

## Structural Framework of Brand Loyalty Affected By Feature Connotations Through Attitude Towards Shopping in Merchandising<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

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**Purpose** - In merchandising subjected to a rapid consumption cycle and many warning bombardments that trigger sudden purchasing, ensuring that consumers remain loyal to the store has been important. This study's purpose is to shed light on the structural framework of which brand loyalty is affected by feature connotations through attitude towards shopping in merchandising.

**Design/methodology/approach** - 373 responses are interviewed face-to-face for a well-known clothing brand in Istanbul. How brand loyalty is affected by feature connotations through attitude towards shopping is structurally analyzed by the extent of the positivity, strength, and uniqueness of the connotations. The extent of brand loyalty refers to being more willing to pay, defensive about the store in opposing views, and inclined to recommend it to others. Some store features are highlighted including ease of access, acclimatization conditions, shelf layout, price image, and perception towards sales personnel.

**Findings** - Thanks to strong, unique, and positive features associated with the store, consumers become more loyal to the store brand. All features except for shelf layout develop positive attitudes toward shopping, thereby increasing brand loyalty. The highest indirect effect on brand loyalty belongs to the price image, followed by, respectively, acclimatization conditions, perception towards sales personnel, and ease of access. Acclimatization condition has a positive direct effect whereas ease of access has a direct but negative effect on brand loyalty.

**Discussion** - The relatively superior effect of price perception on shopping attitude shows that it is the focus of brand loyalty development activities. This can be supported by acclimatization conditions, perception towards sales personnel, and ease of access. To gain the loyalty of store customers, alternative ways exist if the acclimatization conditions feature is improved. In the case of other store features, shelf layout is not our priority criteria in developing brand loyalty because it is ineffective.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In addition to the fact that competition is difficult due to the changing perception of fashion and constantly evolving technology, the increase in the number of environmental stimuli and transmit messages and the differentiation policies of competitors make it difficult for brands to hold on to the market. Brands need to be in a strong position by adopting various strategies in order to adapt to this process, maintain their competitiveness, and ensure their profit-making sustainability, which is their ultimate goal. Creating a strong brand is achieved by establishing the brand image on a solid foundation. Strengthening the brand's image allows them to sell products at a much higher price, thus creating a higher profit, as well as being in a more preferable position in the market than competing products (Keller, 1993).

It is important for brands to create facts about their specific concepts, such as brand, product, or store in the consumer's mind, so that they can create a strong image. The concept of merchandising comes into play at this point, especially in the academic field and sector. The concept of merchandising is not only the business

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function that is necessary especially for brands with products that have a demand for rapid change today but also the phenomenon that mobilizes the consumer to buy the product. A well-planned merchandising process will mobilize consumers to buy a product, strengthen the image of the product and brand (Bulut, 2007) stand out the brand among competitors, and convince the consumer of purchasing behavior (Park and Srinivasan, 1994). The most powerful tools at this point are the store atmosphere and in-store practices to convince the consumer and form their buying behavior. As a result of thoughts, feelings, and intentions formed by store experiences, many effects can occur, such as the customer's enjoyment of shopping, spending more time in the store, the possibility of coming back to the store, and the tendency to spend more money than planned. In more general words, these activities can be effective in consumer attitudes and behaviors, brand image, and customer loyalty (Odabaşı, 2001).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a result of literature research, in this study, brand connotation (association) and components, store image based on store atmosphere, characteristics and effects, as well as attitude concept and components, brand loyalty and dimensions, and possible relations of these concepts with each other were mentioned.

The sum of the emotions, thoughts, impressions and feature connotations formed in the mind of the individual about the brand is characterized as the brand image (Keller, 1993). According to the researcher Hung (2008), brand image is formed by the connotations that the view formed in the consumer's mind creates in the consumer's brain when the consumer sees or remembers the brand. Considering that most of these associations are formed through sources such as stores, the importance of store atmosphere characteristics in making brands preferable will be undeniable (Korkmaz et al., 2009).

According to the term, "store atmosphere" first used by P. Kotler (1974), the store atmosphere elements trigger the consumer reaction mechanism. Their visual, auditory, olfactory, and touch-related dimensions also affect consumers' entry into the store, the time they spend in the store, and therefore the purchase process. By examining the literature, it is seen that the effects of the store atmosphere characteristics in terms of forming the brand image and their effects on the attitude, store behavior, and preferences towards the store are studied (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). Evaluation of consumer purchasing behavior in retailer brands (Altunışık and Mert, 2001), in-store stimuli (shelf signs, product display methods, etc.) (Abratt and Goodey, 1990), shopping discounts, and campaigns (Parsons, 2003), sales personnel (Bayar, 2019), the location of the store (Arslan, 2018), price and quality perceptions for brands and retailer (Orel, 2000). In addition, some studies show some other factors affecting consumers' store selection, consumption behavior, and purchasing intentions. These are accessibility or proximity (Manowan et al., 2022), product diversity (Hapsari et al. 2022), quality, affordability, expected service, store awareness, and tramping the store comfortably (Altunışık and Mert, 2001). This study followed the work of Turley and Milliman (2000). Accordingly, the store atmosphere is surrounded by the feature connotations of the store including exterior and interior, layout and design, point of sale, decorations, and human variables.

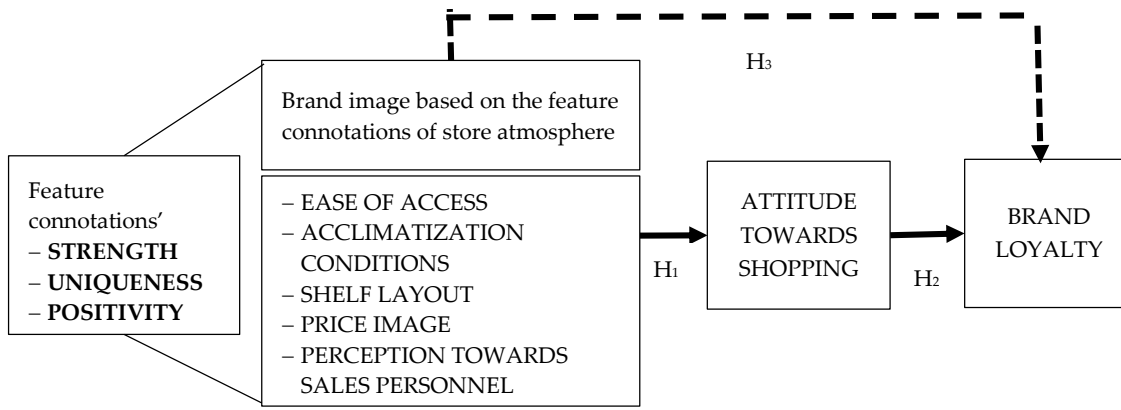
Stores that can instantly respond to many needs and contain many features that affect consumer perceptions are effective at attracting consumers to the store. It is expected that they will trigger the motivation to belong to a particular store, leading to sensory, cognitive, and behavioral responses that are attitude components in consumers (Varinli, 2005). A person's reactions at the moment to their previous experience and beliefs will be reflected in their behavior in the future (Mucuk, 1994). For this reason, the current changes in consumer beliefs and attitudes will allow them to show the desired behavior in the future. Persuading is the easiest and most common activity to be used for the desired attitude change. Raven and Haley (1982) expressed that persuasion is to create changes in cognition, attitude, or behavior under the influence of stimulus, while McCombs and Shaw (1972) defined it as creating awareness in the mind, transferring information, first creating changes in attitudes and then in behavior (Yüksel, 2001). It is seen that beliefs and attitudes are formed as a result of a person's learning and experience. Attitudes formed in the light of learned experiences and acquired knowledge may appear as buying behavior in the future. In other words, there is a very strong relationship between the consumer's buying behavior for a brand or product and their attitude towards it (Bristol, 2002).

Many researchers have expressed brand loyalty in different ways of behavior. For example, re-buying or re-choosing the brand (Ishida and Taylor, 2012), connecting (commitment) to the store or revisiting the store (Hsu et al., 2007), praising the brand to others or defending against them (Lau and Lee, 1999; Thiele and Mackay,

2001), or being willing to pay the higher price (Aaker, 1996a; Kelemci, 2002). In this study, brand loyalty includes three different approaches together: increased price tolerance for the brand (Aaker, 1996a), a tendency to recommend the brand to people around it (Lau and Lee, 1999), and "the psychological commitment that consumers develop towards brands" (Yılmaz, 2005), i.e. the status of defense.

Brand loyalty refers to the positive feelings of consumers towards a brand and the strength of the bond between them and that brand, where they make repeated purchases. Consumers take into account the connotations they receive from the brand and several prominent features of the brand when creating this connection (Çavuşoğlu, 2011). The fact that brands offer only quality and cheap products is no longer sufficient for the formation of positive attitudes and loyalty in consumers. Studies have shown that the process of providing products and services is also very important for consumers. For this reason, brands need to direct their images, which are in a multidimensional complex structure, such as store layout and design, price, product quality, service rating, and store staff aspects, which directly or indirectly affect consumer choice (Kelemci, 2002). For example, easy access to the store is very important for consumers to recognize the brand and want to shop (Arslan, 2018). Providing services such as providing access to all types of customers to the store, and finding a social environment in nearby areas will lead to positive attitudes in the customer, a desire to visit the store again, and brand loyalty through recommendation (Thang and Tan, 2003). In addition, acclimatization conditions are also of extra importance for the stores to be more inviting. A spacious, seasonally warm, or cool store will have a relaxing effect on the customer who has the potential to enter the store (Orel, 2000). In this way, consumers who spend more time in the store will receive a product that attracts their attention and will visit more often due to the comfortable conditions in the store. The density created by other people and the disorder and complexity in the store environment (i.e. shelf layout) will negatively affect the brand image and the desire to buy, causing the disturbed customers to leave the store in a short time (Arslan, 2011). In stores, the main goal is to keep the customer inside the store for the longest possible time. Shelf layout and store layout lead the consumer to show purchasing behavior during unplanned shopping (Fettahlioğlu, 2014). When we look at the price variable, which is considered an internal factor in the store, its effect on attitude and buying behavior is both faster and greater than other characteristics (Kelemci, 2002; Grewal et al., 2003). The consumer prefers a brand that he considers positive in terms of price image. As such, increases price Tolerance, takes a special interest in discounts or campaigns, and can buy more than he needs or repeat the purchase process (Kelemci, 2002; Hamilton and Chernev, 2008). Because they can make a good or bad impression on customers who come with their appearance, the behavior of staff working in stores is also very important. The brand image can be strengthened by creating positive connotations such as friendly and warm-blooded behavior and creating trust, and will even cause the consumer to advertise for free through advice (Bayar, 2019). While other elements that make up a store atmosphere are easy to imitate, employee staff are more difficult to imitate in terms of interest, knowledge, sincerity, kindness, and body language. Many researchers also stated the importance of interaction between store employees and consumers in consumer buying behavior (Davis et al., 2008).

As a result, if one or more elements of the store atmosphere are important to the consumer, attract enough attention to enter the store, and are perceived positively, the consumer in question will develop a positive attitude towards that store (Morschett, 2005). In this case, the attitude towards the store will create a trend towards the brand and/or the store, allowing loyalty. This attitude that consumers create towards the store thanks to the store atmosphere characteristics will be long-lasting and will include many aspects of brand loyalty. A consumer with a positive attitude towards shopping will recommend the brand or store by word of mouth communication (Lau and Lee, 1999), ignore competitors with a more affordable price option (Kelemci, 2002), and be more possessive and defensive towards the company (Morschett, 2005). For this reason, Keller (1993) stated this concept as values in brand-related nodes in the consumer mind, while Aaker (1996b) expressed connotations as the spirit and heart of the brand. At this point, the positivity, strength and uniqueness of brand associations are distinctive for brands to be preferred. A consumer's positive assessment of concepts belonging to a brand will be considered a sign of trust and form the basis of the process (Aaker, 1996b). The strength of connotations is evaluated as the amount, quality, and degree of association of information processed in memory related to the brand (Keller, 1993), while its uniqueness means that it's perceived as different from its competitors (Yener, 2007). Because of the effect, these associations formed through store features have on consumer attitudes and behaviors, it will be a topic worth studying from the point of view of marketing and its applications (Schlegelmich and Sinkovics, 1998).



H1: Store atmosphere features positively affect the attitude towards shopping.

- H1a: Ease of access positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H1b: Acclimatization conditions positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H1c: Shelf layout positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H1d: Price image positively affects the attitude towards shopping.
- H1e: Perception towards sales personnel positively affects the attitude towards shopping.

H2: Attitude towards shopping positively affects brand loyalty.

H3: Store atmosphere features positively affect brand loyalty.

- H3a: Ease of access positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H3b: Acclimatization conditions positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H3c: Shelf layout positively affect the attitude towards shopping.
- H3d: Price image positively affects the attitude towards shopping.
- H3e: Perception towards sales personnel positively affects the attitude towards shopping.

**Figure 1.** Research Model

In this study, the brand image formed by the positivity, strength, and uniqueness of the identified store features is mentioned. It is to determine the effect of the brand image measured in this way on the attitude towards shopping and the effect of the attitudes affected by this stated brand image on brand loyalty. In this context, the hypotheses extracted from the research model are shown above in Figure 1.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Purpose and Importance

In today's market, it will be more beneficial for brands to use their resources in merchandising activities to gain a competitive advantage in the market, ensure the continuity of their assets, and create value in customer perception. At this point, the most important source after the product/service is the stores where they meet with the customer. Through the stores, brands use store atmosphere features to present the message they want to convince or convey to the customer to the targeted final behavior (i.e. purchase). In this study, it has been suggested that the brand image formed by the use of store atmosphere features affects both attitudes towards shopping and brand loyalty.

#### 3.2. Data Collection Method

In this study, in which a quantitative research technique was used, to test the research model, potential customers of a particular store constituting the scope of the research were interviewed face to face. The brand's various stores in different districts of Istanbul were listed. Data were randomly collected from volunteer people who were at the entrance and exit of the stores on different days and times of the week. It lasted 15 to 20 min per person on average. After eliminating 7 unfilled ones, 373 survey forms in total were included in the analysis. Since the researches in which data is collected from people require the permission of the ethics committee, the permission of the ethics committee of Marmara University was obtained from the Ethics Committee on 17.06.2021 regarding the applicability of the research in terms of scientific research ethics regarding the fact that there is no drawback (Issue no: E-44174047-663.13-48961).

### 3.3. Sample Size

The sample size was checked in terms of hypothesis testing in the G\* Power 3.1.9.4 statistical analysis package program. In this program, the minimum sample size required for the chi-square and goodness of fit tests applied for hypothesis testing was calculated. As shown in Table 1, effect size limit value ( $d$ )=0.50 (Cohen, 1988), 1<sup>st</sup> type error ( $\alpha$ ) level=0.05, 2<sup>nd</sup> type error level (power of the test-probability of rejecting a false null hypothesis) ( $1-\beta$ )=0.95 and  $df=188$ . As a result, the non-centrality parameter  $\lambda=74.25$ , critical  $\chi^2=220.9908$ , total sample size 297, and actual power=0.9500892. While the minimum sample size was 297, hypothesis tests were conducted with a sample size of 373 in this study. As a result, it was understood that the sample size used was sufficient to represent the findings.

**Table 1.** Sample Size Statistics

$\chi^2$ tests - Goodness-of-fit tests: Contingency tables	
<b>Analysis</b>	A priori: Compute the required sample size
<b>Input</b>	Effect size $w$ = 0.50
	$\alpha$ err prob = 0.05
	Power ( $1-\beta$ err prob) = 0.95
	$df$ = 188
<b>Output</b>	Noncentrality parameter $\lambda$ = 74.2500000
	Critical $\chi^2$ = 220.9908
	Total sample size = 297
	Actual power = 0.9500892

### 3.4. Pretests

#### Brand Selection

Purchasing power is one of the most important factors that can limit individuals' purchasing. To control the difference created by this factor among consumer brand preferences, a pre-test of 50 people was applied to determine "the first clothing brand name that comes to mind when it comes to affordable price/discount". Based on this, a well-known store brand in clothing was included in the research as an analysis unit.

#### Determination of Store Feature Connotations for the Brand

Many attribute associations based on the store atmosphere reflecting the brand image were collected with references from different sources. The store atmosphere features, which are of the highest importance for brand image measurement, were determined by a survey of 100 people. Some of these were eliminated and separated so that they could be grouped among themselves to create brand image dimensions. In addition, the questionnaire was revised in terms of comprehensibility and clear expression of the questions.

### 3.5. Measurements

Brand image measurement consisted of store features, and the association was divided into components of positivity, strength, and uniqueness (Keller, 2003; Alfriansyah and Rubiyanti, 2022). In this study, five feature connotations for the store to be examined were discussed. 2 measures for (i) ease of access, (ii) 3 for acclimatization conditions, (iii) 3 for shelf layout, (iv) 3 for price image and 5 for perception towards sales personnel were used (Turley and Milliam, 2000). The feature connotations that made up each dimension of the brand image had also been measured in terms of strength, positivity, and uniqueness. The strength of store connotations was measured by the question 'I easily remember this feature of the store'. Their positivity was measured by 'This feature of the store makes me feel positive'. Their uniqueness was measured by 'The store is different from its competitors with this feature' (Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 2003; Keller, 2008). Brand loyalty measurement consisted of three dimensions: (i) price tolerance (4 questions) (Aaker, 1996a; Frempong et al. 2022), (ii) brand defense (2) and (iii) recommendation (3) (Lau and Lee, 1999; Frempong et al. 2022). 5-point Likert type scale was used to evaluate the relative questions in brand loyalty and brand image measurement: (1) I do not agree at all, (2) I do not quite agree, (3) I am indecisive, (4) I partially agree, (5) I completely agree. The attitude towards shopping consisted of 3 questions for emotions, 4 for thoughts, and 5 for purchase intention, respectively (Lau and Lee, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). A 5-point Likert type scale was used in the measurement: (1) lowest (2) low (3) medium (4) high (5) very high.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 and Lisrel 8.51 programs. Participants were asked to answer the questionnaire based on the store they shop the most among the stores of a given brand.

##### 4.1. Sampling Statistics

Out of the sample (see Table 2); 57.9% were female (216 people) and 42.1% (157) were male. Participants' age was between 19 and 63, with a mean of 39 and a standard deviation of 11. While the majority (281 people) were married with 75.3%, single people were in the minority with 24.7% (92). 44 different kinds of professions had been reported. Most of them were housewives (123 people) with 33%. Others were 13.4% self-employment (50), 12.9% students (48), 5.4% retired (20), 4.3% workers (16), 4.3% lecturer (16), 3.5% cooks (13) and 2.9% civil servants (11) and etc. While 32.7% of the respondents owned a car (122 people), 67.3% did not have a car (251). Regarding their educational status, 41.6% waweret primary school (155), 29.5%int high school (110), 15.5% with an associate degree (58), 11.3% with bachelors' degree (42) 1.3% with master's degree (5), 0.8% with Ph.D. degree (3). Their monthly income ranges were determined as min 329 USD or below and max 1276 USD or above. The highest rate was at the level of 330-499 USD (118 persons) with 31.6%. Then, 29.2% had 329 USD and less (109 people), 22.8% 500-708 USD (85), 9.9% 709-1062 USD (37), 3.2% 1063-1275 USD (12) and 3.2% or over 1276 USD (12). Finally, 351 participants, with a rate of 94.1%, answered that they lived with their families. 4.3 % was with their partner/spouse (16 people), 1.1% alone (4), 0.3% with their friends (1) and 0.3% with their relatives (1).

**Table 2.** Sample Profile Statistics

<b>Education</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Who lives with</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary school	155	41.6	Family	351	94.1
High school	110	29.5	Friends	1	0.3
Associate degree	58	15.5	Partner	16	4.3
Bachelors' degree	42	11.3	Myself	4	1.1
Master's degree	5	1.3	Relatives	1	0.3
Ph.D.	3	0.8	<b>Sex</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Monthly income (USD)*</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	Female	216	57.9
Mean=2.36, Sd=1.263			Male	157	42.1
329 - lower	109	29.2	<b>Car ownership</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
330 - 499	118	31.6	Available	122	32.7
500 - 708	85	22.8	Not available	251	67.3
709 - 1062	37	9.9	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1063 - 1275	12	3.2	Max.1 Housewife	123	33.0
1276 - more	12	3.2	Max.2 Self-employment	50	13.4
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	Max.3 Student	48	12.9
Married	281	75.3	Max.4 Retired	20	5.4
Single	92	24.7			
<b>Age</b>	Min	19	Mean	39	
	Max	63	Sd	11	

Note: f: Frequency, %: Percent, SD: Standard deviation\*1 USD=7.06 TL

##### 4.2. The Reliability and Validity Features of the Scales

Based on the maximum likelihood estimation method, the reliability and validity features of measurement models were tested with a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in Lisrel 8.51. CFA was applied to test the compatibility of the factor models that were created as single and /or multi-dimensional based on a theory with the observed data (Raykov and Marcoulides, 2006). The chi-square value in the analysis was found to be significant due to the sensitivity it shows to the number of sample units. In general, the goodness of fit indices in the relevant analysis was also at good or acceptable levels.

##### *Multidimensional Factor Measurement Models: Brand Loyalty, Store Image and Attitude towards Shopping*

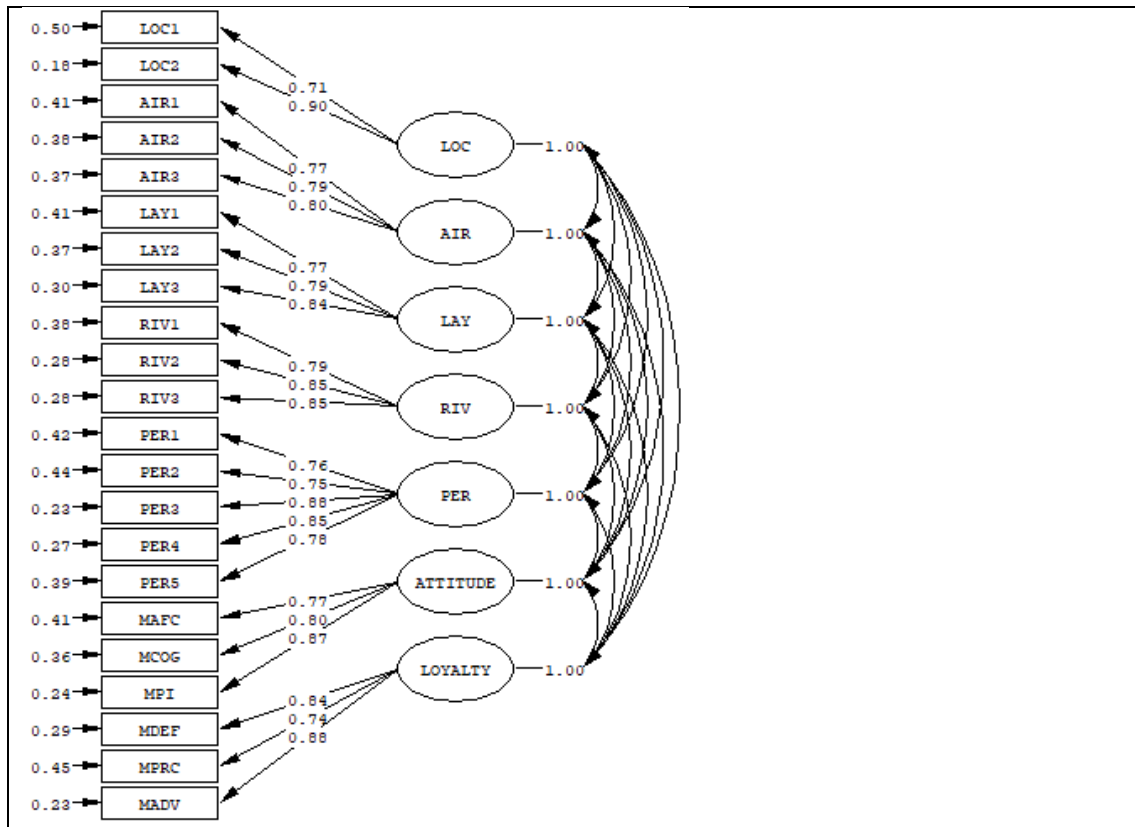
Brand loyalty factor structure measured in three dimensions was tested with CFA. From dimensions, defense consisted of 2, price tolerance 4, and recommendation 3 indicator variables. The theoretical consistency of the

data was observed by testing the multidimensional factor model with CFA. As a result, the factor model defined showed an acceptable fit with the observed data set ( $\chi^2/df=56.04/24=2.335$ ,  $p=0.00023$ ). Good fit index results were at a good level. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)=0.060, Normed Fit Index (NFI)=0.98, Comparative Fit Index (CFI)=0.99, Incremental Fit Index (IFI)=0.99, Standardized RMR (SRMR)=0.025, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)=0.97, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)=0.94. The t values for standard factor loadings (lambda) were found between the lowest at 15.49 and the highest at 31.46.

The store image factor was theoretically explained in five different dimensions, with the number of indicator variables being 2 for ease of access, 3 for acclimatization conditions, 3 for shelf layout, 3 for price image, and 5 for perception towards sales personnel. Observed data according to CFA results showed acceptable compliance with the theory ( $\chi^2/df=227.55/99=2.298$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Goodness of fit indexes for the model were acceptable or obtained at a much better level (RMSEA=0.059, NFI=0.94, CFI=0.97, IFI=0.97, SRMR=0.042, GFI=0.93, AGFI=0.90). The t values for standard factor loadings (lambda) were ranging from the lowest at 9.34 to the highest at 17.92.

The attitude towards shopping, which was theoretically determined to be composed of emotional, cognitive reactions, and behavioral disposition components, with the number of indicator variables 3, 4, and 5, respectively, were tested with CFA. The model was a three-component factor as predicted theoretically at an acceptable level of fit, although it achieved a slightly higher fit value proportionally ( $\chi^2/df=204.43/51=4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Goodness of fit indexes were found to be good or more acceptable (RMSEA=0.090, NFI=0.95, CFI=0.96, IFI=0.96, SRMR=0.034, GFI=0.92, AGFI=0.87). The t values for factor loadings varied between the lowest 14.69 and the highest 24.09. You could see in the Appendix standard lambda, measurement error variance, and t values obtained from the multidimensional factor measurement models for brand loyalty, store image, and attitude towards shopping.

**Measurement model**



$\chi^2/df = 653.65/168=3.89$ ,  $p=0.000$

LOC: Ease of access, AIR: Acclimatization conditions, LAY: Shelf layout, RIV: Price image, PER: Perception towards sales personnel, ATTITUDE: Attitude towards shopping, LOYALTY: Brand loyalty

**Figure 2.** Measurement Model Standard Estimates

In Lisrel 8.51, as can be seen in above Figure 2, the validity and reliability of the concepts that made up the measurement model were tested by applying CFA based on the maximum probability procedure. Among the latent variables which revealed the causality relationship between observed and latent variables, ease of access 2, acclimatization conditions 3, shelf layout 3, price image 3, perception towards sales personnel 5, attitude towards shopping 3 and brand loyalty were measured with 3 observed variables. Here, multidimensional concepts (brand loyalty and attitude towards shopping) were aggregated by averaging the relevant measurements for each of their respective dimensions and thus included in the model. In the analysis, an acceptable level of goodness of fit index estimates was obtained. Accordingly, the ratio of the square to the degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df=653.65/168=3.89$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and goodness of fit index results (RMSEA=0.088, NFI=0.88, CFI=0.90, IFI=0.91, SRMR=0.064, GFI=0.86, AGFI=0.80) were found to be acceptable.

Based on the measurement model statistics, the composite reliability ( $\rho$ ) obtained for all concepts in the model was greater than 0.70 (see Table 3). The average variance extracted (AVE) index ( $\rho_{vc}(n)$ ) was larger than 0.50. Accordingly, these values were at the level predicted by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was above 0.70 and at the level suggested by Nunnally (1978) for the reliability of the measurements. All these results supported the convergent reliability of the measurements for all the concepts in the model. The AVE index for each concept was greater than the square of the highest level of correlation of that concept with other concepts. With the suggestion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), this ensured the discriminant validity. The quality of the measurements used for the concepts was confirmed according to the measurement model test results.

**Table 3.** The Reliability and Validity Parameters of Measurement Model Variables

Measurement Model Variables	$\lambda$	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	$r^2_{max}$
LOC: EASE OF ACCESS		0.78	0.79	0.66	0.24
LOC1: The store is close to my house.	0.71				
LOC2: Access to the store is easy.	0.90				
AIR: Acclimatization conditions		0.83	0.83	0.62	0.46
AIR1: In the store, temperature/coldness is adjusted according to the season.	0.77				
AIR2: The store is spacious and airy.	0.79				
AIR3: The store is clean and well maintained.	0.80				
LAY: SHELF LAYOUT		0.84			0.46
LAY1: Complementary products are placed together in the store.	0.77		0.84	0.64	
LAY2: Size and color options are easily accessible on shelves and stands in the store.	0.79				
LAY3: In the LCW store, sections and departments are organized according to product groups.	0.84				
RIV: PRICE IMAGE		0.87	0.87	0.69	0.42
RIV1: In the store, quality products are available at a more affordable price than their competitors.	0.79				
RIV2: Price discounts in the store are more attractive than their competitors.	0.85				
RIV3: Promotion at the store is tempting.	0.85				
PER: PERCEPTION TOWARDS SALES PERSONNEL		0.90	0.90	0.65	0.39
PER1: The sales personnel in the store are reliable.	0.76				
PER2: The number of sales personnel in the store is sufficient.	0.75				
PER3: The sales personnel in the store are very concerned with their customers.	0.88				
PER4: The sales personnel in the store is polite and friendly.	0.85				
PER5: Cleaning and personal care of the sales personnel in the store are sufficient.	0.78				
ATTITUDE: ATTITUDE TOWARDS SHOPPING		0.86	0.85	0.66	0.43
AFC: Affective response	0.77				
COG: Cognitive response	0.80				
PI: Purchase Intention	0.87				



LOYALTY: BRAND LOYALTY	0.87	0.86	0.55	0.43
DEF: Defense	0.84			
PRC: Price Tolerance	0.74			
ADV: Recommendation	0.88			

Notes:  $\lambda$ : Standardized estimates (loadings), CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted, r: Correlation coefficient.

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

#### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The correlations between the latent constructs and descriptive statistics were depicted in Table 4. The mean score for the “brand loyalty” that was expected to be predicted by a set of other variables was very close to average based on the responses rated on a 1-5 scale. The SD score, in conjunction with the mean, provided a better understanding of the data. The mean was 2.90 with an SD of 1.06, responses lie between 1.84 (2.90 - 1.06) and 3.96 (2.90 + 1.06).

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for Each Construct and the Inter-Correlations across Pairs of Constructs

N: 373	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	ATTITUDE	LOYALTY	LOC	AIR	LAY	RIV	PER
ATTITUDE	3.52	0.87	1	0.81	0.56	0.63	0.66	0.72	0.66
LOYALTY	2.90	1.06	0.654**	1	0.36	0.57	0.55	0.58	0.53
LOC	3.55	1.04	0.442**	.272**	1	0.54	0.60	0.55	0.56
AIR	3.70	0.95	0.519**	.472**	.415**	1	0.81	0.64	0.66
LAY	3.75	0.96	0.551**	.443**	.481**	.679**	1	0.76	0.70
RIV	3.58	1.05	0.615**	.481**	.490**	.541**	.646**	1**	0.72
PER	3.64	0.94	0.594**	.448**	.492**	.592**	.623**	.643**	1**

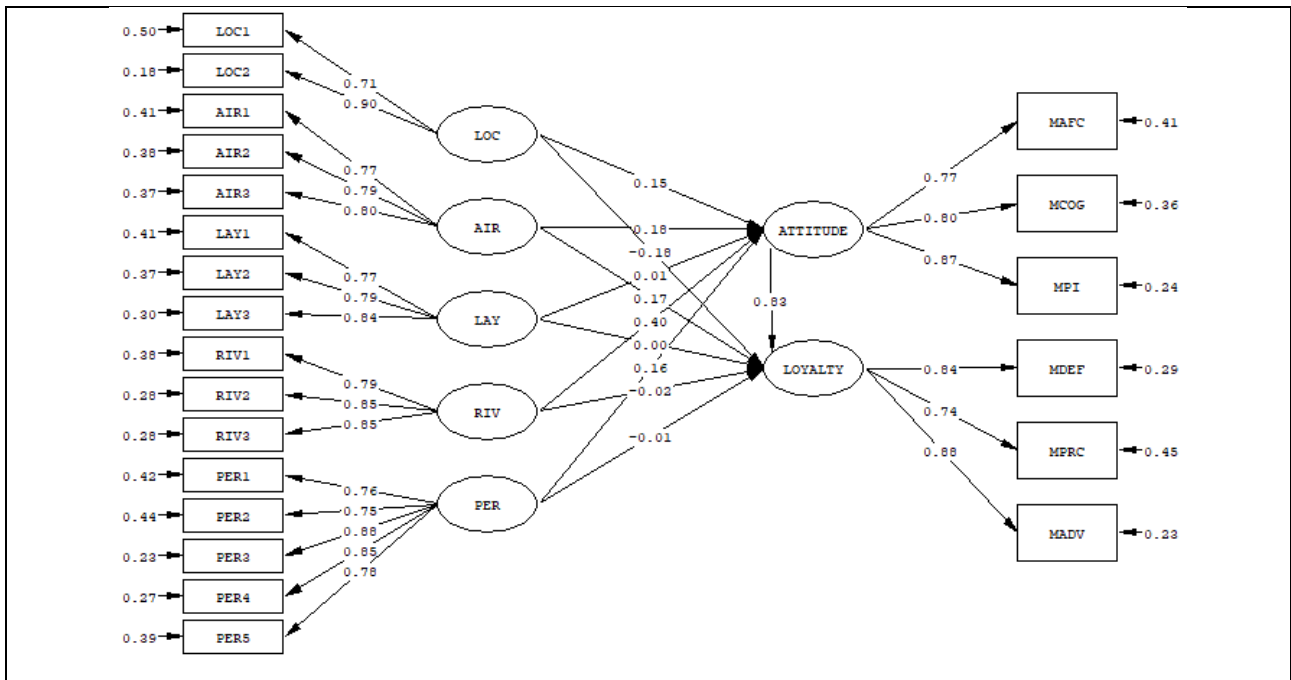
\*\* Pearson correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: The latent factor correlations obtained from the measurement model referred to the figures above the diagonal; The correlations across the aggregated scales used as input in the path analyses referred to the figures below the diagonal.)

Abbreviations: N: Full Sample Estimates, ATTITUDE: Attitude towards shopping, LOYALTY: Brand loyalty, LOC: Ease of access, AIR: Acclimatization conditions, LAY: Shelf layout, RIV: Price image, PER: Perception towards sales personnel

#### Structural Equation Modeling

Through the Structural Equation Model (SEM) created within the framework of the conceptual model and factor analysis, the direct effects of different components that made up the brand image on brand loyalty and their indirect effects on brand loyalty through the attitude towards shopping were analyzed. It was aimed to see the effects of each of the components of brand image on brand loyalty, such as ease of access, acclimatization conditions, shelf layout, price image, and perception towards sales personnel. While attitude towards shopping and brand loyalty were multidimensional variables, these variables were included in the SEM in an aggregated manner as in the measurement model. As can be seen in Figure 3, the SEM test, which showed the relationship between only latent variables (ease of access, acclimatization conditions, shelf layout, price image, perception towards sales personnel, attitude towards shopping, brand loyalty), was



$\chi^2/df=518.83/188=2.79$ ,  $p=0.000$ , LOC: Ease of access, AIR: Acclimatization conditions, LAY: Shelf layout, RIV: Price image, PER: Perception towards sales personnel, ATTITUDE: Attitude towards shopping, MAFC: Emotional response, MCOG: Cognitive response, MPI: Purchase intention, LOYALTY: Brand loyalty, MDEF: Defense, MPRC: Price tolerance, MADV: Recommendation

**Figure 3.** Proposed Research Model Standard Estimates (SEM)

tested with CFA. According to the results, the predicted model fitted well with the observed data ( $\chi^2/df=518.83/188=2.79$ ,  $p=0.000$ , and the goodness of fit index results were either acceptable or rather good fit (RMSEA=0.069, NFI=0.91, CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94, SRMR=0.046, GFI=0.89, AGFI=0.85). Estimates and t values obtained for the predicted relationships in the hypotheses were given in Table 5. In the light of the results obtained from SEM, the decision on whether the hypotheses are supported is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Projected Research Model Parameter Estimates and Significance Values

H	Relations predicted in hypotheses		Std. estimates	t values	Result
H1a	Ease of access	→ Attitude towards shopping	0.15 ( $\gamma_1$ )	2.40***	Supported
H1b	Acclimatization conditions	→ Attitude towards shopping	0.18 ( $\gamma_2$ )	1.86**	Supported
H1c	Shelf layout	→ Attitude towards shopping	0.01 ( $\gamma_3$ )	0.05 (n.s.)	Not supported
H1d	Price image	→ Attitude towards shopping	0.40 ( $\gamma_4$ )	4.60***	Supported
H1e	Perception towards sales personnel	→ Attitude towards shopping	0.16 ( $\gamma_5$ )	2.16**	Supported
H2	Attitude towards shopping	→ Brand loyalty	0.83 ( $\beta_6$ )	9.28***	Supported
H3a	Ease of access	→ Brand loyalty	-0.18 ( $\beta_1$ )	-2.96***	Not supported
H3b	Acclimatization conditions	→ Brand loyalty	0.17 ( $\beta_2$ )	1.76**	Supported
H3c	Shelf layout	→ Brand loyalty	0.00 ( $\beta_3$ )	0.01 (n.s.)	Not supported
H3d	Price image	→ Brand loyalty	-0.02 ( $\beta_4$ )	-0.18 (n.s.)	Not supported
H3e	Perception towards sales personnel	→ Brand loyalty	-0.01 ( $\beta_5$ )	-0.20 (n.s.)	Not supported

t value greater than 1,282, \*  $p<0.10$ , t value greater than 1.645, \*\*  $p<0.05$  and t value greater than 2.326, \*\*\*  $p<0.01$ , n.s. : Nonsignificant, H: Hypothesis, Std.: Standardized.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this study, store brand image was determined according to the features that evoke the store atmosphere. Later, the direct effect of the feature connotations and their indirect effect on brand loyalty through the attitude towards shopping were examined. The features were ease of access, acclimatization conditions, shelf layout, price image, and perception towards sales personnel. The strength, positivity, and uniqueness of the feature connotations that made up the brand image were taken into account. But, although the approach was theoretically put forward, there was no study in this way to measure store image. In this study, which revealed its original side in this sense, each feature connotation was measured by recording the multiplicative result of its strength, uniqueness, and positivity.

First, attitude towards shopping was a meaningful premise variable that constitutes brand loyalty. Acclimatization condition as one of store atmosphere's features was found to affect brand loyalty not only directly but also indirectly through shopping attitude. Out of feature connotations, ease of access had a direct but negative effect on brand loyalty, contrary to expectations. On the other hand, price image and perception towards sales personnel had a positive but direct effect on brand loyalty, not an indirect effect. One of the store atmosphere characteristics that are examined, shelf layout neither directly nor indirectly affects brand loyalty in any way.

When impact magnitudes were examined, attitude towards shopping was a defining premise that had a strong impact on brand loyalty. Price image, which indirectly affected brand loyalty through brand image, was again the second variable with a strong effect. Whether it was indirect or direct effects, the variables of ease of access, acclimatization conditions, and perception towards sales personnel had a significant impact on brand loyalty at close levels. The magnitude of these effects was relatively lower than the effects that shopping attitude and price image variables had.

Ease of access contributed positively to the attitude towards shopping but did not unexpectedly result in a positive behavioral tendency (brand loyalty). But, the indirect positive effect of this feature on brand loyalty through the attitude towards shopping was confirmed. Another connotation of in-store image formation was acclimatization conditions, which could have the same effect on brand loyalty indirectly through the attitude towards shopping, as well as the power of influence it had on direct brand loyalty. The shelf layout remained an ineffective factor when the effect of other factors for both the attitude towards shopping and brand loyalty comes into play. The dominance of the indirect effect that perceptions of price and sales personnel had on brand loyalty through attitude towards shopping has eliminated the possibility that the effects that other features will create on brand loyalty. As it had been confirmed many times in previous studies, attitude, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies towards shopping, was a precursor variable that was determined to have a huge effect in creating brand loyalty.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Ease of access causes an increased chance in the positive attitude toward shopping, but then the attitude affected by ease of access leads to a decrease in brand loyalty. Because it could be mostly possible to develop stronger brand loyalty against "the store that is more rarely found and difficult to access". A store that can be found everywhere may be losing the value of being privileged.

Acclimatization conditions have given practitioners two alternative ways to develop brand loyalty because it has direct effects as well as indirect effects that occur through shopping attitudes. For customers who come to shop, it doesn't matter whether they focus on shopping attitudes or brand loyalty, improving the connotation of acclimatization conditions will give a positive result in both ways.

Shelf layout is a connotation that motivates non-planned purchases inside the store more. It is more common for it to create a motive for a behavioral action at the point of purchase. It may not have enough influence on attitudes and behavioral trends that go through stronger structuring processes. For this reason, the attitude toward shopping and brand loyalty was not affected by the layout of the shelf.

From the internal factors of the store, the price is the most effective factor in-store purchases, and the positive image of the price will be positively reflected in consumer attitudes and behavior. Sometimes, even if they want to buy, they cannot shop in every store when people's economic power does not allow them. Sometimes

a high price creates a connotation of high quality, and some consumers evaluate it more positively and are motivated to buy it. Overall, price perception is a factor that shapes consumer store image and has a decisive impact on purchasing attitude and brand loyalty.

Store employees who communicate face-to-face with customers in the shopping environment have separate importance. They promote the products in the store and inform the customer, and it is there in any case that it should help during shopping to them. Their behavior style, knowledge, and persuasion abilities have a significant impact on their shopping attitude, which will result in brand loyalty.

The more powerful, unique, and positive all these connotations, such as ease of access, acclimatization conditions, shelf layout, price, and perceptions towards sales personnel contained in the brand image, the stronger the effects will be. Better experience with the shopping in stores evokes positive emotions, thoughts and increases their purchasing tendencies, the more their customers develop their loyalty to the store. As such, they become willing to pay more money, recommend the store to others more, and are more defensive of anti-store views. Whether it has an indirect effect on shopping attitude or a direct effect on brand loyalty, the connotations that make up the brand image should be examined by addressing with relative attention to their meaningful impact and the size of the impact. In the shopping environment, the question of what ways to create positive, strong, and unique brand connotations in the minds of customers can be studied in the future.

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## APPENDIX

## Multidimensional Factor Measurement Models for Brand Loyalty, Store Image and Attitude towards Shopping

LOYALTY: Brand loyalty ( $\chi^2=56.04$ , $df=24$ , $p=0.00023$ )	$\lambda$	t	$\theta$
DEF: Defense	0.92	17.99	
DEF1: If a negative review is made about the store, I will go on the defensive.	0.89		0.20
DEF2: I don't believe those who make negative reviews about the store.	0.85	20.19	0.27
PRC: Price tolerance	0.83	16.32	
PRC1: I would still prefer the store's products, even if they cost 10% more than other stores selling the same product.	0.89		0.21
PRC2: I can agree to pay more for The store's products than others.	0.96	31.46	0.09
PRC3: I prefer to shop at the store even if other stores are on sale.	0.92	28.08	0.16
PRC4: I can pay more for the store's products, even if other stores sell the same product at a lower price.	0.94	30.42	0.11
ADV: Recommendation	0.87	15.49	
ADV1: I recommend the store that sells this product to a person who can't decide which store to buy the product he wants.	0.83		0.31
ADV2: I tell others about my positive experiences with the store.	0.80	17.47	0.37
ADV3: I often tell friends, relatives, or those around me how good the store's products are.	0.89	20.03	0.21
STORE IMAGE: Store image ( $\chi^2=227.55$ , $df=99$ , $p=0.000$ )	$\lambda$	t	$\theta$
LOC: EASE OF ACCESS	0.67	9.34	
LOC1: The store is close to my house.	0.72		0.48
LOC2: Access to the store is easy.	0.89	11.05	0.22
AIR: Acclimatization conditions	0.83	13.49	
AIR1: In the store, temperature/coldness is adjusted according to the season.	0.76		0.42
AIR2: The Store is spacious and airy.	0.79	14.71	0.38
AIR3: The store is clean and well maintained.	0.80	14.86	0.36
LAY: SHELF LAYOUT	0.92	14.98	
LAY1: Complementary products are placed together in the store.	0.77		0.41
LAY2: Size and color options are easily accessible on shelves and stands in the store.	0.79	15.36	0.38
LAY3: In the store, sections and departments are organized according to product groups.	0.85	16.49	0.28
RIV: PRICE IMAGE	0.83	14.06	
RIV1: In the store, quality products are available at a more affordable price than their competitors.	0.78		0.38
RIV2: Price discounts in the store are more attractive than their competitors.	0.86	17.40	0.26
RIV3: Promotion at the store is tempting.	0.85	17.17	0.28
PER: PERCEPTION TOWARDS SALES PERSONNEL	0.81	13.51	
PER1: The sales personnel in the store are reliable.	0.76		0.42
PER2: The number of sales personnel is sufficient.	0.75	14.80	0.44
PER3: The sales personnel in the store are very concerned with their customers.	0.88	17.92	0.22
PER4: The sales personnel in the store is polite and friendly.	0.86	17.36	0.27
PER5: Cleaning and personal care of the sales personnel in the store are sufficient.	0.78	15.56	0.39
ATTITUDE: Attitude towards shopping ( $\chi^2=204.43$ , $df=51=4$ , $p=0.000$ )	$\lambda$	t	$\theta$
AFC: Affective response	0.84	15.99	

AFC1: Entertaining	0.89		0.21
AFC2: Pleasant	0.89	23.35	0.21
AFC3: Appealing	0.84	21.44	0.29
COG: Cognitive response	0.93	16.97	
COG1: Reliable	0.85		0.28
COG2: High-quality	0.85	20.79	0.28
COG3: Practical	0.91	23.23	0.17
COG4: Satisfactory	0.82	19.28	0.33
PI: Purchase intention	0.79	14.69	
PI1: I intend to continue shopping at the store.	0.85		0.28
PI2: when I need a product, the store that sells that product I'd like to buy it at his store.	0.91	24.09	0.17
PI3: I prefer to shop at the store when my shopping needs arise.	0.91	24.02	0.17
PI4: When I go shopping to buy a product, I first go to the store that sells this product.	0.83	20.15	0.32
PI5: I'll probably buy a product again from the store.	0.82	20.05	0.32

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$\lambda$ : Standardized estimates,  $\theta$ : Measurement errors