

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF BRAND IDENTITY ON BRAND PERFORMANCE, BRAND SATISFACTION AND BRAND LOVE IN IRAN

Farbod Souri¹, American Liberty University, e-mail: farbodsouri63@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the issue of brand identity has become more and more important to academics and researchers. It stands to the reason that managers and market analysts have become aware of the value of the brand. Since many people make decisions based on the brand name, logo and color, brand identity is an important component in helping a business thrive and is the goal, mission, vision, feeling and voice of the company. In fact, it can be said that brand identity is a mixture of science and art. Therefore, considering the importance of brand identity, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of brand identity on brand performance, brand satisfaction and brand love in Iran.

The statistical population of this study consists of employees of a government organization in Tehran, whose number in 1399 was 513 people. By using simple random sampling method, 265 questionnaires were distributed and among these, 205 correct questionnaires were selected for analysis. The data collected from the questionnaire are measured by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) technique and AMOS software.

Findings from the analysis of research results showed that brand identity has affected brand performance. Also, a significant relationship was found between brand identity and brand satisfaction. Other evidence points to the impact of brand identity on brand love.

Keywords: Competitive advantage, brand equity, brand reputation, marketing, brand

INTRODUCTION

These days, with the idea that the concepts and values of the brand reach their audience through communication and advertising and create for them a more appropriate and superior identity than competitors in the minds of the audience, many organizations direct their large investments towards branding in order to enjoy a strong and valuable brand. Because they believe that the mentality of customers plays a key role in their decision to buy[1]. Brand identity is an intra-organizational structure that originates unilaterally from the organization (i.e. what managers expect from the brand) and it entails maintaining stability over time. Brands identify themselves to customers through identity and distinguish themselves from other competitors. Brand identity is an intra-organizational factor that leads to the promotion of brand equity. In essence, brand identity determines individuality, ideals and goals, values and is the identifying marks of a service brand[2].

Identity is the cornerstone of one of the most important fields of study in recent years in corporate marketing[3]. This term provides a basis for presenting various concepts such as the brand identity of the company[4]. The company's brand identity is a strategic and effective tool and an important source of sustainable competitive advantage that provides numerous benefits to organizations[5]. Brand identity is the basis for an image and its reputation. If the brand identity is well managed, it will lead to perceptions, attitudes and positive behaviors in different beneficiaries; For example, from a consumer perspective, creating a unique, cohesive and distinctive identity adds value to the company's products[6], and increases their preference and loyalty[7]. Also, brand identity affects the attractiveness of the organization and helps companies to increase employees' motivation and attract better and qualified applicants[5], and make more investment[8]. By focusing on market control strategy, brand-oriented companies can formulate and implement specific procedures with the aim of brand successful performance, which in turn will reduce the volatility of consumer behavior and improve effective brand management (Acker et al.,

2000). In addition, some studies place great emphasis on the effective role of brand-orientation in the success of an organization [9][10]. Brand-based organizations consider the brand to be the center of the business model and the core of all their strategies, policies and operations to gain a competitive advantage[10][11]. Many researchers have pointed out that building a strong brand is one of the key factors in achieving competitive advantage and long-term sustainability in the market. So amazingly, all types of organizations and individuals tend to be managed as a brand.

On the other hand, by becoming an important source of competitive advantage, branding has become a vital issue for the corporate arena because in today's changing world, companies are widely based on their performance as a special competitive advantage. And this seems inevitable in today's world. Given that the scope of companies' activities in addition to the financial level, has become international, and that technological advances have caused increasing changes in the business environment, it has become difficult for companies to maintain a competitive advantage. Therefore, one should seek to gain and maintain any kind of competitive advantage. Today, brands are considered by company managers as a factor that makes distinction and an acceptable form of competitive advantage for national and international markets. Brands play an important role in the customer decision-making process and act as a tool to achieve consensus among the decision-makers in the purchasing process. Thus, by considering the brand discussion for companies, it seems necessary to conduct research on brand and performance and brand love. Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the effect of brand identity on brand performance, satisfaction and brand love.

In fact, the purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the effects of corporate brand identity. To achieve this goal, the brand identity of companies is examined from the perspective of employees in an organization; In addition, this study examines the relationship between brand identity and performance and brand satisfaction and love. This research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it expands previous research by providing empirical evidence on corporate branding board and by taking employee perspectives. Second, the findings of this study provide useful guidance on how to manage the firm's brand identity and provide useful concepts for companies and organizations.

Thematic literature

Today, many organizations believe that one of their most valuable assets is the brand of their products and services. Many researchers have pointed out that building a strong brand is one of the key factors in achieving competitive advantage and long-term survival in the market[1]. A strong brand creates value for both the customer and the organization. On the one hand, brands provide the customer with a concise and useful tool to simplify the process of selecting and purchasing a product or service, and make the processing data and information easier and faster for them, and thus create value for customers. On the other hand, product manufacturing and design processes may be easily copied, but the image and role that has remained in the minds of individuals and organizations based on years of marketing and brand experience, cannot be easily replaced and copied[12]. As a result, companies can set higher prices for their products based on a strong brand, create better leveraged trading, increase sales and profit margins, and reduce their vulnerability against competitors. Cutler, on the other hand, defines a brand as follows: "A brand is a name, phrase or term, sign, symbol, symbol, design or combination thereof that aims to introduce a product or service offered by a vendor or group of vendors and thereby distinguish them from the products of competing companies". In fact, branding is considered by many market researchers as one of the most powerful positioning strategies that enables the product to stand out among its competitors and in the minds of customers by taking advantage of benefits and promises. A strong brand differentiates the product from competitors' products[13], reduces search costs, minimizes perceived risks and provides high quality from the customer's point of view[8]. In terms of what gives a brand strength and power, it is the coherence of the brand components that, for example, should support a clear and specific overall theme[12]. In the traditional view, the role of branding has only been to differentiate products, while today brands increasingly depend on the image of an organization, which is created especially through services, where the intangible characteristics of the product give the organization a position to gain credibility. This by itself is one of the most important indicators of customer choice[14].

Brand identity is one of the most important marketing topics that has been considered in few studies; Both researchers and practitioners have concluded that brand identity plays a key role in differentiating and brand management process[12]. Brand identity is an intra-organizational structure that originates unilaterally from the organization and it entails maintaining stability over time. Therefore, it is necessary for the brand to have a stable,

obvious and coherent identity and to act as a constant reference for consumers. However, some managers believe that due to the extreme dynamics of the environment and its constantly changing, the brand identity should also be dynamic and be developed over time and by the mutual interaction of managers and other social elements.

Brand identity is defined as the basic idea and concept of a brand that introduces unique and valuable aspects of the brand. Also, with this idea and concept, the brand communicates with its shareholders and through it the brand strategy is created and perceived in the minds of customers[6]. Achieving the brand identity makes it stand out in the minds of customers. All the brand elements that create its identity affect the awareness and mental images of customers[12]. Over the past few decades, experts have proposed several frameworks regarding brand identity. These brand identity frameworks have no limitations right now[6].

The following are some important researches in the field of brand identity, love, satisfaction and performance of brand:

In their research, Birada et al. found that functional structures and symbolic structures are significantly and positively related to brand love[15]. Also, structures with functional nature have an indirect effect on brand love, while abstract structures play a mediating role in the effects of very specific features. Finally, brand love is associated with important results such as brand loyalty, recommendation type advertising, and a willingness to pay more. Hegner et al. also proposed a model in their study that provides valuable insights into brand love and that engaging with the brand plays a moderating role. Attitudes toward interesting brand have a strong impact on brand love in customers, while financial power plays only a small role in experiencing the brand love[16].

Bamgarth and Schmidt examined and validated the intra-organizational brand equity and its relationship with brand equity based on customers in the market and industrial organizations[10]. The weakness of the study is that for examining the special value of the brand from the perspective of customers, the opinion and perception of managers in this regard was examined, which cannot express the true perception of customers. These researchers consider the special value of intra-organizational brand, includes employee loyalty to the brand and brand-related in-role and out-of-role behaviors. Other results of this study confirm the positive effect of brand knowledge, brand engagement and brand orientation on the special value of intra-organizational brand.

Development of hypotheses:

Brand performance is a challenging topic. Many researchers believe that branding should be unique and very smart; Because consumers see it as a distinct capability when they clearly perceive its superiority over competitors[17]. Brand performance is a benchmark to measure brand success in the market to the extent that the realization of the company's business goals is said to be rooted in brand performance (De Chernatoni and Segal Horn, 2003). Although the brand approach alone may not be enough to create strong brands, the strategic importance of branding cannot be ignored[10]. In fact, more than 70% of a company's revenue comes from the brand[18], which indicates the deep relationship between brand performance and the successful performance of an organization[19]. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the factors affecting brand performance, which is both a platform for developing creative solutions in order to create more value to the customer[18], and also realizes the effectiveness of the organization's operations in accordance with the external environment[13]. In addition, brand management capability is a mechanism that realizes effective brand communication in the market and empowers the company in branding, appropriate positioning and creating the perceptual value of the customer[20]. In other words, companies with brand-based strategies can build stronger brands, probably because of their cultural mindsets in terms of important aspects of branding[1].

On the other hand, today customers expect to be satisfied by buying the goods or the brand; But satisfaction is not a sufficient condition for establishing a continuous relationship with the brand. Customers seek some connections beyond satisfaction. In fact, some relationships based on emotional dependency. A degree of this passionate emotional dependency that a satisfied customer has with a particular brand is brand love[21]. In recent years, love of the brand has been one of the most important topics in the field of brand studies[21][22][23][24][25][26][27]. In other words, when a brand operates in a way that has the ability to satisfy real and tangible needs on the one hand and emotional and intangible desires on the other hand, it can create a strong feeling in the consumer that can be interpreted as love. And, so on and so forth the concept of brand love was increasingly conceptualized in consumer research in comparison with human love[28][29]. Creating a romantic relationship between the brand and the

customer and makes the customer feel that the brand in question is so important and unique that it cannot be replaced with other brands. This feeling will create huge capital for the brand. Studying the literature on love does not show a single and simple definition of this concept. Love is described as an initial emotion and is different from other emotions, which are mainly based on short-term temporary events, because love is a long-term situation. When a brand operates in a way that it has the ability to satisfy real and tangible needs on the one hand and emotional and intangible desires on the other hand, it can create a strong feeling in the consumer that can be interpreted as love. And, so on and so forth the concept of brand love was increasingly conceptualized in consumer research in comparison with human love[28][29]. Brand love is defined as consumer emotional attachment and an identification with a particular brand. Brand love includes consumer excitement for a brand and emotional attachment to a brand that reflects a person's emotional bond to a particular issue and separation from the brand can lead to distress. Brand love stems from a long-term relationship with a brand and by focusing on the emotional component integrated with consumers' brand identity.

In fact, it seems that today's customers are more and more looking for symbolism and self-identification in choosing and consuming brands. In other words, consumers prefer brands that match their set of personality traits and associations. If the characteristics of the brand are more in line with the personality and self-image of the customer, the possibility of creating love for the brand in the customer increases[30]. In other words, because of the strengthening of the empirical approach in purchasing decision-making, customers evaluate brands not only for logical reasons, but also for their own feelings, experiences, and associations[31]. In this concern, regardless of the actual distance between expectations and product performance, it is possible for them ultimately to fall in love or hate the brand only for emotional reasons, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, faithful or unfaithful. And brands that do not have the ability to build such links in the long run will not only not have the ability to build brand heritage, they will also gradually lose market share[32].

Also, the results of some studies show that satisfaction is one of the main factors in the success of companies and creating a competitive advantage, increasing perceived value and quality, increasing market share and profitability, less price sensitivity, buying by-products, more loyalty, etc. Research in this area shows that satisfaction is one of the prerequisites for brand love and an effective factor in building brand trust[33], and more brand satisfaction will build more trust[34]. However, some researchers believe that satisfaction is not always a prerequisite for brand love[35], other researchers believe that satisfaction is a positive reaction to the results of previous experiences that affect subsequent purchases. In other words, the more customer satisfaction during purchases, the more likely it is to strengthen these emotional bonds and create brand love[36]. In this way, creating experiences for customers that they can talk about and share with others will increase satisfaction over time.

According to the contents, the research hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: Brand identity affects **brand performance**.
- Hypothesis 2: Brand identity affects **brand satisfaction**.
- Hypothesis 3: Brand identity affects **love of the brand**.

Research methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive and survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population of this study consists of employees of a government organization in Tehran, whose number in 1399 was 513 people. According to the Jersey and Morgan table, the minimum sample size is 208 people. After coordination with the security of the organization under study, a letter of introduction was issued to refer to different sections of the organization and the researchers referred to the sections to collect data. For this purpose, 265 questionnaires were distributed using simple random sampling method and among these, 205 correct questionnaires were selected for analysis. The questionnaire used in this study included four general questions about gender, age, education and work experience and 23 questions related to research variables. The rating scores for each question, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, are based on a score of 1 to 5. The questionnaire is a combinatory type and each of the variables has been used in previous research, so its content validity has been confirmed. In this study, two questionnaires have been used. These questionnaires were closed-ended with a range of five options from very low to very high. Also, the validity constructs of the questionnaire have been measured by confirmatory factor

analysis technique and AMOS software and significance have been confirmed by rejecting the items related to the constructs in question.

To analyze the data, various statistical analysis methods, such as Pearson correlation analysis to calculate zero-order correlation coefficients and structural equation modeling to investigate the fit of the structural equation pattern with the collected data, are applied. The analysis was performed by using AMOS and SPSS.24 software.

Research findings

5.1. Descriptive findings: The characteristics of the respondents in this study were examined using 4 demographic variables of gender, age, level of education and work experience and only to report the appearance of the subjects. 35.4% of respondents were female and 64.6% were male. 13% of respondents were under 30 years old, 26% were between 30 and 40 years old, 45% were between 40 and 50 years old and the rest were more than 50 years old. In addition, 3% of employees had associate degree and less, 56% had a bachelor's degree and the rest had a master's degree or higher. Also, 9% had a work experience of less than 5 years, 25% had a work experience of 5 to 10 years, 32% had a work experience of 10 to 15 years and the rest had a work experience of 15 years or more.

Inferential findings: The results of confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for questionnaire items

Variable's name	Option	Regression weight	Significance level	Result
Brand identity	I1	0.713	0/000	Significant
	I2	0.724	0/000	Significant
	I3	0.828	0/000	Significant
	I4	0.767	0/000	Significant
	I5	0.791	0/000	Significant
	I6	0.739	0/000	Significant
Brand performance	P1	0.671	0/000	Significant
	P2	0.754	0/000	Significant
	P3	0.748	0/000	Significant
	P4	0.776	0/000	Significant
	P5	0.800	0/000	Significant
	P6	0.796	0/000	Significant
	P7	0.797	0/000	Significant
	P8	0.714	0/000	Significant
Brand satisfaction	S1	0.673	0/000	Significant
	S2	0.685	0/000	Significant
	S3	0.728	0/000	Significant
	S4	0.768	0/000	Significant
	S5	0.775	0/000	Significant
	S6	0.757	0/000	Significant
Brand love	L1	0.663	0/000	Significant
	L2	0.744	0/000	Significant
	L3	0.687	0/000	Significant

Since one of the preconditions for using the latent variables approach in the structural equation modeling model is the existence of correlations between the research variables, Pearson correlation analysis is used for this purpose. Table 2 shows the correlation of each variable with other variables, Cronbach's alpha of each variable as well as their descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation:

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation, reliability and correlation of variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Brand identity	Brand performance	Brand satisfaction	Brand love
Brand identity	3.93	0.61	(0.894)			
Brand performance	3.95	0/63	0/507**	(0.906)		
Brand satisfaction	3.84	0/69	0.455**	0/659**	(0.873)	
Brand love	3.90	0.65	0.472**	0.632**	0.679**	(0.738)

Given that the KMO test coefficient always fluctuates between zero and one, if its value is less than 0.05, the data will not be suitable for factor analysis, and if its value is between 0.5 to 0.69, it can be conducted the factor analysis more carefully, but if its value is greater than 0.70, the correlations between the data are suitable for factor analysis. Since the KMO index value is 0.799, the number of samples is sufficient for factor analysis. Also, the sig value of Bartlett test is less than 0.05, which indicates that factor analysis is suitable for identifying the structure of the factor model, and the assumption of knowing the correlation matrix is rejected. The results of the data adequacy test for factor analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Data adequacy test

Kizer-Meyer-Eklin Sample Adequacy Test (KMO)		0.799
Bartlett sphericity test and chi-square approximation		12445.613
Degree of freedom	3218	Sig
		0.001

Also, before evaluating the proposed structural model, it is necessary to examine the significance of the regression weight of the various constructs of the questionnaire in predicting the relevant items to ensure the suitability of the measurement models and the acceptability of their markers in measuring the structures. This was done by using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) technique and Amos software. Due to the fact that in the fitted CFA model, the regression weights of all variables in predicting the items of the questionnaire, at a confidence level of 0.99, was significantly different from zero, none of the items were excluded from the analysis process. The significance of the items is that the level of significance for them is below 0.05. Finally, 23 items of the questionnaire were analyzed. Model fit indices in this study indicate the optimal fit of measurement models and the significance of the load of each explicit variable to the related latent variable is confirmed. Figure 2 shows the fitted SEM model and illustrates the intensity of the relationships between the variables. For the fitted structural equation model, chi-square equals 149.462, the ratio of chi-square degree of freedom equals 2.105, standardized, adaptive, and goodness-of-fit indices are 0.95, 0.91 and 0.90, respectively. And the residual root-mean-squares is achieved by 0.060 and the root-mean-squares of estimation error by 0.083. All final pattern fit indices are more desirable than the aforementioned cutting points, which indicates a completely satisfactory fit of the model.

The test results of the research hypotheses are summarized in Table 4:

Table 4: The summary of results of the research hypotheses

Relationship results	Standard coefficient	Significant number	Significance level	Test result
Brand identity → Brand permeance	0.95	6.228	0/000	Confirmation
Brand identity → Brand satisfaction	0.83	8.105	0/000	Confirmation
Brand identity → Brand love	0.61	5.119	0/000	Confirmation

Conclusion

Brand performance, which is itself a marketing indicator, is based on consumer awareness of the brand, the attitude of the organization's employees towards the brand, and the financial value of the brand. The consumer mentality of the brand represents what exist and shows the performance of the brand, a mentality that is fixed and has nothing to do with the requirements of time and place. It is the consumer mentality of the brand that builds his loyalty and shapes the customer's preferences in subsequent purchases. The attitude of the employees of the organization towards the brand, which is also called internal branding, reflects the needs and philosophy of the brand and recounts its promises. When an organization and its employees have a heartfelt belief in the performance of the brand, then they can fulfill its promises in the external environment. The financial value of a brand is the financial value arising from the brand, which differs from the power of the brand. Brand power is the financial value of the brand that is in the mind of the customer and the customer is willing to pay money to get it; But the financial value of the brand is the financial benefits of the brand that belong to the company. In this view, the brand is one of the assets of the company. Thus, the financial value of the brand indicates the financial performance of the brand and is an indicator in explaining the success of the organization. Therefore, it is recommended that companies pay due attention to this point.

In line of strengthen trust and emotional bond, company managers and marketing managers are also recommended to always be available to customers and respond quickly to customer questions to increase satisfaction. Lack of timely interaction with customers reduces customer satisfaction and in the long run leads to a loss of brand trust. Software such as desk.com, participating in useful and relevant national and international events, can increase access and further customer satisfaction and trust, and also increase the likelihood of creating emotional bonds by creating positive associations.

It should also be borne in mind that the result of creating and managing such links is the creation of value which is greater than any other tangible asset in the organization, and based on them, appropriate marketing strategies can be presented. One of the most important and effective factors in creating brand associations is advertising. Brand advertising should also include emotional content. Emotions and content are among the effective stimuli in arousing individual feelings about a brand. Good experiences with the brand stimulate love and affection for the brand; Therefore, marketers should try to increase customer enjoyment. Satisfaction with product performance, satisfaction with service, and satisfaction with fairness also affect brand love. By continuously increasing satisfaction over a long period of time and decreasing one's reflection, the possibility of creating love for the brand increases.

According to the results, the following items and points are suggested:

- 1) It should be considered that in order to establish long-term and effective communication with customers, it is necessary to know the underlying layers affecting their behavior and feelings; Therefore, managers should allocate a budget to conduct research in this field.
- 2) Companies can create a positive experience in the minds of customers and increase brand love among their customers by increasing the quality and variety of services, using up-to-date technologies and increasing the level of knowledge of employees.
- 3) Using advertisements in which below-threshold stimuli are used; these stimuli not only create positive and lasting associations but also create emotional bonds with the customer that can affect the customer's feelings. This will strengthen the love of the brand in customers.
- 4) Holding training workshops on brand, principles of brand management and the benefits of brand orientation. Managers and employees of the company must participate in training courses. These training courses should be held with the aim of recognizing the importance of the brand and the benefits of having a strong brand. In this way, all members of the company realize the importance of the brand and try to take steps towards this goal.

In the sequel, in order to better evaluating the brand performance, it is suggested that a study be designed by examining different statistical communities consisting of consumers with different wants and needs to explain brand performance from their point of view. It is also suggested that instead of researching a single industry for the statistical community, a study on different industries be designed to generalize the findings. It is appropriate to make

a comparative study in such studies to compare different branding and market control strategies with the aim of achieving a principled structure.

Like other studies, this study had limitations. One of the limitations of this study is that the statistical population of this study includes a single organization. Therefore, it should be noted that the results of this study can be generalized in the same statistical community, and when applying it in similar organizations, its cultural and social context should be considered and the results should be used more carefully. In this research, the effects of several concepts have been investigated together. Since this is a field study, other variables beyond these concepts may have been included in the independent variable. And even some disturbing and out-of-control variables of the researchers have may affected the results of the research by the way of filling in the questionnaire, because despite all the necessary measures, it is still not possible to control the respondent's considerations.

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