

# Brand Love and Brand Forgiveness: An Empirical Study in Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

Brand love is an interesting and important concept that required further research in brand management. This study tested the impacts of consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and brand anthropomorphization on brand love and brand forgiveness in the framework provided by the theory of planned behavior. Regression analyses showed that brand anthropomorphization and subjective norms have a significant impact on brand love. Brand love positively influences brand forgiveness and acts as a mediator between subjective norms, brand anthropomorphization, and brand forgiveness constructs. Besides mediation, brand anthropomorphization directly influences brand forgiveness. The findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge on brand love and brand forgiveness concepts by presenting empirical research findings that investigate brand love antecedents. This study has also shown the significant impact of anthropomorphizing a brand on brand forgiveness and brand love.

JEL classification: M1, M3

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Brand love is among the primary goals of successful brand management (Langner et al., 2015) and has received increasing attention in the last decade after the study of Batra et al. (2012). Exploring consumers' emotions toward brands has become increasingly important as emotions are significant factors that build up brand loyalty and equity. Brand love is an intense feeling and consumers' passionate emotional attachment to a brand, and a significant concept for marketing practitioners and academicians (Joshi & Garg, 2021). The majority of studies about brand love have focused on the benefits of consumers' love for the brand and are related to brand loyalty, willingness to pay a higher price, positive word of mouth, and willingness to forgive the brand for product or service failures (Kim et al., 2019). Consumers usually feel love for their favorite brands (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013), and brand love contributes to brand loyalty (Algharabat, 2017), brand equity (Palazon et al., 2017), willingness to pay a higher price (Bairrada et al., 2018), and word of mouth (Strandberg & Styvén, 2020).

In today's increasingly competitive and complex markets, understanding brand love antecedents and outcomes are essential for marketing managers as previous studies have shown the significant impact of brand love on brand loyalty and equity (Algharabat, 2017; Palazon et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand or brand love can be more effective than mere satisfaction, for example, for positive word of mouth (Loureiro et al., 2017). Studies related to the brand love concept mainly focus on its meaning and conceptualization after the research by Shimp and Madden (1998), and from then on, some other studies have been published regarding the antecedents of brand love (Vernuccio, 2015; Bairrada et al., 2018). Brand love can be an effective marketing tool as it leads to positive word of mouth and repeat purchases, but it is a still relatively under-researched topic that requires further attention (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020). Within that context, this study focuses on the antecedents of brand love and examines the relationship between brand love and brand forgiveness concepts in the theoretical framework of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Hegner et al., 2017).

The theory of planned behavior is one of the major frameworks used in marketing studies to examine consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). A review of the theory of planned behavior has shown that the model can be used in many different research contexts by including additional predictors or variables (Han & Stoel, 2017). In this study, brand love, brand anthropomorphization, and brand forgiveness concepts are analyzed within the theoretical framework provided by the theory of planned behavior following the positive expectations that brand love increases consumers' willingness to forgive the brand's possible faults.

Brand anthropomorphization, which is attributing human characteristics to lifeless objects, is getting increased attention in the consumer-brand relationship context as examining its impact on brand love and brand forgiveness helps to develop these concepts (Schmid & Huber, 2019). Besides anthropomorphization, brand love has received increasing attention because of its potential to influence customer engagement and brand loyalty; however, studies that explore brand love are still scarce (Palusuk et al., 2019). Due to its significant impact on consumer psychology and brand loyalty, a continuous exploration of the brand love concept from a marketing and branding perspective is required (Joshi & Garg, 2021). In particular, available research about anthropomorphism in the brand love context is limited (Palusuk et al., 2019). Filling this important gap in the literature, this study focuses on brand anthropomorphism and brand love concepts. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by examining anthropomorphism, brand love, and brand forgiveness in an emerging market. Brand love is very important for both marketing practitioners and academicians (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020). Examining consumer-brand relationships in various cultures is necessary since culture has a direct influence on how people approach love and create bonds with brands (Palusuk et al., 2019). Within that context, the current study aims to contribute to the literature on brand love and brand forgiveness by

presenting original empirical research findings that investigate the antecedents of brand love and by revealing the impact of brand anthropomorphization on brand love and brand forgiveness.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Brand Love

Brand love was initially introduced by Shimp and Madden (1988) and can be explained as a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The concept was firstly explained by adapting the interpersonal love theory to the marketing and consumption domain (Hegner et al., 2017). After the interpersonal love theory, the self-inclusion theory of love (Aron & Aron, 1986) was used to explain brand love, pointing out that a consumer loves a brand when it has high integration with the consumer's self-concept (Ahuvia, 1993). Besides, the identity theory was also used to explain brand love since a brand with high resonance with a consumer's self-image is more likely to express the consumer's identity (Strandberg & Styvén, 2020) and facilitates brand love (Zhou et al., 2020).

Since brand love has an essential role in strong relationships between consumers and brands (Kohli et al., 2014; Kaufmann et al., 2016), researchers have examined it from many perspectives to contribute to its growing literature. For example, Koo and Kim (2013) conceptualized store love for retail ready-to-wear brands and stated that love was a significant antecedent of brand loyalty. Rodrigues and Rodrigues (2019) have shown that luxury brands' perceived mystery and intimacy influence brand love positively, and brand love mediates the impact of brand image on consumers' purchase intentions and the impact of brand image on word of mouth. Loureiro et al. (2017) have shown the mediating effect of brand love between online brand engagement and electronic word of mouth, while Joshi and Garg (2021) pointed out the impact of brand love on loyalty intentions through the mediating effect of brand engagement. Brand love was found to mediate the relationship between brand experience and word of mouth (Rodrigues & Brandão, 2020). Strandberg and Styvén (2020) have stated that brand love has a significant impact on the positive word of mouth for place brands, while Schmid and Huber (2019) have indicated that brand love can be felt for both hedonic and utilitarian brands. In parallel, Zhang et al. (2020) have studied brand love in the destination branding context and stated that tourists can feel love toward a destination brand. Kumar et al. (2021a) explored brand love for natural products and showed that the product's region, image barriers, and usage barriers shaped brand love. Additionally, Lee and Hsieh (2021) have shown how community engagement facilitated brand love. Shen et al. (2021) have found that brand love is more critical than satisfaction and perceived value regarding revisit intentions for casual customers of restaurants. Additionally, both self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence have been found to mediate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Le, 2020).

Besides those findings, researchers have reported different facets of brand love. Fournier (1998) has indicated six dimensions of brand-consumer relationships: love and passion, commitment, inter-dependence, self-connection, brand partner quality, and intimacy. In another study, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) proposed that brand love consists of attachment, positive evaluations and emotions, passion, and demonstrations of love for the brand. Albert et al. (2008) have contributed to the dimensions of brand love that constituted dreams, memories, intimacy, idealization, pleasure, unicity, passion, and affection. In addition to these studies, Ahuvia et al. (2008) have stated that brand love has three aspects such as the cognitive, affective, and conative brand love. After these studies, Batra et al. (2012) have explained brand love with seven dimensions: positive and negative effects, satisfaction, loyalty, attitude strength, self-related cognitions, and functional quality. Loving a brand consists of rational benefits and rational components, so in

consumer-brand relationships, rational appearances impact brand love (Huber et al., 2015; Hegner et al., 2017). In alignment with its research questions, the current study has operationalized brand love as having three dimensions, which are commitment, intimacy, and passion (Hegner et al., 2017).

The literature on brand love has grown in the last decade, while previous studies examined the brand love construct within several perspectives, such as its conceptualization, and relevance for the self-concept, digital space, services, luxury products, and other brand-related constructs (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). Only a few studies have been focused on its antecedents and concentrate on a variety of topics such as self-expressiveness (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Algharabat, 2017; Strandberg & Styvén, 2020), information-seeking, perceived value, and personal interaction (Junaid et al., 2020), brand identification and self-brand connection (Palazon et al., 2019), the antecedents of brand love (Vernuccio et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021b), brand love antecedents regarding local food consumption (Kumar et al., 2021a), and explaining brand love with the theory of planned behavior (Hegner et al., 2017). Within that context, the current study examines the antecedents of brand love in the theoretical perspective of the theory of planned behavior.

## 2.2. The Theory of Planned Behavior and Brand Love

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is considered one of the most critical consumer behavior theories. It is a broadened version of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory states that a consumer's intentions are influenced by their attitudes and perceived control, and also subjective norms (Ajzen, 2011). This theory has been used as a theoretical framework for many studies in marketing on a variety of topics such as examining green purchasing behavior (Chan & Lau, 2001; Yadav & Pathak, 2016), marketing managers' intentions (Ferdous, 2010), brand-following behavior on social media (Chu et al., 2016), brand love (Hegner et al., 2017), revisit intentions for tourism destinations (Soliman, 2019), eco-conscious consumer behavior (Hameed et al., 2019), and patronage intention for food (Ukenna & Ayodele, 2019).

Attitude is a relatively enduring propensity to respond either favorably or unfavorably towards an object (Simons, 1976). Consumers' attitudes toward brands inevitably influence their emotions such as brand love (Batra et al., 2012). When consumers have a strong positive attitude towards a brand, they are more likely to develop strong emotional attachment, feelings, and love to it. Positive evaluations form the basis of attitudes and can be considered as elements that contribute to the dimensions of brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). For example, perceived value has been found as an antecedent of brand love (Bairrada et al., 2018). In this context, H1 is developed as:

*H1: A positive attitude towards a brand is positively related to brand love.*

Besides attitudes, the subjective norm is defined as people's preference to behave in conformity with other people's expectations and to behave as one must act. If consumers think that it is not acceptable to use or like a brand, they will be less likely to develop a strong emotion like love. According to Karjaluo et al. (2016), subjective norms represent consumers' beliefs of whether loving a brand is accepted or not. Subjective norms may be reflected as word of mouth or recommendations that influence consumers' purchase decisions. In parallel, Zhang et al. (2020) have shown that potential tourists are more likely to develop love toward a destination brand due to the positive influence of a celebrity endorser. Consumers prefer brands according to some reference groups (Vernuccio et al., 2015). For example, a sense of belonging to and being accepted by an online brand community influences brand love (Palazon et al., 2019). Similarly, brands with a higher perceived value and prestige are liked more by consumers (Bairrada et al., 2018), as such positive characteristics make them more acceptable by others. Within that context,



subjective norms are expected to directly impact brand love (Hegner et al., 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed.

*H2: Positive subjective norms regarding a brand are positively related to brand love.*

Anthropomorphizing is attributing human-like characteristics and perceiving human-like attributes in objects or things (Gutherie, 1993). In addition to attitude and subjective norms, anthropomorphism is another factor influencing brand love. It can be operationalized as the perceived behavioral control over the consumer-brand relationships, as human-like characteristics like having consciousness decrease perceived behavioral control over brands (Hegner et al., 2017). According to Epley et al. (2007), the basis of anthropomorphism is associating human-like characteristics with the real or imaginary behaviors of objects or non-human agents. Anthropomorphized brands are considered actual human beings with emotions, minds, and consciousness (Puzakava et al., 2009). When people anthropomorphize brands, they evaluate them as human beings and make more favorable evaluations, so brand anthropomorphization directly impacts brand love (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017).

Anthropomorphized brands have a social nature, and their relationships with consumers are more similar to interpersonal relationships as if brands are members of society (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). It becomes easier to develop emotions and connections with brands if they are considered human-like agents. For example, Bairrada et al. (2018) have found that a brand's intimacy, uniqueness, and prestige contribute to brand love. Brand managers generally apply anthropomorphizing strategies like using a brand character to emphasize their human-like characteristics (Hegner et al., 2017). The anthropomorphization of a brand can lead to increased engagement, which positively affects brand love (Loureiro et al., 2017). For example, the personal branding of celebrities contributes to brand love through the mediating role of the common meaning of consumption and shared signs of the consumer culture (Zhou et al., 2020). As a result of their comprehensive literature review, Palusuk et al. (2019) have stated that brand love can appear in the early stages of a consumer-brand relationship similar to a marriage, in which customers "fall in love" with a brand and feel passion and intimacy. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H3: The anthropomorphization of a brand is positively related to brand love.*

### **2.3. Brand Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is getting over negative thoughts or replacing negative feelings with positive ones, and it can be valid in consumer-brand relationships (Kim et al., 2019). Forgiveness is considered a complex cognitive, affective, and behavioral phenomenon (McCullough & Worthington, 1995). The perceived behavior of brands, which is the result of brand anthropomorphization, influences consumers' emotions and thoughts. The human-like characteristics attributed to brands change people's reactions toward them. For example, consumers may show varying levels of forgiveness for product or service failures depending on the level of personal identification with the brand (Kim et al., 2019).

*H4: The anthropomorphization of a brand is positively related to brand forgiveness.*

Forgiving a brand's wrongdoings may be a result of emotional or cognitive processes. When consumers have a powerful attachment to a brand, they become more willing to forgive it in cases of problems (Aaker et al., 2004; Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Fedorikhin, 2008). Consumers are usually more willing to forgive mistakes made by brands if they have a strong relationship with

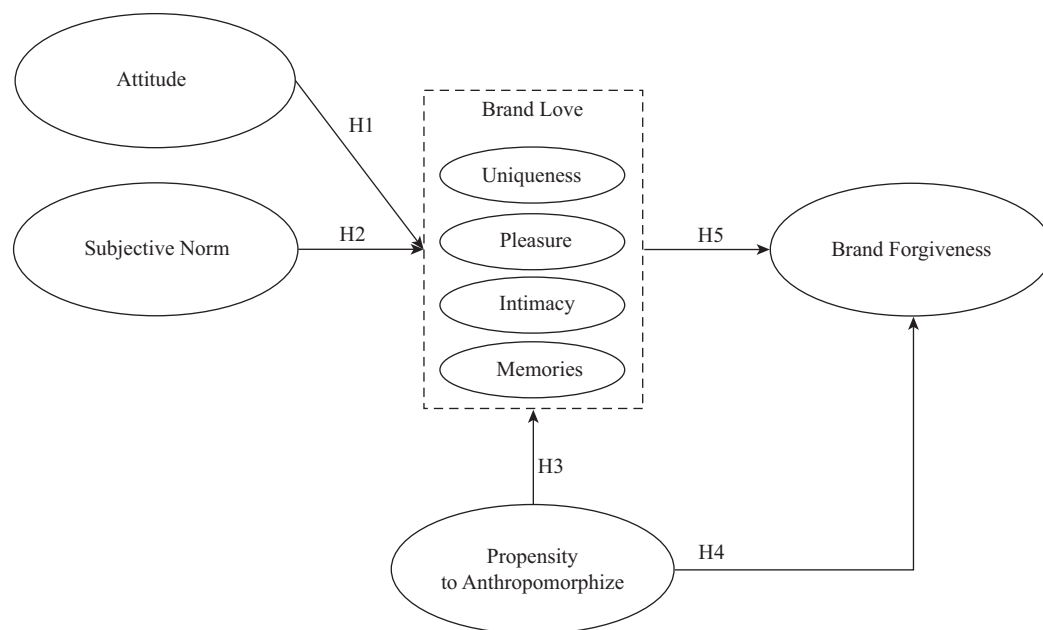
the brand (Heinrich et al., 2012) or feel love toward it (Hegner et al., 2017). Brand love directly influences brand loyalty (Algharabat, 2017), positive word of mouth (Strandberg & Styvén, 2020), brand equity (Palazon et al., 2019) and can be associated with resistance to negative news and information towards a brand (Batra et al., 2012). Joshi and Garg (2021) have also shown that brand love positively influences brand loyalty and brand engagement acts as a mediator in the brand love-loyalty relationship. Therefore, H5 is developed as:

*H5: Brand love is positively related to brand forgiveness.*

The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

The research model



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Collection Procedure

A global sportswear brand is used in the study. Clothing is a way of self-expression for many consumers and ready-to-wear is an appropriate product category to study consumer-brand relationships. Besides their generally vast target markets, ready-to-wear brands are more likely to create strong bonds with their consumers than other brands (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017). Within that context, apparel brands gained significant attention of marketing scholars worldwide (Joshi & Garg, 2021). The brand targets mass and upper-mass consumer segments in Turkey with a wide range of ages, gender, occupation, and lifestyle. Data were collected through online questionnaires using the snowball sampling method, which turned out a convenience sample with 247 complete surveys.

#### 3.2. The Scales

The scales were adopted from Hegner et al. (2017). The attitude construct was measured by four items, including the participants' opinions about the brand regarding being funny, interesting,

rewarding, and desirable. Subjective norm was measured by three items that included the participants' views about the opinions of others and the society about their brand choice. Brand anthropomorphization was measured by four items and had questions about the participant's perceptions of the brand's free will, emotions, consciousness, and mind. Brand forgiveness was measured by four items, including the participant's intention to defend the brand, take revenge on the brand, and repurchase it. Brand love was measured by twelve items associated with the uniqueness, pleasure, and intimacy of the brand and the memories evoked by it.

The items were translated into Turkish and then re-translated into English (Ball et al., 2002). The original and re-translated items of the brand love scale are listed in Appendix Table 1. After taking the opinion of a marketing professional, items were finalized in Turkish. Responses of participants were collected on a 5-point Likert scale, from “1-Strongly disagree” to “5-Strongly agree” options.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics and the Reliability of Scales

After the elimination of incomplete questionnaires, 247 valid surveys were obtained. 65% of the participants were female. The mean age was 30, with a standard deviation of 10. Participants' education level was 1% primary school, 23% high school, 50% undergraduate, and 26% graduate level.

The factor analysis results for brand love scale items were highly satisfactory, with a KMO value of 89% and items loading on four dimensions as indicated in the literature while explaining 83% of the variance. The scale was reliable with Cronbach's Alpha levels greater than 0.7 for all dimensions of brand love, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Brand love scale factor analysis

Factors and Related Items	Communalities	Factor Loadings	Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Uniqueness (UN)</b>				
UN1	0.870	0.869	13.041%	0.724
UN2	0.783	0.707		
<b>Pleasure (PL)</b>				
PL1	0.773	0.830	28.035%	0.917
PL2	0.814	0.861		
PL3	0.833	0.823		
PL4	0.826	0.808		
<b>Intimacy (IN)</b>				
IN1	0.753	0.595	18.412%	0.864
IN2	0.876	0.781		
IN3	0.812	0.843		
<b>Memories (ME)</b>				
ME1	0.858	0.822	23.778%	0.934
ME2	0.903	0.894		
ME3	0.892	0.847		
Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.896				
Bartlett test of sphericity = 2383.866, $p = 0.000$				
Total variance explained = 83.266%				

**Note:** Principal component analysis and varimax rotation were used.

Factor analysis results for the other scale items were also satisfactory (KMO = 89%). The scales were reliable with Cronbach's Alpha levels that are greater than 0.7, as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Factor analysis results for other scale items

Factors and Related Items	Communalities	Factor Loadings	Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude (AT)				
AT1	0.720	0.818	17.899%	0.815
AT2	0.748	0.815		
AT3	0.522	0.637		
AT4	0.704	0.748		
Subjective Norm (SN)				
SN1	0.882	0.890	19.785%	0.945
SN2	0.902	0.897		
SN3	0.885	0.912		
Brand Anthropomorphisation (BA)				
BA1	0.795	0.818	19.460%	0.906
BA2	0.667	0.615		
BA3	0.867	0.818		
BA4	0.819	0.783		
Brand Forgiveness (BF)				
BF1	0.655	0.740	18.615%	0.834
BF2	0.531	0.622		
BF3	0.846	0.875		
BF4	0.820	0.849		
Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.862				
Bartlett test of sphericity = 2716.293, $p = 0.000$				
Total variance explained = 75.760%				

**Note:** Principal component analysis and varimax rotation were used.

## 4.2. Brand Love as the Dependent Variable

Regression analyses were conducted for testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. As an initial check, sub-dimensions of brand love, which were uniqueness, pleasure, intimacy, and memories, were analyzed one by one as dependent variables. The impact of the subjective norm, attitude, and brand anthropomorphization on the dimensions of brand love construct were analyzed with separate regression analyses.

After this initial check, their impact on the first-order or composite brand love construct was calculated by taking the arithmetic average of brand love dimensions. The regression analyses showed that attitude did not significantly impact brand love, so hypothesis 1 (H1) regarding the relationship between brand love and brand attitude was not confirmed. On the other hand, subjective norms significantly influenced brand love, with significant  $p$  levels for all dimensions, so hypothesis 2 (H2) regarding the positive relationship between subjective norms and brand love was confirmed.

Brand anthropomorphization had a significant effect on the uniqueness and pleasure dimensions of brand love but did not have a significant impact on the intimacy and memories dimensions. Since brand love is multi-dimensional, some of its dimensions may show different trends than others (Schmid & Huber, 2019). The results of the multivariate regression analyses are illustrated in Table 3.



**Table 3**

Multivariate regression analysis results for brand love

Dependent Variable	F	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Independent Variables	Unstandardized B	Standardized $\beta$ Coefficients	Significance (p)	VIF
Uniqueness	41.370 ( <i>p</i> = 0.000)	0.338	0.330	SN	0.202	0.243	0.000	1.343
				AT	0.063	0.079	0.214	1.473
				PA	0.354	0.370	0.000	1.685
Pleasure	57.528 ( <i>p</i> = 0.000)	0.415	0.408	SN	0.239	0.273	0.000	1.343
				AT	0.084	0.100	0.094	1.473
				PA	0.402	0.399	0.000	1.685
Intimacy	67.529 ( <i>p</i> = 0.000)	0.455	0.448	SN	0.567	0.686	0.000	1.343
				AT	0.012	0.016	0.787	1.473
				PA	-0.034	-0.036	0.560	1.685
Memories	81.925 ( <i>p</i> = 0.000)	0.503	0.497	SN	0.652	0.703	0.000	1.343
				AT	0.067	0.075	0.173	1.473
				PA	-0.052	-0.049	0.404	1.685
Brand Love	110.129 ( <i>p</i> = 0.000)	0.576	0.571	SN	0.415	0.591	0.000	1.343
				AT	0.056	0.084	0.099	1.473
				PA	0.167	0.207	0.000	1.685

Since the impact of attitude was insignificant, it is interpreted that the theory of planned behavior was insufficient to explain brand love.

### 4.3. Brand Forgiveness as the Dependent Variable

Brand anthropomorphization had a significant effect on brand forgiveness ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.544$ ), so hypothesis 4 (H4) regarding the positive relationship between brand anthropomorphization and brand forgiveness was confirmed.

All dimensions of brand love had significant effects on brand forgiveness and the significance and standardized beta values were computed as follows: uniqueness ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.462$ ), pleasure ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.581$ ), intimacy ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.328$ ), and memory ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.340$ ). Besides, the first-order brand love had a significant impact on brand forgiveness ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.527$ ). Thus, H5 could not be rejected.

### 4.4. Brand Love as a Mediator

Previous analyses had shown that subjective norms had a significant impact on brand love, and brand love had a significant impact on brand forgiveness. The mediating effect of brand love was analyzed by Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro procedure, model 4. The mediation analysis showed that brand love mediated the relationship between subjective norms and brand forgiveness.

The analysis was repeated for brand anthropomorphization. Although it did not have a significant effect on the first-order brand love construct, it influenced brand forgiveness and the uniqueness and pleasure dimensions of brand love. A mediation analysis revealed that both the direct and indirect effects of brand anthropomorphization on brand forgiveness were significant. As can be seen in Table 4, brand love acted as a mediator variable between brand

anthropomorphization and brand forgiveness. PROCESS analysis results and model statistics are reported in Appendix Table 2 and Appendix Table 3.

**Table 4**

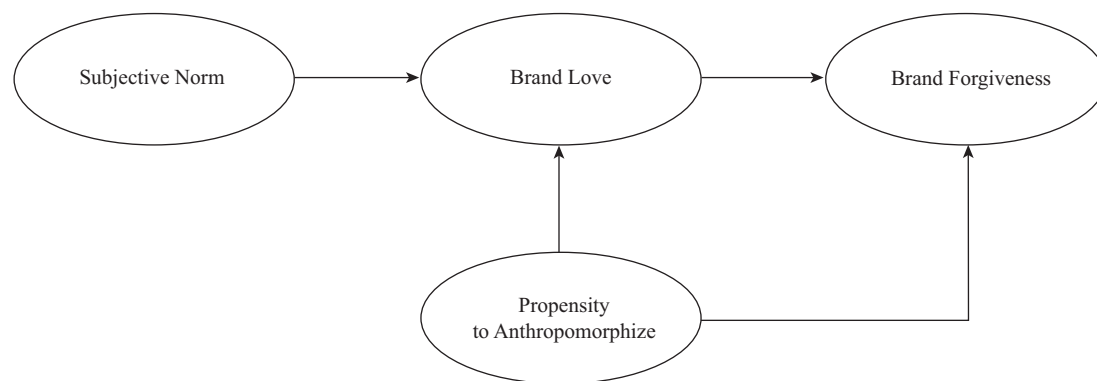
Mediation analyses for brand love

Independent Variable	Brand Love (Mediator)	Dependent Variable: Brand Forgiveness			
		Direct effect	Boot LLCI	Indirect Effect Boot ULCI	Mediation
Subjective norms	Brand Love	No ( $p = 0.889$ )	0.2019	0.4540	Yes
Brand anthropomorphisation	Brand Love	Yes ( $p = 0.000$ )	0.0768	0.2938	Yes

The results of the analyses are illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

The mediation relationship



## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings showed that a positive attitude towards a brand does not significantly influence brand love, while subjective norms significantly influenced brand love. Accordingly, it can be interpreted that the theory of planned behavior was not sufficient in explaining brand love. Although the theory of planned behavior provides a strong theoretical domain in consumer behavior and it has been used in many studies, it may have some limitations and the attitude construct may be insignificant depending on the research context (Han & Stoel, 2017). This study contributes to the literature by examining brand love and forgiveness constructs within the theory of planned behavior in an emerging market context, as emerging markets have a big potential for marketers in various sectors (Joshi & Garg, 2021). By examining the antecedents of the brand love and brand forgiveness constructs, this study provides marketing managers and academicians with empirical evidence regarding the factors that can shape consumer-brand relationships. Examining brand love is crucial for both marketing managers and academicians (Gumparthy & Patra, 2020).

The findings of this study have partly supported Hegner et al. (2017), who stated that the theory of planned behavior was effective in explaining brand love in their sample; although the impact of attitude on brand love was significant for both high and low-involvement cases in their study, it was insignificant in the current study. This finding can be explained by the fact that the attitude construct in Hegner et al.'s (2017) study was conceptualized as the "attitude towards loving a brand" while the current study has conceptualized it as the attitude toward the brand,

in alignment with its research questions. Although attitude is a substantial factor for feelings and judgments toward brands, a strong emotion such as brand love may stand independently. For example, Bairrada et al. (2018) have shown that perceived quality was also insignificant in explaining brand love.

On the other hand, the significant impact of the subjective norm on brand love was in alignment with Hegner et al. (2017) and Palazon et al. (2017), who have shown the impact of belonging to a brand community on brand love. While people may have specific attitudes towards a brand, they can be influenced by other individuals' opinions in their social network, such as reference groups or role models. Factors that make brands more attractive in social contexts such as perceived brand value and prestige were previously shown to positively influence brand love (Bairrada et al., 2018). This finding can also be explained by the relatively collectivist culture of Turkey compared to the more individualistic Western cultures. In the Turkish culture, others' views have a strong impact on people's attitudes. Culture directly influences consumers' approach to brand love, i.e. collectivist cultures tend to attach higher importance to love from a social and community perspective, while individualistic cultures view love as more related to one's individual identity (Palusuk et al., 2019).

Although the theory of planned behavior is a widely studied topic in the literature, brand love and brand forgiveness are relatively new concepts. This study has contributed to the literature by presenting empirical research findings on the relationships of these constructs with another attention-raising concept, brand anthropomorphization. Brand anthropomorphization has been conceptualized within the theory of planned behavior, but the findings of this study showed that this theoretical domain is not sufficient for explaining the antecedents of brand love.

The second finding of the study was the significant positive impact of brand anthropomorphization on brand love. In particular, brand anthropomorphization positively influenced brand love for the uniqueness and pleasure dimensions. This finding supported the findings by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2017), who have also examined brand love in the clothing product category. Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014) stated that the perceived level of anthropomorphism is a significant antecedent of brand love, and it is more important than the perceived quality of the brand. The findings have also supported Rauschnabel and Ahuvia's (2014) study in the ready-to-wear industry and showed the mediating effect of brand love between anthropomorphizing a brand and brand forgiveness. Attributing personal characteristics to a brand is important for loving it. Furthermore, brand love has been shown to mediate the relationships between brand image and purchase intention, brand image and word of mouth, brand experience and word of mouth (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Rodrigues & Brandão, 2020).

Another important and unique contribution of the current study is showing the significant direct impact of brand anthropomorphization on brand forgiveness. Associating human-like characteristics with brands may lead to human-like considerations regarding brands as if they have feelings and consciousness (Epley et al., 2007; Puzakava et al., 2009). Therefore, brand anthropomorphization leads to higher brand forgiveness. When brands are considered as humans, people become willing to forgive them and make more positive evaluations (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017). Zhou et al. (2020) have also shown the positive impact of a celebrity's congruence and attractiveness on consumers' emotions toward brands.

This study has shown that brand love has a positive effect on brand forgiveness. This finding has supported Bauer et al. (2009) and Hegner et al. (2017) and showed that consumers are more likely to ignore a brand's mistakes if they have cognitive solid and affective bonds with brands. Besides, Palazon et al. (2017) have posited that brand love positively influences brand equity. The findings of the current study also support the positive effect of brand love on brand equity. As the propensity to forgive a brand increases, repurchase intentions and loyalty also increase and contribute to brand equity.

In summary, the study results revealed that brand anthropomorphization significantly influences brand love and brand forgiveness. Subjective norms significantly affect brand love, and brand love acts as a mediator in the subjective norm-brand forgiveness and the brand anthropomorphization-brand forgiveness relationships. Sajtos et al. (2020) have pointed out the importance of examining brand love in different contexts. As a relatively new construct, brand love will develop better by accumulating knowledge from different cultures. Hoping to contribute to this knowledge accumulation, this study presented empirical research findings from Turkey.

## 6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study findings point to guidelines for brand managers to create brand love for their brands to increase customer-brand relationships. An important practical implication of these findings is that brand love is an important factor for ensuring consumers' forgiveness in cases of product failures and avoiding possible reputation loss problems. Brands benefit from consumers' love in increasing brand loyalty and repurchase intentions (Pawle & Cooper, 2006). In addition, the current study has shown that brand love is positively related to brand forgiveness. Therefore, firms must establish a good relationship with their customers and deserve their love to gain a competitive advantage. Having more positive and stronger relationships with consumers may be enabled by several actions. First of all, as a basic requirement, brands must keep their promises to their customers. Second, they must exceed expectations and create a favorable image associated with uniqueness, pleasure, intimacy, and memories. Differentiation will be a good strategy to evoke stronger and more favorable consumer emotions. To that end, firms must invest in strategic marketing actions to build and maintain favorable symbolic brand attributes. For example, firms can design attractive events or experiences for their target consumers or employ specific programs to retain their loyal customers (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Besides, offering interactions with the brand on social media may also contribute to brand love since Laroche et al. (2013) have shown that such activities lead to positive word of mouth and brand loyalty. While mass marketing mediums may be utilized for building positive attitudes and feelings, social media may be a more direct channel to create bonds and experience brand-related emotions in an interactive way. Such marketing actions will increase a brand's competitive power since brand love directly influences positive word of mouth, which is among the most trusted means of communication and sources of information (Strandberg & Styvén, 2020). All of these actions support brand love, and consumers become more likely to recommend the brand to others and forgive its mistakes.

According to the findings, anthropomorphism provides good opportunities for branding. Supporting previous findings, this study has shown that brand anthropomorphism motivates consumers to develop human-like bonds with brands and increasing levels of anthropomorphism increases brand love (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). Since ready-to-wear brands are more self-expressive, they become a symbol of status or unique identity for many customers. As an emerging market, consumers in Turkey are highly involved in fashion shopping. This study has shown that brands can differentiate their brands and build stronger emotional bonds with their customers by including human-like features. Using influencers or celebrities, getting endorsed by opinion leaders, or communicating in the first person can be listed as some ways for brand managers to present human-like characteristics of their brands (Puzakova et al., 2009). Using such attributes in marketing activities such as social media marketing or in-store promotions are more likely to generate positive emotions and influence consumers' brand love and forgiveness positively.

Regarding brand forgiveness, firms that want to have a unique and strong positioning in the market and a high level of customer loyalty must establish brand love because brand love acts as a barrier in case of a crisis or a brand failure and decreases consumers' likelihood to churn. Taking customers' emotions into consideration in product or service failures, providing a sincere

apology with the product or service redress may effectively stimulate brand love and brand forgiveness.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As with other academic studies, this study has some limitations. First of all, it was based on a convenience sample and a single brand. Secondly, it has a correlational nature, which does not allow for inferences about causal mechanisms in the model. Besides, the attitude construct was operationalized differently from previous studies (Hegner et al., 2017). Although that was a difference that has contributed to the originality of the current study, it may limit the ability to compare the findings with previous research. Finally, the scales were translated into the local language. This can also be seen as an issue although the researchers followed the generally accepted item adaptation procedures strictly.

Future research can be carried out by random sampling methods with different respondents and brands. Similar studies may also be conducted in other product categories or services by using more than one brand. Further studies can consider separating luxury and non-luxury brands and examine the differences between them. Besides, the impact of culture needs more research. Studies that focus on the interpretation of consumer-brand relationships and distinguish between hedonic and functional products in various cultural settings will contribute to the existing knowledge about brand love. In particular, examining the influence of marketing actions of highly self-expressive brands such as apparel and luxury brands would be beneficial. Because the consumer perspective may differ depending on the geographic location and cultural context, such research would contribute to marketing practitioners in multinational companies by providing guidelines for implementing their marketing campaigns across countries. So, future studies may be conducted comparing different countries and taking marketing communication activities of brands into consideration. Another direction for future research may be measuring the actual levels of brand love and interpreting the findings by examining the associated customer complaints. Such an effort would be very effective in revealing the relationship between brand love, brand forgiveness, and consumer complaining behavior and present solid findings. Moreover, the impact of brand anthropomorphism on brand love and forgiveness can be examined further by distinguishing different product categories and brand characteristics. Finally, other antecedents of brand love can be explored, aiming to find a more robust theoretical framework.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1**

The original and re-translated scale items (Hegner et al., 2017)

Items	Original item	Item in Turkish	Re-translated item
<b>Uniqueness</b>			
UN1	This brand is special.	... markası özeldir.	... brand is special.
UN2	This brand is unique.	..., eşsizdir.	... is unique.
<b>Pleasure</b>			
PL1	By buying this brand, I take pleasure.	... 'dan bir ürün satın almak beni memnun eder.	I am pleased to purchase a product from ...
PL2	Discovering new products from this brand is a pure pleasure.	... 'un yeni ürünlerini keşfetmek benim için bir zevktir.	It is my pleasure to discover the new products of ...
PL3	I take a real pleasure in using this brand.	... markasını kullanmak benim için gerçekten bir zevktir.	It is truly a pleasure for me to use the ... brand.
PL4	I am always happy to use this brand.	... markasını kullanmak bana her zaman mutluluk verir.	Using the ... brand always makes me happy.
<b>Intimacy</b>			
IN1	I value this brand greatly in my life.	... markasının hayatımda önemli bir yeri bulunur.	The ... brand has an important place in my life.
IN2	There is something almost “magical” about my relationship with this brand.	... markasıyla aramızda neredeyse “büyülü” denilebilecek bir bağ vardır.	There is an almost “magical” bond between me and the ... brand.
IN3	There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with this brand.	Benim için ... markasıyla aramızdaki ilişkiden daha önemli bir şey yoktur.	For me, there is nothing more important than my relationship with the ... brand.
<b>Memories</b>			
ME1	This brand reminds me of someone important to me.	... markası bana, benim için önemli birini hatırlatır.	The ... brand reminds me of someone important to me.
ME2	This brand brings my memories back.	... markası, bazı anılarımı aklıma getirir.	The ... brand brings back some memories.
ME3	I associate this brand with some important events of my life.	... markasını hayatımdaki bazı önemli olaylarla ilişkilendiririm.	I associate the ... brand with some important events in my life.

**Table 2**  
Brand love PROCESS procedure mediation analysis results-1

Brand anthropomorphization → Brand love → Brand forgiveness					
Outcome variable: Brand love					
Model summary		<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	MSE	<i>F</i>
		0.000	0.2975	0.3546	103.7617
Model	Variable	coeff.	se	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Brand anthropomorphization	0.4403	0.0432	10.1863	0.000
Outcome variable: Brand forgiveness					
Model summary		<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	MSE	<i>F</i>
		0.000	0.3714	0.4537	72.0749
Model	Variable	coeff.	se	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Brand anthropomorphization	0.3522	0.0583	6.0369	0.000
	Brand love	0.3906	0.0723	5.4056	0.000

**Table 3**  
Brand love PROCESS procedure mediation analysis results-2

Subjective norms → Brand love → Brand forgiveness					
Outcome variable: Brand love					
Model summary		<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	MSE	<i>F</i>
		0.000	0.5246	0.2400	270.3537
Model	Variable	coeff.	se	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Subjective norms	0.5082	0.0309	16.4424	0.000
Outcome variable: Brand forgiveness					
Model summary		<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	MSE	<i>F</i>
		0.000	0.2775	0.5214	46.8682
Model	Variable	coeff.	se	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Subjective norms	−0.0092	0.0661	−0.1386	0.889
	Brand love	0.6380	0.0942	6.7752	0.000