



Cynical Brand Distance: Is it a response or not?

Its Relationship with Social Distance, Brand Congruency and Brand Switch

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Abstract

Aim: The present article examines the brand-contextual effects of the recent pandemic in the form of cynical brand distance conceptualization. The study aims to determine whether the consumers' perception of social distance and brand congruency perceptions affects the cynical brand distance and then brand shift perception.

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Methods: The research was carried out in the form of a web survey on social media on 298 consumers and analysis was done with PLS algorithm with SmartPLS software.

Results: It is found that a positive relationship between brand congruency and cynical brand distance. A positive association between social distance and cynical brand distance is determined. It was also positive effect of cynical brand distance on brand switch.

Conclusion: They are considering that the impact of the social distance comes from pandemic on the consumer's preferences, especially on their attitudes towards brands, it has been considered that the consumer may create a subjective or general negative attitude or distance to the brand or brands. Especially because it triggers brand cynicism, the validity of the brand distance scale based on brand cynicism, again, its relationship with social distance, and brand switch concepts were examined. Brand cynicism items created in the form of netnography were handled as brand distance and an item pool was created.

Keywords: Social Distance, Segment Shift, Pandemic, Brand Distance

Introduction

Consumers' negative attitudes towards brands that affect social desirability or social integration of the brand can be more towards a single brand (Dessart et al., 2016) and it can be based on micro or macro causality (Romani et al., 2015) and even a perception process may arise that brands are not what they appear to be (Guèvremont, 2019) or brand aversion in context (Lee et al., 2009). In addition to singular brand attitudes, brand attitudes may develop, and consumer opposition may develop in response to a general stance with an anti-consumption context (Chatzidakis et.al, 2012). It may be in the transformation of resisting being a brand society or not defining oneself with the brand (Lam et al., 2012). As a result, they can stand against brands that may also have an ideological reflection. Some factors can create reasons and environments that may negatively affect the importance level of consumers towards brands. The concept of anti-consumption, anti-capitalism, and anti-branding has been made and it has been stated that reflexive consumers interact with brands in the context of identity creation and will not define anti-branding in this context. It can be deduced that the phenomenon of anti-branding is not seen as an identity tool and

does not overlap with itself. Thus, resistance can be seen in consumers within an ideological framework (Cherrier, 2009).

Brands act as a social identity tool in terms of adaptation to the consumers' selves and work as a tool of the identification process of consumers (Wolter et al., 2016). From this point of view, it is necessary to separate the consumers' anti-consumption stance and their attitudes towards the brands they consume. There are conceptualizations like Brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009; Liao et al., 2015), Brand rejection (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009; Nenycz-Thiel and Romaniuk, 2011), Brand dislike (Dalli et al., 2007), Anti-loyalty (Rindell et al., 2014), Negative emotions toward brands (Romani et al., 2012), brand Attachment-aversion model (Park et al. 2013), Brand Hate (Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016), Bad relation with brands (Fournier and Alvarez, 2013), Negative emotion to brands (Romani et al., 2009), Brandlessness (Lee et al., 2012), Brand attachment-anti-brand reactions (Thomson et al., 2012), Consumer Embarrassment Tendency (Walsh et al., 2016). However, Anti-consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Cromie and Ewing, 2009; Hogg, 1998; Iyer and Muncy, 2009), Boycott (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009), Anti-branding (Dessart et al., 2016; Romani et al., 2015), Brand opposition (Wolter et al., 2016), Consumer resistance (Cherrier, 2009), Consumer rebellion (Austin et al., 2005), anti-consumption and materialism (Lee and Ahn, 2016), Corporate distrust (Adams et al., 2010), Consumer Cynicism (Helm et al., 2015), Cynicism and scepticism (Helm, 2004) are the conceptualizations that express a negative attitude towards consumer culture or firms in general.

Actually, there is a cognitive and emotional distance between consumers and brands and it has an effect on brand attitudes of consumers. Some individual or societal factors may determine and feed this attitude and create a perception for brands. It can be assumed that the perception of social distance / physical distance in question reveals the concepts of brand cynicism and brand distance, and these phenomena become clear. An important reflection of the purchasing behavior of consumers is attitudes towards brands. Considering that consumers' social stances can also be analyzed in terms of brand interaction; It seems possible to have an attitude towards brands. While consumers may generally have attitudes towards the consumption algorithm, they also have positive and negative attitudes towards the brands they use. In this context, the basic equation is that consumers generally have a structure that depends on consumption opposition and a positive polarity that depends on consumption attitudes. Social distance is one of the most focused

measures introduced in the context of Covid 19 (Williamson et al., 2020). However, one of the primary motives of people is to belong and stay in touch (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). People have to come up with highly creative solutions to this problem, using guaranteeing and virtual interaction and communication (Murphy et.al, 2019), which means spending the quarantine period with their families or friends Telepresence in digital technologies reduces the perception of social distance as a form of psychological distance (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Social distance perception was examined as an essential substructure in terms of CLT theory. Basically, distance, in the context of social distance, is stated that consumers' perceptions of power trigger or increase social distance (Liberman et al., 2007). The negative-positive qualities of the events/objects that form the core of the concept will naturally affect the distance drawn (Von Boven et al., 2010). At this point, it should be noted that the consumer's pandemic process can affect the attitudes of consumers towards brands directly or indirectly. Therefore, considering that consumers with high correlation with the brand have lower construal levels and those with low connectivity have higher construal levels (Kim and Song, 2019), consumers' perceptions of social distance affect the interaction with the brand (Mantovani et al., 2017).

Negative attitudes of consumers towards brands also will trigger switch behavior as a behavior. In this sense, understanding consumer behavior changes and adaptation is the most important aspect of surviving in a constantly changing environment (Kim et al., 2005). As segmentation criteria (1) geographic; (2) demographic; (3) psychographic; (4) behavioral; and (5) benefits sought might be classified. There is a relationship between segmentation and customer profile in terms of data mining (Jansen et.al, 2007). In customer segmentation, perceptual, emotional, and behavioral variables are examined (Ruiz et al., 2004). Customer segmentation is the most important strategic marketing activity that considers the dynamic nature of today's consumer behavior (Noughabi et al., 2015). This structure considers customer dynamics in segmentation analysis with a "dynamic customer segmentation" perspective. This perspective is based on consumer wants and needs change and creates segment instability (Kim et al., 2005; Chong and Chen, 2010). The main goal of a business in the marketing context is to win and retain new customers. After a certain period of time, due to certain reasons, the customer group will either exit the system, turn to other company products or switch within the company's product group. At this point; It is necessary to protect a qualitative segment profile beyond the numerical protection

of the company's product/brand customers. Segment profile transformation is experienced as a process that needs to be managed. At this point, the concept of customer escape is in question. Customer switch focuses on the customer leaving the current product/brand by turning to another product or brand. In this context, the focus of the present article is to find main relationship brand distance, customer switch intention, brand congruency and social distance perspective. Below, first, the theoretical conceptualization is made, and then the results and findings of the field research are discussed.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Distance and Cynical Brand Distance

Construal level theory (CLT) refers to how individuals decide about an object or event over the psychological distance (Trope and Liberman 2003, 2010). Psychological distance is subjective between the target and the perceiver and has four main types; temporal, spatial, social, and probable (Liberman and Förster, 2009). The concrete quality of consumers closer to social distance as a basic approach (Frechette et al., 2020) will increase the brand's abstract quality as the social distance increases. Consumers' getting closer to the current and future products affects their divergence (Dhar and Kim, 2007) and affects the preference in consumers' mindfulness of brands and products and their mental placement (Lynch and Zauberman, 2007). On the other hand, targeting the product/brand in the context of features-suitability is another special issue in temporal distance (Freitas et al., 2008), which is essential for the consumer's mental-distance conceptualization of what the brand should be. Consumer behavior has drastically changed due to existing social distance measures (Chauhan and Shah, 2020).

It is more important how and to what extent the construal level theory conceptualizes goals and the opposite object / event (discussed as a brand in this article) as a goal (Trope and Liberman, 2010). There are conceptualizations that what is mentally transferred to the consumer is not interrupted by the consumer (Hernandez et al., 2015). In this respect, as the social or physical distance increases, the decrease of consumers' connection with the brand will create interruption, and this will generate brand distance. The person makes a comparison between himself and the person he/she interacts with and others in terms of distance and performs the positioning of social distance (Bar-Anan et al., 2006) with processing (Yan et al., 2016). From here, the brand used by the consumer will naturally use the abstraction-concrete pole among other brands. Therefore,

consumers' brands in the context of construal level distance are effective in mental evaluation-preference decisions (Kardes et al., 2006). Because social distance is also effective in the contextual affective distance (Friedler, 2008). Brand distance is also in this sense, as it follows a path depending on how much importance it gives to the object or event (Tangari et al., 2015) and abstraction refers to the main structure and meta-meaning of the subject and ignores sub-elements (Lieberman et al., 2002) can be treated as an abstraction.

According to Feather (2020), two switches will be observed in the social distance and consumer behavior. These; there will be channel and product switching. Channel switching is rarer and will occur in switch to delivery and click n collect with shopping from online channels. Product switches will be in the form of testing new brands and cheaper alternatives. Shopping habits will be shaped into four necessary forms. These are the form of shopping where the essential shopping is made as much as possible where the demand decreases, the way online channels are basically used in parallel with the remote work where the demand changes, the way of shopping where the demand increases because the stock is made and consumed. It is the form of hoarding where the demand does not change. According to Tan et al. (2020), the requirements of covid 19 regarding social distance will dominate the evolution of e-commerce in shopping channels. Evans (2020) similarly emphasizes e-commerce and draws attention to contactless payment systems. Thus, the absence of intermediaries increases profitability, more targeted customer data is obtained, a structure where personalization is more dominant and more control over profit (Thompson, 2020).

Major changes in consumer behavior caused by COVID-19 with stay-at-home calls, panic buying, home-cooked food, and hoarding is the evolution of online purchasing, with bans on tourism and travel (Grover et al., 2020). Measures related to Covid 19, especially the emphasis on social distance, will be healthier, interested, thrifty, higher awareness, less active but more productive of the new consumer (Biswas et al., 2020). Cynicism can be actively manifested in an introvert or outward direction in the context of objecting to the existence of a hegemonic structure against brands (Bertilson, 2015). There is a system of creating a consumer identity based on an individual and social representation of consumption (Totaro and Marinho, 2017). However, when considered based on consumption culture, cynicism symbolizes a counter-stance led by a more naive and sufficient consumption and a mode of consumption that has gone to extremes (Lee et al., 2016). At this point, cynicism works as a consumer response to generate distrust towards

companies (Adams et al., 2010). In terms of the brand, it is an internal dynamics of the consumer attributing a meaning to the brand and creates avoidance, aversion, and abandonment (Hogg et al., 2009; Østergaard et al., 2015).

In the conceptualization of consumer cynicism, it works as a part of an active resistance phenomenon and "putting distance" (Chylinski and Chu, 2010). On the other hand, consumer cynicism is based on the basis that businesses consider their interests. Helm et al. (2015). Cynicism works as a phenomenon with the concept of anti. Anti-consumption focuses on the individual or social perception of consumption as an element of pressure and threat (Portwood-Stacer, 2012). Consumers should actively consider a resistance or anti-consumption stance (Pentina and Amos, 2011) in this context. This structuring lays the groundwork for consumers to act activism against certain brands (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Consumer resistance conceptualization towards market structure is evaluated whether it is a radical-reformist in the individual-collective context (Penaloza and price 1993). Consumers' anti-consumption attitudes can reach the level of exceeding social norms in action (Amine and Gicquel, 2011).

The concept of consumer resistance includes an area of study, firm behavior and market; As a result of the individual's cognitive and emotional evaluation of the situations, a counteraction and thought system develops (Roux, 2007). As stated above, a structural or individual opposing stance of consumers also emerges as a rebellion in the form of "cynicism"; This effect of cynicism is examined in the context of items such as sneaky and generating cynical suspicion (Austin et al., 2005). The consumer's perception of hegemonic pressure against brands refers to an imbalance of power (Cromie and Ewing, 2009). Cynicism is also used in negative attitudes towards brands. For example, consumer cynicism in terms of "moral avoidance" comes among the reasons for the concept of Brand avoidance (Lee et a., 2009). Brand avoidance is theorized as not turning towards the brand and adopting a negative attitude due to the damages in the individual, social and ideological harmony. However, consumers can focus on the brand (Kavaliauske and Simanaviciute, 2015).

Consumers see brands as a threat to society and themselves. In a sense, a threat has a negative effect on existing existence (Simberloff, 2003) and this threat can turn into animosity (Fescbach 1994). The concept of threat is a theory that can explain the xenophobic attitude and works with bias (Yakusho, 2009). Brands can be seen as a foreign phenomenon in the life or mental

opening of the consumer. Here, this reaction or resistance to brands can turn into a threat perception. Threat theory can be classified as realistic, symbolic, and intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping; While realistic threats are concrete structures that go over their effect on the entity, symbolic threats are abstract in values and beliefs (Stephan et al., 2000). Since the perception of threat creates successors such as conflict, identification with its group (Stephan et al., 1999), brands may manifest as consumers not identifying with brands and entering into conflict with them. Threat perception may occur individually or as a group (Pettigrew, 2008), as well as preventing the expansion of the social space of the person or the loss of the existing structure (Burns et al., 2008), further disrupting cohesion (Lewin, Epstein and Levanon 2005). When analyzed in segregation, assimilation, exclusion or integration structures, it can be determined that brand cynicism is closer to exclusion (Florack et. al, 1992). These threat perceptions are among the group anxiety, fear, and anger etc. it creates emotions and eventually appear as intergroup behaviors and outgroup attitudes (Riek et al., 2006). Consumers make a match between themselves and brands by looking at the level of congruence (Wijnands and Gill, 2020). When the decrease in the congruence level of the person is considered in terms of the conceptualization that she can turn into a socially cynical structure (Byza et al., 2017), the weakness of the congruence that the consumers will experience with the brand may increase the brand cynicism. In this light, there are evaluations regarding implicit (Priluck and Till, 2010) and self-object relationship regarding brand perceptions on implicit evaluations and attitude (Perkins and Forehand, 2006). It is possible to predict consumers' behavior / preferences through implicit and explicit attitudes (Maison et al., 2004). Implicit attitudes are considered sufficient to demonstrate automatic behavior (Maison et al., 2004). The coercion of time in consumers' purchasing processes strengthens the influence of implicit attitudes (Friese et al., 2006). It successfully develops and influences the communication strategies and implicit attitudes established by companies (Madhavaram and Appan, 2010; Horcajo et al., 2010). Implicit measurements represent a structure placed from the customer's cognitive structure and emerge when connected (Dimofte, 2010). On the other hand, implicit tests are organized to reveal their counterpart in the mind (Yang et al., 2006) and express an indirect or implicit system (Gawronski et al., 2007). Explicit attitudes can be expressed as self-reported behavior, liking, and beliefs (Maison et al., 2001). In the light of the explanations, the scale development process developed based on the following theoretical background is included. The fundamental opposition to the existence of brands can be expressed in an implicit-explicit way in

the consumer. Cynical brand distance can be analyzed with value-based perspective. Anti-materialism is vital for design the cynical brand distance. While anti-materialism avoids the drive of ownership, anti-consumption emphasizes the causality of consumption; It is stated that the society is harmed, the inability to reach a simpler lifestyle, and the consumer has a negative impact on well-being as a suppression factor (Lee and Ahn, 2016). When working as a personal value, personal values constitute an important subject of study as they affect consumer behavior and provide powerful explanations for consumer behavior (Shrum and McCarty, 1997). Forsyth (1980) evaluates idealism to minimize negative consequences, especially for others, and maximizing gains. Idealism is inherently the perspective of placing society's welfare above individual interests (Tsai and Shih, 2005). From this perspective, individuals with high idealism believe that the desired results will be achieved as long as they are realized correctly (Mathur 2001). Individualist western societies are less idealistic than eastern cultures (Karande et al., 2002). Idealism is defined as post materialism as an application of modern societies (Benedikter, 2002). At this point, Holt (1995) emphasizes the value attributed to experience and people more than they support roles. There is an interest in spiritual elements (Uebersax, 2013). Materialism's phenomenon focuses on the role that commodity possessions play for happiness (Lee et al., 2014) and prioritizes physical comfort over spiritual values (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). As people get older, they become more materialistic (Benedikter, 2002). Idealism and materialism provide two different interpretations of the same question or two opposing explanation approaches to each question (Mohsin, 2014). Materialists give causal priority to technical and economic forces. On the other hand, idealists prioritize influence with human factors such as power, language, desire, norms (Adler and Borys, 1993). Idealism and materialism can inherently be made sense of the relationship between having and being (Shankar and Fitchett, 2002). It can be thought that the increase in materialist attitude has increased both consumer and brand cynicism as a pressure factor.

Social Distance and Consumer Switch Intention

It is stated that two basic concepts trigger this decision, considering that different factors affect the customer's escape-decision. These are situational and influential elements. Situational triggers tend more towards the customer's value structure, while the other includes the content of the competition and a reactive structure (Roos et al., 2004). Therefore, the process includes a choice,

one of the essential elements for segmentation (Auty, 1992). The customer's choice factor has an important place in customer behavior. In this context, it is necessary to construct a mindset for customer acquisition, development, and protection processes (Kamakura et al., 2005). The fact that the selection process is discrete and continuous in the context of demand affects the process (Haneman, 1984). The preference density of the customer appears as another factor (Fudenberg and Tirole, 2000). The customer runs a choice system in the form of utility maximization while switching to another brand/product (Givon, 1984). Therefore, firms think that protecting the customers they bring to the firm in a competitive environment defines a less costly process than gaining new ones (Heskett, 1990). This system of thinking brings up the phenomenon of customer satisfaction, which focuses more on the "expectation threshold" paradigm developed for customers' expectations from the company and the product (Spreng et.al, 1995), and this is true with the direction of customer loyalty. It can work proportionally (Richards, 1998). Although it prevents the customer from escaping or is a strong predictor of repurchase probability, the situation may not always work linearly (Dube et al., 1994). Therefore, the loyalty of the customer who is loyal to the company, and the product is an integral function of the switch concept with the satisfaction level (Fornell, 1994). This simple network of relationships follows the motto of leaving the company/dissatisfaction during the exit process, evaluating the alternatives, becoming aware, and abandoning (Stewart, 1998). This is why companies need to focus their main marketing aspects on maintaining the number of customers as the first and priority business (Weiser, 1995). The fact that customers leave the company or enter the product/service of another firm indicates a relationship in the way that attitude change changes behavior (Schultz and Oskamp, 1996). To develop customer segmentation analysis and marketing strategy, it is necessary to consider the dynamic nature of consumer behavior (Chen et al., 2005; Chong and Chen, 2010; Song et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2000; Böttcher et al., 2009; Ha and Bae, 2006; Ha, 2007). Dynamic customer segmentation was introduced to evaluate the dynamic nature of customer behavior in segmentation analysis. There are two main areas of work for dynamic customer segmentation. These are "tracking customer shifts between segments" and "mining segment changes." Like mining segment change, the segment can be called segment structural change (Blocker and Flint, 2007). Businesses need to define customer segments and examine the changes in segments over time (Wang and Lei, 2010). It can emerge, disappear, merge, contract, or grow (Böttcher et al., 2009). The most promising area of research concerns modeling the complex nature of structural segment changes.

There is an emphasis on that these behavioral traits are a precursor to ensuring customer loyalty (Stum and Thiry, 1991). This situation inevitably brings the firm's behavior model towards the customer and its associated profile (Chung-Hoon and Young-Gul, 2003; Day and Van den Bulte, 2002). In other words, it tends to a preference feature point and makes it a preference area.

Preference is a vital classification element in segmentation (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2002; Koo et al., 1999). This process is called a discrepancy of preference (Tripsas, 2008). The importance of segments is included in the organization of companies' CRM strategy (Rigby et al., 2002). It is stated that segments should be structured within the framework of customer needs and purchasing models (Berger et al., 2002). These segments form the basis for customer profitability (Reinartz et al. 2005). Within the framework of modeling, it is seen that there may be variation between segments, especially in terms of satisfaction and performance (Herrman et al., 2002). At the same time, customer loss analysis is also considered on a segment basis (Jamal and Bucklin, 2006). Segments can be subjected to a created value-based classification (Floh et al., 2004). Segment or customer profile management is of vital importance here. In segment management, establishing an emotional connection with the consumer requires focusing on the hidden patterns of consumers and monitoring the reactions of consumers to the products in the context of what they do. Therefore, it has a structure that works in conjunction with market dynamics and requires revision when necessary (Yankelovich and Meer, 2006). Changes that occur depending on customer behaviors become important in segment management within the scope of customer profile change. It is possible to examine the customer profile's change models under three or four main headings (Song et al., 2001; Mu-Chen et al., 2005); emerging, added, perished an unexpected changes.

Generally, decision trees are used to identify the variation between two data sets, and a rule agreement is looked at (Kim et al., 2005), and numerical weights are significant (Song et al., 2001). However, structural changes are not looked at, from coffee consumption to tea consumption (Kim et al., 2005). In the segment shift, we are trying to conceptualize, there are structural transformations with numerical density and even beyond. In addition, in the approaches examined numerically, there are temporary changes (Böttcher et al., 2009). Mainly considered as an element of CRM processes, customer segment management is part of a decision system that matures based on customer segments entering a classification over time and then shifts in time (Akhondzadeh-Noughabi and Albadvi, 2015) and classification as segmentation models, establishing

relationships, combining, clustering practices are implemented (Chen et al., 2007). It is seen that customer-firm interactions are handled passively-intermittently-actively in the relational platform (Netzer et al., 2008). When these are considered data, it is seen that the transition between segments of the customer individually appears (Ha, 2007). In the context of CRM, the customer profile (socio-demographics) for LTV is structured as an antecedent (Hwang et al., 2004), and these socio-economic variables are a segment determining factor (Teichert et al., 2008). Customer segmentation is a revenue-related concept from a long-term perspective (Jonker et al., 2004).

Segment shift refers to the concept of customer switching. When examining the models constructed in the conceptualization of escape, In addition to the effect of factors such as product complexity (Burnham et al., 2003), presented to the customer (Chang and Chen, 2007; Loker and Perdue, 1992), affective commitment (N'Goala, 2007; Bansal et al., 2004), problems experienced (Wieringa and Verhoef, 2007), communication structure living with the product (Lopez et al., 2006), demographics (Shin and Kim, 2008), lack of alternative (Han et al., 2011) habit are important factors in terms of staying in the company (Woisetschläger et al., 2011). The main antecedents of customer flight are price, quality, value, trust, commitment, alternatives, social impacts, escape costs, previous flight behavior, and tendency to seek variety (Ranaweera et al., 2005). In segment change, it is seen that some studies have been analyzed according to socio-demographic (Lees and Winchester, 2014), geographical (Rindfleisch, 2003), and attitude (Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2001) changes, on the other hand, a relationship is also established between the dynamic behavior change of the customer and CLV (Lemon and Mark, 2006), which is related to the customer churn referring to the length of time the customer remains in the company (Neslin et al., 2006).

In addition, suggestions are made that the customer engagement structure will increase the efficiency in the management of segment management (Van Doorn et al., 2010). In this context, it is included as a stability factor in segment management (Balasubramanian et.al, 1998). However, it should not be forgotten that the customer staying in the segment is also a concept related to the length of the customer interaction in staying with the product/brand (Thomas, 2001). Noughabi et al. (2015) drew attention to a consumer group that determines consumer dynamics in segmentation analysis and defined this group as "structure breakers". The main feature of the group is that its changing behavior causes structural changes. These customers cause segments' instability. The

structure conceptualized in the context of segment instability refers to the customer's mobility and, in a sense, focuses on the customer-based change of segments (Blocker and Flint, 2007). In other words, it is customer shift management. It is possible to define the relationship that the customer establishes with the company, product, brand, based on the interaction, the customer profile of a brand, product or company that has been marketing activities in a certain period of time, again transforming into a different profile after a specific time. The segment that businesses construct over time may consciously / unconsciously (willingly or unintentionally) transform. The basic logic of the concept is that the profile that uses the company's product/brand is destroyed, evolved, and altered. The effect of this situation can be positive/negative on the company. The dangerous is the unconscious- the involuntary

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Purpose

The study aims to determine whether the consumers' perception of physical/social distance during pandemic periods affects the cynical brand distance and the segment shift trend through this.

2.2. Sampling and Survey

The research was carried out in the form of a web survey on social media on 298 consumers. The survey form of the research consists of two main groups. The first group of questions is about the demographic structure of the participants. The second group includes the scales used. Scales include questions expressing Covid19 fear, Brand distance, physical distance, and switch tendency. The important point here is that physical distance, cynic brand distance, and switch trend scales are used for the first time in this article since the subject is new. First of all, the cynical brand distance items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. A four-factor structure was obtained. However, each factor was considered as an independent composite variable. The main reason for this is the existence of different and independent reflections of the cynical brand distance. In other words, an uncorrelated first order contextual perspective was evaluated.

2.3. Scales

The research basically uses four basic structures and six scales expressing them. The first is Covid19 attitudes / perception; the second is the perception of physical distance, the third is brand distance, which is the center of the study, and the fourth is consumers segment shift intention. All

the measurement items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale that was anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree to express the degree of agreement. All scales items can be seen at below.

a) Social Distance Scale

Social distance perception is expressed as two separate questions with one item considering that it may have positive and negative reflections on consumers. Questions from adapted from Popovic et al. (2003) and Dabbs(1971). Items are seen below.

1. The pandemic process made me understand life better
2. Physical distancing helped me return to myself.

b) Brand Switch Scale

Considered in the context of anti-loyalty as a segment shift trend, insisting on switching to other brands and insisting on replacement, Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Adapted and / or the opposite expressions of the items in the scales developed by Bloemer et al., 1999 and Spears and Singh, 2004 were preferred. First statement Adapted from Delgado-Ballester et al. 2003 is taken as the opposite of the issue of loyalty. The second statement Adapted from Bloemer et al., 1999. The third statement, Spears and Singh, 2004) has been adapted as the answer to the question of the extent of definitely and probably not taking. Brand switch statements are shown below.

1. I have a high probability of changing the brands I use.
2. I will probably switch to other brands.
3. I will insist not changing the brands I use

c) Brand Congruency Scale

Similarly, three expressions were preferred if the consumer's harmony with the brand is mainly influenced by lifestyle (together with income) and the perceptions of other customers who use the brands they use. The first two statements focus on adaptation towards lifestyle. These statements are adapted from Del Rio et al., 2001. The third statement was added by the authors in the context of the impact of interaction between customers that used same brand.

1. I think the brands I use don't appeal to me anymore
2. I think the brands I use do not perceive me correctly.

3. It is now very difficult for the brands I use to win and protect me.

d) Cynical Brand Distance Scale

The elements of the brand distance scale, which is at the center of the study, include the use of the classical scale development process and the determination of the elements and their direct analysis. The process of determining the cynical brand distance items is explained below. The item development process is used as the equivalent of a reductionist approach in some sources. In a sense, the general structure of the content is determined, and then the relevant items are reduced by various methods in line with the target and purpose. Among these methods, literature review, determining the items by interviewing subject experts when necessary, and approaching the subject with content analysis can be specified. Later, the most important of these items are selected and analyzed (Holt et al., 2007). When evaluating the number of items, the detail of the subject has not been covered before, and the researcher's expertise is important. The researcher's primary goal is to try to describe the scale related to the subject of interest with as few items as possible. Therefore, having a certain number of items in terms of understanding and interpretation will provide a better evaluation of the subject. While 26 items (Walsh et al., 2007) or 30 items (Eastman et al., 1999) are examined in some sources, they are reduced to 63 items (Tsai et al., 2010) in some sources.

As mentioned above, expert panels are also used in the reduction of content. These panels reduce the content according to their own views in terms of repetition of the contents of the content and their suitability to the structure (Vandala et al., 2010). Experts on the subject are asked to evaluate not only the relevant concepts or items, but also the readability and general appearance of the items in the item pool, and in a sense, these people subject the items to a pre-evaluation (Chaudhuri et al., 2011). Therefore, with item identification, reduction of items, and content validity can be accomplished simultaneously. The preliminary pool items determined by the researcher should be critically reviewed and refined if necessary, and similar ones should also be removed and avoided (Latner et al., 2014). Especially in experts' evaluations, it is examined that the relevant item on a particular Scale is unrelated, it needs revision or can be used with minor regulations, and ultimately, it is an Item that fully represents the subject (Kwon et al., 2013). As another method, evaluating items through individual interviews also brings a higher validity to the agenda (Rat et al., 2007).

The study involved textual discourse analysis with recourse to netnography methodology, which examines online communities' communication acts and discourse (Kozinets, 2002). The netnographical-based discourse method was employed in this study as a qualitative analysis. It was thought that the data obtained from online platforms without the research strain and allowing people to express their opinions freely will yield a much more realistic result. By typing, imaging, coding and posting ourselves into being, we can create and recreate ourselves endlessly, liberated from our bodies and the identity markers they carry (Rybas and Gajjala, 2007). A community discourse observation similar to Hemetsberger's (2006) research methodology was conducted, and data taken from the archives were investigated. Discourse analysis as a method relies on the social or collective process, rather than the individual's perceptions (Elliott, 1996), to clarify social design, semantic perspective (Sitz, 2008) and the origin of meaning (Çelik and Eksi, 2008), which is why the netnography method was employed in this study to determine and classify the cynic behavior of the consumers. As mentioned above, this methodology can analyze the daily routines of consumers (Catterall and Maclaran, 2002; Broillet et al., 2008) and is very effective in the determination of consumer behavior (Sandlin, 2007). This study has investigated online communities, social media tools and other news and comments on the internet. The context of the concept were chosen using cynicism and cynic keyword postings. The examination of discourses that are related to the cynicism talks in the websites and blogs lead us to an improved understanding of the discourses related to reality, meaning, social relationship, and identity. The qualitative data analysis involved the application of requisite categorization, abstraction, comparison, and dimensionalization criteria. The posts involved two phases. First, the authors coded the text according to the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), reading the postings several times, moving from the specific to the general, and devising categories. The categories were then clarified by revisiting the data several times, grouping responses into like categories. Then, the themes were audited and suggestions and corrections were provided in the interpretation and writing phases. There was a qualitative assignment of analyzed texts to super-ordinate and subordinate semantic dimensions. The basic dimensions are shown below. In total, the study resulted in 19 dimensions which are presented in direct quotes. Then we have created questions that reflect or match with this items' meaning. Proposed scale items can be seen at below:

Cynical Brand Distance Themes and Items

1. Lack of passion
"I am cold from brands now"
2. Not being sincere
"I realized that I am a more natural person without a brand"
3. Disappointed
"I have no faith in brands"
4. Rejecting brand civilization
"I reject the statements of brands"
5. critical idealism
"I realized a more idealistic life without a brand"
6. Scepticism
"Brands do not tell the truth"
7. Nihilism
"I find brands meaningless"
8. Antagonistic distrust
"I think we should say stand against brands"
9. Seeking happiness beyond the established structure
"I feel happier without brands"
10. Simplicity
"I realized that unbranded life is better"
11. Not needing others' approval
"Brands are just social class enforcement"
12. Strain
"Brands create despair in me"
13. True-self
"I think brands are constraining me"
14. Disbelief
"Now I am more distant from brands"
15. Sarcasm
"I do not take brands seriously anymore"
16. Stripping out of the requirements
"Life without brand is better"
17. Displaying ambition
"I think I disclose myself using branded products"
18. Contempt of humanity
"Brands prevent an idealistic life"
19. Selfish
"Brands take people away from the realities of the world"

The next step includes testing the relationships between structures using the PLS technique of all scales and the SmartPLS software, and essentially conceptualizing and modeling brand distance perception.

3. FINDINGS

Demographics

Considering the demographic information of the participants, 59.4% are women and 40.2% men. The rate of those who are married is 52.4%, and the rate of those who are single is 46.9%. Considering the age distribution, the age of 20 and under is 3.8%; Those between the ages of 21-30 31.5%; Those in the range of 31-40 37.1; The 41-50 age range is 21.3%, the 51-65 age range is 4.9 and the distribution of those over 65 is 1.4%. Considering their educational status, 5.6% of them are secondary education, 49.7% are high school graduates and 44.8% are university graduates. Income distributions are 42.7% of which are 5000 TL and below, 36% between 5001-9999 TL, 21.3% have an income of 10000 TL and above.

Model

The main reason for measuring the model with PLS is the direct estimation of the structures and the direct testing of the methodological power associated with it (Hair et al., 2017). Using the Consistent PLS logic, a verification system was tried to be studied (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015). On the other hand, since predictive validity is based on the relationship with the output variables (Matthews et al., 2010; Singh and Krishnan, 2007), the effects of Physical Distance, Brand Distance and also Brand Switch and Congruency were investigated.

Hypothesis

In the study, three main hypotheses and a total of six hypotheses were developed and tested in the model. The hypotheses are:

H1: Brand congruency has a positive effect on Cynical Brand Distance

H2: Social Distance has a positive effect on cynical brand distance.

H3: Cynical Brand Distance has a positive effect on the brand switch.

Measurement Model

SmartPLS 3.0 software was used (Ringle et al., 2015) to analyze the model developed. Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedures by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this study tested the measurement model and the structural model. The preference of the PLS technique is due to the fact that the relevant model is directly predictive. For this reason, two-step measurement was carried out in testing. The first of these is the measurement model. At this stage, their loads, R^2 , f^2 , discriminant validity, and Cronbach alpha examinations were examined. In the second stage,

structural equation modeling was carried out. At this stage, together with the beta coefficients, the Q^2 , value where the difference from 0 is sought (Chin, 1998) was examined. In the literature, tests such as R^2 , and Q^2 , cross-validation tests for the variable variable and non-parametric tests such as f^2 , that explain the power of the effects are used (Fornell and Cha, 1994). In structural model evaluations, f^2 , (effect size) and Q^2 (estimation ability of the model) criteria are used in basic evaluations (Cohen, 1988; Gim et al., 2015). Basically, if Q^2 , is greater than zero, exogenous variables have predictability for a particular endogenous variable, while Q^2 , is less than zero indicates that it has no prediction ability (Gim et al., 2015). The effect level (f^2 ,) is a value obtained by adding and subtracting models one by one and evaluates how useful a structure is to the model (Ringle et al., 2014). Klesel et al. (2019), instead of analyzing alternative parameters among groups, the area that showed the whole model, proposed two general tests for multi-group comparisons in PLS-SEM (Sarstedt et al., 2011). In the structural model evaluation, the path coefficients (path-coefficients) of the endogenous structures of the model are determined (Sarstedt and Henseler, 2011). The Q^2 test, which is processed as a blindfolding process in the SmartPLS 3.0 version, is a process that reveals results regarding the endogenous variables of the structure and is performed by repeated use of the sample (Hair et al., 2014). An error range of 5-10 is recommended for calculation and values are expected to be greater than 0 (Hair et al., 2014). The Q^2 value used to reveal the predicted value of the model assumes that the model should estimate each endogenous variable appropriately (Sarstedt et al., 2014). The value evaluates how close the model is to what is expected from it / estimation quality (Ringle et al., 2014). Effect size (f^2 ,) is a test used to evaluate the strength or magnitude of the relationship between endogenous variables; it predicts each of the exogenous variables that explain the intrinsic variable in the structural model. These values can be evaluated as low effect size at 0.02, medium level at 0.15 and high effect size at 0.35 (Cohen, 1988). Depending on the f^2 , values, removing any latent variable from the analysis may have a higher / lower effect on revealing the observed variable (Gim et al., 2015). In order to test the significance of the path coefficients and the loadings, a bootstrapping (resampling 5,000) method was used. Reliability was measured with composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach alpha values. Convergent validity has been examined in terms of factor loads of the building materials being .50 and above. Discriminant validity was measured by AVE. Loadings of elements in the measurement model; Internal structure reliability is stated as convergent validity and discriminant validity. The most important factor in using the PLS technique and choosing the Smart PLS

program is to directly test whether the model works with analysis.

Convergent Validity

The 19-item reflective factors indicated convincing evidence of convergent validity with strong and significant factor loadings ($p < .05$), ranging from 0.70 to 0.95, AVEs well above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The first step of testing the research model is the validity and reliability analysis of the structures in the model. Internal consistency, composite reliability, and discriminant validity have been tested. Cronbach alpha and CR values were taken into consideration for internal consistency. In addition, AVE value was examined. The square root of the AVE value is greater than the correlations of the structures. Decomposition validity is proved. Composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values show that measurement tools are reliable. (The values were between .80 and .90). Relevant results can be seen below. The outer factor loadings were positive as expected and change with .617-.921 range.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity involves a comparison, which means that the distance to each other is similar in a sense with similar but structural differences (Tian et al., 2001). Since there is no expression below .50 in factor loadings in the relevant structures (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), item analysis was not excluded. All factor loadings are within acceptable limits. Next, the discriminant analysis used criteria by Fornell-Larcker. The requirement that must be met is the AVE square root value must be greater than the correlation coefficient between constructs. Below, Table 3 shows that all square root values of each construct are greater than the correlation coefficient between constructs. Thus, all requirements have been met with exceeding the .50 value limit. The lowest AVE value is .586 that matches .50 limit advised (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The shared values between the constructs are square correlations. Comparing the loadings across the columns, Table 1 indicates that in all cases an indicator's loadings on its own construct are higher than all of its cross-loadings with other constructs, thus, the results indicate there is discriminant validity between all the constructs.

TABLE 1. Discriminant Validity Result

	Brand Switch	Brand Congruency	Cynical Brand Distance	Social Distance
BrandSwitch	0.918			
Brand Congruency	0.730	0.862		
Cynical Brand Distance	0.633	0.701	0.781	
Social Distance	0.214	0.148	0.286	0.867

Structural Model

We have preferred for the analysis by SmartPLS 3 software to estimate the model parameters. We use path-weighting process with 300 iterations in the PLS-SEM algorithm settings. To assess the structural model, Hair et al. (2017) suggested looking at the R^2 , beta (β) and the corresponding t-values via a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000. They also suggested that in addition to these basic measures researchers should also report the predictive relevance (Q^2) as well as the effect sizes (f^2). In testing the structural model, firstly, if there was no collinearity problem ($VIF < 5.0$), the R^2 , beta and t values and Q^2 and f^2 values of the endogenous structures were examined. Q^2 is measured for prediction accuracy. Factor loads $> .70$; $AVE > .50$ HTMT $< .90$ criteria are in question. $VIF \leq 5$ for the structural model; R^2 minimum 0.25; Q^2 is expected to be higher than zero (Hair et al. , 2019). Bootstrapping used to examine the significance of the loadings and these are reported in Table 1., with significant loadings being demonstrated where $p < .05$ (5% significance level). The SRMR is expected to be less than < 0.08 saturated (Fassot et al., 2016). The SRMR value obtained from the research is within acceptable limits (SRMR = .056).

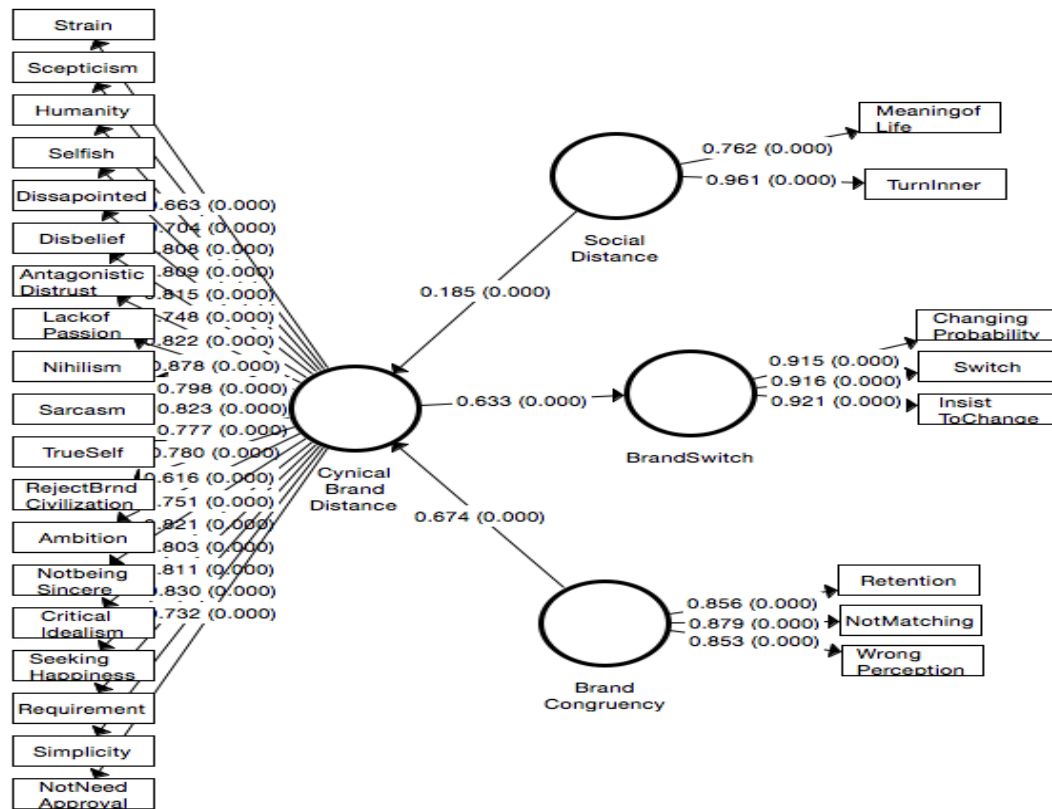


Figure 1. Model Test (SmartPLS Result)

According to Hair et al. (2013), in SEM models, Q2 values bigger than zero for a reflective endogenous construct imply the path model's predictive relevance for a particular construct. By performing blindfolding procedures, all Q2 values are considerably above zero, which supports the model's (Fig.1) predictive relevance for the four endogenous constructs. Both R2 and Q2 mainly focus on the accuracy and relevance of the model (Hair et al., 2014). In addition, the *f*² effect size, which shows the impact of a specific predictor construct on an endogenous latent construct, and the Q² effect size for the predictive relevance are presented in Table 3. The results in Table 4 and Figure 2 provide support for all the six hypotheses. All the three hypotheses were posited to be positive and significant and accepted. H1 posited a positive relationship between brand congruency and cynical brand distance, while H2 hypothesised a positive association between social distance and cynical brand distance. H2 was accepted. H3 was also accepted regarding the positive effect of cynical brand distance on brand switch. The hypotheses testing results obtained using Smart PLS analysis are shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. Support is provided

for all hypotheses with path coefficients (0.674, 0.189, 0.633, respectively) at .000 significant level as shown in Figure 1 and Table 3.

TABLE 2. Research Model Result

	Original Sample (O)	R2	f2	Q2	Hypothesis
Brand Congruency -> Cynical Brand Distance	0.674***	.522	.934	.315	Accepted
Social Distance -> Cynical Brand Distance	0.185***		.007		Accepted
Cynical Brand Distance -> BrandSwitch	0.633***	.398	.667	.327	Accepted
BrandSwitch(Cr.Alp=.907;Com.Rel=.941; AVE=.842); BrandCongruency(Cr.Alp=.828;Com.Rel=.897; AVE=.744); CynicalBrandDistance(Cr.Alp=.964;Com.Rel=.967; AVE=.610); SocialDistance(Cr.Alp=.712;Com.Rel=.855; AVE=.750);					

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present article examines the brand-contextual effects of the recent pandemic in the form of brand distance conceptualization. They are considering that the impact of the social distance comes from pandemic on the consumer's preferences, especially on their attitudes towards brands, it has been considered that the consumer may create a subjective or general negative attitude or distance to the brand or brands. Especially because it triggers brand cynicism, the validity of the brand distance scale based on brand cynicism, again, its relationship with social distance, and brand switch concepts were examined. Brand cynicism items created in the form of netnography were handled as brand distance and an item pool was created.

The study's main difference is to determine the structure of consumer attitudes towards brands in the context of cynicism-brand distance. In this context, the study approaches context from a different point of view compared to other studies in the related literature. It is seen that there is a contrast within the general or brand scope according to the level of personal and social importance of the consumers in the context of anti-consumption (Iyer and Muncy, 2009). From the point of view, idealism can be considered as the integration and harmonization of materialism and anti-materialism (Uebersax, 2013). Especially in the context of opposition, it may appear as an ideological phenomenon that emerges as an element of the oppression of capitalism (Ellis et al. 2018), as well as a sphere of influence that reduces the effect of consumers' perception of justice (Balaji et al., 2018). On the other hand, cynicism is a structure that emphasizes an idealism in the

search for happiness (Forman, 2016) that does not take into account the necessity of "necessity" in a sense (Forman, 2016), and emphasizes worthlessness in the form of apathy (Yamamoto et al., 2017). It is seen that the items that make up the scale are compatible with the relevant theoretical structure.

Social Axiom (Leung et al., 2002) Cynicism (Floberg et al., 2014), cynicism (Turner and Valentine, 2001), Cynicism sub-dimension (Austin et al., 2005; Neiderhoffer, 1967), cynicism scale, sub-dimension cynicism scales (Stanley et al., 2005), consumer cynicism (Helm et al., 2015) are scales used in the context of cynicism in the literature. However, there is no scale as a cynical context brand distance. While establishing a weak or strong bond with brands is expressed as defining-not identifying on the brand, brand cynicism can be built on the line of non-opposition. It is necessary to explain that consumers do not want to create a social identity on brands, but a contrasting system for brands or companies. Cynicism is included as an anomie sub-dimension (Rosenbaum and Kuntze, 2003). The cynicism phenomenon is structurally related to a congruence between two phenomena (Byza et al., 2017). Cynicism, which can be conceptualized with disaffection, acts with premises such as insecurity and rupture, and over time tends to apathy (Yamamoto et al., 2017). Trust is vital to cynicism. Dispositional trust takes a lot of space (Helm, 2004). It also represents a trait of reaching conclusions, chipping ethics, and insecurity as a social axiom (Leung et al., 2002).

In a sense, when examined as a negative attitude towards method and process (Pinkleton and Austin, 2002), it can be thought that the discourse of brands is effective because the perceived importance attributed to the source of the transferred information (Pinkleton and Austin, 2001) affects cynicism. It is seen that the suggestion of a valid scale that is compatible with the cynicism measures existing in the literature but has its own internal dynamics will be a difference in terms of meaning orientation to the brand. In determining the items, it was thought that it would be more effective to base the individual opinions about real life by using netnography method instead of making a reflective measurement using many items and determining the main groups as items. The substances and the brand cynicism structure they create are shaped according to the reflective measurement model. In future studies, it may be suggested to examine existing items through the formative measurement model.

In the study, nomological validity was evaluated with the materialism scale and Discriminant and Convergent Validity with social distance and brand switch concepts. It may be suggested to use different scales in this context in future studies. Being the subject of an intercultural study is considered important in terms of general validity. In terms of managerial contribution of the scale, it can be determining how consumers' cynicism attitudes in brand management should be examined in a perceptual sense, what should be taken into consideration in conveying messages and developing brand perception, and what might be related to social responsibility or cause-related marketing practices, especially in marketing communication.

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