THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE BRAND EQUITY FOR SPORTS BRANDS (1)

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Abstract: Aim: This study aims to determine the attitudes of the target groups on this issue to investigate the effects of perceived corporate social responsibility on the brand equity of sports brands. The research included 260 students from the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Muğla Sıktı Koçman University.

Method: The form, which was applied to students, included demographic information, sports brand attitude scale, and brand equity scale. In the analysis of the data, number, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistical methods. The t-test was used to compare continuous quantitative data between two independent groups. One-way ANOVA test was used to compare continuous quantitative data between more than two independent groups. The Scheffe test was used as a complementary post-hoc analysis to determine the differences after the Anova test. Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze the relationship between the continuous variables of the study.

Results: It was determined that the students' perceived social responsibility averages were weak, the attitudes towards sports brands were moderate, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association averages were weak, the average of the brand loyalty scores was moderate. There were positive relationships between perceived corporate social responsibility and all dimensions of brand equity.

Conclusion: According to the results, it was found that attitude towards sports brands and perceived corporate social responsibility increased the level of brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association; perceived social responsibility did not affect the level of brand loyalty.

Key Words: Sportswear Industry, Brand Equity, Corporate Social Responsibility, Young Consumer

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility is one of the most discussed global phenomena that influence organizational performance in different contexts (Sindhu ve Arif, 2017). In a rapidly changing world, businesses endeavor to fulfill their social responsibilities by carrying out various activities that seek to resolve social problems, while also working to create a positive corporate image and brand perception by satisfying the emotional expectations of their consumers (Akkoynolu ve Kalyoncuoğlu, 2014).

CSR has been defined as a company’s commitment to minimizing or eliminating its harmful effects on society and maximizing its long-term beneficial impact (Mohr, Webb and Haris, 2001; Trendafiova, Ziakas and Sparvero, 2017). Recently, with increasing environmental concerns worldwide, the discussion on CSR to incorporate activities that regenerate the quality of our natural environment has rapidly increased. Since the past couple of decades, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been attracting increasing attention (Huang, Wu, and Gaya, 2017). CSR is particularly important for large brands as it represents a source of competitive advantage (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). CSR is known to improve both corporate image and brand image, and it ultimately helps enhance purchase intention (Balmer and Greyser, 2006).

As a significant sector in the world economy, with its broadcasting rights, merchandising and sponsorship agreements, the sports industry has recognized the importance of CSR programmes (Breitbarth ve Harris, 2008; Trendafiova, Ziakas and Sparvero, 2017). Financial reasons, in efforts to maintain legitimacy, and in response to social pressures, sports organizations increasingly engage with corporate social responsibility (Weems et al., 2017).

The philosophy of many sports brands has changed the last few years. Quality, traceability, environmental health, and social responsibility have become more important than ever before. Almost all professional organizations and sports teams began to engage in various forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in recent years. This is because CSR can provide financial benefits to increase the public opinion of an organization, increase brand loyalty, and attract potential talent for a firm (Erickson, 2009). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an area of great interest, yet little is known about how CSR is perceived and practiced in the professional sports industry (Sheth and Babiak, 2010). Despite the level of CSR–brand integration, the idea is to consider CSR as a consistent part of how the brand behaves. The aim is to understand CSR as an integrative part of a brand and not only as an instrument for improving sales or reputation.
with all the implications and consequences that result from such a strategic shift (Gollob and Podnar, 2018). According to Maignan and Ferrell (2001), customers favor companies that have a good corporate image. CSR practices by companies will build a strong corporate reputation, known as intangible assets, and brand equity.

The global sportswear market is highly competitive, and it is one of the most heavily branded areas in the global apparel market (Tong and Hawley, 2009). The sportswear brands are dedicated to create strong brand equity and build brand loyalty by creating a strong and distinctive brand personality. Sportswear brand personality enhances the effectiveness of marketing communications efforts (Su and Tong, 2015). Brand equity (BE) has multiple definitions, which traditionally reflect brands with a commercial lens (Yoo et al. 2000; Naidoo and Abratt, 2018). BE considers the differentiation effect that the customers’ knowledge of the brand has on the customers’ response to a product or service, the overall utility that customers place in a brand compared to its competitors (Keller 1993; Chekalina et al., 2018).

We must understand the BE as a concept created and maintained in the mind of the consumer, and therefore, to estimate it, it will be necessary to know and to understand the perceptions of the market related to the brands that, in each case try to compete. (Vilarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007). Perceptual and behavioral components of BE are significant elements of branding and have been extensively discussed in the marketing domain (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Forudi et al., 2018). Brand equity refers to the value derived from consumer recognition of the overall superiority of a particular brand, which raises a firm’s competitive advantage based on brand value propositions besides low price (Lassar et al., 1995). Moreover, the outcome of BE is consumer’s purchase intentions (Aaker, 2009). It would not be possible to determine a brand’s value without analyzing all elements of which it is composed: the perceived quality, loyalty towards the brand, recognition of the name, and the images associated with the brand (Vilarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007). Prior studies in the branding literature have examined the relationship between specific dimensions of brand equity (e.g., brand trust) and attitudinal or stated measures of behavioral loyalty and have found a strong positive relationship between them (Hariharan et al., 2018).

Aaker (1991) classifies brand equity assets and liabilities into five categories: brand loyalty; name awareness; perceived quality; brand associations; and other proprietary assets (e.g., patents). Keller (1993) distinguishes two significant components of brand
knowledge (seen as the brand equity differentiator and comparable to brand equity assets and liabilities, as defined by Aaker (1991); brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness reflects brand node strength in memory and how quickly the brand comes to mind, while brand image reflects types of associations with different levels of abstraction ’determining the differential response’ to brand equity (Keller, 1993).

Brand awareness in general is a slightly far-reaching and vague term that is impulsively recognized by individuals in most companies. It can be defined as a tool which emphasizes on defining and generating the familiarity and recognisability of a target audience towards a particular brand (Foroudi et al., 2016). Brand image has been defined as “perceptions of the brand that reflect consumer associations in the mind of the consumer” (Keller, 1993). Perceived quality is defined as “the consumer’s judgment about a product’s overall excellence or superiority” (Zeithaml, 1988; Su and Chang, 2018). Keller (2008) defines brand loyalty regarding resonance: that level of customer-brand relationship which depicts syne between the brand and its customers, and which generates peculiar behavioral outcomes such as customers actively seeking means to interact with and share their brand experiences with others. Recent studies argued that brand loyalty is an outcome of brand equity and confirmed that other brand equity dimensions influence brand loyalty (Buil et al., 2013; Su and Chang, 2018).

While corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an extensively studied phenomenon across management, marketing, and business ethics literature, there still exists a lack of clarity regarding the outcomes associated with investment in CSR.

From a marketing perspective, brand equity (BE) represents the power and reputation that an organization has in the marketplace and ultimately, due to its influence on consumer perceptions and behaviors, will influence a firm’s financial performance (Kim et al., 2003; Rao et al., 2004; Yang and Basile, 2018). Since engaging in CSR is an increasingly common business practice across countries and industries (Seok-Sohn et al., 2012), most fashion companies have conducted CSR even without insights about which CSR activities have more significant influence: at the corporate level or brand level. Therefore, it is necessary to academically study how the implementation of corporate-level or brand-level CSR has a positive effect on the corporate image, brand image, and purchase intention. To explain the increasing purchase intention by corporate-level and brand-level CSR, we employ reciprocity. This study was carried out to investigate the effects of corporate so-
cial responsibility projects in the sports brand industry on the components of brand equity.

**MATERIAL and METHODS**

In this study, the effects of perceived corporate social responsibility and attitude towards sports brands on brand equity were tried to be determined.

2.1. Research Group

Having considered that the young generation comprises the significant consumers for sportswear products (Dickson et al., 2004), the target population of this study was defined as university students as young shoppers. The research included 260 students from the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University.

**Data Collection Tools**

The form included demographic information, brand choices, sports brand attitude scale, and brand equity scale. In this study, the general purpose of CSR and its impact on consumers’ brand perception were questioned, thus, in the future CSR activities of the enterprises, the findings related to the general thought of the target groups have been tried to be obtained. The study aims to determine the effectiveness of CSR activities in brand perception and to make extensive evaluations for future studies. For this reason, while creating the model, the brand perception was measured by the elements in the brand equity model of Aaker (1991).

**Model of Research**

- Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility
- Attitude Towards Sports Brand
- Brand Awareness
- Perceived Quality
- Brand Loyalty
- Brand Association

![Figure 1. Research Model](image-url)
The hypotheses of this study, which was conducted to determine how the corporate social responsibility and attitude towards sports brand affect brand equity dimensions are as follows:

**H1. Perceived social responsibility activities have impacts on the elements of brand equity.**

H1a: Perceived social responsibility has an impact on brand awareness.

H1b: Perceived social responsibility has an impact on perceived quality.

H1c: Perceived social responsibility has an impact on brand loyalty.

H1d: Perceived social responsibility has an impact on brand association.

**H2. Attitude towards the sports brand has an impact on brand equity.**

H2a. The attitude towards sports brand has an impact on brand awareness.

H2b. The attitude towards sports brand has an impact on perceived quality.

H2c. The attitude towards sports brand has an impact on brand loyalty.

H2d. The attitude towards the sports brand has an impact on brand association.

Consumer-based brand equity model is emphasized, the form was designed by examining the studies of brand equity of Akkoyunlu and Kalyoncu (2014) and Aaker (1991, 1996) in CSR activities, CSR scale of Sert (2012) and sports brand attitude scale of Ariboğan (2018). The questionnaire form consists of 4 sections: demographic information, sports brand attitude scale, corporate social responsibility scale and brand equity (brand awareness).

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows 22.0. In the analysis of the data, number, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistical methods. The t-test was used to compare continuous quantitative data between two independent groups. One-way ANOVA test was used to compare continuous quantitative data between more than two independent groups. The Scheffe test was used as a complementary post-hoc analysis to determine the differences after the Anova test. Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze the relationship between the continuous variables of the study.

**Limitations**

In the literature, although there are many studies into Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Equity which constitute the basic structure of the research, the fact that there
are few studies overlapping with the subject of the study constitutes a significant limitation. On the other hand, the study included students from Muğla Sitki Kocman University. Also, the study focused on the sports industry; thus, the result of this study may not be universally applied to other industries.

**RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

This section contains explanations and comments based on the findings obtained from the analysis of the data collected through the scales.

**Table 1. Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility, Attitudes Towards Sports Brand and Brand Equity Score Means**

|                                | N   | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. | Alpha |
|--------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | 260 | 2.178 | 0.873 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.950 |
| Attitudes Towards Sports Brand    | 260 | 2.701 | 0.537 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.766 |
| Brand Awareness                  | 260 | 2.259 | 0.776 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.884 |
| Perceived Quality                | 260 | 2.309 | 0.881 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.809 |
| Brand Loyalty                    | 260 | 2.910 | 1.024 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.739 |
| Brand Association                | 260 | 2.415 | 0.833 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.705 |

It was determined that the students’ perceived social responsibility averages were weak 2.178±0.873 (Min=1; Max=5), the attitudes toward sports brands were moderate 2.701±0.537 (Min=1; Max=5), brand awareness was weak 2.259±0.776 (Min=1; Max=5), perceived quality was weak 2.309±0.881 (Min=1; Max=5), and brand association averages were weak 2.415±0.833 (Min=1; Max=5), the average of the brand loyalty scores was moderate 2.910±1.024 (Min=1; Max=5).

Increasing the importance of enterprises on social responsibility leads to an increase in research on students. There are many studies in the literature measuring social responsibility perceptions of students. In these studies, demographic factors were used as possible explanatory variables. Kraft (1991) investigated the relative importance of work experience in social responsibility perceptions. These researches reveal that social responsibility is considered less important for undergraduate students who act as managers than finance, marketing and human resources students (Kraft, 1991). Gordon (1998) concluded that intensive reading and discussions of students in their classes had a significant
impact on social responsibility perceptions (Özalp, Tonus, and Sarıkaya, 2008). Özalp, Tonus, and Sarıkaya (2008) examined the students’ understanding of the concept and how they learned this concept in order to evaluate the level of perception of their social responsibility. The majority of the students (421 students, 57.7%) reported that they heard the concept but had no detailed information. The work experience of the sample group in our study, the low level of reading and working in the field and the fact that most of them do not work in any job can be associated with the result.

The awareness of a social variable (such as CSR) precedes the development of positive (effective) associations of that variable, and both may influence behavior. In other words, awareness of a specific CSR initiative is a precondition for an individual’s beliefs about an organization’s social responsibility. Despite this, much of the previous research on CSR implicitly assumed that individuals would naturally be aware of an organization’s CSR initiatives if they interacted with an organization at any level. However, research shows that stakeholders often have low awareness of an organization’s CSR (Morrison, Misener and Mock, 2018).
| Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | Attitudes Towards Sports Brand | Brand Awareness | Perceived Quality | Brand Loyalty | Brand Association |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------|
| r                                       | 1.000                          |                |                 |              |                  |
| p                                       | 0.000                          |                |                 |              |                  |
| Attitudes Towards Sports Brand          | r                              | 0.310**        | 1.000           |              |                  |
|                                         | p                              | 0.000          | 0.000           |              |                  |
| Brand Awareness                         | r                              | 0.454**        | 0.306**         | 1.000        |                  |
|                                         | p                              | 0.000          | 0.000           | 0.000        |                  |
| Perceived Quality                       | r                              | 0.427**        | 0.327**         | 0.633**      | 1.000            |
|                                         | p                              | 0.000          | 0.000           | 0.000        | 0.000            |
| Brand Loyalty                           | r                              | 0.136*         | 0.213**         | 0.123*       | 0.272**          | 1.000            |
|                                         | p                              | 0.028          | 0.001           | 0.047        | 0.000            | 0.000            |
| Brand Association                       | r                              | 0.479**        | 0.269**         | 0.450**      | 0.502**          | 0.372**          | 1.000            |
|                                         | p                              | 0.000          | 0.000           | 0.000        | 0.000            | 0.000            | 0.000            |

*<0.05; **<0.01
When the correlation analysis between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitude towards sports brand, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand association were examined, the correlations were as follows:

- Positive among corporate social responsibility and attitude towards sports brand \( (r = 0.31, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand awareness and perceived corporate social responsibility \( (r = 0.454, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand awareness and attitude towards sports brand \( (r = 0.306, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between perceived quality and perceived corporate social responsibility \( (r = 0.427, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between perceived quality and attitude towards sports brand \( (r = 0.327, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand quality and perceived quality \( (r = 0.633, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand loyalty and perceived corporate social responsibility \( (r = 0.136, p = 0.028 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand loyalty and sports brand attitude \( (r = 0.213, p = 0.001 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand loyalty and brand awareness \( (r = 0.123, p = 0.047 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand loyalty and perceived quality \( (r = 0.272, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand association and perceived corporate social responsibility \( (r = 0.479, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive relationship between brand association and sports brand \( (r = 0.269, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive among brand awareness and brand awareness \( (r = 0.45, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand association and perceived quality \( (r = 0.502, p = 0.000 <0.05) \),
- Positive between brand association and brand loyalty \( (r = 0.372, p = 0.000 <0.05) \)

As Deigendesch (2009) argues, ‘brands and corporate social responsibility are two sides of the same coin of entrepreneurial success.’ On the one hand, strategically integrated CSR has a substantial impact on brand image and brand equity. On the other hand, the brand is a result of all that the firm does, regarding
product offering as well as operating practices and behavior assumed in the competitive environment, especially for value generated for the company and society (Popoli, 2011). It can be asserted that the more fulfilled the consumer expectation, the more valuable the BE. A firm’s reputation arising from its ethical behavior is an essential driver of brand valuation (Holt et al., 2004).

In our study, a positive and significant relationship was found between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitude towards sports brand and all components of brand equity. Several marketing studies have found that CSR can positively affect consumers’ attitudes towards the firm and its products (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006; Mohr et al., 2001).

Lai et al. (2010) indicated that buyers’ perception of companies’ socially responsible activities influenced industrial brand performance and BE. In Koçoğlu (2016) study, according to another result obtained from the effects of the perception of corporate social responsibility on the components of consumer-based brand equity, the respect of the employees from the dimensions of the corporate social responsibility perception ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.040$), the philanthropic activities ($\beta = 0.246$, $p = 0.001$) and consumer respect activities ($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.001$) have a positive and significant effect on perceived quality, which are the components of consumer-based brand equity. Similarly, in the literature, Swaen, and Chumpitaz (2008), Lai et al. (2010) support the results of the studies.

Corporate social initiatives strengthen brand image by creating brand awareness. Here, it is aimed to create brand awareness in consumers that the brand is a part of a social campaign rather than creating brand awareness through social initiatives. In the highly competitive sportswear industry, the key is to create a unique, favorable, and strong brand image to provide customers with a reason to buy the brand, then work to keep their loyalty and gain their repeat business (Tong and Hawley 2009). One of the critical variables for the image is the CSR strategy. Businesses with CSR awareness gain significant advantages in providing customer loyalty. Before investing in a company, many investors in the world have now started to evaluate the company’s performance in social responsibility (Mohr and Webb, 2001). CSR initiatives help a company to differentiate its product and service by creating a positive brand image, and this safeguards the firm’s reputation. This approach makes CSR an integral element in a firm’s differentiation strategies and is a form of strategic investment comparable to R&D and advertising (McWilliams et al. 2006; Hsu, 2012). The businesses having an awareness of corporate social responsibil-
ity will both realize expected social responsibilities by creating brand image taking social issues into account and create brand loyalty by increasing the level of brand awareness and brand association and perceived quality (Koçoglu, 2017).

In their research Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill found that greater than 80% of respondents believed firms should engage in social initiatives and 76% felt those initiatives would benefit firms (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Brand equity is considered as an essential marketing strategy on which business should focus to ensure the trust in the brand, to perceive the products and services as quality by consumers, to decrease the perceived risk and to ensure brand loyalty with the effect of all these.

According to our results, When the correlation analysis between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitude towards sports brand, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, the brand association was examined, positive and significant correlations were found regarding all components. Similarly, these results support the studies of Hoeffler & Keller (2002), Polonsky & Jemons (2006), Niazi et al. (2012) in literature.
Table 3. The Effects of Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Attitudes Towards Branding on Brand Equity Elements

| Dependent Variable | Independent variable | β     | t     | p     | F      | Model (p) | R²    |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|
| Brand Awareness    | Constant             | 0,776 | 3,512 | 0,001 | 39,782 | 0,000     | 0,230 |
|                    | Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | 0,353 | 6,929 | 0,000 |         |           |       |
|                    | Attitude Towards Sports Brand | 0,265 | 3,194 | 0,002 |         |           |       |
| Perceived Quality  | Constant             | 0,563 | 2,228 | 0,027 | 37,178 | 0,000     | 0,218 |
|                    | Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | 0,364 | 6,238 | 0,000 |         |           |       |
|                    | Attitude Towards Sports Brand | 0,353 | 3,729 | 0,000 |         |           |       |
| Brand Loyalty      | Constant             | 1,737 | 5,347 | 0,000 | 6,899  | 0,001     | 0,044 |
|                    | Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | 0,090 | 1,207 | 0,228 |         |           |       |
|                    | Attitude Towards Sports Brand | 0,361 | 2,966 | 0,003 |         |           |       |
| Brand Association  | Constant             | 0,949 | 4,032 | 0,000 | 41,855 | 0,000     | 0,240 |
|                    | Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility | 0,418 | 7,689 | 0,000 |         |           |       |
|                    | Attitude Towards Sports Brand | 0,206 | 2,333 | 0,020 |         |           |       |

Regression analysis, which is run to determine the causal relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitude towards sports brand and brand awareness, was found to be significant (F=39,782; p=0,000<0,05). Total change in the level of brand awareness is explained by the perceived corporate social responsibility and the attitude towards sports.
brand by 23% \((R^2=0.230)\). Perceived corporate social responsibility increases the level of brand awareness \((\beta=0.353)\). The attitude towards the sports brand increases the level of brand awareness \((\beta = 0.265)\). Attitudes may be measured by asking how much people say they like the brand, feel committed to it, will recommend it to others and have positive beliefs and feelings about it relative to competing brands (Dick and Basu, 1994).

True loyalty exists only when the consumer regularly purchases the product or services and displays a strong, positive attitude towards a particular brand (Kaynak, Salman, and Tatoğlu, 2007). Managers should concentrate their efforts primarily on brand loyalty and brand image, which have high importance in the construct of brand equity. In the highly competitive sportswear industry, the key is to create a unique, favorable, and strong brand image to provide customers with a reason to buy the brand, then work to keep their loyalty and gain their repeat business (Aaker, 1991).

Brand awareness creates value in different ways. Brand awareness provides the anchor to which other associations can be linked. Recognition provides the brand with a sense of familiarity and people like the familiar. In the absence of motivation to engage in attribute evaluation, familiarity may be enough. Brand awareness can be a signal of substance. The first step in the buying process often is to select a group of brands to consider. Brand awareness can be crucial to getting into this group (Aaker 1991). Brand awareness affects consumer decision making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image (Keller 1993).

Brand awareness can be a sign of quality and commitment, letting consumers become familiar with a brand and helping them consider it at the point of purchase (Aaker, 1991). CSR initiatives help a company differentiate its products and services by creating a positive brand image, which maintains the firm’s reputation. This approach makes CSR an integral element in a firm’s differentiation strategies and is a form of strategic investment comparable to R & D and advertisements (McWilliams et al., 2006). Devinney et al. (2006) contend that the firm should be ‘more proactive about consumer social responsibility if they want their corporate social responsibility initiatives to have a greater impact.’

The regression analysis to determine the causal relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitude towards sports brand and perceived quality was found to be significant \((F=37,178; p=0.000<0.05)\). The total change in the perceived quality level is explained by the perceived corporate social responsibility and the attitude towards the sports brand by 21.8% \((R^2=0.218)\). The
perceived corporate social responsibility increases the perceived quality level (β=0.364). The attitude towards sports brand increases the perceived quality level (β=0.353). Perceived quality is defined as “the consumer’s judgment about a product’s overall excellence or superiority” (Zeithaml, 1988).

It is not the objective quality of the product but consumers’ subjective evaluations which depend on their perceptions. Similar to brand associations, perceived quality also provides value to consumers by providing them with a reason to buy and by differentiating the brand from competing brands (Su and Tong, 2015). Marketers across all product and service categories have increasingly recognized the importance of perceived quality in brand decisions (Morton, 1994). Brand managers should consider the intercorrelations among the four dimensions of brand equity, especially the relationship of perceived quality to brand association and brand loyalty, and the relationship of brand awareness to brand association and brand loyalty. While brand awareness serves as a foundation for brand image and brand loyalty, high quality enables consumers to recognize a brand’s distinctiveness and superiority and leads to consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Oliver, 1997).

Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found that consumers are sensitive to the implications of CSR activities and the company’s ability to exceed expectations. Garcia de los Salmones et al. (2005), for example, found that consumers’ perception of CSR behavior can have direct consequences in their assessment of the service and perceived service quality (PSQ) (Poolhong and Mandhachitara, 2009). The direct influence of CSR on customer satisfaction was verified by Luo and Bhattacharya (2006). On the other hand, the empirical data and statistical tests in this study did not provide enough support for the positive and direct relationship between perceived quality and brand awareness and brand equity, indicating that having high quality or having a brand name alone is not a guarantee of a successful brand in the sportswear industry. This result is also in line with some earlier studies (Yoo et al., 2000; Tong and Hawley 2009).

Regression analysis to determine the causal relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitudes towards sports brand and brand loyalty was found to be significant (F=6,899; p=0,001<0.05). The total change in brand loyalty level is estimated at 4.4% by perceived corporate social responsibility and sports brand attitude ($R^2=0.044$). Perceived corporate social responsibility does not affect the level of brand loyalty (p=0.228>0.05). The attitude towards the sports brand increases the level of brand loyalty (β=0.361). Brand loyalty is the core of
a brand’s equity, which signifies a measure of attachment that a customer has to a brand (Aaker, 1991). On the other hand, it can be observed that a consumer who is very loyal to any brand in a product group has a low level of loyalty towards a brand in another product group. In this sense, it is important to identify the differences between loyalty levels that may be valid for different consumers or different brands. The most important reason for this is that each brand loyalty level requires a different marketing effort and should be managed with different marketing staff (Aaker, 1991). The importance and necessity of creating strong brand awareness in creating brand loyalty is an undeniable fact. A strong partnership and trust between consumers and sports products are needed.

Numerous researchers have examined the attitudinal aspect of brand loyalty (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998; McCleary and Weaver, 1992). According to Jacoby and Chestnut, behavioural loyalty represents the propensity of a consumer to purchase the same brand repeatedly over time (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). Attitudinal brand loyalty focuses not only on transactional strategies, such as frequent-user programs and gifts for repeated customers but also on attitudinal variables, such as commitment and trust. Attitudinal studies have described brand loyalty not only as the outcome of repeated purchase behavior but also the consequence of multidimensional attitudes toward a specific brand (Back and Parks, 2003). Unlike many studies, Akkoynulu and Kalyoncu (2014) concluded that the participants in Turkey were not prone to change their previously used goods and service to support CSR activities because brand loyalty dimension of brand perception is the least affected by CSR.

The regression analysis to find out the causal relationships between perceived corporate social responsibility, the attitude towards sports brand and brand association was found to be significant (F=41,855; p=0.000<0.05). The total change in the level of brand association is explained by the perceived corporate social responsibility and attitude towards the sports brand by 24% (R²=0.240). Perceived corporate social responsibility increases the level of brand association (β=0.418). The attitude towards the sports brand increases the level of brand association (β = 0.206). In their research Tong and Hawley (2009) when the correlation among dimensions was specified in the structural model, the intercorrelations between perceived quality and brand association (γ=0.52, t=5.74) and brand loyalty (γ=0.52, t=6.05), and the intercorrelations between brand awareness and brand association (γ=0.69, t=6.16) and brand loyalty (γ=0.57, t=5.88) were significant and all positive. Thus, perceived quality and brand
awareness might affect brand equity by influencing brand association and brand loyalty. Many previous studies also suggested a potential causal order might exist among the brand equity dimensions (Yoo et al., 2000).

Akkoyunlu and Kalyoncu (2014) revealed that the general purpose of CSR activities was to benefit the organization and to promote the corporate image by advertising. According to the analyzes of the brand equity model of Aaker used to measure the brand perception of CSR, It has been concluded that CSR activities affect the brand perception by affecting the factors that make up the brand equity and the brand equity factor that affects the highest rate of CSR activities was brand awareness. The fundamental reason for companies to demonstrate the ability to satisfy CSR expectations in a multidimensional sphere is that the impact of a company’s social behavior on brand image is amplified by the very rapid communication flow existing in the inter-stakeholder global context. One of the principal characteristics of globalization is that a large part of popular culture has become a global culture (Holt et al., 2004; Poppoli, 2011). In their research Klein and Dawar (2004) CSR appears to influence brand evaluations directly, its impact through attributions appears to be pronounced only for those consumers who report considering a company’s CSR as relevant to their decisions. These results point to important theoretical and managerial implications. Establishing and maintaining a relationship with CSR activities between customers and the company shows that the likelihood of positive results such as CR and BE is higher (Lai et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the statistical analysis performed to test the hypotheses suggested in the study, essential findings were obtained. In the scope of the research, it was determined that the students’ perceived social responsibility averages were weak, the attitudes towards sports brands were moderate, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association averages were weak, the average of the brand loyalty scores was moderate.

There were positive relationships between perceived corporate social responsibility and all dimensions of brand equity. According to the results, it was found that attitude towards sports brand and perceived corporate social responsibility increased the level of brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association; perceived corporate social responsibility did not affect the level of brand loyalty. It was found that it did not affect brand awareness and perceived quality level, that perceived corporate social responsibility did not influence brand loyalty level, and that the
attitudes towards sports brand increased the brand association level.

Our results support our hypotheses and indicate that perceived social responsibility have positive effects on brand equity. When the correlations between perceived corporate social responsibility, attitudes towards sports brand, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand association were examined, a significant positive relationship was found between the brand equity dimension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CSR is gaining more importance every day in Turkey. Branding and product images are becoming increasingly crucial to Turkish consumers, just as they are to those in Europe and the USA. Increasing the sensitivity of the consumers and the economic level, and purchase preferences increase the images of sports brands that carry out CSR activities. Considering the socio-cultural structure of Turkish consumers, it is known that CSR activities are an essential marketing strategy that adds value to society and provides communication between the society and the enterprise. For brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty to be high, the sports brand industry generally places emphasis on consumer-based brand equity as a whole; in particular, it would be a good practice for enterprises to develop individual strategies for each component due to the fact that the components of consumer-based brand equity affect each other.

If it is considered that the program was limited research groups and carried out with limited resources, studies with similar content but more consumers may provide more effective results.

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