

THE EFFECT OF BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON CONSUMERS' LOYALTY TENDENCY CONSIDERING THE MEDIATOR ROLE OF BRAND PREFERENCE

Hassan Ghorbani¹, Ehsan Emadi²

Abstract. The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of brand involvement on consumers' willingness to loyalty by considering the mediating role of brand preference. The current study is a descriptive-survey study of structural equation modeling. The statistical population of this study includes users of mobile phones of iPhone company (Apple brand) in Isfahan city. As the size of the statistical population in the present study is unlimited, using Cochran formula, the sample size was determined to be 384 individuals. Hence, 384 users of iPhone (Apple-branded) mobile phones in Isfahan were chosen as the sample. A questionnaire was used for data collection, and SMART-PLS software version 3 was used for data analysis. The findings of the study indicated that consumer brand engagement is a second-order structure which consists of three variables: energy, dedication and attraction and fascination; the consumer's engagement in product class (the consumer's mental engagement in product class) and the duration of brand use have a significant effect on consumer brand engagement; consumers' brand engagement has a significant effect on brand preference; and satisfaction, perceived value and perceived quality have a significant effect on loyalty tendency.

Keywords: Consumer's brand engagement, Brand preference, Consumer loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer brand engagement has been a prominent structure in recent years, and it is becoming increasingly important among professionals and academics because of its potential impact on consumer behavior (Gambetti, Graffigna, 2010). A survey of 124 senior marketing executives showed that improving brand engagement among consumers is among the top ten marketing priorities (Burt, 2013). Similarly, academics have intensively interested in this concept (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011; Vivek et al. 2012). The nature of brand engagement is contradictory in itself. For example, the issue that brand engagement is generally behavioral (Van Doorn et al. 2010), and has additional emotional and cognitive dimensions is still controversial (Hollebeek, 2011). Additionally, it has a generally ambiguous and largely conceptual structure (Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012), thereby, it provides opportunities for empirically examining key relationships that have theoretical and managerial significance. In this study, consumer brand engagement is considered as a positive and satisfying state of mind related to the brand consumption and its prominent features are power or energy (energy and potency), dedication (endowment) and attraction and fascination. In the context of brand-consumer relationships, being energetic means having high levels of energy and mental resilience in the time of interacting with the brand, and the consumer's enthusiasm and ability to invest more in these interactions (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dedication refers to the sense of importance, passion, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Attraction and fascination refer to the sense of being fully concentrated and attracted to brand interactions, the interactions that rapidly take place over time (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Each dimension of energy, dedication and fascination corresponds to behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011). Brand loyalty, as one of the strategies for keeping a customer, is considered as a key factor for profitability, and it is one of the accredited and concepts in the field of marketing which is widely discussed by scholars and experts. One of the important reasons for this fame is its

¹Assistant professor - Department of Business Management, Islamic Azad University, Mobarakeh Branch, Isfahan, Iran

² Ph.D. student of Marketing Management, Islamic Azad University, Mobarakeh Branch, Isfahan, Iran

role in creating long-term benefits for organizations, because loyal customers do not need extensive promotional efforts. They are willing to pay more for obtaining the benefits and quality of their favorite brand. Loyal customers repeatedly purchase the brand and resist against the situational factors and competitors' marketing efforts (Yoo, 2008). Oliver (1999) defined loyalty as: loyalty refers to a strong commitment to repurchase a superior product or service in the future, so that the same brand or product is purchased despite the marketing impacts and efforts of potential competitors. In most of the definitions presented for loyalty, two approaches can be seen; in the attitude approach, various feelings create a particular attachment to the organization, service, and product in the individual. Attitudinal loyalty scales include positive word-of-mouth advertising, the willingness to recommend, and encourage others to use the goods and services; a behavioral approach is the customer's willingness to frequently purchase services and products providing services, and maintain a relationship with the supplier of the products and services (Gharache and Daboyian, 2011). Brand preference is the bias that a customer has over a particular brand. Hellier et al. (2003) have defined brand preference as the extent to which a customer considers the services provided by the current company to be favorable and superior to the services provided by other companies. Regarding the importance of loyal customers in the persistent life of businesses, and the consistent efforts of businesses to attract customers and ultimately create loyalty in them, as well as the proximity of brand preference, that has been defined as a customer's bias towards a particular brand, with loyalty, and on the other hand, the role of brand engagement in the consumer's buying process and the necessity to purchase a product and repeat it to obtain the loyalty of the same customer, as well as empirical background research which shows that few studies have investigated the relationships between consumers' brand engagement, tendency to brand loyalty and preference. Therefore, the main question of the present study is whether the consumer brand engagement (as explained by the dimensions of power, dedication, and attraction and fascination) affects on customers' tendency to loyalty (which is measured by the dimensions of satisfaction, perceived value and quality, and trust) considering the mediator role of brand preference.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The nature of the consumer brand engagement: From the academic viewpoint, consumer-brand engagement has been defined in various forms: "The levels of mental motivational state related to the brand and dependent to customers' background that specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions are its outstanding characteristics (Hollebeek, 2011), Or "the intensity of the individual's cooperation with products or activities of the organization through a relationship or association which is initiated either by the customer or the organization (Vivek et al., 2012), or it is one of the customers' behavioral representations toward the brand or company, which is beyond purchasing, and is the result of motivational stimuli (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Sullivan (2009) defines engagement as the emotional and mental attachment that customers have to the brand. In these definitions, there is a number of common points. Dimensions such as "participation in", "communication with", "multidimensional state of mind" (including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements) as well as pivotal contexts are closely related to the structure of the consumer brand engagement. Despite various studies conducted, experts believe that this concept has not been fully developed yet (Schultz, 2013; Vivek et al., 2012), and they have emphasized on having a deep perception and understanding of the concept (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). The purpose of this study is to contribute to achieve a better and deeper understanding of this concept. In this examination, the consumer brand engagement is investigated in the field of organizational psychology (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Sonnentag, 2003). For two reasons: First, the index of measuring engagement considering organizational psychology effectively includes individual behavior, whereby, engagement is considered as a motivational trait (Sonnentag, 2003) (Salanova et al., 2005). This means that engagement is different among different people. The "subject" of engagement in organizational psychology and also in marketing resources and studies is "individuals", namely in

organizational psychology "employees" and in marketing resources "consumers". Therefore, an index based on characteristic and motivational behavior has a good performance under different conditions. In the present study, the subject is the engagement of individuals or consumers. Secondly, the definition for engagement in organizational psychology is quite comprehensive, and puts the multiple dimensions of individual engagement - cognitive (attraction and fascination), emotional (dedication), and behavioral (power and energy) - into one general framework. As such, the assessed engagement index will help to better comprehend the consumer engagement (Dwivedi, 2015). In consumer brand engagement, the consumer is the "subject" and a particular brand is the "object" (Hollebeek, 2011). Or consumer brand engagement refers to the interaction between the consumers and the brand (Dwivedi, 2015). According to Fournier (1998), it is quite obvious that brands and consumers interact with each other as partners in various ways. Similarly, consumer brand engagement includes a type of interaction whereby consumers eagerly spend much effort maintaining a degree of engagement with a brand (ie, showing energy) and get attracted in such interaction (ie, showing attraction and fascination) and a sense of passion and inspiration to do so (ie, dedication). The definition of the consumer brand engagement described above represents the multidimensional nature of its structure. Brand engagement is considered a second-order concept that is measured by the three dimensions of energy, dedication, and attraction and fascination (Dwivedi, 2015). This type of measurement model refers to the first-order and second-order reflective models (Jarvis et al., 2003). In other words, the three dimensions jointly reflect the second-order structure, and it is expected that the causality flows from the higher-order structure to each of the dimensions, showing positive correlations between the three dimensions. Studies in the field of organizational psychology have consistently reported positive correlations between the three dimensions (Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Therefore, it is expected that the three dimensions are positively correlated with each other and the first research hypothesis is presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Consumer brand engagement is a second-order structure that is reflected in the first-order dimensions of energy, dedication, and attraction and fascination.

Factors Affecting Consumer Brand Engagement: The conducted studies show that the direction of the causality relationship between the structures can vary depending on whether the brand consumers are new users or the previous ones (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). In this study, the previous (existing) user's perspective is considered in consumer brand engagement. This study examines two factors or prerequisites of consumer brand engagement - consumer product category engagement and brand consumption duration, each of which are described below in a hypothesis.

Product category engagement: The consumer engagement which is the importance of a particular product or category of product perceived by the consumer based on his/her interests, needs and values, has long been regarded as a critical and important dimension of consumer behavior (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Engagement in category and type of product is positively correlated with consumer motivation to look for information about the product, broad decision making, and consumer commitment to the brand (Warrington & Shim, 2000; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Some experts have emphasized on the conceptual distinction between consumer product engagement and specific brand engagement (Goldsmith, 2012; Vivek et al., 2012). Therefore, we deduce that, on the one hand, consumer product engagement represents the general tendency of the consumer to consider a category of products (for example cell phone) essential, relevant and important, and on the other hand, consumer brand engagement (as investigated in this study) shows the high degree of importance consumers place on a particular brand (eg Apple). Some experts use the term "brand engagement" to refer to consumers' mental engagement in a particular brand. For example, Schultz (2007) states that brand engagement directly represents the marketer's effort to attract and engage the customer in a brand. Therefore, confirming this distinction is apparently important because product engagement can increase consumer motivation (Mano & Oliver, 1993) and thereby, affect consumer engagement in particular brands in a particular product category. From an empirical

perspective, considering that the two structures - consumer product engagement and consumer brand engagement – are apparently interrelated, it is important to empirically consider the effects of consumer product engagement on consumer brand engagement. In this way, it will be possible to clarify the future effects of the consumer brand engagement on loyalty intentions (Dwivedi, 2015). Hence, in this study, consumer product engagement is considered as an effective factor in consumer brand engagement, and a positive relationship is expected to exist between them. Therefore:

Hypothesis 2: Consumer product category engagement (Consumer's mental engagement in product category) has a significant effect on consumer brand engagement.

Duration of Brand Consumption: It is expected that the duration of brand consumption would affect on consumer brand engagement (Dwivedi, 2015). Duration of brand consumption means the total period of time during which a consumer owns or interacts with the brand (Dodd et al., 2005). Dagger et al. (2009) in the context of firm-customer service marketing, observed a direct positive effect on the power of customer's perceived relationship. Therefore, a similar dynamicity is expected to exist in the context of consumer brand engagement. It is possible that the consumer's experiences of the previous brand that have been left in his memory have affected on relationship assessments (Lau and Lee, 1999). The experience of brand consumption naturally facilitates habit-based belonging to brands, thereby affecting consumers' assessment of their relationships with brands (Esch et al., 2006). So the third assumption can be presented as follows:

Hypothesis 3: The duration of brand consumption has a significant effect on consumer brand engagement.

The Effect of consumer brand engagement on brand preference: So far, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and marketers have considered the concept of brand preference (Pike, 2009). Accordingly, scholars do not have the same idea and opinion for the definition of brand preference. In brand preference marketing, consumers' tendencies toward a brand are defined as to be originated from their hidden perceptions and beliefs. In other words, brand preference is fundamental behavioral tendencies that reflect the consumer's tendencies and inclinations toward a particular brand. So according to this definition, there is a difference between brand preference and brand loyalty. In fact, brand preference can be viewed as the attitudinal loyalty of a consumer rather than his or her practical loyalty toward a brand. The main purpose of marketers is to connect with buyers rather than just focusing on selling a product (Mumm & Kim, 2005). Generally, the essence of this relationship consists of a strong relationship between the buyer and the brand. There are six strategies for making this connection: linking the brand with a specific need, associating it with a pleasing mood, capturing the unconscious motivations, making shoppers conditioned to prefer a brand by rewarding, penetrating cognitive and intellectual constraints for making the brand preference, and creating attractive models for shoppers. Choosing one or a combination of these strategies largely depends on the nature of the named product or service in the market. The success of this strategy majorly depends on marketers' understanding of brand creation and preference and the link between processes (Bracus et al., 2009). Thus, considering that the consumer's mental engagement with a brand is defined as perceived dependence or brand-specific attachment, and brand preference is also regarded as attitude loyalty, the fourth assumption can be asserted as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Consumer brand engagement has a significant effect on brand preference.

The effect of brand preference on brand loyalty: Brand preference is a bias that a customer has over a specific brand. Hellier et al. (2003) have defined the brand preference as the extent to which a customer views the service provided by the current company as favorable and superior to the services provided by other companies. Chang and Liu (2009) define the customer's tendency towards a particular brand as brand preference. Hellier et al. (2003) also define brand preference as the extent to which a customer focuses on the services and products of the intended brand over other brands. The studies of Chang and Liu (2009); Moradi and Zarei (2011) and Buil et al. (2013) showed that brand preference has a positive

correlation with the tendency to buy the brand, additionally, the results of the studies done by Reza Dolatabadi, Khaza'ie Poul and Amani (2013) in the field of the mediating role of the structures of effect, trust, and brand preference in the relationship between brand characteristics on brand loyalty showed that brand preference plays a mediating role between brand characteristics and brand loyalty. So, the following hypothesis can be made:

Hypothesis 5: Brand preference has a significant effect on consumer loyalty.

The effect of consumer brand engagement on tendency for loyalty: The value of the consumer brand engagement index depends on its ability to explain the consumer's behavior in the market (Dwivedi, 2015). The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of consumer brand engagement on consumer loyalty tendency regarding the mediator role of brand preference. Consumer brand engagement is a relational structure that reflects the strong sense of belonging of the consumer to a brand. Additionally, consumer brand engagement indicates a beneficial experience for the consumer, an experience that is positive and satisfying. This experience encompasses the emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions that are explained by the dimensions of energy, dedication, attraction and fascination. When this bond and belonging are beneficial, consumers become more committed to maintaining this bond and attachment (Lambe et al., 2001). Increasing the consumer's future tendency towards loyalty to a brand is a way to maintain the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Dwivedi, 2015). When consumers are engaged in a brand, they exhibit a kind of behavioral approach based on a strong emotional and mental dimension (Esch et al., 2006). The consumer participates in loyalty behaviors such as repeating shopping, resistance to brand change, and the development and enhancement of positive word-of-mouth advertising. Today, researchers are seeing the positive effect of relationship structures on consumer loyalty (Loureiro et al., 2012; Nysveen et al., 2014). Therefore, the sixth research hypothesis is presented as follows:

Hypothesis 6: Consumer brand engagement has a significant effect on consumer loyalty tendency.

Quality, value and satisfaction as predictive indicators of loyalty tendency: For a long time, consumer loyalty intentions have been the result of consumer evaluative judgments, namely, his perceptions of quality, received value, and total satisfaction with the product (see, for example, Cronin et al., 2000; Yang & Patterson, 2004). Satisfaction judgment has been mainly consisted of consumers' evaluations as fulfilling the expectations (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993), so that perceived quality generally represents the perceived superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988), and the value perceived by the consumer necessitates assessing the loss (perceived cost) in comparison with the profit (perceived profit) (Zeithaml, 1988). The three concepts have some aspects in common. For example, quality and value are originated from in consumer cognitive evaluations (Zeithaml, 1988), and satisfaction implies an emotional and cognitive state of the consumer after consuming the product (Aurier & Gaola, 2010). The concepts are therefore empirically linked to each other. For example, perceived value and customer satisfaction are closely related to each other (Yang & Patterson, 2004). Common judgments are limited in their ability to fully cover the dimensions of the brand-consumer relationship and are therefore insufficient for long-term success of the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In this study, the justifiable and explanatory potential of the effect of consumer brand engagement on consumer loyalty tendency after controlling the effects of three consumer judgments is investigated. Although it is clear that brand engagement is one of the top priorities of managers (Burt, 2013), what matters is whether the consumer brand engagement has more power and explanatory capability than value judgments, quality and consumer satisfaction or not. Therefore, it is expected that the consumer-brand engagement would be better able to explain and justify the tendency to loyalty compared to the three above judgments cumulatively (Dwivedi, 2015). So we can assume:

Hypothesis 7: Satisfaction, perceived value, and perceived quality have a significant effect on loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method: Since the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between consumer brand engagement and tendency to loyalty by considering the mediating role of brand preference in the context of the above conceptual framework, the research was applied in terms of purpose and regarding descriptive information of the correlational type, and it is clearly based on structural equation modeling. In the conceptual model, consumer engagement is an independent variable, brand preference is a mediator variable, and tendency to loyalty with the dimensions of perceived value, perceived quality and satisfaction are dependent variable.

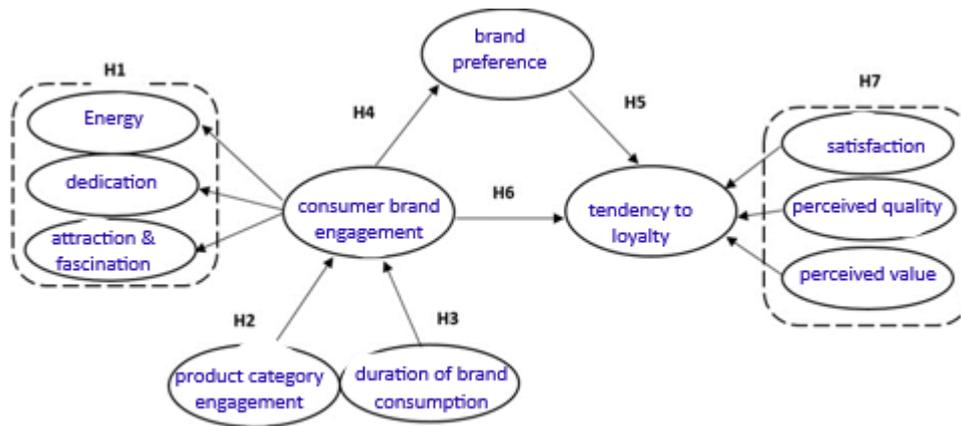


Figure 1: Conceptual model of research (Source: Dwivedi (2015) with modifications)

Measuring tools, reliability and validity: The main data gathering tool is a questionnaire, and accordingly, for the existing concepts in the conceptual framework, a number of questions have been selected from the previous research studies as shown in Table 1. In order to assess reliability, the initial sample including 30 questionnaires was pre-tested, and then using the data obtained from the questionnaire, the reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha method, and the results for the conceptual dimensions of the conceptual model are presented in Table 1. The validity of the above questionnaire was confirmed for being used in previous research studies and confirmatory factor analysis as well as the opinions of professors and experts.

Table 1: Operational Definitions of Model Variables and Its Elements

Variable	Dimensions	Sources	The number of questions
Consumer Brand Engagement	Energy	Mengac et al(2013)	6 items
	Dedication		5 items
	Attraction and Fascination		6 items
Consumer Brand Engagement		Albert et al(2013)	4 items
Duration of Brand Consumption		Dagger et al (2009)	1 item
Tendency to Loyalty	satisfaction	Aurier & N'Gaola (2010)	4 items
	Perceived Value	Johnson et al (2006)	4 item
	Perceived quality	Sepri et al (2011)	4 items
Brand Preference		Chang & Liu (2009)	5 items

Statistical population and sample and sampling method: The statistical population of the study is all users of iPhone (Apple brand) cell phones in the city of Isfahan. Since the size of the statistical population is indefinite and unlimited, the Cochran formula is used to determine the sample size. According to Cochran's formula, the sample size was 384, which was selected using available sampling method, and the results were analyzed.

DATA ANALYSIS

At the beginning of the statistical analysis with existing indices, the demographic variables and the main variables of the study have been described, and then the structural equation modeling has been used to test the hypotheses.

Table 2: Description of the demographic variables of the individuals in the statistical sample (Reference: the researcher's Findings)

Age	Percentage	Education	Percentage	Gender	Percentage
18-24	12	Diploma & under diploma	14/1	female	14/6
25-35	40/4	Associate Degree	19	male	85/4
36-50	43/5	Bachelor	47/4		
Above 51	4/2	Master	14/6		
		Phd	4/9		

As shown in the table above, among 384 individuals existing in the sample, 14.6% were women and 85.4% were men. Regarding education, it can be concluded that the majority of people have a bachelor's degree, accounting for 47.4% of the total number of the individuals. Regarding the age of the individuals, it can be concluded that the high percentage of the individuals are in the age range of 25 to 50 years.

Description of the studied variables: It is obvious that, essential information can not be obtained from raw data alone, and the raw data must be summarized as much as possible through using indicators. Table 3 describes the variables using the central and dispersion indices.

Table 3: Descriptive indices and normality test of the studied variables (Reference: The researcher's Findings)

Research Variables	Index of central tendency	dispersion indices		Kolmogorov-Smirnov test	
		Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	Statistic Value
Energy	3/53	0/55	0/74	0/118	0/00
Dedication	3/73	0/51	0/71	0/182	0/00
Attraction and Fascination	3/20	0/75	0/86	0/08	0/00
Consumer brand engagement	3/49	0/46	0/67	0/07	0/00
Consumer product category engagement	3/46	0/78	0/88	0/098	0/00
Duration of brand consumption	3/22	1/13	1/06	0/263	0/00
Brand preference	3/39	0/60	0/77	0/075	0/00
Tendency to loyalty	3/97	0/59	0/77	0/142	0/00
Satisfaction	3/33	0/73	0/85	0/096	0/00
Perceived Quality	3/66	0/57	0/75	0/144	0/00
Perceived Value	3/52	0/38	0/62	0/112	0/00

As can be seen in the table above, the mean scores of all available variables were greater than 3 (the median of the 5-optional likert scale). Therefore, it is inferred that the majority of the individuals responded to the questions in the questionnaire as agree or completely agree. Also, the significance level of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all variables is equal to zero with less than 0.05 error level ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be claimed that the data distribution of all variables does not follow the normal statistical distribution.

Structural Equation Modeling: Structural equation method (SEM) with partial least squares approach and smartpls3 software were used for data analysis. Researchers have mentioned several reasons for using the PLS method. The most important reason is the superiority of this method for small samples. The next reason is the abnormal data that researchers deal with in some research studies, and finally, the last reason for using PLS is to avoid constructive measurement models.

The partial least squares modeling method consists of the following three steps, and after confirming the criteria of each step, finally the hypotheses are tested.

1. Fitting the measurement model
2. Fitting the structural model
3. Fitting the general model

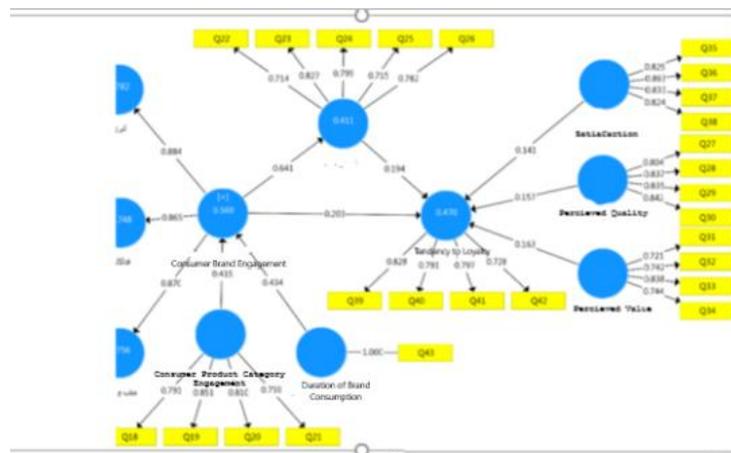


Figure 2. Research Model with Standardized Coefficients of Factor Load and Path Coefficients (Reference: The researcher’s Findings)

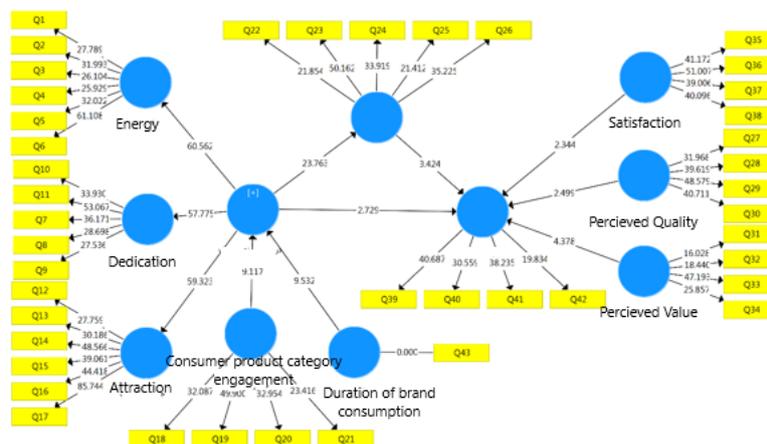


Figure 3. Research Model with t-Values Coefficients (Reference: The Researcher’s Findings)

Measurement Models: The measurement model is a model in which the relationships between the variables that are observable and present are taken into account and measured. The following criteria have been used to check the fitness of the measurement models:

- 1- Significant factor loading between the items and their current variables
2. Reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficients and combined reliability.
- 3 - Convergent validity, which is evaluated by the average variance extracted (AVE) criterion.
- 4- Divergent validity as measured by the Fornell and Larker method.
- 4.4. Significance of factor loadings

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the factor loadings and t-statistic coefficients between the questions and their current variables were greater than 0.4 and 1.96; respectively, and this shows the significance of the correlation between each question and its own variable.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficient

As can be seen in Table 3, the value of the composite reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, was calculated for all the research constructs, and it is clear that the values of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha for all the variables are greater than 0.7 representing the appropriate model reliability.

Convergent validity

Convergent validity has been used to compare average variance extracted (AVE). A value above 0.5 indicates that this criterion is adequate and appropriate. As can be seen in Table 4, the value of AVE is suitable for all structures, and it is above 0.5.

Table 4: Results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, composite reliability, and convergent validity (Reference: The Researcher's Findings)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Satisfaction	0/858	0/904	0/701
Perceived Quality	0/849	0/898	0/689
Perceived Value	0/769	0/847	0/581
Consumer product category Engagement	0/817	0/879	0/646
Duration of Brand consumption	1	1	1
Brand Preference	0/827	0/878	0/591
Consumer Brand Engagement	0/935	0/942	0/762
Energy	0/869	0/902	0/605
Dedication	0/870	0/906	0/660
Attraction and Fascination	0/903	0/925	0/675
Tendency to Loyalty	0/795	0/867	0/619

DIVERGENT VALIDITY

The matrix invented by Fornell and Larker (1981) was used to investigate the divergent validity. The square root of AVE of the current variables is in the main diameter of this matrix, and the other matrix boxes show the amount of correlation between the current variables. As can be seen in Table 5, because the values of the square root of AVE are greater in the lower right of the main diameter, it can be claimed that in the research model the current variables interact more with questions about themselves rather than with other constructs. In other words, this table shows the suitability of divergent validity of the model.

Table 5: The Results of Divergent Validity (Reference: the Researcher's Findings)

Study Variables	Satisfaction	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Product Category Engagement	Duration of Brand Consumption	Brand preference	Energy	Dedication	Attraction And Fascination	Tendency to Loyalty
Satisfaction	0/84									
Perceived Quality	0/52	0/83								
Perceived Value	0/47	0/53	0/76							
Product Category Engagement	0/57	0/53	0/41	0/80						
Duration of Brand Consumption	0/59	0/48	0/45	0/56	1					
Brand preference	0/50	0/49	0/36	0/58	0/51	0/77				
Energy	0/67	0/58	0/46	0/63	0/69	0/56	0/78			
Dedication	0/60	0/63	0/55	0/57	0/57	0/58	0/67	0/81		
Attraction And Fascination	0/49	0/53	0/52	0/54	0/49	0/55	0/64	0/62	0/82	
Tendency to Loyalty	0/53	0/55	0/50	0/61	0/55	0/53	0/58	0/60	0/45	0/79

Structural Model: The structural model is a model in which the relationships between the present variables (exogenous) and the dependent (endogenous) variables are considered. The structural model examines only the hidden variables and the relationships between them. Structural model test criteria include the following:

1. Path coefficient (beta) and its significance (t-value)
2. Determination coefficient index (R^2) of the current endogenous variables
- 3 - Predictive Relationship Index Q^2
- 4- Effect size criterion (f^2)

Significance coefficients of t-value: The value of t-coefficient among the current variables in Fig. 2 is all greater than 1.96, showing the significance of these paths and the suitability of the structural model.

R^2 criterion: This is a criterion that shows the effect of one or more exogenous variables on an endogenous variable, and the three values of 0.19, 0.33 and 0.67 have been considered for weak, moderate and strong values of R^2 . The value of this criterion, as shown in Table 5, was determined by the determination coefficient of consumer brand engagement (0.556), brand preference (0.411) and loyalty (0.470) at the optimum and suitable level.

The determination coefficient of Consumer brand engagement shows that 56.9% of the changes in the consumer brand engagement are predicted by the variables of consumer product category engagement and brand consumption duration, and the rest of the changes depend on other factors and variables that are not included in the model. Also, the adjusted determination coefficient of brand preference (0.411) shows that 41.1% of the changes in this variable are predicted by consumer brand engagement, and the rest (59%) of this variable depends on other factors considered in this model.

The determination coefficient of tendency to loyalty shows that 47% of the mentioned variables are predicted by the variables of consumer brand engagement, brand preference, satisfaction, perceived quality and perceived value, and the rest of its variations depend on other factors and variables which are not included in the model.

4. The criterion f^2 and Q^2

The f^2 criterion represents the severity of the relationship between structures. The higher the value of this criterion, the greater the effect. The values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35, respectively, show the magnitude of the small, medium, and large effects of one current variable on the other current variables. This criterion is computable for endogenous variables that affect more than one variable; therefore, the f^2 criterion is computable for the variables of consumer brand engagement and the tendency to loyalty, and the results have been presented in the following.

The Q^2 criterion specifies the predictive power of the model in the dependent variables. For all endogenous constructs, three values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are defined as low, medium, and strong predictive power, respectively. According to Table 5, the value of Q^2 of endogenous constructs of consumer brand engagement (0.225), brand preference (0.222), and loyalty tendency (0.226) was positive, and at an appropriate level indicating a good predictive power of the model for these variables.

12.4. The General model

There is only one criterion called GOF (Goodness Of Fit) for the general model, and three values of 0.01, 0.25 and 0.36 are presented as weak, medium and strong values for this criterion. According to Table 6, the value of GOF criterion was found to be 0.554, which is a good fit of the general research model based on the mentioned classification.

Table 6: Results of Fit Criteria for Structural and General Model (Reference: The Researcher's Findings)

Dependent Variable → Independent variable	β	T_value	Significance Level	R^2 Dependent Variable	Q^2 Dependent Variable	F^2	GOF
Consumer brand engagement → Energy	/8840	60/562	0/00	0/782	0/440	-	GOF $= \sqrt{Communalities \times R^2}$ $= \sqrt{0.483 \times 0.623}$ $= 0.548$
Consumer brand engagement → Dedication	/8650	57/775	0/00	0/748	0/462	-	
Consumer brand engagement → Attraction And Fascination	/8700	59/323	0/00	0/756	0/476	-	
Consumer Product Category engagement → Consumer brand engagement	/4190	9/117	0/00	0/569	0/257	0/28	
Brand preference → Consumer brand engagement	/4340	9/532	0/00	0/569	0/257	0/30	
Tendency to Loyalty → Brand preference	/6410	23/763	0/00	0/411	0/224	-	
Tendency to Loyalty → Consumer	/1940	3/424	0/001	0/470	0/268	/0410	

brand engagement							
Brand Preference →Tendency to Loyalty	/203 0	2/729	0/007	0/470	0/268	/025 0	
Satisfaction →Tendency to Loyalty	/141 0	2/344	0/019	0/470	0/268	0/02	
Perceived Quality→ Tendency to Loyalty	/157 0	2/499	0/013	0/470	0/268	/024 0	
Perceived Value →Tendency to Loyalty	/163 0	4/378	0/00	0/470	0/268	/031 0	

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS TEST

After examining the measurement, structural and general models, the hypotheses have been investigated.

Investigating the first hypothesis: Consumer brand engagement is a second-order structure that is reflected in the first-order dimensions of energy, dedication and attraction and fascination.

The results show that the relationship between the second-order variable of consumer brand engagement with the first-order variables of energy, dedication and attraction and attraction is statistically significant. In other words, the t-statistic between consumer brand engagement with variables of energy (60.556), dedication (57.775) and absorption and fascination (59.323) was calculated above the border limit of 1.96, and the significant levels have been found to be less than 0.05 for all three variables. Therefore, it is inferred that consumer engagement is a second-order structure consisting of three variables: energy, dedication and attraction and fascination. The value of determination coefficient of the first-order variables shows that consumer brand engagement was able to predict 2.78% of energy variances, 8.74% of dedication variances, and 6.75% of attraction and fascination.

Investigating the second hypothesis: Consumer product category engagement (consumer's mental engagement with product category) has a significant effect on consumer brand engagement .

The value of t-statistic and the calculated significance level of the path between consumer product category engagement (consumer's mental engagement with product category) with brand engagement were calculated to be 9/117 and 0/00; respectively. Therefore, considering that the significance level of the test is less than 0.05, and the t-value is more than 1.96, it can be declared that the effect of consumer product category engagement (consumer's mental engagement with product category) on consumer brand engagement with beta coefficient of 0.419 is significant with 95% probability. The positive beta coefficient between the variables indicates that by increasing a standard deviation in the consumer product category engagement, the consumer brand engagement will increase by 0.419 standard deviation. There, the second hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

Investigating the third Hypothesis: The duration of brand consumption has a significant effect on consumer brand engagement. The calculated t-statistic value of the path between the duration of brand consumption and brand engagement is 9.532 and more than 1.96. Hence, it is concluded that the effect of the duration of brand consumption on consumer brand engagement is significant with a beta coefficient of 0.434 and the probability of 95%. The positive beta coefficient among the

variables indicates that by increasing a standard deviation over the duration of brand consumption, the consumer brand engagement will increase by the standard deviation of 0.434. Therefore, the third hypothesis of the research is confirmed.

Investigating the Fourth Hypothesis: Consumer brand engagement has a significant effect on brand preference.

The calculated t-statistic value of the path between the consumer-brand engagement and the brand preference is 23.763 and more than 1.96. Therefore, it is inferred that the effect of consumer brand engagement on brand preference with a beta coefficient of 0.641 is significant with a 95% probability.

The positive beta coefficient among the variables indicates that with the increase of a standard deviation in the consumer brand engagement, the brand preference will increase by standard deviation of 0.641. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of the research is also confirmed.

Investigating the fifth hypothesis: Brand preference has a significant effect on consumer loyalty.

The calculated t-statistic of the path between brand preference and consumer loyalty is 3.424 and greater than 1.96. Therefore, it is inferred that the effect of brand preference on consumer loyalty with a beta coefficient of 0.194 and 95% probability is significant. The positive beta coefficient among the variables indicates that by increasing a standard deviation in brand preference, consumer loyalty will be increased by the standard deviation of 0.194. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of the research is confirmed.

Investigating the sixth Hypothesis: Consumer brand engagement has a significant effect on consumer loyalty.

The calculated t-statistic of the path between consumer brand engagement and consumer loyalty tendency is 2.729 and greater than 1.96. Therefore, it is inferred that the impact of consumer brand engagement on consumer loyalty tendency is significant with beta coefficient of 0.220 and 95% probability. The positive beta coefficient between the variables indicates that by increasing a standard deviation in the consumer brand engagement, the tendency for consumer loyalty will increase by the standard deviation of 0.203. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

Investigating the seventh hypothesis: Satisfaction, perceived value, and perceived quality have a significant effect on loyalty.

The seventh hypothesis of the research consists of three hypotheses in which there are three independent variables and one dependent variable. The research findings presented in Table 5 show that the effect of the variables of satisfaction ($T = 2.344$, $P < 0.05$, $B = 0.141$), perceived quality ($T = 2.499$, $P < 0.05$, $B = 0.157$), and perceived value ($T = 4.378$, $P < 0.05$, $B = 0.163$) on loyalty tendency is statistically significant. The path coefficients of the variables indicate that an increase in each of the variables of satisfaction, perceived quality, and perceived value will lead to a change in loyalty tendency.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

In today's competitive world, companies with their superior performance are striving to maintain their customers and gain loyalty, so salespeople and marketing managers must look for various management strategies to improve their customers' loyalty and gradually understand the need for paying more attention to customers, and seek for their loyalty and enjoy other benefits such as positive verbal advice and greater competitive power. For this reason, this paper investigates the factor of brand engagement and brand preference over customer loyalty, based on the analyses done in previous sections, the hypotheses were confirmed. The result of the first hypothesis is in line with the research done by Holbeek (2011), Vandoran et al (2010), Salanova et al (2005), David (2015), Shafli et al (2002), Shafli and Baker (2004). The result of the second hypothesis is in line with the research of Mano and Oliver (1993) and Schultz (2007). The result of the third hypothesis is in line with the research conducted by Gill et al. (1998), Bandapadi and Barry (1997), Kumar et al. (1995), Anderson and Weins (1989). The result of the fourth hypothesis is in line with the research studies by Riham (2011), Zajunik and Marcus (1982). The result of the fifth hypothesis is in line with the studies of Boyle et al. (2013), Chang and

Liu (2009), and Khazai Money and Amani (2014). The result of the sixth hypothesis is in line with the research by David (2015), Holik (2011), Lurio et al. (2012), Nison et al. (2014).

The result of the seventh hypothesis is in line with the research studies done by Cronin et al. (2000), Yang and Paterson (2004), Zitmal et al. (1996).

Interaction with brands is one of the key features of the brand and is considered as a type of value. Interaction with a commercial name offers many communication benefits to the consumer. Consumer brand interaction has a direct impact on customer loyalty, and providing value, quality and satisfaction are among the least requirements to compete in the marketplace. Nowadays, where consumers are looking for fun and stimulating experiences, making it possible for the consumer to interact with a brand may help in keeping the customers. Based on the results, it is perceived that if companies impact on consumers' minds, and create a mental engagement with a brand in them, in a way that they would prefer only that particular brand, they would increase customer loyalty, and guarantee the continuation of their lives.

Consumer brand engagement is a second-order structure that is reflected in the first-order dimensions of energy, dedication, attraction, fascination. According to the result of the first hypothesis, it is suggested that companies by linking the brand to a specific need, associating it with a good feeling, creating attractive models for shoppers would make the brand attractive and fascinating for the consumers and consequently, develop consumer brand engagement. According to the result of the second hypothesis, the consumer product category engagement has a significant effect on the consumer brand engagement. Companies can create product category engagement through psychological advertising, thereby affect on consumer brand engagement and increase the likelihood of purchasing products using this strategy. Based on the result of the third hypothesis, the duration of brand consumption has a significant effect on consumer brand engagement. To maximize the duration of brand consumption, companies are expected to provide flawless and distinctive services to customers, and consequently, thereby increase consumer brand engagement and directly affect on customer loyalty, as well, this factor can be as a basis for expanding the brand of a company. According to the result of the fourth hypothesis, consumer engagement has a significant effect on brand preference. Regarding the main role of brand engagement for consumers, marketing executives should strive to create a desirable image in the minds of consumers by taking into account the psychological and social processes involved in making a brand. And, this research alerts managers of organizations and companies that creating high mental engagement with the brand is a prerequisite for affecting on brand preference and selection. According to the fifth hypothesis, brand preference has a significant effect on consumer loyalty. Positive brand preference helps in brand loyalty expansion, in other words, brands with higher preference levels, reinforce customers' repeating buying behavior in customers' minds and lead to increased brand loyalty. Companies can influence on consumers' brand preference and consequently, gain their loyalty by ways such as attracting unconscious motivations, conditioning customers to prefer one by rewarding them, and by penetrating in perceptual and cognitive constraints. Based in the result of sixth hypothesis: consumer brand engagement has a significant effect on consumer loyalty tendency. The factor of brand engagement and the effort to maintain it should always be considered as a key factor by marketing managers who want to increase their profitability through loyalty. We also need to keep in mind that depending on the type of provided goods and services, the impact of the engagement dimensions on loyalty can be highly variable requiring sufficient investigations. According to the result of the seventh hypothesis, the satisfaction, perceived value and perceived quality have a significant effect on loyalty tendency. Customer satisfaction is created through the value and quality of perception and ultimately leads to brand choice, repetition, recommendation to others, and loyalty. The greater the perceived value and quality of the brand, the greater the satisfaction and loyalty of the customer. Therefore, it is suggested that by enhancing product quality through increasing their functionality and regarding intangible considerations as well, the commercial units can affect on the costumers' perceived value and obtain customer loyalty and consequently, gain

the benefits of customer loyalty, which includes repeated shopping and word of mouth advertising. Companies also need to always move one step beyond customers' expectations, thereby increasing perceived value by customers and thereby becoming loyal customers.

6. Limitations and suggestions for future research:

The main limitation of this study is its cross-sectional research design, as the consumer brand engagement changes over time, and thus the weights of the three dimensions change as well. It is better if future research studies address this issue using temporary questionnaire designs so that the results get close to reality. Another limitation is the available sampling. Future studies should be done through alternative sampling designs to reach generalizable designs which can be used for various groups of customers. The study was conducted in one country and only the product category or class was investigated as the field of study. Future studies should repeat the estimated relationships in different markets using different product categories and classes (and perhaps make comparisons between various categories) to gain a more complete understanding of the consumer brand engagement. Regarding that this study and most of the conducted studies have been done in the field of consumed goods, it is suggested that similar researches be done in the field of services. One of the problems in all humanities subjects is that most people express their attitudes and perceptions rather than reality itself, and this factor has some effects in determining the results of the research and may result in findings that are not real. This study specifically measures the impact of brand engagement and brand preference on consumer loyalty, but since this factor alone is not effective and other important factors play a role in this process, further research is suggested to be done to investigate the impact of these factors.

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