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Research Article

THE EFFECT OF PERCEPTION TOWARDS CHOCOLATE BRANDS ON PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

Chocolate is one of the most consumed products in daily life. This research aims to examine the effect of consumers' perceptions of chocolate brands on their purchasing behavior. For this purpose, a survey was administered to 399 people who consume chocolate. Explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis was applied to the collected data. Then, structural equation analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses in the research. According to the data obtained from the research, consumers' perceptions of chocolate brands have a significant and positive effect on purchasing behavior. In addition, the brand quality, price, brand image and brand awareness perceived by chocolate consumers and the chocolate sales environment also positively affect consumers' purchasing behavior. In line with these results, suggestions were made to companies.

Keywords: Chocalate Brand, Image, Purchase Behaviour

Introduction

The chocolate industry is one of the sectors with intense competition and a wide range of opportunities (Muda and Aslami, 2022). Many brands such as Ülker, Eti, Nestle, Milka, Sarelle, Kinder, etc. compete in the Turkish chocolate market. In this direction, many brands offer a variety of chocolate with different prices, quality and brands to consumers in intense competition. Chocolate has now turned into a symbolic product consumed for pleasure, aconsumption experience and even addiction rather than a commercial product. The reason for this transformation in consumption behaviour is seen to be related to the proliferation and diversification of chocolate brands in the sector. As a result of the proliferation of brands, competition has increased and brands have invested in brand strategies to gain advantage in their products (Demo, Scussel and Azevedo, 2021).

Chocolate Brands need to continuously create product innovation and a positive brand image in order for their brands to be preferred by consumers in the intensely competitive environment. With a positive brand image, the market share of products or services is expanded by creating a well-known brand, increasing awareness, and ensuring consumer loyalty. However, although firms can imitate the products of other firms with which they compete, the brand image created in the minds of consumers cannot be imitated (Muda and Aslami, 2022). With brand image, functional, social, physical, psychological and health risks perceived by consumers are reduced. In other words, consumers think that they do not take these risks with the confidence they have in the brand in line with the brand image created (Eminler, 2012).

Consumers' purchasing behavior is influenced by the positive brand image created by brands (Sari and Yuniati, 2016). Even when consumers do not have information about the product, the brand of a product can affect their purchasing behaviour. Ünüsan, Pirtini and Bilge (2004) state that consumers prefer branded products when they have to choose between products with the same features and price. According to Erdil, Tığlı and Kitapçı (2004), consumers who have information about a brand repurchase the product of the same brand. This

situation is effective for consumers to buy other products of the same brand. The positive brand image created by the company can ensure the permanence of the brand and its permanence in other products produced. While the positive image in other products supports the image of the brand, it contributes to the strengthening of the image of the company. In this direction, depending on the brand image, a common power occurs between the consumer's purchasing behaviour and the consumer's purchasing behaviour. In this context, the study aims to examine the effect of brand image on chocolate purchasing behavior. This situation constitutes both the importance and the original value of the research.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the research focuses on chocolate, perception towards chocolate brands and purchasing behavior.

Perceptions of Chocolate and Chocolate Brands

Chocolate is defined as a type of sweet food made by adding sugar, milk, peanuts, hazelnuts, etc. into cocoa. It is divided into types as dark, milk, white, filled, praline. Dark chocolate contains at least 35% cocoa dry matter, while milk chocolate consists of at least 25% cocoa dry matter and at least 3.5% milk fat. White chocolate contains at least 20 % cocoa butter and at least 14 % milk dry matter and 3.5 % milk fat, while the outer coating of the filled chocolate contains one of dark, milk, white, etc. chocolates covering 25 % of its total weight Praline chocolate consists of a combination of dark, milk, abundant milk, white chocolate or any of them (Artık and Özhan, 2012).

The origin of chocolate dates back to Mexico, where the Maya, Inca and Aztec cultivated the cocoa tree and described it as "the gift of the gods". It is stated that chocolate, which is thought to have an aphrodisiac effect, was used only on special occasions for the rich at that time. In 1520, vanilla and sugar added chocolate was introduced to Europe by Spanish explorers. It is also stated that chocolate was a food consumed by the rich in this period. Later, despite its high cost, chocolate became widespread in Europe and North America. Today, although cocoa, the raw material of chocolate, is harvested in West Africa, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, most of it consumption is in developed countries (Bruinsma and Taren, 1999).

Chocolate consumption in the world varies among countries. While the highest chocolate consumption is in Europe, it is lower in Asia and Mediterranean countries (Douglass and Amann, 1999). Per capita chocolate consumption is highest in Switzerland (11.5 kg), followed by England (9.9 kg) and France (7.7 kg). It is also reported that per capita chocolate consumption in Turkey is 1 kilogram (Ondoğan, 2008). Chocolate is also considered important in terms of nutrition. According to Brown, Klein and Simmons. (1990), cocoa, which is the raw material of chocolate and contains many minerals, contains high amounts of iron. In addition, many of these minerals are used by the body. Cocoa, the main source of chocolate, is reported to have antioxidant (polyphenol) properties (Hammerstone, Lazarus, Mitchell, Rucker, and Schmitz, 1999). It is stated that mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases are lower in chocolate and cocoa consumers (Afoakwa and Mphil, 2008). It is also stated that chocolate has a positive effect on blood pressure and immune system.

Chocolate is one of the most desirable foods among consumers. However, other products that do not contain chocolate are insufficient for consumers who want to eat chocolate (Weingarten and Elston, 1991). Özdoğan (2008) examined the effect of demographic variables on young consumers' chocolate preferences and purchasing behaviors. According to the findings of the study, it was stated that young consumers buy chocolate regardless of their income level and that women consume chocolate more than men. Perceptions of chocolate brands are frequently used in research. Erciş, Yapraklı and Can (2009) reveal the relationship and differences between brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand image, brand awareness dimensions and purchase behaviour by considering strong and weak brands in the chocolate preferences of young consumers. The data obtained show that the dimensions have an effect on strong brands, but they have no effect onweak brands. However, it is stated that strong brands will be recommended now and in the future in purchase behaviour. Emari, Jafari and Mogaddam (2011) examined the mediating role of brand loyalty and brand image in brand equity in the chocolate industry. According to the data obtained, brand loyalty and brand image are expressed as important in brand equity. Bassıt (2017), in his study comparing the Turkish and Moroccan markets, measures the brand image of Ülker products. The findings indicate that the brand image of Ülker products is strong in the Turkish market, while it is at a medium level in Morocco. Puska, Beganovic and Beganovic (2018), in their study on chocolates in Bosnia and Herzegovina, measured the effect of brand image, value and satisfaction perceived by consumers on loyalty. According to the findings, brand image and value are effective on loyalty. In addition, it is stated that satisfaction affects loyalty more than the other two dimensions. Muda and Aslami (2022)

examine the effect of image factor on the purchase decision in Silverqueen chocolate brand. According to the findings, the firm should increase the price of Silverqueen chocolate products. The low price affects the brand image and it is stated that the prices should be adjusted in order to be more popular. Similarly, Suminto et al. (2022) examined brand identity, brand image and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty in their study on Silverqueen brand chocolates in Samarinda city. According to the findings of the study, brand identity and brand image are effective on brand satisfaction, but not on brand loyalty.

Brand is defined as a special name or signs that serve to identify a product or service and distinguish it from similar ones. According to another definition, brand is a symbol, name, term, sign, colour or various combinations of these that serve to identify, promote, distinguish and differentiate the goods and services of the producer or seller from its competitors (Baş, 2015). Brand image is defined as a subjective perception that takes place in the minds of consumers after they experience the product or service (Keller, 1998). According to Persson (2010), brand image in the minds of consumers includes symbolic functions that are tangible or intangible quality aspects of certain features of the product and service. Brands have their own characteristics such as texture, taste, smell, packaging, visuality, etc. These features constitute the images created by leaving permanent traces in the minds of consumers. However, the name and symbol of the brand are important for brand image. On the other hand, personal characteristics of the consumer also affect and shape the brand image. Therefore, brand image plays an important role especially when it is difficult to distinguish the product or service according to its physical quality and characteristics (Mudambi, Doyle and Wong 1997).

It is stated that the creation of a brand image by organizations helps to increase the competitiveness of the product in the market and to maintain the position of the product (Aeker, 1996). In this context, the creation of brand image by organisations contributes to their competitiveness in the market. Moreover, brand image plays an important role in purchasing behaviour. The more positive the image is, the more positive consumers are towards the brand's product (Aghekyan-Simonian, Forsythe, Kwon and Chattaraman, 2012). Wang and Yang (2010) also examine how brand image together with brand trustworthiness affect consumers' purchasing behaviour. According to the findings, brand trustworthiness has a positive effect on brand image. In addition, brand image and brand trustworthiness affect purchase behaviour. Anselmsson, Bondesson and Johansson (2014) examine consumers' willingness to pay a price premium for packaged food products and the image of brands for the price premium. While quality is the most important factor in paying a price premium, the most important brand image is that it is the country's own production product, that it is unique and that it expresses a social image. Hsieh, Pan and Setiono (2004) state that consumers' attitudes towards brand image have significant effects on their purchasing behaviour. In addition, it is stated that with a product or service with a successful brand image, consumers tend to purchase behaviour by distinguishing the brand from its competitors. Islam and Rahman (2016) state in their study that the more attractive the brand image is, the better the consumers' relationship with the brand. In this direction, brand image has a much higher value for the consumer. Foster (2016) examines whether the brand image of Amidis mineral water affects purchase behaviour. According to the findings of the study, brand image consists of three variables: attribute, utility and attitude. Attitude has more influence on brand image than attribute and utility, and brand image affects the purchase decision by 7%. In their study, Atıgan and Yükselen (2018) examine the relationship between brand attitude, brand image, brand equity and brand trust dimensions and their effects on consumer purchasing behaviour. According to the findings of the study, the dimensions are interrelated and affect consumer purchase behaviour. Puska, Begonovic and Begonovic (2019), in the Dorina brand chocolate study, address how brand image, brand influence, brand satisfaction and brand equity will affect brand loyalty. According to the findings, the most important factor for brand loyalty is consumer satisfaction while brand influence and brand equity have less influence. Brand image, on the other hand, has less effect on consumer loyalty, while brand satisfaction has more effect on brand loyalty. Hermiyenti and Wardi (2019) examine the effect of promotion, price and brand image on purchase behaviour. According to the data obtained, promotion, price and brand image affect purchase behaviour. According to a study examining the effect of consumer ethnocentrism and brand image on purchase intention, ethnocentrism and brand image are effective on the intention to purchase packaged food products (Onurlubaş and Altunışık, 2019).

Purchase Behaviour

Consumer is defined as a person who benefits from goods and services, buys and uses them. According to another definition, a consumer is a person who buys goods or services to fulfil personal or family needs, to satisfy desires and wishes (Nicosia, 1996). Consumer behaviour has been addressed for a long time since the main purpose of businesses is to achieve high sales levels and to ensure customer loyalty. According to Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2001), consumer behaviour involves a series of activities such as the

acquisition, use and disposal of products and services to meet the needs of a consumer. Consumer buying behaviour, on the other hand, is defined as the activities that the consumer performs by considering the advantages that the consumer will obtain in return for the price of a product or service (Kim, Kim, Garrett, and Jung, 2015).

Consumers go through the decision-making stage before performing purchasing behaviour. This stage consists of realising the consumer's need, wanting to obtain information, evaluating between options, making a purchase decision and postpurchase behaviour (Lamb, Charles, Joseph and Carl 1994). In addition, cultural, social, personal and psychological factors affect the purchasing behaviour of consumers (Odabaşı, 2003). Patwardhan, Flora and Gupta (2010) discussed the factors affecting consumers' chocolate an soap purchasing behaviour. Packaging, cost, availability and content were found to influence consumers' purchasing behavior when choosing chocolate and soap. Douce, Poels, Janssens and De Backer, (2012) examined the different effects of chocolate scent on consumers' behaviour. According to the study, the smell of chocolate positively affects general approach behaviour and improves purchase behaviour. Rousseau (2014) examined the effect of product label and fair trade dimensions on chocolate purchasing behaviour. It also addresses the desirability of the taste of sustainable products when compared to conventional products and price perceptions towards environmentally friendly products. According to the findings of the study, while the fair trade label affects chocolate purchase behaviour, the organic label is not effective since chocolate is seen as a product consumed for pleasure. Muda and Aslami (2016), in their study on Generation Y in Malaysia, address perceived risk, trust, reputation, utility and purchase behaviour in online shopping. According to the findings, only perceived trust and perceived reputation dimensions affect purchase behaviour. Liu and Niyongira (2017) also address consumers' food safety awareness and purchasing behaviour. The data obtained show that consumers with low education level are less concerned about food safety and perform purchasing behaviour. However, it is stated that consumers with higher education level are sensitive about food safety and perform purchasing behaviour. Pranoto and Sunaryo (2021) investigate the mediating role of consumers' money and time on impulse buying behaviour in chocolate snack products. While money positively affects emotional variables, it does not affect impulse buying behaviour. Time variable, on the other hand, does not affect emotional variables but affects impulse buying behaviour. When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are not many studies that deal with chocolate and different concepts and measure consumers' purchasing behaviors towards brand perceptions. In this context, it is thought that the study will contribute to the literature and provide data to researchers who will study and other food products.

Method

Quantitative research method and survey technique were used in this research. Quantitative research method enables the relationship between variables to be analysed (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Questionnaire is defined as a research technique consisting of a series of questions created to determine people's behaviour, attitude, etc. (Büyüköztürk, 2005). The population of the research consists of chocolate consumers. However, convenience sampling was preferred as a sampling type in terms of economic conditions and easy accessibility (Haşıloğlu, Baran and Aydın, 2015). In this context, 399 participants were reached by utilizing convenience sampling in the research (Çıngı, 2009). The data were collected through an online form reaching the participants between 1-25 June 2023.

The scale used in the study was adapted from Dugan's (2017) brand image scale. The questions in the questionnaire were evaluated by experts in the field of gastronomy and made suitable for the study. A pilot test was conducted with 50 people in order to understand whether the statements in the questionnaire were understood by the participants. Since the statements adapted as a result of the pilot test were understood by the participants, the number of samples required for the universe was completed. In total, data were collected from 399 participants. In addition, the ethics committee permission document required to collect the data obtained in the study was obtained from Eskişehir Osmangazi University Ethics Committee on 28/04/2023.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, demographic characteristics of the participants were included, while in the second part, chocolate brand image and purchasing behaviour questions were included. The data obtained from the research were analysed with structural equation model (SEM). Structural equation model is defined as a statistical method used to test the hypotheses created in the research and to analyse the relationships between variables (Hoyle, 1995). Structural equation modelling is used in many different fields such as marketing, psychology, sociology and management. While the structural equation model allows analysing the relationship between many variables, it also enables the creation of latent variables (Chin, 1998).

In this direction, the structural equation model was used since it was found to be appropriate for the purpose of the research. The model established within the scope of the research is as follows (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research Model
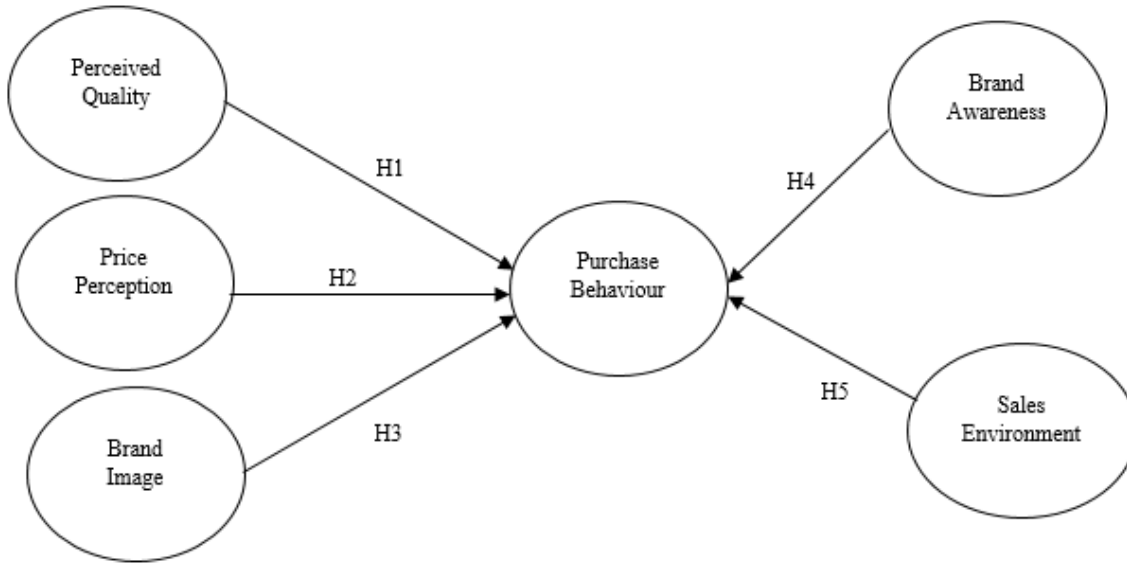
According to Figure 1, the hypotheses to be tested within the scope of the research are as follows:

H1. Perceived quality has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchase behaviour.

H2. Price perception has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchase behaviour.

H3. Brand image has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchase behaviour.

H4. Brand awareness has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchase behaviour.

H5. Sales environment has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchase behaviour.

Results

Findings on Demographic Characteristics of Participants

In the first stage of the analysis, information about the demographic characteristics of the participants was tabulated and interpreted (Table 1).

Tablo 1. Findings on Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Gender	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	204	51.1
Male	195	48.9
Age	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Generation Z	162	40.6
Generation Y	177	44.4
Generation X	60	15.0
Education Status	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
High school graduate	71	17.8
University graduate	277	69.4
Postgraduate graduate	51	12.8
Income	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
7500TL and below	63	15.8
7500-15000TL	176	44.1
15001TL and above	160	40.1
Total	**399**	**100**

When Table 1 is analysed, it is determined that 51.1% of the participants are female (204) and 48.9% are male (195). When the participants are analysed in terms of generations, 40.6% of the participants are Generation Z (162), 44.4% are Generation Y (177) and 15% are Generation X. When analysed in terms of education level,

69.4% of the participants are university graduates (277), 17.8% are high school graduates (71) and 12.8% are postgraduate graduates (51). The income status of the participants was distributed as 15,8% 7500TL and below (63), 44,1% 7501-15000TL (176), 40% 15001TL and above (160).

**Findings Regarding Participants' Chocolate Brand Preferences**

In the second stage of the analyses, the findings regarding the participants' first preferences of chocolate brands were examined (Table 2).

Table 2. Findings Regarding Chocolate Brand Preferences

Brand	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Ülker	82	20.6
Eti	78	19,5
Milka	51	12,8
Nestle	40	10,0
Tadelle	38	9,5
Godiva	35	8,8
Kinder	26	6,5
Elite	19	4,8
Other	30	7,5
Total	**399**	**100**

When Table 2 is analysed, it is seen that the most preferred chocolate brand of the participants is Ülker (82) with 20.6%, Eti (78) with 19.5%, Milka (51) with 12.8%, Nestle (40) with 10%, Tadelle (38) with 9.5%, Godiva (35) with 8.8%, Kinder (26) with 6.5% and Elit (19) with 4.8%. 7.5% of the participants preferred other (30) chocolate brands. The graph for the chocolate preferences of the participants is as follows (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Chocolate Preferences
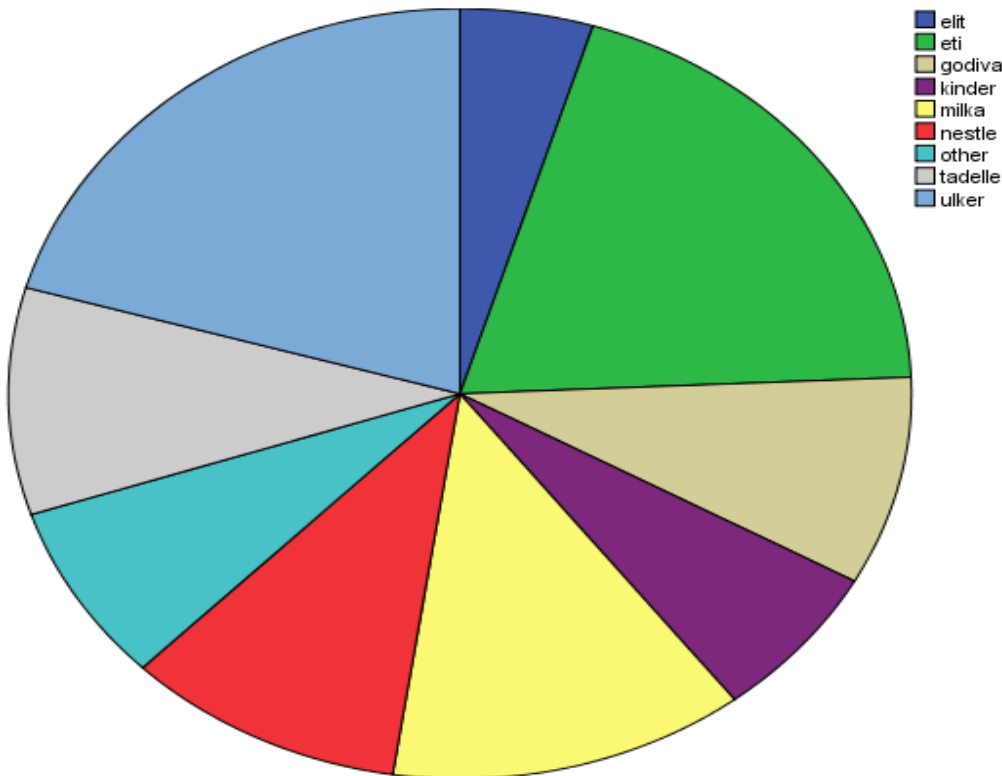
Validity and Reliability

In the third stage of the analyses, the validity and reliability of the statements in the scale were examined (Table 3).

Table 3. Reliability Analysis

Statements	Mean	Standart Error

1. I give importance to the brand when buying chocolate.	4.2381	0.66947
2. The price of a chocolate bar gives an idea about its quality.	4.0777	0.74110
3. I believe that the chocolate brand provides prestige	4.0702	0.74354
4. Advertisements of chocolate brands are effective in my purchase.	3.4336	0.87107
5. The reputation of the company producing the chocolate is effective in my purchase.	3.8672	0.69449
6. I buy chocolates with reasonable prices.	3.8647	0.69581
7. I prefer branded chocolate even if the price is high.	3.6917	0.76854
8. When I buy chocolate, I only look at the design and appearance	3.2581	0.89725
9. The emblems of chocolate brands are an important criterion for my purchase.	3.2556	0.89376
10. The opinions of the people around me about chocolate brands are effective in my purchase.	3.5564	0.77083
11. I follow discount campaigns and I find chocolate brands that are on sale more advantageous and I buy that brand.	4.2306	0.69598
12. The production of a chocolate bar should not harm the environment.	4.2381	0.69885
13. Reliability of the brand is important for me.	4.3434	0.61791
14. For my health, I buy chocolate with a known brand name.	4.3709	0.69655
15. I buy chocolate because it has the best packaging.	3.8546	0.81378
16. I buy chocolate because it has healthy ingredients.	3.8571	0.81884
17. Promoters play an encouraging role in encouraging me to buy chocolate.	3.8568	0.81576
18. I buy the brand that I have been satisfied with in chocolate before.	4.3810	0.60587
19. I can buy chocolate even if I don't need it.	4.0576	0.85900
20. It is important for me where the chocolate I will buy is produced.	4.0526	0.85932
21. I buy popular chocolate brands.	4.0501	0.85801
Cronbach's Alpha	**0.904**	

When Table 3 is analysed, the reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was found to be 0.904. This value shows that the scale has high reliability (Alpar, 2020).

Factor Analysis

After the determination of reliability, analyses related to testing the model established within the scope of the research were started. At the beginning of these analyses are exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. In this context, exploratory factor analysis was used to discover the priorities and confirmatory factor analysis was used to verify the discovered structures. For the exploratory factor analysis, firstly, KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) coefficient and Bartlett's test findings were examined to investigate whether the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis and it was determined that the values were appropriate (KMO: 0.874; Bartlett's: 0.00 and p<0.010).

Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factors	Loadings	Explained Variance %	Reliability
Perceived Quality			
PQ2	0.918		
PQ3	0.905	17.480	0.865
PQ1	0.840		
PQ4	0.762		
Price Perception			
PP6	0.917	16.395	0.842
PP5	0.904		
PP7	0.731		
Brand Image			
BI10	0.862	14.134	0.817
BI9	0.776		
BI8	0.765		
Brand Awareness			
BA11	0.884	13.639	0.893
BA12	0.883		
BA13	0.814		
BA14	0.728		
Sales Environment			
SE16	0.930	10.589	0.892
SE17	0.898		

SE15	0.822		
Purchase Behaviour			
PB20	0.923	10.447	0.889
PB19	0.921		
PB21	0.879		
PB18	0.755		
Total Explained Variance		**82.683**	

When the explanatory factor analysis findings in Table 4 are analysed, it is seen that a six factor structure was identified. The related factors are named as perceived quality, price perception, brand image, brand awareness, sales environment and purchase behaviour. The total explained variance value of the six factors was determined as 82.683. After the exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the relationships between the related structures (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis
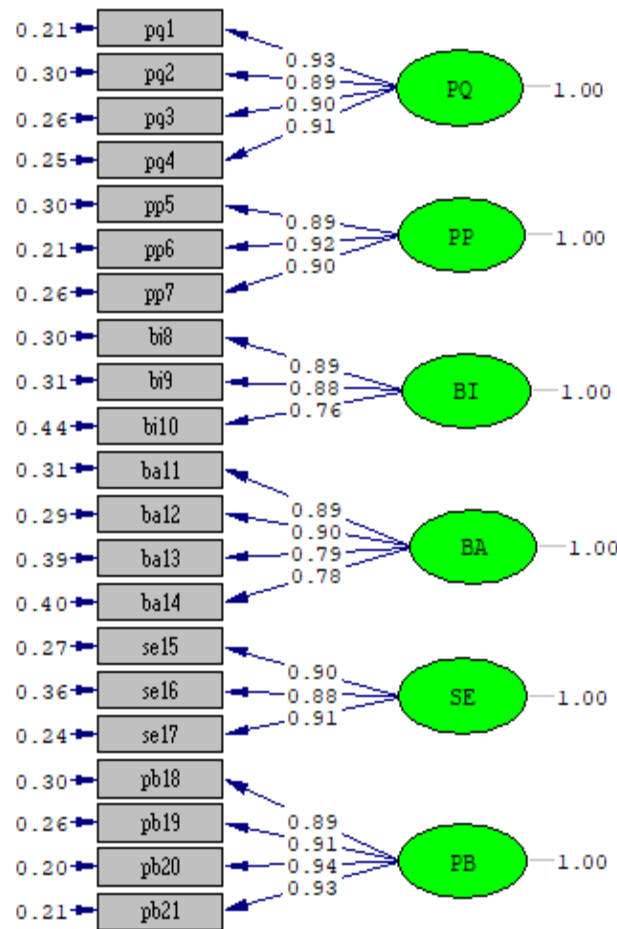
Chi-Square=418.83, df=174, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.069

As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the factors and the statements under them were distributed in accordance with the literature.

Table 5. Fit Values and Standard Fit Criteria of the Proposed Model

Compliance Criteria	Good	Acceptable	Model Value	Result
x2 / sd	$0 \leq x2/sd < 2$	$2 \leq x^2/sd \leq 5$	2.41	Acceptable
RMSEA	$0 \leq RMSEA < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.10$	0.069	Acceptable
SRMR	$0 \leq SRMR < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR \leq 0.10$	0.033	Good Fit
NFI	$0.95 < NFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq NFI \leq 0.95^{a}$	0.97	Good Fit
NNFI	$0.97 < NNFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq NNFI \leq 0.97^{b}$	0.98	Good Fit
IFI	$0.95 < IFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq IFI \leq 0.95$	0.98	Good Fit
RFI	$0.95 < RFI \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq RFI \leq 0.95$	0.97	Good Fit
CFI	$0.97 < CFI \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$	0.98	Good Fit

|				
GFI	0.95 < GFI ≤ 1.00	0.90 ≤ GFI ≤ 0.95	0.91	Acceptable
AGFI	0.90 < AGFI ≤ 1.00	0.85 ≤ AGFI ≤ 0.90	0.89	Acceptable

When Table 5 is analysed, it is found that the proposed model complies with the standard fit criteria (Çelik and Yılmaz, 2016).

Structural Equation Modelling

In the study, the relationships between the dimensions were examined through structural equation modelling (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Structural Equation Modelling

Chi-Square=418.83, df=174, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.069
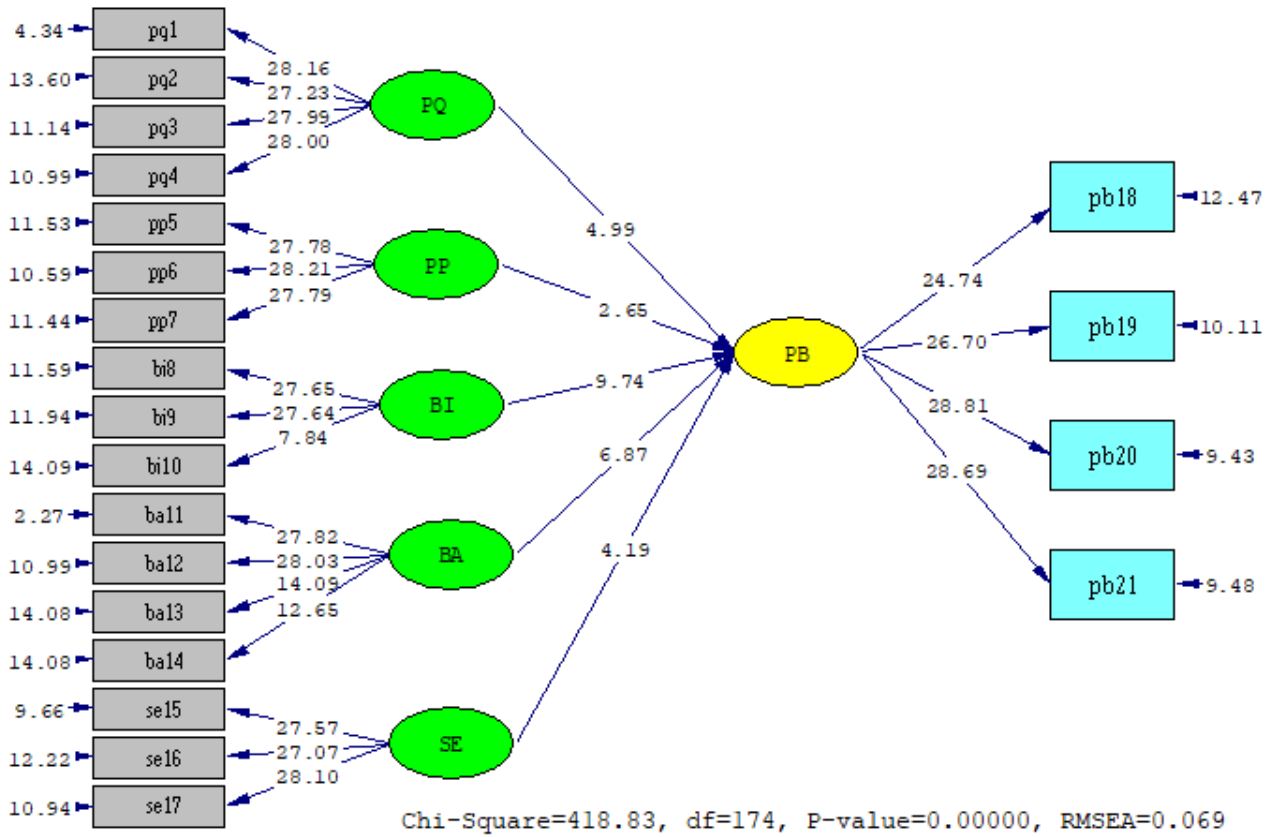
After the structural equation modeling, the findings for hypothesis testing were examined.

Table 6. Hypothesis Results

Factors / Items	Loadings	t-value	R^2	CR	AVE
Perceived Quality				0.93	0.76
(PQ)	0.93	28.16***	0.8649		
	0.89	27.23***	0.7921		
	0.90	27.99***	0.8100		
	0.91	28.00***	0.8281		
Price Perception				0.91	0.76
(PP)	0.89	27.78***	0.7921		
	0.92	28.21***	0.8464		
	0.90	27.79***	0.8100		
Brand Image				0.86	0.67
(BI)	0.89	27.65***	0.7921		
	0.88	27.64***	0.7744		
	0.76	7.84***	0.5776		
Brand Awareness				0.89	0.67
(BA)	0.89	27.82***	0.7921		
	0.90	28.03***	0.8100		
	0.79	14.09***	0.6241		

	0.78	12.65***	0.6084		
Sales Environment				0.89	0.73
(SE)	0.90	27.57***	0.8100		
	0.88	27.07***	0.7744		
	0.91	28.10***	0.8281		
Purchase Behaviour				0.93	0.78
(PB)	0.89	24.74***	0.7921		
	0.91	26.70***	0.8281		
	0.94	28.81***	0.8836		
	0.93	28.69***	0.8649		
Hypotheses			**Conclusion**		
H₁: PQ➔PB	0.23	4.99***	Supported		
H₂: PP➔PB	0.17	2.65***	Supported		
H₃: BI➔PB	0.42	9.74***	Supported		
H₃: BA➔PB	0.30	6.87***	Supported		
H₃: SE➔PB	0.21	4.19***	Supported		
***p < 0.010 (t> 2.58); **p < 0.050 (t>1.96); *p < 0.100 (t>1.65)*					

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the proposed model is in accordance with the literature in terms of construct reliability and explained variance. In addition, 3 hypotheses established within the scope of the research were also supported.

Conclusion

This research examined the effect of consumer perception towards chocolate brands on purchasing behaviour. According to the data obtained from the research, consumer perception towards chocolate brands has a significant and positive effect on purchasing behaviour. In addition, brand quality, price, brand image and brand awareness perceived by chocolate consumers and chocolate sales environment also have a significant and positive effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour. In this direction, the hypotheses formed in the research are supported. This result shows that consumers' perceptions of quality, price, brand image, brand image, brand awareness and sales environment positively affect purchase behaviour in chocolate brands. When the literature is examined, there are many different studies in which chocolate brand image perception affects purchase behaviour (Erciş, 2009; Patwardhan et al., 2010; Puska et al., 2019; Muda and Aslami, 2022; Suminto et al., 2022). Erciş et al. (2009) stated that chocolate brands that consumers perceive as strong affect their purchasing behaviour. Patwardhan et al. (2010) state that dimensions such as packaging, cost, availability, and content affect chocolate purchasing behaviour. In this context, this research study is similar to these studies. In terms of its contribution to the literature, the findings of the study show that brand quality, price, brand image and brand awareness and sales environment dimensions are effective on consumer purchase behaviour.

As a result of the research, it was determined that brand image has a statistically significant and positive effect on purchasing behavior. In this context, brand image, which is expressed as a subjective perception that takes place in the minds of consumers after they experience the product or service, has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour. For this reason, chocolate manufacturers can increase the chocolate sales of the brand and ensure the continuity of the brand by giving importance to the perceptions of consumers and gaining a place in their minds with positive effects on post-purchase behaviour. In addition, with the positive brand image created, the chocolate of the brand can be recommended by consumers to their relatives and friends. Thus chocolate businesses with a positive brand image can provide a competitive advantage over other businesses.

According to another finding obtained from the research, consumers' perceived chocolate quality, price perception, brand awareness and sales environment also positively affect purchase behaviour. The findings show that the high price of the chocolate brand is directly proportional to the perception of quality. In addition, consumers tend to prefer chocolates that are more known as a brand because they find them reliable. In this context, chocolate producers can increase their profit rates by making studies and innovations to make the content of their products better quality. Chocolate manufacturers can increase brand awareness by organizing more campaigns and create the opportunity for consumers to try their products.

Limitations and Future Studies

Some limitations were encountered during the research. Since obtaining the research data with the questionnaire technique in the quantitative method will be a limiting feature, utilising other methods in future researches may provide different results. In addition, obtaining the research data through an online form may be another limiting feature. On the other hand, convenience sampling was selected as the sample type in the

research population. Different sample types can be considered in future studies. In addition, it is thought that examining the relevant variables through the theory of planned behavior or S-O-R theory in future studies will contribute to the literature.

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