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Effects of Customer Perception of Product Risk, Price, and Quality on National Brand Attitude

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Abstract: *The present study aimed to investigate effects of customer perception of product risk, price and quality on national brand attitude. The research model consisted of variables such as the product quality perception (PQP), perceived risk (PR), price value perception (PVP), behavioral characteristics (BC), and national brand attitude (NBA). The research method was applied in terms of objective, and correlational according to its method. Using the questionnaire and survey method, the required data was randomly distributed among customers of Refah Chain Stores Co. in Mashhad City and 310 acceptable samples were collected. Data was analyzed using SPSS18 software. Relationships of variables and factors were confirmed using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and PLS modeling technique via PLS2 Smart software. Research results confirmed a relationship between the product quality perception and national brand attitude. There was a significant relationship between the perceived risk and national brand attitude.*

Keywords: *Product Quality Perception (PQP), Perceived Risk (PR), Price Value Perception (PVP), Behavioral Characteristics (BC), National Brand Attitude (NBA)*

INTRODUCTION

Brand topics are among issues that have attracted the attention of companies and market players. Consequently, the brand loyalty is an important and vital issue in today's global marketing and especially adult markets (Hosseini et al., 2011). Brand is an important concept in value-added businesses, and thus marketers can benefit from a strong brand as a competitive advantage (Aaker, 2000; Keller, 1993). Since 1980, incentives have been made to select and buy goods giving the first role to brands in this regard. Most brand evaluations are transfer from advanced economies to other regions of world. Due to the creation of a global economy, branding has changed the position of questions and concerns of many people about products of companies (Roth, 1995). Brand awareness is the ability to recognize and remind potential buyers of a brand as a member of a particular class of products. Accordingly, among the competition of brands in the market, marketers need to focus on the brand management and apply strategies for awareness and communication of products and consumers (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). A strong brand can increase prices compared to a weaker brand or product as consumers are more likely to tolerate price increases and how a stronger brand is compared to other brands. Despite the fact that pricing strategies are often short-time, the investment in brands is the appropriate proposition in the long term (Khajavi and Nayebzadeh, 2013). For instance, Erdem et al. (2002) found that the consumer price sensitivity affected the brand acceptance; and most consumers believed it and were more tolerant of higher prices.

From today's managers' perspective, marketing includes customer growth namely the attention, satisfaction and quality from customer perspective, customers' loyalty and effective communication with them. To this end, organizations try to have loyal customers (Pakdel et al., 2011). Satisfaction leads to a positive attitude in customers and plays an important role in their loyalty. This attitude-based loyalty suggests brand preferences in customers' repurchase intention, long-term commitment and their tendency towards a brand. Therefore, the commitment, trust, sense of belonging and attachment to brands will be created in them (Mohammadi, 2014). Perceived quality can be defined as customer perceptions of overall quality or superiority of a product or service according to its intended purpose compared to other options. Perceived quality is a general and intangible feeling about a brand. However, the perceived quality is usually based on key dimensions including product specifications (reliability and performance, and usually brands). It is useful to identify and measure main dimensions of the perceived quality, but it should be noted that the perceived quality is a general concept (Aaker, 1991). When the relationship between a brand and product quality is understood before the relationship between product attributes, consumers are more likely to be affected by the quality perception. The risk of distrust decreases by the information and increases the expected utility and price prediction and perception. Therefore, the present research aimed to investigate effects of customer perception of product risk, price and quality on national brand attitude.

Research background

Khraim (2011) conducted a study entitled "The Impact of Brand Loyalty on Cosmetics Purchasing Behavior in UAE Female Consumers". The research aimed to investigate effects of brand loyalty on the cosmetics purchasing behavior in UAE female consumers. Research results indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between the brand loyalty and brand loyalty (seven brand loyalty factors were brand name, product quality, price, design, service quality promotion and store environment). Szczepanski et al. (2012) conducted a paper entitled "Risk Management System in Business Relationships- Case Study: Poland". This research aimed to identify and describe risk management systems based on a combination of relational mechanisms and formal control of case studies on 5 relationships of active companies in the Polish market. Based on findings of this paper, Poland's companies focused on the partner diversity or their complete integration by reducing the relative risk. Managers often pointed their fear of being affiliated with a particular partner. This phenomenon could significantly reduce benefits of inter-organizational close and centralized cooperation in Poland.

Cai & Shannon (2012) conducted a study entitled "Individual Values and Behavior of Purchasing from Mall: Mediating Role of Consumers' Intention and Attitudes in China and Thailand". Based on findings, the purchase intention played a mediating role in the attitude-behavior relationship in the Chinese sample and could improve the predictive power of values towards the behavior. Despite finding the relatively poorer mediating effect in the Thai sample, the purchase intention did not lead to stronger predictions of values. Anand et al. (2013) conducted a research entitled "Consumer Brand Priorities and Brand Loyalty- An Empirical Study with Specific Reference to Packaged Milk". Their research aimed to identify determinants of brand preferences. Based on researchers' findings, the quality, price, type and marketing strategies were mediating factors in the brand loyalty leading to the brand priority. Simonyan and Goldstein (2013) conducted a study entitled "Brand Recognition and Inference of Quality". This study aimed to answer the question of whether brands related to negative information could be considered superior compared to unrecognized brands. Results indicated that associated brands with negative information in fact had high quality than unrecognized brands.

Guadix et al. (2015) conducted a research entitled "Strategies for psychosocial risk management in manufacturing". This study aimed to investigate strategies for psychosocial risk management in manufacturing organizations. Based on findings of this study, the adoption of psychosocial-social safety management systems could improve the psychosocial-social risk performance. Psychosocial-social preventative activities moderated

relationships between psychosocial-social safety management and psychosocial-social performance. Benefits of effective psychosocial-social risk management are so high, and thus policy makers should promote psychosocial-social risk management. Cage & Rouzet (2015) conducted a study entitled "Improving National Brands: Fame for Export Promotion Quality and Strategy". According to findings, (1) Export subsidy increases the average quality of exports and welfare in a low-quality equilibrium, while reducing these two components in a high-quality equilibrium; (2) There is a tax-subsidy program based on the continuation of the export experience repeating consequences of the complete information; and (3) the minimum quality standard can help to achieve a low-quality equilibrium in the shift towards the higher quality.

Theoretical principles and hypotheses

- **Perceived product quality**

Perceived quality can be considered as a form of attitude that is associated with the satisfaction but they are unequal and it can be obtained from comparing expectations with perceptions of performance. Perceived quality can be shown in a range that is unacceptable on one side and has an ideal quality on the other side. Points between these two represent different degrees of quality. Another group of scientists defined the perceived quality as the customer perceptions of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service in comparison to other products of competitors (Aaker, 1991; Atiglan et al., 2005). Perceived quality increases initial values of institutions by justifying customers' buying reasons, distinguishing the institution brand construction from rival brands, creating a willingness to pay surcharges, attracting distributors, and allowing brands to grow and expand (Erenkol and Duygun, 2010).

- **Perceived risk**

Perceived risk is formed on the basis of external signs (Richardson et al., 1996) and internal signs (Grewal et al., 1994). For instance, the perceived financial risk by customers' increases when prices of products increase. Existing literature indicates that brands can reduce the perceived risk, so that they can be credible signs of product quality. Marketing researchers suggest that the brand loyalty is a main strategy for developing the customers' perceived risk. Findings indicate that the brand risk is the main introduction to the brand commitment. National brand manufacturers spend significant resources on advertising and promotional activities to improve the brand awareness and reduce many perceived risk dimensions (Burt and Davis, 2010).

- **Price value perception**

Price is a key factor for the profitability of most small and medium enterprises. Recent studies on the price sensitivity has primarily focused on the price flexibility from an economic point of view and emphasized on market characteristics such as commodities, consumer goods, income, and life expectancy (Bijmalt et al., 2005). In these circumstances, the neglect of some vital indices such as the service quality, customer satisfaction, and perceived value is an important limitation. Price sensitivity can be defined as an extent to which a customer endures the price rise of a particular product from an economic and psychological point of view (Anderson, 1996). Consumers usually tolerate reasonable price changes when they realize that output-input ratio is comparable with the experienced output-input ratio of company (Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988).

- **Behavioral characteristics**

Customer behavior has always been a favorite among marketers. The variety of consumer behavior affects the individuals' behavior and their motivation to purchase due to various factors (Habibi, 2015). Acquiring knowledge about customers' through, feelings and selecting from alternatives such as products and brands, and also understanding how consumers are influenced by the environment, reference groups, family, salespersons and others can help to achieve a successful marketing. Customer buying behavior is affected by many factors including cultural, social, individual, and psychological factors. Most of these cases cannot be controlled by marketers, but they are necessary to understand the complexity of customer behavior (Brosekhan & Velayutham, 2013). Companies need to be able to adapt to position of this dynamic and variable environment

to survive by recognizing the consumer behavior because this recognition is an important factor for their success (Hosseini et al., 2009).

- **National brand attitude**

In the field of national brands and their role in the economic development of countries, most developed countries have considered priorities for showing their abilities in different domains and obtaining a special superiority to similar products in other countries in the recent century. A national brand represents all aspects of the identity of a country. National brand can change wrong thoughts about a country and raise a country's position in target markets. The role of a national brand in the comprehensive development of all countries is to an extent that it is considered as a public diplomacy (Nouri, 2015). Given the above mentioned principles, the following hypotheses were considered and tested in order to achieve the research objectives:

Hypothesis (1): The product quality perception has a significant effect on national brand attitude.

Hypothesis (2): The perceived risk has a significant effect on national brand attitude.

Hypothesis (3): The price value perception has a significant effect on national brand attitude.

Hypothesis (4): Behavioral characteristics have significant effects on national brand attitude.

Model of this research was based on variables such as product quality perception, perceived risk, price value perception, behavioral characteristics, and national brand attitude. The conceptual model of research was as follows:

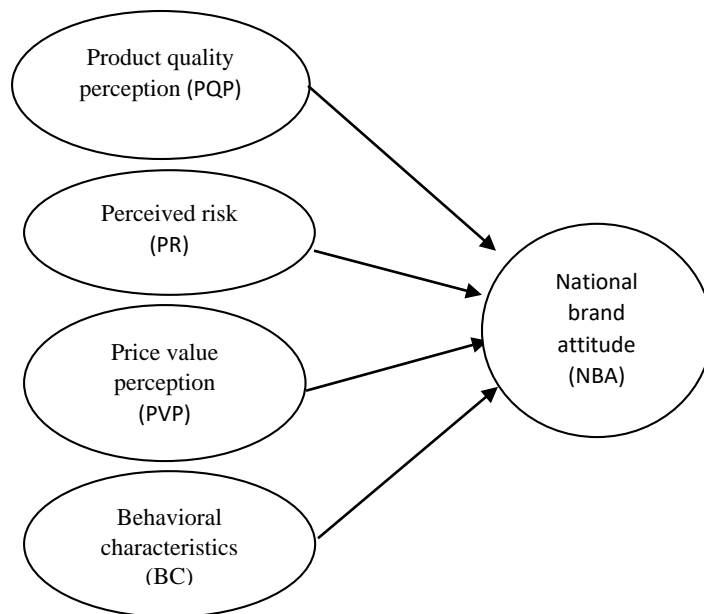


Figure 1: Conceptual model of research

Research method

The present research was applied in terms of objective, and correlational due to investigating the correlation of variables. It was a cross-sectional research as it collected data in a time domain. The statistical population consisted of uncertain number of customers of Refah Chain Stores Co. in Mashhad City. Given the unlimited population, the statistical sample of research was calculated according to the formula for estimating sample size in the population.

The present research used desk studies for investigating the literature on the research subject, definitions of concepts, indices and variables, and background. In the data collection method by a field approach, a questionnaire was used for a period of eighteen months from October 2015 to March 2016. Many studies were

conducted through investigating theses and papers to fully clarify important concepts and variables in the research and how they are measured in order to design questions for examining hypotheses. To measure any variable after designing questions, initial questionnaires were given to supervisors to be corrected and verified. Finally, a final questionnaire was compiled and distributed among customers of Refah Chain Stores Co. Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the reliability of questionnaire. If an alpha coefficient is more than 0.7, then the questionnaire has an acceptable reliability (Momeni, 2007).

Table 1: Calculating the reliability of questions of the questionnaire

Variable	Number of questions	Count of questions	Cronbach's alpha
National brand attitude (NBA)	14 to 18	5	0.882
Received risk (PR)	24 to 29	6	0.761
Price value perception (PVP)	30 to 33	4	0.882
Product quality perception (PQP)	34 to 39	6	0.760
Behavioral Characteristics (BC)	40 to 45	6	0.742
Total questionnaire	-	45	0.902

Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alpha and number of questions of the entire questionnaire and variables of questionnaire. Since the Cronbach's alpha value of the entire questionnaire (0.902) and variables are greater than 0.7, then the test has acceptable reliability. In the present research, the demographic data was described using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, Pie charts, and bar graphs. The one-sample t-test was used to examine variables according to the mean scale; and data was analyzed using SPSS18 software. Relationships of variables and factors were confirmed through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and PLS modeling technique using Smart PLS2 software which was a variance-based path modeling technique allowing the simultaneous examination of theories and measures. This method was used in cases where the model was complex or sample size was small or distribution of variables was not normal. It was used to test hypotheses with the aim to measure simultaneous, direct or indirect relationships between variables.

Research findings

In the present research, the structural equation modeling was used to help the partial least squares and Smart PLS software to test hypotheses and accuracy of the main model. This method was used in cases where the model was complex or sample size was small or distribution of variables was not normal. Two models were tested in PLS models. The external model was equivalent to measurement model; and the internal model was similar to the structural model in structural equation models. The external model represented factor loading of observed variables.

- **External model (measurement model)**

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the construct validity, so that the factor loading of each item with its variable had a t-value of higher than 1.96. Results of the analysis indicated that all items had t-statistics of larger than 1.96, and thus none of items were excluded from the model, then we continued the procedure with all items (questions) and examined the model. Based on factor loading, an index with the highest factor loading had a larger contribution to measuring the corresponding variable, but an index with smaller coefficients played a smaller role in measuring the corresponding construct.

In the measurement model, the internal consistency of model or the reliability was measured by calculating the composite reliability. This process was specified using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The obtained reliability coefficients indicated that all constructs of model had high composite reliability and were larger than the criterion 0.6 that was introduced by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Composite reliability indicated high internal reliability of research data. Cronbach's alpha of higher than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951) indicated an acceptable reliability. Divergent validity was measured by a proposed criterion by Fornell and Larcker. The squared AVE

value of latent variables located in homes of the matrix's main diameter was greater than the correlation between them that were arranged in the lower and left homes of the main diameter. Therefore, this criterion was acceptable; and the appropriate divergent validity was confirmed. Using the internal model, we can study hypotheses. The research hypothesis can be confirmed or rejected by comparing the calculated t-value for coefficient of each path. To determine the significance of path coefficients, t-value of each path should be higher than 1.96.

- **Internal Model (Structural Model)**

Hypotheses were examined as the internal model; and the structural model path was evaluated. In order to assess the significance of path coefficient, beta, t-value should be taken into account for each path coefficient. Given the t-statistics of all paths except for the price value perception (PVP) and behavioral characteristics on the national brand attitude (NBA) was greater than 1.96, all paths except for price value perception (PVP) and behavioral characteristics had a significant effect on the national brand attitude at a 95% confidence level.

Table 2: Linear effect of roles of research variables in the main model

Path	Beta	Standard error	T- statistics of resampling		
			200	500	800
PQP → NBA	0.259894	0.078057	3.329532	3.426978	3.161547
PR → NBA	-0.206077	0.084000	2.453304	2.631998	2.561519
PvP → NBA	0.118465	0.075802	1.562817	1.571562	1.590254
BC → NBA	0.102507	0.081210	1.262243	1.271757	1.232089

Table 3: Summary of path coefficients, coefficients of determination, t-statistics and results of the main hypothesis

Main hypotheses	Path coefficient	T- statistics	Coefficient of determination	Result
Product quality perception → National brand attitude	0.259894	3.329532	0.343	Confirmed
Perceived risk → National brand attitude	-0.206077	2.453304		Confirmed
Price value perception → National brand attitude	0.118465	1.562817		Rejected
Behavioral characteristics → National brand attitude	0.102507	1.262243		Rejected

- **Research hypotheses test**

Research model hypotheses were evaluated after investigating and confirming the main model. If an absolute value of t-statistics is smaller than 1.96, the null hypothesis is approved, otherwise it is rejected. The main hypotheses of each question are tested in this section.

Table 4: Results of hypotheses

Research hypotheses	Test result
Hypothesis (1): The product quality perception has a significant effect on the national brand attitude.	Confirmed
Hypothesis (2): The perceived risk has a significant effect on the national brand attitude.	Confirmed
Hypothesis (3): The price value perception has a significant effect on the national brand attitude.	Rejected
Hypothesis (4): Behavioral characteristics have significant effects on the national brand attitude.	Rejected

Discussion and Conclusion

Given the first hypothesis test, the product quality perception had a significant effect on the national brand attitude at a 95% confidence level and the effect value was equal to 0.26 and positive (direct), in other words, an increase in the level of product quality perception enhanced the level of national brand attitude. Results of

the data analysis and the second hypothesis test indicated that the perceived risk had a significant effect on the national brand attitude at a 95% confidence level and the effect value was equal to 0.21 and negative (reverse), in other words, an increase in the level of perceived risk reduced the national brand attitude. According to the third hypothesis test, the price value perception had no significant effect on the national brand attitude at a 95% confidence level. According to the data analysis and the fourth hypothesis test, behavioral characteristics had no significant effect on the national brand attitude at a 95% confidence level.

Suggestions

Managers of Refah Chain Stores Co. are suggested utilizing products and goods that have full information about manufacturers for supplying to customers and meet their needs. Products and goods of *Refah Chain Stores Co.* should have the highest quality, so that customers receive products with the best quality in return for paid prices. Since customers compare product prices before choosing a brand, this store should pay attention to prices of products and goods. Brands of products and commodities may be among the most influential factors in the purchasing decision; hence, marketing managers in companies of food and dairy, garment, home appliances, etc. should try to consider plans and strategies. Refah Chain Stores Co. should take into account the availability of various types of goods and products demanded by customers in the store, convenient facilities and attractive arrangement of goods on shelves and booths, affordable prices, the availability of various Iranian products and goods (national), etc.

Manufacturers should pay attention to external characteristics of products (appearance, beauty, brand, etc.) and internal characteristics of products such as the quality. Food, garment and ... products are better to have national brands. The ease of access to the store, getting necessary information about products, delivering goods, easy payment, parking lot, restroom, recreational facilities and other welfare services should be also considered by managers of Refah Chain Stores. The store image is created in the customer mind based on product-related aspects and the pleasure of shopping experience in the store. Therefore, managers of Refah Chain Stores should try to affect buyers' relations, behavior and attitude by giving special discounts on products, giving prizes for purchasing goods, providing promotional items and giving gifts to customers and buyers before their payment. The store space displays the use of color, smell, sound, music, furniture and other elements to create an ideal space for customers. A special feeling can be created in customers by manipulating each of these elements. Similar products should be placed on the adjacent shelves in Refah Chain Stores Co., so that customers see similar necessary products and has no need to search all shelves and floors of store to find products. The light and romantic music in the store and the well-dressed staff and their customer-friendly contact can be also attractive to customers. The aromatic space makes customers more willing to buy. The presence of escalators and elevators in large Refah Chain Stores can be good for convenience of the elderly. Refah Chain Stores can also auction products in suitable booths. New and different products can be attractive to customers, for example, playing music with a customer's movement towards a specific product (playing music with themes of nature, beach, etc.), and the presence of a person who gives comprehensive information to customers. Refah Chain Stores Co. can also provide images such as usefulness, security, kindness, quality, simplicity, creativity, beauty, magnanimity, diversity, and family in the customer mind.

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