THE EFFECT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON BRAND LOVE AND BRAND EQUITY[*]

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Abstract

The concept of service quality (SQ) is of great importance in terms of ensuring the competitive structure and continuity of businesses in the service sector and other sectors. In the study, the effect of interaction dimension of service quality (IDSQ) on brand equity (BE) and brand love (BL) was investigated. Depending on the purpose of the research, a survey will be carried out by using the appropriate scales in the literature. Operating in the service sector and having received the Lovemark award in the 'Most Loved Bank' category 8 times in a row, T.R. Ziraat Bankası A.Ş. A survey was conducted on its customers. The survey was conducted in the province of Van, based on simple random sample selection and in a way that education, age, gender, and income status could represent the entire population. After the analysis of the data obtained from the appropriate statistical tests, the situation of affecting the measurement of the variables in accordance with the purpose of use was revealed. The model was tested with structural equation modeling (SEM). It was understood that the IDSQ has a positive effect on BE. IDSQ has a positive effect on BL. It has been observed that BL also has positive effect on BE. In addition, BL has a mediating role in the effect of the IDSQ on BE.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Brand Love, Interaction Dimension of Service Quality, Ziraat Bankası Inc.

Jel Classification   : *M31, M39*

HİZMET KALİTESİNİN MARKA AŞKI VE MARKA DEĞERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Öz

Hizmet kalitesi kavramı hizmet sektöründe ve diğer sektörlerde işletmelerin rekabetçi yapısı ile sürekliliğinin sağlanabilmesi açısından büyük öneme sahiptir. Bu çalışmada marka aşkı (MA) ve marka değerinin (MD) hizmet kalitesinin etkileşim boyutundan (HKEB) etkilenip etkilenmediklerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada HKEB'nin MA ve MD üzerindeki etkisi incelenmiştir. Araştırma amacına bağlı olarak, literatürdeki uygun ölçeklerden faydalanılarak anket çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Hizmet sektöründe faaliyet gösteren, üst üste 8 kez

'En Sevilen Banka' kategorisinde Lovemark ödülü almış olan T.C. Ziraat Bankası A.Ş. müşterilerine anket uygulanmıştır. Anket çalışması, Van ilinde basit rastgele örneklem seçimine bağlı olarak ve eğitim, yaş, cinsiyet ve gelir durumu tüm evreni temsil edebilecek şekilde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yapısal eşitlik modellemesi kullanılarak araştırmanın modeli test edilmiştir. Bulgular HKEB'nin MD'yi olumlu ve anlamlı etkilediğini göstermiştir. HKEB'nin MA üzerinde de olumlu ve anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğu anlaşılmıştır. MA'nın da MD'yi olumlu ve anlamlı etkilediği belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca HKEB'nin MD üzerindeki etkisinde, MA'nın aracılık rolü olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka Değeri, Marka Aşkı, Hizmet Kalitesinin Etkileşim Boyutu, Ziraat Bankası A.Ş.

Jel Kodları   : *M31, M39*

INTRODUCTION

In the service market where intense competition is experienced, one of the biggest factors that brings brands to the forefront is SQ. The degree to which service providers meet customer expectations and customer satisfaction develop certain feelings in the customer towards the brand. It is an undeniable fact that SQ is also of great importance for customer expectations.

Today, there are many factors that affect consumers in brand selection. Brands can have different values in the consumer's mind according to their physical and perceived features. Consumers' opinions about each brand can affect the value of that brand in the consumer. In addition, customers can establish a bond with the brand based on their impressions and experiences about the brands. The bond established between the consumer and the brands can resemble a love affair between people over time, allowing the brand to gain a special place in the consumer's mind. The physical features of the brand may not always be the determining factor in consumer preferences. Especially in the service sector, the degree of care and quality of the service provided can affect the impressions about the brand and the feelings felt towards the brand. This study examines whether IDSQ has an effect on the concepts of BE and BL, which can be effective from the first use of a preferred brand to the subsequent purchase. In the literature studies have been conducted on the variables of service quality and brand love (Salman and Ayar, 2024; Tekin et al., 2022; Yang, 2010), service quality and brand equity (Özdener and Duygun, 2020; Kuyanay and Aydın, 2022; Işık and Ay, 2022; Bamert and Wehrli, 2005; Kao and Lin, 2016; Loureiro et al., 2014; Soni and Govender, 2018; Esmaeilpour et al., 2016), brand equity and brand love (Önen, 2018; Aydın, 2021; Verma, 2021; Sallam, 2015; Madadi et al., 2021). It is expected that the research on the effect of IDSQ on BE and BL will enrich the literature. It is expected that the research on whether the IDSQ in the service sector and especially in banks, such as the attitude, behavior, attitude, knowledge levels of employees, etc., have an effect on important variables in terms of marketing discipline such as BE and BL, will contribute to both the literature and the service sector and provide contributions and insights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Equity

A brand does not have any tangible assets. However, value is created for the business with BE (Moriarty et al., 2012). BE is a set of assets such as loyal consumers, brand awareness, associations and perceived quality that are connected to the brand and add value to the product offered by the business (Aaker, 1991). BE emerges when consumers have a high level of awareness and have positive, unique, strong brand associations in their memories (Keller, 2013). With brand perception, the product turns into a unique and distinctive asset. In addition, brand perception shapes customers' expectations depending on the brand and gives them meaning (Moriarty et al., 2012). BE causes the value created by the brand in a product to be more important than the functional benefits in the product. This added value has two advantages. These are: consumers are willing to pay a higher price for a product with BE and it provides a competitive advantage (Kerin and Hartley, 2018). High BE provides many competitive advantages for companies. A strong brand has a high degree of brand awareness and loyalty in the consumer. When the brand name is highly reliable, the company can expand its product line more easily (Armstrong and Kotler, 2017). It is obvious how important a concept BE is for businesses. Below are studies investigating the effects of SQ and BL on BE.

Service Quality

Perceived SQ is a global judgment or attitude regarding the superiority of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). SQ has indicators such as: Access, competence, communication, reliability, courtesy, sensitivity, security, credibility, understanding and physical elements, and most of these indicators occur at the time the service is provided (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Businesses that provide high quality service have higher market share, higher return on investment and asset turnover. The most important factor affecting business performance in the long term is SQ (Ghobadian et al., 1994). While SQ is an extremely important factor for businesses, SQ occurs especially when the service personnel and the customer meet at the moment the service is provided. In this study, addressing the interaction dimension of SQ is very important in terms of understanding the effects of SQ on BE and BL. In the study conducted by Işık (2011), it was concluded that perceived quality has the highest effect among the dimensions that directly affect BE. In the study conducted by Işık and Ay (2022), it was found that bank call center SQ has a positive effect on bank BE. In the study conducted by Özdener and Duygun (2020), it was observed that the perception of SQ towards e-retail businesses has a positive effect on the BE of e-retail businesses. In the study conducted by Tekin et al., (2022), it was determined that there are positive relationships between SQ and BL. According to the results of the study conducted by Yıldız and Günaydın (2019), perceived quality positively affects BL. Accordingly:

H_1. IDSQ has a positive effect on BE.

H_2. IDSQ has a positive effect on BL.

H_3. BL has a mediating role in the effect of IDSQ on BE.

Brand Love

BL is the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer feels towards a particular brand name (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006). BL is an intense and positive emotional bond that develops over time, leads to passionate behaviors, and can be strengthened as the person establishes a close bond with the brand (Kwon and Mattila, 2015). BL does not only have an emotional effect on people, it also has a logical effect. BL creates an intimate bond with customers that makes them think that it is impossible to live without the brand and creates a bond of love that cannot be explained by logic (Bridgewater, 2015).

As a result of the study conducted by Önen (2018), it was determined that there is a positive relationship between all dimensions of BE and BL. There are studies in the literature that conclude that BL positively affects BE (Sallam, 2015; Machado et al. 2019; Verma, 2021; Çatlı and Yalçın, 2023). Accordingly:

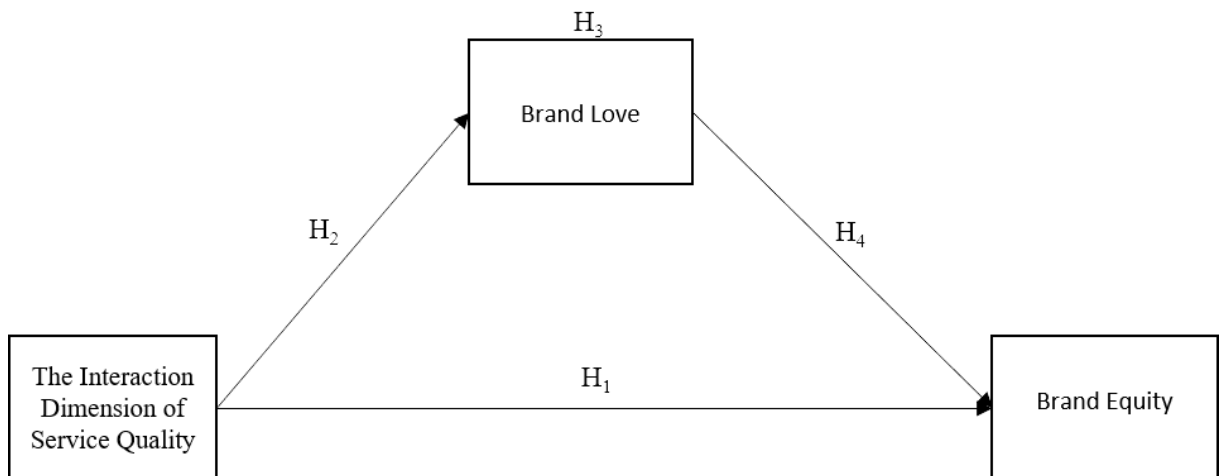H_4. BL has a positive effect on BE.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the population and sample of the research, model, data collection tools, data collection process, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and the limitations of the study are stated.

Research Model

The research model is given in Figure-1 depending on the hypotheses of the study:

Figure-1 Research Model

Population and Sample

The population of this study is the customers of Ziraat Bank. The sample of the study was reached by simple random sampling method. The participants consist of customers who came to Ziraat Bank Branch in İpekyolu district of Van. Data was collected from 217 people. Therefore, the sample of the study consists of 217 people.

Data Collection Process and Tool

The implementation of the surveys and data collection started in June 2023 and was completed in January 2024 over a period of approximately 6 months. The surveys were collected by face-to-face survey method. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and it was stated that participation was based on volunteering. SPSS 25 and AMOS 24 programs were used to analyze the obtained data.

For this study, the necessary permission was obtained from Van Yuzuncu Yil University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research Publication Ethics Board dated 23.01.2023 and numbered 2023/02-06, indicating that the study complies with ethical rules.

In the study, the effect of the IDSQ on BE and BL was investigated. Scales of BL, BE and IDSQ were created in the form of a five-point Likert scale. The scales used by Polat et al. (2013: 31) for IDSQ, Ismail and Spinelli (2012: 392) for the BL scale, and Yoo and Donthu (2001: 14) for the BE scale were used.

Findings Obtained Regarding Demographic Structure

Findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample were obtained as a result of frequency analysis. As seen in Table-1, 57.6% (125) of the 217 participants constituting the sample are male, 42.4% (92) are female. 64.5% (140) of the participants are single, 35.5% (77) are married. 17.1% (37) of the participants constituting the sample are 18-23, 20.3% (44) are 24-29, 24.0% (52) are 30-35, 18% (39) are 36-41, 12.4% (27) are 42-47, 4.6% (10) are 48-53 and 3.7% (8) are 54 and above. Of the participants who participated in the survey, 10.1% (22) had primary school education, 32.7% (71) had high school education, 49.3% (107) had undergraduate education, and 7.8% (17) had postgraduate education. Of the participants, 20.3% (44) had an income of 7,500 TL and below, 12.4% (27) had an income of 7,501-12,500 TL, 11.5% (25) had an income of 12,501-17,500 TL, 9.7% (21) had an income of 17,501-22,500 TL, and 46.1% (100) had an income of 22,500 TL and above.

There are 2 independent variables in the study. When the formula $N>50+8M$ is examined, it is understood that the sample consisting of 217 people is sufficient (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007: 123).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Standardized values in the path diagram are below 1. These values must be below 1 for CFA analysis (Aytaç and Öngen, 2012: 19). The fit values for CFA are given in Table-2.

Table-2 Fit Values for CFA

χ2	Sd	p	χ2/Sd	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
290.044	127	.000	2.284	.873	.955	.077

According to the results of CFA, it can be said that the construct validity of the scale was ensured.

AVE and CR values of factors

Standardized factor loadings of items as a result of CFA and AVE and CR values of factors are given in Table-3.

Table-3 AVE and CR Values of Factors and Standard Regression Coefficients of Items

Items	IDSQ	BL	BE
Ziraat Bank employees are polite and respectful.	0.71		
Ziraat Bank employees are honest and reliable.	0.79		
Ziraat Bank employees are knowledgeable and competent.	0.77		
Ziraat Bank employees are tolerant.	0.81		
Ziraat Bank employees are sincere and cheerful.	0.81		
It is easy to communicate with Ziraat Bank employees.	0.83		
Ziraat Bank employees love their jobs.	0.77		
Ziraat Bank employees strive to fulfill customers' requests.	0.79		
Ziraat Bank is a wonderful brand.		0.83	
Ziraat Bank makes me feel good as a brand.		0.87	
Ziraat Bank makes me happy as a brand.		0.88	
I love Ziraat Bank.		0.90	
Ziraat Bank appeals to my taste as a brand.		0.89	
I am loyal to Ziraat Bank.		0.84	
Even if they are the same, it makes sense to choose Ziraat Bank over another bank.			0.83
Even if another bank has the same features as Ziraat Bank, I would prefer Ziraat Bank.			0.89
Even if there is another bank as good as Ziraat Bank, I would prefer Ziraat Bank.			0.92
If another bank is not different from Ziraat Bank in any way, it seems wiser to choose Ziraat Bank.			0.85
AVE	0.62	0.75	0.76

CR	0.93	0.95	0.93

When we look at the AVE and CR values, it is understood that convergent validity is achieved. (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017: 82).

Reliability Analysis

In order to understand the security of the scales, the Cronbach Alpha values, which are the reliability coefficients, were examined. Accordingly, Cronbach Alpha values were reached as 0.929 for the IDSQ, 0.945 for the BL scale, and 0.926 for the BE scale. Accordingly, all scales have high reliability (İslamoğlu, 2009: 135).

Normality Test

As seen in Table-4, since the skewness coefficient values are between ±3 and the kurtosis coefficient values are between ±10, the data is normally distributed (Kline, 2005).

Table-4 Normality Test Results

Variables	IDSQ	BE	BL
Skewness	-1.360	-1.161	-1.266
Kurtosis	2.113	1.120	1.399

Correlation Analysis Results

The correlation coefficient between the variables is given in Table-5.

Table-5 Correlation Analysis Results

Variables		IDSQ	BE	BL
IDSQ	r	1	.713**	.728**
	p		.000	.000
BE	r	.713**	1	.809**
	p	.000		.000
BL	r	.728**	.809**	1
	p	.000	.000	

As can be understood from Table-5, since the correlation coefficient between both variables is less than .90 (values between .713-.809), there is no common method variance bias problem in the data set of this study (Bagozzi et al., 1991: 437).

Findings Obtained by SEM

Considering the quantity and quality of the variables used in the study, it was understood that it was appropriate to analyze the data using SEM.

In the study, it was investigated whether IDSQ has direct effects on BE and BL, as well as whether BL has a mediating role in the effect of IDSQ on BE. It was also investigated whether BL has a direct effect on BE.

In the analysis results, the acceptable fit value ($\chi2/sd=2.329$) is less than 5 and is statistically sufficient. RMSEA: 0.078; SRMR: 0.037; GFI: 0.871; AGFI: 0.828; CFI: 0.953; NFI: 0.921 and TLI: 0.944 values were reached and it was understood that these values were statistically sufficient for model fit (Muise et al., 2010).

Table-6 SEM Results

Structural Relationships	Standardized Regression Coefficients (β)	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	R^2	p
BE<---IDSQ	0.284	3.928	0.753	***
BL<---IDSQ	0.764	9.768	0.584	***
BE<---BL	0.631	8.183	0.753	***

When Table-6 is examined, it is understood that IDSQ has a positive and significant effect on BE ($\beta=.284$; $p<.05$). It is understood that IDSQ has a positive and significant effect on BL ($\beta=.764$; $p<.05$). It is also seen that BL has a significant effect on BE ($\beta=.631$; $p<.05$).

Table-7 Mediator Roles

Mediator Roles	Standardized Indirect Effect (β)	Bootstrap(Lower Bounds/Upper Bounds) %95 CI
MD<---MA<--HKEB	0.482	0.411-0.880

Table 7 shows that BL has a mediating role in the effect of IDSQ on BE ($\beta=.482$, 95% CI [.411-.880]).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Changing living conditions day by day also affect the interests, needs and requirements of consumers. For this reason, there may be changes in marketing methods. The diversity in products and services, the difference in quality and the ease of access to products and services compared to previous periods have caused the activities of brands to be adopted by consumers to increase. It is thought that in order for a product to appeal to consumers, it is important for it to establish a bond with consumers in order to create BE and ensure its continuity in being preferred. Therefore, 4 hypotheses were developed in the study depending on the effects of the concepts of BE, BL and IDSQ on each other. It was also investigated whether IDSQ has direct effects on BE and BL, whether BL has a mediating role in the effect of IDSQ on BE and whether BL has a direct effect on BE. According to the findings obtained, all of the developed hypotheses were accepted.

It is known that the banking sector operates in a service-oriented manner. The quality of the service provided while offering banking products to customers is an important element that determines customer preferences. Customers can determine which bank they will make a transaction at by

considering both the attitude of the service provider personnel and physical elements in the environment such as lighting, spaciousness, modernity, etc. as well as the maturity of the marketed product, interest rate, commission fee, etc. It can be expected that a person whose expectations regarding the elements mentioned above are met will prefer the same bank for subsequent transactions. It can be said that the BE of the said bank has increased in a person who prefers the same bank in subsequent transactions. After a while, a habit and loyalty towards the relevant brand may develop. The customer may think that his/her transactions cannot be realized under the conditions he/she wants without going to that bank. This may also show that the customer is attached to that bank's brand with a feeling of love. The study used surveys administered to the customers of T.C. Ziraat Bankası A.Ş., which has been operating in Turkey for 160 years and has earned the love of its customers. It has been concluded that this study is valuable in terms of long-term customer acquisition and ensuring BE and BL in this and other sectors; that the concepts researched in the study will contribute to this while determining the marketing and sales strategies of businesses and institutions; It is thought that the results obtained contain important information that institutions and businesses should consider in achieving their goals.

When the results obtained from the study are considered, it is first understood that IDSQ has a positive effect on BE. The study conducted by Işık (2011) concluded that hospital BE has a positive relationship with perceived quality. Similarly, Işık and Ay (2022) determined that there is a positive and medium-level relationship between bank call center SQ and BE. It is seen that the obtained result is consistent with the results of these studies.

The second result obtained is that IDSQ has a positive effect on BL. This result is parallel to the result of the research conducted by Tekin et al. (2022) that there are positive relationships between SQ and BL. The level of SQ in institutions and organizations is directly proportional to the love for the brand. It can be expected that the level of BL that develops towards institutions and organizations that offer high SQ will also be high.

The third conclusion is that brand love has a mediating role in the effect of IDSQ on BE. When the mediating role of BL is examined between IDSQ and BE, it is seen that it has a positive and indirect role. Since IDSQ positively affects BE through BL, it is recommended that businesses focus on the emotions of their target markets in order to increase their effectiveness in these matters.

The fourth result obtained is that BL has a positive effect on BE. In the study of Çatlı and Yalçın (2023), it was concluded that BL affects consumers' BE perceptions in every dimension. This result is parallel to the result in the study. However, Akgözlü and Kılıç (2021) revealed that BL does not have a positive effect on BE in their study. In the surveys in this study, participants residing in Istanbul were asked to answer questions according to the brand they chose and it was determined that there was no positive relationship between BL and BE. In this respect, the result of the study conducted is not compatible with this study. This shows that differences in variables such as target audience, brand, etc. used in the studies may change the results of the research. In this study, the sample consists of customers

who come to the Ziraat Bank Branch in the İpekyolu district of Van. If the same study was conducted with customers of T.C. Ziraat Bank in another city or region or with customers of other banks, the results may differ. The study does not cover different sectors. Therefore, it is not expected that the results obtained will cover all consumers. In this study, differences in variables such as education status, gender, age and income status were not investigated separately. The findings were reached only by taking T.C. Ziraat Bank's customers in the İpekyolu district as basis. In this regard, more comprehensive studies can be conducted on the sample; studies can be conducted on other banks and sectors or on other banks and sectors. Only IDSQ, BE and BL variables were examined in the study. More detailed studies using different variables can be conducted or similar studies can be conducted to show whether there are differences in variables such as education status, gender, age and income status. It can be suggested to researchers who will work on the subject to conduct research in other banks and compare the results. In addition, since the results may differ when the study is conducted in different cultures, it is thought that selecting the sample from different places will contribute to the literature.

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