



Assessing the Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty and Brand Choice Intention for the Products of Saipa Corporation

Javad Golzari ^{1*}, Farshid Movaghar Moghaddam ^{2*}

¹ Master student of MBA, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University,

² Department of Management, Abade Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abade, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Today, customer loyalty is the key to business success. With the increase in customer loyalty, market share and profitability of a business enterprise will also increase. Understanding the market, along with planning and choosing the right strategies to make customers more loyal and increase their loyalty ratio, will produce long-term profits for a business enterprise. This loyalty will lead to brand choice intention. Recent marketing for car sale in Iran has increased the attention of car producers to the factors that influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Although various studies have been done on brand among car producing companies, concerning the scope of influential factor, they have included some limited and repetitive variables such as brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. In the current paper, a model has been suggested and examined that covers the effects of eight factors on brand loyalty, as well as, the impact of brand loyalty on brand choice intention.

Introduction:

In recent years, research done to discover the factors that influence customer satisfaction and loyalty has expanded. Richard Oliver has described loyalty as

when a product is purchased in spite of potential marketing attempts by rivals and its effects. Most of the Research on customer loyalty has focused on particular products or brands. (Oh & Hsu, 2014) As customer loyalty is a paramount factor in the success of Saipa Corporation and the improvement of its profitability, this paper will deal with influential factors on brand loyalty to the products of this corporation. Customer loyalty is such a crucial factor that it is turning into a key factor in the excellence of automotive products. Car markets have become highly competitive and with the advent of Chinese cars enjoying a better quality and affordable prices compared to domestic products, car corporations, especially Saipa, have been alarmed to take action to increase customer satisfaction and preserve customer loyalty to Saipa brand. Brand, as one of the pillars of business competitions today, needs to be clearly defined, set, and managed so that institutes and companies can ascertain profitability based on its strategic role in their strategic decisions. Nevertheless, the problem is that segments of the current market are getting smaller and more competitive. Thus, preserving previous customers and attracting new ones is getting more difficult. In these conditions, those companies are successful which can properly identify the needs of customers and move toward the excellence of their brands and thus reduce the costs of attracting new customers, which is more costly than preserving the past ones (Firoozian et al, 2006). No doubt, one of the basic principles of adjusting marketing strategy is to have useful and timely information regarding the needs and preferences of the customers and studying the determining factors in accepting a brand and being loyal to it (Abasi & Safarnia, 2011). No longer do people need to stand long lines and spend months and years with a prepayment of large sums of money to get a car. Instead of waiting for old and low quality cars, they expect domestic car producers to provide cars, spare parts, and after-sale services appropriately and expediently. Currently, low quality, inappropriate distribution network, faulty sales network, and ignoring the needs of the customers have literally caused serious dissatisfaction among domestic

customers. Not only is not there a positive brand image in the minds of the customers, but also there is no appropriate brand prestige attributed to the products. This is because these corporations have been producing cars with unattractive shapes and body designs (like Tiba and Peugeot SD) and imposing cars, which have been in the production line for over 15 years, on customers. Thus, customers have lost their positive attitude to the brands and all trust in the management. These serious problems brought about some studies on brand loyalty and brand choice intention. The experience of other car producers in industrial countries also shows that after the first phase of mass-producing and supplying new, up-to-date models; it will be time for improving quality, delivering spare parts expediently, creating various and inexpensive financial facilities, satisfying customers, and finally customer loyalty. Iranian car producers, too, have to offer different and inexpensive financial facilities along with expedient and widespread supply of spare parts. A corporation, which is better at establishing an appropriate after-sale service network and supplying spare parts punctually, will be more successful at building up Iranian customer satisfaction and trust and will increase its market share (Tsiotsu, 2006). Dissatisfaction will certainly lead to disloyalty of customers to the brand and products of Saipa Corporation. Considering the above-mentioned facts, the importance of study factors influencing brand loyalty to Saipa products will become more obvious. As this study has not been carried out in Tehran so far and discovering the results of the study can have a dramatic effect on marketing plans, we have decided to study the factors influencing brand loyalty and brand choice intention for the products of Saipa car producing corporation. Since there has been no research of the kind so far for any car producing company (as far as the writer is concerned), the current writer is determined to venture this attempt. Based on the knowledge and experience of the writer with some companies related to car production, most of the companies seem to be partially unaware of the effects of factors like brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand

personality, brand attitude, brand prestige, management trust , brand loyalty, as well as, the effect of brand loyalty on brand choice intention. Thus, the writer aims at scientifically studying these factors in the car market (Saipa corporation products). The results of the study could benefit Saipa Corporation and the car production industry in the country to discover these factors and their importance from customers' viewpoint, ascertain loyal and satisfied customers, and preserve them. It is hoped that this will lead to proper and effective investment on these factors.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development:

A lot of research has been done on brand loyalty structure and levels, including the research done by Jacoby & Chestnut (1978), Blomer & Kasper (1995), as well as, the studies by Hong and Goo (2004). In these studies, quality has been defined as the factor concerning customer satisfaction. Although Bitner and Bolton (1990) believed that the idea of satisfaction just represents previous experience of the product quality and satisfaction with it, Cronin and Taylor (1992), with regard to quality, consumer satisfaction, and brand choice came to this conclusion that the first two variables affected the third. The study done by Aydin Ozer suggested that the assumption of quality is a necessary condition in services but it is not the only condition in establishing customer loyalty. Dodds and Monroe (1985) and Zeithamel (1988) had previously stated that value and price were the main factors in brand choice intention and were determined by the cost of services. Garton (1995) believes that the actual and perceived quality by customers has a minor effect on customer's loyalty to a store.

Sivadas & Baker Prewitt (2000) concluded that customers' perception plays a significant role in their satisfaction but does not have direct impact on their loyalty.

In Turkey, A study on people who were born between 1974 and 1999 regarding clothing items done by Erdugmas & Turan (2012), showed that a brand's reputation, brand attitude, and perceived quality had a strong and positive impact on brand loyalty.

In a research by Haemoon and Hsu (2014), carried out in China on brand loyalty regarding the choice of hotels; factors like brand personality, brand awareness, perceived quality, management trust and commitment, and brand trust will have a great positive impact on brand loyalty and brand equity.

Brand loyalty

This is one of the assets of the brand as a source to build equity and brand loyalty. Literally, brand loyalty entails concepts of insistence and commitment. Nevertheless, when the concept of loyalty is used in relation to customers, the underlying belief is that this loyalty exists emotionally in the minds of the customers. Brand loyalty measures a degree of attachment between the customer and the brand that forms the basis for brand equity and assessed by various factors such as perceived quality, brand awareness, management trust, brand attitude, brand value, and brand personality. Brand choice intention is one of the major results of brand loyalty (Aaker, 2000). An important characteristic of loyal customers is an everlasting support for a particular brand and avoidance of other brands. In other words, brand loyalty is established by brand use and will make the customer choose the brand and resist a brand change. (Oliver, 1999) Leman & Greenfield (1995), Due to a good opinion created by a shopping experience, customers will become loyal, will share their experience with others, and will be considered as the best supporters of a company or a productand (Keller, 2003). Thus, the customer's intention to buy a certain product in the presence of rival products is referred to as brand choice intention and there exists a positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand choice

intention ,Thus, considering the points mentioned so far, the first theory can be stipulated as follows:

H1: brand loyalty has a positive impact on brand choice intention.

Perceived quality:

Aaker and Keller (2003) have defined perceived quality as a customer's perception of the overall quality or the excellence of a product or service based on their intended purpose and in relation to other alternatives. After all, perceived quality is an overall and intangible feeling about a brand and a logo. The above definition and the perceived function in other studies such as customer value (Zeithmal, 1988), service quality (Parasuraman et al, 1985), and customer satisfaction (Oliver,1999)are aligned. Briefly speaking, this concept represents a customer's emotive and cognitive behavior toward a brand. The relationship between brand and loyalty has long been considered as one of the fundamental structures of marketing.

According to Aaker (1991), a customer will remain loyal to a brand when that brand enjoys a high quality and that high quality will persuade the customer to buy the brand frequently and ignore the offers of other rivals. This can even occur when brand products have higher prices (Aaker, 1991). According to the highly acclaimed PIMS study carried out by Bazzel and Gill (1987), there is some evidence that perceived quality is influenced by market share and profitability in the long run (Burner et al, 2008). Customer value theory has defended the reasoning that quality-loyalty relationship is influenced by quality perception. Quality perception will in turn determine a customer's inclination to buy a product again. (Rao & Monroe, 1989) support the experimental studies of the concepts that perceived quality is a subjective evaluation of a brand and that perceived quality has had a key precedence in affecting the brand. Thus, based on what has been mentioned so far, the second theory can be stated as follows:

H2: perceived quality will have a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Brand awareness:

This is the ability of potential customers, as members of a certain social class, to recognize products (Aaker, 2000). Brand awareness is a major condition in knowing a brand, preferring or not preferring it, and remaining loyal to it (Wilcox et al, 2008). Brand awareness will affect customer loyalty and choice intention by influencing intensifying the brand bonds in the brand image, which is itself created by different data related to the brand. Practical studies have shown that brand awareness can have a positive impact on the choice of new brands and market share (Srinivasan et al, 2005). Thus, according to Keller and practical results, it seems logical to assume that brand awareness will affect the results of brand equity such as brand choice and brand loyalty (Keller, 2003). Thus, based and what has been covered so far, the third hypothesis can be stated as follows.

H3: Brand awareness will have a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Management trust:

Fukuyama (1995), what builds trust is the existence of regular, right, and cooperating behavior in a society based on shared criteria of the members of a group of that society. Fukuyama believes that technological changes will always make the role of trust in understanding business behavior more prominent. Loyalty and trust have close relationship with each other (Lai, Griffin, 2008). The more customers trust the products under a certain brand, due to man's risk avoiding nature; they will try more to buy products of the same brand and will show less inclination toward the products of other brands. This is referred to as brand loyalty. Trust can be defined as the customer's certainty regarding the

delivery of products as promised (Augusting & Singh, 2005). The more customers trust a brand the more they will remain loyal to that brand. Loyalty is based on trust (Oshaughnessy, 1192). Thus, the customers' purchase will be done regardless of costs and profits. As such, brand loyalty implies brand loyalty (Lau, Lee, 1999). Therefore, making a trustworthy brand will lead to the preservation of the relationship between producers and customers (Augusting and Singh, 2005). Trust has a crucial role in building brand-customer relationship and positively influences brand loyalty. Customers' trust in a brand is based on their positive beliefs regarding their expectations of an organization's behavior and the function of the products. In the long run, trust will have a significant impact on customers' loyalty and as time passes, customers who have trust in a brand will increasingly become loyal to that brand (Christy, Hillary, 2009). Trust-commitment theory, a subcategory of relationship marketing will provide proper conceptual sources for the potential role of the management in studies on brand equity (Morgan, Hunt, 1994). Aaker suggested that commitment could be one of the ancillary components of brand loyalty (Aaker, 2000). The results of these studies show that management trust has a positive relationship with brand loyalty. Thus, according to what was said, the fourth hypothesis can be stated as follows.

H4: management trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Brand image

Brand image and brand association are often used interchangeably. Brand image is a combination of different mental associations in customers' minds, which are often regular and significant. They show the customer's perception of the brand, which could represent the intrinsic truth of the brand or not. Tepeci claims that brand image is the first step in the structure of brand loyalty (Tepeci, 1999). In many cases, customers prefer a brand and become loyal to it merely because of

the brand image (Schifman, Kanuk, 1991). Zins (2001) says that there is a strong connection between a brand image and brand loyalty based on relational commitment. Kandampully and Suhartano (2000) believe that brand image is strongly linked with brand loyalty. Brand image along with satisfaction and the functioning of the company specifically explains the customer's loyalty variance. Anderson and Lindestad (1998) said that for both expert customers and customers with less expertise about a career or a service, brand image is the first path to loyalty compared to other factors such as satisfaction. It also has a strong impact on satisfaction. Hsieh and Kai Li (2008) believe when brand image is agreeable, the positive relationship between customer's perception of the public relations and their loyalty will become stronger. (Keller, 1993) Thus, according to what has been mentioned, the fifth hypothesis can be stated as follows:

H5: Brand image has a positive impact on brand loyalty

Brand attitude

Green (1954) said that the concept of attitude refers to a concordance or the ability to foresee the response. Campbell (1963) referred to attitude as an acquired behavioral readiness (Smith & Swinyard, 1983). Keller (1993) says that according to the specified model, there is a hierarchy among brands like the fact that brand attitude precedes brand loyalty (Baldinger et al, 1996). Attitude can be considered as a permanent ratio in assessing the overall framework of environmental features of a product, a service, or a brand. Brand attitude can be a customer's overall assessment of a brand's ability to fulfill his/her needs. In attitude models, several characteristics have been offered where customers' beliefs regarding a brand can be rated based on them. It has been proved that attitudes contain different content dimensions with emotive, behavioral, and cognitive labels. The study done by Woo and Wang (2011) revealed that brand

attraction, brand choice intention, and brand trust can respectively represent emotive, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of brand choice intention. As the definitions of brand behavior and loyalty and brand choice intention overlap, it can be concluded that brand loyalty, brand choice intention, and buying behavior are controlled by the customers' attitude (Kruger et al, 2013). Baldinger and Robinson say that brand loyalty links up brand behavior and brand attitude (Baldinger et al, 1996). Chadhuri (1996) explains that there is evidence of the mediating role of brand loyalty between brand attitude and market share (Liu et al, 2012). Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002) say that brand attitude can have a fundamental and unified role in forming behavioral purposes regarding technology. In this conceptual model, brand loyalty can act as superior to brand attitude (Liu et al, 2012). Therefore, considering the points mentioned, the sixth theory can be stated as follows.

H6: brand attitude positively affects brand loyalty.

Brand prestige

Brand prestige is innate and unique and depends on special features or high quality and function of a brand. It is a key criterion for a brand. Consumers and customers express their identity through the choice of acclaimed brands (Bettencort, Lane, 1997). When customers attribute a good prestige to a service-providing institute, they probably have a greater sense of belief in its commitment and a good inclination toward continuing transactions with the institute (Einwiller et al, 2006). Einwiller et al (2006), for instance, proved that the recognition of an institute by customers would lead to commitment to the extent that customers would have a positive feeling and belief about the institute. Thus, a good prestige for the institute will make customers positively and continuously strengthen their emotive and committing link to the institute (Gruen, 1995). When a highly respected customer is preserved for an institute,

this might support the institute by means of an intentional action or a fixed belief behavior. Nevertheless, customers' behavior can stem from the customers' inclination to commit to a highly esteemed institute (Fomburn, 1990). A good prestige is also a sign of institutional behavior aligned with the general operations of the market, in a way that it creates not only a higher level of commitment, but also a greater brand loyalty. A good prestige will reduce the perceived risk of customers and will persuade them to make a transaction with the organization. Wang and Zhou (2005) showed that the perceived prestige of a brand will have a great effect on brand loyalty and brand choice intention when a product family enjoys a high level of social value (Zayerkabehe et al, 2012). Thus, considering what has been mentioned so far, the seventh hypothesis can be stated as follows:

Brand prestige will have a positive effect on customers regarding the brand. The following hypothesis is also confirmed.

H7: brand prestige will have a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Personality congruence

According to the studies by Costa and McCrae (1985), the personality of a customer is, to some degree, the personality of consumers regarding themselves as to their being extrovert, adaptive to environment, responsible, mentally healthy, and open-minded (Grover, Schoormans, 2005). According to the studies by Grovers and schoormans(2005), it was shown that if customers find congruence between their personality and the personality of the product, their priority will change and they will form a better opinion about the product. The studies of the researchers display that consumers will show greater tendency to buy the products with personalities closely congruent with their own personalities. This is referred to as personality congruence (Kim et al, 2001). In different studies, Aaker's brand personality

scale was applied to different countries such as France, Japan, Germany, Korea, and Turkey. In Turkey, four dimensions of brand personality i.e. excitement, competence, tradition, and gender were studied. Self-congruity theory, with regard to customers' behavior, shows that there is an external relationship between personality congruence (congruence between product image and consumers' personality) and consumer's choice. Personality congruence plays an important role in customers' brand acceptance and decision-making process. Consumers like, prefer, and become loyal to brands that are congruent with their real and ideal concepts (Erdugmas & Turan 2012). Yee and La (2007) proved that brand personality would affect brand recognition, which would itself positively affect brand loyalty. Kim and Park (2001), using customers' brand recognition, studied the effects of personality on brand asset management and developed a conceptual model that showed the effects of brand recognition on brand loyalty. Thus, considering what the above-mentioned points, the eighth hypothesis can be stated as follows:

H8: personality congruence will positively affect brand loyalty.

The effects of brand reliability on brand loyalty

Brand Reliability

Brand reliability will probably lead to brand loyalty over time. When a brand acts reliably in fulfilling the needs of its customers, customers will realize the quality of the product and its services and will become willing to become loyal to the brand. Brand reliability will accomplish management trust, which will focus on the general strength and capability of the brand in fulfilling customer expectations permanently and frequently. A trustworthy brand will return the customer to the organization, will lead to customer commitment, and will finally bring about customer loyalty (Oh, Hsu, 2012). Thus, according to the above-mentioned points, the ninth hypothesis can be stated as follows:

H9: Brand reliability has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Table 2-1: The effects of independent and dependent variables and the sources used.

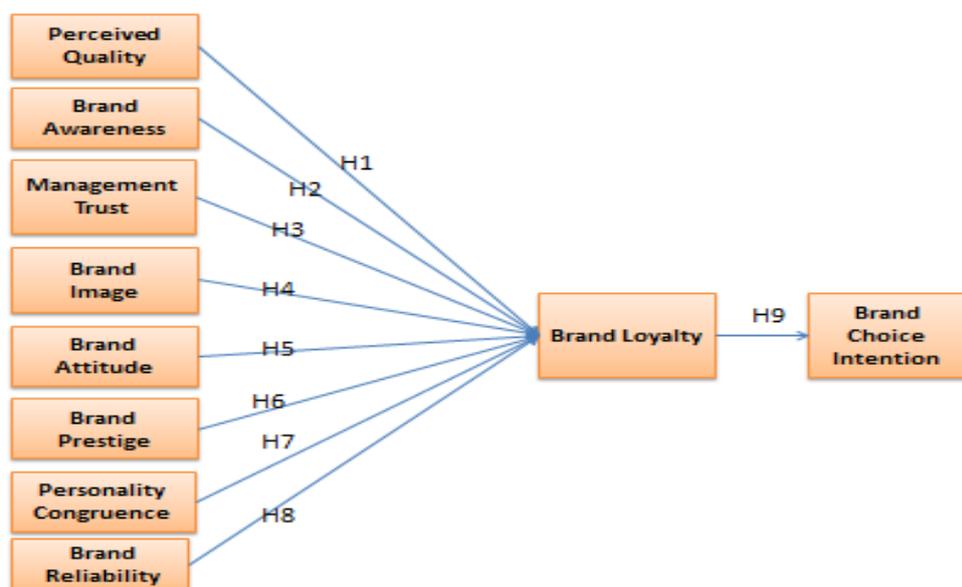
Researcher	The effect of variables			Dependent variable	Independent variable	Hypothesis
	None	negative	positive			
Oh & Hsu(2014)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Perceived quality	H1
Erdugmas, Turan(2012)	----	----	✓			
Aaker(1991)	----	----	✓			
Zetihaml(1988)	----	----	✓			
Namkung(2009)	----	----	✓			
Tepeci(1999)	----	----	✓			
Rao&Monroe(1989)	----	----	✓			
Ha Emoon(2014)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Brand awareness	H2
Aaker(1991),(1996)	----	----	✓			
Keller(2003)	----	----	✓			
Tepeci(1999)	----	----	✓			
Wilcox(2008)	----	----	✓			
Konecnik(2007)	----	----	✓			
Trasorras (2009)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Management trust	H3
Hsu&others(2012)	----	----	✓			
Chaudhuri ,Holbrook(2001)	----	----	✓			

Aaker(2000)	----	----	✓			
Schiffman(1991)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Brand image	H4
Tepeci(1999)	----	----	✓			
Martinson(2007)	----	----	✓			
Yasin(2007)	----	----	✓			
Fang Liu(2012)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Brand attitude	H5
Keller(2003)	----	----	✓			
Erdugmas, Turan(2012)	----	----	✓			
Kruger(2013)	----	----	✓			
Zayerkabe(1991)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Brand prestige	H6
Mellens(1996)	----	----	✓			
Vigneron(1999)	----	----	✓			
Yi & La (2002)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Personality congruence	H7
Kim, Han (2001)	----	----	✓			
Erdugmas, Turan(2012)	----	----	✓			
Keller(1993)	----	----	✓			
Oh & Hsu(2014)	----	----	✓	Brand loyalty	Brand trust capacity	H8
Erdem,Swait(2004)	----	----	✓			
Oh,Hsu(2014)	----	----	✓	Brand choice intention	Brand loyalty	H9
Hsu&others(2012)	----	----	✓			
Srinivasan(2005)	----	----	✓			
McCarthy(2001)	----	----	✓			

The suggested model

In 1991, David Aaker studied the influential factors on brand equity. These factors included brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality. All of these factors had a positive effect on brand equity. In 2014, Oh and Hsu studied the influential factors on brand loyalty and brand equity in China. They assessed the effects of factors of perceived quality, brand reliability, brand awareness, brand image, and trust in hotel management on brand loyalty and the effects of brand loyalty on brand choice intention. This study showed that all the factors had a positive effect on brand loyalty and brand choice intention. Erdogmus and Turan studied the effects of influential factors on brand loyalty including brand personality congruence, brand prestige, brand attitude, and perceived quality in Turkey’s market of clothing industry. All the factors in their study had a positive effect on brand loyalty.

The model of research in this paper is a combination of above-mentioned models, which will deal with influential factors on brand loyalty and brand choice intention of Saipa products from the customers’ point of view.



Picture 2-1 suggested research model (sources: Oh & Hsu (2014) and Erdogmus & Turan (2012))

Conclusion:

In this model, the purpose has been to study the effects of factors such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand reliability, organizational management trust, brand attitude, brand prestige, and brand personality congruence on brand loyalty and examine the effect of brand loyalty on brand choice intention. Prior to this paper, different scholars have already studied factors influencing brand loyalty and had agreed upon factors analyzed in this model. In much of the study done, these factors have had a pronounced presence, yet they have focused on one group of the factors; whereas the current model, focusing on several groups, can be a comprehensive model. This model combines two conceptual models, which is considered innovative in industry and can examine brand equity and brand value, as well. The current model mainly attests to customer centricity and value, production quality, services, brand excellence and reputation on the one hand and the obstacles in the way of these qualities, on the other. It also deals with factors influencing brand loyalty and brand choice intention by means of a comprehensive, standard questionnaire. Since the framework of the above-mentioned model is highly conceptual and its structure is based on a well-supported and highly varied literature review, its validity can be evaluated and approved by means of an experimental model. The present model can be utilized in different production industries and services such as clothing industry, hotel industry, banks, car production industries, insurance, packaging industries, as well as, companies producing food and dairy products.

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