(Araştırma)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND EXPERIENCE: THE MODERATING ROLES OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND BRAND TRUST

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ABSTRACT

In the era of fierce competition and high market dynamism, creating superior brand experience has been one of the key objectives of companies, which in turn fostered the importance and number of experience studies in the marketing literature. Drawing from extant brand experience literature, this study aims to investigate the boundary roles of social influence and brand trust in the relationship between brand engagement and brand experience. A conceptual framework is tested using structural equation modeling with survey responses from 215 Turkish consumers. The data analysis results reveal that brand engagement is positively related to brand experience and this positive relationship is stronger in the case of higher social influence. Contrary to expectations, brand trust negatively moderates the brand engagement – brand experience link. Further, brand experience increases consumers' willingness to pay. The study provides theoretical and practical implications and ends with fruitful future study directions.

Keywords: Brand engagement, brand experience, social influence, brand trust, willingness to pay

MARKA ETKİLEŞİMİ VE MARKA DENEYİMİ İLİŞKİSİNDE SOSYAL ETKİ VE MARKA GÜVENİNİN DÜZENLEYİCİ ROLÜ

ÖZ

Tüketici pazarlarındaki yoğun rekabet ve yüksek dinamizmin etkisiyle, güçlü marka deneyimi yaratmak işletmelerin temel amaçlarından biri haline gelmiş ve pazarlama literatüründe deneyimi anlamaya ve açıklamaya yönelik çalışmaların önemini ve sayısını artırmıştır. Mevcut marka deneyimi literatüründen yola çıkan bu araştırmada, marka etkileşiminin marka deneyimi üzerindeki etkisinde sosyal etki ve marka güveninin düzenleyici rolü incelenmektedir. Araştırmada öne sürülen kavramsal model 215 Türk tüketiciden toplanan anket verisi ile yapısal eşitlik modeli üzerinden test edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları marka etkileşiminin marka deneyimini olumlu yönde etkilediğini ve bu etkinin yüksek sosyal etki durumunda daha güçlü olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ancak, beklenenin aksine, marka güveni marka etkileşimi – marka deneyimi ilişkisini zayıflatmaktadır. Bunların yanında, marka deneyimi tüketicilerin daha çok harcama isteğini artırmaktadır. Teoriye ve yöneticilere öneriler sunan çalışma, gelecek araştırmalar için yararlı önerilerle sonlanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Marka etkileşimi, marka deneyimi, sosyal etki, marka güveni, ödeme isteği

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1. Introduction

As competitiveness and dynamism determine the success of companies, the importance of brand experience among practitioners has been widely recognized. It seems especially valuable in service settings because compared to goods, customers tend to share their service experiences with others more frequently (Perry and Hamm, 1969). Marketing scholars have investigated the customer experience in diverse service settings, such as, tourism (Klaus and Maklan, 2011), food and beverage (Ding and Tseng, 2015; Hwang et al., 2021), and banking (Iglesias et al., 2021) and asserted that service performance depends heavily on the extent to which customers engage in unique and memorable experiences. Therefore, service providers need to understand how to create memorable experiences with their brands in order to develop sustainable marketing strategies for their products (Brakus et al., 2009).

The notion of experience originates from the seminal article by Hirschmann and Holbrook (1982) and has taken much attention in the consumer behavior literature during the past decade. Brakus et al. (2009) integrated the previous research on experiential marketing and provided a conceptualization and operationalization of brand experience. They define brand experience as customers' sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses caused by brand stimulations. When consumers look for brands, buy, and/or consume them, they are exposed to different forms of brand stimuli such as, name, logo, color, packaging, and brochures, which in turn form brand experience (Schmitt, 2009). Brand experience is seen as a motivation to purchase (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) and therefore, it can help consumers to choose which brand to buy and establish strong relationships with the brand (Schmitt et al., 2015).

While the development of memorable experiences between customers and brands is recognized as crucial, the determinants of this concept are often neglected (see Table 1). This study investigates the contribution of brand engagement to brand experience. Engagement is one of the concepts frequently discussed in the experience literature. It is established that customer engagement determines companies' success in the marketplace (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). Yet, current literature shows that there is no consensus about the direction of the causality between brand engagement and brand experience. While Prentice et al. (2019) document that experience impacts engagement (through brand love), Islam et al. (2019) and Rather and Hollebeek (2021) propose an opposite direction. That is, they demonstrate that brand engagement influences brand experience. Therefore, more empirical research is required to clarify the nature of the linkage between these notions and extend the current knowledge on antecedents of brand experience.

Literature review indicates that brand experience is subjective (Brakus et al., 2009) and depends on several contingencies (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). These

contingencies can be classified as (1) customer, (2) situational, and (3) sociocultural. Customer-related contingencies could be in the form of characteristics, resources, knowledge, etc. Situational factors represent the immediate context, for example, the conditions in the experience environment. Sociocultural contingencies are related to cultural aspects, such as language, norms, and rules (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). However, extant literature pertaining to experience lacks of enough attention to the roles of the contingencies in consumers' experience towards goods and services. What is more, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) emphasize the need for more research on the interaction impacts of various marketing concepts on brand experience. Specifically, little is known about the roles of society and the extent of brand credibility in creating unique brand experiences.

Previous research also shows that delivering brand experience results in positive outcomes, such as satisfaction (Iglesias et al., 2019), brand equity (Moreira et al., 2017), word-of-mouth (Klein et al., 2016), repurchase intention (Sahin et al., 2012), and consumer-brand relationship (Brakus et al., 2009). That said, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is no research in the literature (except for Dwivedi et al., 2018) investigating the direct influence of brand experience on consumers' willingness to pay more for the product or service. The price of the product is a particularly important element in profit calculation. Moreover, as being one of the strongest indicators of brand loyalty (Netemeyer et al., 2004), consumer willingness to pay reflects purchasing intentions of current and prospective customers. Companies also take into consideration willingness to pay in planning and implementing brand positioning (Tan et al., 2019). Therefore, willingness to pay needs more interest from marketing scholars.

Thus, this research aims to offer three contributions to the literature by addressing the gaps mentioned above. Firstly, the study enlightens the brand experience literature by shedding light on how brand engagement may help shape brand experience. Secondly, the findings enrich the literature by studying the boundary roles of social influence (as a sociocultural contingency), and brand trust (as a customer contingency) in the relationship between brand engagement and brand experience. Thirdly, examining the impact of brand experience on customers' willingness to pay more would add to the extant experience literature.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. Firstly, the related literature review, along with the proposed conceptual model and hypothesized relationships are presented. Secondly, the research method is discussed, which is followed by the presentation of data analysis and results. Later, the results of the analysis are discussed and the key theoretical and managerial implications are provided. Finally, the paper concludes with an overview of study limitations and an agenda for future research.

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2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Brand Experience

Brakus et al. (2009: 53) conceptualize brand experience as "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) as well as behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments". Therefore, in this study, experience is seen as the consumer's responses and reactions to the goods or services (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). Brand experience is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that involves sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual components (Brakus et al., 2009). The sensory dimension of brand experience appeals to consumers' five senses. In other words, it is the visual, olfactory, auditory, gustatory, and tactile stimulation offered by the brand. The emotional brand experience corresponds to emotions, that is feelings and emotional bond that brand creates with the customers. The behavioral brand experience involves consumers' actions and bodily experiences with brands (Brakus et al., 2019). The intellectual brand experience relates to the brand's capability to stimulate imaginative and analytical thinking. Table 1 highlights the existing literature on antecedents and consequences of brand experience.

Table 1. Illustrative examples of previous studies on brand experience

Study	Antecedents	Outcomes	Sample	Key findings
Nysveen et al. (2013)	-	Brand personality Brand satisfaction Brand loyalty	Survey on 1090 Norwegian consumers	Brand experience positively influences brand personality and loyalty, while its impact on brand satisfaction is negative.
Ding and Tseng (2015)	-	Hedonic emotions Brand awareness/ associations Perceived quality	An interview survey in 21 stores of four service brands: Burger King, Cold Stone Creamery, McDonald's and Starbucks Coffee	Brand awareness/ associations mediate the positive impact of brand experience on perceived quality while perceived quality mediates the positive influence of brand experience on hedonic emotions. Also, hedonic emotions mediate the positive link between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Klein et al. (2016)	Hedonic shopping value Store atmosphere	Word of mouth	Survey on 440 pop-up brand store visitors (181 from the US, 259 from the UK)	Hedonic shopping value and store atmosphere contribute to brand experience and brand experience positively influences word of mouth.
Khan and Fatma (2017)	Event marketing Brand clues Marketing communication	Brand trust Behavioral brand loyalty Attitudinal brand loyalty Customer satisfaction Word of mouth Brand credibility Brand attitude	Survey on 284 restaurant customers in India	Event marketing, brand clues, and marketing communication increases consumer's brand experience and this experience positively influences brand trust, behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, word of mouth, brand credibility, and brand attitude.
Coelho et al. (2020)	Brand innovativeness Perceived quality	Brand personality Perceived value	Cross-cultural survey study on 534 Portuguese and 282 American consumers	Both brand innovativeness and perceived quality positively impact brand experience. Brand experience relates to brand personality and perceived value.
Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020)	-	Behavioral intentions toward the destination Perceived online destination brand credibility	Multimethod approach using a projective technique, an online experiment, and a multigroup analysis with five official destination platforms	There are positive direct and indirect relationships among online destination brand experience, perceived online destination brand credibility, and users' behavioral intentions toward the destination (intentions to visit/recommend).

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| Hwang et al. (2021) | - | Brand satisfaction | Survey on 352 Korean coffee shop visitors | The sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual brand experiences help to enhance brand satisfaction. Also, the type of barista (human versus robot) moderates the sensory brand experience-brand satisfaction and intellectual brand experience – brand satisfaction links. |
| Singh et al. (2021) | - | Brand love | Survey on 541 hypermarket visitors in India | Brand experience contributes to brand love and this relationship is positively moderated by agreeableness and openness personality traits. On the other hand, neuroticism negatively moderates the experience – love link. |

2.2. The Impact of Brand Engagement on Brand Experience

Marketing scholars propose several forms of engagement, such as customer engagement (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021), customer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011), global customer engagement (Gupta et al., 2018), customer engagement behavior (van Doorn et al., 2010), and customer engagement marketing (Harmeling et al., 2017). In the present study, the author focuses on the brand engagement concept, which is defined as the degree of a customer's affective, cognitive, and behavioral investment in a specific brand (Hollebeek, 2011). As definition shows, brand engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct with affective, cognitive, and behavioral facets (Brodie et al., 2011). The affective aspect of brand engagement is the degree of consumer's positive affect toward a brand with which customer engages (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Cognitive brand engagement refers to the degree of customer's thought-processing about a brand in a particular interaction (Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Behavioral brand engagement represents the level of energy, effort, and time that a consumer spends on the engaged brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014).
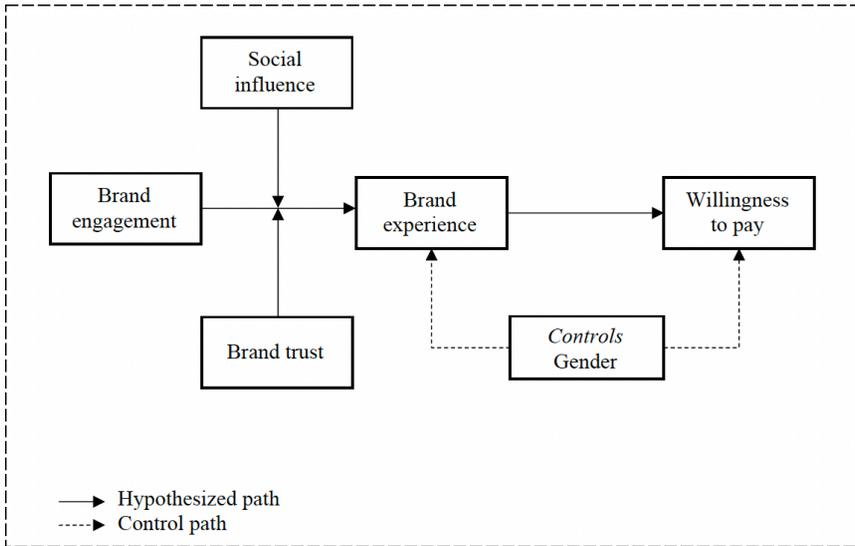
Figure 1. Conceptual model

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model and the hypotheses of the study, which are discussed subsequently. To begin with, as stated before, the direction of causality between brand engagement and brand experience is ambiguous. Prentice et al. (2019) demonstrate that brand experience influences brand engagement through brand love. However, this direction of causality does not sound logical. When consumers engage in goods and services, they make purchases, which in turn help them to create experiences (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Brand engagement represents the customer's role in the overall experience development in pre-, intra-, and post-purchase stages (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Therefore, customers are expected to eventually form strong and unique experiences with the brand when they engage with them. Islam et al. (2019) found the similar results suggesting that customers who are exposed to pleasurable interactions with brands are likely to have more positive feelings and thoughts toward them. Thus, this study proposes that:

H1: Brand engagement is positively related to brand experience.

2.3. The Moderating Role of Social Influence in the Relationship between Brand Engagement and Brand Experience

Previous research in marketing suggests that consumers' choices, decisions, intentions, and behaviors are influenced by social influence, i.e., the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of other people (Verhoef et al., 2009). Deutsch and Gerard (1955) propose two types of social influence, namely informational and normative. While informational social influence involves accepting information from others without questioning, normative social influence is about complying

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with the expectations of others (Cohen and Golden, 1972). For the scope of this study, only normative social influence is examined. Therefore, the influence of others on customers' choices and behaviors is investigated.

Specifically, this study proposes that engaged customers' experiences are shaped by the groups they belong to. When these customers experience conformity pressures from others they look up, i.e., they are under the condition of higher social influence, they are expected to generate stronger experiences with the brands. On the other hand, such customers' experiences with the brands would be weaker if others do not expect the customer to use the relevant brand. Thus, other people's thoughts and expectations would increase the positive effect of brand engagement on brand experience. Therefore, it is offered that:

H2: Social influence positively moderates the impact of brand engagement on brand experience such that the higher (lower) the social influence, the stronger (weaker) the positive effect of the brand engagement on brand experience.

2.4. The Moderating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship between Brand Engagement and Brand Experience

Brand trust has been considered as a crucial element in maintaining long-term customer – brand relationships by leading scholars in marketing (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001: 82). Consumer trust towards brands plays a significant role in attitudes (Kong et al., 2021) and behaviors (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). It is particularly important in experience literature because trust is built from past experiences. In other words, it accumulates from interactions with brands. In this study, it is claimed that when engaged customers feel confident about the ability of the brand to deliver its promises, they are prone to develop stronger emotions, think about the brand more often and, exhibit physical actions and behaviors. Conversely, when such customers feel suspicious about the reliability of the brand, they would be less likely to develop memorable experiences with it. Thus, it is proposed that:

H3: Brand trust positively moderates the impact of brand engagement on brand experience such that the higher (lower) the brand trust, the stronger (weaker) the positive effect of the brand engagement on brand experience.

2.5. The Impact of Brand Experience on Willingness to Pay

In today's intense competition, customers' willingness to pay more for goods and services is critical for firm survival. Willingness to pay can simply be defined as the maximum amount of money a customer is willing to pay for a product or service (Cameron and James, 1987; Smith and Nagle, 2002). Consumer willingness to pay for a product is used as a determinant of the product's price

and it is a strong indicator of loyalty (Netemeyer et al., 2004). It represents the value that a customer assigns to a product. In this study, it is proposed that a memorable experience with the brand motivates customers to spend more money for this brand. Brand experience is known as a motivator for customers to hold hedonic emotions (Ding and Tseng, 2015), and this can cause them to pay more in order to re-experience such emotions. However, when their experience with the brand is weak, they are expected to be more sensitive to price and pay less for this brand. As a result, it is posited that:

H4: Brand experience is positively related to willingness to pay.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Context, Sample and Data Collection

The research model was tested in the coffee chain business in Turkey. There are several reasons behind this choice. Firstly, experience in service industries is classified as quite apparent in previous studies (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009). Also, coffee consumption around the world is expected to increase by 2.3% in 2021 (Global Coffee Report, 2021). Similarly, recent research on coffee consumption in Turkey reveals that 10% of the respondents consume at least 5 cups of coffee a day (Marketing Turkiye, 2021). Moreover, as the high competitiveness in the coffee chain industry necessitates building strong branding strategies, understanding the determinants of brand experience would help coffee chain managers plan their marketing efforts.

Data were collected using self-administered cross-sectional (data collection method at one point in time) survey responses from Turkish consumers. The research model was applied in a coffee shop industry as an experience in the coffee shop is observed as quite strong (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). Starbucks was chosen as a coffee shop brand for three main reasons. First, as being the biggest coffee retailer in the world, it has more than 32000 branches in 80 countries (Starbucks, 2021). Second, after the UK, Turkey has the second highest number of Starbucks branches in Europe. Third, Starbucks is one of the most cited brands in the experience literature because it produces strong experiences among its consumers (Brakus et al., 2009; Hultén, 2011). Therefore, Starbucks seems to be suitable to research Turkish consumers' experiences with coffee chain brands.

The convenience sampling method was used due to time and budget constraints. The link of the survey was sent to participants through email and social media platforms. In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to visit any Starbucks store over the last six months. To ensure this, a screening question was included in the beginning of the survey if the participant visited any Starbucks store in Turkey over the last six months. If the answer was yes, the rest of the questionnaire form was provided to the respondent. From the initial 245 responses, 18 responses were excluded because of missing data. Also, 12 responses were omitted as they failed

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to meet the attention check question (Please respond to this statement as "agree"), which yielded a final sample of 215 for the analysis. The respondents were mostly up to 25 years old (57.7%) and fairly distributed in terms of gender (54% female). The average of respondent age was 27, which seems parallel with the customer segment of Starbucks. The majority of respondents (74.4%) had an undergraduate degree and held an average household income level between 5001 and 10000 Turkish Liras (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sample demographics

Characteristic	Sample = 215 (%)
Age	
18-25	57.7
26-35	32.5
Over 35	9.8
Gender	
Male	46
Female	54
Education	
High school	8.5
Undergraduate	74.4
Postgraduate	18.1
Income (in Turkish Liras)	
Less than 2500	8.8
2500-5000	28.4
5001-10000	44.2
Over 10000	18.6
Frequency of visit	
At least twice a week	22.8
Once a week	27.4
Once a month	34.9
Less than once a month	14.9

3.2. Measures

The study constructs were measured using established scales from previous studies in the marketing literature. The questionnaire was first designed in English and then translated into Turkish by translation-back translation approach (Brislin, 1970). The questionnaire was evaluated by two academics from the brand management field in terms of question ordering, comprehension, and face validity. A pretest with 40 target respondents was conducted to ensure the understandability and readability of study measures (Dillman, 2000).

All scale items were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Brand engagement was captured with the three-dimensional scale of Hollebeek et al. (2014), which has affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Brand trust was operationalized with four items from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Social influence was measured with three item-scale developed by Pedersen and Nysveen (2003). Brand experience was measured with Brakus et al.'s (2009) four-dimensional scale as sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual. This way of conceptualization and operationalization of brand experience has been validated in several studies (e.g., Khan and Fatma, 2017; Das et al., 2019). Following Homburg et al. (2005), willingness to pay was measured with an open-ended question. Accordingly, the respondents were asked the maximum amount of money they would be willing to pay for the coffee shop visit.

Besides, in order to rule out any possible explanations, gender and income were included as control variables in the analysis. Gender was measured using a binary variable (female versus male). Income represents the average monthly household income of respondents and it was measured with an open-ended question. These two variables were controlled whether they determined the brand experience and willingness to pay.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Measure Validation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the psychometric properties of the study constructs before testing the research model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Brand engagement and brand experience constructs were operationalized as higher-order reflective constructs with three and four dimensions, respectively. The CFA results indicate that the measurement model provides a good fit to the data ($\chi2/df$ = 2.262 (p = .00); TLI = .90; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .077). Further, as provided in Table 3, standardized first-order factor loadings are significant (t $\geq$ 8.13) and higher than the commonly used threshold value of .50 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Also, AVE and CR values are greater than .50 and .70, respectively (Hair et al., 2014). These results confirm the presence of appropriate convergent validity.

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Table 3. Measures, standardized factor loadings, and t-values

Measures	Factor loading	t-value
Brand Engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014)		
Affective		
I feel good when I visit this coffee shop brand	.76	
Visiting this coffee shop brand makes me happy	.88	13.47
I feel very positive when I visit this coffee shop brand	.90	13.68
I'm proud to visit this coffee shop brand	.62	9.13
Cognitive		
I think about this coffee shop brand a lot when I'm visiting it	.88	
Visiting this coffee shop brand gets me to think about it	.77	10.28
Visiting this coffee shop brand stimulates my interest to learn more about it	.58	8.13
Behavioral		
Whenever I'm visiting a coffee shop, I usually visit this coffee shop brand	.83	
I spend a lot of time visiting this coffee shop brand compared to other coffee shops	.91	16.71
I visit this coffee shop brand the most	.91	16.73
Social Influence (Pedersen and Nysveen, 2003)		
People important to me think I should visit this coffee shop brand	.81	
It is expected that people like me goes to this coffee shop brand	.83	14.29
People I look up to expect me to visit this coffee shop brand	.95	16.40
Brand Trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001)		
*I trust this coffee shop brand	-	-
I rely on this coffee shop brand	.82	
This is an honest coffee shop brand	.78	11.48
I feel safe at this coffee shop brand	.76	11.23
Brand Experience (Brakus et al., 2009)		
Sensory		
This coffee shop brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses	.89	
This coffee shop brand appeals to my senses	.96	22.11
I find this coffee shop brand interesting in a sensory way	.85	17.62
Emotional		
I have strong emotions for this coffee shop brand	.83	
This coffee shop is an emotional brand	.87	15.55
This coffee shop brand induces feelings and sentiments	.76	12.71
Behavioral		
This coffee shop brand results in bodily experiences	.86	

I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I go to this coffee shop brand	.89	16.67
This coffee shop brand is action oriented	.77	13.38
Intellectual		
This coffee shop brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving	.87	
I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this coffee shop brand	.87	15.73
This coffee shop brand makes me think	.75	12.74
Fit Statistics: χ^2/df = 2.262 (p = .00); TLI = .90; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .077		

Note: *Item is omitted due to low model fit.

Discriminant validity was tested using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. As shown in Table 4, all the square-roots of AVE exceed the bivariate correlations among the constructs. Therefore, discriminant validity is also supported. The low correlation between brand engagement and brand experience (r = .64), along with the AVE – bivariate correlation comparison test, prove that they are distinct constructs. This can be seen as a response to the call for more research confirming that the engagement and experience are different from each other (see Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Finally, the reliability of the constructs given in the questionnaire was examined through Cronbach's alpha. As seen in Table 4, all Cronbach's alpha values are greater than .70 (Nunnally, 1978), confirming that constructs are internally consistent. Besides, as Hair et al. (2014) suggested, normal distribution was evaluated by examining skewness and kurtosis values. Results show that skewness and kurtosis values for brand engagement, social influence, brand trust, brand experience, and gender fall between -1 and +1, and -3 and +3, respectively. However, as measured with open-ended questions, willingness to pay and income were not normally distributed. Therefore, log transformation was performed for these two variables.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Brand engagement	**.81**						
2. Social influence	.54**	**.87**					
3. Brand trust	.55**	.44**	**.79**				
4. Brand experience	.64**	.73**	.55*	**.85**			
5. Willingness to pay (log)	.17**	.15*	.08	.15*	-		
6. Gender	-.01	.16*	.06	.06	.05	-	
7. Income (log)	.10	.13	.02	.13	.15*	.15*	-
Mean	2.90	2.05	3.36	2.54	1.56	1.46	3.82
SD	.81	1.02	.96	.84	.26	.50	.34
Alpha	.88	.89	.83	.94	-	-	-
AVE	.66	.75	.62	.72	-	-	-
CR	.95	.90	.83	.97	-	-	-

Note: ** p < 0.01; *p < .05. The square-root of the AVE is typed in bold italics along the diagonal.

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4.2. Common Method Bias

Common method bias (CMB) might be an issue in this research since data were collected in a cross-sectional research design from the same respondents, namely customers. A series of procedural remedies was employed with respect to questionnaire design (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, the respondents were ensured that participation was fully anonymous. Second, there was no right or wrong answers. Third, criterion and predictor variables were ordered randomly using sections and page breaks. Additionally, Harman's single factor technique was followed as a post hoc test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Exploratory factor analysis results showed that 6 factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1 were produced and the first factor extracted explained 42.9% of the total variance, which is below the recommended 50% threshold. Therefore, the CMB does not pose any issue in this study.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

To formally address the study hypotheses, structural equation modelling (SEM) with IBM SPSS Amos 24.0 software was used. Testing moderation impacts in SEM requires computing the relevant latent interaction terms. In order to reduce multicollinearity, all predictor variables (i.e., brand engagement, social influence, and brand trust) were mean-centered prior to computing interaction terms (Aiken and West, 1991). The indices suggest good model fit ($\chi2$ (11) = 7.911; p > .01; TLI = .96; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .052). The results of hypothesis testing are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Structural model results

Paths	Standardized coefficient	t-value	Result
Hypothesized paths			
H1: Brand engagement → Brand experience	.28	5.07**	Supported
H2: Brand engagement x Social influence → Brand experience	.09	2.12*	Supported
H3: Brand engagement x Brand trust → Brand experience	-.12	-2.63**	Rejected
H4: Brand experience → Willingness to pay	.14	1.96*	Supported
Control paths			
Gender → Brand experience	-.05	-.75	
Gender → Willingness to pay	.01	.32	
Income → Brand experience	.07	.69	
Income → Willingness to pay	.11	1.98*	
Fit Statistics: $\chi2$ (11) = 7.911; p > .01; TLI = .96; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .052			

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01

Hypothesis 1 is related to the direct effect of brand engagement on brand experience. The analysis shows that brand engagement positively and significantly influences brand experience (β = .28, p < .01), confirming H1. Hypothesis 2 pertains to the positive moderating effect of social influence on the relationship between brand engagement and brand experience. Results provide support for H2 ((β = .09, p < .05). As Figure 2 displays, when social influence is higher, brand engagement has a stronger impact on brand experience. However, when social influence is lower, the influence of brand engagement on brand experience becomes weaker. Hypothesis 3 claims the positive moderating effect of brand trust on the brand engagement – brand experience link. Contrary to expectations, brand trust has a significant and negative moderating role on the particular link (β = -.12, p < .01), rejecting H3. Finally, as predicted, there is a positive and significant relationship between brand experience and willingness to pay (β = .14, p < .05), providing support for H4. Regarding the roles of control variables, only income has a significant impact on willingness to pay (β = .11, p < .05).
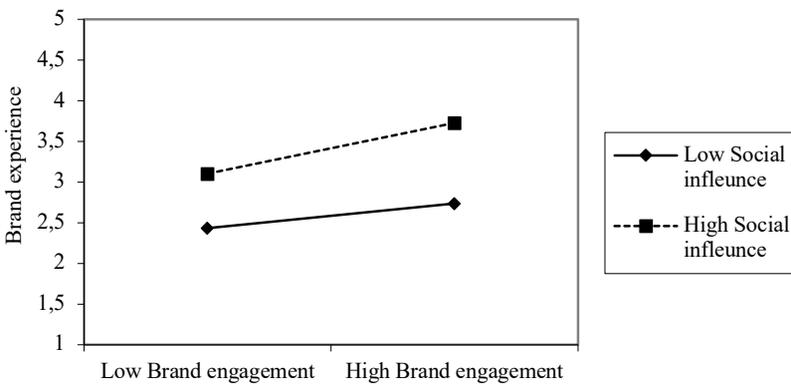

Figure 2. The Moderating role of social influence in the brand engagement – brand experience link

5. Discussion and Implications

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This paper contributes to the experiential marketing literature by examining the boundary roles of social influence and brand trust in brand engagement – brand experience link in the context of a coffee shop business in Turkey. The results indicate that brand engagement plays a significant role in influencing brand experience. This finding implies that when coffee shop customers are engaged with the coffee chain brand, they tend to develop memorable experiences, which is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Islam et al., 2019; Rather and Hollebeek, 2021).

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Another key contribution of this study is to the social influence theory in marketing. Results provide support that social influence positively moderates the impact of brand engagement on brand experience. When engaged customers are exposed to social influence, they are more prone to form favorable experiences with the coffee shop brand. This is the first study to investigate the strengthening role of social influence in the relationship between brand engagement and brand experience. Contrary to expectations, findings show that brand trust negatively moderates the relationship between brand engagement and brand experience. In other words, the impact of brand engagement on brand experience deteriorates in case of higher trust towards the brand. One possible explanation for this negative moderation may relate to the fact that when consumers believe that the brand is reliable, they may not need to engage in brands to form strong experiences. Another possible explanation is that the formation of trust takes time to evolve and mature (Svejenova, 2006) and therefore, investigating its moderating role in a cross-sectional study may not be appropriate.

Finally, results also confirm that brand experience is positively related to the amount of money consumers are willing to spend in the coffee shop. Thus, willingness to pay is influenced by the degree of satisfactory experiences that consumers derive with the coffee shop brand. This is of the two studies so far investigating the willingness to pay as an outcome of brand experience (also see Dwivedi et al., 2018).

5.2. Managerial Implications

It is believed that this study findings generate relevant insights to help coffee shop owners understand how to build brand experience and use it to boost firm profitability. To begin with, the study results suggest that brand engagement contributes to brand experience. Hence, coffee shop managers should invest in affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement to build maximally pleasurable experiences. For instance, they can design their products to cultivate affective engagement. When customer feel positive in their coffee shop visits, they would want to develop more positive thoughts about the brand, learn more about it, and they are more likely to form experiences with the brand in time.

Moreover, as social influence strengthens the impact of brand engagement on brand experience, coffee shops should pay attention to the image they have in the society. Although coffee shop managers cannot totally control the influence of others on the attitudes and behaviors of their customers, they can develop sustainable strategies to create a desirable image in the society by employing social responsibility activities and attractive advertisements.

Lastly, the results suggest that brand experience plays a crucial role in coffee shop's pricing strategy. Specifically, enriched brand experience help coffee shop customers be more willing to spend higher amounts of money and therefore, less

sensitive to price. This is especially important for the coffee shops which demand higher prices for their goods and services to increase sales revenue and profitability. Therefore, coffee shops who desire higher financial returns can capitalize on this finding and focus on providing their customers a great experience. They can emphasize producing experiential benefits for their customers in developing marketing strategies. In doing so, they should take into account of all four aspects of brand experience (sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual). Managers should utilize visually interesting and appealing brand elements in their branding strategies. The design, scent and layout of the shops should be arranged for customers to stimulate their emotions, thrill, and curiosity. Advertising campaigns are also advised to be designed and implemented in a way that customers may think about the coffee shop brand more often, focus on problem solving, and exhibit behaviors in their visits.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Along with its valuable implications for theory and practice, this study has some limitations. First, the research model was tested using data from a single brand in the coffee chain industry. Therefore, the inclusion of other coffee chain brands along with the replication of the proposed model in diverse service settings, such as banking, hospitality, and communications, would contribute to the generalizability of the findings. Second, the results are based on data from Turkish consumers, which also weakens the generalizability. Future studies should investigate the conceptual model in other nations. In this vein, a cross-cultural study would be very interesting to evaluate the impact of cultural values (such as, collectivism vs. individualism and uncertainty avoidance) on creating strong brand experiences and getting benefits from them. Third, the results are based on cross-sectional data, which arises concerns about the direction of causality between variables. Therefore, although the conceptual model was based on related theories, the longitudinal investigation of the model would further validate the findings. Fourth, the present study investigated brand experience as a higher order construct. Future research could try to explain the antecedents and consequences of specific dimensions of brand experience. Lastly, this study only examines the direct impact of brand experience on willingness to pay. The roles of some potential moderators in this link, such as degree of involvement, hedonic or utilitarian consumption, need for uniqueness, and demographic characteristics (e.g., age and gender), could be the aim of future studies.

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