

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

THE EFFECT OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION ON BRAND LOYALTY AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF REFERENCE GROUPS

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Abstract

The fact that brand loyalty ensures the development of behaviours and attitudes in favour of the business, such as consistent and continuous preference for the same brand and not turning to different brands, can be regarded as an important competitive tool for businesses. On the other hand, there are many factors that affect consumers' purchase decision process, brand preferences and brand loyalty. While some of these factors are related to the marketing efforts of businesses, others may be based on personality, culture, psychological or social factors. In addition to the functional benefits and features of brands, consumers are also interested in the status and prestige they provide to them. In this context, this study intends to reveal the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty and the mediating role of reference groups in this effect. In the study, convenience sampling method was used due to time and budget constraints to conduct an online questionnaire and a total of 393 participants were reached through various social media platforms and mobile applications. To test the research hypotheses constructed under a theoretical model based on an extensive literature review, the collected data were examined with the help of frequency analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation, and regression analysis. Findings of the present research is indicative of that conspicuous consumption has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty. Conspicuous consumption explains 29.9% of the variance of brand loyalty. Furthermore, it was concluded that conspicuous consumption affects the informative role of reference groups positively, weakly and significantly, and the normative role of reference groups positively, moderately and significantly. As the last finding of the study, it was concluded that there is no mediating role of reference groups in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Conspicuous Consumption, Reference Groups.

JEL Codes: M30, M31, M39.

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GÖSTERİŞÇİ TÜKETİMİN MARKA BAĞLILIĞI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ VE REFERANS GRUPLARIN ARACILIK ROLÜ²

Öz

Marka bağlılığının müşterilerde tutarlı ve sürekli olarak aynı markayı tercih etme ve farklı markalara yönelmeme gibi işletme lehine olan davranış ve tutumların gelişmesini sağlaması, işletmeler için önemli bir rekabet aracı olarak değerlendirilebilir. Diğer yandan tüketicilerin satın alma karar sürecini, marka tercihlerini ve markalara bağlılıklarını etkileyen birçok faktörden söz etmek mümkündür. Bunlardan bazıları işletmelerin pazarlama çabalarıyla ilgiliyken, bazıları ise kişilik, kültür, psikolojik ya da sosyal faktöre dayanabilmektedir. Tüketiciler markaların fonksiyonel yarar ve özelliklerinin yanında, onların kendilerine sağladıkları statü ve prestij gibi özellikleriyle de ilgilenmektedirler. Bu kapsamda bu çalışmada gösterişçi tüketim marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisi ve referans grupların bu etkideki aracı rolünü incelenmektedir. Zaman ve bütçe kısıtları nedeniyle kolayda örnekleme yöntemi tercih edilen çalışmada, çevrimiçi anket aracılığıyla çeşitli sosyal medya platformları ve mobil uygulamalar üzerinden toplam 393 katılımcıya ulaşılmıştır. Kapsamlı bir literatür taramasına dayanan teorik bir model altında oluşturulan araştırma hipotezlerini test etmek için, veriler frekans analizi, doğrulayıcı faktör analizi, korelasyon ve regresyon analizleri yardımıyla incelenmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre, gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğu ve bu etkinin yönünün ise pozitif olduğu görülmektedir. Gösterişçi tüketim eğilimi marka bağlılığı varyansının %29,9'unu açıklamaktadır. Ayrıca gösterişçi tüketim, referans grupların bilgilendirici rolünü pozitif yönde, zayıf düzeyde anlamlı olarak, referans grupların normatif rolünü ise pozitif yönde, orta düzeyde ve anlamlı olarak etkilemektedir. Araştırmanın son bulgusu olarak gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığına etkisinde referans grupların aracılık rolünün olmadığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka bağlılığı, gösterişçi tüketim, referans gruplar.

JEL Kodları: M30, M31, M39.

“Bu çalışma Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır.”

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumption has been an important phenomenon of life since the existence of humanity and used to have a utilitarian meaning mainly for the purpose of meeting needs. However, in today's modern world, consumption has started to carry more abstract and symbolic meanings far beyond the basic needs. Today's consumers regard consumption not only as the fulfillment of needs, but also as a tool to seek pleasure, image, and status (Ekşi et al., 2022: 73; Azizağaoğlu and Altunışık, 2012: 34). With

² Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet, makalenin sonunda yer almaktadır.

this in mind, consumption could be said to become a “need in itself” (Aydm, 2018: 124). Frequently discussed marketing phenomena such as conspicuous consumption, hedonistic consumption, and symbolic consumption signify this transformation over the consumption behaviors (Azizağaoğlu and Altunışık, 2012: 34).

Conspicuous consumption refers to a consumption behavior exhibited with motivations beyond fulfillment of physiological needs, such as raising status, showing off wealth and displaying power (Çetin and Yaylı, 2019: 229). According to Tunç (2017: 417), conspicuous consumption as a phenomenon of human life could be traced back to the ancient times. The Anatolian phrase “desinler” (let them envy), also, well encapsulates the existence of conspicuous consumption among common people way before modern times. Thanks to the advancements in communication technology, conspicuous consumption is more prevalent today. The ease of access to the Internet and the widespread use of social media tools, en masse, enable today's consumers to get to know how people live and consume even in the remotest areas around the globe. Consumers who are exposed to excessive information and images about others on social media also tend to share a lot of information about themselves including their lifestyle and consumption behavior (Topçu, et al., 2020: 153).

A consumer who tends to exhibit conspicuous consumption is likely to prioritize the symbolic features of the product such as self-expression and social approval over the direct physiological benefits of consumption (Yıldız, 2019: 155). Thus, when making purchasing decisions, the consumer might stick to the brands that are considered prestigious (Çetin and Yaylı, 2019: 228). Notwithstanding, the reference group of individuals the consumer attributes importance to for show-off could be considered as an anchor to the conspicuous consumption. According to Tek, the effect of reference groups on consumer's purchasing decision varies depending on products and brands and is greater especially for products that are consumed to show off (Tek, 1999: 202). Individuals may tend to show more commitment to conspicuous consumption and branded products in order to create an impression and image among a reference group such as family, friends, and neighbors (Şahin and Nasır, 2019: 387). The consumer might already a member of this reference group, or else, might just intend to involve in it without initial membership.

From this perspective, it can be evaluated that reference groups may possess a mediating role in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty. While there are studies on different variables affecting brand loyalty in the literature, as far as we know, there exists no study about the possible mediating role of the reference groups in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty.

Hence, the present study intends to fill an important gap in the literature by examining the mediating role of reference groups in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty. To this end, an online survey was conducted with 393 individuals to capture their preferences over conspicuous consumption, brand loyalty, and reference groups. To test the research hypotheses constructed under a theoretical model based on an extensive literature review, the collected data were examined through frequency

analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The rest of the paper is designed as follows: In section 1.1, the extant literature related to brand loyalty, conspicuous consumption, and reference groups are discussed and initial research hypotheses are constructed. In section 2, the employed methodology is explained including the sampling choices, data collection methods and the preferred scales used in the survey. Section 3 presents research findings reached through various data analysis techniques. Last, Section 4 and 5 provides an overall discussion and concludes.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Brand loyalty

Kotler and Armstrong (2012: 231) defines brand as "a name, word, symbol, design or a combination thereof that identifies the manufacturer or seller of a product or service". While the brand distinguishes goods and services from its competitor products, it also provides information about the benefits, symbolizes a certain quality, gives an identity to goods and services and ensures that the branded products are remembered (Firat and Azmak, 2007: 254; İslamoğlu, 2013: 365; Tek, 1999: 357).

Brand loyalty can be defined as "consumers' positive attitudes and behaviors towards the brand" (Kwon, 2020: 17). When purchasing a product, consumers have the luxury to choose among dozens of alternative brands in almost all sectors in today's competitive environment. Consumers are likely to prefer the brand that offers them the most benefit and value. Offering solutions to boost the of satisfaction level and fulfillment of the consumer based on understanding the expectations, wishes and needs of the consumer base is very crucial in terms of ensuring brand loyalty (Hacıfendioğlu, 2014: 61).

The goals of maintaining brand loyalty is not only to make the customer repeat its shopping behavior but also to establish an emotional bond with the brand (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002: 20). As a result of the failure to establish this emotional bond between the customer and the brand, customers may change their brands for various reasons (Rowley, 2005:574). In the case where brand loyalty is achieved, consumers tend to prioritize the value they attach to the brand and show the attitude of not changing their brands in any case. Such an attitude exhibited by the consumer indicates the existence of true brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005: 189).

Achievement of brand loyalty has been examined through different approaches. While some studies suggest that the number of repeat purchases is an indicator of brand loyalty, how many repeated purchases can guarantee brand loyalty is debatable. The cognitive approach argues that repurchasing behavior cannot be the sole indicator of brand loyalty, but additionally, the consumer should also have a positive attitude towards the brand (Bayraktaroğlu, 2004: 70-71). This approach actually emphasizes the psychological attachment that the consumer develops towards the brand (Yılmaz, 2005: 60). Ensuring such an attachment will be a protective shield for a business

whose market share is threatened by existing or potential businesses in an increasingly competitive market environment (Firat and Azmak, 2007: 254).

1.1.2. Conspicuous consumption

Conspicuous consumption was first addressed scientifically by Veblen (Güllülü et al., 2010: 106). In his work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen showed that the most developed form of the leisure class prevailed in barbaric cultures such as the ones in feudal Europe and Japan. In these cultural settings, the class distinction was very strict, and the most distinctive feature of the class distinction was the attachment of certain jobs to specific classes. According to Veblen, those in the upper class are exempted from taking part in industrial jobs. They either deal with administrative and religious services, which are considered as honorable jobs, or engage in warfare or athletic sports (Veblen, 2005: 19-20). The upper class, however, cannot gain and maintain respectability only through wealth and power. Power and prestige must also be proven (Veblen, 2005: 40). According to Veblen, individuals in the upper class, traditionally, do not work, but display their wealth through idleness in consumption and leisurely activities. By using idleness as a status indicator, they differentiate themselves from people in lower classes (Koçak, 2017: 83).

In addition to their physiological needs, individuals may also want to meet their psychological and social needs, e. g. being loved, being respected and having a sense of belonging (Yayar and Oruç, 2020: 36). It wouldn't be wrong in saying that the use of possessions such as houses, vehicles, and clothes as a tool display power and status in a social environment has been prevalent throughout the human history. While the rich people belonging to the upper-class use expensive products for show-off, people in the lower classes imitate this behavior. The demand for such products increases in direct proportion to the increase in their prices (Ekşi et al., 2022: 74).

Akın (2021: 220) defines conspicuous consumption as the hedonically motivated preference of a more expensive product that is indicative of the social class or higher status, although a lower-priced product can meet the need. In another definition, conspicuous consumption is referred to as consumption that aims to make individuals feel powerful and have status from the perspective of those around them (Çinar, 2014: 91). Therefore, individuals aim to achieve a higher status or give messages to their environment, especially the reference groups, about their status, wealth and power through the symbolic features of the products they buy (Podoshen and Andrzejewski, 2012: 321-322; Hız, 2011: 118; Akgül, 2020: 44; Şahin and Nasır, 2019: 387). In such a case, consumer satisfaction does not stem from the product's use value, but from the reaction of other viewers to the consumer's wealth (Mason, 1984: 26). From another perspective, conspicuous consumption provides a symbolic presentation of the prestigious position of consumers in their social groups and psychological advantage in the consumption process (Shukla, 2008: 27).

Technological changes, transformation of socio-cultural structures and increased purchasing power led to different consumption behaviors such as hedonic

consumption (Terzi and Bayrakdaroğlu, 2022: 523; Akın, 2021: 220). By attributing reputation and status exclusively to certain consumption habits (Boğa and Başçı, 2016: 465), today's consumers may exhibit consumption acts just for reasons of being appreciated or impressing others. In this respect, by showing their wealth and purchasing power, consumers with conspicuous consumption seek to be envied by and admired from their social environment, and thus, gain satisfaction through such reactions by others, rather than the use value and physiological benefits they receive from the products (Avcılar and Atalar, 2019: 1383; Güleç, 2015: 80).

1.1.3. Reference groups

Consumer's purchasing decision process can be affected by many different psychological, social and demographic variables like culture, family, sex, age and income (Baydaş et al., 2008: 70; Erciş et al., 2007: 282). Reference groups are groups that a consumer attaches importance to, evaluate herself in comparison to them and regard their values and attitudes as a guide for her own behavior (Karaca, 2016: 213; Arlı, 2012: 157; Özkalp, 2000: 89). Tek (1999: 201) defines the reference groups as "the set of people who directly or indirectly affects the attitudes, behaviors, ideas and value judgments of an individual". In this respect, he states that the reference groups, in a broader sense, include "the close environment such as family, friends, neighbors where face-to-face communication is maintained", "groups that the individual is not an existing member", and/or "singers and athletes who are not directly related to the individual". Escalas and Baetman (2003) define the reference groups as "social groups to which consumers attribute significance, and with which consumers compare themselves". Thus, the direct or indirect effects of reference groups on consumer behavior are realized through two basic motivations related to informative and normative roles (Kavak and Dinçer, 2020: 191). The relevance of the informative role can be evidenced by the consumer's desire to make an informed decision based on the opinions of reference groups such as friends and neighbors who can provide information about a product (Dinçer, 2018: 28-29; Karaca, 2016: 215). If the consumer makes product and brand choices in tandem with the expectations of reference groups for reasons such as being loved, respected, appreciated, accepted or not to be shamed and rejected, then this behavior indeed signifies the relevance of the normative role (Kirel et al., 2010: 59; Sakallı, 2016: 27; Karaca, 2016: 217; Dinçer, 2018: 29-30). Many studies show that the reference groups, among other social factors, have a significant impact on the consumer's purchasing decision process (Yıldırım, 2021: 101; Yıldırım, 2016: 215). Hsu et al., (2006) state that 80% of purchasing decisions are realized with the influence of reference groups (cited in Çelikkol, 2021: 748). Escalas and Bettman (2003: 339) stated that reference groups have an impact on individuals' brand affiliation and that the degree of this impact depends on the degree of individuals' desire to belong to the reference groups.

1.1.4. Interactions between variables and research hypotheses

To examine the interaction among variables at hand, statistical properties of the collected data were examined to test the validity of the hypotheses explained below.

When the studies on brand loyalty are examined, the quality of customer complaint management (Bengül, 2019), functional and symbolic features of brands (Azizağaoğlu and Altunışık, 2011), public relations perception (Koçyiğit, 2017), consumer interest (Çiftiyıldız, 2010; Çiftiyıldız and Sütütemiz, 2007), social media applications (Şahin and İçil, 2019; Hacıfendioğlu, 2014), social media as means of word-of-mouth communication (Can, 2017), service quality (Onan, 2017; Usta and Memiş, 2009), brand trust (Aydın, 2017; Gürbüz and Doğan, 2013; Torlak et al., 2014), brand awareness (Torlak et al., 2014; Aydın, 2017), brand image (Yalçın and Ene, 2013; Torlak et al., 2014), brand affinity (Torlak et al., 2014), self-image congruence (Aydın, 2017), brand equity (Onurlubaş, 2018), consumer ethnocentrism (Eroğlu and Sarı, 2011) stand out among other variables that carry the potential to affect brand loyalty.

Yeşil (2022), in his study on the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty, found out a significant relationship between brand loyalty and conspicuous consumption. According to the findings of the study, 28% of the brand loyalty is realized as a result of consumers' conspicuous consumption attitudes (Yeşil, 2022: 89). Terzi and Bayrakdaroğlu (2022: 538) found that tendencies of their sample participants towards conspicuous consumption had a significant effect on compulsive buying. In another study, it was found that conspicuous consumption affects experiential purchasing (Özbek and Güçer, 2022: 3351). In their study, Yeşil and Ünsalan (2021: 17) found that the tendency of conspicuous consumption has a positive effect on foreign product purchasing behavior. Oral et al., (2022: 62) found that usage of online technologies as means of word-of-mouth communication and conspicuous consumption significantly affect experiential brand perception and, together, could explain 51.5% of the variance of the brand perception variable. Bulut et al., (2021: 319) found that conspicuous consumption has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty. Although studies examining the effect of conspicuous consumption tendency on brand loyalty are limited, the literature suggests that conspicuous consumption tendency carries a positive effect on different consumer behaviors such as brand loyalty, foreign product consumption, and compulsive buying. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study was formed with the idea that conspicuous consumption will positively affect brand loyalty.

H1: Conspicuous consumption has a positive and significant effect on consumers' brand loyalty.

The effect of reference groups on consumers generally emerges in product and brand selection (Childers and Rao, 1992: 199). It is seen that there are studies showing that reference groups have a significantly positive effect on consumer behaviors such as consumers' purchase intentions (Karaca, 2016; Çelikkol, 2021; Arlı, 2012; Gümrükçü and Kurtuldu, 2023), consumer preferences (White and Dahl, 2006), product perception (Gümrükçü and Kurtuldu, 2023) and individual brand connection (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). In addition, there are also studies showing the compatibility between the groups that consumers are members of and their brand usage (Bearden

and Etzel, 1982; Childers and Rao, 1992). From this point of view, the second and third hypotheses of the study were formed with the assumption that reference groups will also display a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H2: The informative role of reference groups has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

H3: The normative role of reference groups has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

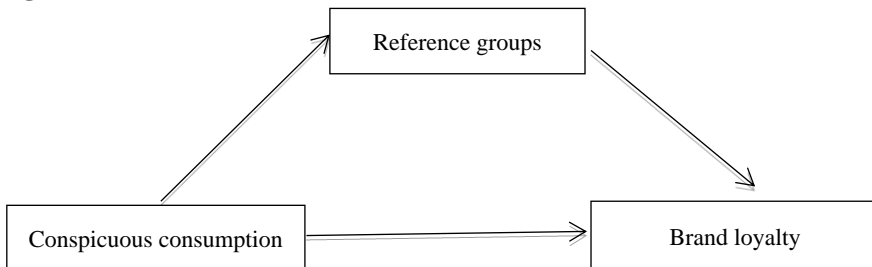
While number of studies investigating the effect of reference groups on brand loyalty is quite limited in the literature, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study on whether reference groups have a mediating role in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty. According to the findings of Yıldırım (2021: 105), while reference groups do not have a mediating role in the effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty, they do carry a mediating role in the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. Moreover, the literature also evidenced that the reference groups play a mediating role between “brand familiarity” and “product design and experience” and also between “brand loyalty” and “product design and experience” (Coudounaris, 2018: 191). Based on the mediating role of reference groups in different consumer behaviors, formation of the remaining two hypotheses were done with the idea that reference groups may also play a mediating role in the effect of consumers' conspicuous consumption tendencies on brand loyalty.

H4: The informative role of reference groups has a mediating effect on the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty.

H5: The normative role of reference groups has a mediating effect on the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty.

The research model constructed based upon the hypotheses presented above is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sample and data collection

Consumers over 18 years of age constitute the main population of the present study. According to the data published by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the population over the age of 18 in Turkey is 62.7 million (TUIK, 2022). Due to time and budget constraints, convenience sampling method was used. In the convenience sampling method, everyone who wants to participate in the data collection process is allowed to be included in the sample until a predetermined sample size is reached (Ural and Kılıç, 2011: 43).

To determine the sample size appropriate for the purposes of the present study, Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan's (2004: 50) table of sample sizes for finite populations was utilized. In accordance, the minimum sample size to represent the studied population with 95% confidence level corresponding to a 5% margin of error was found out to be 384. Therefore, the sample group consisting of 393 people exceeds this threshold and seems to be sufficient to represent the interested population. Data were collected through various social media platforms and mobile applications with an online survey. Online surveys enable researchers to reach a larger group of participants, increase the chance of participation due to not requiring paper or pen, prevent participants from being influenced by the presence of researchers, help obtain data in a quicker fashion and make it ready for further analysis, allow many configurations such as restricting participants to move between questions without answering and provide time and cost advantages (Oktay, 2022: 67; Dereli, 2022: 463-464).

2.2. Scales

In the first part of the online survey, closed-ended questions were included to acquire information about various demographic characteristics of the participants, e.g. age, sex, and income. In the second part of the survey, the "Conspicuous Consumption Scale" developed by Chaudhuri et al., (2011) and the validity and reliability study conducted by Arslan (2021), and the "Brand Loyalty Scale" developed by Yoo et al., (2000) and validity and reliability study conducted by Ayas (2012) and the "Reference Group Scale" developed by Bearden et al., (1989), which has "Informational Role" and "Normative Role" sub-dimensions, and the "Reference Group Scale", which was validity and reliability study conducted by Dinçer (2018), were used. Answering options to the questions suggested by these scales are given as a 5-point Likert type (1=Strongly disagree / 2=Disagree / 3=Neither agree nor disagree / 4=Agree / 5=Strongly agree). In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics such as percentage frequency, factor analysis, correlation, and regression analyses were performed using AMOS and SPSS software.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Findings on demographic characteristics

Frequency analysis was conducted to understand the demographic features of the participants. Accordingly, 54.7% (n = 215) of the participants were female and 63.1% (n = 248) were married. It is observed that people with a vocational school/bachelor’ degree (69.7%), those with a monthly income between TL10,000-20,000 (41.2%), civil servants (45.8%), and those between 26-35 years of age (27.7%) participated more than the remaining complementary groups within the respective demographic features.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Features		n	%	Demographic Features		n	%
Gender	Female	215	54.7	Marital status	Married	248	63.1
	Male	178	45.3		Single	145	36.9
	Total	393	100		Total	393	100
Education level	Primary/middle school	10	2.5	Monthly income	Under 5000 TL	79	20.1
	High school	50	12.7		5000-10.000 TL	77	19.6
	Vocational school/ Bachelor’s degree	274	69.7		10.000- 20.000 TL	162	41.2
	Master’s degree	59	15.0		20.000-30.000 TL	50	12.5
					30.000 TL and above	27	6.6
	Total	393	100		Total	393	100
Job	Civil servant	180	45.8	Age	18-25	95	24.2
	Worker	28	7.1		26-35	109	27.7
	Tradesmen	6	1.5		36-45	99	25.2
	Housewife	23	5.9		46-55	73	18.6
	Student	79	20.1		56 and above	17	4.3
	Other	77	19.6		Total	393	100
	Total	393	100				

3.2. Reliability and validity analysis results for the scales

Cronbach Alpha (α) value was utilized for testing the reliability of the scales used in the study. Accordingly, the reliability coefficient is found to be 0.855 for the conspicuous consumption scale, 0.886 for the brand loyalty scale, and 0.862 for the reference groups scale. The reliability coefficient values reached indicate high-reliability levels for all the three scales used in the study (Nakip, 2013: 205).

In this study, the goodness of fit of the scales was tested with normed fit index (NFI), chi-square fit test (χ^2/sd), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI) and goodness of fit index (GFI). In the CFA conducted on the brand loyalty scale, modifications were made between item 2 “I prefer XYZ brand even if another brand has the same features as XYZ” and item 6 “It makes sense to buy XYZ brand even if other brands have the same features”. Additionally, item 5 was removed due to its high standardized residual covariance. The following model fit measures can be reported for the final model: Three of the goodness of fit values

obtained are good (NFI= 0.986, CFI = 0.990, GFI= 0.987) and two of them are at acceptable levels (CMIN/DF = 3,457, RMSEA= 0.079). In the CFA applied to the conspicuous consumption scale, modifications were made between item 1 “The high-priced products I buy give information about me to the people around me” and item 2 “I buy some products because I want to show others that I am rich”, between item 2 and item 3 “I want to be a member of an ostentatious and luxurious business community/club” and between item 7 “I show my friends that I am different by choosing products with an exotic appearance and design” and item 10 “I often try to find interesting versions of products to show others that I like to be original”. The following model fit measures can be reported for the final model: One of the obtained goodness of fit values (GFI= 0.937) is good and three of them are at acceptable level (NFI= 0.919, CMIN/DF = 3.525, RMSEA= 0.080), while CFI is slightly below this level (0.940). A second level multifactor CFA was conducted with the informative role and normative role dimensions of the reference groups scale. Modifications in the CFA were made between item 6 “It is important that the products and brands I buy are liked by other people” and item 8 “In order to be the same as other people, I often buy the products and brands they buy” and between item 8 and items 10 “I would like to know which products and brands create a good impression on other people” in the normative role dimension. Additionally, item 12 was removed due to its high standardized residual covariance. The following model fit measures can be reported for the final model: One of the obtained goodness of fit values is good (GFI= 0.942) and three of them are at acceptable level (NFI= 0.927, CMIN/DF = 3,363, RMSEA= 0.077), while CFI is slightly below this level (0.948). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the scales. While there is a consensus in the literature that reporting of all compliance indices should be avoided, there is no consensus on which ones should be used in the assessment or accepted as standards (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 51). In addition to this, it is seen that different values are put forward regarding the goodness of fit values. For example, according to Hu and Bentler (1999) and West et al. (2012), CFI values above 0,90 indicate adequate fit and values above 0,95 indicate perfect fit (cited in Clark and Bowles, 2018: 546). When the obtained goodness of fit values in this study are evaluated as a whole, it can be said that the scales generally have acceptable goodness of fit values.

Table 2. Good / Acceptable Fit Values and Fit Values Obtained

Fit Indices	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit
χ^2/sd	$\chi^2 /df \leq 3$	$3 < \chi^2 /df \leq 5$
RMSEA	$RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 < RMSEA \leq 0.08$
NFI	$0.95 \leq NFI < 1.00$	$0.90 \leq NFI < 0.95$
CFI	$0.97 \leq CFI < 1.00$	$0.95 \leq CFI < 0.97$
GFI	$0.90 \leq GFI < 1.00$	$0.85 \leq GFI < 0.90$

Source: Karagöz (2019: 1043)

3.3. Findings related to correlation analysis

Table 3 shows the findings of the correlation analysis in determining the relationships between Conspicuous Consumption, Brand Loyalty, and the Informative and Normative roles as the sub-dimensions of the Reference Group scale. In Table 3, the variables of conspicuous consumption, brand loyalty, informative role and normative role are coded as CC, BL, IR and NR, respectively. When descriptive statistics are considered, the lowest mean belongs to NR and the highest mean belongs to IR. Based on findings of the correlation analysis, significantly positive relationships between all variables were found. The relationships between CC-BL and CC-NR are moderate, the relationship between NR-BL is weak, and the relationships between CC-IR and IR-BL are very weak (Karagöz, 2019: 808).

Table 3. Correlation Analysis between Variables

Variables	Mean	SD.	CC	BL	IR	NR
CC	2.501	0.736	1			
BL	2.832	0.8126	0.547**	1		
IR	3.550	0.780	0.111*	0.089*	1	
NR	2.498	0.822	0.621**	0.362**	0.283**	1

** significant at $p < 0.01$, * significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

3.4. Findings related to regression analyses

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis in determining the total effect of CC on BL. The significance level is $p < 0.05$ and the model is significant. It is seen that conspicuous consumption has a moderate and positive effect on brand loyalty at

1% significance level (β : 0.547, R^2 : 0.299, $p < 0.05$). CC explains 29.9% of the total variance of BL. According to this finding, the following hypothesis is accepted:

"H1: Conspicuous consumption positively and significantly affects consumers' brand loyalty"

Table 4. Regression Analysis Findings on the Effect of CC on BL

Variables	B	SD.	(β)	t	P
Constant	1.296	0.124		10.462	0.000
CC	0.614	0.048	0.547	12.915	0.000

Dependent variable: BL
R: 0.547 R²: 0.299 F: 166.807 P: 0.000

Table 5 and Table 6 displays the results of the regression analysis in determining the effect of CC on BR and NR. The established regression models are significant since the significance levels are $p < 0.05$. While CC affects IR weakly positively and significantly (β : 0.111, R^2 : 0.13, $p < 0.05$), it affects NR moderately positively and significantly (β : 0.621, R^2 : 0.385, $p < 0.05$). According to these findings, CC explains 1.3% of the total variance of IR and 38.5% of the total variance of NR.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Findings for the Effect of CC on IR

Variables	B	SD.	(β)	t	P
Constant	3.256	0.139		23.427	0.000
CC	0.118	0.053	0.111	2.212	0.028

Dependent variable: IR
R: 0.111 R²: 0.130 F: 4.891 P: 0.028

Table 6. Regression Analysis Findings on the Effect of CC on NR

Variables	B	SD.	(β)	t	P
Constant	0.763	0.115		6.611	0.000
CC	0.693	0.044	0.621	15.661	0.000

Dependent variable: NR
R: 0.621 R²: 0.385 F: 245.259 P: 0.000

The results of the multiple regression analysis in determining the mediating role of IR and NR in the effect of CC on BL are given in Table 7. In the model in which the effect of CC on BL together with IR and NR is analyzed, IR and NR do not have a significant effect on BL ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, no evidence could be reached towards

the existence of a mediating role by IR and NR in the effect of CC on BL. Accordingly, the following research hypotheses are rejected.

“H2: The informative role of reference groups has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty”

“H3: The normative role of reference groups has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty”

“H4: Informative effect of reference groups has a mediating effect on the effect of conspicuous consumption brand loyalty”

“H5: Normative effect of reference groups has a mediating effect on the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty” are rejected.

Table 7. Regression Analysis Findings on the Effect of CC, IR and NR on BL

Variables	B	SD.	(β)	t	P
Constant	1.167	0.192		6.218	0.000
CC	0.591	0.061	0.527	9.703	0.000
IR	0.024	0.047	0.023	0.512	0.609
NR	0.028	0.057	0.028	0.498	0.619

Dependent variable: BL
R: 0.548 R²: 0.300 F: 55.653 P: 0.000

4. DISCUSSION

Gaining new customers can be more costly than retaining the existing customer base. “Marketing is the science and art of finding profitable customers, keeping them loyal to the company and increasing their purchases” (Karaca, 2001: 132). Hence, in order to be successful in an intensely competitive environment, businesses pursue to be consistently preferred by the consumers, and in continuum, establish a brand loyalty via emphasizing the superior aspects of their brands and the values and benefits the brand provides (Firat and Azmak, 2007: 252).

Notwithstanding, various factors are in effect in the establishment of brand loyalty. While some of these factors are related to the marketing efforts of the business itself, some are related to the consumers with respect to their consumption attitudes and behaviors such as consumer interest (Çiftyıldız, 2010; Çiftyıldız and Sütütemiz, 2007), self-image congruence (Aydın, 2017), gender role (Aymaz and Can, 2020) and hedonic benefit expectation (Deniz and Erciş, 2010). From this perspective, it is vital to investigate that whether conspicuous consumption as a consumer behavior also have a possible positive effect on brand loyalty. The study findings indicate that conspicuous consumption has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty. Accordingly, conspicuous consumption explains approximately one-third (29.9%) of the variance of brand loyalty. This finding of the present study is supported by some

of the related literature. The findings coincide with the results of Yeşil's (2022) study, which found that conspicuous consumption has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty and conspicuous consumption explains 28% of the variance of brand loyalty. Lee and Workman (2015) also reached that conspicuous consumption categorized as high, medium and low levels, has a significant effect on brand loyalty. According to their findings, consumers with high conspicuous consumption tendencies also have high brand loyalty scores.

Another outcome of the study is the effect of conspicuous consumption on reference groups. Conspicuous consumption has a significantly positive effect on the informative and normative role of reference groups. This effect is weak for the informative role and moderate for the normative role. Conspicuous consumption explains 1.3% of the variance observed in the informative role, while it explains 38.5% of the variance observed in the normative role. With conspicuous consumption, individuals aim to achieve a higher status or give messages to their environment, especially the reference groups, about their status, wealth and power through the symbolic features of the products they buy (Podoshen and Andrzejewski, 2012: 321-322; Hiz, 2011: 118; Akgül, 2020: 44; Şahin and Nasır, 2019: 387). On the one hand, the informative role of the reference groups is mostly related to the fact that consumers are influenced by the opinions of various reference groups such as family and friends and regard them as social evidence in their purchasing decision. On the other hand, the normative role is related to the individual's tendency to comply with group expectations with concerns such as being liked, respected, accepted and appreciated in the reference groups. At this point, it can be argued that while the informative role of the reference groups affects the consumer more in the rational decision-making process, the normative role is more related to the emotional motivations (Kavak and Dinçer, 2020: 191; Dinçer, 2018: 28-29; Karaca, 2016: 215). The distinction between informative and normative roles can explain one of the findings of the present study as conspicuous consumption has found to have a greater effect on the normative role of reference groups.

Although there is no study in the literature that deals with the mediating role of reference groups in the effect of consumers' conspicuous consumption tendencies on brand loyalty, Yıldırım (2021) determined that reference groups play a mediating role in the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty and also reference groups positively and significantly affect brand loyalty. Nugraha (2019) revealed that reference groups possess a partial effect on brand loyalty. In the present study, however, no strong evidence could be found towards the mediating role of reference groups in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION

Consumers directly affect the sales and profitability of businesses with their purchasing decisions (Altunışık et. al., 2012: 60). There are many social, psychological and personal factors affecting the consumer purchase decision process (Yıldırım, 2016: 215). In addition to such factors, marketing efforts of businesses and

especially brand and brand loyalty are very important (Altunışık, et. al, 2017: 58). The brand has benefits such as creating demand for businesses, support for promotion efforts, product loyalty, stability in demand (Yükselen, 2014: 216-217). Ensuring brand loyalty will enable the consumer to purchase the product of the business repeatedly without identifying and evaluating alternatives in the purchasing decision process. The advantages of brand loyalty such as reduction in customer price sensitivity, lower cost of acquiring new customers, more sales and sales revenue, increased ability to respond to competitive threats will create a significant competitive advantage for businesses (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005 and Rowley, 2005 as cited in Roy, 2011: 114). Brand loyalty can be regarded as an attitude with behavioral and cognitive roots (Fırat and Azmak, 2007: 255) that emerges in the purchasing decision process of consumers. Thus, studies investigating the factors affecting brand loyalty possess significant potential of contributing to knowledge accumulation in the respective literature. Based on this motivation, the present study analysed the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty and the mediating role of reference groups in this effect. The research findings indicate a significantly positive effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty, informative role and normative role of reference groups. No evidence could be found towards mediating role of reference groups in the relationship between brand loyalty and conspicuous consumption.

Beyond fulfillment of basic needs, consumers may now prefer certain products and brands that are *seen* by other people and have *different* meanings in an effort to be appreciated, to stand out, to be superior, or to belong to another social group (Barut and Güneş, 2018: 82-83). Businesses pursuing to establish brand loyalty should take into account these motivations that trigger conspicuous consumption in all marketing efforts, and especially in their marketing communication activities. In the messages given to the target market, emphasizing the values that match with consumer motivations towards conspicuous consumption can be regarded as an important strategy in terms of ensuring brand loyalty.

According to the result of the research, the explanatory power associated with the effect of conspicuous consumption on the informative role of the reference groups is very low. Moreover, the mediating role of reference groups in the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand loyalty and the reference groups do not have a significant effect on brand loyalty. Considered together, these findings indicate that certain other factors may have a significant effect on the intertwined connections among these variables. For this reason, further studies should be conducted by utilizing different factors such as consumer characteristics like personality and social status, reference group characteristics, or brand-product characteristic, in order to enhance the accumulated scientific knowledge on the subject of interest. Furthermore, the employment of convenience sampling method due to time and monetary constraints may be considered as a limitation the present study bear. When the sample is examined, it is not confident to generalize the findings of the research to the entire population, since approximately two-thirds of the participants consisted of university graduates and almost half of them were civil servants. Thus, the social strata existing

in the population according to certain demographic features might not have been represented by their true respective weights in the sample. This situation can be considered as another constraint of the present research. Therefore, future large sample studies with different demographic characteristics might help generalize the findings of this study.

GÖSTERİŞÇİ TÜKETİMİN MARKA BAĞLILIĞI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ VE REFERANS GRUPLARIN ARACILIK ROLÜ

1. GİRİŞ

İnsan yaşantısının bir olgusu olarak tarihin eski dönemlerinden günümüze kadar gelmiş (Tunç, 2017: 417) ve Anadolu’da “desinler” tabiriyle ifade edilen gösteriş amaçlı tüketim ile tüketiciler fizyolojik ihtiyaçların karşılanmasından çok statülerini yükseltmek, zenginlik ve güçlerini sergilemek gibi motivasyonlarla tüketmektedirler (Çetin ve Yaylı, 2019: 229). Markanın kendini ifade etme ve sosyal onay gibi sembolik faydaları göz önüne alındığında (Yıldız, 2019: 155), gösterişçi tüketim eğiliminde olan bir tüketicinin ürünün faydasından ziyade sembolik özelliklerini önceleyerek satın alma karar sürecinde ürün markasını dikkate alacağı ve prestijli gördüğü markalara bağlı kalacağı değerlendirilebilir (Çetin ve Yaylı, 2019: 228). Ayrıca bireyler aile, arkadaş, komşular gibi üyesi olduğu ya da üyesi olmadığı ancak üyesi olmak istediği referans gruplarında oluşturmak istediği intiba ve imajı sağlamak için gösterişçi amaçlı tüketim ve markalı ürünlere daha fazla bağlılık eğilimi gösterebilirler (Şahin ve Nasır, 2019: 387). Bu kapsamda bu çalışmada marka bağlılığı, gösterişçi tüketim ve referans grup kavramları ele alınmakta ve gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığına etkisi ve bu etkide referans grupların aracılık rolü incelenmektedir.

2. YÖNTEM

Araştırmanın anakütlesini Türkiye’deki 18 yaş üstü 62,7 milyon tüketici oluşturmaktadır. TÜİK 2022 yılı verilerinden Çalışma kapsamında elde edilen 393 katılımcı sayısı bu evreni temsil etmeye yeterlidir (Yazıcıoğlu ve Erdoğan, 2004: 50). Araştırmada Chaudhuri vd., (2011) tarafından geliştirilen ve Arslan (2021) tarafından geçerlilik ve güvenilirlik çalışması yapılan “Gösterişçi Tüketim Ölçeği”, marka bağlılığını ölçmek üzere Yoo vd., (2000) tarafından geliştirilen, geçerlilik ve güvenilirlik çalışması Ayas (2012) tarafından yapılan tek boyutlu ölçek ve Bearden vd., (1989) tarafından geliştirilen “Bilgilendirici Rol” ve “Normatif Rol“ alt boyutlarından, Dinçer, (2018) tarafından geçerlilik ve güvenilirlik çalışması yapılan çalışması yapılan “Referans Grup Ölçeği” kullanılmıştır.

3. BULGULAR

Araştırma bulgularına göre gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığına anlamlı bir etkisi bulunmaktadır. Bu etki pozitif yönlü ve orta düzeydedir ($\beta: ,547, R^2: ,299, p<0,05$). Gösterişçi tüketim marka bağlılığının toplam varyansının %29,9’unu açıklamaktadır.

Gösterişçi tüketimin referans grupların bilgilendirici rolü üzerinde pozitif yönde ve zayıf düzeyde anlamlı (β : ,111, R^2 : ,013, $p < 0,05$), referans grupların normatif rolü üzerinde ise pozitif yönde ve orta düzeyde anlamlı olarak (β : ,621, R^2 : ,385, $p < 0,05$) etkisi bulunmaktadır. Gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığına etkisinde referans grupların aracılık rolünü belirlemeye yönelik yapılan çoklu regresyon analizi sonuçlarına göre aracılık rolünün bulunmadığı tespit edilmiştir.

4. TARTIŞMA

Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, gösterişçi tüketim marka bağlılığı varyansının yaklaşık üçte birini (%29,9) açıklamaktadır. Mevcut çalışmanın bu bulgusu, ilgili literatürün bir kısmı tarafından desteklenmektedir. Bulgular, Yeşil'in (2022) gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı bir etkisi olduğunu ve gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı varyansının %28'ini açıkladığını ortaya koyan çalışmasının sonuçlarıyla örtüşmektedir. Lee ve Workman (2015) da yüksek, orta ve düşük düzey olarak kategorize edilen gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır.

Çalışmanın bir diğer sonucu ise, gösterişçi tüketimin referans grupları üzerindeki etkisidir. Buna göre gösterişçi tüketimin referans gruplarının bilgilendirici ve normatif rolü üzerindeki etkisi anlamlı ve pozitif yöndedir. Bu etki bilgilendirici rol için zayıf, normatif rol için ise orta düzeydedir. Gösterişçi tüketim, bilgilendirici rolde gözlemlenen varyansın %1,3'ünü açıklarken, normatif rolde gözlemlenen varyansın %38,5'ini açıklamaktadır. Referans gruplarının bilgilendirici rolü, çoğunlukla tüketicilerin aile ve arkadaşlar gibi çeşitli referans gruplarının görüşlerinden etkilenmeleri ve satın alma kararlarında bunları sosyal kanıt olarak görmeleri ile ilgilidir. Normatif rol ise bireyin referans gruplarında sevilme, sayılma, kabul görme ve takdir edilme gibi kaygılarla grup beklentilerine uyma eğilimi ile ilgilidir. Bu noktada referans gruplarının bilgilendirici rolünün tüketiciyi daha çok rasyonel karar verme sürecinde etkilerken, normatif rolün daha çok duygusal motivasyonlarla ilgili olduğu söylenebilir (Kavak ve Dinçer, 2020: 191; Dinçer, 2018: 28-29; Karaca, 2016: 215). Bilgi verici ve normatif roller arasındaki ayrım, gösterişçi tüketimin referans gruplarının normatif rolü üzerinde daha büyük bir etkiye sahip olduğu bulunduğundan, bu çalışmanın bulgularından birini açıklayabilir.

Literatürde tüketicilerin gösterişçi tüketim eğilimlerinin marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisinde referans gruplarının aracılık rolünü ele alan bir çalışma bulunmamakla birlikte, Yıldırım (2021) çalışmasında, marka güveninin marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisinde referans gruplarının aracılık rolü olduğunu, ayrıca referans gruplarının marka bağlılığını pozitif ve anlamlı bir şekilde etkilediğini tespit etmiştir. Nugraha (2019) referans gruplarının marka bağlılığı üzerinde kısmi bir etkiye sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu çalışmada, gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisinde referans gruplarının aracılık rolüne yönelik güçlü bir kanıt bulunamamıştır.

SONUÇ

Marka bağlılığının daha düşük müşteri fiyat duyarlılığı, daha düşük yeni müşteri çekme maliyeti, daha fazla satış ve satış geliri, rekabetçi tehditlere cevap verme yeteneğinin artması gibi faydaları işletmeler için önemli bir rekabet avantajı yaratacaktır (Delgado-Ballester ve Munuera-Aleman, 2005 ve Rowley, 2005'ten aktaran Roy, 2011: 114). “*Satın alma karar sürecinde ortaya çıkan, davranışsal ve bilişsel kökleri olan bir tutum*” (Fırat ve Azmak, 2007: 255) olarak değerlendirilebilecek marka bağlılığını etkileyen faktörlerin belirlenmesine yönelik yapılacak çalışmalar literatüre önemli katkı sağlayacaktır. Araştırma bulgularına göre, gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı, referans gruplarının bilgilendirici rolü ve normatif rolü üzerinde anlamlı ve pozitif etkiye sahip olduğu görülmektedir. Gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığına etkisinde referans grupların aracılık rolü bulunmamaktadır.

Tüketiciler artık temel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamının ötesinde takdir edilmek, öne çıkmak, üstün olmak ya da başka bir sosyal gruba ait olmak amacıyla başkaları tarafından görülen ve farklı anlamlar taşıyan belirli ürün ve markaları tercih edebilmektedir (Barut ve Güneş, 2018: 82-83). Marka bağlılığı oluşturma peşinde olan işletmeler, gösterişçi tüketimi tetikleyen bu motivasyonları tüm pazarlama çalışmalarında ve özellikle pazarlama iletişimi faaliyetlerinde dikkate almalıdır. Hedef pazara verilen mesajlarda, tüketicilerin gösterişçi tüketime yönelik motivasyonlarıyla örtüşen değerlerin vurgulanması, marka bağlılığının sağlanması açısından önemli bir strateji olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, gösterişçi tüketimin referans gruplarının bilgilendirici rolü üzerindeki etkisine ilişkin açıklayıcı güç çok düşüktür. Ayrıca, gösterişçi tüketimin marka bağlılığı üzerindeki etkisinde referans gruplarının aracılık rolü bulunmamaktadır. Bu bulgular birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, diğer bazı faktörlerin bu değişkenler arasındaki ilişki üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olabileceği değerlendirilebilir. Bu nedenle kişilik ve sosyal statü gibi tüketici özellikleri, referans grup özellikleri ya da marka-ürün özellikleri gibi farklı faktörler kullanılarak yapılacak yeni çalışmalar, konuyla ilgili bilimsel bilgi birikimini artıracaktır.

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KATKI ORANI / CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA / EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR / CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir veya Kavram / <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak / <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	Fatih ELİBOL
Tasarım / <i>Design</i>	Yöntemi, ölçeği ve deseni tasarlamak / <i>Designing method, scale and pattern</i>	Fatih ELİBOL
Veri Toplama ve İşleme / <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlenmek ve raporlamak / <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Fatih ELİBOL
Tartışma ve Yorum / <i>Discussion and Interpretation</i>	Bulguların değerlendirilmesinde ve sonuçlandırılmasında sorumluluk almak / <i>Taking responsibility in evaluating and finalizing the findings</i>	Fatih ELİBOL
Literatür Taraması / <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak / <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Fatih ELİBOL