



# Investigating the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility and Price Image on Consumer Response by Mediating the Retail Brand Personality in the Food Market of Tehran

Shireen Tahmasebi Hajivand

M.A. International Business Management, Azad University of Tehran Shomal.  
**Corresponding Author**

**Abstract:** *The present research examines policies of corporate social responsibility and the price image on consumer responses by mediating brand personality in the food retailers' market, which collects various brands alongside each other. In the research, the purpose of customer response is the satisfaction of customer from brand of retail, consequently satisfaction of trust and, consequently, the trust in creating the attitude and intention of buying in the future. The present study is descriptive-correlative in terms of nature and it is a survey study in terms of method. The statistical population consisted of 384 food buyers from the hypermarket and Shahrvand and refah stores, chain store in the north, east and west of Tehran. With the probability of 0.95, according to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.49), the corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on brand personality. Based on the path coefficient (0.20), the mental image has a significant impact on brand personality traits, including complexity, adaptability, and palatability. According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.18), corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. The path coefficient (0.44) indicates that customer satisfaction has a significant impact on trust. According to the path coefficient (0.36), trust had a significant impact on customer attitude toward retail brand. The path coefficient (0.26) also showed that brand personality has a significant impact on brand satisfaction. Path coefficient (0.32) also showed that the attitude has a significant impact on purchase intention in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Personality, Price Image, Food Market*

## INTRODUCTION

By gaining reputation and strong brand image and subsequently gaining distinction between rival brands, the brand becomes a real name and a complete brand.

Whether from a theoretical point of view or from the point of view of many factors in the market, such as manufacturers, distributors, and customers, brand should be the carrier of message for customers, as well as commitments and promises. It's important for today's industries to have a strong brand. A strong brand has a strong impact on customer perceptions and guides their choices, which is critical to today's highly competitive markets for every business.

Brand of a company can be an essential step in creating customer need and subsequently the source of profit, a relationship between the customer and that business, and even more interesting that a brand is in the context of a consumer's preferences.

Brand is one of the most visible assets of any company. Today, the main capital of many businesses is their brand, a name whose record is publicly one of the stable values. Today, other brands are not efficient tool in the authority of managers but they are considered a strategic requirement.

Aaker (1996), as the first person introducing the concept of brand personality, expresses it as human features attributed to a particular brand. When customers are buying a brand with a pure personality, they buy symbolic meaning associated with that brand instead of physical products or touching features.

Responsibility of business owners for social and humanitarian concerns, fortunately, has been popular in Iran for centuries, in the forms such as the dedication of property for charity affairs. As another example, some businessmen are committed to dedicate a certain percentage of their business profits to charity.

Brand personality is a concept in the field of relationship marketing, the brand personality of all attributes and personality traits that are used to describe a person and is associated is defined with a brand. This helps to better understand the development and preservation of relationships between brands and consumers. It also explains how these relationships affect consumer behavior (Fournier, 1998; Ambroise et al., 2005).

We are also witnessing the implementation of many humanitarian programs by large and small Iranian companies, among the most famous one is the investment of one of the mineral water producer companies to train 4,500 children in the deprived areas of the country, the investment of one of the steel producers to create 50 development projects in the deprived areas of the country.

Nevertheless, it seems that in a modern economy, all phenomena, including business responsibility towards social concerns will be complex that requires a logic and scientific exact analysis. Thus, we have seen the conceptual plan titled (Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)) over the past twenty years, in which many prominent thinkers in the field of management and economics have tried to design frameworks to increase efficiency of social and humanitarian programs of companies as well as aligning these programs with corporate strategies.

How can increase customer loyalty? This question is now a major challenge for professors and caused to the creation of unlimited research topics for researchers (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973).

One of the ways to increase customer loyalty and trust to the company is to create a relationship operation that Ovesteke Morgan and Hunt defines it as a series of activities that its aim is to create, develop and maintain successful communication exchanges, and then the company over time tries to expand and maintain relationship with its customers. For this purpose, the corporate can rely on its brand to back it up (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) Because in Iran, the food market is relatively competitive and the prices of food products are more or less at a level, so in this market, price cannot be used as a differentiation aspect and competitive advantage to attract more customers. So other issues, such as social responsibility, can be used as this differentiation aspect.

Because one of the pillars of social responsibility is the discussion of respect for customer rights that requires responsiveness to customers that this right has the most manifestation to control quality, and about the issue of food, the importance of the quality of food that it is mentioned as food security. It is recognized as a human right in the FAO. Therefore, the discussion of the social responsibility of food industry activists is strongly emphasized in the world. Unfortunately, in Iran, due to the lack of familiarity of food brands from this topic and the marketing and commercial capabilities of this topic, it is more than ever necessary to work on this discussion.

In general, the problem of this research is that what impact has the corporate social responsibility and the price image on the consumer response and the mediation of brand personality?

### **Definition of concepts**

**Corporate Social Responsibility:** According to the definition of the World Business Center, it is defined as a business commitment, in terms of sustainable economic development, working with employees, the family, the local community and society as a whole in improving quality of life.

Brand personality: Aaker as the first person introducing the concept of brand personality expresses it as human features attributed to a particular brand. When customers are buying a brand with a pure personality, they buy symbolic meaning associated with that brand instead of physical products or touching features.

**Brand Trust:** It is the customer's desire to accept the ability of a particular brand in its defined tasks.

**Loyalty:** One of the ways to increase customer loyalty and trust to the company is to establish a relationship operation with him that Morgan and Hunt defined as a set of activities aimed at creating, developing and maintaining successful communication exchanges, and then the company over time tries to expand and maintain relationships with its customers. For this purpose, the corporate can rely on its brand to back it up (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

**Intent to buy in the future:** it specifies the probability of buying from a product or brand (Lacouihe, 1996). Intent to buy reflects the attitudes associated with future selection behaviors and attitudes related to economic decisions. The reciprocal benefits of consumerbrand communication provide a framework for developing long-term future relationships between consumer and corporate. Satisfied customers are more likely to rebuy from the company that staying with a special company causes to anticipate less uncertainty and costs.

Hiskok (2001) showed both brand trust and brand commitment through the desire to establish a consumer relationship has a positive impact on future intentions of buying (whether directly or indirectly).

**The price Image:** it is called to the price perceptions of the consumer from a particular brand or store.

### **Empirical background of research**

Aghaiefar (2011) investigates the impact of goodwill marketing on brand attitude and brand intention of buying (case study of buyers of consumer goods in Tehran) and concludes that benevolent marketing is a good tool to improve the attitude of the target market toward brand and intention to buy them. In addition, Iranian customers consider the corporate as responsible for social and environmental issues and to respond to such issues are ready to encourage them using their buying power.

Another study by Adibi (1391) was conducted titled investigating the relationship between personal characteristics of the customer, brand personality and brand loyalty in customer buying behavior and in investigating the buyers and owners of Kia, Hyundai and Iran Khodro cars. The results showed that personality traits of consumers affect brand personality and brand personality also affects brand loyalty. But there was no relationship between the personality traits of the consumer and his loyalty to the brand.

Arab Bafrani (2013) conducted a study entitled investigating the impact of perceived brand equity and perceived quality on brand loyalty and brand satisfaction and the intention to rebuy of third-party insurance policies of Iranian Insurance Company with the aim of investigating the impact of perceived brand equity on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and investigating the impact of perceived quality on the intention to re-buying. Based on analyzes and results, all hypotheses are accepted in this research.

Rahman Seresht et al (2009) have explained the necessity of attention to ethics and social responsibility and examined the positive effects of social responsibility on the performance and success of the organization. They have concluded that considering business ethics and social responsibility by increasing the legitimacy of the organization's performance, the use of benefits of multiplicity increase, increasing revenue, profits, and improving competitive advantage affect the success of organization.

Mangesha (2007) examined the impact of brand personality on brand preference, interest, loyalty, and consumer intent to buy. The result shows that the brand personality has a positive impact on brand preference, interest, loyalty and intent to buy.

Linnata McDonald et al. (2008) have examined the relationship between social responsibility and customer satisfaction and confirmed the existence of this relationship.

Perclyn and Dijang (2011) concluded in a research entitled brand personality and customer trust in pharmacies that there is a significant difference in terms of brand personality among different types of pharmacies; it means

that consumers have ranked independent pharmacies slightly more reliable than multinational goods and national chain pharmacies. They also found that honesty and competence has the most significant impact on customer confidence. They found that organizations, by creating a brand personality that is competent and honest, would be able to distinguish themselves from other organizations, which would attract customers' trust. They also found that organizations should try to create brand personality that is aligned with the company's objectives in the best form.

An investigation was conducted by Sidney Lambert and Didir Lewis (2014) at the Nantes School of management in France to investigate the impact of corporate social responsibility and pricing image on brand personality and consumer s' response, including consent, trust and loyalty to that brand.

### **Research hypotheses**

**The main hypothesis:** The corporate social responsibility and price image affects consumers' response.

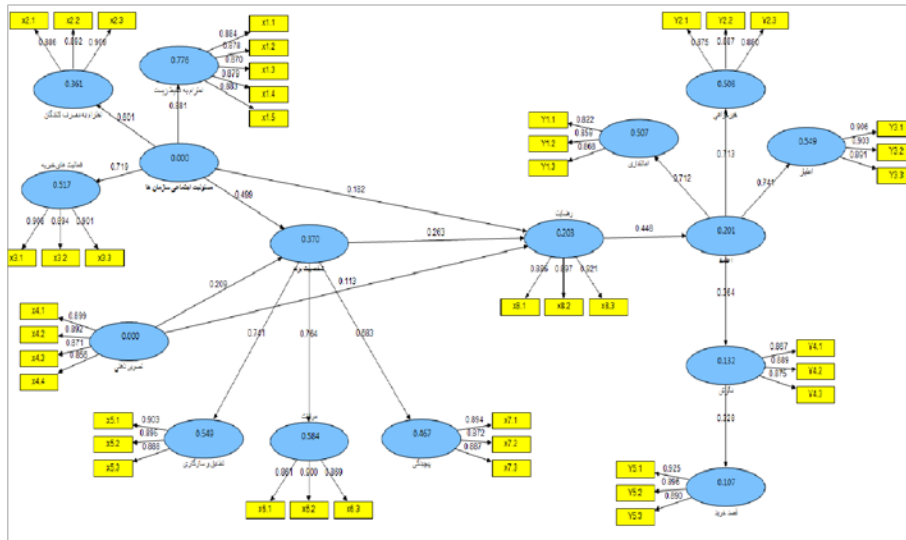
### **Sub-hypotheses**

1. Corporate social responsibility affects brand personality.
2. Corporate social responsibility affects customer satisfaction on brand.
3. Price image of brand affects the brand personality.
4. Price image of brand affects customer satisfaction on brand.
5. Customer satisfaction affects customer trust on brand.
6. Customer trust affects customer attitude.
7. Customer attitude affects future intention to buy on brand.

### **Research Methodology**

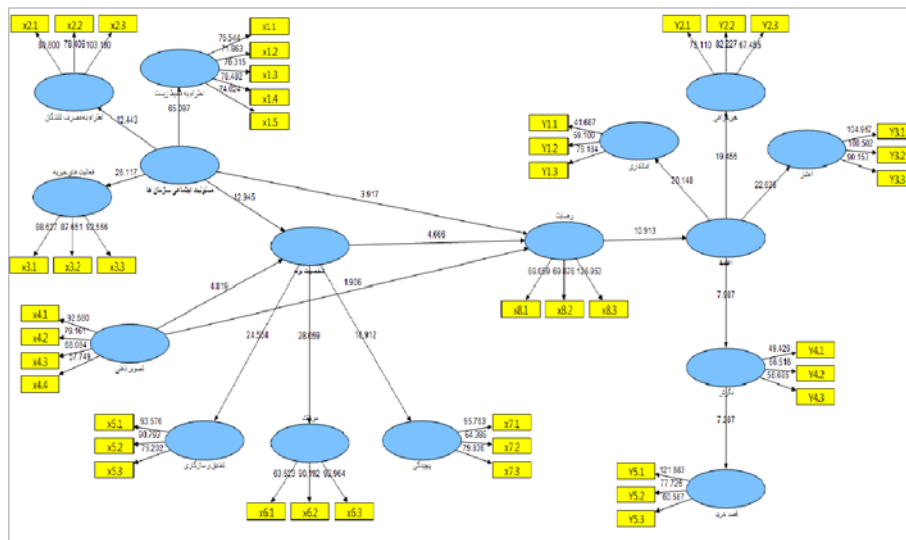
This study is descriptive-survey and in terms of investigating relations between variables is correlation. The statistical population is consumers of food market in Tehran. The sample size of the sample, which is based on the Tuckman table, includes 384 customers who selected random clustering process among which 344 questionnaires are analyzed and investigated. To collect data, a researcher-made questionnaire was used including questions related to income level and brand share in the household basket (4 questions), perceptions of customers from different dimensions, and price image of CSR (15 questions), measuring trust and satisfaction level (11 questions), measurement of attitude (4 questions), and intention to rebuy (4 questions). The face and content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed based on the view of experts. In order to analyze the internal structure of the questionnaire and the discovery of the constituent elements of each construct, the construct validity was done using a confirmatory factor analysis tool. In order to test the hypotheses, the path analysis technique has been used using Smart PLS software.

### **Research findings**



**Figure 1.** Model in the mode of estimating standard coefficients

Factor loads of all indexes are greater than 0.5 and have been valid. Any index that has a larger load factor has created more weight in measuring its variable.



**Figure 2.** The model in the absolute value (| T-Value |) mode

According to model 2, the path coefficient in the 95% confidence level is significant if the value of the t statistic is greater than 1.96.

**Table 1.** Standardized factor loads

Significant level	Factor load	Symbol	Hidden variables	Factor analysis
<0.001	0.884	X1.1	Respect for environment	First-order confirmatory factor analysis
<0.001	0.878	X1.2		
<0.001	0.870	X1.3		
<0.001	0.879	X1.4		
<0.001	0.883	X1.5		
<0.001	0.886	X2.1		

<0.001	0.892	X2.2	Respect for consumer	
<0.001	0.909	X2.3		
<0.001	0.908	X3.1	Charity activities	
<0.001	0.894	X3.2		
<0.001	0.901	X3.3		
<0.001	0.899	X4.1	Mental image	
<0.001	0.892	X4.2		
<0.001	0.871	X4.3		
<0.001	0.856	X4.4		
<0.001	0.903	X5.1	Conformity and adaptability	
<0.001	0.896	X5.2		
<0.001	0.888	X5.3		
<0.001	0.659	X6.1	Palatability	
<0.001	0.685	X6.2		
<0.001	0.666	X6.3		
<0.001	0.894	X7.1	Complexity	
<0.001	0.872	X7.2		
<0.001	0.887	X7.3		
<0.001	0.887	X8.1	Satisfaction	
<0.001	0.897	X8.2		
<0.001	0.921	X8.3		
<0.001	0.822	Y1.1	Bailment	
<0.001	0.859	Y1.2		
<0.001	0.868	Y1.3		
<0.001	0.875	Y2.1	Benevolence	
<0.001	0.887	Y2.2		
<0.001	0.880	Y2.3		
<0.001	0.906	Y3.1	Credit	
<0.001	0.903	Y3.2		
<0.001	0.891	Y3.3		
<0.001	0.867	Y4.1	Attitude	
<0.001	0.889	Y4.2		
<0.001	0.875	Y4.3		
<0.001	0.925	Y5.1	Intent to buy	
<0.001	0.896	Y5.2		
<0.001	0.890	Y5.3		
<0.001	0.881	Respect for environment	Corporate social responsibility	Second-order confirmatory factor analysis
<0.001	0.601	Respect for consumer		
<0.001	0.719	Charity activities		
<0.001	0.741	Conformity and adaptability	Brand personality	
<0.001	0.764	Satisfaction		
<0.001	0.683	Complexity		

<0.001	0.712	Bailment	Trust	
<0.001	0.713	Benevolence		
<0.001	0.741	Credit		

According to Table 1, all values of factor loads have been increased from 0.5, and also the calculated values of the significance level for each factor load are less than 0.01. Therefore, the alignment of questions of questionnaire can be shown in this validate level for measuring concepts. In fact, the results show that what the researcher has been trying to measure them by the questions of questionnaire has been achieved by this tool. Therefore, relations between constructs or hidden variables can be cited. An index that has a higher load factor has a higher significance than other indicators.

**Table 2.** Indicators of validity, reliability

GOF			Cronbach's alpha	R2	CR	AVE	Hidden variables
0.564	0.645	0.873	0.926	0.776	0.944	0.772	Respect for environment
			0.877	0.361	0.924	0.802	Respect for consumer
			0.884	0.517	0.928	0.812	Charity activities
			0.903	0	0.932	0.774	Mental image
			0.877	0.549	0.924	0.802	Conformity and adaptability
			0.85	0.584	0.909	0.769	Palatability
			0.861	0.467	0.915	0.782	Complexity
			0.886	0.203	0.929	0.813	Satisfaction
			0.808	0.507	0.886	0.722	Bailment
			0.855	0.508	0.912	0.775	Benevolence
			0.883	0.549	0.928	0.81	Credit
			0.851	0.132	0.909	0.769	Attitude
			0.889	0.107	0.931	0.817	Intent to buy
			0.881	0	0.904	0.666	Corporate social responsibility
0.826	0.37	0.866	0.618	Brand personality			
0.813	0.201	0.858	0.702	Trust			

Based on Table 2, with the help of the mean index of the variance extracted, it was determined that all the studied constructs have the mean of extracted variance higher than 0.5. Combined reliability indices (CR) and Cronbach's alpha are used to test the reliability of the questionnaire and the prerequisite of confirming reliability is higher indexes than 0.7. All of these coefficients are above 0.7, indicating the reliability of the measuring tool.

**Table 3.** Correlation coefficients and divergent valid index

	(7)	(6)	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	Hidden variables
0.88							1	1) mental image
0.902						1	0.328	2) satisfaction
0.877					1	0.357	0.314	3) attitude
0.904				1	0.328	0.351	0.411	4) intention of buying
0.816			1	0.564	0.438	0.333	0.373	5) corporate social responsibility
0.786		1	0.577	0.522	0.484	0.4	0.395	6) brand personality
0.838	1	0.696	0.688	0.448	0.364	0.448	0.509	7) trust

According to table 3, the value of square root of the mean value of variance explained, for all variables, is the correlation of that variable with other variables. In below, the main diameter of the Pearson correlation

coefficients is shown. The positive coefficient indicates a positive relationship and the negative coefficient indicates a negative and inverse relation between the two variables. All coefficients at the error level less than 0.05 is significant.

**Goodness of Fit Index of Model (GOF)**

The value of the fitting index is 0.564 and is larger than 0.4 and indicating the proper fitting of the model. Simply, the data of this research has an appropriate fit with factor structure and the theoretical foundation of the research, which indicates the alignment of questions with the theoretical constructs.

**Answer to research hypotheses**

**Table 4.** Path coefficients, t statistic and result of research hypotheses

Result	Direction of relation	Sig	R <sup>2</sup>	t-static	Beta	Research hypotheses
Confirmed	+	0.001	0.37	4.819	0.209	Mental image->brand personality
Confirmed	+	0.001		12.945	0.499	Corporate social responsibility-> brand personality
Confirmed	+	0.001	0.203	4.666	0.263	brand personality->satisfaction
Confirmed	NS	0.067		1.906	0.114	Mental image-> satisfaction
Confirmed	+	0.001		3.917	0.182	Corporate social responsibility-> satisfaction
Confirmed	+	0.001	0.201	10.913	0.448	Satisfaction->trust
Confirmed	+	0.001	0.132	7.988	0.364	Trust->attitude
Confirmed	+	0.001	0.107	7.287	0.328	Attitude->intention of buying

[t]>1.96 significant at P<0.05, [t]>2.58 significant at P<0.01

**Discussion and Conclusion**

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.49) and that the T-static value (12.94) is outside the interval of significance (more than 1.96) with probability of 95%, the corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on brand personality. Given the positive beta coefficient, it can be said that corporate social responsibility has a direct and positive impact on brand personality. Therefore, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that by increasing corporate social responsibility, brand personality will increase and by decreasing corporate social responsibility, brand personality will decrease. In the present research, only the factors of conformity and adaptability, palatability and complexity are tested. These results are consistent with the results of the research of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis, as well as with the results of exploratory research of Brangman and Wilms (2009).

Considering the positive impact of corporate social responsibility on brand personality, it is suggested to food retailers to take serious steps to have responsible attitude towards the beneficiaries, including the community and customers, and take step to strengthen their brand personality. Unfortunately, the Iranian consumers' community suffers from lack of awareness to their rights to the community in the process of purchasing and providing their supplies.



Large food retailers in Tehran, due to lack of information on their responsible activities, lose one of their important marketing opportunities and competitive advantage. Whether the Iranian consumer has sufficient intelligence and insight to understand the responsible brand from irresponsible brand, therefore, food brands are recommended if they have a responsible attitude or are active in charity, environmental activities, and consumer rights or beyond that, getting the ISO 12000 associated with CSR can increase the level of customer and community awareness and create competitive advantage for themselves in the market or try to control the crises caused by scandals by increasing advertising and information in this field.

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.20) and that the T-static value (4.81) is outside the interval of significance (more than 1.96) with a probability of 0.95, the mental image has a significant impact on brand personality traits, including complexity, conformity, and adaptability, and palatability. In the present research, only three brand personality traits that are complexity, adaptability, and palatability were studied. These three traits are complexity with path coefficient of 0.683 and conformity and adaptability with path coefficient of 0.741 and palatability with path coefficient of 0.764 and in general, given the presence of positive beta coefficient, it can be said that the mental image has a direct and positive impact on brand personality.

Therefore, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that by increasing the mental image, brand personality will increase and by decreasing mental image, brand personality will decrease, which is consistent with the research results of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis. The coefficient of determination for brand personality has been 0.37. Therefore, the variables of the mental image and corporate social responsibility have been able to explain 37% of brand personality changes. Regarding the beta coefficient, it can be said that the share of corporate social responsibility is more than the mental image (higher beta value), which is consistent with the researches of Lambert and Lewis (2014). Also, the exploratory researches by Brangman and Wilms (2009) are confirmed which specifically researched about retail brand personality.

Basically, the price image is referred to consumer perceived prices, that this perception is the main factor of consumers' mental image (Zeilke et al, 2006). So far, little research has been carried out in this regard, and most of these studies have been carried out by (Zeilke, 2006, 2010).

In general, Brangman and Wilms (2009) showed that perceived prices affect the characteristics of originality, complexity and firmness of the brand personality. In the present study, only the complexity and originality characteristics have been studied and confirmed.

**Suggestion:** Since price is one of the main factors in buying, creating a mental image can help to improve the brand personality in consumers. Therefore, it is recommended that food retail brands act to sell their products with right price under their brand name and provide continuous and timely information on their price differences with competitors, as this will strengthen the brand's personality in the mind of their customers.

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.18) and that the T-static value (3.91) is outside the interval of significance (More than 1.96), with the probability of 0.95, corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Considering the presence of positive beta coefficient, it can be said that the corporate social responsibility has a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction. I.e, by increasing corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction increases and by decreasing responsible activities of the company, customer satisfaction also decreases.

These results are consistent with the results of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis, Lao, and Bahatasharya (2006), Matote-Valjou et al. (2011), which show that corporate social responsibility policies have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Gupta and Pearsh (2008) acknowledged to this results in their research specifically about the distribution.

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.11) and that the T-static value (1.96) is within the interval of significance. (More than 1.96), with the probability of 0.95, the hypothesis "mental image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction" is rejected.

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.26) and the T-stativ value (4.66) is outside the interval of significantce (More than 1.96), with a probability of 0.95, brand personality has a significant impact on brand satisfaction. Given the positive beta coefficient, it can be said that brand personality has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction. Thus, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that with the strengthen of brand personality, satisfaction will increase and by decreasing brand personality, customer

satisfaction will decrease, which in the brand personality of the present research, only the factors of comfirmity, adaptability, and complexity and palatability have been tested. These results are consistent with the results of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis's research, as well as their research results, in another separate study (2012). According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.44) and that the T-static value (10.91) is outside the interval of significance (More than 1.96), with 0.95 probabilities, "customer satisfaction has a significant impact on trust". Given the positive beta coefficient, it can be said that corporate social responsibility has a direct and positive impact on brand personality. Therefore, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that by increasing corporate social responsibility, satisfaction will increase and by decreasing corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction will decrease, which these results are consistent with results of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis, and also with the results of the research of Gupta and Pearss (2008), whose research was limited to distributors.

Suggestion: In the food industry in Iran due to the sensitivity of people to health and the importance of psychological factors such as food security, people in this sector in the market are willing to pay higher amounts and attract better quality or even quality assured and since the price of the top companies is very competitive and close to each other, this is an important factor in not having the effect of price perception on Iranian consumers. In competitive condition and prices controlled by the government, other factors affect the price on customer satisfaction.

For this reason, food retailers should have more careful supervision in choosing suppliers in price control, and try to select supplier's sensitive to quality with the attractive and beautiful appearance. In this way, they can enjoy from profits of repurchase of their customers in full competition with other retailers as a reputable brand. Another discussion is informing about consumers' rights, raise their awareness to their rights. Considering the many environmental problems in our country, it is recommended that the stores act from current market sensitivities to strengthen brand personality while increasing customer satisfaction of educated and young people, and increasing profits and market share by launching environmental awareness campaigns and introducing and inducing themselves as a supportive brand of the environment.

According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.36) and that the T-static value (7.98) is outside of interval of significance (More than 1.96), with probability of 0.95, "trust has a significant effect on customer's attitude toward the retail brand." Considering the positive beta coefficient, it can be said that trust has a direct and positive effect on attitude. Therefore, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that by increasing trust to company's brand, positive attitude will increase and by decreasing trust, attitude will decrease which is consistent with the results of the research of Sindy Lombart and Didir Lewis.

Considering the results obtained from the path coefficient (0.32) and that the t-static value (7.28) is outside of interval of significance (More than 1.96), with a probability of 0.95, "the attitude has a significant effect on the intention to buy in the future." Regarding the presence of positive beta coefficient, it can be said that the attitude has a direct and positive effect on the intention to buy in the future. Therefore, at 95% confidence level, it can be expected that by increasing attitude, the probability of intention of buying in the future will increase, and by decreasing attitude, the probability of intention of buying in future decreases, that these results are the same with the results of the research of Sindy Lombart and Diter Lewis.

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