AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND LOVE AND BRAND IMAGE IN THE IMPACT OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY ON POSITIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION[*]

MARKA ÖZGÜNLÜĞÜNÜN POZİTİF AĞIZDAN AĞIZA İLETİŞİM ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİNDE MARKA AŞKI VE MARKA İMAJININ ARACILIK ROLÜNÜN İNCELENMESİ

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Abstract

The rapid development of technology, the increase in the number of brands in global and local markets, and the creation of related products and services in global markets have intensified the competitive environment between businesses. It has become crucial for businesses to create authentic brands that are original, strong, distinguishable, and memorable for customers to attract the attention of them against numerous competitors and various alternatives. While perceiving a brand as authentic provides a competitive advantage to the brand, it also contributes to love felt by consumers for the brand, the image of the brand from the point of consumers and the recommendation of the brand to other consumers. In this context, the objective of this study is to assess the impact of brand authenticity on brand love, brand image and positive word-of-mouth communication and to investigate the mediating role of brand love and brand image in the relationship between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication. The universe of the study consists of consumers who live in Turkey, are over 18 years old and purchase home electronics. 410 valid surveys were collected using convenience sampling method and online survey technique in the study.

As a result of the analysis, it has been observed that brand authenticity has a meaningful impact on brand love, brand image and positive word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, it was determined that brand love and brand image has mediating role in the effect of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication.

Keywords: Brand authenticity, brand love, brand image, positive word-of-mouth communication

JEL Classification: M30, M31

Öz

Günümüzde teknolojinin gelişmesi, global ve yerel pazarlardaki marka sayısının artış göstermesi ve küresel pazarlarda benzer ürün ve hizmetlerin oluşması işletmeler arasındaki rekabet ortamını yoğunlaştırmıştır. İşletmelerin sayısız küresel ve yerel rakip ile çeşitli mal ve hizmet alternatifi karşısında tüketicilerin ilgisini çekebilmek için orijinal, güçlü, tüketici gözünde ayırt edilebilir ve hatırlanabilir olan özgün markalar yaratmalarını önemli hale getirmiştir. Bir markanın özgün olarak algılanması markaya rekabet avantajı sağlarken aynı zamanda tüketicilerde markaya duyulan aşkı, markanın tüketici zihnindeki imajını ve markanın diğer tüketicilere tavsiye edilmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın temel amaçları marka özgünlüğünün; marka aşkı, markı imajı ve pozitif ağızdan ağıza iletişim üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmak ve marka özgünlüğü ile pozitif ağızdan ağıza iletişim arasındaki ilişkide marka aşkı ve marka imajının aracılık rolünü incelemektir. Çalışmanın evrenini Türkiye'de yaşayan, 18 yaşından büyük olan ve beyaz eşya satın kullanan tüketiciler oluşturmuştur. Çalışmada kolayda örnekleme yöntemi ve çevrimiçi anket tekniği kullanılarak 410 geçerli anket toplanmıştır. Gerçekleştirilen analizler sonucunda marka özgünlüğünün; marka aşkı, marka imajı ve pozitif ağızdan ağıza iletişim üzerinde pozitif yönde etkisinin olduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca marka özgünlüğünün pozitif ağızdan ağıza iletişim üzerindeki etkisinde marka aşkı ve marka imajının aracılık rolü olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka özgünlüğü, marka aşkı, marka imajı, pozitif ağızdan ağıza iletişim

JEL Sınıflandırılması: M30, M31

1. Introduction

In the 2000s, the acceleration of globalization and technological advancements led to the emergence of numerous competitors and products and services with similarities in both local and international markets. The increasing number of brands in global markets and the presence of similar products and services intensified competition among businesses operating in contemporary economies. In the highly competitive environment of global markets, businesses have sought to differentiate themselves from their competitors, maintain their existing market shares, and achieve profitability. This has underscored the significance of the concepts of brand and brand authenticity as businesses endeavour to sustain their presence and competitiveness in the global marketplace (Schallehn et al., 2014; Gilmore & Pine, 2017; Erdil et al., 2019).

Businesses, faced with numerous local and global competitors and a variety of product and service alternatives, need to focus on the concept of brand authenticity and strive to create unique brands in order to capture the attention of consumers and stay in their minds. Brand authenticity involves making a brand original, strong, distinguishable, and memorable in the eyes of consumers, thereby creating a competitive advantage for the brand (Bruhn et al., 2012). Authenticity is expressed as an important characteristic that adds value to a brand and contributes to the successful perception of brands (Arıkan & Telci, 2014).

Authentic brands that differentiate themselves from competitors with distinctive characteristics have the ability to influence consumers' perceptions and behaviors. Brand love, as a consequence of brand authenticity, allows consumers to feel a sense of closeness and emotional connection towards brands that align with their self-identity and lifestyle. An authentic brand can foster brand love in the eyes of consumers, facilitating the establishment of an irreplaceable and enduring bond between the consumer and the brand (Manthiou et al., 2018).

Brand authenticity, by differentiating the brand from similar products and services in the market with similar functions and features, creates a unique association in the consumer's mind, in other words, it forms a strong and distinctive brand image (Mabkhot & Saari, 2017). The strong brand image formed in the consumer's memory, in conjunction with brand authenticity, can lead to positive word-of-mouth communication about the product purchased or the service experienced, and it can directly influence consumers' favorable behaviors towards the brand, ultimately impacting consumers' purchasing preferences (Silverman, 2011, p. 12).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has its origins in the Greek word "authentikos", which is derived from the combination of "autos" meaning self or own, and "hentes" meaning doer or entity, signifying an entity that acts on its own authority. It also finds its Latin equivalent in the term "authenticus," which conveys meanings of originality, appropriateness, reliability, and non-imitation. This linguistic lineage forms the basis for the concept of authenticity (Spiggle et al., 2012, p. 968; Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004, p.1). In the literature, the term authenticity is commonly associated with words like real and genuine, serving to express the reality and genuineness of a product, service, or brand (Kennick, 1985).

Brand authenticity is defined as the perceived consistency between a brand's core values, characteristics, and the behaviors that it embodies in defining itself. It is also described as norms that do not compromise a brand's identity or its fundamental nature, perceived as loyal to its principles (Fritz et al., 2017). In other words, brand authenticity is a concept that delineates the degree to which a brand distinguishes itself from others or competitors, and maintains its uniqueness while remaining true to the promises it makes (Akbar & Wymer, 2017, p. 29).

According to Bruhn et al. (2012), it is emphasized that a brand's core values, unique features, and identity alone are not sufficient for the creation of brand authenticity. Consumers perceive a brand as authentic when it consistently exhibits behaviors that align with its promises, is reliable in its claims, transparent, and viewed as honest. Furthermore, brands that are considered trustworthy are more likely to be perceived as authentic compared to other brands (Luffarelli et al., 2019). Eggers et al. (2013) suggest that the attribution of authenticity to a brand is influenced by the level of trust

consumers have in that brand. Brands that resist trends, remain true to their original designs, are reliable, and integrate unique features that resonate with consumers while forming a connection with them tend to be perceived as authentic (Beverland, 2006; Morhart et al., 2015).

In the literature, brand authenticity has been expressed through various attributes and dimensions, depending on researchers' perspectives and assessments of the concept. Bruhn et al. (2012) defined brand authenticity in terms of the dimensions of continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. On the other hand, Napoli et al. (2014) proposed that brand authenticity consists of dimensions such as sincerity, symbolism, heritage, craftsmanship, nostalgia, quality commitment, consistency, and heritage. The brand authenticity scale developed by Morhart et al. (2015) comprises dimensions such as continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. These varying perspectives and dimensions contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the concept of brand authenticity in the literature.

2.2. Brand Love

Businesses aim to not only meet the needs and desires of consumers with their products and services but also to create a positive impression of the brand in consumers' minds. They seek to make consumers feel close to the brand and establish an emotional connection. Brand love is a concept used to describe the degree of positive emotions and passionate emotional attachment that a consumer feels toward a brand when they are satisfied with its products and services (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). In other words, brand love is a concept that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements and defines the long-term brand relationship between the consumer and the brand, distinguishing it from personal love between individuals (Batra et al., 2012, p. 13).

The term "brand love" first appeared in the field of marketing when Shimp & Madden (1988) adapted Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love to consumer research. In their work, Shimp & Madden (1988) theoretically examined the bond between the consumer and the object of consumption. Ahuvia (1993), who conducted the first experimental study on brand love, stated the intense emotions that individuals feel towards objects with which they form a connection and affection, which could be referred to as "love objects." In addition, it was mentioned that the intensity of these emotions varies subjectively from one individual to another (Ahuvia, 1993). Fournier (1998) states that consumers feel close to brands that align with their own personalities and the sense of closeness that develops between the consumer and the brand gives rise to brand love.

In the literature review, there are several studies that have examined the relationship between brand authenticity and brand love. Manthiou et al. (2018), in their research on luxury hotel brands, highlighted the critical role of brand authenticity as a determinant of brand impressions, lifestyle compatibility, and brand love and demonstrated the relationship between brand authenticity and brand love, emphasizing its significance. Mody & Hanks (2020) attempted to comparatively measure the impact of brand authenticity on brand love between Airbnb and traditional hotel brands and observed that brand authenticity had a positive influence on brand love. Aytekin & Taştepe (2020) investigated the mediating effect of brand love in the relationship between brand authenticity and

brand preference, focusing on the Samsung mobile phone brand. Similarly, studies by Safeer et al. (2021), Meilawati & Ferdinand (2021), and Harjadi et al. (2023) have all concluded that brand authenticity positively affects brand love. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H_1: There is a significant and positive impact of brand authenticity on brand love.

2.3. Brand Image

The concept of image refers to phenomena that summarize, define, and facilitate the recall of products, services, brands, individuals, or places, carrying symbolic meanings (Güner & Öngel, 2021). The term "brand image" first appeared in research related to consumer purchase preferences in the study conducted by Gardner and Levy (1955) and it represents the emotions, thoughts, and attitudes consumers have towards a brand. Biel (1992) defined brand image as the set of features and associations that consumers connect with a brand's name, while Keller (1993) described brand image as a composite of all the information held in a customer's mind about the brand and all the associations that form regarding the brand. In other words, brand image is formed by the subjective perceptions that consumers have in their minds about the brand's characteristics and the associations created by those characteristics (Keller, 1993; Özüpek & Diker, 2013, p. 103). Brand image is defined as a concept that helps consumers process information, differentiates the brand from competitors, motivates consumers to engage in purchase behavior, and creates value by evoking positive emotions in consumers (Aaker, 1991).

In the literature, there are studies that provide evidence of a positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand image. For instance, Dağ & Durmaz (2020) conducted a study in the home electronics sector, examining the impact of brand authenticity on brand image and brand preference and found that brand authenticity had a positive and significant effect on brand image. Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) investigated the multidimensional nature of brand authenticity and its effects on brand image and brand loyalty in the context of traditional restaurants and revealed that the three dimensions of brand authenticity had an impact on brand image and brand loyalty. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H_2: There is a significant and positive impact of brand authenticity on brand image.

2.4. Word-of-Mouth Communication

Individuals sharing their positive and negative thoughts, experiences, and opinions about a product or service with their friends, close associates, and current or potential consumers is referred to as word-of-mouth communication (Ennew et al., 2000; Cheng et al., 2006, p. 97; Phan & Pilik, 2018). Essentially, word-of-mouth communication encompasses conversations in which consumers discuss their purchase experiences, without primarily driven by commercial or economic concerns, both

positively and negatively about the products they have bought or the services they have experienced (Arndt, 1967; Bone, 1992; Buttle, 1998, p. 242).

Satisfied consumers engage in positive or favorable word-of-mouth communication about a product or service, while dissatisfied consumers express negative or unfavorable word-of-mouth communication about the product or service. Therefore, word-of-mouth communication is categorized into two different types: positive (favorable) word-of-mouth communication and negative (unfavorable) word-of-mouth communication (East et al., 2008).

In the literature, there are studies that suggest a positive relationship between brand authenticity and word-of-mouth communication. For example, Morhart et al. (2015) found that the dimensions of brand authenticity lead to positive word-of-mouth communication and that there is a positive relationship between them. Yıldız & Ülker-Demirel (2017) examined the relationship between brand authenticity and word-of-mouth communication and concluded that brand authenticity has a positive impact on word-of-mouth communication. Similarly, Şimşek (2017) concluded in their study that there is a high degree of positive relationship between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H$_3$: There is a significant and positive impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication.

Studies by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), Ismail & Spinelli (2012), Albert & Merunka (2013), Erdoğan & Erginkaya (2018), and Çavuşoğlu & Demirağ (2020) have examined the relationship between brand love and word-of-mouth communication, and they have found that brand love has a positive impact on word-of-mouth communication. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H$_4$: There is a significant and positive impact of brand love on positive word-of-mouth communication.

Based on the studies conducted by Unal & Aydın (2013), Anggraeni & Rachmanita (2015), Kurtoğlu & Sönmez (2016), Dam (2020), and Fitriani &Achmad (2021), there is a consensus that brand image has a positive influence on word-of-mouth communication. These studies have consistently found evidence supporting the notion that a positive brand image contributes to positive word-of-mouth communication. According to these findings, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H$_5$: There is a significant and positive impact of brand image on positive word-of-mouth communication.

The literature review reveals that brand authenticity has an impact on brand love and positive word-of-mouth communication, and brand love also influences positive word-of-mouth communication. However, in the literature review, no study was found that investigates the mediating effect of brand love on the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed to examine the mediating role of brand love on the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication.

H$_6$: Brand love has a mediating role in the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication.

The literature reveals that conducted studies support the assertion that brand authenticity has an effect on brand image and positive word-of-mouth communication. Additionally, it is observed that brand image influences positive word-of-mouth communication. Yıldız & Ülker-Demirel (2017) in the study explored the correlation between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication along with the mediating role of brand image in this relationship. The study's findings illustrated that brand authenticity exerts an influence on positive word-of-mouth communication. Furthermore, brand image plays an mediating role in the relationship between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication. Consequently, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H$_7$: Brand image has a mediating role in the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication.

The research model, based on the developed hypotheses, is presented in Figure 1.
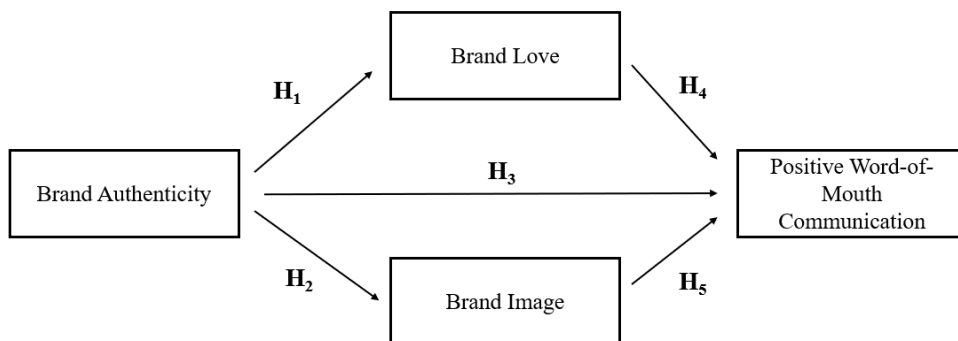
Figure 1: Research Model

3. Methodology

In this section of the study, the research objective and limitations, research model, the population and sample of the research, data collection method and data analysis methods are elaborated upon.

3.1. Purpose and Limitations of The Research

This study aims to investigate the impact of brands possessing brand authenticity on consumers in terms of brand love, the brand image perceived by consumers and positive word-of-mouth communication. Within this framework, the primary objective of the research is to examine the influence of brand authenticity, a concept gaining significance in the literature, on the concepts of

brand love, brand image, and positive word-of-mouth communication. The secondary objective of the research is to explore the mediating role of brand love and brand image in the relationship between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication.

The primary limitation of the research lies in its restriction to consumers residing exclusively in Turkey, aged 18 years or older, and users of home electronics. A second limitation is to use the convenience sampling method, one of the non-probability sampling methods, which arises from the constraints of time and cost. Consequently, the research findings can only be generalized to the specified sample group. Another limitation of the research is that the survey data was collected only with an online survey form and that other data collection methods were not utilized.

3.2. The Population and Sample of The Research

The universe of this study consists of consumers who reside in Turkey, are 18 years of age or older, and either purchase or use home electronics. In consideration of the large size of the universe and constraints related to time and budget, a sampling method was employed to represent the universe. Given the limitations in time and financial resources, a convenience sampling method, one of the non-probability sampling methods, was adopted to represent the research population (Gegez, 2019, p. 199).

When calculating the sample size for the research, it was determined, based on the table created by Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan (2007), that when universe is one milion or more, a sample size of at least 384 is sufficient for a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error.

The primary reasons for conducting the research on home electronics brands are that the home electronics sector caters to a substantial consumer base due to the essential nature of its products in daily life, brands in the home electronics sector continually update their products and services according to technological advancements, and there has been relatively limited attention given to studies related to the home electronics sector in the existing literature on brand authenticity.

3.3. Data Collection Method

Online survey, one of the quantitative data collection methods, was employed in collecting research data. The online survey form was created using Google Forms. The online survey form used for data collection consists of three main sections. The first section of the survey form includes a filter question ("Do you use home electronics?"). Based on the response to the filter question, participants who do not use home electronics were directed to finish the survey, while participants who use home electronics were directed to the main survey questions.

Participants were asked to select the home electronics brand they were most familiar with or used in the second section of the survey form, and in the subsequent sections, they were instructed to answer the questions posed based on the selected brand. Subsequently, 33 scale questions related to four

variables in the research model were presented. Participants were requested to indicate their levels of agreement on the scale questions using a 5-point Likert scale as follows: (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) (Gegez, 2019, p.162).

In the research, established scales with demonstrated validity and reliability in the literature were utilized. To measure brand authenticity, a scale consisting of four dimensions (continuity, originality, reliability, naturalness) and 15 statements developed by Bruhn et al. (2012) was employed. For measuring brand love, a scale comprising 10 questions adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006)'s study was used. The scale for brand image was selected from the works of Park et al. (1986) and Aydın & Ozer (2005), consisting of 5 questions. Additionally, a scale comprising 3 questions taken from Price & Arnould (1999)'s study on positive word-of-mouth communication was chosen for assessment.

In the third section of the survey form, six questions were posed to obtain information about the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, marital status, age, educational background, occupation, and income. Prior to reaching a broad audience with the survey form for the research, a pilot study was conducted with a group of 36 individuals to identify and rectify potential errors and deficiencies, as well as to ensure that the questions were correctly understood and feasible. Following the pilot study, the survey was administered to other participants without the need for modifications to the survey form.

The online survey form was distributed through WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn channels from January 2023 to May 2023. In total, the survey form was completed by 423 participants. 13 surveys that provided a negative response to the filter question in the survey were excluded from the study. As a result, 410 survey forms were deemed suitable for analysis within the scope of the research.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the research were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 16 software. The socio-demographic profile of the participants was examined through frequency analysis. To test the validity and reliability of the scales in the research model, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was applied. Exploratory factor analysis, regression analysis, mediation analysis, and the Sobel test were conducted to test the hypotheses in the research model.

4. Research Findings

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the research findings related to the demographic characteristics of the participants, normal distribution of the scales, reliability analysis, explanatory factor analysis of the scales and regression analysis.

4.1. Participant Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 410 participants who took part in the survey are presented in Table 1, along with the frequency and percentage distributions.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Martial Status	Frequency	Percent
Female	294	71.7	Married	235	57.3
Male	116	28.3	Single	175	42.7
TOTAL	410	100.0	*TOTAL*	410	100.0
Age	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Income**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
18-25	64	15.6	0 – 8.500 TL	91	22.2
26-35	129	31.5	8.501 – 17.000 TL	145	35.4
36-45	87	21.2	17.001 – 25.500 TL	106	25.9
46-55	79	19.3	25.501 – 34.000 TL	30	7.3
56+	51	12.4	34.001 TL +	38	9.3
TOTAL	410	100.0	*TOTAL*	410	100.0
Occupation	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Education**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Public	127	31.0	Elementary School	5	1.2
Private	123	30.0	High School	47	11.5
Self-Employed	29	7.1	Associate's Degree	41	10.0
Retired	45	11.0	Bachelor's Degree	246	60.0
Student	57	13.9	Master's Degree	63	15.4
Housewife	17	4.1	Doctorate	8	2.0
Unemployed	12	2.9			
TOTAL	410	100,0	*TOTAL*	410	100.0

As observed in Table 1, the participants in the survey predominantly consist of individuals within the 26-35 age range (31.5%), employed either in the public sector (31.0%) or the private sector (30.0%) and are females (71.7%). In addition, the majority of survey participants are married (57.3%), have a monthly income ranging from 8,501 to 17,000 Turkish Lira (35.4%), and hold a bachelor's degree (60.0%).

The brand preferences of the participants in the study within the home electronics sector are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Home Electronics Brands

Brand	Frequency	Percent
Arçelik	148	36.1
Beko	27	6.6
Bosch	132	32.2
Elektrolux	1	0.2
LG	2	0.5

Miele	4	1.0
Profilo	5	1.2
Samsung	22	5.4
Siemens	53	12.9
Vestel	16	3.9

According to Table 2, it has been determined that 36.1% of the participants have purchased or used Arçelik brand home electronics, 32.2% have opted for Bosch, and 12.9% have chosen Siemens.

4.2. Normal Distribution

Skewness and kurtosis values of the scales were examined to assess whether the data in the study exhibited a normal distribution. As a result of the conducted analyses, it was observed that the skewness and kurtosis values respectively for the scales used in the research were within the range of – 0.474 to 1.492 for brand authenticity, – 0.020 to 1.373 for brand love, – 1.382 to 1.356 for brand image, and – 1.123 to 1.027 for positive word-of-mouth communication. The fact that skewness and kurtosis values fell within the range of – 1.5 to +1.5 suggests that the data follows a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Therefore, it is concluded that the research variables exhibit a normal distribution, allowing for the application of parametric tests in the analyses.

4.3. Reliability Analysis

Before proceeding with the analyses, a reliability analysis was conducted by examining the Cronbach's Alpha values of the scales associated with the variables in the research model. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of 0.70 or higher indicates the reliability of the scale (Nunnally, 1978). According to the reliability analysis results presented in Table 3, it has been observed that the scales used in the research are reliable, and there are no impediments to their use in the analyses.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of Variables

Scale	Number of Question	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Brand Authenticity	15	0.937
Continuity	4	0.909
Originality	4	0.889
Reliability	4	0.945
Naturalness	3	0.721
Brand Love	10	0.808
Brand Image	5	0.882
Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication	3	0.939

4.4. Mean, Standard Deviation and Exploratory Factor Analysis Results of the Scales

The means, standard deviations, and exploratory factor analysis results for the scales used in the research model are provided in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: The Mean and Standard Deviation Values and The Results of The Exploratory Factor Analysis for Brand Authenticity (BA)

Scale*	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Factor Loadings**	Factor Explained Variance (%)	Cronb. Alfa (α)
BRAND AUTHENTICITY		**3.87**	**0.58**		**77.84**	**0.936**
BA	**F1: Continuity**	**4.17**	**0.67**		**55.12**	**0.909**
1	Brand offers continuity.	4.33	0.72	0.817		
2	I think the brand stays true to itself.	4.10	0.75	0.795		
3	The brand has a clear concept that is pursues.	4.10	0.77	0.788		
4	I think brand is consistent over time.	4.15	0.76	0.762		
BA	**F2: Originality**	**3.51**	**0.79**		**6.56**	**0.889**
5	Brand stands out from other brands.	3.60	0.88	0.828		
6	I think the brand is unique.	3.30	0.98	0.792		
7	The brand is different from all other brands.	3.61	0.88	0.768		
8	The brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands.	3.51	0.92	0.750		
BA	**F3: Reliability**	**4.00**	**0.67**		**10.05**	**0.945**
9	Brand's promises are credible.	4.01	0.72	0.807		
10	The brand delivers what it promises.	4.03	0.71	0.798		
11	The brand makes reliable promises.	3.98	0.70	0.772		
12	My experience of the brand has shown me that it keeps its promises.	3.97	0.76	0.716		
BA	**F4: Naturalness**	**3.80**	**0.64**		**6.13**	**0.721**
13	The brand makes a genuine impression.	3.91	0.70	0.746		
14	The brand does not seem artificial.	3.83	0.88	0.743		
15	The brand gives the impression of being natural.	3.65	0.81	0.677		

*A5-point Likert scale was employed.
** KMO=0.886; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: X^2=4830.683, p=0.000

According to Table 4, it was determined that 15 items in brand authenticity scale converged into four dimensions (F1: Continuity, F2: Originality, F3: Reliability, and F4: Naturalness) when conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the scale. It has been observed that the factor loadings of the items exceeded the threshold of 0.50.

Table 5: The Mean and Standard Deviation Values and The Results of The Exploratory Factor Analysis for Brand Love, Brand Image, and Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

Scale*	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Factor Loadings**	Factor Explained Variance (%)	Cronb. Alfa (α)****
BRAND LOVE		**3.31**	**0.59**		**70.09**	**0.937**
1	This is a wonderful brand.	3.47	0.92	0.824		
2	This brand makes me feel good.	3.69	0.88	0.833		
3	This brand is totally awesome.	3.41	0.93	0.865		
4	I have neutral feeling about this brand. ***	2.79	1.09	-	-	-
5	This brand makes me very happy.	3.52	0.89	0.884		
6	I love this brand.	3.87	0.76	0.790		
7	I have no particular feeling about this brand. ***	3.08	1.09	-	-	-
8	This brand is a pure delight.	3.41	0.94	0.843		
9	I am passionate about this brand.	2.98	1.06	0.839		
10	I am very attached to this brand.	2.90	1.11	0.817		
	BRAND IMAGE	**4.08**	**0.61**		**68.50**	**0.882**
1	This brand is stable and firmly established.	3.97	0.74	0.802		
2	This brand has a positive image.	4.11	0.69	0.883		
3	This brand is popular.	4.08	0.74	0.785		
4	This brand has a social contribution for society.	4.24	0.70	0.875		
5	This brand is innovative and forward-looking.	4.01	0.79	0.788		
	POSITIVE WOM COM.	**4.04**	**0.72**		**89.11**	**0.939**
1	I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.	4.05	0.76	0.952		
2	I say positive things about this brand to other people.	4.04	0.74	0.954		
3	I would recommend this brand to others.	4.04	0.77	0.925		

A 5-point Likert scale was employed.
* Brand Love: KMO=0.899; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: X^2=2791.409, p=0.000; Brand Image: KMO=0.821; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: X^2=1156.747, p=0.000; Positive WOM Com.: KMO=0.757; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: X^2=1111.640, p=0.000.*
***It has been excluded from the analysis due to having a factor loading <0.50 in EFA.
**** The dimensions were computed based on the remaining items in the final result of EFA.

According to Table 5, two items (Item 4 and Item 7) were excluded from the analysis due to having factor loadings below 0.50 when conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on brand love scale. Subsequently, EFA was reconducted, revealing that the remaining items in the scale converged into a single factor with factor loadings exceeding 0.50. Similarly, it was determined that items within brand image and positive word-of-mouth communication scales converged into a single factor, with factor loadings exceeding the threshold of 0.50 when separately conducting exploratory factor analyses for the scales.

4.5. Results of Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was employed to assess the impact of brand authenticity on brand love, brand image, and positive word-of-mouth communication.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis Table for The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.081	0.173		-0.471	0.638				
Continuity	-0.027	0.054	-0.023	-0.506	0.613			0.468	2.138
Originality	0.508	0.042	0.514	12.051	**0.000**	155.233*	0.605	0.536	1.865
Reliability	0.254	0.061	0.217	4.196	**0.000**			0.363	2.756
Naturalness	0.212	0.051	0.173	4.175	**0.000**			0.567	1.764
Dependent Variable: Brand Love									

*$p < 0,05$

When examining Table 6, it is observed that the statistical impact of brand authenticity's continuity dimension (p>0.05) on brand love is not significant. However, it has been determined that originality, reliability, and naturalness dimensions of brand authenticity significantly and positively affect brand love (respectively β=0.514, t=12.051, p=0.000; β=0.217, t=4.196, p=0.000; β=0.173, t=4.175, p=0.000) in a statistically significant manner. Additionally, there is no autocorrelation and multicollinearity among the independent variables (Tolerance > 0,20; VIF <10). Therefore, H_1 has been supported.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis Table for The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Brand Image

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.190	0.146		8.127	**0.000**				
Continuity	0.268	0.045	0.295	5.891	**0.000**			0.468	2.138
Originality	0.084	0.036	0.110	2.351	**0.019**	111.862*	0.525	0.536	1.865
Reliability	0.355	0.051	0.393	6.912	**0.000**			0.363	2.756
Naturalness	0.016	0.043	0.017	0.317	0.711			0.567	1.764
Dependent Variable: Brand Image									

*$p < 0,05$

When examining Table 7, it is observed that the statistical impact of brand authenticity's naturalness dimension (p>0.05) on brand image is not significant. However, it has been determined that continuity, originality and reliability dimensions of brand authenticity significantly and positively

affect brand image (respectively β=0.295, t=5.891, p=0.000; β=0.110, t=2.351, p=0.019; β=0.393, t=6.912, p=0.000) in a statistically significant manner. Additionally, there is no autocorrelation and multicollinearity among the independent variables (Tolerance > 0,20; VIF <10). Therefore, H_2 has been supported.

Table 8: Multiple Regression Analysis Table for The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.441	0.159		2.782	**0.006**				
Continuity	0.195	0.049	0.182	3.960	**0.000**			0.468	2.138
Originality	0.111	0.039	0.123	2.869	**0.004**	153.104*	0.602	0.536	1.865
Reliability	0.552	0.056	0.517	9.928	**0.000**			0.363	2.756
Naturalness	0.052	0.047	0.046	1.108	0.269			0.567	1.764
Dependent Variable: Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication									

p < 0,05

According to Table 8, it is concluded that brand authenticity's naturalness dimension (p>0.05) has no meaningful effect on positive word-of mouth communication. On the other hand, it has been determined that continuity, originality and reliability dimensions of brand authenticity affirmatively and meaningfully affect positive word-of mouth communication (respectively β=0.182, t=9.928, p=0.000; β=0.123, t=2.869, p=0.004; β=0.517, t=6.912, p=0.000). Additionally, there is no autocorrelation and multicollinearity among the independent variables (Tolerance > 0,20; VIF <10). Therefore, H_3 has been supported.

Table 9: Regression Analysis Table for The Impact of Brand Love on Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p		
Constant	1.946	0.117		16.681	**0.000**		
Brand Love	0.616	0.033	0.674	18.452	**0.000**	340.476*	0.455
Dependent Variable: Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication							

p < 0,05

According to the analysis results presented in Table 9, it has been determined that brand love influences positive word-of-mouth communication in a statistically significant manner (β=0.674, t=18.452). The explanatory power of the regression model is 0.455 (R^2=0.455), indicating that 45.5%

of the variance in positive word-of-mouth communication can be explained by the variance in brand love. Therefore, H_4 has been supported.

Table 10: Regression Analysis Table for The Impact of Brand Image on Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p		
Constant	1.587	0.118		13.492	0.000	463.145*	0.532
Brand Image	0.616	0.029	0.729	21.521	0.000		
Dependent Variable: Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication							

*$p < 0,05$

As seen Table 10, it is concluded that brand image affects positively and meaningfully positive word-of-mouth communication (β=0.729, t=21.521). The explanatory power of the regression model is 0.532 (R^2=0.532). Thus, 53.2% of the variance in positive word-of-mouth communication can be explained by the variance in brand image. Therefore, H_5 has been supported.

4.6. Results of Mediation Affect

A three-stage regression analysis method as proposed by Baron & Kenny (1986) was preferred to examine the mediating role of brand love and brand image in the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication. In order to establish the mediating variable, the dependent variable should be predictable from the independent variable, and the three steps must be fulfilled for mediation tests to be properly applied (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

First step: The independent variable should have an effect on the dependent variable.

Second step: The independent variable should have an effect on the mediating variable

Third step: The dependent variable should be related to both the independent and mediating variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Table 11: Multiple Regression Analysis Table for The Mediating Effect of Brand Love on The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.583	0.154		3.782	0.055	295.684*	0.592		
Brand Authenticity	0.679	0.058	0.550	11.714	0.000			0.454	2.202
Brand Love	0.245	0.043	0.268	5.706	0.000			0.454	2.202
Dependent Variable: Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication									

*$p < 0,05$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of brand love in the effect of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication. As seen Table 11, both brand authenticity and brand love meaningfully influence to positive word-of-mouth communication ($\beta=0.550$, t=11.714, p=0.000; $\beta=0.268$, t=5.706, p=0.000). The three-step model described by Baron & Kenny (1986), it is noted that the regression coefficients in the first and second steps are significant according to the results in Table 6 and Table 8.

According to the results of Table 11, it is determined that the impact of brand authenticity, the independent variable, on positive word-of-mouth communication, the dependent variable, does not disappear. Additionally, it was found that the mediating variable, brand love, influences positive word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, it has been established that brand love has a partial mediating effect.

According to the Sobel test conducted with the variables found in Table 6 and Table 11, the p-value is less than 0.5. Therefore, it has been concluded that brand love plays a mediating role. Consequently, H_6 has been supported.

Table 12: Multiple Regression Analysis Table for The Mediating Effect of Brand Image on The Impact of Brand Authenticity on Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients			F	R^2	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	p			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.130	0.156		-0.835	**0.404**				
Brand Authenticity	0.576	0.051	0.466	11.269	**0.000**	366.568*	0.643	0.512	1.953
Brand Image	0.477	0.049	0.403	9.745	**0.000**			0.512	1.953
Dependent Variable: Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication									

*$p < 0,05$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of brand image in the effect of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication. When examining Table 12, it is concluded that both brand authenticity and brand image affirmatively and positively influnce on positive word-of-mouth communication ($\beta=0.466$, t=11.269, p=0.000; $\beta=0.403$, t=9.745, p=0.000). The three-step model described by Baron & Kenny (1986), it is noted that the regression coefficients in the first and second steps are significant according to the results in Table 7 and Table 8.

According to the results of Table 12, it is determined that the impact of brand authenticity, the independent variable, on positive word-of-mouth communication, the dependent variable, does not disappear. Additionally, it was found that the mediating variable, brand image, influences positive word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, it has been established that brand image has a partial mediating effect.

According to the Sobel test conducted with the variables found in Table 7 and Table 12, the p-value is less than 0.5. Therefore, it has been concluded that brand image plays a mediating role.

4.7. Results of T-test

Independent samples t-test was applied to examine whether there were differences in brand authenticity, brand love, brand image, and positive word-of-mouth communication based on participants' gender.

Table 13: T-test Results Among Gender Groups

Scale	Gender	N	X̄	Std. Deviation	t	p
Brand Authenticity	Female	294	3.87	0.54	0.180	0.858
	Male	116	3.86	0.67		
Continuity	Female	294	4.17	0.64	-0.355	0.723
	Male	116	4.19	0.73		
Originality	Female	294	3.51	0.78	-0.011	0.991
	Male	116	3.51	0.84		
Reliability	Female	294	4.00	0.60	0.262	0.794
	Male	116	3.98	0.82		
Naturalness	Female	294	3.81	0.63	0.781	0.435
	Male	116	3.76	0.68		
Brand Love	Female	294	3.43	0.75	0.938	0.349
	Male	116	3.35	0.86		
Brand Image	Female	294	4.08	0.55	0.206	0.837
	Male	116	4.07	0.73		
Positive WOM	Female	294	4.08	0.66	1.549	0.123
	Male	116	3.95	0.84		

As seen Table 13, it is determined that there is no significant difference between participants' genders and the variables since p-values for brand authenticity, dimensions of brand authenticity, brand love, brand image, and positive word-of-mouth communication were found to be greater than 0.05.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In contemporary society, consumers are inclined to seek authenticity by attaching importance to originality and genuineness in their products, services, or brands, as they grapple with the increasing commercialization, proliferation of counterfeit and imitation products and services, and the multitude of market offers encountered ubiquitously (Brown et al., 2003; Boyle, 2003; Beverland, 2005). Therefore, businesses prioritize the concept of brand authenticity to cultivate brand love by fostering emotional connections with consumers, reinforce the brand image in the consumer's

mind, and facilitate the generation of positive recommendations related to the brand. In this context, this study has examined the relationships between brand authenticity, brand love, brand image and positive word-of-mouth communication within the home electronics sector.

The data in the study were collected through an online survey technique from 410 participants selected using convenience sampling. The collected data were analyzed, and the demographic distributions of the participants were presented in terms of frequency and percentage. In the research, the reliability analysis was conducted by examining the Cronbach's Alpha values of each scale variable used in the model. Multiple linear regression analysis and Sobel test were employed to test the hypotheses.

As a result of the conducted study, it has been determined that brand authenticity has a strong positive impact on brand love. In this context, the findings align with previous research conducted by Mody & Hanks (2020), Aytekin & Tastepe (2020), Safeer et al. (2021), Meilawatil & Ferdinand (2021), and Harjadi et al. (2023) in both international and local literature. Additionally, the research identified that brand love has a meaningful and positive influence on positive word-of-mouth communication. This result is in parallel with studies conducted by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), Albert & Merunka (2013), Erdoğan & Erginkaya (2018), and Ismail & Spinelli (2012).

One of the significant findings of the research is the conclusion that brand authenticity has a positively strong impact on brand image. Consistent with the results obtained in this research, similar findings have been reported in the studies conducted by Lu et al. (2015), Dağ & Durmaz (2020), and Xu et al. (2022), which highlight the positive and significant influence of brand authenticity on brand image. Furthermore, the analyses conducted in this research have revealed a meaningful impact of brand image on positive word-of-mouth communication. Studies conducted by Anggraeni & Rachmanita (2015), Kurtoğlu & Sönmez (2016), and Dam (2020) can be cited as examples in the literature that support this finding.

The research has concluded that brand authenticity has a strong positive impact on positive word-of-mouth communication. This finding aligns with studies conducted in different sectors by Morhart et al. (2015), Şimşek (2017), and Wymer & Akbar (2018). Additionally, in line with the study conducted on computer brands by Yıldız & Ülker-Demirel (2017), this research has found that brand authenticity has a significant and affirmative effect on positive word-of-mouth communication, with brand image playing a mediating role in this effect.

The most significant contribution of this study to the literature is the understanding that brand love and brand image have a mediating role in the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication. Upon reviewing the literature, no previous study has been found that examines the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between brand authenticity and positive word-of-mouth communication. In this regard, the finding of the mediating role of brand love in the impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth communication in this research contributes to its originality and provides a valuable addition to the existing literature.

The study contains guiding information for companies and brands operating in home electronics sector. Within the scope of the research, it has been determined that brands in home electronics sector can gain a distinct advantages in competition by incorporting advertising campaingns that emphasize not only the functionality and quality of the products but also focus on the abstract benefits of brands or products. It has been identified that advertising campaigns that emphasize the consumer's love and passion for the product, by highlighting its abstract benefits, contributes to the unique perception of the brand. This, in turn, fosters the formation of brand loyalty among consumers and provides an advantage that is difficult to imitate in the competitive landscape. Also, it can be asserted that brands or products with a higher degree of authenticity compared to their competitors are more likely to be preferred and recommended.

The study was conducted in Turkey and focused on home electronics brands. For future academic research, it is recommended to select a specific home electronics brand and conduct a study tailored to that particular brand. Furthermore, expanding the research model to include different mediator and moderator variables, as well as conducting similar studies using brand authenticity scales that measure different dimensions found in the literature, can contribute significantly to the existing body of literature.

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