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Hedonic Benefit Perceptions, Brand Image, and Consumer Happiness in Smartphone Purchases

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Abstract

Today, the purchasing processes of technology products are shaped not only by functional utility but also by emotional and hedonic motivations. In the current age of consumption, many emotional purchasing experiences have shown that consumption is not based on rational decisions alone but is based on pleasure. Particularly in high-involvement products like smartphones, consumers associate happiness not just with technical features but also with experiential values (prestige, entertainment, aesthetics) offered by the product. However, multidisciplinary studies on how brand image mediates this relationship remain limited. The aim of this study was to determine the effect of hedonic value perception on consumer happiness and the mediating role of brand image in the smartphone preferences of consumers. The study was conducted with 396 participants living in Bursa. The convenience sampling method was used within the non-probability sampling design, and data were collected using an online questionnaire. Simple Linear Regression was used in the analysis of the study hypotheses, and to test the hypothesis related to the mediating effect, Process Macro (Model 4), developed by Hayes, was applied. The findings obtained in the study demonstrated that the hedonic benefit perception had a positive effect on consumer happiness. Brand image was also found to have a mediating effect between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness.

Keywords: Marketing Happiness, Emotional Value, Smartphone Marketing, Statement of identity, Symbolic Consumption.

JEL Codes: M31, D12, D91

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1. Introduction

Due to the great changes and transformations currently being experienced in the field of technology, smartphones have become an inseparable part of modern life. According to the We Are Social 2023 data, mobile telephones are used by 5.44 billion people worldwide (Kempt, 2023). The need created by the digital world and the wish to experience innovations explain the importance of smartphone marketing. Mobile communication technology offers pleasure to consumers with continuously updating and developing features as a result of developments which could not have been predicted in technology. In the current age of consumption, many emotional purchasing experiences have shown that consumption is not based on rational decisions alone but is based on pleasure. In addition to facilitating communication with different brands and models, smartphones are selected because of other benefits such as colour, quality, price, aesthetics, ease-of-use, and even social life image perceptions (Hubert et al., 2017; Van Cleef et al., 2010).Therefore, some studies have drawn attention to the importance of the perceived benefit to consumers in their mobile telephone preferences (Hubert et al., 2017; Van Cleef et al., 2010).

Consumers seek hedonic benefits with visually pleasing features such as colour, size and brand, and cognitive benefits such as communication benefits, ergonomics, use, usefulness, and quality at a suitable price (Arruda Filho, 2012; Petruzzellis, 2010). In the perception of the benefit of consumer happiness, which is a term recently often used in the field of marketing, the experience of consumption is based on hedonic decisions of elements of pleasure such as colour, shape, brand, appearance, and symbolic value (Anderson et al., 2013; Gaston-Breto et al., 2020; Mingione, 2020). In some consumer studies it has been suggested that consumer happiness, explained as an important criteria of the consumption experience, affects general life happiness (Braxton and Lau-Gesk, 2020; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022; Niedermeier et al., 2019; Razmus et al., 2022; Thürridl et al., 2020).

In addition to the benefit perceived of a brand by consumers, all the perceptions and attitudes towards brand experiences constitute brand image (Keller, 2003). Therefore, it has been suggested that brand image is significantly associated with the emotional attitudes of consumers (Hennigs et al., 2013; Park et al., 1986). Moreover, consumers are happy buying brands especially because of the brand image created by mass prestige (Burhanudin, 2024; Kumar et al., 2021; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Nobre et al., 2023; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). In these studies, the use of mass-known brands was evaluated as having a positive effect on the subjective well-being of consumers. This suggests that hedonic benefit and brand image factors may be asssociated with consumer happiness.

In recent years, there has been observed to be increasing interest in happiness, which is a central issue for individuals, in a broad area including the field of marketing. The concept of consumer happiness continues to develop and mature because of the involvement not only of researchers and consumers but also of businesses and practitioners. Having happy customers is important in respect of obtaining customer loyalty. The primary aim of this study was to determine the relationships between consumer happiness, hedonic benefit and brand image in the mobile telephone preferences of consumers.

The mobile telephone brand image and the hedonic benefit perceptions of smartphone users were investigated in this study. The effect on consumer happiness of hedonic benefit and the preferred brand image as a mediating variable was also investigated. Finally, the results of the hypothesis tests were discussed. There are previous studies in the literature that have examined consumer happiness and hedonic benefit and have shown a relationship between these (Gaston-Breto et al., 2020; Kaul, 2007; Kousi et al., 2023; Okada, 2005; Seva et al., 2005). Despite the increasing number of studies focusing on consumer happiness and hedonic value in various product categories, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding how brand image mediates this relationship specifically in the context of smartphone purchasing. Smartphones are not only communication tools but also status symbols that embody both functional and emotional value. In particular, few studies have explored how consumers' perceived brand image can strengthen or reshape the effect of hedonic benefits on their happiness derived from consumption. Moreover, while consumer happiness has been studied in relation to general consumption experiences, limited empirical research has been conducted that directly addresses the smartphone market, which is rapidly evolving and deeply integrated into daily life. This study aims to address this gap by examining the mediating role of brand image between hedonic benefit perceptions and consumer happiness in the context of mobile phone purchasing intentions.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1. The Relationship Between Hedonic Benefit and Consumer Development

Hedonism is a lifestyle focused only on pleasure and enjoyment. Classically defined as pure happiness, what gives the individual pleasure and other negative aspects of life are not important, but to feel pleasure as a part of life, whatever the cost, is sufficient to be happy in life (Brülde, 2007). According to

Freud, "happiness" is the feeling of pleasure. The "pleasure principle" is something that determines the aim of human life (Freud, 2015). The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristippus, explained happiness as hedonism, and evaluated happiness as a set of sensual and pleasurable, but temporary, emotions (Gaston-Breto et al,, 2020). Therefore, happiness is seen as a concept usually associated with hedonism.

Explaining hedonism in consumer behaviours, Hirschmann and Holbrook (1982) stated that the hedonistic aspect of consumers was determined by the consumption of multiple emotional and fantastic experiences related to products. Happiness, or in other words, subjective well-being, occurs from the elements of various personal experiences such as life satisfaction and hedonic pleasures (Anderson et al., 2013). In one sense, hedonic consumption exposes the strong role of stimulated feelings in the purchasing decision. Consumption is based on emotion rather than reason, is experience-focused rather than problem-solving, emotional rather than cognitive, and is directed to products loaded with symbolic meaning rather than cognitive evaluation (Kaul, 2007).

In this situation, placing hedonism as a central value of life and internalisation form the most important component of hedonic consumption (Davis, 2010). Babin et al. (1994) described hedonic shopping as both a dark and enjoyable aspect of consumption. In studies by Zhong and Mitchell (2010), the understanding of the enjoyable aspect of hedonic consumption is the perceived understanding of life as an entertainment activity and the feeling of life satisfaction was determined to have a direct effect on consumer happiness. According to research by Okada (2005), in a favourable environment people will show a tendency to have a life of entertainment, and this indulgence in entertainment is reflected in consumption, legitimising hedonic consumption. The dark aspect of hedonic consumption is explained as the momentary pleasure and satisfaction in the perceived hedonic consumption benefit. This can cause compulsive, unwilling, irrational shopping behaviours, and even unnecessary debt (Dittmar, 2005; Mueller et al., 2011). The evaluation adopted in consumer happiness is generally hedonic and directed towards entertainment and pleasure-seeking (Gaston-Breto et al., 2020). Compared with brands which put functional features at the forefront, hedonic consumption creates a stronger emotional desire in consumers (Mingione, 2020:217). For consumers who want to obtain pleasure and happiness, the feeling of pleasure as a personal value and the greatest and single motivation in life will direct them to pleasure-seeking activities (Tarka and Harnish, 2023). The presence of this enjoyment and satisfaction in consumption is reflected as hedonistic well-being (Anderson et al., 2013).

Therefore, happy customers are more interested in hedonic services, have a more positive perception of service quality, and brand loyalty is formed as a result of satisfaction (Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011). In a study of mobile telephone purchases, Hubert et al. (2017) determined that in addition to ease-of-use when buying smartphones, consumers also approached it with hedonic motivation. Van Kleef et al. (2010) stated that smartphone purchasers preferred products because of the social, personal, and hedonic benefits. Taking the research questions and findings in literature into consideration, the following hypothesis was formed:

H1: Hedonic benefit has a linear, positive effect on consumer happiness.

2.2. The Relationship Between Hedonic Benefit and Brand Image

The concept of happiness, which is the most basic component of human desire, has always been evaluated as a means of adding meaning to life, with viewpoints weighted towards subjective opinions such as positive feelings formed towards any object or any goal desired to be reached. Although scientists, researchers, and philosophers have always debated happiness and different meanings of the concept of happiness have been used, no common definition has been reached. Companies wishing to have a say in the markets have introduced the new concept of "consumer happiness" into marketing as a result of wanting to attract the interest of consumers with strategies promising happiness.

Happiness started to enter marketing literature for the first time with the realisation that emotions are a guiding force in consumer behaviours (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2023). Due to the emotional satisfaction and formation of strong desires in the consumer by brands, a new and important area of research entered the field of marketing, named as the concept of consumer happiness. The satisfaction formed during purchasing goes beyond satisfaction and by the satisfaction in the period after the purchase going beyond happiness and satisfaction, marketing creates consumer happiness (Dhiman and Kumar, 2023).

Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) defined consumer happiness as "a momentary emotional experience of consumers with brands in which satisfaction is felt by contact with different forms such as purchasing, consumption, and advertising". If the happiness felt directly by consumers related to the purchase of a product converts to general happiness, it is seen as an indispensible component of consumer happiness (Schellong et al., 2019). Desmeules (2002) stated that hedonic, experiential, and rational purchasing preferences affecting happiness first have an effect on life satisfaction and then on general life happiness.

Negative experiences with a product or brand are known to cause anger and disappointment in consumers. As people wish to have a pleasant and enjoyable experience, consumption is related to happiness. Previous studies have stated that emotional consumer behaviours when shopping are directly affected by many different emotions such as, primarily happiness, and hope, pride, gratification, excitement, relaxation, and enjoyment. Some studies explaining consumer happiness as positive emotions accept emotions as a significant criteria in consumer preference (Bagozzi et al.,1999; Mogilner et al., 2012; Richins, 1997; Laros ve Steenkamp, 2005). Mogilner et al. (2012) stated that consumer happiness occurred from positive emotions, and the tendencies of happy consumers to seek experiential marketing showed a difference according to their personal characteristics of excitement and calmness. Hellén ve Sääksjärvi (2011) claimed that consumer happiness was an external reflection of internal composure of the consumer. Accordingly, a happy consumer is described as a consumer with a tendency to be happy from products and services focussing on the beautiful aspect of life. Many products and services offer a happiness value to consumers, such as the perceived value of services such as travel, entertainment, eating drinking, and gourmet experiences (Howell and Hill, 2009; Nıcolao et al., 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003; Weingarten and Goodman, 2021), the happiness offered to ethical consumers showing environmentally friendly and socio-economic-focused consumer behaviour (Cachero-Martínez et al., 2024; Ramos-Hidalgo et al., 2022; Ruo-Fei, et al., 2022), the happiness of a healthy lifestyle offered by healthcare products and services (Block et al., 2011; Cornil and Chandon, 2016; Renner et al., 2012), and the happiness offered to consumers in digital markets (Dhiman and Kumar, 2020; Lin and Windasari, 2019). In addition, societal happiness is affected by the services provided to consumers in education, healthcare, and public sector economic and social areas (Anderson et al., 2013).

Taking the research questions and findings in literature into consideration, the following hypothesis was formed:

H2: Hedonic benefit has a linear, positive effect on brand image.

2.3. The Relationship Between Brand Image and Consumer Happiness

As brands are visible in every area of current life, they have become of great importance globally and have become a strategy for some companies to maintain their presence. The concept of brand image is the total of the emotional and cognitive impressions formed by the product in the target mass. This is formed from all the positive or negative evaluations obtained as a result of the customer experiences related to the brand (Tekin and Öztürk, 2010). Brand image essentially refers to the whole combination of everything a person associates with the brand.

As a result of the importance of brand image, researchers in the marketing world have suggested that brand image is a vital component for brand value (Phau and Lau, 2001). When the marketing process becomes more complex, consumers base their purchasing decisions on their impressions of the brand. In this respect, brand image constitutes an important element of brand value. High value brands provide the company not only with status but also competitive advantages (Aaker, 1996). This image of the brand formed formed in the eyes of the consumer can distinguish the brand from other brands.

At the stage of placing the product in the marketing planning, the stage of product differentiation forms the basis for the strategic decisions taken (Lee et al., 2014). Kapferer (2013) stated that brand image was the most effective means of communicating with the consumer, thereby showing the importance of brand image. Park et al., (1986) suggested that the success of the brand in the market depended on selection of brand identity, correct use of the image, and correct transfer of the image by the company to consumers. Therefore, a strong brand should be transferred to the target market with a rich and clear identity, because if the brand image is not compatible with consumer expectations this opens opportunities for competitors.

Taking the research questions and findings in literature into consideration, the following hypothesis was formed:

H3: Brand image has a linear positive effect on consumer happiness

2.4. The Mediating Role of Brand in the Relationship Between Hedonic Benefit and Consumer Happines

In most modern marketing activities, brands implicitly offer a happiness value to the consumer with brand image by creating the image, especially with advertising, that consumption will make the consumer happy. Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) described the brand image perceptions of consumers as the impressions and experiences related to functional, emotional, and symbolic benefits of the brand. Park et al., (1986) explained that in addition to the emotional and functional benefits of the brand, the experience satisfaction benefit was also important. Brand happiness offering benefits beyond satisfaction created through brand image is not a new term in marketing. A study by Aaker, accepted as one of the pionering studies of branding, stated ten basic principles which should be applied on the road to success for brand strategies. Within the first ten work principles in the recommendations for brands, Aaker recommended that businesses should go beyond the functional benefits of the products and services offered, and develop sustainable customer relationships with more emotional benefits that can be better described by the consumers themselves (Kotler and Keller, 2018). In this context, positive emotional attachment, which is a valuable emotion like happiness, came to the forefront and emotions have been reported to have a positive effect on the attitudes and evaluations of consumers towards brand image (Adaval, 2003; Howard and Barry, 1994).

It has recently been stated that the prestige of a brand perceived by the consumer affects emotional attachment to the brand and consumers who are strongly attached to brands are happier (Nobre et al. 2023). The search for happiness, which is reflected in every area of life has an effect on consumer choices. It has been reported that buying and experiencing products because of mass prestige and image makes consumers happy (Burhanudin, 2024; Kumar et al., 2021; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Nobre et al., 2023; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). From the mobile telephones of Samsung, Apple iPhone, and Huawei, which have a known brand image, some consumers who aim to reach their ideal self-identity have been observed to much prefer iPhone because of the perceived prestige (Nobre et al., 2023). It has been previously determined that brand image increases consumer happiness and there is an increase in purchasing frequency as a result of consumer happiness (Yoshida et al., 2021). Stating the importance of brand image in smartphone selection, Petruzzellis (2010) emphasized that the perceived image of the brand was imprinted in the mind of the consumer. Therefore, it was concluded that the benefits expected were expectations rather than the concrete benefits of the brand. These findings suggest that brand image could have a a mediating role in the relationship between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness.

Taking the research questions and findings in literature into consideration, the following hypothesis was formed:

H4: Brand image has a mediating role in the relationship between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness

3. Study Model and Study Methodology

The study model is presented first in this section, then information about the study universe and sample, followed by the data related to hedonic benefit, brand image, and consumer happiness

3.1. Study Model

Based on a detailed examination of the literature in the period before the study, the research model was developed to include the variables of hedonic benefit, consumer happiness, and brand image selected as the mediating variable. The model is shown in Figure 1.

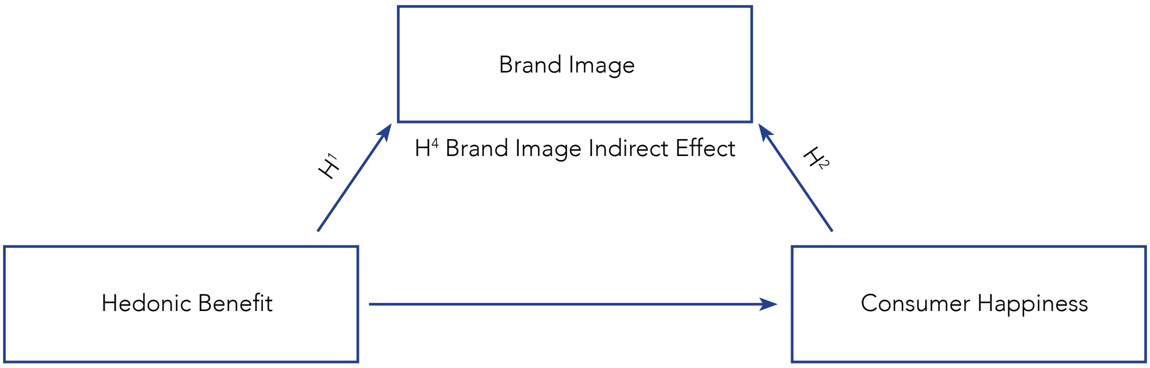

Figure 1. Study Model

3.2. Research Universe and Study Sample

This questionnaire-based study was conducted with 396 participants, aged ≥18 years, in the province of Bursa, north-west Türkiye. Using the convenience sampling method, the lowest sample number required for a 95% confidence interval according to Karagöz (2017) was calculated to be 274 subjects. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and after the exclusion of 54 (incomplete or casual responses), 396 questionnaires were included for analysis.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included 6 questions to determine age, gender, education level, occupation, marital status, and income level. In the second section of the questionnaire, the scale developed by Babin et al. (1994) was used to measure the benefit perceptions of consumers. For hedonic benefit there are 11 items with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.93. The brand image scale developed by Low and Lamb (2000) consists of 5 statements with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.85. To measure consumer happiness, the scale used was developed by Ruo-Fei et al. (2022). It consists of 5 items with with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.85.

All the items on the scales were evaluated with 5-point Likert-type responses, scored as 1: I definitely disagree, 2: I disagree, 3:I am undecided, 4:I agree, 5: I definitely agree.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The non-probability convenience sampling method was used to form the study sample. An online questionnaire was used as the data collection tool.

Approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Bursa Technical University (decision no: 5, dated: 15.10.2024). Before completing the online questionnaire, information about the study was given and the participants provided informed consent for voluntary participation.

Data obtained in the study were analyzed statistically using SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Analysis of the mediating role was performed using Process Macro (Model 4) software, developed by Andrew F. Hayes.

4. Results

Normality tests and reliability analyses were first applied to the scales, then the data obtained in the study were examined. Normality tests, frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression analyses were performed. For the mediating role analysis, Process Macro (Andrew F. Hayes) was applied. Descriptive statistics of the sociodemographic characteristics of the study participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Demographic Variables of the Study Participants

Parameters	N	%		n	%
Gender			**Marital status**		
Female	210	53	Single	277	69.9
Male	186	47	Married	119	30.1
Age (years)			**Income level**		
18-25	154	38.9	Income more than outgoings	102	25.8
26-35	162	40.9	Income equal to outgoings	129	62.6
36-45	48	12.2	Income less than outgoings	165	41.7
≥45	32	8.1			
Education level			**Occupation**		
Primary school	4	1	Student	152	38.7
High school	35	8.8	Civil servant	108	27.3
University	184	46.5	Private sector	102	25.8
Postgraduate	173	43.7	Retired	25	5.8
Total	**396**	**100**	**Housewife**	**11**	**2.8**

The total 396 study participants comprised 53% females and 47% males. Age distribution was seen to be 38.9% in the 18-25 years age group, 40.9% in the 26-35 years group, 12.2% in the 36-45 years group, and 8.1% in the ≥45 years group. Education levels were reported as 1% having completed middle school, 8.8% high school, 46.5% university, and 43.7% postgraduate. Of the total sample, 69.9% were single and 30.1% were married. Income level was stated as income greater than outgoings by 25.8%, income equal to outgoings by 62.6%, and outgoings greater than income by 41.7%. Occupations of the participants were seen to be 38.7% students, 27.3% civil servants, 25.8% private sector employees, 5.8% retired and 2.8% housewife.

The kurtosis and skewness values were examined of the statements in the hedonic benefit perception, brand image, and consumer happiness scales to determine whether or not the data were normally distributed. The variable of hedonic benefit was determined to have kurtosis value of -0.037 and skewness value of 0.123, the brand image variable had a kurtosis value of -0.806 and skewness value of 0.421, and consumer happiness had a kurtosis value of -0.554 and skewness value of 0.123. The values of all the scales were seen to be between -2 and +2, so the scale data can be said to have normal distribution (George and Mallery, 2010). As the data showed normal distribution, parametric tests were applied.

Before analysis of the study model, validity and reliability analyses of all the dimensions were performed. Within this framework, separation and overlap validity and internal consistency reliability analyses were performed. The Cronbach alpha value, which is widely used to show the appropriacy of variables to the aim, was accepted as the measurement of internal consistency reliability. A Cronbach alpha coefficient of ≥0.60 is accepted as the threshold (Taber, 2018). To determine overlap validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were used to explain factor weighting of the items. An overlap reliability value of AVE>0.70 was accepted as close, and AVE>50 that the model was reliable and valid. (Hair et al., 2009). When the combined reliability value is >0.70, the AVE value cannot be accepted even if <0.50 (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). Validity and reliability analyses were performed on the independent variable of brand image, the mediating variable of hedonic benefit, and the dependent variable of consumer happiness. It was concluded that the scales were valid and reliable (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Analysis Of The Variables Used In The Study

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Value	Number of statements	AVE	CR
Hedonic benefit	.891	11	0.41	0.88
Brand image	.919	5	0.36	0.74
Consumer happiness	.873	5	0.49	0.82

Correlation analysis was conducted to measure the relationships among the variables of hedonic utility, brand image and consumer happiness in the study. Table 3 below shows the correlation analysis of the variables.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
Hedonic benefit (1)	1		
Brand image (2)	.273**	1	
Consumer happiness (3)	.538**	.650**	1

** Correlation is statistically significant at the level of 0.01

As seen in Table 3, the results of the multiple correlation analysis showed correlations between all the variables at 1% significance level. A significant low-level correlation was determined between hedonic benefit and brand image ($r=0.27$, $p<0.01$). A significant moderate-level correlation was determined between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness ($r=0.53$, $p<0.01$). A significant high-level correlation was determined between brand image and consumer happiness ($r=0.65$, $p<0.01$).

Simple regression analysis was applied to determine the effect of the independent variable of hedonic benefit on the dependent variables of brand image and consumer happiness, and of the effect of brand image on consumer happiness. The results of the simple regression analysis of the relevant variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Showing the Effect of the Variable of Hedonic Benefit on Brand Image and Consumer Happiness

Variables	Beta coefficient	Standard deviation	R2 value	p value
Hedonic benefit>brand image	,307	0,055	,273	0,00
Hedonic benefit>consumer happiness	,599	0,047	,538	0,00
Brand image> consumer happiness	,643	0,038	,650	0,00

As seen in Table 4, the independent variable of hedonic benefit had a statistically significant positive effect on brand image ($\beta=30$, $p<0.01$). The R2 value explains approximately 27% of the effect of the hedonic benefit variable on brand image.

The independent variable of hedonic benefit was found to have a statistically significant positive effect on the dependent variable of consumer happiness ($\beta=59$, $p<0.01$). The R2 value explains approximately 53%% of the effect of the hedonic benefit variable on consumer happiness.

The variable of brand image was found to have a statistically significant positive effect on the variable of consumer happiness ($\beta=54$, $p<0.01$). The R2 value explains approximately 65%% of the effect of the brand image variable on consumer happiness.

Thus the H1, H2, and H3 hypotheses were accepted.

The effect of the independent variable of hedonic benefit on the mediating variable of brand image and the dependent variable of consumer happiness was investigated. The mediating relationships of the variables are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Hierarchic Regression Analysis Related to the Role of Brand Image on the Variables of Hedonic Benefit and Consumer Happiness

Variables	Beta coefficient	Standard deviation	P value	LLCI	ULCI
Hedonic benefit> consumer happiness **total effect**	.599	.047	0.00	.506	.692
Hedonic benefit> consumer happiness **direct effect**	.434	.039	0.00	.358	.510
Hedonic benefit> consumer happiness **indirect effect**	Effect (b) .165	Bootstrap standard error .031	BootLLCI .089	BootULCI .209	

As seen in Table 5, the variable of hedonic benefit was determined to have a statistically significant positive effect on the variable of consumer happiness (95% CI: 0.506-0.692, $p<0.01$), with a total effect of 59% (β:0.599) and the direct effect was found to be positive at a statistically significant level (95% CI:0.358-0.510, $p<0.01$).

Bootstrap regression analysis was performed to determine whetther or not brand image had a mediating role in the effect of hedonic benefit on consumer happiness. The analysis results showed an indirect effect (95% CI:0.089-0.209) and as the value range was below zero, the variable of brand image was understood to have a mediating role between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness.

The mediating effect was evaluated taking the theories of Baron and Kenny (1986) into consideration. According to Baron and Kenny, to be able to say that there is a mediating variable, there must be a significant correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable, a significant correlation between the independent variable and the mediating variable, and a significant correlation between the dependent variable and the mediating variable. When the mediating variable is included in the model formed of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, if the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable decreases significantly, there can be said to be a partial mediating effect (Baron and Kenny,1986: 1173-1182). In the simple regression analysis, the independent variable of hedonic benefit had an effect of β =59 on the dependent variable of consumer happiness. With the mediating effect of brand image, the beta coefficient fell to β= 16. Thus, there can be said to be a partial mediating effect of brand image in the relationship between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness. Therefore, the H4 hypothesis was accepted.

5. Discussions

The desire of humankind to feel better throughout life both physically and mentally has been shown to be the basis of pleasure-seeking behaviour. The wish to be happy, which is subjective as much as it is valuable, is reflected in every area of life. The concept of happiness and the seeking of happiness, which have been considered at great length have recently attracted increasing attention in social sciences fields in particular. The world evolving into an increasingly dissatisfied consumer society has led to pleasure-seeking starting to be seen everywhere, and has been shown to be an important factor for consumer happiness after the purchase. The search for hedonic benefit reveals the power of senses and emotions in the purchase, and in one sense explains the relationship with consumer happiness. Moreover, the expectations of consumers today are not limited to the benefits of a brand but they are also attracted to the perceived effect of different brand images such as the visually pleasing elements of a brand, the stories, and the superior features. This suggests that in addition to hedonic benefits, brand image could have an effect on consumer happiness.

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceived hedonic benefit that could have an effect on consumer happiness and the role of brand image, which was thought to have a mediating effect, on the smartphone preferences of consumers. From the results of the analyses performed in the study it was understood that the hedonic benefit perceptions of smartphone users were influential on brand image and consumer happiness. Previous studies in the literature that have examined the relationship between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness have demonstrated that by forming an effective mechanism for the element of taking enjoyment from life, hedonic benefit affected consumer happiness (Anderson et al., 2013; Gaston-Breto et al., 2020; Mingione, 2020; Thürridl et al., 2020). The current study results support these findings in literature. It was also observed that the variable of brand image formed an effective mechanism on consumer happiness, and this result was consistent with the literature. It has been determined in previous studies that brand image increased consumer happiness, and an increase in purchasing frequency was experienced as a result of customer happiness (Yoshida et al., 2021), and Petruzzellis et al. (2010) stated that the perceived image of the brand is imprinted in the mind of the consumer.

Studies of consumer happiness have investigated many products and services such as the perceived value of services such as travel, entertainment, eating drinking, and gourmet experiences (Howell and Hill, 2009; Nıcolao et al., 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003; Weingarten and Goodman, 2021), the happiness offered to ethical consumers showing environmentally friendly and socio-economic-focused consumer behaviour (Cachero-Martínez et al., 2024; Ramos-Hidalgo et al., 2022; Ruo-Fei, et al., 2022), the happiness of a healthy lifestyle offered by healthcare products and services (Block et al., 2011; Cornil and Chandon, 2016; Renner et al., 2012), and the happiness offered to consumers in digital markets (Dhiman and Kumar, 2020; Lin and Windasari, 2019). Unlike the previous literature, the current study was related to smartphones only, and investigated the indirect effect of brand image in the relationship between hedonic benefit and consumer happiness.

6. Conclussion

Smartphones have become not only a communication tool, but also a statement of identity and a platform for socialising and creating experiences in the daily life of individuals. In this study, the direct effect of perceived hedonic benefit on consumer happiness, and the indirect effect with brand image mediation were compared quantitatively. The data obtained from 396 smartphone users in the province of Bursa showed that consumer happiness was strengthened directly by hedonic benefit (β=0.59) and partially indirectly (β=0.17) by brand image. These findings show that in the mobile technology market, emotional needs have become internalised with rational characteristics and can shed light on the multi-layered structure of consumer happiness.

This study can be considered to make theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions to this field. From a theoretical perspective, by transferring the literature of consumer happiness to mobile telephone dependency, which requires a high level of participation, the study results confirm that the relationship of hedonic value and happiness is valid for other technology-based products. By emphasizing that happiness is not dependent on internal pleasure factors alone, but also on the symbolic and social value of a product, the partial mediating role of brand image provides empirical support to multi-levelled value theories (eg., Consumer Values Theory). Revealing the hedonic benefit-brand image-consumer happiness chain provides a new angle to the holistic models explaining the "well-being" concept in consumer behaviour research.

Methodologically, this field study conducted in Türkiye is one of the first quantitative studies to have examined consumer happiness in the developing smartphone market, and therefore contributes geographical variety and cultural factors to the literature. Methodological robustness and clarity were provided by the separate mediating tests for direct and indirect effects performed with PROCESS (Model 4). The validity and reliability tests of the Turkish versions of the scales provide a measurement tool basis for future studies.

From a managerial contribution perspective, the results showed that when hedonic elements of brands (design, colour, aesthetic experience) are at the forefront, consumer happiness is directly increased, so focus on emotional associations can be recommended in product placement. The partial mediating role of brand image indicated that happiness- focused loyalty was created by improving the hedonic values of positive brand perception. Emphasizing the "happiness theme" in advertising campaigns can address the consumer's desire to feel good, and this theme should be visually supported with intimate moments, positive emotions, and social interaction.

There were some limitations to this study, primarily the cross-sectional design and that self-reported data were used. Longitudinal studies in the future can monitor the change in happiness over time. In addition, comparisons between cultures will be able to test the generalisability of the findings. Additional variables such as rational benefit, brand trust, and advertising perception could also be evaluated to expand the model.

In conclusion, happy customers are important for companies to gain a competitive advantage. In the light of the data obtained in this study, it can be said that companies that want to have a say in the market should thoroughly analyse the happiness-seeking of consumers. Companies wanting to gain customer loyalty should focus on consumer happiness. In product placement studies, happiness associations can be made in advertising, and the happiness value can be presented to consumers.

Declarations:

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. The study protocol was approved by the Bursa Technical University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Decision No. 2024/19, 15 October 2024). Before data collection began, each prospective participant was shown an electronic information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty and data-protection measures. Informed consent was recorded electronically: participants indicated agreement by selecting the statement "I approve of participating in the study". All responses were collected anonymously; no personally identifying data were stored, and confidentiality was maintained at every stage of data handling and reporting.

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