



# The Mediating Role of Brand Image in the Effect of Attitudes Toward Activist Advertising on Customer Loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of brand image in the effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty. As brands increasingly take stances on social and political issues, understanding how consumers respond to activist messages has become critical for marketing strategy. Data were collected from 409 participants residing in Turkey through an online survey and analyzed using Jamovi software. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement scales, followed by path analysis and bootstrap-based mediation analysis. The findings reveal that advertising value and entertainment directly affect customer loyalty, while the effects of informativeness, deceptiveness, and irritation on loyalty operate indirectly through brand image. Notably, deceptiveness positively affects brand image—a finding that, contrary to the prevailing literature, may reflect how young and educated consumers interpret provocative activist messages. Brand image has a strong positive effect on customer loyalty. Mediation analysis shows that brand image significantly mediates the effects of advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, and entertainment on customer loyalty, while irritation has no significant mediation effect. By integrating multiple attitude dimensions within a single mediation framework, this study provides theoretical contributions to the brand activism literature and offers practical implications for marketing managers in designing effective activist advertising strategies.

**Keywords:** Activist Advertising, Brand Image, Customer Loyalty, Attitude Toward Advertising

**JEL Classifications:** M31, M37, M19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, consumer behavior has undergone a significant transformation. Traditional factors such as product quality and price remain important. However, brands' stance on social issues is also incorporated into the evaluation process. Consumers no longer find it sufficient for brands to be merely economic actors. There has been an increasing tendency toward brands that show sensitivity to social problems and represent certain values. This change has brought the concept of brand activism to the forefront. Brand activism refers to businesses taking a clear position on social and political issues and reflecting this stance to the public (Herzberg and Rudeloff, 2022).

Brands communicate these stances to consumers through various communication tools. Advertising is at the forefront of these

tools. Activist advertisements are contents that go beyond product promotion. They are value-oriented communication forms carrying social messages. Such advertisements attract consumers' attention and change the way they evaluate brands. Consumers no longer focus solely on functional benefits when evaluating brands. The values represented by the brand, its stance, and its approach to social issues are also included in the evaluation process (Castro, 2022).

Attitudes toward activist advertising play a determining role in shaping consumer behavior. The consumer's response to an advertisement affects the overall evaluation of the brand. While positive attitudes strengthen brand perception, negative attitudes can lead to loss of trust and alienation from the brand (Cagampan et al., 2022). In this context, the effect of activist advertising

is often not direct. The effect emerges through the consumer's mental evaluation processes. Indeed, perception, attitude, and interpretation processes constitute the fundamental components of this mechanism (Lee et al., 2024).

Brand image refers to the overall perception consumers form about a brand. This perception is one of the fundamental determinants of purchasing behaviors and brand preference. Activist advertisements can strengthen brand image, but they can also create negative effects through poorly constructed messages (Schmidt et al., 2018). While messages aligned with consumer values create a stronger impact, misaligned messages may lead to negative reactions. This situation demonstrates that brand activism is an area containing both opportunities and risks.

Customer loyalty is a critical variable for businesses in terms of long-term success. Loyal customers prefer the brand again and communicate positively about it. These behaviors provide sustainable competitive advantage to businesses. Although brand activism is known to be effective on customer loyalty, it is stated that this effect often emerges indirectly rather than directly (Wicaksono et al., 2025). At this point, brand image emerges as an important mediating variable.

When the literature is examined, brand activism is associated with various variables. Variables such as attitude, perception, trust, and loyalty are frequently addressed. However, it is noteworthy that studies examining the effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty through brand image are limited. Particularly, holistic models addressing these relationships together have not been sufficiently investigated. This study aims to fill this gap. The effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty is addressed. Brand image is included in the model as a mediating variable in this relationship. The study examines the effect of brand activism on consumer behavior within a more systematic structure.

In this context, the study is expected to make two fundamental contributions to the literature. First, it integrates the fragmented structure in the literature by bringing together activist advertising, brand image, and customer loyalty variables under a single model. Second, by testing the mediating role of brand image, it provides a more explanatory framework regarding how the effect of activist advertising on consumer behavior occurs. In this respect, the study offers both theoretical and practical important implications.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Activism and Activist Advertising

Brand activism has become one of the prominent concepts in the marketing literature in recent years. While traditional marketing understanding is product and service-oriented, the attitude displayed by brands toward social issues is gaining importance in the new approach. Consumers consider how brands position themselves in the face of social and political issues, and this situation has given rise to the concept of brand activism. Brand activism is defined as businesses taking a clear position on social issues and reflecting this stance to the public (Herzberg and Rudeloff, 2022). Brand activism has a different

structure from corporate social responsibility. While corporate social responsibility includes activities aimed at contributing to society, brand activism requires taking a clearer stance. Since there is an explicit expression regarding social, environmental, or political issues, brand activism is a more visible and riskier form of communication. Consumers carefully evaluate such stances (Del Vacchio, 2023).

Brands communicate their activist approaches to consumers through various communication channels. Advertisements are among the most effective tools of these channels. Activist advertisements are contents that reflect brands' views on social issues. These advertisements go beyond describing a product, presenting a social discourse, an ideological background, and value judgments. Therefore, they create a different effect on consumers compared to classical advertisements (Castro, 2022). The effect of activist advertisements on consumers is not unidirectional. In some cases, positive perceptions occur and support the establishment of an emotional bond with the brand, while in other cases, negative reactions may arise. Messages incompatible with consumer values can lead to loss of trust. For this reason, activist advertisements are a type of communication that contains both opportunities and risks (Schmidt et al., 2018).

Consumers attach importance to the element of sincerity when evaluating brands' activist discourses. While realistic and consistent messages are perceived more positively, superficial messages or those thought to serve only marketing purposes create negative reactions. This situation shows that the effect of activist advertisements is shaped through consumer perception (Kiran et al., 2024). In this framework, activist advertisements are an important communication tool affecting consumer behaviors. Attitudes toward advertising, brand perception, and behavioral outcomes are considered as the fundamental components of this process.

### 2.2. Consumer Attitudes toward Activist Advertising

Consumer attitude refers to individuals' evaluations of a specific object, message, or brand. Attitude is a multidimensional structure consisting of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Attitudes toward advertisements cover consumers' processes of perceiving, interpreting, and evaluating the advertising message. This process plays a determining role in shaping consumer behavior (Spears and Singh, 2004). When it comes to activist advertisements, consumer attitudes show a more complex structure. These advertisements carry content beyond product promotion. They contain social and political messages. Consumers evaluate the advertisement not as a commercial message but as a value-oriented form of communication. Attitudes toward advertisements are directly related to individual values and ideological tendencies (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Positive attitudes toward activist advertisements support the formation of positive perceptions toward the brand. They contribute to the establishment of an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand and increase identification with the brand. Especially messages aligned with consumer values lead to the development of positive attitudes. As the level of alignment

increases, the persuasiveness of the advertisement also increases (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Negative attitudes yield different results. Consumers can react to activist messages they find insincere or opportunistic (Moorman, 2020). The literature contains strong findings that deceptive advertisements undermine consumer trust and lead to negative attitudes. The perception of deception creates negative effects on attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention (Darke and Ritchie, 2007; Chaouachi and Rached, 2019). Consumers question the brand's intention as much as the content of the message.

Regarding the dimension of irritation, it is known that irritating advertisements cause negative reactions in consumers. Aaker and Bruzzone (1985) defined an irritating advertisement as "one that provokes, causes discomfort and momentary impatience" and revealed that this situation reduces the effectiveness of the advertisement. Qin and Yan (2017) state that as the level of irritation increases, consumers' purchase intention decreases. Similarly, Naser and Ismail (2020) reported that irritation negatively affects advertising effectiveness.

The literature includes findings that attitudes toward activist advertisements do not directly translate into behavior. In some cases, consumers support activist messages, but this support does not reflect on behavior. This situation is expressed as the attitude-behavior gap. Additional variables need to come into play for attitudes to turn into behavior (Jung and Mittal, 2020). Attitudes toward activist advertisements are considered a fundamental variable affecting consumer behaviors. However, it is observed that this effect often emerges through indirect means. Mediating variables such as brand image play an important role in understanding this process.

### 2.3. Brand Image

Brand image is defined as the whole of perceptions that consumers form in their minds about a brand. This perception is fed by the consumer's direct experiences with the brand, marketing communication, and environmental influences. Brand image is accepted as one of the fundamental concepts in understanding consumer behavior (Keller, 1993). Brand image is an important component of brand equity. A strong image enables the brand to obtain a positive position in the consumer's mind. This situation creates continuity in brand preference. Consumers make decisions based on the perceived brand image when choosing among alternatives. Therefore, brand image is considered a strategic element that provides competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996).

Brand image consists of cognitive and emotional elements. The cognitive dimension covers the information and beliefs the consumer has about the brand. The emotional dimension includes feelings toward the brand. These two dimensions together shape consumer behavior. A positive brand image supports trust, loyalty, and preference behavior (Kiriş, 2025). Activist communication activities play an effective role in the formation process of brand image. The attitudes exhibited by brands on social issues directly affect consumer perception. Not only the content of activist messages but also how these messages are perceived is important. Consumers evaluate whether the message is compatible with the

brand's values. In cases where alignment is high, brand image strengthens. In cases where alignment is low, negative perceptions arise (Schmidt et al., 2018).

Perceived sincerity is a determining factor in the formation of brand image. Activist messages perceived as sincere create trust in consumers. This situation supports the positive development of brand image. Messages perceived as insincere can damage brand image (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The literature also emphasizes the negative effects of deceptive advertisements on brand image. There are strong findings that deceptive advertisements undermine consumer trust and negatively affect brand image (Darke and Ritchie, 2007; Chaouachi and Rached, 2019). Therefore, activist communication strategies should be planned carefully.

The effect of brand image on consumer behavior is clearly revealed in the literature. Brand image is an effective variable on purchase intention and customer loyalty. This effect often does not occur directly. Consumer attitudes and perceptions mediate this process. This situation makes the mediating role of brand image important (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Brand image is considered a critical variable in the transformation of attitudes toward activist advertising into behavioral outcomes. It undertakes a determining role in reflecting consumer perceptions to the relationship established with the brand.

### 2.4. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as consumers' tendency to repurchase a specific brand and maintain this preference over time. This concept is not limited to behavioral repeat purchasing. The psychological commitment the consumer develops toward the brand is also considered an important component of loyalty. Therefore, customer loyalty is handled as a multidimensional structure involving behavioral and attitudinal dimensions (Dick and Basu, 1994). Customer loyalty has strategic importance for businesses. Loyal customers prefer the brand again and exhibit positive communication behaviors toward the brand. This situation provides cost advantage for businesses and supports long-term profitability. In highly competitive markets, customer loyalty is accepted as one of the fundamental determinants of sustainable competitive advantage (Oliver, 1999).

In the literature, customer satisfaction stands out as an important variable in the formation of customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is based on the comparison between the consumer's expectations and the perceived performance. Satisfaction occurs when expectations are met or exceeded. The increasing level of satisfaction strengthens the consumer's loyalty to the brand. However, some studies show that satisfaction alone is not sufficient to explain loyalty (Jacksena et al., 2021). Brand image is another important variable affecting customer loyalty. The perceptions consumers form about the brand direct their purchasing behaviors. A strong and positive brand image enables the consumer to trust the brand and increases the level of loyalty. Especially in studies where service quality and brand image are addressed together, it has been determined that these two variables create significant effects on customer loyalty (Saleem and Raja, 2014). The literature also contains strong findings that deceptive advertisements undermine

consumer trust and negatively affect loyalty (Darke and Ritchie, 2007; Chaouachi and Rached, 2019).

Current literature shows that customer loyalty cannot be explained only by traditional marketing variables. Consumers' value-oriented evaluation processes are becoming increasingly important in the formation of loyalty. In this context, brand activism emerges as a new element affecting the quality of the relationship between the consumer and the brand. The attitudes exhibited by brands on social and political issues can affect the level of identification of consumers with the brand, and this situation can reflect on loyalty behavior (Kiran et al., 2024). However, the effect of brand activism on customer loyalty does not show a direct structure. It is stated that this effect often emerges through variables such as consumer perceptions, brand image, and trust. The positive image the consumer develops toward the brand plays a critical role in the formation of loyalty behavior. This situation necessitates the evaluation of brand image as a mediating variable in the loyalty process (Wicaksono et al., 2025).

It is also stated that irritating advertisements can create negative effects on customer loyalty. Aaker and Bruzzone (1985) revealed that irritating advertisements cause negative reactions in consumers and this situation weakens brand loyalty. Similarly, Qin and Yan (2017) and Naser and Ismail (2020) state that as the level of irritation increases, the consumer's level of loyalty toward the brand decreases.

Customer loyalty is considered an important outcome variable in the transformation of attitudes toward activist advertising into behavioral outcomes. Consumers' evaluations of activist advertisements shape brand image, and customer loyalty is formed through this image. Therefore, customer loyalty is handled both as an outcome variable and as the ultimate indicator of consumer behaviors in the research model.

## 2.5. Hypothesis Development

H1: The sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising directly affect customer loyalty. The literature includes studies revealing the direct effect of advertising value and entertainment on consumer behavior (Ducoffe, 1995; Castro, 2022; Spears and Singh, 2004). It is stated that informative advertisements do not directly translate into behavior, and this effect occurs through cognitive processes (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). It is also known that deceptive and irritating advertisements undermine consumer trust and lead to negative attitudes (Schmidt et al., 2018; Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985). In this context, the following sub-hypotheses have been developed:

H<sub>1a</sub>: Advertising value positively affects customer loyalty. Activist advertising messages that consumers find valuable can directly affect loyalty behavior without needing any intermediary mechanism (Ducoffe, 1995; Spears and Singh, 2004).

H<sub>1b</sub>: Informativeness positively affects customer loyalty. It is expected that the effect of informative activist advertisements on consumer behavior is not direct, and this effect occurs through cognitive processes (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993).

H<sub>1c</sub>: Deceptiveness negatively affects customer loyalty. Deceptive activist advertisements are expected to undermine consumer

trust and negatively affect loyalty (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007).

H<sub>1d</sub>: Entertainment positively affects customer loyalty. Entertaining activist advertisements can directly strengthen loyalty behavior by arousing positive emotional responses in consumers (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).

H<sub>1e</sub>: Irritation negatively affects customer loyalty. Irritating activist advertisements are expected to cause negative reactions in consumers and reduce loyalty (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Naser and Ismail, 2020).

H<sub>2</sub>: Brand image positively and significantly affects customer loyalty. A strong and positive brand image enables the consumer to trust the brand and increases the level of loyalty. The direct and positive effect of brand image on customer loyalty has been demonstrated in various studies in the literature (Keller, 1993; Saleem and Raja, 2014; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

H<sub>3</sub>: The sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising affect brand image. The literature indicates that informativeness positively affects brand image (Aaker, 1996), while deceptiveness and irritation damage brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is stated that entertaining advertisements are evaluated more positively by consumers and contribute to brand image (Castro, 2022), and advertising value strengthens brand image (Keller, 1993). In this context, the following sub-hypotheses have been developed:

H<sub>3a</sub>: Advertising value positively affects brand image. Activist advertising messages that consumers find valuable support the formation of positive perceptions toward the brand (Keller, 1993; Ducoffe, 1995).

H<sub>3b</sub>: Informativeness positively affects brand image. Informative activist advertisements help consumers develop positive associations about the brand (Aaker, 1996; Schmidt et al., 2018).

H<sub>3c</sub>: Deceptiveness negatively affects brand image. Deceptive activist advertisements are expected to undermine consumer trust and negatively affect brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007).

H<sub>3d</sub>: Entertainment positively affects brand image. Entertaining activist advertisements are evaluated more positively by consumers and support the establishment of an emotional bond with the brand (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).

H<sub>3e</sub>: Irritation negatively affects brand image. Irritating activist advertisements are expected to cause negative reactions in consumers and damage brand image (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Naser and Ismail, 2020).

H<sub>4</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of the sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising on customer loyalty. The literature contains findings that the effect of different dimensions of advertising on consumer behavior occurs through brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018; Wicaksono et al., 2025). Informative and entertaining advertisements first strengthen brand image, and then this positive image turns into loyalty behavior. Deceptive and irritating advertisements, on the other hand, can damage brand image and lead to decreased loyalty (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In this context, the following sub-hypotheses have been developed:

H<sub>4a</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of advertising value on customer loyalty. Activist advertisements that

consumers find valuable first strengthen brand image, and then this positive image turns into loyalty (Keller, 1993; Saleem and Raja, 2014).

- H<sub>4b</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of informativeness on customer loyalty. Informative activist advertisements contribute to consumers developing positive perceptions about the brand, and these perceptions increase loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Wicaksono et al., 2025).
- H<sub>4c</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of deceptiveness on customer loyalty. Deceptive activist advertisements are expected to damage brand image and negatively affect loyalty (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007).
- H<sub>4d</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of entertainment on customer loyalty. Entertaining activist advertisements arouse positive emotions in consumers, strengthening brand image, and this situation supports the formation of loyalty (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).
- H<sub>4e</sub>: Brand image has a mediating role in the effect of irritation on customer loyalty. Irritating activist advertisements are expected to negatively affect brand image and reduce loyalty (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Naser and Ismail, 2020).

### 3. METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative research approach. The research design is based on a causal framework that allows testing the relationships between variables. Quantitative research methods enable testing theoretically developed models through empirical data. This approach offers a strong structure, especially for analyzing direct and indirect effects between variables. Within the scope of the research, the relationships between attitude toward activist advertising, brand image, and customer loyalty were addressed within a holistic model framework. Accordingly, the effect of attitude toward activist advertising on brand image and customer loyalty was examined. The role of brand image on customer loyalty was included in the model. Data were

collected using an online survey method. This method provides the opportunity to reach a wide participant audience. Participants' perceptions of the relevant variables were obtained through standardized measurement tools. The obtained data were analyzed in line with the predetermined conceptual model.

#### 3.1. Conceptual Model

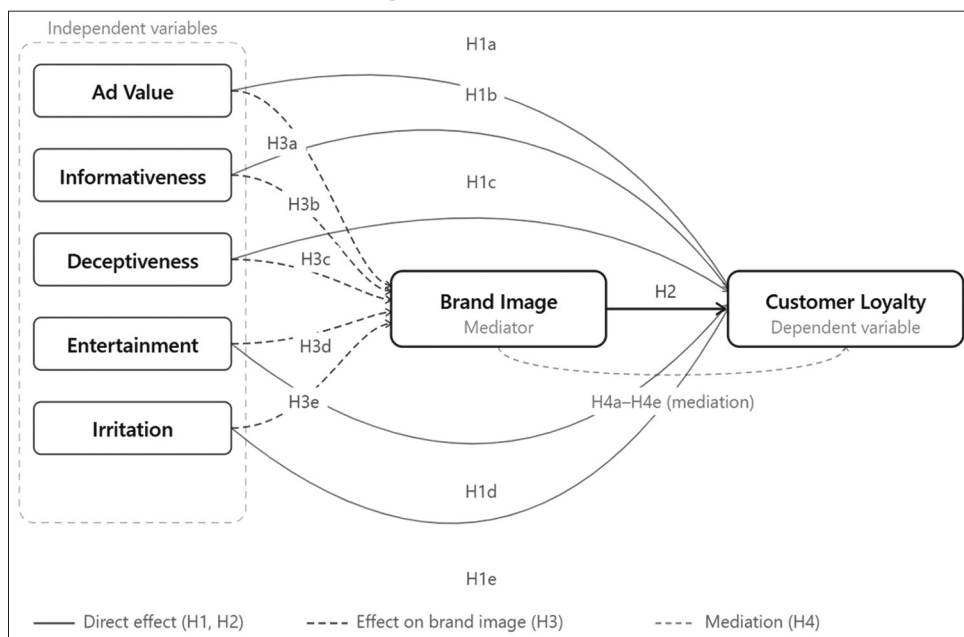
The conceptual model developed within the scope of this study addresses the mediating role of brand image in the effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty within a multidimensional and multi-layered structure. The conceptual model of the study is presented in Figure 1. The model examines the direct effects of the sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising (advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, entertainment, irritation) on customer loyalty (H<sub>1</sub>), their effects on brand image (H<sub>3</sub>), and their indirect effects through brand image (H<sub>4</sub>), while also testing the direct effect of brand image on customer loyalty (H<sub>2</sub>).

At the core of the model lies Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> (H<sub>1a</sub>-H<sub>1e</sub>), which tests the direct effects of the sub-dimensions of activist advertising attitude on customer loyalty. This direct relationship aims to show to what extent consumers' evaluations of activist advertisements affect loyalty behavior without any mediating variable. Advertising value and entertainment dimensions are expected to affect loyalty positively, while informativeness, deceptiveness, and irritation dimensions are expected to affect it negatively (Ducoffe, 1995; Castro, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2018; Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985).

Furthermore, Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>, explaining the direct effect of brand image on customer loyalty, reveals that brand image is a central mechanism in consumer-based brand evaluations. A strong and positive brand image enables the consumer to trust the brand and increases the level of loyalty (Keller, 1993; Saleem and Raja, 2014).

Additionally, the model includes Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> (H<sub>3a</sub>-H<sub>3e</sub>), which tests the effects of the sub-dimensions of activist advertising attitude

Figure 1: Research model



on brand image. Within the scope of this hypothesis, advertising value, informativeness, and entertainment dimensions are expected to positively affect brand image, while deceptiveness and irritation dimensions are expected to negatively affect brand image. Activist messages aligned with consumer values strengthen brand image, while incompatible or insincere messages can negatively affect brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Hypothesis  $H_4$  ( $H_{4a}$ - $H_{4c}$ ) tests the mediating role of brand image in the effect of the sub-dimensions of activist advertising attitude on customer loyalty. The literature contains findings that the effect of different dimensions of advertising on consumer behavior occurs through brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018; Wicaksono et al., 2025). Informative and entertaining advertisements first strengthen brand image, and then this positive image turns into loyalty behavior. Deceptive and irritating advertisements, on the other hand, can damage brand image and lead to decreased loyalty (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In this context, the mediating effect will be examined separately for each dimension: advertising value ( $H_{4a}$ ), informativeness ( $H_{4b}$ ), deceptiveness ( $H_{4c}$ ), entertainment ( $H_{4d}$ ), and irritation ( $H_{4e}$ ). This approach provides a holistic framework for understanding how the effect of different dimensions of activist advertising on loyalty is shaped through brand image.

### 3.2. Population and Sample

The population of this research consists of individuals aged 18 and over residing within the borders of the Republic of Turkey. In the study, it was aimed to reach participants from different geographical regions and with various demographic characteristics in order to reveal consumer attitudes toward activist advertising and the effects of these attitudes on brand image and customer loyalty. Accordingly, during the data collection process, only individuals with Turkish IP addresses were allowed to access the survey, thus ensuring the geographical consistency of the sample.

Although the research population has a quite wide and heterogeneous structure, the convenience sampling method was used in the data collection process. While this method provides practicality and speed to the researcher, it may limit the representativeness of the sample. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings obtained to the entire population.

During the data collection process, in order to enable participants to evaluate the research context in a consistent and controlled manner, a definition of the concept of “activist advertising” was provided before starting the survey. Participants were explained that advertisements aiming to draw attention to social, environmental, economic, or cultural issues, aiming to raise awareness on these issues, and containing messages to inform society are considered activist advertisements. This definition was adopted as a conscious methodological choice to ensure that participants develop a common understanding of the subject.

Within the scope of the research, a total of 417 participants were reached; however, 8 questionnaires containing missing or incorrect

data were excluded from the dataset. After this elimination process, the valid sample size included in the analyses was determined as 409. Data cleaning and screening processes are of critical importance in reducing measurement errors and increasing data quality in quantitative research (Hair et al., 2014).

The adequacy of the sample size was evaluated within the framework of the minimum number of observations recommended for structural equation modeling in the literature. Hair et al. (2014) state that a sample size exceeding 200 is sufficient for structural equation modeling. In this context, reaching 409 participants was carried out in a planned manner to ensure the statistical adequacy of the research, to reduce the effects of possible missing data, and to increase the representativeness of subgroups (age, gender, education level, etc.) to be used in the analyses. Furthermore, it was determined that the obtained sample exhibited a meaningful distribution in terms of demographic variables.

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire form was used as the data collection tool in the research. The questionnaire form consists of questions measuring participants’ demographic characteristics, attitudes toward activist advertising, brand image perceptions, and customer loyalty levels. At the beginning of the questionnaire, a definition of the concept of “activist advertising” was presented to the participants, and they were asked to evaluate the scale items within the framework of this definition. All scale items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5).

**Activist Advertising Attitude Scale:** The original 15-item scale developed by Ducoffe (1995) was used to measure attitude toward activist advertising. The scale consists of five sub-dimensions: advertising value (3 items), informativeness (3 items), deceptiveness (3 items), entertainment (3 items), and irritation (3 items). The scale items were adapted as “brands that engage in activist advertising” in line with the purpose of the research. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was reported as 0.89 (Ducoffe, 1995). The adaptation study of the scale to the Turkish sample was carried out by Uğur (2024). In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the adapted scale was calculated as 0.866.

**Brand image scale:** The 8-item scale developed by Salinas and Pérez (2009) was used to measure brand image. The scale evaluates consumers’ perceptions regarding the quality, authenticity, and position in the sector of brands that engage in activist advertising. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was reported as 0.85. In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.834.

**Customer loyalty scale:** The 8-item scale developed by Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016) was used to measure customer loyalty. The scale measures consumers’ tendency to repurchase brands that engage in activist advertising, their willingness to recommend the brand to others, and their level of commitment to the brand. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was reported as 0.89. In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.913.

Through the demographic information form, data regarding participants' gender, age, education level, marital status, and monthly income level were obtained. Demographic variables are very important in interpreting research findings and help in understanding the participant profile. The statements in the form were answered in a way that does not contain participants' personal information, and the data collection process was conducted in accordance with ethical rules. The obtained demographic data were used to describe the sample structure of the research and to make comparisons between different demographic groups.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage distributions were first calculated to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample. Descriptive analyses are a fundamental analysis step for understanding the structure of the sample and evaluating the distribution in terms of demographic variables (Field, 2013). Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to test whether the data showed a normal distribution. In the literature, skewness and kurtosis values within the range of  $\pm 1.5$  are considered sufficient for normal distribution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to determine the factor structures of the scales used in the research and to test construct validity (Hair et al., 2014). The dimensional structures of the scales for attitude toward activist advertising, brand image, and customer loyalty were examined, and model fit indices were evaluated. In evaluating model fit, the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ), RMSEA, CFI, and TLI fit indices were used. For acceptable fit, values of  $\chi^2/df \leq 5$ ,  $RMSEA \leq 0.08$ ,  $CFI \geq 0.90$ , and  $TLI \geq 0.90$  were taken as reference (Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015).

Within the scope of reliability assessment of the scales, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was calculated. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above indicates that the scale is reliable (Nunnally,

1978). Mediation analyses were conducted to test the research hypotheses. Mediation analyses are important in revealing through which mechanisms the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable occurs (Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2018). In this context, the statistical significance of indirect effects was evaluated using the bootstrap method. In the bootstrap analysis, 5000 samples and a 95% confidence interval (CI) were preferred. If the bootstrap confidence interval did not contain zero (0), the mediation effect was considered statistically significant (Hayes, 2018). All statistical analyses performed were carried out using the Jamovi program, an open-source statistical analysis software (The Jamovi Project, 2023).

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Demographic Findings

The responses in the demographic information section of the questionnaire were analyzed to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants. Frequency and percentage distributions were calculated based on the obtained data. Descriptive statistics reveal the basic structural characteristics of the sample, allowing for a more accurate contextual interpretation of the research findings. Such analyses play a critical role, especially in quantitative research, in evaluating the representativeness of the sample (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014). The demographic data regarding the participants are presented in detail in Table 1, which holistically reflects the sample profile of the research.

The demographic characteristics of the 409 participants were examined. Of the participants, 76.3% ( $n = 312$ ) were female and 23.7% ( $n = 97$ ) were male, indicating that females predominated in the sample. In terms of marital status, the vast majority of the participants (74.8%,  $n = 306$ ) were single. Regarding age distribution, 67.0% ( $n = 274$ ) of the participants were in the 18-29 age range, 29.1% ( $n = 119$ ) were in the 30-44 age range, 2.9% ( $n = 12$ ) were in the 45-54 age range, and 1.0% ( $n = 4$ ) were aged 55 and over. The vast majority of the sample (96.1%) consisted of individuals aged 44 and under; therefore, it can be said that the young and middle-aged groups were predominant. When education level was examined, 48.4% ( $n = 198$ ) of the participants had a master's or doctorate degree, and 42.1% ( $n = 172$ ) had a bachelor's degree. The total rate of participants with a bachelor's or master's/doctorate degree was 90.5%. This finding indicates that the education level of the sample is quite high. Regarding monthly income distribution, 34.0% ( $n = 139$ ) of the participants had an income below 28,000 TL, 25.2% ( $n = 103$ ) had an income between 60,001 and 90,000 TL, 16.1% ( $n = 66$ ) had an income between 28,001 and 40,000 TL, 14.4% ( $n = 59$ ) had an income between 40,001 and 60,000 TL, and 10.3% ( $n = 42$ ) had an income above 90,001 TL. The income distribution is spread over a wide range, indicating that participants from low, middle, and high-income groups are represented in the sample. Overall, the sample exhibited a profile characterized by high education level, predominantly young and middle-aged, and a majority of female participants. This situation suggests that attitudes toward activist advertising may find more resonance among young, educated, and female consumers.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Female	312	76.3
	Male	97	23.7
Marital status	Married	103	25.2
	Single	306	74.8
Age	18-29	274	67.0
	30-44	119	29.1
	45-54	12	2.9
	55 and over	4	1.0
Education	Primary/Middle School	1	0.2
	High School	16	3.9
	Associate Degree	22	5.4
	Bachelor's Degree	172	42.1
Monthly income	Master's/Doctorate	198	48.4
	Below 28,000 TL	139	34.0
	28,001-40,000 TL	66	16.1
	40,001-60,000 TL	59	14.4
	60,001-90,000 TL	103	25.2
	Above 90,001 TL	42	10.3
Total		409	100

$n=409$ . Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

**Table 2: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results for activist advertising scale**

Factor	Item	Loading ( $\lambda$ )	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{AVE}$	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
F1: Advertising value	A1	0.794	0.87	0.83	0.62	0.787	236	66	3.58	0.943	0.922	0.079
	A2	0.740										
	A3	0.843										
F2: Informativeness	A4	0.695	0.85	0.74	0.49	0.700						
	A5	0.735										
	A6	0.661										
F3: Deceptiveness	T_7	0.796	0.80	0.74	0.50	0.707						
	T_8	0.753										
	T_9	0.539										
F4: Entertainment	A10	0.561	0.83	0.69	0.43	0.656						
	A11	0.592										
	A12	0.746										
F5: Irritation	T_13	0.836	0.74	0.72	0.56	0.748						
	T_14	0.650										

n=409. All factor loadings are significant at  $P < 0.001$ . T\_7=Ters\_7, T\_8=Ters\_8, T\_9=Ters\_9, T\_13=Ters\_13, T\_14=Ters\_14. The item Ters\_15 was removed from the scale due to its low factor loading ( $\lambda = 0.233$ ).  $\chi^2/df$ =Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio; CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted,  $\sqrt{AVE}$ : Square root of AVE,  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's Alpha

## 4.2. Findings on Validity and Reliability

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the study were calculated. The mean of the activist advertising variable was 38.5 (SD = 8.27), the mean of the brand image variable was 21.9 (SD = 5.28), and the mean of the customer loyalty variable was 22.4 (SD = 6.74). Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine whether the data showed a normal distribution. In the literature, skewness and kurtosis values within the range of  $\pm 1.5$  are considered sufficient for normal distribution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Accordingly, all values for activist advertising (skewness = 0.334; kurtosis = 0.750), brand image (skewness = 0.018; kurtosis = 0.292), and customer loyalty (skewness = 0.509; kurtosis = 0.060) were within acceptable limits, indicating that the data met the assumption of normal distribution.

Activist advertising scale: The construct validity of the scale used to measure attitudes toward activist advertising was tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The maximum likelihood estimation method was used in the analysis. In the model established to test the five-factor theoretical structure, factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and goodness-of-fit indices were examined. As a result of the analysis, the item Ters\_15, which had a low factor loading ( $\lambda = 0.233$ ), was removed from the scale. The findings for the final model are presented in Table 2.

Factor loadings: All items had factor loadings above 0.50 and were statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). Factor loadings ranged from 0.740 to 0.843 for advertising value, from 0.661 to 0.735 for informativeness, from 0.539 to 0.796 for deceptiveness, from 0.561 to 0.746 for entertainment, and from 0.650 to 0.836 for irritation. These findings indicate that each item was adequately represented by its respective factor (Hair et al., 2014).

Composite Reliability (CR): CR values for the sub-dimensions of the scale ranged from 0.69 to 0.83. Considering the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014), although the entertainment factor (0.69) remained borderline, all other factors had acceptable levels of internal consistency.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE): AVE values were calculated as 0.62 for advertising value, 0.50 for deceptiveness, and 0.56 for irritation. These values met the recommended criterion of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For informativeness (0.49) and entertainment (0.43), AVE values remained borderline but were considered within acceptable limits for convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity: The  $\sqrt{AVE}$  values for all factors ranged from 0.656 to 0.787. Since the inter-factor correlations were below these values, discriminant validity was established (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Fit Indices: When evaluating the goodness-of-fit of the model, the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio ( $236/66 = 3.58$ ) was within acceptable limits (Kline, 2015). The CFI (0.943) and TLI (0.922) values were above the threshold of 0.90, indicating that the model had a good fit with the data (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA value (0.079) being below 0.08 revealed that the model had an acceptable level of fit (Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

In conclusion, the five-factor structure of the attitude toward activist advertising scale (advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, entertainment, and irritation) was confirmed in the Turkish sample. The scale had adequate convergent and discriminant validity and was evaluated as a reliable measurement tool.

Brand image scale: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the brand image scale. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used in the analysis. By examining the modification indices, covariances were defined between items I6 and I7, and between I1 and I2, which were theoretically considered meaningful. This improvement aimed to increase the model's fit to the data. When the fit indices obtained from the analysis were examined, the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio ( $55.9/18 = 3.11$ ) was found to be within acceptable limits (Kline, 2015). The CFI (0.965) and TLI (0.945) values were well above the threshold of 0.90, indicating that the model showed a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA value (0.072) being below 0.08 indicated that the model had an acceptable level of fit (Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

**Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results for brand image scale**

Factor	Item	Loading ( $\lambda$ )	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/\text{df}$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Brand Image	I1	0.658	0.83	0.81	0.38	0.616	55.9	18	3.11	0.965	0.945	0.072
	I2	0.684										
	I3	0.330										
	I4	0.664										
	I5	0.585										
	I6	0.651										
	I7	0.637										
	I8	0.545										

n=409. All factor loadings are significant at  $P < 0.001$ . Covariances were defined between I6 and I7, and between I1 and I2, based on modification indices.  $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted,  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ : Square root of AVE.  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's Alpha

**Table 4: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results for customer loyalty scale**

Factor	Item	Loading ( $\lambda$ )	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/\text{df}$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Customer loyalty	S1	0.752	0.91	0.91	0.61	0.781	62.1	17	3.65	0.979	0.965	0.081
	S2	0.902										
	S3	0.870										
	S4	0.824										
	S5	0.928										
	S6	0.747										
	S7	0.582										
	S8	0.790										

n=409. All factor loadings are significant at  $P < 0.001$ . Covariances were defined between S6 and S7, and between S4 and S7, based on modification indices.  $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted,  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ : Square root of AVE,  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's Alpha

When the factor loadings were examined, all items had statistically significant factor loadings ( $P < 0.001$ ). Although the factor loading of item I3 ( $\lambda = 0.330$ ) was relatively low, the item was retained in the scale because the overall fit indices of the model were at a good level. The composite reliability (CR) value (0.81) being above the threshold of 0.70 indicated that the scale had a high level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). Although the average variance extracted (AVE) value (0.38) remained below the recommended threshold, the fact that other fit indices such as CFI and TLI were at good levels indicated that the scale generally had acceptable psychometric properties. In conclusion, it can be stated that the single-factor structure of the brand image scale showed an acceptable level of fit and is a valid measurement tool that can be used in the research. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Customer loyalty scale: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the customer loyalty scale. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used in the analysis. Based on the modification indices, covariances were defined between items S6 and S7, and between S4 and S7, which were theoretically considered meaningful. This improvement aimed to increase the model's fit to the data. When the fit indices obtained from the analysis were examined, the  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio ( $62.1/17 = 3.65$ ) was found to be within acceptable limits (Kline, 2015). The CFI (0.979) and TLI (0.965) values were well above the threshold of 0.90, indicating that the model showed a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Although the RMSEA value (0.081) remained borderline, the fact that other fit indices such as CFI and TLI were at excellent levels indicated that the model had an acceptable level of fit (Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

Factor loadings: All items had statistically significant factor loadings ( $P < 0.001$ ). Except for item S7 ( $\lambda = 0.582$ ), all items had factor

**Table 5: Direct effect analysis results**

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate (B)	$\beta$	z	P
H <sub>1a</sub>	AV → CL	0.364	0.137	3.024	0.002
H <sub>1b</sub>	INF → CL	-0.059	-0.020	-0.485	0.627
H <sub>1c</sub>	DEC → CL	0.193	0.067	1.709	0.087
H <sub>1d</sub>	ENT → CL	0.250	0.085	2.131	0.033
H <sub>1e</sub>	IRR → CL	0.105	0.035	0.931	0.352

AV: Advertising value, INF: Informativeness, DEC: Deceptiveness, ENT: Entertainment, IRR: Irritation, CL: Customer loyalty

loadings above 0.70. Particularly, items S2 (0.902), S5 (0.928), and S3 (0.870) stood out as strong items of the scale with their high factor loadings. Reliability and Validity: The composite reliability (CR) value (0.91) being well above the threshold of 0.70 indicated that the scale had a high level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). The average variance extracted (AVE) value (0.61) meeting the criterion of 0.50 revealed that the scale had an adequate level of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In conclusion, it can be stated that the single-factor structure of the customer loyalty scale showed a good fit and is a highly reliable and valid measurement tool. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

### 4.3. Findings Related to Hypothesis Testing

#### 4.3.1. Findings related to direct effects

Path analysis was conducted to determine the direct effects of the sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising on customer loyalty without the mediation of brand image. The findings obtained are presented in Table 5.

Hypothesis H<sub>1a</sub> (AV → CL) was supported. The direct effect of advertising value on customer loyalty was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.137$ ,  $z = 3.024$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ). This finding indicates that activist advertising messages that consumers find valuable can

directly strengthen loyalty behavior. This finding is consistent with previous studies revealing the direct effect of advertising value on consumer behavior (Ducoffe, 1995; Spears and Singh, 2004).

Hypothesis  $H_{1b}$  (INF → CL) was not supported. The direct effect of informativeness on customer loyalty was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.020, z = -0.485, P = 0.627$ ). This finding suggests that the effect of informative activist advertisements on loyalty is not direct, but rather occurs through a mediating variable such as brand image. This result aligns with studies stating that the effect of informative advertisements occurs indirectly through cognitive processes (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993).

Hypothesis  $H_{1c}$  (DEC → CL) was not supported. The direct effect of deceptiveness on customer loyalty was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.067, z = 1.709, P = 0.087$ ). Although the literature indicates that deceptive advertisements undermine consumer trust (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007), the lack of a significant direct effect in this study suggests that this effect may be better explained through brand image.

Hypothesis  $H_{1d}$  (ENT → CL) was supported. The direct effect of entertainment on customer loyalty was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.085, z = 2.131, P = 0.033$ ). This finding reveals that entertaining activist advertisements can directly strengthen loyalty behavior by arousing positive emotional responses in consumers. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that entertainment is an important determinant of advertising effectiveness (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).

Hypothesis  $H_{1e}$  (IRR → CL) was not supported. The direct effect of irritation on customer loyalty was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.035, z = 0.931, P = 0.352$ ). Although the literature indicates that irritation generally leads to negative attitudes (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985), it is also stated that this effect may not always reflect on behavioral outcomes (Naser and Ismail, 2020).

4.3.2. Findings related to path coefficients

The effects of the sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising on brand image ( $H_{3a}$ - $H_{3e}$ ) and the effect of brand image

on customer loyalty ( $H_2$ ) were tested. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Hypothesis  $H_{3a}$  (AV → BI) was supported. The effect of advertising value on brand image was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.242, P < 0.001$ ). Activist advertising messages that consumers find valuable support the formation of positive perceptions toward the brand (Keller, 1993; Ducoffe, 1995).

Hypothesis  $H_{3b}$  (INF → BI) was supported. The effect of informativeness on brand image was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.235, P < 0.001$ ). Informative activist advertisements help consumers develop positive associations about the brand (Aaker, 1996; Schmidt et al., 2018).

Hypothesis  $H_{3c}$  (DEC → BI) was supported but in the opposite direction. The effect of deceptiveness on brand image was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.155, P < 0.001$ ). While the literature expects deceptive advertisements to damage brand image (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007), a positive effect emerged in this study. This unexpected finding suggests that due to the nature of activist advertisements, consumers may perceive deceptiveness not as brand insincerity, but as a bold or provocative communication strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Hypothesis  $H_{3d}$  (ENT → BI) was supported. The effect of entertainment on brand image was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.292, P < 0.001$ ). This finding represents the strongest path coefficient in the model. Entertaining activist advertisements are evaluated more positively by consumers and support the establishment of an emotional bond with the brand (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).

Hypothesis  $H_{3e}$  (IRR → BI) was not supported. The effect of irritation on brand image was not statistically significant ( $P = 0.586$ ). Although the literature indicates that irritating advertisements lead to negative attitudes (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985), no significant effect could be detected in this study.

Hypothesis  $H_2$  (BI → CL) was supported. The effect of brand image on customer loyalty is positive and quite strong ( $\beta = 0.617, P < 0.001$ ). This finding demonstrates that a strong and positive brand image plays a critical role in the formation of consumer loyalty. This finding is consistent with previous studies revealing the direct and positive effect of brand image on customer loyalty (Keller, 1993; Saleem and Raja, 2014; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.3.3. Findings related to indirect effects

Within the scope of the mediating role of brand image in the effect of the sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising on

Table 6: Path coefficient analysis results

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate (B)	$\beta$	z	P
$H_{3a}$	AV→BI	0.505	0.242	4.763	<0.001
$H_{3b}$	INF→BI	0.539	0.235	5.044	<0.001
$H_{3c}$	DEC→BI	0.351	0.155	3.481	<0.001
$H_{3d}$	ENT→BI	0.675	0.292	6.696	<0.001
$H_{3e}$	IRR→BI	-0.056	-0.024	-0.544	0.586
$H_2$	BI→CL	0.787	0.617	14.407	<0.001

AV: Advertising value, INF: Informativeness, DEC: Deceptiveness, ENT: Entertainment, IRR: Irritation, BI: Brand image, CL: Customer loyalty

Table 7: Indirect effect analysis results

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	$\beta$	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	z	P
$H_{4a}$	AV→BI→CL	0.398	0.149	0.225	0.570	4.522	<0.001
$H_{4b}$	INF→BI→CL	0.424	0.145	0.250	0.599	4.760	<0.001
$H_{4c}$	DEC→BI→CL	0.276	0.096	0.116	0.437	3.383	<0.001
$H_{4d}$	ENT→BI→CL	0.531	0.180	0.360	0.702	6.072	<0.001
$H_{4e}$	IRR→BI→CL	-0.044	-0.015	-0.202	0.114	-0.544	0.587

AV: Advertising value, INF: Informativeness, DEC: Deceptiveness, ENT: Entertainment, IRR: Irritation, BI: Brand image, CL: Customer loyalty, CI: Confidence interval

**Table 8: Hypothesis summary and results**

Hypothesis	Content	Result
H <sub>1a</sub>	Advertising value positively affects customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>1b</sub>	Informativeness positively affects customer loyalty.	Not Supported
H <sub>1c</sub>	Deceptiveness negatively affects customer loyalty.	Not Supported
H <sub>1d</sub>	Entertainment positively affects customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>1e</sub>	Irritation negatively affects customer loyalty.	Not Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Brand image positively and significantly affects customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>3a</sub>	Advertising value positively affects brand image.	Supported
H <sub>3b</sub>	Informativeness positively affects brand image.	Supported
H <sub>3c</sub>	Deceptiveness negatively affects brand image.	Not Supported (Positive effect found)
H <sub>3d</sub>	Entertainment positively affects brand image.	Supported
H <sub>3e</sub>	Irritation negatively affects brand image.	Not Supported
H <sub>4a</sub>	Brand image mediates the effect of advertising value on customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>4b</sub>	Brand image mediates the effect of informativeness on customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>4c</sub>	Brand image mediates the effect of deceptiveness on customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>4d</sub>	Brand image mediates the effect of entertainment on customer loyalty.	Supported
H <sub>4e</sub>	Brand image mediates the effect of irritation on customer loyalty.	Not Supported

n=409. H<sub>1a</sub>-H<sub>1e</sub> represent direct effects, H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3a</sub>-H<sub>3e</sub> represent path coefficients, H<sub>4a</sub>-H<sub>4e</sub> represent indirect (mediation) effects

customer loyalty, the mediating role of brand image in the effect of advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, entertainment, and irritation on customer loyalty was tested. The findings obtained are presented in Table 7.

Hypothesis H<sup>4a</sup> (AV → BI → CL) was supported. The mediating role of brand image in the effect of advertising value on customer loyalty was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.149$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Activist advertisements that consumers find valuable first strengthen brand image, and then this positive image turns into loyalty (Keller, 1993; Saleem and Raja, 2014).

Hypothesis H<sub>4b</sub> (INF → BI → CL) was supported. The mediating role of brand image in the effect of informativeness on customer loyalty was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.145$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Informative activist advertisements contribute to consumers developing positive perceptions about the brand, and these perceptions increase loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Wicaksono et al., 2025).

Hypothesis H<sub>4c</sub> (DEC → BI → CL) was supported. The mediating role of brand image in the effect of deceptiveness on customer loyalty was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.096$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). While the literature expects deceptive advertisements to damage brand image and negatively affect loyalty (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007), a positive indirect effect emerged in this study.

Hypothesis H<sub>4d</sub> (ENT → BI → CL) was supported. The mediating role of brand image in the effect of entertainment on customer loyalty was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.180$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). This finding represents the strongest indirect effect in the model. Entertaining activist advertisements arouse positive emotions in consumers, strengthening brand image, and this situation supports the formation of loyalty (Castro, 2022; Kiran et al., 2024).

Hypothesis H<sub>4e</sub> (IRR → BI → CL) was not supported. The mediating role of brand image in the effect of irritation on customer loyalty was not found to be significant ( $P = 0.587$ ). Irritating activist advertisements do not have a significant effect on loyalty through brand image (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Naser and Ismail, 2020). The overall results are summarized in Table 8.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of brand image in the effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty within a holistic model framework. The findings largely support the main hypotheses of the study and offer various theoretical contributions to the literature. The results reveal that the effects of the five sub-dimensions of attitude toward activist advertising (advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, entertainment, irritation) on brand image and customer loyalty differ.

The research findings show that advertising value, informativeness, and entertainment positively affect brand image (H<sub>3a</sub>, H<sub>3b</sub>, H<sub>3d</sub>). These results prove that the concept of advertising value developed by Ducoffe (1995) and the brand image theories put forward by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996) are also valid in the context of activist advertising. Particularly, the fact that entertainment has the strongest effect ( $\beta = 0.2919$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) is consistent with the results reported by Castro (2022) and Kiran et al. (2024). This finding reveals that consumers develop more positive reactions to activist messages they find entertaining, and these messages are the most effective tool in strengthening brand image.

The most striking and original finding of the study is that deceptiveness positively affects brand image (H<sub>3c</sub>). The literature contains strong findings that deceptive advertisements undermine consumer trust and lead to negative attitudes (Schmidt et al., 2018; Darke and Ritchie, 2007). Chaouachi and Rached (2019) state that the perception of deception creates negative effects on attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention. However, the positive effect of deceptiveness in this study ( $\beta = 0.1551$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) suggests that due to the nature of activist advertisements, consumers may perceive deceptiveness not as brand insincerity, but as a bold or provocative communication strategy. Within the framework of the concept of “woke washing” discussed by Vredenburg et al. (2020), it is thought that some consumers may overlook deceptive elements while appreciating the activist stance of brands. The fact that the majority of the sample consists of young (Generations Y and Z) and educated

consumers may have led this group to evaluate the perception of deceptiveness from a different perspective.

Another important finding is that irritation has no significant effect on brand image ( $H_{3c}$ ). The literature indicates that irritating advertisements generally lead to negative attitudes (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Qin and Yan, 2017; Naser and Ismail, 2020). However, the lack of a significant effect of irritation in this study shows that this effect may vary depending on consumer characteristics. It is thought that young consumers can tolerate irritating advertisements more or interpret them as the brand's bold stance. Kiran et al. (2024) state that especially young consumers focus on sincerity and value alignment rather than irritation when evaluating the activist stance of brands.

The effect of brand image on customer loyalty is quite strong ( $H_2$ ). This finding ( $\beta = 0.6165$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) is consistent with the results reported by Keller (1993), Saleem and Raja (2014), and Fornell and Larcker (1981). This study also confirms that a strong and positive brand image plays a critical role in the formation of consumer loyalty.

When direct effects are examined ( $H_{1a}$ - $H_{1c}$ ), advertising value ( $\beta = 0.1368$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ) and entertainment ( $\beta = 0.0847$ ,  $P = 0.033$ ) directly affect customer loyalty. These findings show that activist advertising messages that consumers find valuable and entertaining can directly affect loyalty behavior without needing any intermediary mechanism (Ducoffe, 1995; Spears and Singh, 2004; Castro, 2022).

The fact that the direct effect of informativeness is not significant ( $P = 0.627$ ) but its indirect effect is significant ( $\beta = 0.1447$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) indicates full mediation in this dimension. This finding reveals that informative activist advertisements do not directly lead to loyalty; they must first strengthen brand image. This result proves that the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model developed by Keller (1993) is also valid in the context of activist advertising. Similarly, Aaker (1996) states that the effect of informative advertisements occurs indirectly through cognitive processes.

When mediation effects are examined ( $H_{4a}$ - $H_{4c}$ ), it has been revealed that brand image plays a significant mediating role in the effect of advertising value, informativeness, deceptiveness, and entertainment on customer loyalty, while the mediating role of irritation is not significant. This finding supports the theoretical framework put forward by Wicaksono et al. (2025) and Jung and Mittal (2020) that "the effect of activist advertising often emerges through indirect means."

This study makes four main theoretical contributions to the literature. First, the five-factor structure of the advertising value scale developed by Ducoffe (1995) was confirmed in the Turkish sample and proved to be a valid measurement tool in the context of activist advertising. Second, the mediating role of brand image confirms the theoretical framework showing that the effect of activist advertising occurs through indirect means. Third, the positive effect of deceptiveness is an original finding that challenges the prevailing view in the literature and offers a new research paradigm in the field of activist advertising.

Fourth, full mediation was detected in the informativeness dimension, proving the validity of the theories developed by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996) in the context of activist advertising.

The research findings offer important practical implications for marketing managers and brand strategists. Entertainment and advertising value dimensions should be prioritized in activist advertising campaigns. Informative activist advertisements do not directly lead to loyalty; such messages should be designed to first strengthen brand image. Deceptiveness is a risky strategy; it is recommended that brands adopt sincere, transparent, and consistent communication strategies for long-term trust building and avoid "woke washing" criticisms (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Avoiding irritating activist advertisements is recommended, as such content neither contributes to nor harms loyalty. Brand image should be placed at the center of activist advertising strategies.

This study has some limitations. The use of convenience sampling, cross-sectional design, only quantitative method, the sample consisting predominantly of young and educated consumers, not distinguishing between types of activist advertising (environmental, gender, human rights, political, etc.), and the research being conducted only in the Turkish sample limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to work with larger and random samples, longitudinal designs, qualitative or mixed methods, consumers from different age and education levels, focus on specific types of activist advertising, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons.

In conclusion, this study presents a comprehensive model revealing the mediating role of brand image in the effect of attitudes toward activist advertising on customer loyalty. The findings show that entertainment and advertising value have the strongest effects; full mediation occurs in the informativeness dimension; deceptiveness, contrary to expectations, has a positive effect; and irritation does not create a significant effect. The research offers theoretical contributions to the brand activism literature and guides practitioners in designing activist advertising strategies. In the age of activism, it should not be forgotten that brands can make a difference not only with product quality and price but also with their stance on social issues, and can create customer loyalty by strategically integrating this stance into their brand images.

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