

# The effects of consumer clothes design engagement on brand love and loyalty

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## ABSTRACT – REZUMAT

### **The effects of consumer clothes design engagement on brand love and loyalty**

*This study aims to investigate the effect of consumer engagement in the clothing industry on brand love and brand loyalty. Besides social peer influence was added to the model as an independent variable affecting loyalty and consumer engagement. In line with the research purpose, a model was developed that demonstrates the effect of consumer engagement on brand loyalty and brand love. Data were obtained from 399 consumers through a questionnaire designed to test the developed model. The variables in the established model were tested with confirmatory factor analysis. Hypotheses were tested with path analysis in the AMOS structural equation model. Consumer engagement in the design of clothes has positive effects on attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. No conclusion that consumer engagement leads to brand love. According to the results, behavioural loyalty leads to brand love. However, this feeling of consumers who show attitudinal loyalty is not effective on their brand loves. The variable that triggers consumers to engage in product design is the social peer effect.*

**Keywords:** consumer engagement, brand loyalty, brand love, social peer influence, clothing industry, structural equation model

### **Influența angajamentului consumatorului legat de designul îmbrăcămintei asupra atașamentului și loialității față de brand**

*Acest studiu își propune să investigheze influența angajamentului consumatorilor din industria de îmbrăcăminte asupra atașamentului și loialității față de brand. În plus, influența egalității sociale a fost adăugată modelului ca o variabilă independentă, care afectează loialitatea și implicarea consumatorilor. În conformitate cu scopul cercetării, a fost dezvoltat un model care demonstrează influența angajamentului consumatorului asupra loialității și atașamentului față de brand. Datele au fost obținute de la 399 de consumatori printr-un cuestionar conceput pentru a testa modelul dezvoltat. Variabilele din modelul stabilit au fost testate cu analiză factorială de confirmare. Ipotezele au fost testate cu analiza traseului în modelul de ecuație structurală AMOS. Implicarea consumatorilor în designul îmbrăcămintei are efecte pozitive asupra loialității atitudinii și comportamentului. Nu s-a ajuns la concluzia că implicarea consumatorilor duce la atașamentul față de brand. Conform rezultatelor, loialitatea comportamentală duce la atașamentul față de brand. Cu toate acestea, acest sentiment al consumatorilor care arată loialitatea atitudinii nu este eficient asupra atașamentului lor față de brand. Variabila care îi determină pe consumatori să se implice în proiectarea produsului este efectul de egalitate socială.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** angajamentul consumatorilor, loialitatea față de brand, atașamentul față de brand, influența egalității sociale, industria de îmbrăcăminte, modelul de ecuație structurală

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since experiential marketing emerged, it has been used by companies as a strategic weapon to create a competitive advantage. Today, businesses are faced with a quite different competitive environment. To create a competitive advantage in the market, companies should strengthen the products or services they offer to consumers, and it was underlined that it is an effective way to offer unique experiences to consumers [1]. Specific understanding of consumers' perceived requirements and meeting their demands and expectations is becoming a difficult situation [2].

Consumer engagement is vital, especially in the field of new product development. Consumers are ready

to provide ideas for new goods or services that have not yet been fulfilled by the market or that can meet the needs that can be improved with existing offerings. For example, Ozbek's study, in which Turkish University students wanted to participate in the t-shirt design process, determined that 83.1% of female students and 87.9% of male students are willing to participate [3].

Nielsen Company stated in the 2015 Global Advertising Trust Report that, according to the research data conducted in 60 countries around the world, 83% of the consumers were most affected by the recommendations of their families, close friends and friends during the purchasing decision phase. They consider these sources the most reliable

source [4]. Edelman, who carries out marketing communication activities, stated in the BrandShare report published in 2014 that 80% of consumers want brands to listen to them, but a few brands can achieve this [5].

Allowing consumers to participate in marketing activities, comment on new products or be included in the new product development process creates the "Hawthorne Effect". The Hawthorne effect is the tendency to generate positive emotions and be closer to collaboration when a person feels valued about something. Consumers who participate in participatory marketing practices and have the opportunity to work with brands develop their emotional ties with the brand, their brand loyalty increases, and thus highly effective word-of-mouth marketing ambassadors are created. From the moment that consumers get involved in participatory marketing, they work as an ambassador of the brand and convey their honest comments about the brand and its products to their friends, close circles or other Internet users over the Internet.

In an environment where product differentiation has become increasingly difficult, global markets and competitors are increasing. And different consumers structure has emerged that have become increasingly difficult to predict, and businesses have started to apply different marketing strategies. In this context, the concept of brand love enables businesses to implement different solutions and practices to achieve a competitive advantage. Even though researchers have been working on consumers' feelings of liking/disliking brands for years, there has been a rapid increase in interest in the topic of "consumers' love for brands" in recent years. Brand love; consists of the sum of elements that contain images about the product, make sense to the consumer and add symbolic value to the consumer with the consumption of the product. To stand out from other brands and become brand love, it is not enough to offer only a better quality or aesthetic product. In brand love, brand loyalty is beyond logical reasons. Businesses also seem to increasingly understand the importance of this issue. The advertisements that were frequently seen in the past, describing the product and highlighting the quality are gradually being replaced by advertisements that emphasize the consumer's passion for the product. Consumers' attachment to the brand with love enables them to continue their relations with the brand for a long time. When businesses create their marketing strategies, they should analyze well what creates loyalty in consumers and act accordingly. When businesses establish strong bonds, they also ensure consumer satisfaction and repurchase.

The success of any firm is influenced by its development capacity and the design of new products at the correct time. Innovation and designing a new product, provide a competitive advantage in the apparel sector [6]. The study aims to examine the effect of consumer engagement on brand love and brand loyalty in the clothes design sector. For this purpose, the

conceptual framework of the variables used in the study was drawn and hypotheses were determined in the light of the relevant literature.

*Brand's Consumer Engagement:* Consumer Engagement (CE) is defined as "a psychological state that occurs by interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships" [7]. Consumer engagement refers to "consumers' behavioural manifestation towards a brand or firm, beyond buying, resulting from their motivational drivers" [8]. Consumer engagement has been indicated to be linked with competitive advantages for companies, such as uncovering consumer demands, improving consumer loyalty, shortening production time to market, and diminishing cycle time from production to consumption [9]. Consumer engagement (CE) brings about positive outcomes for the firms for example; improved company performance, favourable reputation, and increased relationship quality. Likewise, it has been linked positively with consumer-specific outcomes as well, such as consumer satisfaction and welfare [10]. Companies concentrate on the procedure for producing particular task forces to operate upon co-creation of value using collating information and analyzing the shifting priorities of consumers and competition shifts in the market, assessing client responses, executing finest applications and decreasing consumer dissonance [11].

Consumer engagement was considered as both a dependent and independent variable in the literature. Consumer engagement is a driver of consumer trust, value, affective commitment, satisfaction and loyalty. Besides, other critical variables of brand performance, such as profit, sales growth and return on investment, have been linked to consumer engagement [12]. Consumer engagement programs have an influence on brand awareness, then sponsors and consumer engagement programs related to brand awareness [13]. Mobile apps' consumer engagement positively affects consumer equity, which further enhances the repurchase intention of existing consumers [8]. Consumer engagement in the early stages creates trends for products and contributes significantly to the launch phase [14]. Chiang et al. revealed that using social media is a new way of promoting user engagement and understanding potential user demands for a service company [9]. Besides, continuance purpose is positively linked with consumer engagement behaviour. According to Aziz and Ahmed, there is a significant impact of consumer engagement on buying intention in the fashion industry [15]. The results demonstrate that brand interactivity, brand intimacy, brand involvement and brand trust positively influence CBE (consumer brand engagement). Furthermore, this research also found that CBE positively affects buying intention. Consumer engagement with Facebook brand pages (FBPs) is positively affected by consumer intentions; knowledge, payment, social communications and personal identity in apparel/fashion. Consumer engagement is found to be positively associated with

FBP confidence and FBP usage [16]. According to some research; companies have the intent to involve consumers in the design process. They are using consumers' creative ideas, critical decisions and talent to produce new products [17]. Also, firms can get valuable feedback about Website quality, brand familiarity, and brand equity [18]. Perceived advantages positively affect emotional product attachment and attitudes toward the customization process [19]. Besides, commitment positively affects attitudes, which in turn to loyalty. Engaging consumers is important for retail brands because consumers may feel a stronger connection to the brand and the company. The findings provide an understanding of the main drivers of consumer-brand engagement that can lead to purchasing intentions [20].

Morgan et al. revealed that consumer participation is positively related to new product development performance and that the effect is mediated by innovativeness [21]. According to Kim, et. al. successful product development should be based on an in-depth understanding of the consumers and their unique needs [22]. Islam and Rahman found that each of the characteristics positively influences consumer engagement, with information quality and virtual interactivity bearing the strongest influence.

Consumer engagement also exhibits a strong positive impact on brand loyalty [23]. Based on the brand engagement literature of consumers, the main hypotheses of the research were determined as follows:

H1: Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on attitudinal loyalty

H2: Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on behavioural loyalty

H3: Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on brand love

*Brand's Consumer Engagement: Consumer loyalty* is defined as a "deeply commitment that the consumer has to re-buy a preferred product/service consistently in the future [24]. Creating brand loyalty is seen as a long and difficult process. It is thought that a person who feels an emotional connection to that brand will have a positive effect on the processes of the purchasing behaviour of consumers. It is expected that this will increase its effect, especially on brand loyalty and that these people will have a higher level of loyalty to that brand than other consumers [25]. There are three types of brand loyalty namely, attitudinal, behavioural, and composite loyalty [26]. Attitude is a crucial aspect to predict the behaviours of consumers [27]. In the model of this research, consumer loyalty takes place in two forms, behavioural and attitudinal.

When the research is examined, it is seen that people can fall in love not only with other people but also with objects, products or brands [28–31]. The consumer love for a brand; includes the passion for the brand, the degree of attachment to the brand, positive evaluation and positive feelings toward the brand [28]. The concept of love for brands, inspired by the mutual relationship between people, is a concept that

emerged by measuring the object-human relationship. The earliest study on this subject is the work of Shimp and Madden, which is based on Sternberg's Triangle Love Theory, which consists of sincerity, passion and commitment components and explains interpersonal love [32]. Brand love includes emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements. It consists of seven dimensions: "passionate behaviour, seeing oneself with the brand, positive emotional attachment, anxiety about the possibility of the brand being removed from the market, long-term relationship, positive attitude towards the brand, and trust in the brand" [29]. According to Albert and Merunka, brand love affects both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Brand love plays an important role in maintaining a long-term relationship with a brand due to psychological, functional and emotional reasons [33]. There is a lot of research which are searching relation between brand loyalty and brand love [33–39]. There is a significant link between consumer engagement, brand image and brand love [40]. It has been understood that consumer participation leads to consumer loyalty. Firms must interact with consumers while branding and marketing their fashion apparel brands to achieve a loyal consumer base. It is possible to mention that there is a strong relationship between brand love and brand loyalty [41]. In the light of this information, the following hypotheses were developed:

H4: Behavioural loyalty has a significant positive effect on brand love

H5: Attitudinal loyalty has a significant positive effect on brand love

*Social peer influence:* The young consumer group has gained tremendous attention from marketers as they have increased purchasing power [42]. Especially young people's interactions with various individuals and/or groups in the process of socialization as consumers play a key role in shaping their consumption behaviours. Although the persons/groups in question are referred to as reference groups/socialization agents in the relevant literature; it is examined under two main headings as normative and comparative reference groups [43, 44].

Normative reference groups are considered as individuals with whom there is direct interaction, such as mothers, colleagues/schoolmates/teachers, and where the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed are acquired [45–47]. Comparative reference groups, on the other hand, consist of individuals who are relatively more individual and/or socially distant, such as sports celebrities (heroes) and artists, who are inspired, admired and desire to achieve their standards of success [44, 47, 48]. Within the scope of this research, the role modelling situation is discussed in normative terms. Beaudoin, Lachance and Robitaille state that the peer group has great importance in the clothing shopping and brand preferences of adolescents [49].

Peer influence is generally used to understand the extent to which consumers are affected by others when purchasing goods [50]. According to Johnson,

Jorgensen and Ha, peer influence is present when making buying decisions, as individuals want to be viewed as popular within the group [51]. Peer influence occurs when people's opinions and behaviours are affected by peers [52]. Social peer influence has important effects on consumer behaviour [2]. Ahmed et al. revealed that the early adopters are actively influencing the buying decisions of the late adopters with viral marketing [53]. According to Wolny and Mueller, fashion has been characterised by peer influence [54]. Especially high brand commitment and fashion engagement motivate people to commit to talking about fashion brands [55], revealing that there is a significant effect between peer influence and shopping behaviour. They searched this effect between Chinese and American users. Consumers consider searching for information from their relatives and friends more than they search for it from the providers of the products [56].

These hypotheses developed in line with are as follows:

H6: Social peer influence has a significant positive effect on consumer engagement

H7: Social peer influence has a significant positive effect on behavioural loyalty

In the model established, it is seen that consumer participation has a mediating role between social peer influence and behavioural loyalty. Therefore, the mediation hypothesis H8 was established.

H8: Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between social peer influence and behavioural loyalty.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

While investigating the impact of consumer engagement on loyalty and brand love, the effect of social peer effect on engagement and loyalty was also examined. The questionnaire form consisting of 5 variables and 23 expressions with the Likert Scale was delivered to consumers online. First of all, a pre-test was carried out with 99 consumers and the model was tested. Later, the survey was completed with the participation of 399 people. It is sufficient to have a sample of more than 200 in terms of having sufficient statistical power for structural equation model analysis [57]. While it is sufficient to reach 5 times the number of expressions in the scale used in some studies [58–59], it is deemed appropriate to reach a sample of 10–15 times in some studies [58], [60]. In this study, it was aimed to reach at least 15 times the number of proposals. There are 23 expressions on the scale used. In this case, it is sufficient to reach 345 participants. The study was conducted with 399 people, in this sense, it can be said that the number of samples studied is sufficient. The data of the study were collected through an online questionnaire in January 2021. Figure 1 shows the basic model of the research.

The expressions of the 5 variables used in the study were prepared by making use of important studies in

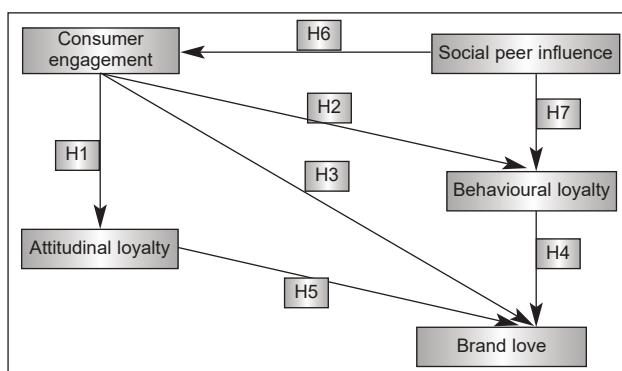


Fig. 1. The fitting curve of Exponential function

the literature [61–65]. After the pre-test, incomprehensible expressions were made more understandable. Table 1 includes the sources of the variables, their expression codes, and their reliability scores. The reliability scores of the variables vary between 0.82 and 0.89.

Table 1

VARIABLES AND REFERENCES OF SCALE			
Variable	References of scale	Code	Cro. Alpha
Brand Love BL	Wallace, Buil, and de Chernatony, 2014 [61]	BL1	0.891
		BL2	
		BL3	
		BL4	
		BL5	
		BL6	
Behavioural Loyalty BEL	Halim, 2009 [62] Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001 [63]	BEL1	0.853
		BEL2	
		BEL3	
		BEL4	
Attitudinal Loyalty ATL	Halim, 2009 [62] Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001 [63]	ATL1	0.828
		ATL2	
		ATL3	
		ATL4	
Consumer Engagement CE	Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014 [64]	CE1	0.863
		CE2	
		CE3	
Social Peer Influence SP	Hung et al., 2011 [65]	SP1	0.882
		SP2	
		SP3	
		SP4	
		SP5	
		SP6	

The data were analyzed first based on the demographic characteristics. We found that 60.2% of participants were female (n:240), whereas 38.6% of the participants (n:154) were male. 5 people among the participants stated that they do not want to answer this question. When the findings of the family income of the participants are examined; 16.3% (n: 65) stated

Table 2

STATISTICAL VALUES				
Variable	Code	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
Brand Love BL	BL1	0.82	0.596	0.897
	BL2	0.73		
	BL3	0.87		
	BL4	0.78		
	BL5	0.84		
	BL6	0.63		
Behavioural Loyalty BEL	BEL1	0.63	0.554	0.829
	BEL2	0.61		
	BEL3	0.85		
	BEL4	0.85		
Attitudinal Loyalty ATL	ATL1	0.79	0.578	0.846
	ATL2	0.73		
	ATL3	0.77		
	ATL4	0.75		
Consumer Engagement CE	CE1	0.84	0.694	0.871
	CE2	0.91		
	CE3	0.74		
Social Peer Influence SP	SP1	0.68	0.552	0.879
	SP2	0.61		
	SP3	0.84		
	SP4	0.88		
	SP5	0.75		
	SP6	0.66		

that they do not have a regular monthly income. 21.1% of the participants stated they earn 3500 TL or less; 16.5% between 3501 TL and 5000 TL, 22.3% between 5001 TL and 7500 TL, 10.3% between 7501 TL and 10000 TL, 13.4% between 10001 TL and above stated. Most of the participants falling between 18 and 25 years of age. In this study, the age groups were divided into three groups Generation X, Y and Z. Table 2 shows the factor loads, AVE and CR values of the variables.

When table 2 is examined, it is seen that most of the factor loads are above 0.70. Fornell and Larcker stated that the calculated AVE values should be greater than 0.50, and the CR values should be more than the AVE values [66, 67]. When the AVE and CR values of this study are examined, it can be easily said that the construct validity of the study is ensured. When the RMSEA, GFI, CFI and X<sup>2</sup>/df values given in table 3 are examined, it is possible to say that the model achieved the desired goodness of fit. Any expression has not been deleted because the values are within the desired range. A correlation link was established between BEL1 and BEL2 variables in line with the recommendation of the Amos program.

The numbers related to the standardized Beta coefficient, standard error, critical rate and p-value of the established structural equation model are given in table 4. According to the analysis, 6 of the 8 hypotheses established were accepted, while 2 were rejected. Significant results were obtained with the path analysis established in the Amos program for hypothesis

Table 3

GOODNESS OF FIT VALUES					
Scales	X <sup>2</sup>	df	X <sup>2</sup> /df	GFI	CFI
Brand Love	26.149	7	3.736	0.978	0.986
Behavioural Loyalty	0.000	1	0.000	1.000	1.000
Attitudinal Loyalty	6.410	2	3.205	0.992	0.993
Consumer Engagement	0.735	1	0.735	0.999	1.000
Social Peer Influence	10.076	8	1.259	0.992	0.998
<b>Good Fit Scores *</b>			<b>≤3</b>	<b>≥0.90</b>	<b>≥0.97</b>
<b>Agreeable Fit Scores *</b>			<b>≤4–5</b>	<b>0.89–0.85</b>	<b>≥0.95</b>

Table 4

RESULTS OF THE HYPOTHESES OF THE GENERAL MODEL						
Hypothesis	→		St. Beta	St. Error	Critical Ratio	p
H1	CE	ATL	0.778	0.059	13.257	***
H2	CE	BEL	0.658	0.055	11.902	***
H3	CE	BL	0.165	0.084	1.964	0.052
H4	BEL	BL	0.573	0.079	7.247	***
H5	ATL	BL	0.055	0.050	1.105	0.269
H6	SP	CE	0.337	0.054	6.269	***
H7	SP	BEL	0.188	0.043	4.401	***
H8	SP → CE → BEL		0.285	0.043	6.590	***

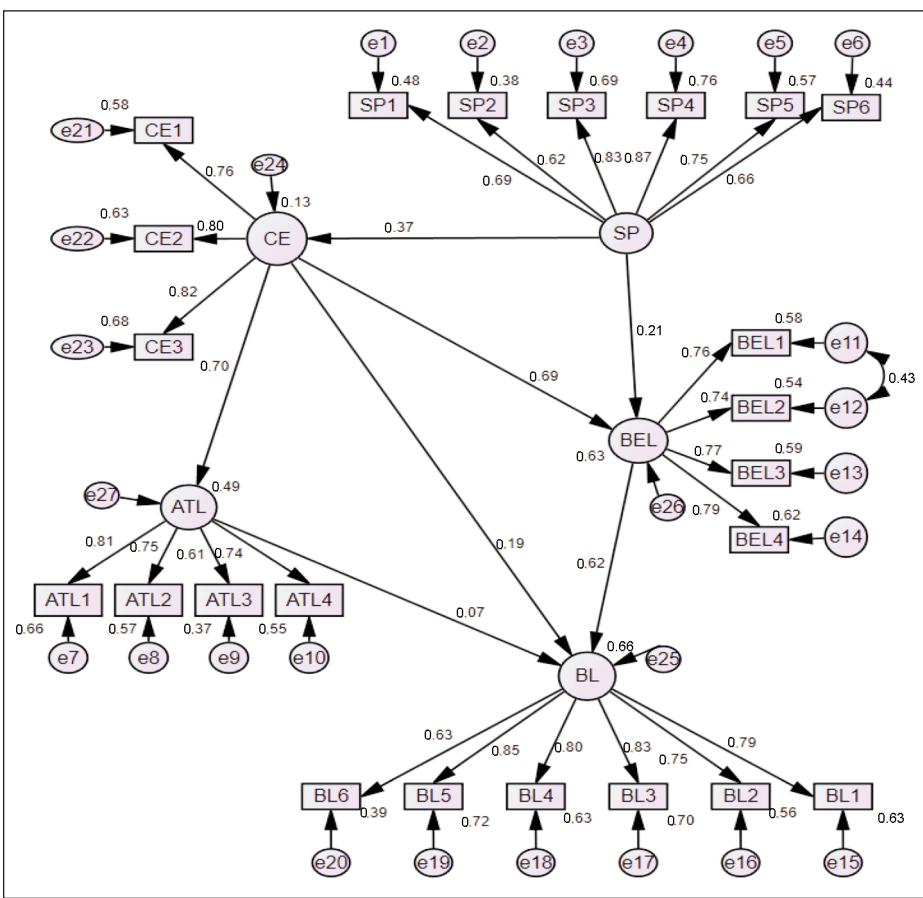


Fig. 2. Structural model of research (RMSA: 0.098, CFI: 0.966; GFI: 0.890; CMIN/DF: 4.797)

testing. Consumer engagement in the design of clothes has positive effects on attitudinal loyalty ( $p:0.00<0.05$ ) and behavioural loyalty ( $p:0.00<0.05$ ). However, we cannot say that consumer participation leads to brand love ( $p:0.052<0.05$ ). It is thought that loyalty will lead to brand love in the established model. According to the results, behavioural loyalty leads to brand love ( $p:0.00<0.05$ ). However, this feeling of

attitudinal loyalty is not effective on their brand love ( $p:0.269<0.05$ ). The variable that triggers consumers to engage in product design is the social peer effect. Social peer influence is also a factor affecting behavioural loyalty ( $p:0.00<0.05$ ). In the model established, consumer engagement plays a role as both a dependent variable, independent variable and mediator variable. This study is important in terms of the originality of the model established.

The mediating role of consumer engagement in the relationship between social peer influence and behavioural loyalty was tested with the three-step method proposed by Baron and Kenny [68]. According to the authors, three stages should take place to speak of a mediating effect. In the first stage; the independent variable (social peer influence)

should affect the dependent variable (behavioural loyalty). In the second step; the independent variable (social peer influence) should have effects on the mediator variable (consumer engagement). When the mediator variable (consumer engagement) is included in the model, the effect of the independent variable (social peer influence) on the dependent variable (behavioural loyalty) decreases, while the mediating variable (consumer engagement) has a significant effect on the behavioural loyalty. Figure 3 shows the mediator role of consumer engagement between SP and BEL.

The first direct effect was examined and all three variables were examined together. When the beta coefficient is examined, the consumer participation consumer engagement (CE) mediating role reduces the strength of the beta coefficient between (SP) social

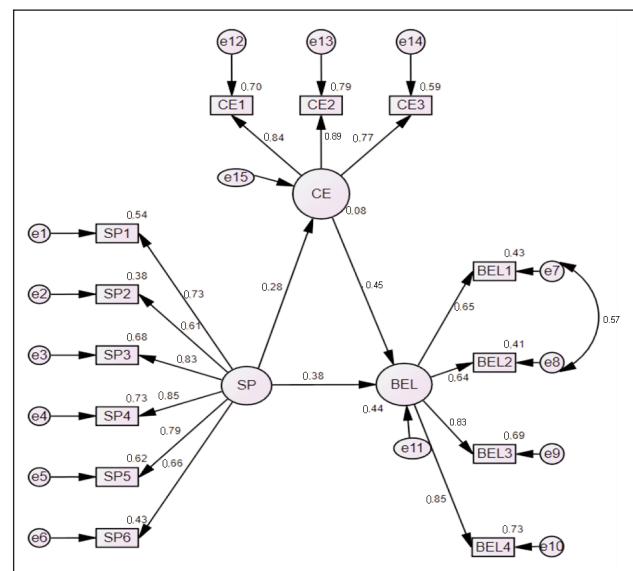


Fig. 3. Mediating effect model ( $\chi^2/df: 3.929$ , GFI: 0.911; CFI: 0.911 and RMSEA: 0.076)

MEDIATING EFFECT FOR CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT				
Direct and indirect effect	St. Beta	St. Error	Critical Ratio	p
SP → BEL	0.360	0.048	7.491	***
SP → CE → BEL				
SP → CE	0.270	0.054	5.002	***
CE → BEL	0.332	0.042	7.933	***
SP → BEL	0.270	0.040	6.697	***

peer influence and (BEL) behavioural loyalty. Thus, the result indicated that there is a partial mediation between independent and dependent variables. In this case, the H8 hypothesis is also partially accepted.

## DISCUSSION

In this research, while investigating the impact of consumer engagement on loyalty and brand love, the effect of social peer effect on engagement and loyalty was also examined. The effect of consumer engagement on loyalty is in line with the results seen in the literature. Consumer engagement affects attitudinal loyalty more than behavioural loyalty. According to the analysis results, consumers participating in the design process continue to purchase the product. Even if there is another brand alternative, they still continue to buy the product of the brand they participated in the design process. It has been observed that consumers show not only behavioural loyalty but also attitudinal loyalty after participation. In other words, consumers even accept to pay more for the products they take part in the design/production process compared to other products. In the research model, three motivations that reveal brand love were determined. Among the variables of attitudinal loyalty, behavioural loyalty and consumer participation, it was seen that only behavioural loyalty led to brand love. This result is similar to some research from the literature [33–40].

Social peer influence was added to the model as an independent variable affecting loyalty and consumer engagement. Consumers with strong social peer influence are those who pay attention to their friends' purchases, do not use unfashionable products, and buy to leave a good impression around them. It is thought that consumers, who are under the influence of social peers, want to influence their environment and become popular by contributing to the production of special products for them. It has been revealed that consumers who are careful to use the same brands as the brands used by their friends, who are under the influence of social peers, have high behavioural loyalty. Finally, the partial mediating role

of consumer participation, social peer influence and behavioural loyalty has been identified. An important share of social peer influence in increasing behavioural loyalty is the involvement of the consumer in the design process.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are some limitations in every study like this research. Firstly, this research sample consists of only Turkish consumers. A comparative study would be desirable among other countries. Secondly, the model consists of 5 variables. Different and more variables can be used in further research. The sample of this research consists of 399 consumers. More different results can be obtained with a larger sample. Another constraint of the study is that consumer participation is not a very popular strategy in the country where the sample lives. Consumers participating in the research know the concept of consumer engagement through examples from around the world. However, there is no consumer participation strategy made by companies in our country. For this reason, while it was determined that consumers will participate in the design process of the product and show ethical and behavioural loyalty, no effect on brand love was observed. The rejection of H3 can be explained by the fact that it is not a product in which consumers actively participate in its design or manufacture. In the future, as consumer participation strategies are implemented, it is anticipated that hypotheses established with brand love will be accepted. This research makes some sectoral recommendations. In the globalizing and digitalizing world, practices regarding "consumer engagement", which can be regarded as the last step of consumer communication, should be made widespread. It is estimated that the brand of the product designed by consumers will be voluntary brand ambassadors. For companies that want to ensure continuity in loyalty; a fully inclusive attitude to the consumer is recommended. Consumer participation is especially important in terms of production, design, website infrastructure and social media content.

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