MARKA BAĞLILIĞI OLUŞTURMADA MARKA İMAJININ ETKİSİNİN YAPISAL EŞİTLİK MODELİ İLE ANALİZİ: SPOR MALZEMESİ MARKASI KULLANICILARI ÜZERİNDE BİR ARAŞTIRMA*

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ÖZET

Markaların, müşterileri ile uzun dönemli ilişkiler kurabilme ve bu ilişkileri sürdürebilme kapsamında en önemli ilişkisel pazarlama öğeleri arasında, marka imajı ve marka bağlılığı yer almaktadır. Markalar, tüketicilerin zihninde yer alan olumlu algıları ile marka imajlarını geliştirmektedirler. Ayrıca, uzun dönemli ilişkiler kurabilmek amacıyla da hem duygusal yönden hem de davranışsal yönden sadık müşteriler elde etmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Bu doğrultuda çalışmanın amacı; ilişkisel pazarlama unsurları içerisinde çok önemli bir yere sahip olan marka imajının, algılanan değer, markaya güven ve marka tatmini değişkenleri aracılığıyla, marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli (YEM) aracılığıyla marka imajının marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisini tespit etmek amacıyla kavramsal bir model oluşturulmuştur. Bu amaç ve model doğrultusunda araştırma, kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle anket aracılığıyla Konya ilinde toplanan veriler kapsamında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma neticesinde; marka imajının, algılanan değer ve markaya güven üzerinde; markaya güvenin de marka tatmini üzerinde, tatminin de marka bağlılığı üzerinde pozitif yönde anlamlı etkileri olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, marka imajının, algılanan değer ve markaya güven üzerinde; güvenin de marka tatmini üzerinde; tatminin de marka bağlılığı üzerinde doğrudan etkileri bulunmaktadır hipotezleri desteklenmiştir. Ayrıca, algılanan değerin marka tatmini üzerinde anlamlı bir etkiye sahip olmadığı yönünde bulgulara da ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka İmajı, Algılanan Değer, Güven, Tatmin, Marka Bağlılığı

THE ANALYSİS OF THE EFFECT OF BRAND IMAGE ON CREATİNG BRAND LOYALTY WİTH THE STRUCTURAL EQUATİON MODEL: A RESEARCH STUDY ON THE SPORTS EQUİPMENT BRAND USERS*

ABSTRACT

Brand image and brand loyalty are among the most important relational marketing elements for brand owners to be able to set up long – term relationships with their customers and to maintain these relationships. Brand owners improve their brand images with the positive perceptions remaining in the consumers' minds. In addition, they try to find the customers that are both emotionally and behaviourally faithful to themselves in order to set up long – term relationships. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the effects of the brand image that has a very important role among relational marketing elements on the brand loyalty in terms of the variables such as the perceived value, the trust in brand and the brand satisfaction. In this context, a theoretical model was created to determine the effect of the brand image on the brand loyalty thanks to the Structural Equation Model (SEM). According to this aim and this model, the study was carried out in the scope of the data collected through the questionnaires in Konya with the method of convenience sampling. The results of the research showed that the brand image has positive significant effects on the perceived value and the trust in brand and that the trust in brand has positive significant effects on the brand satisfaction, and that the brand satisfaction has positive significant effects on the brand loyalty. Thus, the hypotheses that the brand image has direct effects on the perceived value and the trust in brand and that the trust in brand has direct effects on the brand satisfaction and that the brand satisfaction has direct effects on the brand loyalty were supported. In addition, the findings about whether the perceived value has a significant effect on the brand satisfaction were also acquired.

Keywords: Brand Image, Perceived Value, Trust, Satisfaction, Brand Loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Brand is the focus for marketing and advertising activities as it affects and shapes the consumers and their decision-making process and especially differentiates tangible products from one another. Due to their properties, brands build a partnership relationship with their users and serve as a bridge in the development of a social loyalty. Being a significant factor in the consumer buying behavior, the concept "brand" is now increasing in importance. In order to strengthen the brand image and ensure the brand loyalty, it is strategically important for the enterprises to make the brand remain in the consumer's mind for a substantial period of time and get the target message across appropriately and also properly address the target audience.

The brands that once intended to expand their market share by gaining new customers have now started to focus on protecting their current market share on account of increased competition and rapid technological developments in today's marketing conditions.

Today, the brands intending to maintain their continuity have come to understanding that it is really important to create the brand image which often takes a long-term effort to form in the consumer's mind. It matters a lot to the brands how their target audience perceives them and how this audience approaches to their products and brands. In this sense, it is important that brands with a broader target audience need to know their target audience very well, be aware of what their current and potential target audience look for in a brand and ensure that their brand is adopted by consumers.

Reichheld (1993; 1996) observed in his study that retaining existing customers is less costly than acquiring new customers and this notion has been generally accepted in the marketing arena. Similar studies have evidenced that brands that have consumers with brand loyalty get more competitive advantage (Reichheld, 2003).

Using data from the study conducted on the users of a major brand of sportswear and sports equipment, Nike, this study examined the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty through the relational concepts of brand trust, perceived value and brand satisfaction, and a model was proposed suggesting hypotheses based on the associations between the concepts.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Brand Image

Brand image is a set of subjective and perceptual facts in the mind of consumers concerning the brand. These include symbolic and functional perceptions of the brand. In other words, consumers create an image of the brand by using what they already know about the brand and all the associations they recall relating to that brand (Keller, 1993). Concerning the commonly-held approach about the formation of the brand image in the consumer's mind, previous studies showed that consumers do not have to buy or use a product or service provided by that brand for formation of a brand image. Brand image emerges as a result of the brand-related impressions that consumers get from various sources, without having any experience with the brand or without using it (Salinas and Perez, 2009). Mass media, advertisements, brand positioning strategies, general public impressions and the perceptions from all existing sources all play a role in the creation of a brand image in the consumer's mind (Hung, 2008; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). A brand image well-positioned in the mind of the consumer both differentiates the brand from that of competitors and helps consumers gain a better understanding of the service provided by the brand (Salinas and Perez, 2009). Each passing day, the number of new factors is increasing due to the rapid developments in today's communication

technology. The traditional mass media has been replaced by the social media tools. Brands today continue their image development activities on the social media platforms which are particularly influential in the formation of brand image.

To create the intended brand image in the consumer's mind, a lot of brands follow various marketing strategies via social media channels which have turned out to be the most effective strategic communication platforms today. These are the conscious attempts made and the strategies implemented by the brands for the sake of brand image. Brands make positive contributions to the brand image by developing product and service-based tactics in these strategies Moreover, brands emphasize their positive sides and strengths in the strategies and campaigns and try to strengthen their weaknesses or change the ideas of consumers (Hung, 2008; Salinas and Perez, 2009).

Brand Trust

Brand is a quality promise made to consumers. Consumers believe that the brand will always give them a feeling of satisfaction to the same degree or more and therefore they trust in the brand. Brand trust is a sense of security that consumers believe in. They trust the brand in that it will fulfill their expectations of consumption. Consumers build loyalty when they feel more confidence in the brand that shows the desired potential (Lau and Lee, 1999).

Consumer's trust in a company or brand is of great importance. The level of the relationship between a brand and its consumers has an impact on the trust placed in that brand. Since trust creates a very valuable exchange relationship between a brand and consumers and maintains this relationship, it is considered one of the major determinants of brand loyalty. Trust also increases the tolerance for price among customers.

Consumers who trust in the brand keep purchasing without showing much reaction against even higher prices. In this regard, trust becomes more important to most consumers than economy (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Also, consumer trust in a brand arises from the experiences with that brand. Therefore, trust is a matter of experience.

Perceived Value

Brand is an image of a product or service which is committed to the memory or mind of a consumer or of another reference group of the brand and is so firmly placed that it cannot be confused with another one. The product or service associated with the brand should be available to the broadest market possible over a long term preserving or improving its appearance and quality (Kotler and Keller, 2009).

Brands come to the forefront as long as they can add value to the life of the consumers, offer benefits to the customers and differentiate themselves from other brands. Today, perceived value of brands are becoming more and more important because people now access, share and use any kind of information in the quickest way, all products are effortlessly copied and all brands introduce similar products very easily (Knapp, 1999). In cases when consumers care more about a product or service provided by the brand with a higher perceived value, they mostly follow the problem solving path in purchase decision and if they are satisfied after trying the product they keep buying it repeatedly and this will result in brand loyalty over time. In cases when the perceived value is low, brand loyalty does not occur unless brand awareness is built. Brand loyalty is stronger when the personal perceived value of the brand is higher for the consumer. This happens especially when the consumer regards the brand as a source to identify himself with (Kotler and Keller, 2009).

Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty

Satisfaction judgments that customers make in their relationships with brands play a key

role in explaining their brand loyalty. Besides, consumers' satisfaction with the performance provided by the brand will enhance the brand loyalty in terms of retaining them as a customer and the repurchase of product. Here performance of the brand has a central role and consumers mostly like and prefer brands that satisfy their needs and desires. If the experience with the brand is positive, this then will lead to the development of brand loyalty in consumers (Fullerton, 2005).

Brand loyalty starts with customer satisfaction and trust. Brands that satisfy their customers or in other words give a sense of satisfaction and trust to the customers are more likely to maintain their existence. Customer satisfaction is a must for brand loyalty. Customers who are pleased with the brand take a positive attitude towards that brand. It is really hard to talk about brand loyalty unless customers feel satisfied and take an optimistic view. Customer satisfaction is one of the major factors that lead to the formation and maintenance of customer satisfaction. Accordingly, as the customers feel satisfied with the brand, their loyalty to the brand will remain permanent (Fornell, 1992; Darsono ve Junaedi, 2005; Hung, 2008).

Brand loyalty has become one of the top issues in the customer surveys due to the recent fact that brand loyalty is the core of brand's equity and the customer satisfaction derived from the purchased product or service is perhaps the most important condition for the formation of customer satisfaction. Brand satisfaction is the comparison between expectations of customers about the brand and their experiences with that brand. In this sense, brand satisfaction comes from the comparison between customer expectations and experiences and the approval of these expectations (Bloemer and Kasper 1995).

Several studies investigating the relationship between satisfaction and brand loyalty found a positive relationship between brand satisfaction and loyalty (Darsono and Junaedi, 2005; Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992; Bloemer and Kasper 1995). It was reported that customers satisfied with their brand had higher brand loyalty than the dissatisfied ones.

Hypotheses and Theoretical Model

In the light of the literature data, a theoretical model was developed with the intention of determining the role of brand image in the formation of brand loyalty using the variables of brand trust, perceived value and satisfaction. In addition, the possible effects of brand image on brand loyalty were investigated based on the latent variables of brand trust, perceived value and satisfaction. In this regard, the theoretical model and the hypotheses of the study are as follow:

Figure 1. The Theoretical Model
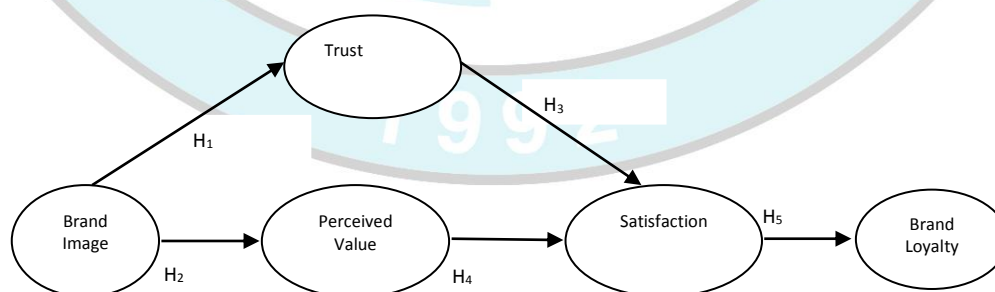
H_1 Brand image has a direct, positive and significant effect on brand trust.
H_2 Brand image has a direct, positive and significant effect on perceived value.
H_3 Brand trust has a direct, positive and significant effect on brand satisfaction.
H_4 Perceived value has a direct, positive and significant effect on brand satisfaction.
H_5 Brand satisfaction has a direct, positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

METHOD

Population and Sample

The present study was designed as a cross-sectional study. Population of the study was comprised of the users of Nike products – a worldwide manufacturer of sportswear and sports equipment. The reason why the population was limited to the users of Nike sports equipment is that its sports products are the top selling ones in the market (www.internetretailer.com.). However, it was not possible to include all the users of Nike products because of time and cost constraints and difficulty in accessing the sample, so the study was carried out between the given dates using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. Of the 412 questionnaire forms administered to the participants, 375 forms were used for the data analysis as 37 questionnaire forms included missing or erroneous data.

Data Collection Method and Tool

One of the most commonly used methods - questionnaire technique and face to face interview - was used for the collection of primary research data. Initially a pretest, pilot study was conducted on 64 participants using the first questionnaire which included 21 attitude items. The pilot study indicated that binary variables grouped under the latent variables and all the statements were comprehensible, so the study was continued using the questionnaire consisting of a total of 27 items together with the ones included in the demographics section.

The questionnaire form used in the study consists of two parts. The first part includes the following scales; "brand image" scale which was compiled from the studies conducted by Salinas and Perez (2009), Hung (2008), Johnson et al., (2001) and Andreassen and Lindestad (1993); "brand loyalty" scale which was compiled from the studies undertaken by Hellier et al., (2003), Severi and Ling (2013), Ballester and Aleman (2001) and Pappu et al., (2005); "brand trust" scale which was compiled from the studies by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Lau and Lee (1999), Shergill and Li (2005) and Ballester and Aleman (2001); "brand satisfaction" scale compiled from the studies carried out by the researchers Darsono and Junaedi (2005) and Bloemer and Lemmink (1992); "perceived value" scale which was developed compiling the studies by Cronin et al., (2000) and Hellier et al., (2003). The second part is composed of the questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The questionnaire form was prepared in Turkish. There was a total 27 questions consisting of two sections. The first 21 questions were designed in the form of statements based on Likert-type scale. A detailed literature review was performed and the scales employed in the above-mentioned studies published in the international literature were used to write the questionnaire items. Also, the items of the scale in the present study were designed based on the Nike brand.

All the items in the scales which were developed to assess in terms of brand loyalty the effects of brand image-related perceptions and opinions of the users of Nike brand on the perceived value, brand satisfaction and brand trust were measured on the basis of 5-point-Likert Type scale. The Likert scale items ranged as follows: (1) represented Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree. SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 19.0 statistical software programs were used for the analysis of data. These two programs were used in

coordination as they complemented each other's features.

Limitations of the Study

Research data was collected from the users of Nike products living in Konya province using convenience sampling due to the time constraint and difficulty in accessing the sample population. In this regard, external validity and thus the generalizability of the results is limited.

Another limitation was that the study dealt only with the components of a certain brand and relational marketing elements yet other variables that might have an impact on the brand loyalty were not involved.

The study was conducted based on the Nike brand and the items in the scale were designed correspondingly. Also, results of the study are limited to the period between April 2015 and July 2015, during which the research data was collected.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographics of the participants based on their gender, age, educational level, job, income and marital status.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Demographic variables	Value	Frequency	Percent	Demographic variables	Value	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	172	45,9	**Job**	Public prac.	36	9,6
	Male	203	54,1		Officer	89	23,7
	Total	**375**	**100,0**		Worker	42	7,5
					Private sect	70	18,7
Age	18-24	106	28,3		Student	130	34,7
	25-31	119	31,7		Other	22	5,9
	32-38	121	32,3		**Total**	**375**	**100,0**
	39-45	26	6,9				
	46+	3	0,8	**income**	Less than 1000	70	18,7
	Total	**375**	**100,0**		1001-1500	40	10,7
					1501-2000	110	29,3
Educational Level	Primary (Elem.sch.)	8	2,1		2001-2500	114	30,4
	Secondary (High sch.)	73	19,5		More than 2501	41	10,9
	Junior university degree	92	24,5		**Total**	**375**	**100,0**
	Bachelor's degree	161	42,9	**marital status**	married	138	36,8
	post-graduate	41	10,9		single	237	63,2
	Total	**375**	**100,0**		**Total**	**375**	**100,0**

As seen in Table 1, 54,1% of the participants are male and 45,9% are female. 36,8% of the participants are married while 63,2% of them are single. The majority of the participants (64%) are at the ages between 25 and 38. The data concerning the educational level indicates that slightly more than half of the respondents are graduates and postgraduates (51,8%). Students (34,7%) and officers (23,7%) together constitute the majority of the sample. As for the income level, the greater number of the respondents earn around 1501-2000 TL (29,3%) and 2001-2500 TL (30,4%) per month.

Table 2. Internal Consistencies of the Scales

Scale	Number of Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Image	6	,881
Brand Loyalty	7	,909
Trust	3	,734
Satisfaction	2	,635
Perceived Value	3	,675
Coefficient Alpha	21	,938
% of variance explained	67,947 %	
KMO	,959	
Barlett	4483,996 (df. 210; p<0,001)	

Table 2 summarizes the results of the Cronbach's alpha computed for each scale administered in a sample of 375 participants. As seen, internal consistency values of all scales exceed the minimum, accepted internal-consistency level of 0.60 as suggested by Kalaycı (2008). Discriminant validity of the scales was tested through exploratory factor analysis. Items in the five different scales were tested through exploratory factor analysis (KMO=0,959; p<0,001) and the factor analysis disclosed five factors indicating a high degree of coherence among the items.

Table 3. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variables name	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Brand.image1	,730				
Brang.image1	,721				
Brand.image1	,721				
Brand.image1	,686				
Brand.image1	,679				
Brand.image1	,663				
Brand.loyalty9		,779			
Brand.loyalty1		,727			
Brand.loyalty1		,631			
Brand.loyalty1		,608			
Brand.loyalty2		,603			
Brand.loyalty1		,602			
Brand.loyalty2		,595			
Trust2			,841		
Trust3			,717		
Trust8			,435		
Satisfaction7				,790	
Satisfaction5				,657	
Perceived.valu					,847
Perceived.valu					,720
Perceived.valu					,403

Table 3 shows that the five factors derived from the exploratory factor analysis explained 67,947% of the total variance. The homogeneity within the items of each category and the heterogeneity between the different scales suggest evidence for the discriminant validity. In other words, results of the exploratory factor analysis performed for 375 respondents show that the scales of brand image, perceived value, brand loyalty, brand trust and

brand satisfaction measure the aspects different from each other.

Table 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

	χ^2	p	χ^2/df	CFI	NFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model Fit Index	429,735	0,000	2,32	0,94	0,90	0,94	0,90	0,87	0,051	0,050

Goodness of fit index assesses how well a theoretical model explains the data collected. Goodness of fit index is tested with Confirmatory Factor Analysis. As Table 4 shows, model structure is acceptable according to the values of goodness of fit index obtained in the confirmatory factor analysis. The application of goodness of fit index determines whether the model being tested is accepted or otherwise. In order for a model to have a perfect fit, RMSEA value needs to be 0.05 or lower (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993; Arbuckle, 2013). In the present study, the RMSEA was 0.051 and the χ^2/df ratio was 2.32 with p<0.000. Also, the other values of goodness of fit index attained the levels acceptable for the model. The satisfying results of the model fit test indicate that the estimated structural coefficients will be evaluated while testing the hypotheses (Ayyıldız and Cengiz, 2007).
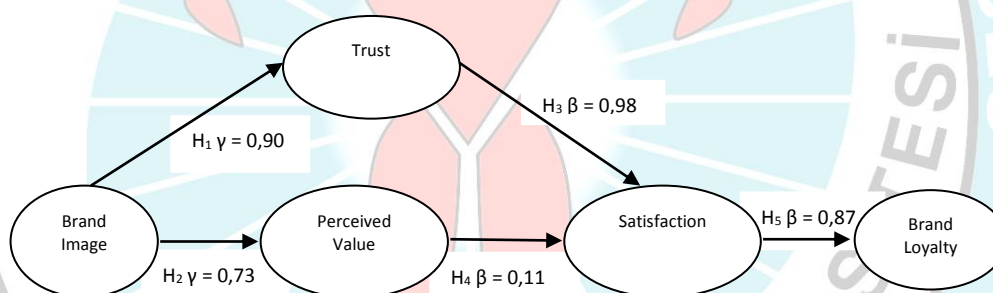
Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

Table 5. Structural Model Results

Dependent variables		Independent variables	Total Effects (SRW)	S.E.	C.R.	P
Perceived_Value	<---	Brand_Image	,729	,048	9,290***	
Trust	<---	Brand_Image	,899	,080	9,775***	
Satisfaction	<---	Trust	,981	,097	7,608***	
Satisfaction	<---	Perceived_Value	,110	,070	1,691*	
Brand_Loyalty	<---	Satisfaction	,873	,188	9,423***	

***p<0,001, *p>0,05

The results of the analysis performed for the structural model showed that brand image had a direct, positive and significant effect on brand trust (γ=0,899; p<0,001). Thus, H1 was supported. The hypothesis (H2) that brand image has a direct, positive and significant effect on perceived value was confirmed, too (γ=0,729; p<0,001). Another hypothesis (H3) supported by the results was that brand trust has a direct, positive and significant effect on brand satisfaction (β=0,981;p<0,001). Nevertheless, it was observed that perceived value had no statistically significant effect on brand satisfaction

($\beta=0,110;p<0,001$) so H_4 was rejected. Moreover, H_5 was confirmed as brand satisfaction had a statistically significant effect on brand loyalty ($\beta=0,873;p<0,001$). In the light of these findings, it was revealed that the direct and significant effect of brand image on brand loyalty resulted from the intervening variables of brand trust and brand satisfaction. In conclusion, the theoretical model was accepted and of all the hypotheses tested, only one was rejected. The results of the hypotheses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Results
H_1 Brand image has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.	Supported
H_2 Brand image has a positive and significant effect on perceived value.	Supported
H_3 Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand satisfaction	Supported
H_4 Perceived value has a positive and significant effect on brand satisfaction	Not Supported
H_5 Brand satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.	Supported

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Brands hoping to retain their market shares and existing customers in today's intense competitive environment have to establish long-term relationships with their customers. Brand image and brand loyalty are among the key factors influencing these long-terms relationships between customers and brands. It is therefore important to determine the relationship of these two concepts with one another.

Conducted to contribute to the academic literature and the sector by revealing the relationship between brand image and loyalty and identifying the roles of intervening variables, the present study yielded results suggesting that brand image, brand trust and brand satisfaction had significant effects on brand loyalty.

No significant impact of perceived value was observed on brand satisfaction. The underlying reason might be that perceived value leads to rapidly changing effects and these effects cannot create the impact essential for brand satisfaction and loyalty.

Brand satisfaction and brand loyalty is a relationship marketing process which involves long-term customer-brand communication. The results obtained in this study seem to support that a brand needs to be effective in image management and meet the requirements of brand loyalty to produce long-term effects rather than building instant or short-term effects in their relationships with the customers. Brand should reflect a stronger image and trust in order to attain brand loyalty in customers.

The results suggest that brands and brand managers, in the first place, need to change, improve and strengthen in the positive way the brand image within the minds of consumers if they expect to build loyalty to their brand. It might also be asserted that it will make major contributions to the creation of brand loyalty to increase the trust and satisfaction felt for the brand and to establish long-term relationships with customers.

The relationships between the factors affecting brand loyalty have been investigated in a large body of research (Ballester and Aleman, 2001; Hellier et al., 2003; Pappu et al., 2005; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Lau and Lee 1999; Shergill and Li 2005; Darsono and Junaedi 2005; Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992). The lack of studies in the literature conducted to investigate the effects of brand image on brand loyalty makes the present study valuable in terms of the insightful contributions it will provide to the literature.

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