts. Although the study evaluates multiple automotive brands, it does not specifically hone in on any particular brand. Future research could benefit from a more targeted approach, examining specific brands to provide nuanced insights into consumer perceptions and emotional connections. Demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, and income are known to influence individuals' emotional responses to brands. Incorporating these factors into future research endeavors could uncover valuable insights into how different demographic groups interact with automotive brands emotionally. This approach would enhance our understanding of the intricate interplay between demographic characteristics and brand attachment within the automotive sector.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declare no competing interest.

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Ethical Approval The author obtained the necessary ethical approvals from an institutional review board. In addition, ethical standards were followed in all processes of the study.

Author Contribution

C.S. carried out all the processes from developing the original idea, collecting data, conducting analyses and writing the manuscript.

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Tables

Tables 1 to 5 are available in the Supplementary Files section.

Figures

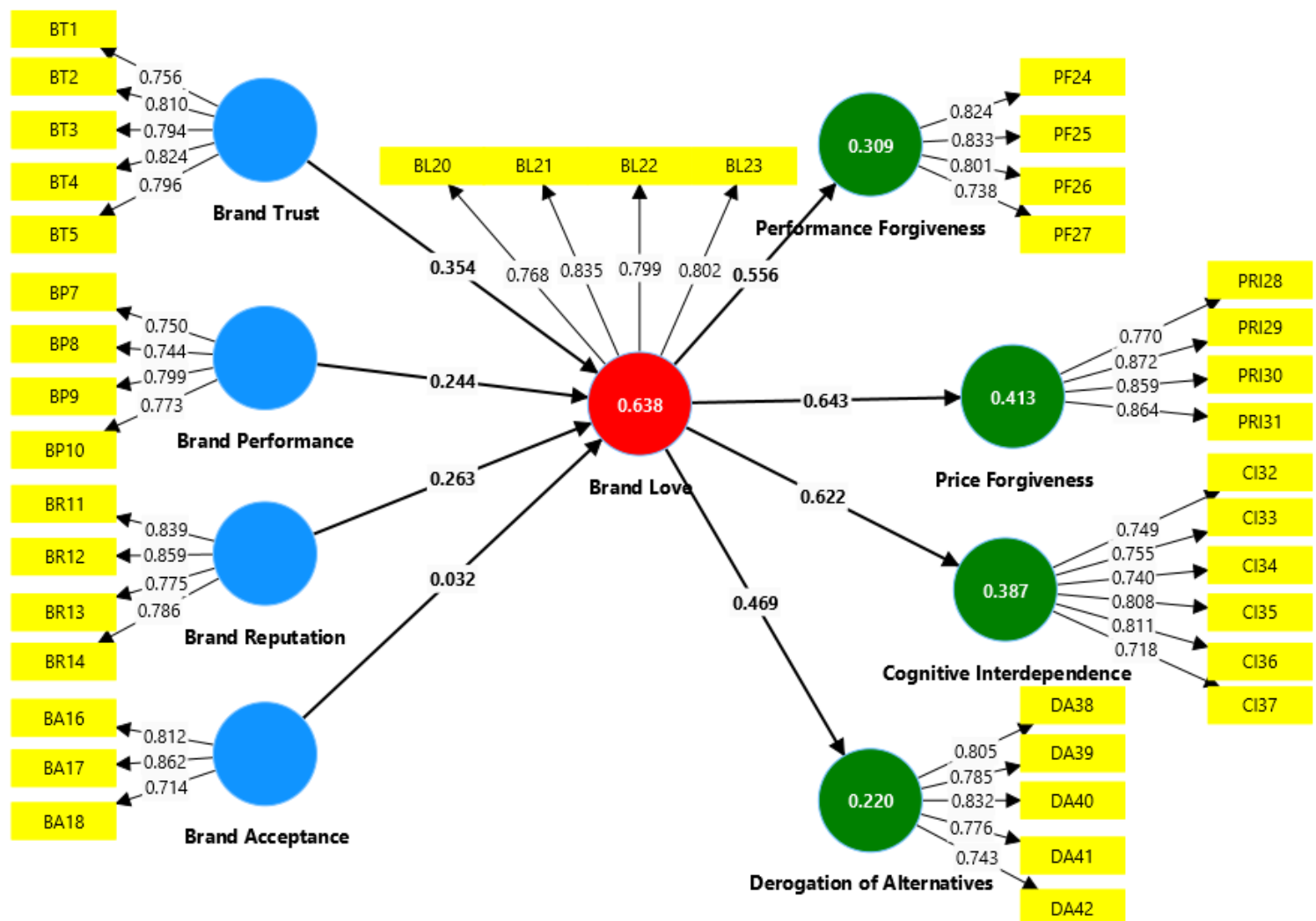


Figure 1

Measurement Model

Note: inner model: *path coefficient*, construct: R^2 , outer model: *outer weights/loading*

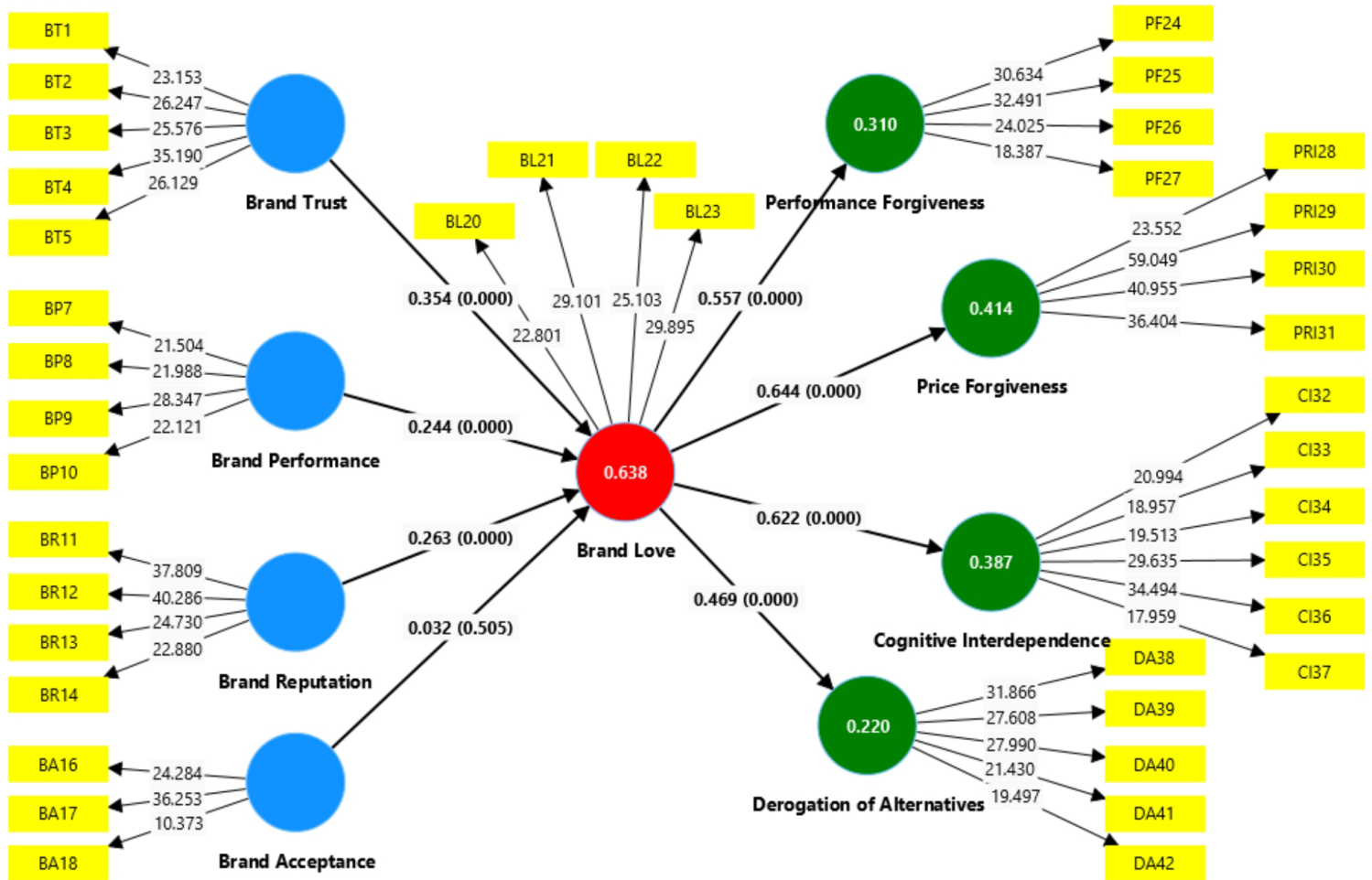


Figure 2

Structural Model

Note: inner model: *path coefficients-p values*, construct: R^2 , outer model: *t values*

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Table1.DemographicsData.docx](#)
- [Table2.DataonAutomobileUsage.docx](#)
- [Table3.ConstructReliabilityandValidity.docx](#)
- [Table4.FornellLarckerCriteria.docx](#)
- [Table5.StructuralModelResults.docx](#)