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## Relationship Between Brand Awareness Levels, Brand Loyalty Behaviors, Brand Function Perceptions, Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty, and Preferred Criteria in Product Purchasing Among Secondary School Students Engaged in Sports

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between brand awareness levels, brand loyalty behaviors, brand function perceptions, factors affecting brand loyalty and preference criteria in product purchase in a sample of secondary school students engaged in sports. In the research, a relational survey method was employed. The study group consisted of a total of 250 students [n(male=185), n(female=65)] who were enrolled in high schools affiliated with the Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education during the first half of the 2019-2020 academic year and represented different sports branches (such as football, volleyball, basketball, handball, folk dancing, taekwondo, kickboxing, badminton, fitness, wrestling, fencing) at their schools or participated in competitions. The average age of the students participating in the research is 16.48±1.16. Brand Awareness Scale consisting of 5 statements and a single dimension, Brand Loyalty Scale consisting of 6 statements and a single dimension, Brand Functions Scale consisting of 14 statements and 3 sub-dimensions, Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale consisting of 13 statements and 4 sub-dimensions and Preference Criteria in Product Purchase Scale consisting of 23 statements and 4 sub-dimensions were used as data collection tools. Relational survey model and convenience sampling method were used in the study. As a result of the research, it was determined that there are positive, medium and low-level significant relationships between the brand awareness levels, brand loyalty behaviors, brand function perceptions, factors affecting brand loyalty and preference criteria in product purchase of secondary school students engaged in sports.

**Keywords:** Brand Awareness, Brand Function, Brand Loyalty, Secondary School Students, Sports Marketing



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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of "brand" as an important factor in consumers' purchasing behavior is becoming increasingly prominent today. For businesses, it is of strategic importance to address the target audience correctly in order to place the life of the brand in the memory of the consumer in the long term and to convey the targeted message correctly, as well as to strengthen the brand image and ensure brand addiction. In this context, businesses whose target audience consists of young people need to know young people very well. What is the importance of brands for young people and to what extent? What functions does the brand undertake for young people? What are the factors that push young people towards certain brand functions? How can brand loyalty be ensured among young people? Finding answers to such questions is of great importance for the future of businesses in terms of placing the brand in a positive position in the eyes of young people at an early age (Acuff, 2010).

The technological breakthrough made in the last hundred years, easy access to the product offered to consumers by technological developments, etc. positive development has led to the formation of a large number of brands and some indecision in the decision-making or purchasing of consumers at the point of brand preference or the formation of large gaps in brand preference. In particular, the fact that the young population around the world sees the brand as an identity card, perceives it as a status tool in society, tends to use this brand in their social relations has pushed many companies to use these channels that have emerged with technology and are widely used by young people in order to influence this young population in order to take place in this large market and to hold on to it, that is, to obtain new customers and to keep the customers they have, and the brand awareness (identity, social status, socialization tool, etc.) created by young people coincides with their own brands. ) overlaps with their own brands and emphasizes that the benefits of their own brands to young people can be much more, offering these brands opportunities to make commercial profit, while causing brand awareness in young people and children to form in a much more permanent way.

Sports has a very complex structure with social depth as well as physical performance elements (Barsbuĝa, 2021). In addition to providing many physical, mental and social benefits to individuals, the increase in its popularity with various mass media and the great increases in the number of sports spectators in parallel with this have caused many brands to turn to the sports sector. Sports, which is accepted as an alternative in leisure time evaluation, has spread to large masses in parallel with the development of technology, and as a result, it has become a service sector with prominent economic qualities (Barsbuĝa et al., 2018). The global sports market, which is the second largest item in the recreation sector after the entertainment sector, reached approximately USD 485 billion in 2018, and according to the compound annual growth rate (CAGR), it has grown by 4.8% since 2014 and is expected to grow at a rate of 5.9% until 2022, reaching approximately USD 614.1 billion (Finch et al., 2022). Professional sports account for approximately 250 billion dollars of the sports market turnover (Allcock, 2017,). On a global basis, North America has the largest share of the sports industry pie with 30.5%. North America is followed by Western Europe, Asia-Pacific and other nations. On a CAGR basis, Asia-Pacific and Middle East countries showed the fastest growth with 9.04% and 6.2% respectively. These countries are followed by North and South America with a CAGR of 6.0% and 5.30%, respectively (Finch et al., 2022). The ease of sports in reaching the masses and the large market that has emerged in parallel with this, as seen above, clearly shows how important it is for brands to use sports to increase their market share by using various mass media to reach their target audiences.

In this context, it is important to know the Brand Awareness Levels, Brand Loyalty Behaviors, Brand Function Perceptions, Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty and Preference Criteria in Product Purchase that encourage children and young people to do sports in this

period when the differences between those who do sports and those who do not do sports are clearly revealed with various scientific data in order to raise healthy generations and to carry out the developed sports policies properly.

### **Brand Awareness**

In the age we are in, due to many reasons such as easy access to the product, fast consumption, product variety and abundance, rapid change of tastes and expectations according to the situation, brand awareness or branding; It reveals the biggest difference by distinguishing a company from other companies and revealing the difference between its products and other same products and ensuring that it can be marketed accordingly. Brand is defined as making a promise, the combination of all perceptions about any service or product, everything perceived by the five senses. While the brand differentiates the product from others, it also facilitates the consumer's purchasing decision (Özdemir & Öncül, 2016). Brand awareness is defined as the desire or inclination to purchase or desire brands that are heavily advertised, more expensive, and well-known (Ghazali & Zaharah 2010). In other words, consumers with strong brand awareness are inclined to acquire expensive, well-known brands that are heavily marketed. These consumers use brands to reflect their fashion consciousness, express their personality traits, and reduce the risk of purchase (Liao & Wang, 2009). As mentioned above, brand product usage is especially used as a tool for creating an image and identity, especially among children and young people, depending on the development of brand awareness. Consumers with brand awareness tend to use branded products to convey their ideal self-image and associate themselves with a higher social class (Bian & Moutinho, 2011). Brand names, especially in sports products, play an important role in influencing consumer preferences (Dickson & Pollack, 2000).

### **Brand Loyalty**

In the brand market, where there is a very intense competition, consumer satisfaction is extremely important for the future of the brand. The fact that the consumer buys or expresses that he/she will buy the product he/she has used again, that is, creating a loyalty to the brand, is one of the most important indicators of the continuity of the brand in commercial terms. Brand loyalty is a commitment to continually prefer or repurchase a brand in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver et al., 1997). In the literature, it is emphasized that it is five to seven times more costly to acquire new customers than to retain existing customers and the importance of brand loyalty in the success of the business is widely mentioned (Galbreath & Rogers 1999).

From this perspective, securing the future of a brand is closely related to its ability to build brand loyalty. With the advancement of technology, the number of informed consumers has been steadily increasing, and these informed consumers are now shifting towards products that fully satisfy their needs and desires. Faced with increased competition, businesses are making efforts not only to acquire new customers but also to retain existing ones by creating brand loyalty (Sekmen & Aslan, 2021).

### **Brand Function Perceptions**

Brand functions play a crucial role in maintaining the value of a brand and increasing its market share among potential customers in the brand's target audience during marketing activities. The reactions that customers show or will show during a brand's marketing activities are important for evaluating brand functions, and they hold significance for companies. Researchers like Aaker (1996) and Ebeling (1996) have categorized brand functions from the perspective of consumers as follows:

- Guidance/Recognition Function
- Habit and Convenience Function

- Risk Reduction Function
- Decision-Making Ease Function
- Identification Function
- Prestige/Self-Presentation Function

### **The Factors Affecting That Brand Loyalty**

Businesses will survive only as long as they can satisfy their customers. Ensuring customer satisfaction is a prerequisite for customer loyalty (Oliver et al., 1997). Based on these definitions, companies trying to produce in today's intensely competitive environment are obliged to attract the attention of the target audience in order to survive by achieving commercial success. In order to create and maintain brand loyalty in this challenging environment, it is extremely important that the products produced not only meet functional and psychological needs but also add additional values for both individuals and communities. With the extra values that this company will add, it puts it in a more attractive and preferable position in the perception of its target audience than other companies. Based on this, the factors affecting the customer's brand loyalty;

- Brand Image
- Brand Trust
- Customer Satisfaction
- Perceived Value
- Replacement Cost
- Perceived Quality and Expectation Level (Şimşek & Noyan, 2009) in the form of a list.

When looking at the literature and case studies related to all these factors, it becomes evident that companies that carefully consider and effectively implement these functions tend to build brand loyalty among their customers and are more efficient in acquiring new customers compared to other firms.

### **Preference Criteria for Product Purchase**

Consumer behavior is a process that encompasses activities before, during, and after a purchase (Demir & Armağan, 2013). During this process, consumers are tasked with making decisions on various aspects, including what goods and services to buy, what the purchase criteria will be, from whom, how, where, and when to make the purchase (Ulama & Koç, 2019). Among these decisions, the question of what the purchase criteria will be holds critical importance.

- Cultural Criteria
- Personal Criteria
- Social Criteria
- It is possible to list them as Psychological Criteria

## **METHOD**

In the research, a relational survey method was used. Survey models are research approaches that aim to describe a past or present situation as it exists. The event, individual or object that is the subject of the research is tried to be defined in its own conditions and as it is. No effort is made to change or influence them in any way. Relational survey models are research models that aim to determine the existence and/or degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar 2008).

## Population and Sample

Convenience sampling is a non-random sampling method in which the sample to be selected from the main mass is determined by the judgment of the researcher. In convenience sampling, data are collected from the main mass in the easiest, fastest and most economical way (Malhotra, 2004; Aaker et al., 2007; Zikmund, 1997). Student athletes who represented their schools in different branches (team and individual sports) and participated in competitions by participating in extracurricular inter-school sports activities in the first half of the 2019-2020 academic year were selected for the study. In this context, the sample of the study consisted of a total of 250 students [n(male=185), n(female=65)] who studied in high schools affiliated to Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education in the first half of the 2019-2020 academic year and represented their schools in different branches (football, volleyball, basketball, handball, folk dances, taekwondo, kick boxing, badminton, fitness, wrestling, fencing). The average age of the students participating in the study was  $16.48 \pm 1.16$ . n=150 of the students in the sample of the study are active in team sports and n=100 in individual sports. The income level of the students' families was 2393.12 TL.

## Data Collection Tools

As data collection tools in the research, Brand Awareness Scale, Brand Loyalty Scale, Brand Functions Scale, Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale, and Preference Criteria for Product Purchase Scale were used, which were translated into Turkish by Erdoğan (2012) by making use of many studies in the literature and whose validity and reliability studies were conducted after language validity was ensured.

**Brand Awareness Scale:** is a scale, which is a five-point Likert type (“1=strongly disagree”, “5=strongly agree”), and composed of 5 statements (for example, “I usually buy brands from famous companies”, “well-known brands are best for me”) and one dimension, and it was developed to determine the brand awareness of secondary school students in general without considering any product group.

**Brand Loyalty Scale:** is a scale, which is a five-point Likert type (“1=strongly disagree”, “5=strongly agree”), and composed of 6 statements (For example, “all kinds of sneakers I own are from the same brand”, “when my sneakers get old, I will buy the same brand of sneakers”) and one dimension, and it was developed to determine the brand loyalty behaviors of secondary school students in sports shoes.

**Brand Functions Scale:** is a scale, which is a five-point Likert type (“1=strongly disagree”, “5=strongly agree”), and composed of 14 statements [For example, “become cooler among my friends thanks to the “brand-name products” I use (image function)”, “I think “brand” indicates which company produced the product (marking/classic function)”, “I am usually interested in the same kinds of sports as my friends who use the same “brands” (social function)”] and 3 sub-dimensions [Image function (7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,14th Items), marking/classic function (1st,2nd,3rd,4th,6th Items), social function (5th,12th,13th Items)], and it was developed to determine the perceived brand functions of secondary school students without considering any product group.

**Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale:** is a scale, which is a five-point Likert type (“1=strongly disagree”, “5=strongly agree”), and composed of 13 statements [For example, “I’m so used to my current sneakers, I’m too lazy to try another brand (brand habit)”, “if a new sneaker brand comes out, I will try that brand (diversity/innovation approach)”, “I believe my current sneaker brand is the right choice (emotional commitment to the brand)”, “I only buy the sneakers I like at the time of sale (sensitivity to price cuts and promotions)”] and 4 sub-dimensions [Brand habit (3rd,8th,9th,11th Items), diversity/innovation approach (2nd,4th,5th Items), emotional commitment to the brand (1st,10th,13th

Items), sensitivity to price cuts and promotions(6th,7th,12th Items)], and it was developed to determine the factors affecting the brand loyalty of secondary school students in sports shoes.

**Preference Criteria for Product Purchase Scale:** is a scale, which is a five-point Likert type (“1=strongly disagree”, “5=strongly agree”), and composed of 23 statements [For example, “It must be suitable for my foot health(Functionality Criterion)”, “It must be a well-known brand(well-known brand/high image criterion)”, “It must be fashionable among young people(innovative/fashionable criterion)”, “it must be a shoe that my friends will also like(social circle/friend criterion) ”] and 4 sub-dimensions [Functionality Criterion(3rd,4th,5th,6th,7th,10th,23rd Items), well-known brand/high image criterion(1st,2nd,12th,13th,17th,20th,21st,22nd Items), innovative/fashionable criterion(14th,15th,16th,18th,19th Items), social circle/friend criterion(8th,9th,11th Items)], and it was developed to determine the preference criteria of secondary school students in the purchase of sports shoes (Erdođdu, 2012).

**Analysis of the Data**

The research data were analyzed with SPSS 23.0 program. Normality distributions were tested with Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. In interpreting the correlation coefficient, a correlation coefficient between 0.70-1.00 was accepted as a high-level relationship, between 0.70-0.30 as a medium level relationship and between 0.30-0.00 as a low-level relationship (Büyüköztürk, 2007).

Since the data obtained in the study showed normal distribution, Pearson product-moment correlation (r) coefficient technique was used to determine the relationship between the mean scores obtained from the related scales by the secondary school students who were engaged in sports in line with the purpose of the study. In all statistical calculations made in the study, the basic significance level was accepted as 0.05.

**FINDINGS**

In this section, the findings obtained as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the scales of the sporting secondary school students participating in the study and explanations for the findings are given.

**Table 1.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results for the Relationship Between Brand Awareness Levels, Brand Loyalty Behaviors, Brand Function Perceptions, Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty, and Product Purchase Preference Criteria of High School Students Engaged in Sports

|                        | Brand Loyalty Scale | Brand Functions Scale |                |                | Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale |                |                |                | Scale of Preference Criteria for Product Purchase |                |                |                |                |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                        |                     | İF                    | SCF            | SF             | MH                                    | DIS            | ECB            | SPPD           | FC  | RBHIC          | IFC            | SEFC           |                |
| <b>Brand Awareness</b> | r                   | <b>0,623**</b>        | <b>0,360**</b> | <b>0,638**</b> | <b>0,335**</b>                        | <b>0,355**</b> | <b>0,283**</b> | <b>0,515**</b> | <b>0,195**</b>                                    | <b>0,420**</b> | <b>0,575**</b> | <b>0,525**</b> | <b>0,419**</b> |
|                        | P                   | 0,000                 | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000                                 | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,002   | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          |
|                        | n                   | 250                   | 250            | 250            | 250                                   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250            |

\*P<significant at 0.05 level \*\*P< significant at 0.01 level

İF=Image Function, İKF=Signaling/Classical Function, SF=Social Function, MH=Mark Habituation, DIS=Diversity/Innovation Seeking, ECB=Emotional Commitment to the Brand, SPPD=Sensitivity to Price Discounts and Promotions, FC=Functionality Criterion, RBHIC=Renowned Brand/High Image Criterion, IFC=Innovative/Fashionable Criterion, SEFC=Social Environment/Friends Criterion

As seen in Table 1, it is determined that there is a moderately significant positive relationship between brand awareness levels and brand loyalty behaviors of secondary school students engaged in sports (r = 0.623; P < 0.01). Table 1 shows that there is a moderately positive relationship (r = 0.623, p < 0.01) between brand awareness levels and brand loyalty behaviors among high school students engaged in sports. This finding indicates that as brand awareness increases, brand loyalty behaviors tend to increase. In other words, this significant

positive relationship indicates that as individuals become more familiar with a particular brand, they are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors towards that brand.

Again, it has been determined that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the brand awareness levels of secondary school students who are engaged in sports and the dimensions of brand function perceptions such as image function ( $r=0.360$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), marking/classical function ( $r=0.638$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and social function ( $r=0.335$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). This significant positive relationship indicates that when students become more familiar with a sports-related brand, they increase their loyalty behavior towards that brand. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as consistently choosing products associated with that brand, recommending the brand to other people, or showing a preference for that brand even in the presence of competing options. In marketing terms, building and enhancing brand awareness can positively influence customer loyalty in the context of the sport under study.

It has been determined that there is a significant positive relationship between the brand consciousness levels of secondary school students who are engaged in sports in general and brand loyalty ( $r=0,355$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and brand habit ( $r=0,355$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and emotional attachment to the brand ( $r=0,515$ ;  $P<0,01$ ); and a low level positive relationship between the search for diversity/innovation ( $r=0,283$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and sensitivity to price discounts and promotions ( $r=0,195$ ;  $P<0,01$ ). These significant positive relationships help to understand brand awareness and brand loyalty. In particular, the positive impact of factors such as brand habituation and emotional attachment on brand loyalty is emphasized. At the same time, the search for variety/innovation and sensitivity to price reductions/promotions can also influence brand loyalty. This information can help brands create more effective marketing strategies among young consumers.

It has been determined that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the brand awareness levels of secondary school students who are engaged in sports and the dimensions of preference criteria for product purchase such as functionality criterion ( $r=0,420$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), well-known brand/high image criterion ( $r=0,575$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0,525$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0,419$ ;  $P<0,01$ ). These findings show the effect of brand awareness on the preference criteria that affect students' product preferences. In particular, it is seen that criteria such as well-known brand/high image and innovation/fashionability gain more importance with increasing brand awareness. Social environment and friends' preferences are also important factors affecting brand awareness. This information emphasizes the importance of taking into account the brand awareness and preference criteria of young consumers when creating brand management and marketing strategies.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results for the Relationship Between Brand Loyalty Behavior, Brand Function Perceptions, Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty, and Preference Criteria for Product Purchases Among High School Students Engaged in Sports

|                      | Brand Functions Scale |                |                | Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale |                |                |                | Scale of Preference Criteria for Product Purchase |                |                |                |                |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                      | iF                    | SCF            | SF             | MH                                    | DIS            | ECB            | SPDP           | FC  | RBHIC          | IFC            | SEC            |                |
| <b>Brand Loyalty</b> | r                     | <b>0,306**</b> | <b>0,597**</b> | <b>0,262**</b>                        | <b>0,395**</b> | <b>0,283**</b> | <b>0,443**</b> | <b>0,235**</b>                                    | <b>0,348**</b> | <b>0,451**</b> | <b>0,413**</b> | <b>0,413**</b> |
|                      | P                     | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000                                 | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000   | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          |
|                      | n                     | 250            | 250            | 250                                   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250            |

\*P<significant at 0.05 level\*\*P< significant at 0.01 level

IF=Image Function, SCF=Signaling/Classical Function, SF=Social Function, MH=Mark Habituation, DIS=Diversity/Innovation Seeking, ECB=Emotional Commitment to the Brand, SPDP=Sensitivity to Price Discounts and Promotions, FC=Functionality Criterion, RBHIC=Renowned Brand/High Image Criterion, IFC=Innovative/Fashionable Criterion, SEC=Social Environment/Friends Criterion



As seen in Table 2, among high school students engaged in sports, there is a positive moderate-level relationship between brand loyalty behavior and brand function perceptions in terms of image function ( $r=0.306$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and a positive high-level relationship in terms of branding/classic function ( $r=0.597$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). However, there is a low-level significant positive relationship between brand loyalty behavior and social function ( $r=0.262$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Again, among high school students engaged in sports, there is a positive moderate-level relationship between brand loyalty behavior and dimensions influencing brand loyalty, specifically habituation to the brand ( $r=0.395$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and emotional attachment to the brand ( $r=0.443$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Additionally, there is a low-level significant positive relationship between brand loyalty behavior and the dimensions of diversity/innovation-seeking ( $r=0.283$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and sensitivity to price discounts and promotions ( $r=0.235$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Among high school students engaged in sports, there is a significant positive moderate-level relationship between brand loyalty behavior and dimensions of preference criteria for product purchases, specifically the functionality criterion ( $r=0.348$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), the recognized brand/high image criterion ( $r=0.451$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), the innovative/fashionability criterion ( $r=0.413$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), and the social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0.413$ ;  $P<0.01$ ).

**Table 3.** Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Results for the Relationship between Brand Function Perceptions of Secondary School Students Engaged in Sports and Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty and Preference Criteria in Product Purchase

|                       |                          |   | Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale |                |                |                | Scale of Preference Criteria for Product Purchase |                |                |                |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                       |                          |   | MH                                    | DIS            | ECB            | SPDP           | FC  | RBHIC          | IFC            | SEFC           |
| Brand Functions Scale | Image Function           | r | <b>0,350**</b>                        | <b>0,362**</b> | -0,014         | <b>0,145*</b>  | -0,076  | <b>0,354**</b> | <b>0,307**</b> | <b>0,259*</b>  |
|                       |                          | P | 0,000                                 | 0,000          | 0,831          | 0,022          | 0,231   | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          |
|                       |                          | n | 250                                   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250   | 250            | 250            | 250            |
|                       | Marking Classic Function | r | <b>0,340**</b>                        | <b>0,291**</b> | <b>0,596**</b> | <b>0,214**</b> | <b>0,583**</b>                                    | <b>0,516**</b> | <b>0,472**</b> | <b>0,431**</b> |
|                       |                          | P | 0,000                                 | ,000           | ,000           | ,001           | 0,000   | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,000          |
|                       |                          | n | 250                                   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250   | 250            | 250            | 250            |
|                       | Socia Function           | r | <b>0,386**</b>                        | <b>0,361**</b> | 0,061          | <b>0,213**</b> | -0,033  | <b>0,314**</b> | <b>0,274**</b> | <b>0,212**</b> |
|                       |                          | P | 0,000                                 | ,000           | 0,340          | 0,001          | 0,607   | 0,000          | 0,000          | 0,001          |
|                       |                          | n | 250                                   | 250            | 250            | 250            | 250   | 250            | 250            | 250            |

\* $P<0.05$  level \*\* $P<0.01$  level

MH=Mark Habituation, DIS=Diversity/Innovation Seeking, ECB=Emotional Commitment to the Brand, SPDP=Sensitivity to Price Discounts and Promotions, FC=Functionality Criterion, RBHIC=Renowned Brand/High Image Criterion, IFC=Innovative/Fashionable Criterion, SEFC=Social Environment/Friends Criterion

As can be seen in Table 3, it was determined that there is a significant positive relationship between the image function, one of the dimensions of brand function perceptions of secondary school students who do sports, and brand habit ( $r=0,350$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and diversity/innovation seeking ( $r=0,362$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), which are among the dimensions affecting brand loyalty; and a low level positive relationship between sensitivity to price discounts and promotions ( $r=0,145$ ;  $P<0,01$ ). Again, it has been determined that there is a significant positive relationship between the image function, one of the dimensions of brand function perceptions of secondary school students who do sports, and the well-known brand/high image criterion ( $r=0,354$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0,307$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), and social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0,259$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), one of the dimensions of preference criteria in product purchase. It has been determined that there is a significant positive relationship between the marking/classical function, which is one of the dimensions of brand function perceptions of secondary school students who do sports, and brand habit ( $r=0,340$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and emotional attachment to the brand ( $r=0,596$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), which are among the dimensions affecting brand loyalty; and a low level positive relationship between the search for diversity/innovation ( $r=0,291$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and sensitivity to price discounts and promotions ( $r=0,214$ ;  $P<0,01$ ). Again, it has been determined that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the marking/classical function, which is one of the dimensions

of brand function perceptions of secondary school students who do sports, and the functionality criterion ( $r=0,583$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), well-known brand/high image criterion ( $r=0,516$ ;  $P<0,01$ ), innovative/fashionability criterion ( $r=0,472$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) and social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0,431$ ;  $P<0,01$ ) among the dimensions of preference criteria in product purchase.

**Table 4.** Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Results for the Relationship between the Factors Affecting the Brand Loyalty of Secondary School Students Engaged in Sports and the Preference Criteria for Product Purchase.

|                                       |   |   | Scale of Preference Criteria for Product Purchase |                                      |                               |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                       |   |   | Functionality Criterion                           | Well-known Brand/High Image Criteria | Innovative/Modernity Criteria | Social Environment/Friends Criteria |
| Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty Scale | Brand habituation                             | r | <b>0,225**</b>                                    | <b>0,397**</b>                       | <b>0,374**</b>                | <b>0,331**</b>                      |
|                                       |   | P | 0,000   | 0,000                                | 0,000                         | 0,000                               |
|                                       |   | n | 250   | 250                                  | 250                           | 250                                 |
|                                       | Seeking Diversity/Innovation                  | r | <b>0,265**</b>                                    | <b>0,419**</b>                       | <b>0,358**</b>                | <b>0,430**</b>                      |
|                                       |   | P | 0,000   | 0,000                                | 0,000                         | 0,000                               |
|                                       |   | n | 250   | 250                                  | 250                           | 250                                 |
|                                       | Emotional Commitment to the Brand             | r | <b>0,652**</b>                                    | <b>0,483**</b>                       | <b>0,433**</b>                | <b>0,441**</b>                      |
|                                       |   | P | 0,000   | 0,000                                | 0,000                         | 0,000                               |
|                                       |   | n | 250   | 250                                  | 250                           | 250                                 |
|                                       | Sensitivity to Price Discounts and Promotions | r | <b>0,283**</b>                                    | <b>0,304**</b>                       | <b>0,245**</b>                | <b>0,336**</b>                      |
|                                       |   | P | 0,000   | 0,000                                | 0,000                         | 0,000                               |
|                                       |   | n | 250   | 250                                  | 250                           | 250                                 |

As seen in Table 4, there is a positively moderate level relationship between brand loyalty, one of the dimensions influencing brand loyalty of high school students engaged in sports, and the recognized brand/high image criterion ( $r=0.397$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), the innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0.374$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), and the social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0.331$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) among product preference criteria for product purchase. However, there is a positively low-level significant relationship with the functionality criterion ( $r=0.225$ ;  $P<0.01$ ).

Once again, it has been determined that among the dimensions influencing brand loyalty of high school students engaged in sports, there is a positively moderate level relationship between diversity/innovation pursuit and recognized brand/high image criterion ( $r=0.419$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), the innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0.358$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), and the social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0.430$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) among product preference criteria for product purchase. However, there is a positively low-level significant relationship with the functionality criterion ( $r=0.265$ ;  $P<0.01$ ).

It has been determined that among the dimensions influencing brand loyalty of high school students engaged in sports, there is a positively moderate level significant relationship between emotional attachment to the brand and functionality criterion ( $r=0.652$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), recognized brand/high image criterion ( $r=0.483$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0.433$ ;  $P<0.01$ ), and the social environment/friends criterion ( $r=0.441$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) among product preference criteria for product purchase.

It has been determined that among the dimensions influencing brand loyalty of high school students engaged in sports, there is a positively moderate level significant relationship between sensitivity to price discounts and promotions and the recognized brand/high image criterion ( $r=0.304$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and the social environment/friend's criterion ( $r=0.336$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) among product preference criteria for product purchase. However, there is a positively low-level significant relationship with the functionality criterion ( $r=0.283$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) and the innovative/fashionable criterion ( $r=0.245$ ;  $P<0.01$ )

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The rapid increase in the use of mass media and social media, both in our country and worldwide, has led to the emergence of various trends. Especially among middle and high school age groups, brand awareness and brand usage have become widespread. This has made children and young people in this age group an important target audience for various brands and commercial companies that want to establish their own brands. The substantial potential for profit and return on investment in this emerging market has caused the role of children and young people in commercial spending to increase day by day. As a result, brand competition has reached significant proportions.

In parallel with this, changes in the family structure, changes in the education system and the perspective of the child have encouraged children to shop according to their own preferences from an early age. Commercial shopping that starts at an early age reveals that brand awareness is formed in children from a very young age. In addition, this brand consciousness developed in children has become supported by families, as the child equipped with a brand is seen as a sign of prestige and social status for them. Studies have revealed that children have a say in the expenditures of families at a rate of over 43%; moreover, there is a development in this direction not only in food, beverages and products for children, but also in other products that the family will consume or use together (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

As seen in Table 1, it has been determined that there is a positively moderate significant relationship between the levels of brand consciousness displayed by high school students who engage in sports and their brand loyalty behaviors in general. In other words, it is possible to say that as students' levels of brand consciousness increase, their brand loyalty behaviors will also increase. The studies in the related literature emphasize that having brand awareness in secondary education level students will make significant contributions to the formation of brand loyalty. Elements such as the image, quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction and replacement cost offered by the brand to children and young people are seen as extremely critical stages that determine how long and loyalty will be permanent to the brand awareness formed. In summary, the result of the research has revealed the importance of brands or brands, which have an extremely important place in terms of the role of children and young people in mental development, identity formation and socialization today, to exhibit approaches that will respond to the physical, spiritual and social expectations of children and young people, especially at the secondary education level. Again, it has been determined that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the brand awareness levels of secondary school students who do sports and their perceptions of brand functions (image function, marking/classical function and social function). In other words, it is possible to say that with the increase in students' brand awareness levels, their perceptions of brand functions will also increase.

Brand functions play a significant role for companies because they greatly influence consumers' responses to marketing activities related to a brand. For example, consumers' perception of brands, their preferences, purchase behaviors, and their responses to promotional activities are all influenced by how they perceive and interpret the functions of a brand (Rio et al., 2001). It has been determined that there are positive and significant relationships between the overall brand awareness levels exhibited by high school students engaged in sports and the factors influencing brand loyalty (brand habit, variety/novelty seeking, emotional attachment to the brand, price discounts, and sensitivity to promotions). In other words, it is possible to say that as the level of brand awareness among students increases, the degree to which factors affecting brand loyalty also influence them will increase. The other result in Table 1 is that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the brand awareness levels of secondary school students who do sports in general and the preference criteria (functionality criterion, well-known brand/high image criterion, innovative/fashionability criterion and social

environment/friends criterion) in product purchase. In other words, it is possible to say that as students' brand awareness levels increase, their preference criteria in product purchase will also increase.

Between the ages of 11 and 17, teenagers exhibit a high degree of selectivity and switching between brands, and the chosen brands hold significant and privileged positions in the eyes of these teenagers. This period is when teenagers develop specific identities related to brands. During this stage, young people determine which brands are popular and which ones enhance or diminish their social status within their peer groups ((Mowen & Minor, 1998). In this frame of mind, certain criteria play a crucial role in determining the level of brand awareness among these young individuals. In a market with a plethora of brands, one of the most significant factors that can expedite the decision-making process for purchasing a product is brand habit. Instead of evaluating each brand individually, brand habit is instrumental in shortening the decision-making process for consumers. The physical, emotional, and social benefits offered by a brand previously used by a consumer can positively influence the level of brand awareness that this brand will create in the consumer. Furthermore, to speak of genuine brand loyalty, we need to discuss strong brand attachment. Brand attachment signifies emotional and psychological commitment to a brand within a product (Beatty et al., 1988). Brand loyalty is more commonly observed in products that consumers perceive as highly important for symbolizing their own identities, values, and needs (Mowen & Minor, 1998). The emotional attachment to a brand can be attributed to factors such as past experiences with the brand (how, where, and through whom they were introduced to the brand), the contribution it makes to their daily lives, its role in their social circles, its logo, and more. These factors can be seen as reasons for the emotional attachment to the brand and can significantly influence the level of brand awareness. One of the undoubtedly most significant expectations consumers have from the products offered by brands is functionality. Functionality, which plays a crucial role in the formation of brand awareness, will contribute to customer retention and the development of brand loyalty based on the satisfaction derived from the brand's performance and the functionality it provides. At this stage, the performance of the brand holds great importance. Consumers tend to favor brands that effectively meet their needs and desires (Hanaysha, 2016). Building on this, it can be said that young customers who have positive experiences with the functionality of the brand's products are likely to develop a healthier and more enduring level of brand awareness and a positive brand image.

As seen in Table 2, it was determined that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between brand loyalty behaviors and brand function perceptions (image function, marking/classical function and social function) of secondary school students engaged in sports. When the literature related to the field is reviewed, the image function, which is one of the dimensions of brand function perceptions, which is extremely important for children and young people, has an important place in determining the status of the brand used as a means of showing or displaying itself during the creation of the image and in social relations. In this context, it is revealed that the image function has a very important place in increasing brand loyalty. It has been observed that there are positive and significant relationships between the brand loyalty behaviors of high school students who engage in sports and the factors influencing brand loyalty (brand habit, variety/novelty seeking, emotional attachment to the brand, price discounts, and sensitivity to promotions). One of the most challenging sub-dimensions in building consumer loyalty to a brand and, consequently, the foundation of brand loyalty, is brand habituation. In an ever-expanding and increasingly competitive market, it is crucial for customers to prefer a brand they are familiar with, know, and have had past experiences with, in other words, are habituated to when considering brand loyalty. Recognizing that, for brands, it is generally less costly to retain existing customers than to acquire new ones, our study's findings align with the literature, underscoring the importance of customer preference for familiar and habituated brands in the context of brand loyalty. Another result in Table 2 is that

there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between the brand loyalty behaviors of secondary school students who do sports and the preference criteria (functionality criterion, well-known brand/high image criterion, innovative/fashionability criterion and social environment/friends criterion) in product purchase. In this context, according to the results in Table 2, it is possible to say that with the increase in the level of brand loyalty behavior of secondary school students who do sports, their perception of brand functions, their level of being affected by the factors affecting brand loyalty and their preference criteria in product purchase will also increase.

As seen in Table 3, there are positive and significant relationships between the dimensions of brand function perceptions among high school students engaged in sports and the dimensions influencing brand loyalty. Specifically, there are positive relationships between the image function and the habituation to the brand, variety/novelty-seeking, and price discounts and sensitivity to promotions dimensions. Additionally, there are positive relationships between the preference criteria dimensions in product purchases, such as recognized brand/high image criteria, innovative/fashionable criteria, and social circle/friend criteria. There are positive and significant relationships observed between the dimensions of brand function perceptions, specifically the signaling/classic function, among high school students engaged in sports and the factors influencing brand loyalty (brand habituation, variety/novelty seeking, emotional attachment to the brand, price discounts, and sensitivity to promotions). Additionally, positive relationships exist between the preference criteria dimensions in product purchases (functionality criteria, recognized brand/high image criteria, innovative/fashionable criteria, and social circle/friend criteria). It has been determined that among the dimensions of brand function perceptions of high school students engaged in sports, there are positive and significant relationships between the social function and the dimensions influencing brand loyalty, namely brand habituation, variety/novelty seeking, price discounts, and sensitivity to promotions. Furthermore, there are positive relationships between the preference criteria dimensions in product purchases, such as recognized brand/high image criteria, innovative/fashionable criteria, and social circle/friend criteria. Based on the results presented in Table 3, it is possible to assert that as the levels of brand function perceptions increase among high school students engaged in sports, their levels of influence by the factors affecting brand loyalty and their preference criteria in product purchases will also increase.

As seen in Table 4, it has been determined that there are positive and significant relationships between the factors influencing brand loyalty (brand habituation, variety/novelty seeking, emotional attachment to the brand, price discounts, and sensitivity to promotions) and the preference criteria in product purchases (functionality criteria, recognized brand/high image criteria, innovative/fashionable criteria, and social circle/friend criteria) among high school students engaged in sports. The abundance of products and brands, the increasing diversity of raw materials due to advancing technology, and developments in design and manufacturing sectors have led to a wide variety of products available to consumers. Additionally, the diversity in products offered to consumers is influenced by the trends and movements that gain acceptance and popularity within the social circles and social media platforms. This conformity to various trends that are embraced and favored by friends and peers in one's social environment plays a crucial role in shaping the brand preferences of young people and subsequently developing brand loyalty. The emotional attachment to a brand is influenced more by the experiences children and young people have with the brand, the physical, emotional, and social benefits the brand offers to consumers, the desired image they want to create, the added value provided by the brand, the preference for innovative, fashionable brands that are highly popular among young people, and the desire to belong to or remain within a social circle facilitated by the use of branded products. These factors have a significant impact on brand loyalty among young people, more so than the corporate identity of the brand itself. One of the most significant influences of our contemporary world's lifestyle, technology, education, mass communication

tools, various social media applications, on children and young people is the prevalence of brand usage and the resulting image perception that endures until the next innovation or emerging trend. Individuals in this age group often believe that the brand image (brand value) associated with the products they purchase and use provides them with a high degree of added value in shaping the image they want to create. Additionally, these brands continuously reinvent their products, adapting them to the times and current fashion trends, which positively contributes to brand loyalty among these individuals. In this context, it is possible to interpret the results in Table 4 as that the preference criteria in product purchase will increase with the increase in the level of secondary school students who are engaged in sports being affected by the factors affecting brand loyalty.

### **Recommendations**

A more in-depth understanding of the relationships can be achieved through a comprehensive study that includes qualitative data in addition to quantitative analysis. The use of focus groups or interviews can provide a deeper understanding of what students think about brand awareness and brand loyalty, how they determine their preferences, and the impact brands have on them.

The research should include students from different geographical regions and cultural groups. This can help us understand the geographical and cultural variations of factors that influence brand awareness and loyalty.

Brand awareness and brand loyalty behaviors can change over time. The research should track how students' views and behaviors in these areas evolve over time and provide a long-term perspective for understanding these changes.

Businesses should specifically develop digital marketing strategies to influence and attract young people. Tools such as social media platforms, digital advertising and influencer marketing can be used to attract the attention of young people.

Young people should be encouraged to engage with brands and provide feedback. Brands should track and respond to their feedback on social media, so that young people can build a stronger bond with the brand.

Young people are familiar with technology, so offering digital experiences can make the brand more appealing. For example, creating mobile apps, games or virtual reality experiences can engage young people.

Young people are hungry for information. Businesses can increase youth brand awareness by providing educational content about their products or services. Educational blog posts, video content or training courses can be created.

Collaborating with other brands that young people appreciate or partnering with influencers can attract the attention of young people.

Consideration can be given to young people's feedback and care can be taken to improve products or services according to young people's wishes and needs.

### **Limitations**

The results of the research will depend on the criteria used during sample selection. The fact that the sample of this study consists of a specific region, a specific age group, and exclusively represents middle/high school students engaged in sports, may limit the generalizability of the results.

The research is based on relational data and cannot confirm causal relationships. In other words, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the causes of the impact of brand awareness on brand loyalty or vice versa.

In the research, it may be challenging to have complete control over all potential variables. The impact of other factors (such as economic conditions, family influence, media exposure) on brand awareness and brand loyalty could be overlooked.

Since the research was conducted during a specific period, it may not capture changes over time or seasonal effects.

It should be noted that the measurement instruments used in the research may not have captured all important variables, and as a result, some factors may have been overlooked.

Considering these suggestions and limitations, designing future research with more comprehensive, diverse, and long-term data could enhance our understanding of brand awareness and brand loyalty topics and lead to broader applications.

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***Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest***

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