

Marka Deneyiminin Marka Savunuculuğuna Etkisi: Havayolu Sektöründe Hizmet Tutsaklığının Aracılık Rolünün İncelenmesi*

The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Advocacy: Examining the Mediating Role of Service Captivity in the Airline Industry

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Anahtar Kelimeler:

marka deneyimi
marka savunuculuğu
hizmet tutsaklığı
havayolu sektörü

Geliş Tarihi 2 Haziran 2026

Düzeltilme Tarihi 19 Ağustos 2026

Kabul Tarihi 30 Ağustos 2026

Makale Sınıflandırması:

Araştırma Makalesi

ÖZET

Amaç- Bu çalışma, havayolu ve hizmet pazarlaması literatürüne üç şekilde katkıda bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak, marka savunuculuğunu memnuniyet, ağızdan ağıza iletişim ve tekrar satın alma davranışından farklı, proaktif bir ilişkisel sonuç olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. İkinci olarak, yapısal değişim engellerinin sıklıkla belirgin olduğu bir bağlamda, marka deneyiminin algılanan hizmet tutsaklığını azaltıp azaltmadığını incelemektedir. Üçüncü olarak, hizmet tutsaklığının marka deneyimi ile marka savunuculuğu arasında bir aracılık mekanizması olarak işlev görüp görmediğini değerlendirmekte; böylece bir hizmet sağlayıcıda zorunluluktan dolayı kalmak ile bir markayı gönüllü bir istekle savunmak arasındaki ayrımı ortaya koymaktadır.

Tasarım/Yöntem/Yaklaşım- Türkiye'deki havayolu yolcularından (N = 427) toplanan anket verileri kullanılarak, marka deneyiminin marka savunuculuğu ile doğrudan ve dolaylı ilişkilerini değerlendirmek amacıyla marka deneyimi çok boyutlu bir yapı olarak modellenmiştir. Hipotezleri test etmek için veriler, 20 Aralık 2025 ile 14 Ocak 2026 tarihleri arasında paylaşılan çevrimiçi bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Yapı geçerliliğini değerlendirmek ve hipotez edilen ilişkileri test etmek için nicel veriler, SmartPLS 4'teki Kovaryans Temelli YEM (CB-SEM) modülü kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular- Yapısal model sonuçları, marka deneyiminin marka savunuculuğunu pozitif yönde ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < .001$) ve hizmet tutsaklığını negatif yönde ($\beta = -0.341$, $p < .001$) yordadığını göstermektedir. Ancak, hizmet tutsaklığı marka savunuculuğunu anlamlı bir şekilde yordamamaktadır ($\beta = -0.025$, $p = .497$) ve dolaylı etki desteklenmemiştir ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .513$).

Tartışma- Bu bulgular, olumlu marka deneyimlerinin daha güçlü bir savunuculuk ve daha düşük tutsaklık algısıyla ilişkili olduğunu, ancak savunuculuğun kısıtlamalara dayalı ilişki mekanizmalarından ziyade, esas olarak gönüllü psikolojik katılımdan ortaya çıktığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, bir sağlayıcıda zorunluluktan dolayı kalmak ile bir markayı gönüllü bir istekle savunmak arasındaki ayrımı belirginleştirerek hizmet pazarlaması araştırmalarına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

brand experience
brand advocacy
service captivity
airline industry.

Received 2 June 2026

Revised 19 August 2026

Accepted 30 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Purpose- This study contributes to the airline and services marketing literature in three distinct ways. First, it conceptualizes brand advocacy as a proactive relational outcome, clearly differentiating it from satisfaction, word-of-mouth (WOM), and repeat patronage. Second, it examines whether brand experience diminishes perceived service captivity within a context where structural switching constraints are highly salient. Third, it evaluates whether service captivity functions as a mediating mechanism between brand experience and brand advocacy, thereby theoretically distinguishing between remaining with a provider out of necessity and advocating for a brand out of genuine willingness.

Design/methodology/approach- Utilizing survey data collected from airline passengers in Türkiye (N = 427), brand experience was modeled as a multidimensional construct to assess its direct and indirect associations with brand advocacy. Data were gathered via an online survey administered between December 20, 2025, and January 14, 2026. To evaluate construct validity and test the hypothesized

* This work has been prepared within the scope of the author's ongoing doctoral dissertation.

ETHICAL APPROVAL: The ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Başkent University with the decision dated August 06, 2025, and numbered 482368.

Suggested Citation

Tavukçuoğlu Tetik, İ.C. & Sümer, S.I. (2026). The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Advocacy: Examining the Mediating Role of Service Captivity in the Airline Industry, Journal of Business Research-Turk, 18 (3), 2666-2683.

Article Classification:

Research Article

structural relationships, the quantitative data were analyzed employing the Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) module in SmartPLS 4.

Results– The structural model estimations reveal that brand experience positively predicts brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.341, p < .001$) and negatively predicts service captivity ($\beta = -0.341, p < .001$). Conversely, service captivity does not significantly predict brand advocacy ($\beta = -0.025, p = .497$), and the hypothesized indirect (mediating) effect is not supported ($\beta = 0.009, p = .513$).

Discussion– The findings indicate that while positive brand experiences are associated with stronger brand advocacy and reduced perceptions of service captivity, advocacy primarily emerges from voluntary psychological engagement rather than constraint-based relationship mechanisms. This research advances service marketing literature by empirically separating the passive retention driven by necessity from the proactive endorsement driven by genuine consumer willingness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern airline industry is becoming more transparent, with platforms facilitating comparisons between carriers and fare classes. This is leading to relatively low digital switching barriers. In this highly competitive environment, sustainable growth is dependent on two key factors: the acquisition of passengers and the encouragement of customers to act as credible and influential voices in the marketplace. Customers' voluntary willingness to recommend a brand to others is referred to as brand advocacy. When customers engage in brand advocacy, they defend the brand when criticized, and encourage others to choose it (Wilder, 2015). In airline industry, although service disruptions are often difficult to avoid completely, such advocacy may play an important role in strengthening trust and supporting favourable brand evaluations.

Brand experience provides a useful framework for understanding how advocacy emerges in service settings. According to Holbrook & Hirschman, (1982), consumption is not limited to functional evaluation, but also includes sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses in branding research, these responses are captured through the concept of brand experience. The brand experience is defined as the internal and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). This perspective is particularly relevant in the airline industry. The customer journey unfolds across multiple touchpoints, including digital booking, airport processes, in-flight service, and post-flight recovery interactions. Consequently, the overall brand experience for passengers may become a significant factor in driving higher-order relational outcomes, such as brand advocacy.

Conversely, it is important to remember that continued patronage of airline services does not always necessarily reflect genuine preference. Passengers may remain with an airline for a number of reasons, including limited alternative routes, loyalty programme lock-ins, organisational travel policies, or switching-related constraints. Due to these reasons, passengers feel unable or unwilling to switch airlines. Service captivity is defined as this perceived lack of freedom in the service relationships (Burnham et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2000; Rayburn et al., 2024). Although service captivity may explain why customers continue to patronize a provider, it does not account for why they would voluntarily support or publicly defend that brand.

This distinction highlights a significant gap in the literature (Rayburn et al., 2024). The theoretical problem this study addresses is the frequent conflation of behavioral retention with genuine relational commitment. While previous research has predominantly examined structural switching barriers (Jones et al., 2000) or hedonic brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009) in isolation, the interplay between experiential value and perceived constraints remains underexplored. Specifically, it is unclear whether superior brand experiences can psychologically mitigate the restrictive nature of service captivity in highly constrained environments like the airline sector. In other words, customers may continue to use a provider because they feel constrained, but advocacy is more likely to require a sense of willingness, autonomy, and psychological engagement (Manser Payne et al., 2017). Accordingly, this study examines whether brand experience influences brand advocacy directly and whether this relationship is mediated by service captivity (Rayburn et al., 2024). While traditional loyalty constructs often conflate genuine relational commitment with mere behavioral retention (e.g., repeat patronage due to high switching barriers), service captivity explicitly isolates the negative psychological state of feeling trapped or constrained. Therefore, this study utilizes service captivity rather than loyalty to clearly distinguish between passengers who remain with an airline out of necessity (spurious loyalty) and those who develop the proactive, voluntary engagement required for true brand advocacy.

This study contributes to the airline and services marketing literature in three ways. First, it conceptualizes brand advocacy as a proactive relational outcome that is distinct from satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and repeat patronage. Second, it examines whether brand experience reduces perceived service captivity in a context where structural switching constraints are often salient. Third, it evaluates whether service captivity functions as a mediating mechanism between brand experience and brand advocacy, thereby distinguishing between staying with a provider out of necessity and advocating for a brand out of genuine willingness. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on brand experience, brand advocacy, and service captivity, culminating in the development of the conceptual model and hypotheses. Section 3 details the research methodology, including sampling, data collection, and measurement. Section 4 presents the empirical findings from the structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) analysis. Finally, Section 5 discusses the theoretical and managerial implications, acknowledges limitations, and outlines directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Experience in Airlines

Brand experience is defined as the internal and behavioural responses of consumers to brand-related stimulation factors (Brakus et al., 2009). The brand experience involves sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural responses emerging throughout the consumption of the customers. This experience is particularly relevant in how service is encountered, interpreted, and remembered across interactions with the customer.

The airline industry serves as an ideal framework for examining brand experience because the service delivery is inherently processual and multi-touchpoint in nature (Laming & Mason, 2014). Passenger engagement with the brand begins long before boarding and continues to evolve even after the flight is completed. The customer journey typically commences with digital search and booking interfaces, progresses through airport procedures, and extends to in-flight experiences and post-flight service recovery. Consequently, airline brand experience is not limited to a single point of consumption. Rather, passengers' evaluations are shaped by a series of cumulative interactions with the brand (Sezgen et al., 2019).

Brand experience can be analysed through four interrelated experiences. According to Brakus et al. (2009) and Pabla & Soch (2023), these are sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience and behavioural experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Pabla & Soch, 2023). Sensory experience refers to the visual and atmospheric stimuli of the service environment, such as cabin aesthetics, lounge ambiance, and overall cleanliness (Brakus et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2021). Affective experience can be defined as the emotional responses elicited during the journey. Feelings of comfort or stress reduction can be counted in that experience. These are largely driven by the empathy and responsiveness of frontline employees (Brakus et al., 2009; Dewasandra et al., 2025). Intellectual experience involves including the clarity of information and the perceived logic of airline procedures (Brakus et al., 2009; Xie et al., 2024). Finally, behavioural experience concerns the actions and participation enabled by the airline. The use of self-service technologies and digital tools that allow passengers to actively engage with the service process can be considered part of that type of experience. (Brakus et al., 2009; Stoopendahl, 2024).

This multidimensional perspective is useful in airline services because two different carriers can have similar schedules, fares, and route structures. Despite this, different passenger evaluations can be evolved depending on how the overall journey is experienced. What distinguishes one airline from another depends on many factors. They include the transportation outcome, the coherence, ease, and emotional quality of the experience that surrounds it. In this sense, airline brand experience may be defined as passengers' sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural responses to brand-related stimuli encountered across digital, airport, in-flight, and post-flight touchpoints.

Considering perspective of the brand experience, present study's measurement approach adopts the brand experience. The measurement approach is constructed through passengers' perceptions rather than firm-level strategic actions. Theoretical match between the conceptual framework and the empirical model is precisely provided by focusing on brand experience. Thus, why favourable passenger responses may emerge even in a highly standardized industry is also explained. For example, customers do not respond only to transportation performance, but to the quality and meaning of the journey as lived through the brand. While brand experience is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing sensory, affective, intellectual,

and behavioural responses (Brakus et al., 2009), the present study models brand experience as an overarching, higher-order latent construct to assess its holistic impact on passenger relationship outcomes.

2.2. Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy is defined as voluntary behaviours of customers through which individuals actively support a brand in public. It goes beyond merely holding favourable attitudes toward a brand. In brand advocacy, the customers recommend the brand to others but also defend it when it is criticized (Wilder, 2015). In this sense, advocacy is motivated by the customer rather than the firm. Because it involves outward-facing, credibility-bearing behaviour. It reflects a particularly demanding form of positive brand response.

To fully grasp its theoretical weight, brand advocacy must be distinguished from related concepts such as satisfaction, word-of-mouth (WOM), and loyalty. While satisfaction reflects a positive evaluative judgment of a service (Anderson, 1998) and WOM generally captures any shared statements about a brand (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), neither necessarily guarantees that a customer will actively defend the brand against public criticism. Advocacy demands a deeper, more proactive commitment (Wilder, 2015). More importantly for the airline industry, advocacy must be separated from loyalty. Traditional loyalty is often conceptualized around repeat patronage (Dick & Basu, 1994); however, this repeated behavior can easily be an artifact of switching costs or limited route alternatives rather than genuine affection (Burnham et al., 2003). Therefore, within the context of this study, brand advocacy is explicitly positioned not as a passive retention metric, but as the ultimate voluntary, high-engagement outcome where passengers actively champion the airline of their own free will.

According to Bhattacharya & Sen (2003), advocacy is more likely to be successful when customers perceive strong value, experience meaningful identity alignment, and develop deeper psychological bonds with the brand. Identification theory proposes that consumers are more likely to support companies that help satisfy self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Likewise, brand attachment research conducted by Park et al. (2010) indicates that emotionally attached consumers are more willing to engage in demanding behaviours that require personal resources, such as defending and recommending a brand. The concept of perceived value is also a contributing factor in determining whether customers regard a brand as worthy of endorsement. (Zeithaml, 1988). In airline services, where customers are exposed to uncertainty, risk, and service disruption, brand advocacy is especially meaningful. Despite the complexities of the service context, it reflects a willingness to publicly stand behind the airline.

2.3. Service Captivity

Service captivity is defined as customer not feeling they have a choice or control over the brand. It reflects customers' feelings of being unable, unwilling, or constrained to change providers (Rayburn et al., 2020). This can be resultant from different facts. Some reasons are alternatives appear limited, switching seems costly, or customers feel they have little voice or control in the relationship (Rayburn et al., 2020). Customers may continue with a brand, not because of their willing preference, but because leaving the brand feels difficult or disadvantageous (Rayburn et al., 2020). In this sense, service captivity is different than from simple repeat patronage (Rayburn, 2015).

Service captivity is closely related to the switching-barriers literature in terms of the concept. Prior researches have shown that customers may remain with a service provider because of procedural, financial, and relational switching costs, as well as a lack of attractive alternatives (Bansal et al., 2005; Burnham et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2000). However, concept of service captivity is not limited to observable barriers; it also considers the customer's subjective experience of having limited options and feeling restricted (Rayburn et al., 2020). In this regard, captivity is better understood not simply as market lock-in, but as a relationship state characterised by vulnerability and reduced autonomy (Rayburn et al., 2020; Rayburn et al., 2024).

The airline industry provides a particularly relevant environment for service captivity (Rayburn et al., 2020). Passengers may face different restriction due to nature of this industry (Rayburn et al., 2020). These are restricted route and schedule options, loyalty-program lock-ins, fare restrictions, organizational travel rules, or rigid disruption-management procedures (Rayburn et al., 2020; Holz et al., 2024). They make switching to another airline difficult in practice. In such circumstances, continued patronage may be indicative of necessity rather than preference (Rayburn et al., 2024). This makes service captivity a theoretically meaningful concept

for researches in the airline industry (Aydın, 2024). Particularly, it is important to examine outcomes that depend on voluntary customer support rather than simply behavioural loyalty (Wilder, 2015).

In addition to association of service captivity with perceptions of limited choice, reduced voice, and diminished control, Rayburn et al., (2024) suggests that service captivity may be linked to adverse outcomes such as vulnerability and negative word-of-mouth. Therefore, it is important to note that service captivity should not be interpreted as a favourable relationship. Instead, it is indicative of a relationship context that is somewhat restricted. Customers remain connected to the provider but do not necessarily feel empowered, committed, or positively attached to the brand.

2.4. The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Brand Advocacy

According to Brakus et al., brand experience refers to sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural responses of consumers evoked by brand-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). The passenger reactions happen throughout the whole trip in the airline services. The brand experience of the passengers is formed during the different phases of the trip. These are using the website to book, spending time at the airport, flying with the airline, and solving service mistakes (Holz et al., 2024; Siqueira et al., 2023). Airline services are high-contact and disruption-prone services. According to Brakus et al., the passengers evaluate the brand in terms of functional transportation performance, the quality, coherence, and meaning of the overall journey experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999).

Brand advocacy requires customers not only like a brand but also recommend it and support it in front of other people. According to Wilder et al. (2015), when customers do this, they are using their own reputation to help the brand. Research shows that this kind of active support happens when customers believe the brand has great value (Zeithaml, 1988). Also, Customers feel that the brand represents who they are (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). They feel a strong emotional connection to it (Park et al., 2010). Therefore, advocacy is not just about being happy with a product or using it many times. Instead, it shows a very deep and personal relationship between the customer and the brand.

Brand experience makes people feel ready to support a brand publicly. This helps create brand advocacy because good sensory and emotional experiences make passengers feel happy and comfortable. At the same time, experiences that make people think and act help them feel in control and understand their journey better (Brakus et al., 2009; Duran et al., 2024; Holz et al., 2024). Passengers are more likely to stop just thinking about the airline when these parts of the experience are always good. They start telling others how great it is.

Passengers are more likely to support the brand when they feel the airline is helpful and cares about them in problematic situations such as delaying flight (Wilder, 2015). When the airline brands are succeeded to make the passengers feel that they tend to recommend it to others. Also, they tend to defend it if someone complains about it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Basically, a good brand experience makes the passenger feel the airline matches their values and who they are (Park et al., 2010).

H1: Brand experience positively affects brand advocacy.

2.5. The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Service Captivity

According to Rayburn et al. (2024), service captivity is when customers feel trapped because they have few other choices, no voice, or no power in their relationship with a company. In the airline industry, this can happen because of limited flight schedules, strict ticket rules, or loyalty programs that make it hard to leave (Bansal et al., 2005; Burnham et al., 2003; Duran et al., 2024). In these cases, it is apparent that customers are obliged to travel with the specific airline company. Therefore, service captivity is important for understanding how passengers feel about an airline (Jones et al., 2000; Rayburn et al., 2024).

Negative feelings due to service captivity can be reduced with a good brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). Customers interact with the brand in many ways, such as booking a ticket, checking in at the airport, and talking to the crew during the flight. If customers are satisfied with these processes, they are more likely to feel the relationship is easy to manage. Instead of feeling obliged to use the airline, they think that they are choosing it for themselves (Brakus et al., 2009; Holz et al., 2024; Siqueira et al., 2023).

The research conducted by Ryan and Deci (2000) suggests that when people feel they have choices and are capable of choosing them, they feel less trapped and more willing to participate. According to recent studies, a positive brand experience makes passengers feel more in control during their journey. (Duran et al., 2024; Holz et al., 2024; Siqueira et al., 2023). As an example, when clear information, easy-to-use digital tools, and helpful staff is provided, passengers shift from feeling restricted to stay there to thinking preferring to stay there. In this way, brand experience is not just about making people feel comfortable. Instead, it changes how customers see the rules and structure of the service. When airline experiences are supportive and controllable, passengers feel less trapped by rules and more free to keep using the brand (Brakus et al., 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Based on this research, the hypothesis that Brand experience negatively affects service captivity is proposed:

H2: Brand experience negatively affects service captivity.

2.6. The Relationship Between Service Captivity and Brand Advocacy

According to Rayburn et al. (2024), Service captivity is when customers feel they do not have freedom in their relationship with a company. When the customers have few other choices, switching among these choices is expensive, they feel they have no control over these choices, they tend to use the same brand (Rayburn et al., 2024). These problems often come from fees, rules, or a lack of better options (Bansal et al., 2005; Burnham et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2000). For the airline industry, these barriers are very clear because of limited flight paths, hard to leave loyalty programmes, and limited work rules on where a person can fly.

According to Bhattacharya & Sen (2003), brand advocacy is a behaviour that people choose to show who they are when they are supporting a brand. In that sense, brand advocacy is different from service captivity. Customers use their own reputation to suggest and protect a brand in public (Wilder, 2015). This is something the customer does of their own free will, not because they are forced to. A passenger may stay with an airline because of hard to change, but they still may not suggest that airline to others.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), and Steindl et al. (2015), when people feel their choices are limited, upset feelings may be experienced, and resistance may be shown. In these cases, customers are less likely to support the brand. Conversely, there is a possibility that they might express disapproval or negative sentiments. (Rayburn et al., 2024; Wendlandt & Schrader, 2007). In the airline business, staying with a company does not show that the customers actually support the brand.

Dick and Basu (1994) and Park et al. (2010) mention that service captivity might explain why customers keep using a service, but it does not create the emotional connection needed for brand advocacy. Indeed, when customers feel trapped, they are less likely to support the brand in public. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: Service captivity negatively affects brand advocacy.

2.7. The Mediating Role of Service Captivity

To theoretically ground the mediating role of service captivity between brand experience and brand advocacy, it is essential to draw upon Psychological Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1966). In the airline industry, structural constraints such as frequent flyer lock-ins or lack of alternative routes often pose a direct threat to consumers' perceived freedom of choice. When autonomy is restricted, consumers experience psychological reactance, which manifests as a feeling of 'captivity.' Because brand advocacy is inherently a proactive, voluntary, and altruistic behaviour driven by high affective commitment, it cannot flourish in an environment of perceived coercion. Consumers who feel trapped may exhibit 'spurious loyalty' (Dick & Basu, 1994) due to switching costs, but they will withhold active advocacy. Therefore, brand experience acts as a critical buffer: superior sensory, emotional, and cognitive experiences mitigate this psychological reactance, reduce the feeling of captivity, and subsequently restore the perceived autonomy required for the consumer to willingly advocate for the brand. It is important to distinguish between objective structural barriers (e.g., lack of alternative routes or restrictive loyalty rules) and the psychological state of service captivity. While a positive brand experience cannot physically eliminate objective switching costs or create new market alternatives, it can significantly alter the consumer's perceptual mechanism. Superior sensory, affective, and cognitive interactions make the

service journey feel more autonomous and rewarding, thereby reducing the subjective perception of being trapped.

Brand experience helps make passengers willing to support the airline. This phenomenon occurs directly and is also influenced by the perception passengers have of their relationship with the company. Brand experience is composed of four components; sensory responses, emotional responses, intellectual considerations, and behavioural responses. In the airline industry, customer experience is shaped by every stage of the journey, from the initial booking to in-flight service. These stages indicate whether an airline is helpful and supportive, which in turn affects how passengers judge the brand and whether they feel free or "stuck" in the relationship. A strong brand experience has been shown to reduce feelings of being restricted. This is achieved by providing them with more information and control during the journey. This idea matches research on "autonomy". It is stated that individuals tend to experience greater satisfaction when presented with options and a sense of control over their circumstances. Research indicates that individuals often feel "stuck" in situations where there are no viable alternatives or when regulations are excessively restrictive. Passengers who find the airline helpful and easy to manage are less likely to feel dissatisfied, they do not feel like the relationship is forced on them.

When passengers feel less restricted, they are more likely to support the brand. The act of supporting a brand can be defined as 'advocacy', and is a choice made by consumers to express their identity. It is important to recognise that people only choose to fly with a particular airline when they feel they have done so freely, not because they are unable to choose otherwise. Airlines should consider offering passengers more choice and flexibility in their booking processes, as this may help to address the feeling of being trapped. Their decision to stop flying is driven by obligation, while their decision to resume flying is motivated by desire. In this way, the experience of feeling less trapped is a significant reason why a positive brand experience encourages people to recommend and defend the airline.

Accordingly, brand experience makes brand support stronger directly and also by making people feel less trapped. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand experience has a positive indirect relationship with brand advocacy through reduced service captivity.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Purpose and Research Model

The purpose of this study is to examine whether service captivity functions as a mediating mechanism in the effect of brand experience of airline passengers on brand advocacy. In addition, the study investigates whether four components of the brand experience, sensory, affective, behavioural responses, and intellectual considerations, increases passengers' willingness to recommend and defend an airline brand. It is also examined whether it simultaneously reduces perceived service captivity. In this framework, service captivity refers to passengers' perceived lack of alternatives, loss of control and power, and the absence of any option to terminate the service relationship. This study uses structural equation modelling to test the direct relationships between the focal constructs and the indirect effect of brand experience on brand advocacy through service captivity. The proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

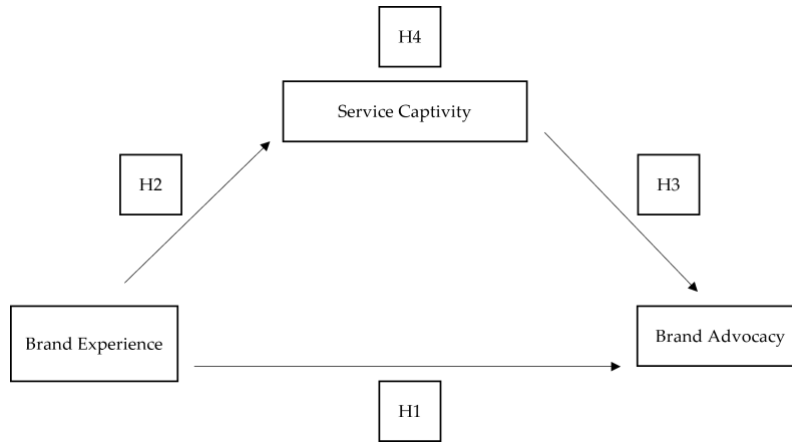


Figure 1. Research Model

3.2. Sampling and Participants

A survey was conducted among passengers who had flown with at least one airline in the past 12 months. The objective of the survey is to ensure whether airline passengers accurately recall their brand-related travel experiences. Respondents were asked to rate the airline they used most frequently over the past 12 months using the scale items. A total of 471 responses were obtained. On the other hand, 44 respondents indicated that they had not travelled by air during the previous year and were therefore excluded from further analysis. Therefore, the final analytical sample consisted of 427 participants.

The final sample size of 427 was deemed highly adequate for Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM), as it comfortably exceeds the widely recommended minimum threshold of 200 observations for evaluating complex structural models and ensuring sufficient statistical power (Hair et al., 2019).

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Google Forms is used for the questionnaire which is administered online between December 20, 2025 and January 14, 2026, utilizing a convenience sampling technique. The target population will be reached through the survey link, which will be distributed via professional and social networking platforms, including LinkedIn, Instagram and WhatsApp. In the questionnaire, respondents were first asked to identify the airline and instructed to answer all subsequent scale items with reference to that airline. This procedure was chosen to ensure that all brand-related experiences were anchored in a specific airline context rather than in general airline travel experiences.

A pilot study was conducted with 49 participants in order to assess item clarity, response flow, and the preliminary internal consistency of the adapted Turkish survey prior to the collecting main data collection. In response of pilot feedback, minor revisions were made to the text to enhance its clarity and conciseness.

Respondents voluntarily took part in the study. On the first page of the questionnaire, they were informed that the study formed part of a doctoral research project and that their responses would be used exclusively for scientific purposes. Respondents were assured that their anonymity would be protected. Also, they were informed that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Electronic consent form was obtained from all respondents before they answered to the questionnaire. The consent form also stated that personal data would be processed in accordance with the relevant scientific research provisions of Türkiye's Personal Data Protection Law (KVKK No. 6698). Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Başkent University Social Sciences Ethics Committee on August 6, 2025, with decision number 482368.

3.4. Measures

All questions were measured using multi-item scales adapted from prior literature. Language of the questionnaire was Turkish, and all questions were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). It is assured that all respondents answered the questionnaires with reference to the airlines they used most frequently during the previous 12 months.

Brand experience was measured using the twelve-item scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009). This scale captures sensory, affective, behavioural responses, and intellectual considerations as part of brand-related experience.

Brand advocacy was measured using a five-item scale adapted from Wilder (2015). In this measurement, passengers' willingness are focussed on to recommend and defend the airline brand. Service captivity was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Rayburn et al. (2024). The dimensions of lack of alternatives, loss of control/power, and silence/forced continuation was covered. To establish linguistic validity and cross-cultural equivalence, a systematic forward- and back-translation procedure was executed. Initially, the original English scale items were translated into Turkish in collaboration with the academic thesis advisor. Subsequently, a formal back-translation (Turkish to English) was conducted by two independent academic experts fluent in both languages to identify and rectify any semantic discrepancies. Following the alignment of the translated items, a pilot study was conducted with 49 participants to evaluate item clarity, readability, and response flow prior to the main data collection, which confirmed that the items were unambiguous and contextually appropriate.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using PSPP for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 4 for structural equation modelling. In line with the two-step approach recommended for CB-SEM research, the analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed in terms of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. Statistical significance was assessed at the .05 level using bootstrapping procedures.

Brand experience was modelled using the Brakus et al. (2009) scale. Prior to analysis, the reverse-worded items were reverse-coded. Service captivity was initially modelled using the 10-item scale by Rayburn et al. (2024); however, one item from the silence dimension was removed due to unsatisfactory loading performance. The final service captivity constructs therefore retained nine items across three dimensions. Brand advocacy was assessed as a single factor construct with five items adapted from Wilder (2015).

Within SmartPLS 4, the measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The structural model was evaluated using collinearity diagnostics, path coefficients, bootstrapped t-values and p-values, and the indirect effect estimate for the mediation test.

To test the hypothesized relationships, the structural equation modeling (SEM) was executed using the Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) module integrated into SmartPLS 4, rather than the traditional variance-based Partial Least Squares (PLS) algorithm. Consequently, evaluating the global model fit through traditional covariance-based indices—such as Chi-square (χ^2/df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)—is methodologically appropriate and necessary to confirm the structural integrity of the model before path estimation.

During the initial evaluation of the measurement model, an iterative item-refinement procedure was carried out based on standardized factor loadings and content validity criteria. Specifically, one item from the affective dimension of brand experience and one item from the behavioral dimension exhibited a weak factor loading (below 0.40) and failed to contribute to the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) thresholds, leading to their exclusion. Additionally, one item from the 'silence' dimension of the service captivity scale (Q24) was dropped due to unsatisfactory indicator reliability. The removal of these specific indicators successfully enhanced the composite reliability (CR) and discriminant validity of the remaining latent constructs, satisfying the rigorous psychometric criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2019). However, although Figure 2 indicates that a few specific indicators (e.g., Q21 and Q22 for Service Captivity) yielded standardized loadings below the traditional 0.40 threshold, these specific items were deliberately retained in the final model. Their retention was necessary to preserve the content validity and theoretical integrity of the 'loss of control/power' dimension (Rayburn et al., 2024), and their inclusion did not critically degrade the overall structural model fit.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Information	Group	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	221	51.8
	Female	206	48.2
Age	18-25	2	0.5
	26-33	131	30.7
	34-41	74	17.3
	42-49	88	20.6
	50 +	132	30.9
	High School	5	1.2
Education	Bachelor's degree	220	51.5
	Graduate	128	30.0
	Doctoral	74	17.3
Monthly Income	30.000 TL and below	5	1.2
	30.001-50.000 TL	10	2.3
	50.001-70.000 TL	23	5.4
	70.001-90.000 TL	40	9.4
	90.001-110.000 TL	69	16.2
	110.001-130.000 TL	57	13.3
	130.001-150.000 TL	169	39.5
	150.001 TL and above	54	12.7
Most Frequently Used Airline	Turkish Airlines	162	37.9
	Pegasus	141	33.0
	Ajet	104	24.4
	SunExpress	13	3.0
	Air Arabia	4	0.9
	ASEAN Airlines	2	0.5
	Private Jet	1	0.2

Table 1 presents the profile of the study participants, including both demographic characteristics and the airline most frequently used by respondents during the previous 12 months. The following conclusions can be drawn for the respondents from the results: the proportion of male respondents was 51.8%, while the proportion of female respondents was 48.2%. This suggests that the gender distribution was relatively balanced. The majority of the sample was concentrated in two age groups: 55+ (30.9%) and 26–35 (30.7%). The educational level of the sample was notably high, with 98.8% of respondents holding at least a bachelor's degree, while 47.3% had completed graduate or doctoral education. In terms of monthly income, the largest share of participants (39.5%) fell within the 130,000–150,000 TL bracket, indicating a relatively affluent sample.

Respondents were also asked to identify the airline they had used most frequently during the previous 12 months, and all scale items were answered with reference to that airline. The most frequently cited airline was Turkish Airlines (37.9%), followed by Pegasus (33.0%) and Ajet (24.4%). Smaller proportions of respondents referred to SunExpress (3.0%), Air Arabia (0.9%), ASEAN Airlines (0.5%), and private jet operators (0.2%). The distribution indicates that respondents' evaluations were anchored primarily in the context of the three dominant airline brands in the sample.

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics

Construct / Dimension	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Brand Experience	0.865		
Sensory (BE)	0.831	0.831	0.631
Affective (BE)	0.751	0.808	0.680
Behavioural (BE)	0.552	0.568	0.394
Intellectual/Cognitive (BE)	0.737	0.739	0.489
Service Captivity	0.896		
No alternatives (SC)	0.924	0.926	0.810
Loss of control/power (SC)	0.801	0.789	0.570
Silence/forced continuation (SC)	0.957	0.959	0.884
Brand Advocacy	0.900	0.897	0.639

The measurement model was assessed in terms of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, the majority of constructs and dimensions exhibited satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70. In particular, service captivity ($\alpha = 0.896$) and brand advocacy ($\alpha = 0.900$) demonstrated strong reliability.

Convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted (AVE). Most dimensions met or exceeded the recommended 0.50 threshold. For example, the AVE values for the sensory (0.631), affective (0.680), and brand advocacy (0.639) constructs were satisfactory. Although the AVE of the intellectual/cognitive dimension of brand experience (0.489) was slightly below the conventional cut-off, it was retained because its composite reliability remained above acceptable levels, indicating marginal but still defensible convergent validity.

The behavioural dimension of brand experience demonstrated a lower internal consistency ($\alpha=0.552$). Despite falling below the conservative 0.70 threshold, this dimension was deliberately retained in the model to preserve the content validity and theoretical completeness of the well-established, multidimensional Brand Experience scale (Brakus et al., 2009). Dropping a core conceptual pillar of the construct would severely undermine the holistic evaluation of passenger experiences. To enhance psychometric quality, indicator refinement was executed by removing low-loading items (Hair et al., 2019), and as noted in exploratory or cross-culturally adapted contexts, reliability coefficients between 0.50 and 0.60 can be deemed acceptable for structural pathways, provided that the overall construct's composite reliability remains defensible (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 3. Model Fit Indicators

Fit Index	Acceptable fit Values	BE	SC	BA
χ^2/df	< 3	2.011	2.338	6.149
RMSEA	< 0.06	0.049	0.057	0.112
SRMR	< 0.08	0.029	0.039	0.025
CFI	> 0.95	0.989	0.971	0.979
TLI	> 0.95	0.981	0.945	0.958
GFI	> 0.90	0.980	0.983	0.969
AGFI	> 0.90	0.957	0.990	0.907

Selected model fit indices for the individual construct assessments were reported in Table 3. The fit values for brand experience and service captivity were generally satisfactory across multiple criteria. However, the results were mixed for brand advocacy. Although incremental fit indices such as CFI and TLI were acceptable, the χ^2/df and RMSEA values were above commonly recommended thresholds. Therefore, the brand advocacy measurement model should be interpreted as acceptable but not without potential item-level limitations.

Table 4. Correlations

	Brand Experience	Brand Advocacy	Service Captivity
Brand Experience	0.794		
Brand Advocacy	0.615	0.799	
Service Captivity	-0.202	-0.197	0.868

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the focal constructs. As shown in Table 4, brand experience was positively correlated with brand advocacy ($r = 0.615$). This indicated that more favorable brand-related experiences were associated with stronger advocacy tendencies. In contrast, service captivity was negatively correlated with both brand experience ($r = -0.202$) and brand advocacy ($r = -0.197$). These associations are aligned with the theoretical expectation that positive brand experience is related to lower perceived captivity and stronger supportive behaviour toward the airline brand.

Discriminant validity was first evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The results indicated that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with the other constructs. This supports adequate discriminant validity at the construct level.

In addition, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) was used in line with current PLS-SEM recommendations to examine discriminant validity. For four different dimensions of brand experience, the HTMT values were 0.766 for affective-cognitive, 0.569 for sensory-cognitive, and 0.867 for sensory-affective. For the dimensions of service captivity, the HTMT values were 0.395 for loss of control/power-lack of alternatives, 0.620 for loss of control/power-silence/forced continuation, and 0.484 for lack of alternatives-silence/forced continuation. Overall, these values were below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90. This supports acceptable discriminant validity. However, the HTMT value between the sensory and affective dimensions of brand experience (0.867) was slightly above the more conservative 0.85 threshold. Therefore, it should be interpreted with some caution.

When considered as a whole, the findings suggest that the constructs demonstrate acceptable discriminant validity. Thus, the subsequent assessment of the structural model was enabled.

4.1. Hypothesis Testing and Structural Model Results

Hypothesized direct relationships among brand experience, service captivity, and brand advocacy were tested by evaluating the structural model presented in figure 2.

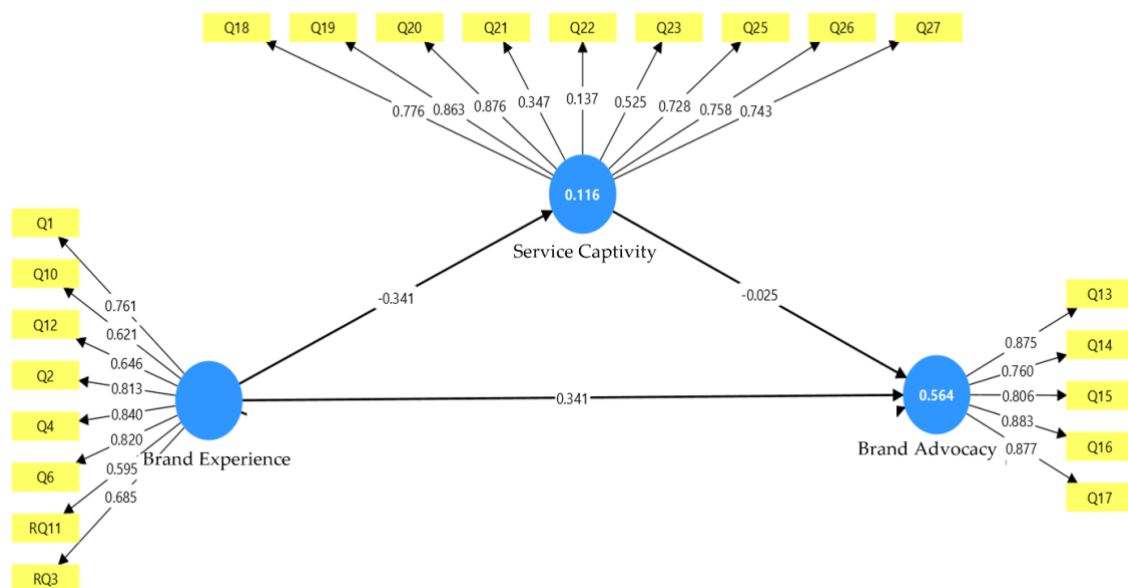


Figure 2. Structural Model Subjected to Hypothesis Testing

Two of the three direct hypotheses were supported as presented in Table 5. Statistical significance was assessed based on bootstrapped t-values and p-values.

Hypothesized direct relationships among brand experience, service captivity, and brand advocacy were tested by evaluating the structural model presented in figure 2. Prior to evaluating the direct path coefficients, the structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power, explaining 56.4% ($R^2=0.564$) of the variance in Brand Advocacy, 34.9% ($R^2=0.349$) of the variance in Consumer-Based Brand Equity, and 11.6% ($R^2=0.116$) of the variance in Service Captivity. Two of the three direct hypotheses were supported as presented in Table 5. Statistical significance was assessed based on bootstrapped t-values and p-values.

Table 5. Structural Model Results (Direct Effects)

Structural Path	Path (β)	T-value	p-value	Effect Size (f^2)	95% Bootstrap CI [LL, UL]	Result
Brand Experience → Brand Advocacy	0.341	8.044	< 0.001	0.135	[0.258, 0.424]	Supported
Brand Experience → Service Captivity	-0.341	7.906	< 0.001	0.132	[-0.425, -0.257]	Supported
Service Captivity → Brand Advocacy	-0.025	0.678	0.497	0.001	[-0.097, 0.047]	Not supported

Hypothesized direct relationships among brand experience, service captivity, and brand advocacy were tested by evaluating the structural model. Two of the three direct hypotheses were supported as presented in Table 5. Statistical significance was assessed based on bootstrapped t-values and p-values.

Hypothesis H1 is supported with the fact that brand experience had a significant positive effect on brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 8.044$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that more favourable airline brand experiences are associated with a stronger willingness to recommend and defend the airline. Hypothesis H2 is supported with the fact that Brand experience also had a significant negative effect on service captivity ($\beta = -0.341$, $t = 7.906$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that positive brand experiences are associated with reduced perceptions of constraints or feelings of being trapped within the service relationship.

However, the effect of service captivity on brand advocacy was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.025$, $t = 0.678$, $p = 0.497$). Therefore, Hypothesis H3 was not supported. Although the coefficient was negative, as theoretically expected, service captivity did not make a significant unique contribution to explaining brand advocacy in this sample.

4.2. Mediation Test

Table 6. Indirect (Mediated) Effect Results

Indirect Path	Path (β)	T-value	p-value	Effect Size (f^2)	95% Bootstrap CI [LL, UL]	Result
Brand Experience → Service Captivity → Brand Advocacy	0.009	0.655	0.513	0.001	[-0.018, 0.036]	Not Supported

Indirect effect of brand experience on brand advocacy through service captivity was evaluated through conducting a mediation analysis using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The indirect effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.009$, $t = 0.655$, $p = 0.513$) as shown in Table 6. This result did not support hypothesis H4.

This finding indicates that, while brand experience is linked to reduced service captivity, this decline does not translate into significantly stronger brand advocacy through an indirect pathway. Instead, the findings indicate that brand advocacy is primarily explained by the direct effect of brand experience, rather than by an indirect "un-trapping" mechanism operating through service captivity.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how brand experience in the airline industry influences brand advocacy, both directly and through service captivity. The results showed that brand experience is positively related to brand advocacy. On the other hand, it was observed that brand experience has a negative relationship with service

captivity. However, it was found that service captivity itself has no significant effect on brand advocacy. Therefore, the idea that service captivity acts as a bridge between brand experience and brand advocacy has not been supported. One of the findings of these studies is that the positive brand experiences gained by airline customers indicate that they have become brand advocates for the company. This appears to result from customers feeling less constrained in their interactions with the company.

The positive correlation between brand experience and brand advocacy is a key concept in marketing. It is demonstrated that customers do not evaluate brands solely based on their basic functions. Instead, customers evaluate brands with regards of their sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural interactions with those brands (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). In airline industry, interactions with brands begin with the reservation, continue through airline operations, and culminate in the flight itself. When these interactions are positive, customers become more willing to recommend and advocate for the airline. Brand advocacy can be defined as customers actively and publicly supporting the brand. This aligns with previous researches indicating that the emotional connection formed between customers and the brand is the key factor in turning them into brand advocates (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Park et al., 2010; Wilder, 2015).

Another key finding is that a better brand experience weakens a sense of service captivity. It has been concluded that when an airline offers a high-quality experience, passengers feel less compelled to use that airline. In many services, customers may feel trapped when no other options are available or when switching brands is too expensive (Rayburn et al., 2024). This study shows that when passengers describe the airline's service as clear, consistent, and supportive, they feel less restricted by their brand-related choices. Brand experience influences both how customers evaluate a flight and whether their relationship with the airline is positive. The most significant theoretical finding of the study is that there is no significant link between service captivity and brand advocacy. 'Remaining loyal to a company' and 'actively supporting it' are the two concepts that are often confused with one another in the business world. In the service captivity concept, the high barriers set by a brand prevent customers from leaving. However, this does not encourage customers acting as brand advocates to voluntarily choose to remain with that brand. A traveller may choose to keep flying with an airline because it offers convenience or better rates yet may be reluctant to publicly advocate for it. This aligns with the "autonomy" theory this theory states that individuals are less likely to provide additional support when they feel their choices are restricted (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When customers feel their choices are restricted, they tend to make negative comments about the brand rather than act as brand advocates (Rayburn et al., 2024). The non-significant relationship between service captivity and brand advocacy can also be attributed to the structural realities of the airline sector. In markets characterized by monopoly routes or systemic operational constraints, passengers often rationalize their continued patronage out of sheer necessity rather than experiencing the proactive psychological reactance required to completely withhold passive loyalty or to actively advocate. They simply accept the structural constraints without translating this captivity into expressive brand-related communication.

The study shows that brand experience through service captivity does not lead to brand advocacy. This reveals how brand advocacy is formed. While having a good experience may reduce peoples' feeling of being trapped, it does not automatically turn them into brand advocates. Instead, the psychological benefits provided by the brand experience are positively associated with brand advocacy. These psychological benefits are coming from four dimensions of the brand experience. Also, the brand advocacy is fostered not merely by removing obstacles, but by creating positive emotions in the customer and building positive connections with them.

In summary, this study makes a valuable contribution to the field of service marketing by demonstrating that the concepts of "service captivity" and "brand advocacy" are not significantly related in this context. Service captivity may be a factor in customers' loyalty to a service provider. However, the study showed that this necessarily leads to advocacy for the brand. It is also demonstrated that customer advocacy is best fostered through meaningful and positive brand experiences. Rather than relying on rules or barriers that make customers feel they must stay, it is far more effective to encourage them to stay by delivering exceptional service.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study provides three primary theoretical contributions to the broader service marketing and consumer behaviour literature.

First, it empirically decouples the concept of brand advocacy from passive customer retention and "spurious loyalty" (Dick & Basu, 1994). While previous research often conflates repeated patronage with brand loyalty, our findings demonstrate that structural constraints (service captivity) do not foster proactive, self-expressive endorsement. By indicating that service captivity has no significant relationship with brand advocacy, this study advances the understanding that advocacy is strictly a voluntary, high-engagement behaviour driven by positive psychological ownership, rather than the mere inability to switch providers.

Second, the research enriches the literature on switching barriers and psychological reactance by positioning brand experience as a critical psychological buffer. In highly constrained service environments like the airline industry, structural limitations often trigger psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966), making consumers feel trapped. Our findings theoretically establish that superior sensory, affective, and cognitive experiences actively mitigate this feeling of captivity. This highlights that experiential marketing is not merely an additive hedonic value, but a transformative psychological mechanism that restores consumer autonomy.

Finally, by testing the mediating role of service captivity, the study offers a nuanced theoretical boundary condition for relationship marketing. The non-significant mediation reveals that simply "un-trapping" a customer or reducing switching costs is insufficient to generate brand advocates. Advocacy emerges through direct, positive experiential engagement rather than the passive elimination of negative relationship constraints. This advances the theoretical understanding of customer-company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) by highlighting that higher-order relational outcomes require proactive value creation, not just the absence of captivity.

5.2. Managerial Implications for Airlines

The study's findings offer practical insights for airline executives seeking to strengthen customer-brand relationships in highly competitive service environments. First, the results indicate that brand advocacy is more likely to stem from positive brand experiences rather than structural conditions that retain customers. Accordingly, airlines should prioritize designing positive experiences where passengers encounter clear and meaningful interactions that provide emotional value throughout their journey.

Second, the inverse relationship between brand experience and service captivity implies that experience design must go beyond merely generating satisfaction; it must actively reduce friction and perceived constraints. By implementing transparent communication, accessible support channels, and user-friendly technologies, airlines can help passengers feel they are choosing the service voluntarily. Thus, minimizing perceived captivity should be viewed as an integral part of effective service design rather than a standalone retention strategy.

Third, managers must recognize that customer retention does not equal brand advocacy. Relying on structural barriers—such as punitive cancellation policies or rigid loyalty programs—may maintain short-term patronage but will not foster voluntary public endorsement. Consequently, airlines should track advocacy metrics separately from behavioral retention rates to distinguish between passengers who stay out of necessity and those who genuinely champion the brand. Ultimately, cultivating true advocates requires investing in coherent brand experiences rather than depending on mechanisms that simply make switching difficult.

Finally, the results suggest that airlines should monitor brand advocacy as a distinct strategic outcome, rather than if repeat purchase or loyalty-program participation automatically signals customer endorsement. It would be beneficial for managers to track advocacy-related indicators separately from behavioural retention metrics, to distinguish between passengers who remain with the airline out of necessity and those who genuinely support and recommend the brand. From a strategic standpoint, this study indicates that airlines are more likely to cultivate advocates by investing in meaningful and coherent brand experiences than by relying on structural barriers that make exit more difficult.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

It should be noted that this study has certain limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to draw strong causal inferences. Future research could better examine the relationships by employing longitudinal designs. Second, data were collected from a single source, which introduces the potential risk of common method bias (CMB). Although procedural remedies (e.g., ensuring participant

anonymity and separating scale items) were applied during data collection, future studies should strengthen findings by incorporating multi-source data or objective behavioural metrics. Third, the sample was obtained through a non-probability convenience and snowball sampling approach, resulting in a disproportionately highly educated and affluent demographic profile. This, along with focusing primarily on the three most frequently mentioned airlines in Türkiye, may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader or more diverse passenger populations. Fourth, the structural model did not include specific control variables such as passenger age, flight frequency, or prior flight disruption experiences, which could potentially influence perceived captivity and advocacy. It is recommended that future research address these demographic and behavioral controls. Finally, since the mediating role of service captivity was not supported, future studies could examine alternative mediating mechanisms such as brand trust, customer-company identification, or perceived value.

DECLARATIONS

Generative AI Statement: Generative artificial intelligence tools were used solely for language editing and improving the clarity of the text during the preparation of this study. These tools were not used to produce research data, perform statistical analysis, interpret findings, or generate scientific conclusions. The authors have critically reviewed all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the published study.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement: İpek Cansev Tavukçuoğlu Tetik: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft. Selay Ilgaz Sümer: Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that they have no financial, commercial, personal, or professional conflict of interest that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, interpretation, or publication of this research.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study were collected by the authors through a primary survey (N = 427) administered via Google Forms. Due to participant confidentiality and the terms of the informed consent under which the data were collected, the dataset is not publicly available; it may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding Statement: The authors received no financial support from any institution or organization for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval: The ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Başkent University with the decision dated August 06, 2025, and numbered 482368.

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