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Investigating the impacts of brand experience and service quality

Azize Şahin
Istanbul University
Hakan Kitapçi
Gebze Technical University
Erkut Altindağ
Beykent University
Mehmet S. Gök
Gebze Technical University

This study examines the impacts of brand experience (BE) and service quality (SQ) on behavioural intentions (BI) via brand trust (BT) by developing an empirical model, building on recent advances in service quality and assessing relationships between brand experience, service quality and brand trust. Building consumers' BI is an important strategic objective for all product managers. This study proposes multiple mediation models to analyse the relationships between the constructs, and analyses survey data using partial least squares structural equations to explore how these elements can be modelled. Results show, in line with previous literature, that BE and SQ indirectly affect BI through BT. Further, BT is effective in building BI, and has a mediating effect on the relationships among BE, SQ and BI. The study found new theoretical insights that highlight the importance of the focusing on high SQ levels.

Introduction

Although the relationship among brand experience (BE), service quality (SQ), brand trust (BT) and behavioural intention (BI) for a brand is complex, it is essential for brand managers to best develop their strategic

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objectives. Therefore, this study investigates the interaction among brand experience (BE), service quality (SQ), brand trust (BT) and behavioural intention (BI) for a brand. To this end, we develop a framework for understanding the complex interactions among BE, SQ, BT and BI.

This paper examines the following research questions:

- How does BE affect BT and BI?
- How does SQ affect BT and BI?
- Moreover, how does BT mediate the relationships between BE-SQ and BI?

The remainder of this study is organised as follows. First, we present a literature review to explain the theoretical framework of the conceptual model and describe the research hypotheses based on previous studies. After that, there is an explanation of the measurement and research methods, following which the study findings and details of their contribution to the marketing field are described. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary and description of limitations, opportunities for future research and recommendations for brand managers. The research tries to investigate and empirically demonstrate all dimensions of the interrelationship between these elements to improve service quality in order to protect the existing customer potential and market share. Accordingly, the study is noteworthy for customer-focused and service quality-oriented firms.

Literature review

Brand experience

In this study, we adhere to the definition of BE proposed by Brakus *et al.* (2009) as 'a bundle of feelings, sensations, cognitions and behavioural responses aroused by brand-related stimuli which are elements of a brand identity'. Previous literature has established that BE is the impression consumers form from the brand image (e.g. brand name, logo, signage, websites, brochures, retail stores, employees) created through advertising, marketing activities, personal contact or customer service (Alloza 2008). Marketing activities for a brand create brand-related stimuli, which shape consumers' mind-sets about the brand and ultimately result in BE. BE is shaped by an individual's perception of any direct (e.g. testing, purchasing, consumption, satisfaction from consumption) and indirect (e.g. advertising, news, consumer reviews, word-of-mouth, brand reputation)

interaction with the branded products and/or services (Şahin *et al*. 2011a). Customer satisfaction refers to the customer's overall judgement about a product or service that provides a satisfactory level of consumption-related fulfilment (Oliver 2010; Blut *et al*. 2015). In this regard, Ha and Perks (2005) proposed a model that describes the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust, considering the effect of brand experience. They argued that increasing brand experiences associated with purchase positively affected all cognitive and emotional factors of the customer experience – in other words, *customer satisfaction*. Similarly, Akbar and Parvez (2009) indicated that management – specifically marketers – should focus primarily on customer satisfaction for which service quality and experiences are important antecedents. The process of BE regards how consumers, drawing on their past and present experiences with the branded products and their access to information, attempt to structure and give meaning to this information by forming individual cognitive structures, or frameworks, which will then guide their BI in the form of BT (Dwyer *et al*. 1987). Therefore, consumers' BE is an important source of BT (Soh *et al*. 2009) and BI for a brand (Lau & Lee 1999). BT can be used as a defensive strategy to avoid brand crises and to retain customers (Shin *et al*. 2016). According to this literature review, the following two relationships are hypothesised:

H1a: BE is positively associated with BT.
H1b: BE is positively associated with BI for a brand.

Service quality

There are differing definitions of SQ in the existing literature. Some researchers studied SQ as a general evaluation of service (Parasuraman *et al*. 1985), while others studied it as a multidimensional construct shaped by service attributes (Mittal *et al*. 1999). Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) conceptualised SQ 'as the degree of discrepancy between consumers' normative expectation for service and their perceptions of service performance'. According to Mittal *et al*. (1999), 'SQ is the focused evaluation regarding the consumer's perception of quality components of service such as interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality.' Accordingly, once customers evaluate the SQ of a brand, they experience the interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality, and can exhibit trust and intentional behaviours, such as continued purchases, desire to pay price premiums, or positive word

of mouth. Similarly, Chiou and Droge (2006) argued that service quality generates overall satisfaction and trust, and promotes purchase intentions. As a result, in a transaction relationship between brands and consumers, a certain degree of trust and intention can increase consumers' willingness to continue the relationship in the future. Prior studies have shown that SQ impacts the BT and BI of branded products and services (Jih *et al.* 2007; Chenet *et al.* 2010; Eisingerich & Rubera 2010; Şahin *et al.* 2011a; Şahin *et al.* 2012). Therefore, it is expected that SQ can lead to BT and, in turn, promote positive BI for a brand. Hence, the following two relationships are hypothesised:

H2a: SQ positively affects BT.
H2b: SQ positively affects BI.

Brand trust and its mediating role

From a marketing perspective, trust is central to the relationship between consumers and brands. However, the definition of trust varies within the consumer behaviour field. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define trust as the 'willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence'. Trust is derived from the ability to perform (expertise), reliability and intentionality (Moorman *et al.* 1992). Similar to BT, Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines brand loyalty as a 'deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronise a preferred product/service consistently in the future'. Moreover, as Papadopoulou and colleagues (2001) indicated, brand trust may be positively related to customer satisfaction. Thus, trust leads to consumer BI by creating highly valuable exchange relationships (Şahin *et al.* 2011a). Customer satisfaction is the primary determinant of customer repurchase (Voss *et al.* 2010). Thus, it is expected that BT can lead to positive BI for a brand. Hence, the following relationship is hypothesised:

H3: BT positively affects BI.

Consumers who experience a branded product or service and its SQ will develop more BT and, therefore, have more positive BI. According to the definition by Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation occurs when 'an active organism intervenes between stimulus and response'. Therefore, it is expected that BT mediates the effects of BE and SQ on BI. Therefore, the following relationships are hypothesised:

H4a: BT positively mediates the relationship between BE on BI.
H4b: BT positively mediates the relationship between SQ and BI.

Behavioural intention

BI can be defined 'as an affirmed likelihood to engage in a certain behavior, [and] are important indicators of customers' future behaviors' (Lai & Chen 2011). Prior research indicates that BT, BE and SQ positively influence BI (Şahin *et al*. 2011b). When consumers experience or consume branded products and/or services, they have BI to experience, buy, pay a higher price for, and recommend the branded products and/or services. Hence, we expect that BI will be influenced by BE, SQ and BT.

Additionally, the concept of customer satisfaction recognised that customers rely on their entire experience when setting the behavioural intentions and making repurchase decisions. Thus, customer satisfaction is directly related to customers' intentions and behaviour (Olsen & Johnson 2003). In addition, there is a direct impact of customer satisfaction on loyalty, and loyalty in turn affects customer profitability (Kumar 2016).

According to this discussion, Supplementary Figure S1 displays the conceptual model.

Methodology

Sample description

We tested our hypotheses by focusing on the Turkish automobile industry. To empirically investigate the hypotheses of the study, we collected the primary data through a fully structured person-administrated survey using the mall-intercept method, conducted in Istanbul, Turkey, over a period of three months. Trained interviewers waiting in the parking area of the mall were instructed to request every fifth shopper who has a middle-class automobile to cross a designated spot to participate in a self-administered questionnaire. Respondents were screened for their age as well as brand and model of their car. A total of 552 drivers were approached and 226 participated in the study (i.e. a response rate of 50%). Nulty (2008) suggests that a response rate above 50% is valid and acceptable for methodological research.

The descriptive statistics of the sample profile are shown in Table 1. Of the 226 respondents, 165 (73%) were male and 61 (27%) female. The mean age of the respondents was 27.4 years (SD = 7.27). The education

Table 1 Scale statistics: mean, standard deviation, measure reliability and correlation

Construct	Number of items	α	*M*	*SD*	Correlations 1	2	3
1. Brand experience (BE)	12	0.94	3.25	0.95			
2. Behavioural intention (BI)	13	0.91	3.36	0.93	0.640**		
3. Brand trust (BT)	8	0.93	3.65	0.88	0.569**	0.749**	
4. Service quality (SQ)	11	0.95	3.38	0.86	0.632**	0.725**	0.788**

Notes: $^{**}p < 0.05$, α = Cronbach's alpha, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation.

profile of respondents revealed that 85% had a university-level and 15% a graduate-level education. The automobile brands of the respondents were Hyundai (42%), Renault (16%), Fiat (11%), Opel (11%), Ford (10%), Toyota (3%), Honda (5%) and others (2%). They answered the survey questions on the variables of the study, such as brand experience (BE), service quality (SQ), brand trust (BT) and behavioural intention (BI). The sample characteristics are shown in Supplementary Table S1.

Data analysis

Partial least squares (PLS), a variance-based structural equation modelling method, provides the proper methodology for data analysis because of our model, sample and data characteristics. The research model uses reflective indicators and data that are non-normal. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small ($n = 226$). These conditions are unsuitable for other structural equation modelling techniques such as Lisrel or Amos (Hair *et al*. 2014). We used SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle *et al.* 2005) to test the proposed theoretical model.

Measures

All variables were measured with multi-item scales adapted from extant research using a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). BE was measured with 12 items adopted from Brakus *et al.* (2009); SQ was assessed by adapting eight items from Mittal *et al.* (1999); BT was assessed by adapting nine items from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001); and BI was assessed by adapting five items from Mittal and Kamakura (2001), and Johnson *et al.* (2006). The internal consistency estimates of the measures were 0.90, 0.91, 0.89 and 0.88, respectively.

Analysis of results

Analysis of the reliability and validity of the model

Prior to hypothesis testing, it is informative to evaluate the properties of the model's measure variables in the following two phases: (1) measurement model and (2) structural model.

Measurement model

In this study, we used a reflective measurement model. To assess a reflective measurement model using PLS-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), the four criteria of factor loading, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity should be considered (Henseler *et al*. 2009). Results show that the measurement model meets all common requirements (Supplementary Table S2). All constructs had Cronbach's alphas (Table 1) and composite reliability (Supplementary Table S2) higher than the recommended threshold of 0.70 (see Hair *et al*. 2014), which verified construct reliability. The AVE figures are considered high as they exceeded the 0.50 threshold (Supplementary Table S2). Importantly, the discriminant validity was met according to the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, as the square root of the AVE for all constructs was greater than the corresponding correlations with any other construct. The results for the outer PLS model support the validity and reliability of the constructs. All indicator loadings are statistically significant, and mostly exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (see Hair *et al*. 2014) (Supplementary Table 2).

Structural model

The main principles to assess the structural model in PLS-SEM are the coefficient of determination (R-squared) of the endogenous latent variables and the strength of the relationships between the variables (Chin 1998). The R-squared measures that all the dependent factors are above the critical level of 0.1. The R-squared for BT and BI were 0.629 and 0.646, respectively, which are considered high (Hair *et al.* 2011). The significance of the path coefficients was calculated by a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples using the replacement method. The results shown in Supplementary Figure S2 confirm the hypotheses of the proposed theoretical model presented in Supplementary Figure S1. Table 2 contains the estimated path coefficients (β) and *t*-values of each hypothesis.

Table 2 Structural modeling results

Hypothesis	β Path coefficients	*T*-statistics	Support
H1a (+) BE → BT	0.118**	2.132	Yes
H1b (+) BE → BI	0.253***	4.424	Yes
H2a (+) SQ → BT	0.713***	14.448	Yes
H2b (+) SQ → BI	0.232***	3.253	Yes
H3 (+) BT → BI	0.422***	5.697	Yes

Notes: R^2 (BT) = 0.629, R^2 (BI) = 0.646, Q2 (BT) = 0.408, Q2 (BI) = 0.397. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Another assessment of a structural model consists of the model's competence to make predictions. The main measure of predictive relevance is the Stone–Geisser Q-squared statistic (Q-squared) (Geisser 1974; Stone 1974), which is measured by blindfolding procedures in PLS-SEM. If the Q-squared value for an endogenous latent variable is greater than zero, its explanatory constructs provide predictive relevance (Henseler *et al.* 2009). The Q-squared values presented in Table 2 are all higher than zero, indicating the model's predictive relevance.

The computed effect size is displayed in Table 3. The effect size is represented by *f*-squared (f^2), where values between 0.02 and 0.14 are considered small, those between 0.15 and 0.34 medium, and those equal to 0.35 and above large (Henseler *et al*. 2009).

Mediation tests

A complementary analysis explored the mediating role of BT by comparing nested models that included direct effect paths (Hair *et al*. 2014). First, the nested models were tested without the mediator variable (BT), and all direct effects were significant from the bootstrapping procedure conducted (with 226 observations per subsample, 5,000 subsamples and no sign changes). Second, the research model was tested with the mediator variable, and all indirect effects were significant from the bootstrapping

Table 3 Effect size

	R-squared	*f*-squared	Effect size
All constructs R^2 included	0.646		
Brand experience excluded	0.609	1.05	Large
Brand trust excluded	0.582	0.18	Medium
Service quality excluded	0.629	0.08	Small

procedure conducted. Third, the strength of the mediation was determined using the variance accounted for (VAF). The VAF provides the size of the indirect effect relative to the total effect. Thereby, we can determine the extent to which the variance of the endogenous latent variable is directly explained by the exogenous latent variable, and how much of the target construct's variance is explained by the indirect relationship via the mediator variable. The direct effect of BE on BI is 0.508, while the indirect effect via BT is 0.315. The indirect effects via BT in the model are 0.569 and 0.571. Thus, the indirect effect has a value of 0.313 (0.568 + 0.552) and the total effect has a value of 0.644 (0.327 + 0.313). The total effect value of 0.64 is considered a moderate VAF level (Shrout & Bolger 2002; Hair *et al*. 2014). Therefore, our research demonstrates that BT, as a mediator variable, has a moderate effect on the relationship between BE and BI, accounting for 64% of the variance.

The same mediation analysis procedure was performed on BT as a mediator variable between SQ and BI. The total effect was calculated to be 0.51, which is also considered a moderate VAF level (Shrout & Bolger 2002; Hair *et al*. 2014). Thus, our research demonstrates that BT, as a mediator variable, has a moderate effect on the relationship between SQ and BI. Since the VAF is larger than 20% but smaller than 80%, this effect is considered a partial mediation (Table 4).

Table 4 Significance analysis of path coefficients without the mediator

Hypotheses and pathways	β path coefficients	*T*-statistics
H (+) BE → BI	0.644***	15.083
H1a (+) SQ → BI	0.510***	22.554

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.
Source: Ringle *et al.* (2012)

Discussion

This study examined customers' BI (e.g. word of mouth, desire to pay price premiums, repurchase intention) through BT for a branded product and service, by analysing the effects of BE and SQ. The approach places BE and SQ at the beginning of the process as the main antecedents of BI, while BT has a mediating role between BE, SQ and BI.

The conceptual model was found to be reliable and valid as a measurement model with high predictive power ($R^2 = 0.646$) and validity ($Q^2 > 0$). The results confirm the hypotheses proposed in the conceptual model (Supplementary Figure S1).

According to the structural model results (Supplementary Figure S2 and Table 4), the relationship between SQ and BT is the strongest (H2a, β = 0.713). This result is consistent with similar studies (Chenet *et al*. 2010; Jih *et al*. 2007; Şahin *et al*. 2012). Past studies have shown that BT has a positive influence on BI (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001; Şahin *et al*. 2011b). However, in this empirical setting, the relationship between BT and BI is the second strongest (H3, β = 0.421). In this study, the results indicate that BE and SQ influence BI, confirming the findings of Brakus *et al*. (2009) and Şahin *et al*. (2011b, 2012). The relationships between BE-BI and SQ-BI have similar levels (H1b, β = 0.253; H2b, β = 0.265). Prior studies have shown that BE has a positive influence on BT (Jih *et al*. 2007; Brakus *et al*. 2009; Soh *et al*. 2009; Şahin *et al*. 2011). In this study, the results demonstrate that BE has a positive impact on BT, but the relationship between BE and BT is the lowest (H1a, β = 0.118).

Conclusion

Theoretical contributions

According to the previous literature, this study explores the impacts of BE and SQ on BI via BT. This study examines the multiple mediation models with BT as the key mediator variable to analyse the relationships among the constructs. Although many studies have examined the relationships among BE, SQ, BT and BI, few empirically address the inclusion of BT as a mediator variable with different variables. However, BT was not a mediator variable for the relationships between BE and BI on SQ, as we predicted. The above analysis attempted to synthesise recent research in marketing management by making major theoretical contributions to the existing literature. The main contributions are the demonstration of the mediating effects of BT on the relationship between BE and BI (H4a), and on the relationship between SQ and BI (H4b). Regarding the mediator effects (H4a–H4b), a multiple mediation analysis is presented in the conceptual model (Supplementary Figure S1). BT as a key mediator variable in these relationships has high predictive power (R^2 = 0.629) and validity ($Q^2 > 0$). The results of the mediation analysis show that BT partially mediates the relationship between BE and BI (VAF = 0.64). Furthermore, BT partially mediates the relationship between SQ and BI (VAF = 0.51). According to the mediation analysis in this study, BE more strongly mediates the relationship between BE and BI (VAF = 0.64) than the relationship between BE and SQ (VAF = 0.51).

The mediation analysis verifies the importance of BT in developing BI. In this way, the influence of BT increases the explained variance of the results from 0.629 to 0.646.

Limitations and future research

Although this study has numerous applications and implications, it is not without limitations. These limitations, however, provide opportunities for future research. First, the technique for testing the model assumes linearity in the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous latent variables. Second, this study follows a soft modelling approach by focusing more on prediction than on causality (Roldán & Sánchez-Franco 2012). Therefore, in the future, researchers should consider these two limitations and design an empirical model to avoid them. Third, the findings have limited generalisability since the study was conducted only in Turkey. Consumer characteristics change across cultures, and this must be taken into consideration. Therefore, it would be useful for this study to be replicated in different countries for greater reliability and external validity. Fourth, the size and type of the sample also limit the generalisability of the findings and require further testing. Further research will need more resources to increase the sample size, and consider other types of firms or industries. Sixth, the data is self-reported. Future research should adopt more objective measures such as obtaining customer record data or extended databases from the companies.

Practical implications

This study provides significant insights for practitioners. The findings show that practitioners should focus more on SQ than BE to create BT. Moreover, high SQ levels can be a key predictor of BT. These findings corroborate that BT is vital for companies to remain competitive. The results indicate that managers must value and develop all BE and SQ dimensions to maximise BT and BI.

BE and SQ have relatively similar power in creating BI. This has practical implications in that BE and SQ activities influence BI almost at the same level. Thus, resources can be allocated for BE and SQ similarly.

According to these findings, companies should concentrate on developing their business processes and allocating their resources to maximise SQ to build BI. Moreover, perceived quality and service or product experience are the seeds of consumer commitment not only because they increase the

level of brand trust but also because they are directly or indirectly related to consumer intentions and behaviours. Therefore, marketers should consider the importance of consumer satisfaction in building brand trust and purchase intention. In other words, findings indicate that experience and service/product quality can be viewed as antecedents to purchase intentions of consumers. Hence, marketers should consider the importance of consumer satisfaction in promoting brand trust as well as in remaining competitive in the market. While increasing SQ, companies should also focus on creating BE at every customer touchpoint. Thus, companies could develop higher BT and BI for their products and services.

Supplementary Table S1 Demographic characteristics of the sample (n=226)

Variable		Count	%
Gender			
	Male	165	73
	Female	61	27
Marital status			
	Married	187	81
	Single	45	19
Education			
	University	200	85
	Graduate	35	15
Automobile brand			
	Hyundai	98	42
	Fiat	27	11
	Renault	37	16
	Ford	23	10
	Opel	26	11
	Toyota	7	3
	Honda	12	5
	Others	5	2

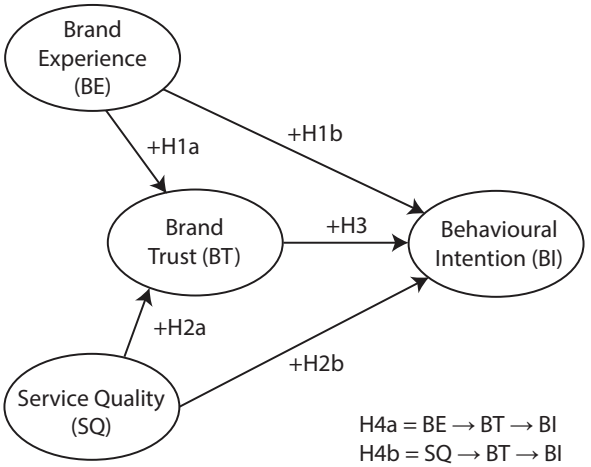
Supplementary Table S2 Factor loadings of the constructs

Construct/dimension/ indicator	Loadings	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BE–Brand experience (Exogenous and multidimensional construct)		.90	.916
BE1	.900***		
BE2	.888***		
BE3	.937***		
BE4	.902***		

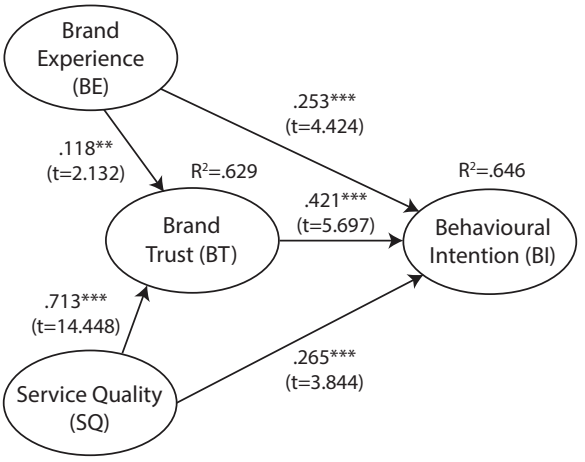
(continued)

Construct/dimension/ indicator	Loadings	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BE5	.812***		
BE6	.804***		
BE7	.981***		
BE8	.888***		
BE9	.977***		
BE10	.908***		
BE11	.823***		
BE12	.826***		
SQ–Service quality (Exogenous-multidimensional construct)		.88	.731
SQ1	.846***		
SQ2	.920***		
SQ3	.878***		
SQ4	.909***		
SQ5	.825***		
SQ6	.815***		
SQ7	.829***		
SQ8	.886***		
SQ9	.833***		
BT–Brand trust (Endogenous construct)		.89	.783
BT1	.872***		
BT2	.842***		
BT3	.790***		
BT4	.918***		
BT5	.804***		
BT6	.915***		
BT7	.924***		
BT8	.995***		
BI–Behavioral intention (Endogenous and multidimensional construct)		.91	.870
BI1	.973***		
BI2	.938***		
BI3	.900***		
BI4	.938***		
BI5	.900***		
BI6	.940***		
BI7	.873***		
BI8	.792***		
BI9	.848***		
BI10	.918***		
BI11	.916***		
BI12	.957***		
BI13	.974***		

***$p \leq 0.001$.



Supplementary Figure S1 Conceptual model



Note: ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Supplementary Figure S2 Structural model results

Appendix: Survey questions

Service quality

1. This brand provides superior service.
2. This brand offers excellent service.
3. I always have an excellent experience when I use this brand.
4. I feel good about what this brand offers to its customers.

5. Overall, the quality of my interaction with this brand's employees is excellent.
6. The quality of my interaction with this brand's employees is high.
7. This brand's physical environment is one of the best in its industry.
8. I would rate this brand's physical environment highly.
9. This brand has a fair system for handling complaints.
10. This brand's staff efficiently handles customer complaints.

Brand experience

1. This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses.
2. I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.
3. This brand does not appeal to my senses.
4. This brand induces feelings and sentiments.
5. I do have strong emotions for this brand.
6. This brand is an emotional brand.
7. I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use this brand.
8. This brand results in bodily experiences.
9. This brand is not action oriented.
10. I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand.
11. This brand makes me think.
12. This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.

Brand trust

1. This brand takes a good care of me.
2. This brand meets my expectations.
3. I feel confident in this brand.
4. This brand never disappoints me.
5. This brand guarantees satisfaction.
6. This brand would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns.
7. I could rely on this brand to solve the problem.
8. This brand would make any effort to satisfy me.
9. This brand would compensate me in some way for a problem with the product.

Repurchase intention

1. I intend to buy this brand in the near future.
2. I intend to buy other products of this brand.

3. I consider this brand as my first choice in this category.
4. The next time I need this product, I will buy the same brand.
5. I will continue to be a loyal customer of this brand.
6. I am willing to pay a price premium over competing products to be able to purchase this brand again.
7. I would only consider purchasing this brand again if it would be substantially cheaper.
8. Commercials regarding competing brands are not able to reduce my interest in buying this brand.
9. I say positive things about this brand to other people and would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.
10. I intend to recommend this brand to other people.
11. I consider this brand my first choice in the next few years.
12. This brand carries products I am looking for.
13. I get good value for my money from this brand.

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About the authors

Azize Şahin is an assistant professor at Istanbul University Business School, Turkey. She is widely recognised for her extensive contributions to management, branding, entrepneurship and marketing through her focus on creavitiy, innovation and the customer experience. She has published several papers in prestigious scientific journals.

Hakan Kitapçi is a professor of operation management and marketing at Gebze Technical University, Turkey. He obtained his PhD in total quality management from Gebze Institute of Technology. His research interests are TQM, self-assessment, organisational learning, service quality and health care quality. His research studies have been published in international journals, including *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence* and *Production Planning & Control*, and in numerous Turkish-language scholarly journals.

Erkut Altindağ is an associated professor of economic and administrative sciences at Beykent University, Turkey. His research interests include family firms, strategic management, technology management, modern management theories and strategic human resources management. His papers have appeared in *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal* and *The European Journal of Health Economics*.

Mehmet S. Gök is an assistant professor at Gebze Technical University, Turkey. He obtained his PhD in operations management from Gebze Institute of Technology in 2012. He was a visiting scholar at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, during 2009–2010. His research interests focus on service management, efficiency analysis, hospital performance and supply chain management.

Address correspondence to: Azize Şahin, Department of Business Law, Istanbul University Business School, Istanbul, Turkey.

Email: azize.sahin@istanbul.edu.tr