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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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

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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. Therefore, 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 impact of brand respect and brand love on brand fidelity by blending Lovemark and attachment theories. To test the research model, data were collected via survey from a sample 283 participants who had experience with any automobile brand. The collected data were analyzed using partial least squares path modeling (PLS). 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 love. The findings reveal that brand respect is an important antecedent of brand love and brand fidelity. An important finding is that brand affection has an effect on brand love creation. Another specific finding of the study is that brand respect has a partial direct effect on brand fidelity, supported by the mediating role of brand love. These critical findings contribute to filling an important gap in the literature, given the limited existing research in this area.

Keywords Brand fidelity · Brand trust · Brand forgiveness · Brand reputation · Brand acceptance · Brand performance · Brand love · Cognitive interdependence · Derogation of alternatives

JEL Classification M30 · M31 · M39

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 twenty first 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 and 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

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formation, highlighting the intricate interaction 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 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 (Christensen and Christensen 1974; Marquardt et al. 1972), characterized by a focus on the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction a precursor to attachment to the late 1980s and early 1990s (Aaker 1992; Johansson and Nebenzahl 1986), marked by the conceptualization of branding and brand value, centered on consumer–company relationships. As we transition into the 2000s (Morrison and Crane 2007; Punniyamoorthy and Prasanna Mohan Raj 2007), 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. Scientists, from the fervent discussions on brand loyalty (Chen et al. 2020; Khamitov et al. 2019; K. Kim and Kim 2024) and brand satisfaction (Dirsehan and Cankat 2021; S. Hwang et al. 2021a, b) to explorations of brand image (Anbumathi et al. 2023; Hamzah et al. 2023; Nilashi et al. 2023) and brand evangelism (Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013; Nobi et al. 2022), brand equity (Keller and Brexendorf 2019; Yuce et al. 2019), brand trust (Sohaib and Han 2023) and brand awareness (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 and Garg 2022; Quezado et al. 2022), brand respect (Jacob et al. 2020; Jahanvi and Sharma 2021), and brand fidelity (Grace et al. 2018; Joshi and 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 scientific 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 et al. (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 relationship 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. 2020b), coffee shops (Song et al. 2019b), and wireless-enabled computing devices (Giovanis and 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 et al. (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.

The data presented above reveal a notable research gap: the absence of studies investigating the impact of brand respect and brand love on brand fidelity in the automotive industry. 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 fidelity. By addressing this research gap, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how brand respect and love influence brand fidelity in the context of automotive brands. Filling this void not only enriches the literature but also provides practical implications for automotive marketers striving to cultivate strong emotional connections with consumers and foster brand fidelity. 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 and Garg 2022; Levy and 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 and 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 relationships 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). Therefore, the study is structured around a comprehensive examination of the impact of brand respect and brand affection on brand fidelity, recognizing that they are interconnected 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. 2020b; Jahanvi and 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. 2019b). 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 and Sharma 2021; Wong and Merrilees 2008). Brand reputation reflects customers' overall evaluations and judgments about the brand, encompassing its evolving and intangible presence over time (Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009). On the other hand, brand acceptance pertains to how customers embrace a brand, influenced by social factors and perceptions of belongingness (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021). In essence, these functional aspects collectively contribute to the perception of respect consumers have toward 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.

Brand love and brand respect are most commonly examined within the framework of the Lovemark theory in the literature. Within this framework, studies typically investigate the effects of brand respect and brand love on various consumer-related variables (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018; Hariandja and Suryanto 2021; S. Kim et al. 2021). However, research directly exploring the relationship between brand respect and brand love remains notably limited. In this context, findings from studies on interpersonal relationships suggest that respect is one of the fundamental precursors of love, and that the absence of respect may jeopardize the sustainability of love (Hendrick and Hendrick 2006; Tobore 2020). In fact, numerous scholars argue that emotional connections between consumers and brands can resemble those found in human relationships (E. Cho et al. 2015; Han et al. 2020a; Jahanvi and Sharma 2021). Nevertheless, the causal link between brand love and brand respect has received relatively little attention in the marketing literature. For example, Garg et al. (2015) propose that brand respect plays a significant role in the development of brand love. The notion that love loses its meaning in the absence of respect highlights the critical role of respect in establishing deep and enduring emotional bonds between consumers and brands. Accordingly, examining the causal relationship between brand respect and brand love emerges as a significant area of inquiry for both theoretical and practical marketing research.

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

H1 *Brand respect positively affects 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 fidelity and advocacy.



The evolution of the concept of brand love has indeed been significant, stemming from the broader understanding of love as a complex relationship of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional experiences between individuals (Fournier 1998). Initially introduced by Shimp and Madden (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 toward 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 toward 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 was created to investigate the role of brand love in building brand fidelity, recognizing the central role of emotional attachment in driving enduring consumer–brand relationships.

H2 *Brand love positively affects 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. (2021a, b), Kim and Kim (2024), Sohaib and 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 toward 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 and 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 et al. (2018), Joshi and Garg (2022), Junaidi (2022), and Quezado et al. (2022) underscore the importance of this emotional bond in driving enduring consumer–brand relationships.

In light of these insights, recognizing the important role of emotional attachment in fostering enduring brand fidelity, H3 was formulated to investigate the role of brand respect in building brand fidelity. This hypothesis aims to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying consumer–brand connections and inform strategic marketing efforts aimed at cultivating brand fidelity in today's.

H3 *Brand respect positively affects brand fidelity.*

Incorporating the mediating effect among the variables enriches the theoretical depth of the study and facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms shaping consumer–brand relationships. As previously discussed, brand love fosters a strong emotional attachment between consumers and brands, thereby influencing both brand trust and brand loyalty (Alnawas and Altarifi 2016). In their investigation of the antecedents and consequences of brand love, Garg et al. (2015) identified brand respect as a significant predictor of brand love. They further emphasized that emotional commitment, customer citizenship behavior, and consumer forgiveness are key outcomes of brand love. In alignment with this perspective, prior literature conceptualizes love as a consequence of respect (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021; Roberts 2005), while loyalty is positioned as a consequence of love (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022). Within the scope of this study, fidelity defined as a distinct form of fidelity characterized by forgiveness, rejection of alternatives, and cognitive commitment is examined in the context of the brand respect–brand love relationship. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was formulated to reflect this theoretical linkage.



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 fidelity to the brand. By examining this mediating effect, the study aims to unravel the intricate causal relationships 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 fidelity via the intermediary role of brand love.

Method

Sample

The research data for this study were collected through a convenience sampling approach from consumers who have experienced any automobile brand in Turkey. Participants were first asked whether they owned any automobile. Data were collected from car owners using a quantitative data technique, namely a questionnaire. The time constraints of the participants were taken into account during the data collection phase, and Google forms were utilized especially for them to fill in the questionnaire at any time. 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.

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 toward 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.

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 (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 Türkiye and express their attitudes and intentions toward these automobile brands is highly valuable.

Data Analysis and Results

In the study, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis technique was used using the PLS–SEM interface. In addition, bootstrapping was used to increase the statistical power and to ensure that the forecasting models produce more



Table 1 Demographics data

Variable	*N*	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	120	42.4
Male	158	55.8
No Answer	5	1.8
Age		
18–25	24	8.5
26–33	88	31.1
34–41	101	35.7
42–49	51	18
50 and above	19	6.7
Marital Status		
Single	89	31.4
Married	193	68.2
No Answer	1	0.4
Monthly Income (TL)		
Less than 6000	9	3.2
6000–9000	15	5.3
9001–12,000	44	15.5
12,001–15,000	71	25.1
15,001–18,000	103	36.4
Over 18,000	41	14.5
Education Level		
Primary Education	6	2.1
High School	46	16.3
Associate Degree	43	15.2
Bachelor Degree	110	38.9
Postgraduate Degree	77	27.2
No Answer	1	0.4
Total	283	100

Table 2 Data on automobile usage

Variable	*N*	Percent (%)
Use Duration (Year)		
Less than 1	41	14.5
1–3	97	34.3
4–6	80	28.3
7–9	34	12
10 and above	24	8.5
No Answer	7	2.5
Automobile Brand		
Opel	12	4.2
Hyundai	4	1.4
Toyota	31	11
Seat	3	0.9
Renault	73	25.8
Dacia	5	1.8
Audi	4	1.4
Volvo	2	0.7
Ford	26	9.2
Skoda	4	1.4
Tofas	24	8.5
Fiat	37	13.1
Citroen	2	0.6
BMW	22	7.8
Nissan	4	1.4
Volkswagen	9	3.2
Chevrolet	1	0.9
Mitsubishi	1	0.4
Kia	1	0.4
Honda	1	0.4
Lexus	1	0.4
No Answer	19	6
Total	283	100

reliable results without distorting the distribution of the available data, and a final dataset of 5000 observations was obtained. There are two basic processes in modeling, which is frequently used to measure causal relationships between variables. These constructs are classified as "measurement model" and "structural model" (Ringle et al. 2014; Samsa 2023; Samsa and Yüce 2022; Yeo et al. 2017).

Measurement Model

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

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

Table 3 Construct reliability and validity

	α	CR (ρ_a)	CR (ρ_c)	(AVE)
Brand Respect	0.867	0.873	0.897	0.522
Brand Love	0.812	0.814	0.914	0.842
Brand Fidelity	0.939	0.940	0.946	0.508

Table 4 Fornell–Larcker criteria

	1	2	3
Brand Fidelity	***0.722***		
Brand Love	0.689	***0.917***	
Brand Respect	0.510	0.538	***0.711***

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 α, CR (Composite Reliability), and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) have been scrutinized.

Jöreskog (1971) emphasized the key role of Cronbach's α in assessing the internal consistency of compound reliability. Cronbach's α and CR value greater than 0.70 indicates satisfactory reliability (Werts et al. 1974). Thus, it is observed that all dimensions of the study have satisfactory compound reliability. Additionally, AVE value is crucial for convergent validity of the structure. 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 and Larcker 1981). The results underscore that the study fulfills these criteria. Refer to Table 4 for further information.

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 all hypotheses supported. For additional information, consult Fig. 2 and Table 5.

Table 5 illustrates that brand respect has a significant positive effect on brand love ($\beta = 0.682$, $p < 0.01$) and brand fidelity ($\beta = 0.458$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, brand love has a significant positive effect on brand fidelity ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.01$). The mediation analysis reveals that brand love acts as a mediator in the impact of brand respect on performance fidelity ($\beta = 0.134$, $p < 0.01$).

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

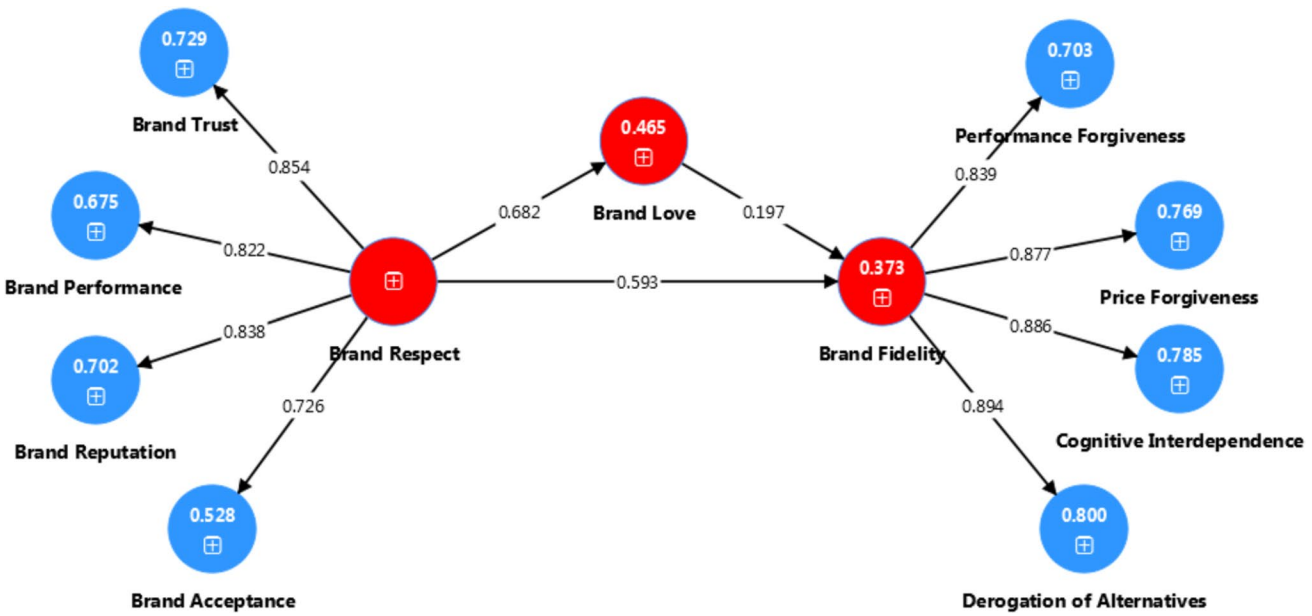


Fig. 1 Measurement model. *Note* structural model: total effects, measurement model: *outer loading*, construct: R^2

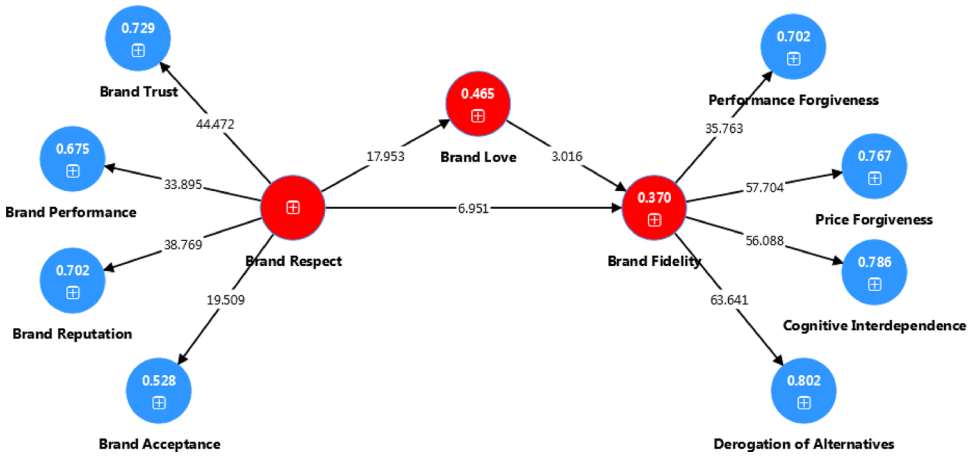


Fig. 2 Structural model. *Note* inner model: *T* values, construct: R^2

Table 5 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Co	S.Mean	Standard deviation	*T*. statistics	*P* value	Hyp.Support
H1	Brand Respect → Brand Love	0.682	0.683	0.038	17.953	0.000	Yes
H2	Brand Love → Brand Fidelity	0.196	0.195	0.065	3.016	0.003	Yes
H3	Brand Respect → Brand Fidelity	0.458	0.457	0.066	6.951	0.000	Yes
H4	Brand Respect → Brand Love → Brand Fidelity	0.134	0.134	0.046	2.925	0.003	Yes

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 sector in particular stands out as an area where emotional bonds with brands play a key role. This study examines the effects of brand respect and brand love on brand fidelity in the automotive industry. The following sections detail the findings of this research.

One of the main findings of this study is that brand respect affects brand love. Recent studies have considered brand respect and brand love as the two main components of the Lovemark theory, drawing attention to the impact of these concepts on consumer attitudes and behaviors (M. Cho et al. 2025; Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018; Han et al. 2020a; Song et al. 2019b). However, the majority of these studies have not directly addressed the causal relationship between these two concepts.

Main contribution of the study is that it reveals the effect of brand respect on brand fidelity. Although there are a limited number of studies in the literature that directly examine the effect of brand respect on brand fidelity, there are many studies that establish significant relationships between the sub-dimensions of this concept and loyalty. For example, brand performance affects loyalty (Unurlu 2019), brand reputation is an important antecedent of loyalty (Vernuccio et al. 2015), brand trust shapes loyalty (Sohaib and Han 2023), and brand acceptance increases loyalty intentions (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021). This study, on the other hand, fills an important gap in the literature in terms of directly addressing the impact of brand respect on brand fidelity as a holistic concept. Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2018) argue that respect, like love, has a significant effect on customer loyalty, while Roberts (2005) argues that customer loyalty cannot be sustained by brand love alone, and that love and therefore loyalty cannot be sustained without the element of respect.

At this point, the unique contribution of this study is that brand love plays a mediator role in the effect of brand respect on brand fidelity. This finding emphasizes the importance of studying the emotional and outcome-oriented dimensions of Lovemark theory as a whole and offers a new perspective to the literature on understanding consumer–brand relationships.

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. 2020b; 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. At this point, while previous studies have examined brand respect and brand love independently of each other, this study develops the Lovemark theory by explaining how love transforms respect into fidelity.

Contributions to Practice

The study addresses brand experiences for consumers and the emotional aspects of these experiences from a relational perspective and offers valuable implications for automotive industry stakeholders. A key revelation from the research underscores the critical roles of brand love and brand respect in cultivating brand fidelity. It becomes evident that individuals who harbor respect toward 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 toward automotive brands are more likely to subsequently develop brand love, a sentiment that significantly contributes to the establishment of brand fidelity.

The study argues that companies seeking to cultivate fidel customers should not ignore key emotional elements such as brand love and brand respect. In the automotive sector in particular, it shows that consumers who show respect and love for the brands they encounter tend to forgive the shortcomings of the brands, ignore alternatives and establish cognitive interdependence. For this reason, brands that want consumers to exhibit such behaviors need to create brand respect and then brand love in consumers. Therefore, companies should shape their brand strategies accordingly.

Limitations and Future Research

The study offers a fresh perspective on the emotional attachment individuals develop toward 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 relationships between demographic characteristics and brand experience within the automotive sector. In addition, the study utilized a cross-sectional survey design, which is a limitation for strong causal inferences. In future research, a similar study could be examined with different designs.

Appendix: Survey Instrument Items

Brand Respect (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021).

Brand Trust

(1) The brand is sincere with its consumers.
(2) I have absolute confidence in the quality of the brand.
(3) Purchasing products/services from this brand is a guarantee.
(4) The products/services of this brand make me feel secure.
(5) The brand is honest with its consumers.

Brand Performance

(1) The brand offers good value.
(2) I use this brand as a sign of consistent quality when purchasing a product/service.
(3) The brand fulfills the fundamental functions of the product/service category.
(4) I find this brand durable.

(5) The brand's services are effective (in terms of speed, responsiveness, etc.).

Brand Reputation

(1) This brand is reputable.
(2) This brand is well known.
(3) This brand is among the leading brands in the market.
(4) This brand is easily recognizable.

Brand Acceptance

(1) I feel a sense of belonging by purchasing the same brand as others.
(2) It is important for others to like the brand I purchased.
(3) When my brand leaves a positive impression on others, I feel confident.
(4) I often identify with others by purchasing the brand they buy.

Brand Love (Cho et al. 2015).

(1) I love this brand.
(2) Using this brand is a pure pleasure.
(3) This brand is absolutely fantastic.
(4) Using this brand makes me feel good.
(5) This brand is exceptional.

Brand Fidelity (Grace et al. 2018).

Performance Forgiveness

(1) If the brand of the car I use had some issues and temporarily fell short, I would still continue to use this brand.
(2) If the brand of the car I use had some issues and temporarily fell short, I would still recommend this brand to others.
(3) If the brand of the car I use had some issues and temporarily fell short, I would support the brand while others complain.
(4) If the brand of the car I use had some issues and temporarily fell short, I would make excuses for the brand.

Price Forgiveness

(1) The increase in prices of the brand of the car I use does not bother me because I will always use this brand.
(2) Regardless of the price of the brand of the car I use, I will always strongly recommend this brand to others.
(3) When the brand of the car I use increases its prices, it has been well justified.
(4) Even if the prices of the brand of the car I use go up, it is worth the money.

Cognitive Interdependence

(1) I consider the brand of the car I use as "my brand."
(2) I feel a strong connection between the brand of the car I use and myself.
(3) If the brand of the car I use didn't exist, I would be lost.
(4) The brand of the car I use says something about me.
(5) The brand of the car I use is a significant part of my life.
(6) If someone speaks ill of the brand of the car I use, I feel shattered.

Derogation of Alternatives

(1) There is truly no brand like the brand of the car I use.
(2) If asked, I would immediately say how superior the brand of the car I use is compared to its competitors.
(3) The brand of the car I use is the only example of its kind, and it has no competitors.
(4) Another brand competing with the brand of the car I use is not possible.
(5) If I couldn't buy the brand of the car I use anymore, I would be devastated because nothing else comes close to it.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declare no competing interest.

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