

**THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED QUALITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND PARITY IN DEVELOPING BRAND LOYALTY IN GLOBAL E-COMMERCE SITES<sup>1</sup>**Rabia MANİSA\* Asst. Prof. Sema SARI (Ph.D.)\*\* **ABSTRACT**

*E-commerce has changed shopping habits and increased the competition of businesses while expanding consumers' options. Therefore, e-commerce businesses have begun to actively seek ways to increase brand loyalty in order to survive and differentiate themselves in a highly competitive environment. In this context, this study investigates the role of perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand parity in cultivating brand loyalty within the realm of global e-commerce. In this study, an online survey has been conducted on the customers of Amazon, Global JD (JoyBuy) and Aliexpress e-commerce sites. SPSS 25 program was used for validity, reliability and frequency analysis in the research, and the AMOS 21 software was utilized to assess the structural soundness of the scales and conduct confirmatory factor analysis. The findings suggest that customer satisfaction and brand parity positively affect brand loyalty. In addition, the empirical evidences have revealed a favorable impact of perceived quality on customer satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** E-Commerce, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, Brand Parity, Customer Satisfaction.

**JEL Codes:** D91, E71, M31, L81, M39.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of computers, telecommunications and technology has enabled the development and progress of the Internet. With the development of internet technologies, electronic commerce has also gained momentum (Doğanlar, 2016: 1). Businesses taking advantage of this opportunity have started to integrate their marketing strategies and methods into the digital platforms that made e-commerce a part of lives (Aliji, 2016: 1).

With the transition of commerce to electronic commerce by changing its dimension, the concept of brand has gained importance in electronic commerce (Doğanlar, 2016: 2). Since brands are the

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symbols, shapes, signatures or all other items that define the products and services of manufacturers or sellers to enable them to distinguish from the products and services of their competitors, it is a one of the. Most important concepts for consumers during shopping (Tek, 1999: 356). Furthermore, as the brand reflects a mental process, it distinguishes both the business and the products from other competitors in the eyes of consumers. The brand is the guarantee of a mutual agreement and quality between the company and the customer. A strong brand is recognizable, creates preference and is an element of prestige (Perry and Wisnom, 2004: 12). It also enables consumers to recognize and re-purchase the product and service (Pira et al., 2005: 62).

For the e-commerce companies, the importance of establishing long-term relationships with consumers is increasing day by day. Because of this situation, companies aim to create customer satisfaction. Businesses need to maintain their profitability in order to be successful and maintain their success. The ability of businesses to ensure their profitability continuously depends on customer satisfaction (Odabaşı, 2010: 14). One of the most important factors affecting customer satisfaction is quality. From the consumer's perspective, it can be posited that perceived quality exerts a direct influence on overall satisfaction. In this case, with the increase in perceived quality, customer satisfaction also increases at the same level (Yu et al., 2005).

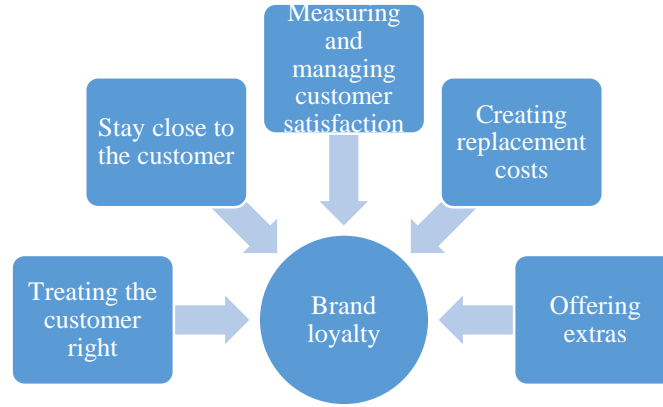
Since there are many e-commerce sites among consumers' alternatives, consumers can easily switch to alternative websites for any reason (Bhatti et al., 2000). Therefore, brand loyalty holds significant importance in the context of e-commerce (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016: 1661).

## **2. BRAND LOYALTY**

Loyalty is defined as always preferring the same product or the same company, increasing the continuity of the buyer (Biçer and Şahin, 2020: 135). Brand loyalty can be defined as the extent to which consumers develop a sense of emotional attachment and affinity towards a specific brand (Aaker, 2015). Conversely, brand loyalty is exemplified by customers engaging in repeat purchases of a particular brand, extending beyond a single transaction to subsequent occasions, and displaying a continuous buying behavior with that brand (Kurutaç, 2019: 22).

Brand loyalty is at the core of the value of brands. Hence, efforts on developing brand loyalty focus on stabilizing the relationship between the consumer and the brand over time (Aaker, 2020: 22). Brand loyalty emerges as an outcome of the cognitive evaluation conducted by consumers regarding the distinctive attributes of a brand (Mellens vd., 1996).

**Figure 1. Creating and Maintaining Brand Loyalty**



**References:** Aaker, 2009: 69

According to Aaker (2009), creating and maintaining brand loyalty includes five main elements that require mutual communication with the consumer. In order to implement such strategy, the education levels of institutions and individuals serving under the auspices of the brand and their consistent communication activities with each other are very important. While elements such as correct behavior and staying close to the consumer are applied by the organizations, on the other hand, the elements of measuring and managing the customer's satisfaction are also observed. Finally, it is aimed to increase and maintain brand loyalty by creating replacement costs for the customer and offering extras to the customer (Coşkun, 2014: 74).

Along with the changing order, shopping habits have gained a different dimension. This situation has caused customers to switch to electronic media (Aliji, 2016). When customers buy products, they first decide which e-commerce site to use. In order to continue using their preferred e-commerce site, consumers should assume that site will provide more benefits than their alternatives (Wen et al., 2014). If consumers cannot benefit from the website sufficiently, they may switch to alternative websites as there are many alternative ones for them (Cao et al., 2005). Therefore, brand loyalty is very important in e-commerce (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

### **3. BRAND PARITY**

Brand owners ensure brand differentiation by implementing strategies that result in a unique brand experience for customers. One of the prerequisites for a unique brand experience is brand differentiation. Current research in brand management shows that brand parity is found in many product categories, despite the intense efforts of brand owners to achieve brand differentiation (Rahman, 2014: 2).

When consumers see a significant resemblance between prominent brand alternatives within a product, they experience perceived brand parity. If consumers find great similarities in a product in the same category, brand parity is accepted high. On the other hand, brand parity is low if consumers find more differences between products in the same category (Iyer and Muncy, 2005: 222).

The investigation conducted by Iyer and Muncy (2005) uncovered that brand parity assumes a moderating function in the connections between brand loyalty and both brand satisfaction and service quality. Conversely, Ilıcalı et al. (2016) discovered, in a recent study, that perceived brand parity, service quality, and brand satisfaction did not show a moderator effect on brand loyalty.

#### **4. PERCEIVED QUALITY**

Perceived quality is consumers' perceptions and feelings towards the brand which are about goals, differences and expectations (Samsunlu and Baş, 2016). Perceived quality depends on the individual's evaluation of product features (Saleem et al., 2015) and is among the most important reasons for purchasing (Samsunlu and Baş, 2016). In terms of online brand communication, perceived quality is the ability of individuals to fulfill their wishes (Brogi et al., 2013). Perceived quality both encourages the consumer to buy a product and imposes its superiority over the overall product (Aaker and Jacobson, 1994).

Perceived quality is consumers' perceptions and feelings towards the brand regarding goals, differences, and expectations from the brand. It shows the value consumers place on the product. For that reason, perceived quality is among the most important reasons for purchasing (Samsunlu and Baş, 2016: 344).

Perceived quality refers to the degree to which the product aligns with consumers' expectations and requirements. The rate of meeting consumer expectations varies among consumers. Yu et al. (2005) concluded that perceived quality directly and positively affects customer satisfaction. In other words, if the perceived quality is in the same direction as the demands of the consumers, customer satisfaction increases (Başanbaş, 2013: 5-6). Hence, the impact of perceived quality on brand loyalty is widely acknowledged in the literature, as demonstrated by the research findings of various studies (Alhaddad, 2015; Biedenbach and Marell, 2009).

#### **5. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

Positive thoughts after the goods and services purchased by people constitute customer satisfaction. While satisfied consumers continue to purchase goods and services, they also share their experiences about businesses with others. Businesses need to pay more and more attention to customer satisfaction in order to reach more customers through word of mouth advertising. In this context, it holds significant importance for businesses to ascertain the desires and preferences of their customers. If the desires and expectations of the consumers are determined correctly, products and services can be offered in line with their expectations. This ensures both customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (Sandıkçı, 2007: 63). According to Bowen and Chen (2001), customer satisfaction brings customer loyalty. Hence customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are closely related with each other (Billi & Özkul, 2015).

When customers are satisfied, customer loyalty emerges. Satisfied customers, on the other hand, purchase more products (Çatı and Koçoğlu, 2008:168). In their study, Chen and Chang (2006) discovered a strong and positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Similar findings were emphasized by Yu et al. (2005), who established a notable correlation between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and service quality.

## **6. METHODOLOGY**

### **6.1. Subject and Purpose of the Research**

E-commerce has garnered significance and undergone growth due to the swift advancements in technology and the widespread adoption of internet usage. With the development of e-commerce, the concept of brand has gained even more importance. Because in e-commerce sites, it is possible for consumers to reach a wider range of products and brands, as well as for businesses to reach a wider consumer base. While businesses gain the advantage of reaching new customers, they also face the risk of losing their existing customers. This situation has revealed the importance of businesses to know their target audience better and to develop strategies for this and to work towards increasing their loyal customers. For this purpose, in this study, the role of perceived quality, customer satisfaction and brand parity at the point of improving consumers' loyalty to the brand has been investigated.

### **6.2. Research Method**

Consumers shopping from Amazon, JoyBuy (JD.com) and Aliexpress sites constitute the population of the research. Cohen et al. (2007: 104) emphasize that if the population size is over 1,000,000, a sample size of 384 participants for a survey is sufficient to understand the target population (Cohen et al., 2007: 104). In this study, 732 people reached through an online survey, and those who did not shop from the relevant e-commerce sites were excluded from the research. Ten questionnaires that were not filled properly were removed from the questionnaires and 395 questionnaires were analyzed as a result.

In order to obtain the data, an online questionnaire was prepared in a 5-point likert format. Questions in the first section of the questionnaire consisted of two sub-parts, 16 statements measuring brand parity, perceived quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and 9 statements consisting of demographic variables and general questions. The three-item customer satisfaction scale used in the research has been adapted from the study of Zerenler and Öğüt (2007), the five-item brand parity scale ( $\alpha= 0.77$ ) has been adapted from the study of Iyer and Muncy (2005), the perceived quality scale ( $\alpha= 0.87$ ) has been adapted Roy et al. (2018) and the brand loyalty scale ( $\alpha= 0.78$ ) has been adapted from the study of Marangoz and Akyıldız (2007).

### 6.3. Research Model and Hypotheses

**Figure 2. Model of the Study**



**H<sub>1</sub>:** Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Brand parity has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Perceived quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand parity.

### 6.4. Research Findings

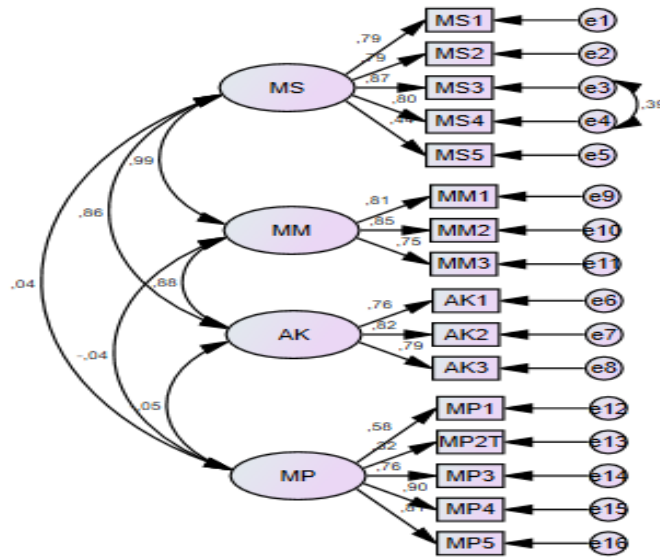
**Table 1. Socio-Demographic Findings Table**

|                           |                     | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>             | Male                | 168       | 42.5    | 42.5               |
|                           | Female              | 227       | 57.5    | 100.0              |
|                           | Total               | 395       | 100.0   |                    |
| <b>Birth Year Range</b>   | 1965-1979           | 41        | 10.4    | 10.4               |
|                           | 1980-1999           | 287       | 72.7    | 83.0               |
|                           | 2000 and Later      | 67        | 17.0    | 100.0              |
|                           | Total               | 395       | 100.0   |                    |
| <b>Educational Status</b> | Primary Education   | 1         | 0.3     | 0.3                |
|                           | Secondary Education | 9         | 2.3     | 43.5               |
|                           | High School         | 73        | 18.5    | 64.6               |
|                           | Bachelor's Degree   | 58        | 14.7    | 83.0               |
|                           | Undergraduate       | 171       | 43.3    | 85.3               |
|                           | Postgraduate        | 83        | 21.0    | 100.0              |
| Total                     | 395                 | 100.0     |         |                    |
| <b>Job</b>                | Unemployed          | 27        | 6.8     | 6.8                |
|                           | Housewife           | 39        | 9.9     | 16.7               |
|                           | Business owner      | 63        | 15.9    | 32.7               |
|                           | Student             | 99        | 25.1    | 57.7               |
|                           | Employee            | 167       | 42.3    | 100.0              |

|       |     |       |
|-------|-----|-------|
| Total | 395 | 100.0 |
|-------|-----|-------|

The socio-demographic findings of the study are presented in Table 1. The table reveals that although the majority of participants are women, a notable portion of the sample comprises individuals born between 1980 and 1999. Furthermore, it is observed that nearly half of the participants possess undergraduate degrees and are employed.

**Figure 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis<sup>2</sup>**



Factors were tested by DFA using the AMOS 21 program. After providing the normal distribution of the data in the SPSS 25 program, the Maximum Likelihood calculation method was used. The model for confirmatory factor analysis is given in Figure 3.

**Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Indices**

|          | Perfect Fit Criterion       | Good Fit Criterion          | Values | References            |
|----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| $X^2/SD$ | 0-3                         | 3-5                         | 3.468  | Meydan ve Şeşen, 2015 |
| RMSEA    | $0.00 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$ | $0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.10$ | 0.079  | Doğan, 2015           |
| CFI      | $0.95 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$   | $0.90 \leq CFI \leq 0.95$   | 0.937  | Akkuş, 2019           |
| GFI      | $0.95 \leq GFI \leq 1.00$   | $0.90 \leq GFI \leq 0.95$   | 0.909  | Waltz vd., 2010       |
| AGFI     | $0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1.00$  | $0.85 \leq AGFI \leq 0.90$  | 0.872  | Çapık, 2014           |

The goodness of fit values obtained for the factor structures as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis are given in Table 2. As a result of confirmatory factor analysis, the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. According to the confirmatory factor analysis results, goodness of fit values ( $X/sd:3.468$ ,  $CFI:0.93$ ,  $RMSEA:0.079$ ,  $GFI:0.90$ ,  $AGFI:0.87$ ) show that the proposed four-factor model is compatible with the data.

**Table 3. Factor Loads Obtained from Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations are defined as “MS: Brand Loyalty, MM: Customer Satisfaction, AK: Perceived Quality, MP: Brand Parity”.

| Factors               | Items | Factor Loads | p Values |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|----------|
| Perceived Quality     | AK1   | 0.757        | -        |
|                       | AK2   | 0.820        | ***      |
|                       | AK3   | 0.875        | ***      |
| Brand Loyalty         | MS1   | 0.794        | -        |
|                       | MS2   | 0.785        | ***      |
|                       | MS3   | 0.867        | ***      |
|                       | MS4   | 0.797        | ***      |
|                       | MS5   | 0.444        | ***      |
| Customer Satisfaction | MM1   | 0.809        | -        |
|                       | MM2   | 0.847        | ***      |
|                       | MM3   | 0.751        | ***      |
| Brand Parity          | MB1   | 0.581        | -        |
|                       | MB2*  | 0.319        | ***      |
|                       | MB3   | 0.756        | ***      |
|                       | MB4   | 0.901        | ***      |
|                       | MB5   | 0.808        | ***      |

\* This item is reverse coded.

Factor loadings for each factor are given in Table 3. As seen in the table, factor loads vary between 0.319 and 0.901. According to Harrington (2009), factor loads should not be below 0.30.

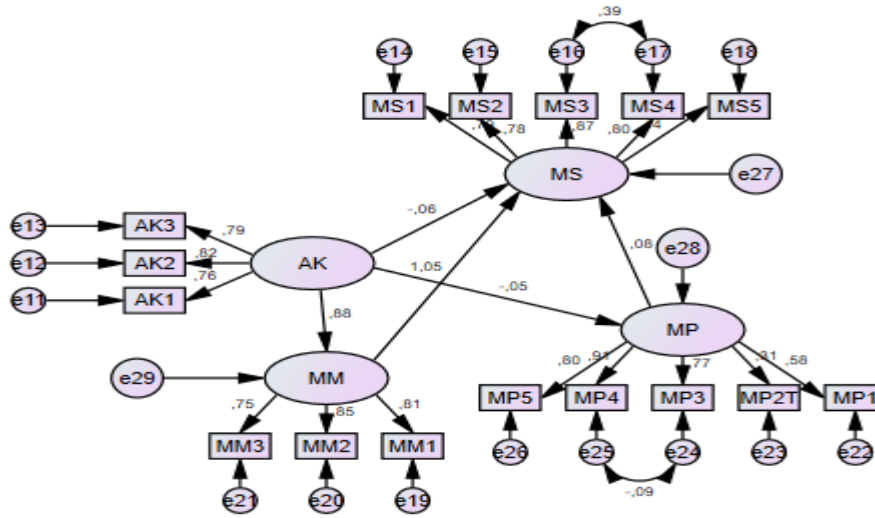
**Table 4. Reliability Analysis**

| Scales                               | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Reliability Coefficient of the Study | 0.827            |
| Perceived Quality                    | 0.830            |
| Brand Loyalty                        | 0.839            |
| Customer Satisfaction                | 0.841            |
| Brand Parity                         | 0.801            |

Cronbach's Alpha values, which were found to be in the range of 0.80 - 1.00 as a result of the reliability analysis, indicate that the study has a high level of reliability (Table 4).



**Figure 4. Path Analysis**



The path analysis model of the study is given in Figure 4.

**Table 5. Path Analysis Results and Fit Indices**

| Effect  | Estimation ( $\beta$ ) | Standard Error | t      | p     | Result       |
|---------|------------------------|----------------|--------|-------|--------------|
| AK → MS | -0.059                 | 0.106          | -0.524 | 0.600 | Not Accepted |
| MM → MS | 1.127                  | 0.134          | 8.389  | ***   | Accepted     |
| MB → MS | 0.079                  | 0.027          | 2.769  | 0.006 | Accepted     |
| AK → MM | 0.880                  | 0.055          | 14.113 | ***   | Accepted     |
| AK → MB | -0.050                 | 0.057          | -0.875 | 0.381 | Not Accepted |

**Fit Indices:**

$\chi^2/df$ :3.465, RMSEA:0.079, GFI:0.909, AGFI:0.872, CFI: 0.937

To evaluate the appropriateness of the established structural equation model, fit indices were employed. Fit indices were obtained as RMSEA: 0.079, CFI: 0.937, GFI: 0.909, AGFI: 0.872, and CMIN/df: 3.465. These results show that the established model is suitable.

In line with these results, it has been determined that customer satisfaction affects brand loyalty ( $\beta= 0.1127, p<0.01$ ), brand parity affects brand loyalty ( $\beta= 0.079, p<0.01$ ) and perceived quality affects customer satisfaction ( $\beta= 0.880, p<0.01$ ) in a meaningful and positive way. On the other hand, it is seen that the effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty ( $\beta= -0.059, p= 0.600$ ) and brand parity ( $\beta= -0.050, p= 0.381$ ) is not significant.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

With the development and spread of e-commerce sites, individuals using these sites have also increased. The increase in consumers' online alternatives has caused businesses to enter into a tough competition. This situation has pushed businesses to maintain their existing customers and gain new customers by increasing their quality and ensuring customer satisfaction. In this context, to establish brand loyalty, it is important to take into account factors like customer satisfaction, perceived quality, and brand parity. This study aimed to examine the interrelationships and impact levels of these elements on brand loyalty among customers of global e-commerce platforms. These four elements were comprehensively elucidated within a unified model framework.

In the study, when perceived quality and brand loyalty are examined by ignoring other factors (customer satisfaction, brand similarity), a significant relationship is detected, but when other variables are included in the model, there is no significant relationship between these two factors. Therefore, the impact forces of other elements may weaken the relationship between these two variables. However, a recent study by Alhaddad (2015) suggested a significant influence of perceived quality on brand loyalty, while Biedenbach and Marell (2009) emphasized that perceived quality serves as the primary antecedent of brand loyalty. Many studies in the literature show that there is a positive relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty. (Akoğlu and Özbek, 2021; Atulkar, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2019; Nguyen et al. 2011).

Numerous studies provide sufficient evidence of the connection between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. As an example, Chen and Chang (2006) discovered a substantial and positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in their empirical investigation. In a similar vein, Yu et al. (2005) concluded that a noteworthy association exists between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and service quality. In the literature, multiple studies have likewise identified a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Başer vd., 2015; Yulisetiorini, 2015; Feng ve Yanru, 2013; Faullant vd., 2008; Marangoz ve Akyıldız, 2007; Yoon ve Uysal, 2005, Szymanski ve Henard, 2001; Coyne, 1989). In this study, a significant and positive relationship was found between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, supporting the literature.

The research conducted by Iyer and Muncy (2005) revealed that perceived high and low brand parity played a moderate role in the associations between brand loyalty and both brand satisfaction and service quality. Conversely, Ilıcalı et al. (2016) found no evidence of a moderate effect of perceived brand parity, service quality, and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty. The findings from the model developed in this study indicated a significant impact of brand parity on brand loyalty, while perceived quality did not show a significant effect on brand parity.

Yu et al. (2005); Tukiran et al. (2020); Othman et al. (2017); Hsu (2006); Park and Kim (2006); Kuo (2003) concluded that perceived quality directly and positively affects customer satisfaction.

Similar findings were obtained in the present study, demonstrating a significant and positive influence of perceived quality on customer satisfaction.

In summary, based on the outcomes of the model, it was established that customer satisfaction and brand parity exert a meaningful and positive influence on brand loyalty, while perceived quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, the analysis indicated that perceived quality does not exert a significant influence on neither brand loyalty nor brand parity.

Within the existing literature, the factors influencing brand loyalty typically encompass elements such as price, satisfaction, promotion, trust, perceived risk, perceived value, image, and perceived quality. Therefore, it is advisable to explore additional factors that could potentially influence these four brand elements in relation to brand loyalty and compare them with the findings obtained in this study. This study was conducted on three different e-commerce sites (Amazon, Joybuy and Aliexpress). Conducting studies on the connections between perceived quality, brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and brand parity in different sectors or on e-commerce platforms would be advantageous for comparing the obtained results.

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