

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF BRAND IDENTITY ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

Today, brand is one of the basic elements of the business, an essential and integral part of the marketing strategy in the world economy, brands marketing is placed in the heart of the business and mostly, its hidden value resides within the hearts and minds of customers, clients, and prospects that attracts them. Besides selling the products, establishing a lasting relationship between the product and certain group of customer's is the main purpose of each organization, the extraction of this stable interaction brings about a kind of commitment and customer loyalty toward the product. Brands with unique identity and targets, by providing tangible and friendly feature, are able to make a rich and beneficial relationship with customer's and not only capture a part of their heart and mind, but also capture a part of consumer's daily life. Therefore, the present study has been performed to examine the impact of brand identity on the development of customer loyalty toward the brand in the industry of mobile phone brands. In the present research, brands of mobile phones such as Nokia, Sony, Samsung, Sony Ericsson, HTC and GLX have been selected to study as the statistical population and sample of the research of 385 persons in the chief (metropolis) city of Rasht. This research has been a Descriptive and Causal study and has been made through Field method. The data resulted from the questionnaire, has been examined by applying statistical tests proportional to research hypotheses using Spss and Lisrel software. The research findings indicate that all hypotheses were confirmed but hypotheses of relationship between brand identity and perceived value, customer satisfaction and confidence in brand through its identification.

Keywords: Brand Identity, Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Identification, Perceived Value

INTRODUCTION

Today brand is one of the most important subjects of the marketing that is in front of all companies such as commercial firms and they are calculated as company's valuable assets economically and strategically. Over the last few years, researchers have concluded that the real value of products and services is not inside of the company's products and services, but rather in the mind of real and potential customer's and this is the brand that creates the real value in customer's minds.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers. David also says that brand is a symbol which has linked with a large number of assets and mental liabilities (Dehdashti Shahrokh et al., 2012).

The main purpose of each organization is to create a steady relationship and connection between the product and a particular group of customer's, as well as selling its product, the extraction and juice of this lasting relationship is led to a kind of commitment and loyalty toward the product (Mir and Ghafari, 2010).

The study of existing theoretical literature in the field of consumer behavior indicates that brand loyalty has been raised as an important and effective concept and describes significant part of consumer's behavior at the time of choosing and purchasing (Saeednia and Jamali, 2010).

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Today, the understanding and anticipating of customer's needs, sustaining and strengthening their loyalty is necessary for acquiring competitive advantage and market segmentation in each economic enterprise and the orientation of objectives, strategies and resources is around the axis of attracting and retaining of customers as well (Haghgouei, 2012).

Buyers are facing many ifs and buts for decision making in the purchasing process in the world today, because in the present markets retaining old customers and attracting new customers becoming increasingly difficult by becoming more competitive and getting smaller of market segments, the variety of different products and the increasing of customer's expectations and their demands in order to improve the quality of products and services, companies have found that the loss of a customer, is not just the loss of a sale item, rather, beyond that it means the loss of the entire stream of purchases that a customer has been able to do throughout his/her life (Moharramzadeh and Akbari, 2013).

Mobile phone market probably is one of the most dynamic markets in the world and the degree and rate of change in technology, market acceptance and product innovation is astounding. The market penetration has increased and mobile phones have changed from the luxury market to the mass market (Qushchi, 2012).

Providing new theories in business of mobile phone with high brand value is important for understanding the way of consumer decision making, because in recent years, despite the several types of mobile phones with lower prices, customer loyalty has faded due to the high diversity, supplying after sales services to customers and increasing the number of mobile phone manufacturing companies (Zandhesami et al., 2010).

Branding with the emphasis on loyalty helps companies and mobile phones sellers to stabilize themselves for the future strategically and compete against the world's biggest companies and the global giants who have conquered the world markets, effectively.

Therefore, by the understanding of customer's needs and their considered values, companies need to give careful evaluation to this important and should always consider about the interaction between themselves and their clients and provide valuable goods and services for them which cause satisfaction and loyalty (Moharramzadeh and Akbari, 2013).

In today's volatile market conditions the organizations are successful that can obtain larger share of the market with the help of brand loyalty, resist against situational factors and competitor's marketing efforts and have identified customer expectations properly as well (Rahimi Kalvar and Hosseini, 2010).

All brands must be able to create and stabilize their identity during the birth and the formation properly for being mighty and finding strong position, improve their image in the minds of consumers by innovating at different time periods, increase market share and organization profit by creating customer loyalty toward brand, positive word of mouth advertising through their loyal customers (by the passing of information from person to person by oral communication) (Bagheri, 2013).

In the present study, we are examining the role of brand identity in the development of customer loyalty toward it through mediated concepts and variables of brand trust, perceived value, brand identification and customer satisfaction.

The Theoretical Framework of Research

Brand Identity

The creation of a desired perception in the target consumer's mind by creating brand identity is one of the favorite fields of brand managers. Today, defining a brand, its attention and emphasis on identity as an important and invisible element, significant more than any other cases. Identity is an element that is not visible, but it has ingenuity and root (Ebrahimi and Nejad, 2011). Consequently, identity is a person's conception, individual and social characteristics, feelings, thoughts, expression of their own (self-identity) and other's individuality or group affiliations that he/she obtains it through ability of interaction between himself/herself and finding own imaginations and in answer to the question "Who am I?" (Hersich et al., 2012).

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"Professor John Kapferer" says: "Having an identity means being you, as you are, following the fixed plan, but your personal plan". Brand identity determines personality, goals and aspirations, values and marks and signs of brand identification.

It can be said that brands are a unique set of brand associations implying a promise to customers and introduces itself by brand identity and distinguished itself from other competitors (Dehdashti Shahrokhet al., 2012).

The concept of identity reminds us that a brand is not able to create any type of opportunity all the time. One brand might have the capacity to accept everything at the beginning of its birth. For those times and symbols that has accepted it creates a meaning, a territory and accordingly boundaries for the territory (Ebrahimi and Nejad, 2011).

Researchers admit the role of brand identity as a sentimental tool for the effective separation and brand management. If we consider options of brand, "Nowadays many options are available for customers who can make an attempt to things that make public brand unique". This growing competition makes the differentiation and brand identity increasingly important. Consequently, the brand managers must create a clear and fixed identity and sustain it so that the brands can serve customers in the form of fixed resources (Silveira, et al., 2013).

Brand identity includes brand perspective, brand culture, positioning, personality, relationships and its providing. Brand identity is a set of functional and intellectual links with the brand. These links are not reasons to purchase; they create unrepeatable and unique popularity and differentiation. Brand Identity is a promise or offer that organizations make to consumers and can be placed as a product, personality, set of values and position in the consumer's mind. Brand identity is what all organizations want to visualize public perception of their brand as they really are (Ebrahimi et al., 2012).

Brand Loyalty

Considering customers loyalty on the subject of marketing returns to efforts of Copleland in 1923 and Churchill in 1942. Since then, the concept of loyalty was set forth for discussion as an academic subject in the marketing literature and various empirical studies were designed and implemented with the aim of explaining the concept (Heydari, 2012).

Many researchers have studied in the field of commercial brand loyalty and the influencing factors for years and also have offered different definitions of loyalty. Moon and Minor (1998): Brand loyalty can be defined as the amount that the customer has a positive attitude towards a brand, his/her rate of commitment to the mentioned brand and intention to buy it in the future (Saeednia and Jamali, 2010).

Aaker considers that brand loyalty reflects "how likely a customer will be to switch another brand, especially when that brand makes a change in prices product features, communication or distribution programme." The biased behavioral response, expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one of more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes. Consequently, brand loyalty is comprised of behavioral as well as attitudinal components (Rahimi Kalvar and Hosseini, 2010).

The American Marketing Association defines brand loyalty as "the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category" or "the degree to which a consumer consistently purchases the same brand within a product class" (Solatan Hosseini et al., 2013). Many definitions were being proposed by many researchers, among which the most complete definition was being proposed by Jacoby and Olson (1970). They defined brand loyalty as the result from non-random, long existence behavior response, and it was a mental purchase process formed by some certain decision units who considered more than one brands (Jafarnejad et al., 2011). Brand loyalty is the ultimate goal a company sets for a branded product. Brand loyalty is a consumer's preference to buy a particular brand in a product category (Alizadeh, 2013).

Development of Hypotheses and Models

The model in the present study will examine the relationship between brand identity and Brand loyalty through the mediating variables of perceived value, Brand identification, Brand trust and customer

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satisfaction as shown in the figure 1. Straight-Line shows direct relationship between the variables and also the broken line shows indirect relationship.

According to this model, the research hypotheses will be developed as follows:

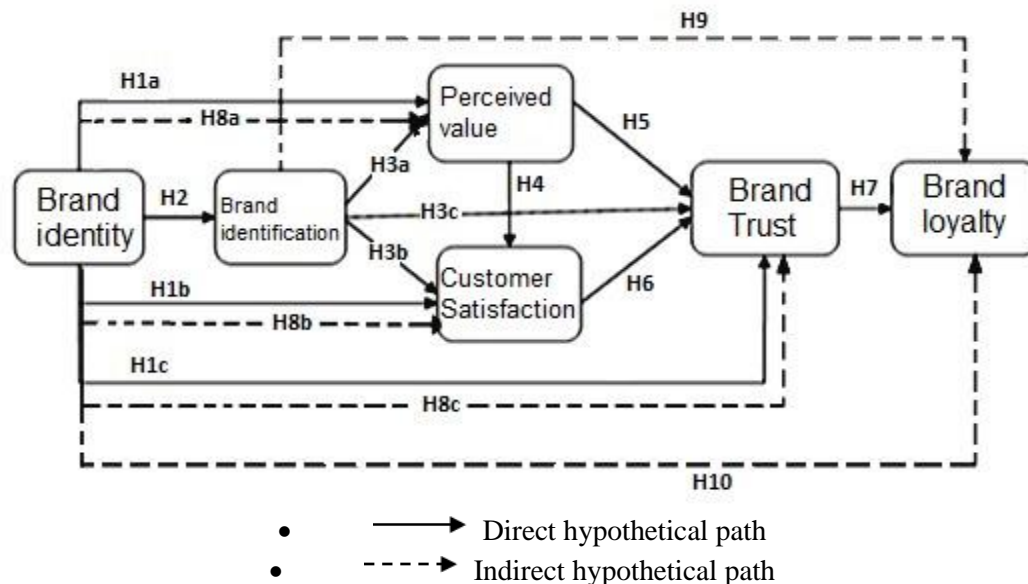


Figure 1: The conceptual model of research (He et al., 2012)

Brand Identity and Perceived Value

There are numerous definitions of Perceived value: the difference between a prospective customer's evaluation of the benefits and costs of one product, straightforward relationship between perceived benefits and perceived costs, both qualitative and quantitative measures or the relationship between the quality and the price of products under the brand, but generally the purpose of value in the marketing is the perceived value by the customer that includes both economic and non-economic aspects, means that how much brands are worth for customers and how much they are willing to pay for attaining them. According to the basic utility principle of perceived value (Parasuraman et al., 1988), (He et al., 2012) a brand with stronger identity tends to enhance value perception and corporate reputation positively relates to perceived economic value (Dehdashti Shahrokh et al., 2012). Brand identity enhances brand value and a brand with strong commercial identity accommodates customer's needs for uniqueness and self-enhancement. Therefore, the studies have shown that features such as prestige, distinctiveness and globalization that all returns to brand identity have positive relationship with brand value. For example, Steenkamp et al., (2003) find that brand features (e.g., brand globalness) enhance brand value, Hansen et al., (2008) find that corporate reputation positively relates to perceived economic value and enhances brand value (He, et al., 2012). Accordingly first hypothesis can be stated as follows:

The First Hypothesis (H1a): Brand identity has positive relationship with the perceived value of the brand.

Brand Identity and Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a fulfillment of a need or desire in consequence of the act of satisfying customers and prospect's needs or desires. Bitner and Hubbert (1994) described customer satisfaction as an overall evaluation of performance based on prior experiences with a provider. Moreover, it is a judgment that the product or the service itself is providing a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under or over fulfillment (Oliver, 1997). Customer satisfaction is also known as an overall emotional evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time (Anderson et al., 1994). Therefore, customer satisfaction can be judicial, cognitive and positive

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feeling process of customer towards the brand. People have diverse needs who are attempting to satisfy themselves by consuming brand products. Some needs that brand can satisfy are Brand Prestige and Brand differentiation, a brand provides an attractive and strong identity when its identity is more distinctive and prestigious in comparison with other brands from the perspective customers (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012). In general, there is a meaningful relationship between brand identity and customer satisfaction, the reason is that brand identity gives special credit to the customer and it is able to meet customer needs for being attractive and distinctive. According to researches done by He *et al.*, (2012) and Shirazi *et al.*, (2013), positive relationship between brand identity and customer satisfaction have proven. On this basis, the first hypothesis can be stated as follows:

The First Hypothesis (H1b): Brand identity is positively associated with customer satisfaction.

Brand Identity and Brand Trust

Trust represents a psychological condition, confiding in partner reliability and honesty, as credit or conviction in positive intentions of other party in respect to relationship and the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function. Brand Trust is the degree of confidence and ability in fulfilling of needs. Therefore, customers tend to understand such brands that ensuring to fulfill the brand promise to them. According to the trust-commitment theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), trust has been considered as a key variable in the development of an enduring desire to maintain a relationship in the long term (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012). According to Herbert *et al.*, (2008) and Berens *et al.*, (2005), Changes in identity may lead to suspicion of stability and constancy as well as on honesty of brand, which in turn can decrease the intensity of the relationship between target customers and brand. Hence, it can be said that trust is a substantial factor in creating committed relationships and reputation has a positive correlation with trust (Ganesan, 1994). Furthermore, the results of previous studies surrounding brand identity indicate that a strong identity leads to customer trust (Berens *et al.*, 2005; Berry, 2000; Simoes *et al.*, 2005; Voeth and Herbst, 2008) (Shirazi *et al.*, 2013). Strong brand identity is a substantial factor for retaining customer trust and a safe place for clients, to have a long-term relationship with customers, brand identity must be considered, because it reduces uncertainty and risk in purchasing and consuming a product for them and customers will have more confidence (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012). On this basis, the first hypothesis can be stated as follows:

The First Hypothesis (H1c): Brand Identity has a positive significant relationship with brand trust.

Brand Identity and Brand Identification

For consumers, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) propose consumer–company identification as a key construct in customer–company relationship to represent ‘deep, committed, and meaningful’ relationship. This study examines customer brand identification, instead of customer identification with companies, because the concept of a brand can be more inclusive than a company (Aaker, 2004; He and Li, 2010). Different brands within the same company can have different identities (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) (He *et al.*, 2012). Brand identification provides a more favorable framework for customers to react to brand function experiences against prior expectations. When the expectations from brand performance are met, the customers who are more identified by the brand feel more satisfaction. For this reason, the customers enhance their psychological dependence to brand that in turn improves their self-esteem (He & Li, 2011). Customers, as non-formal members of a company, can also develop strong attachment and identification with the company and its brands (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He and Li, 2010). Brand with a more distinguishable identity can be assumed as an advantage to attract customers. A brand with a strong identity is eager to satisfy symbolic needs of customers, more than applicable ones consistent with this offer that identification of the consumer’s company comes primarily from identity of company and also organizational identification of employee comes from his/her organizational identity. On this basis, the second hypothesis can be stated as follows:

The Second Hypothesis (H2): Brand identity is positively associated with brand identification.

Brand Identification and Perceived Value

However, the perceived value of a service is determined primarily by its price and quality, increased levels of brand identification of the customer may also impact on consumer’s perception of value. For example, in

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the organizational literature, where the concept of identification has been derived, scientists believe that identification of an individual by an organization increases his/her support. By comparison, from the consumer perspective, identifying by an organization or a brand, is more likely that customer has more tendency to the content and products of organization (Soet et al., 2013). Researchers posit that the consumer identification process has a significant impact on behaviors such as: buying-related decisions (Ahearne et al., 2005), brand preferences (Tildesley and Coote, 2009), loyalty (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Kim et al., 2001), psychological commitment to the brand (Casaló et al., 2008), satisfaction and a higher possibility of repurchase (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008) and the consumer tendency to pay more (Del Rio et al., 2001). Affective attachment with a subject can influence cognitive evaluation (Murphy and Zajonc, 1993). Since the brand identification includes affective attachment to the brands, customers who are identified more effectively, evaluate the value of transaction with focal brand more desirable and at the end the brand identification improves perceived value and has a positive effect on perceived value (He et al., 2012; Shiraziet al., 2013). The third hypothesis of the research is stated as follows:

The Third Hypothesis (H3a): Brand identification relates to perceived value positively.

Brand Identification and Customer Satisfaction

According to expectation-disconfirmation theory of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1993), customer satisfaction happens when the actual brand performance exceeds/confirms the prior-purchase/consumption expectation of performance (Yi and La, 2004). Brand identification could enhance customer satisfaction in two ways: by enhancing the perceived performance (as indicated by its effect on perceived value) and by more favorable overall appraisal due to affective attachment with the brand (Choudhury and Holbrook, 2001; He and Li, 2010). The antecedent role of brand identification can also be due to the fact that brand identification can happen for noncustomer consumers (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), however brand satisfaction's occurrence requires the act of purchase (in other words, it happens only for actual customers) (He et al., 2012).

Brand identification provides a more favorable framework for customers to react to brand function experiences against prior expectations. When the expectations from brand performance are met, the customers who are more identified by the brand feel more satisfaction. For this reason, the customers enhance their psychological dependence to brand that in turn improves their self-esteem (He & Li, 2011). And when expectations from brand functions are not met, customers who are more identified by the brand, feel less dissatisfaction because they (a) have more affective attachment to the brand (Choudhury & Holbrook, 2001) and (b) show greater flexibility in relation to bad news and experiences about the brand (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Thus, when customers are more identified, they are more likely to be satisfied with the focal brand (Namet al., 2011). The third hypothesis of the research is stated as follows:

The Third Hypothesis (H3b): Brand identification is positively associated with customer satisfaction.

Brand Identification and Brand Trust

Brand identification can directly and indirectly influence brand trust. Accordingly, brand identification will mediate the effect of brand identity on brand trust (Shiraziet al., 2013). In addition, brand identification represents affective attachment to the brand, which provides a favorable platform for brand trust development.

In addition to the ability to create favorable perceived value, brand identification is concerned brand trust conceptually. On the one hand, the researches show that trust is a track record for the relation of recognition, because consumers tend to identify with organizations or reliable trademarks for explaining their confidence and enhance their self-concept. In contrast, the determined attachment by identification might be a base of developing brand trust.

While, the marketing literature indicates that the trust is mainly developed through past experience with the brand. Organizational research has introduced the concept of "identification-based trust" which is motivated by identifying individuals with social identity not by past interactions or the benefits of experience. Therefore, brand identification provides a suitable base for customers to evaluate the performance of brand experience in comparison with the previous expectations. When the expectation of brand performance is confirmed or it goes further, the identified customers ensure the

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psychological attachment with the brand which helps customers to retain their confidence (Soet *et al.*, 2013). The third hypothesis of research is stated as follows:

The Third Hypothesis (H3c): Brand identification is associated with brand trust positively.

Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction

Some authors have suggested that perceived quality is an antecedent that has a positive effect on perceived value (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Pierret *et al.*, 1999), whereas others have contended that quality is a sub-component of overall value (Holbrook, 1999; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The effect of perceived value on repurchase intention is completely mediated to customer satisfaction. Blackwell *et al.*, (1999) the perception value can be created without purchase or use of brand. While, the satisfaction is dependent on the knowledge that is acquired of brand consumption (Jalali *et al.*, 2011). Customer satisfaction occurs when the person feels that the benefits received meet or exceed product expectations (Oliver, 1980). A consensus notion found in service literature is that value perceptions are a cognitively-oriented appraisal that precedes customer satisfaction (Cronin *et al.*, 2000). Perceived value is critical for companies and the customer values an important source to gain competitive advantage (Yoo, 2008). According to Ching (2006), customer perceived value improves customer satisfaction, especially when the value is consistent with customer's expectations and based on the previous understanding of customer. Oliver (1999) Value is indeed a unique construct from satisfaction and quality. He believes that the indexes of value and satisfaction affect each other and leads to acceptable results such as customer loyalty, consuming over time (Bamanmoghadam *et al.*, 2011). Conceptual value has affected on customer satisfaction Marshall and Keller (1999) and Menget *et al.*, (2011). In addition to examining the effect of value perception on satisfaction and then satisfaction on customer loyalty, direct impact of perception value on loyalty has been confirmed as well (Alavi *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis of research can be expressed as follows:

The Fourth Hypothesis (H4): Perceived value affects customer satisfaction.

Perceived Value and Brand Trust

Customer Perception of brand value is a function of their subjective perceptions and every single brand has different values in the eyes of different people. Companies need to discover standards that lead brand valuable from the perspective customers and then provide appropriate response to their needs. However, many studies have focused on the concept of perceived value in recent years, the studies of researchers such as Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), Sirohi and *et al.*, (1998), Sweeney and *et al.*, (1999). But there are few theoretical supports and studies in the field of relationship between perceived value and trust. In this regard, Anderson and Srinivasan have argued that perceived value and trust have similar effects on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012). Harris and Goode (2004) have proved that perceived value and trust are associated with each other directly, they show that perceived value has both direct and indirect positive impact on the various aspects of customer loyalty such as purchasing loyalty and relationship loyalty (attitudinal) (Ebrahimi *et al.*, 2012). On this basis, the fifth hypothesis of research can be expressed as follows:

The Fifth Hypothesis (H5): perceived value effects on brand trust.

Customer Satisfaction and Brand Trust

Many scholars such as Anderson and Narus (1990), Bennett (2005) have defined satisfaction as an emotional response to a buying position. If after purchasing, the result becomes positive, it will lead to brand trust. Satisfaction can strengthen customer decision to greater participation with company. Customer brand trust is derived from their previous experience of brand products consuming. Determining the cause-effect in the field of relationship between satisfaction and trust is somewhat difficult; that is, it cannot be said in certain that satisfaction causes building trust and trust effects is satisfaction or, conversely, trust causes satisfaction. Some researchers, such as He *et al.*, (2012) and Harris and Goode (2004) believe that the effect of the relationship between satisfaction and trust is mutual and reciprocal, satisfaction and trust are mutually reinforced each other (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012).

According to Dyer (1987), trust is one of the main keys of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction and trust are positively associated with each other. In particular, the impact of trust on long-term

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relationships and deep satisfaction of seller is much stronger than any other variables. Customers trust has a positive impact on customer satisfaction from relationships. Nevertheless, some researchers believe that the level of mutual satisfaction of relationships affects trust of another one, that is, the trust and satisfaction relationships is established as a two-way. Because, trust has a positive impact on satisfaction with the difference that satisfaction is shaped in the short-term and term trust in the long (Qushchi, 2012; Habibi Pirkouhi, 2013). Accordingly the sixth hypothesis of research stated in the following result:

The Sixth Hypothesis (H6): customer satisfaction affects brand trust.

Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty

Morgan and Hunt (1994) linked trust and commitment, calling them 'key variables' in the exchange network between a company and its various partners because the variables encourage corporate leaders to invest in a long-term relationship and not to give in to appealing, short-term alternatives. Trust is conceptualized in these works as a belief, in keeping with the tenets of social psychology research, as well as willingness or behavioral intention (Moorman *et al.*, 1992) although researchers have actually not reached a consensus on this issue. The concept of trust is a belief, a feeling or expectation of buyer (Seller) that is due to the expertise, reliability and goals or intentions of seller (buyer). Customer trust was defined as the customer recognition of the level of validity (the level of buyer belief of the seller's expertise and ability to adequate performance) and benevolence or goodwill of a company (the level of buyer belief of the seller's intentions and motivations in order to give more benefit to buyers) (Rezaei Dowlatabad *et al.*, 2013; Soet *et al.*, 2013).

Trust and loyalty has close relationship with each other. If customers have more trust and assurance towards certain products under the brands in any way, they try to buy more products from the same brand due to the individual's non-risk nature and reducing the risk purchasing, and they have less tendency towards other brands and products and this is customer loyalty towards brand. Therefore, brand loyalty towards a brand takes its trust as well. Many researchers such as Sweeney and Soutar (2008), Live valley (1999), Ambler (1997), Moorman, Morgan *et al.*, (1995), Omar and *et al.*, (2009) and others have examined the role of trust in brand loyalty and the results of this research show customer trust towards the brand is positively related to customer loyalty (Dehdashti Shahrokh *et al.*, 2012; Khajouei and Nayeb Zadeh, 2013). On this basis, the seventh hypothesis of research can be expressed as follows:

The Seventh Hypothesis (H7): brand trust affects brand loyalty.

Brand Identity on Perceived Value, Brand Trust, Customer Satisfaction (Via Identification of Brand)

Early discussion has also established the positive effect of brand identity on brand identification, and the positive effects of brand identification on brand value, customer satisfaction, and brand trust. Hence, the study expects that brand identification would mediate the effects of brand identity on brand value, customer satisfaction, and brand trust. Prior literature offers some indirect evidence on the mediation effect of brand identification. For example, consumer identification mediates (a) the effect of identity (prestige) on sponsorship-linked purchase intent (Cornwell and Coote, 2003), (b) the effect of corporate social responsibility on customer donation to the corporate-supported NPO (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2004) and service brand loyalty (He and Li, 2010); and (c) the effects of company image and characteristics on their utilization of products from the pharmaceutical firms and extrarole pro-company behavior (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). Given that brand identification also has indirect effect on brand loyalty via brand value, customer satisfaction and brand trust, brand identity will have indirect effects on brand loyalty via not only brand identification, but also the mediators of brand identification. Brand identity and brand identification both have a positive impact on the variables of recent study model and since brand identity is prior to brand identification, it is likely that brand identification adjustment the effects of brand identity on the other variables (He *et al.*, 2012; Shiraziet *et al.*, 2013). On this basis, the eighth hypothesis of research can be expressed as follows:

The Eighth Hypothesis (H8a): Brand identity impacts on perceived value via identification of Brand.

The Eighth Hypothesis (H8b): Brand identity impacts on customer satisfaction via identification of Brand.

The Eighth Hypothesis (H8c): Brand identity impacts on brand trust via identification of Brand.

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Brand Identification and Brand Loyalty (Via Value, Trust and Satisfaction)

Social identity may affect people's perception, understanding and evaluation of issues and events, consumers increased identification can lead to improve customer results such as brand loyalty by providing a product or brand identification. Researches also show that the product-company identification increases consuming and repurchasing, brand identification effects support measures of brand loyalty (Soet al., 2013).

Brand identification can also affect brand loyalty, according to identification theory (e.g., Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). A number of prior studies empirically support that perceived value, customer satisfaction and brand trust will mediate the effect of brand identification on brand loyalty. Among samples of bank customers (Marin et al., 2009), and physicians (Ahearne et al., 2005), Cornwell and Coote (2003), Lichtenstein et al., (2004) (He et al., 2012; Shiraziet al., 2013). Accordingly, the ninth hypothesis of research is as follows:

The Ninth Hypothesis (H9): Brand identification and brand loyalty (via value, trust and satisfaction) affect brand loyalty.

Brand Identity and Brand Loyalty (Via Value, Satisfaction, Trust and Brand Identification)

The main challenge in terms of brand loyalty is brand loyalty concept definition and its measurement. Many scientists and researchers such as Aaker (1996), Hem & Iverson (2003), Robinson (2005), Schult (2005), Wilmott and Comish (2003) believe that brand loyalty is defined this way: Willingness of consumers to purchase a particular brand repeatedly, even though there are other possible alternatives logically (Salehi Sedighian et al., 2012). The brand identity is an essential factor in maintaining customers trust and brand identity must be considered in order to have long-term relationships with customers. Therefore, according to Shiraziet al., (2013), it is assumed that value, customer satisfaction and brand trust and identification play balancing role between brand identity and brand loyalty and also since the concept of a brand can be more exclusive than organization, brand identification can be used for identification determining by organization. In other words, brand identification provides a deep and fundamental connection that organization reputation associated with the brand identification and it improves the perceived value of the brand. When customer expectations are met, customers who have gained more identification through the brand identity, feel more satisfaction. For this reason, they improve their psychological dependency in brand in lieu of improving their trust and finally brand identity affects brand loyalty through perceived value, customer satisfaction and brand trust and brand identification. Conducted researches by Berens (2005), Simoes et al., (2005) regarding the identity of organization strongly suggest that a strong identity leads to more confident, and hence, this study expects that the perceived value, satisfaction and brand trust and identification affect brand identity in brand loyalty as a mediator. On this basis, the tenth research hypothesis is as follows:

The Tenth Hypothesis (H10): Brand identity impacts on brand loyalty through perceived value, customer satisfaction, brand trust and brand identification.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology and Findings

Research Methodology

The present study has examined the relationship between brand identity and brand loyalty and impact of brand identity on customer loyalty development towards brand. In terms of method nature the study is descriptive and causal and is an applied one.

The Statistical Population and Sample Size

In the present research, all mobile phones customers with brands such as Nokia, Sony, Samsung, Sony Ericsson, HTC and GLX have been selected to investigate the effect of brand identity on brand loyalty in the chief (metropolis) city of Rasht as the statistical population and 385 distributed questionnaires. Accordingly, in this research, sampling method, nonprobability sampling is available. In this method, for distributing questionnaires among individuals sample, first, we divided city of Rasht in

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several areas and then we went to an area on consecutive days and gave questionnaires to individuals. Social networks were used for this purpose as well.

Method and Data Gathering Tool

The field method was used to collect data in the study, therefore, a questionnaire was used for this purpose. Questionnaire were designed based on Likert five-item scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree) and questionnaires were distributed among respondents in person. In order to design the questionnaire, the content of questionnaire were derived based on the spectral researches in this area from the theoretical foundations (such as He *et al.*, 2012; Shiraziet *al.*, 2013 and DehdashtiShahrokhet *al.*, 2012).

Research Validity and Reliability

The results of confirmatory factor analysis were used for analyzing internal structure of the questionnaire and determining the validity.

Table 1: The standard factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha values

Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Factor Loading		
0.789	0.56	1. The brand is inaccessible for competitors.	Brand Identity
	0.74	2. My mobile phone brand has a good quality and prestige.	
	0.60	3. My mobile phone brand has a great reputation.	
	0.75	4. My mobile phone brand has a distinct identity.	
0.826	0.62	5. I am satisfy with the value that I acquire for paying money to the products of the brand.	Perceived value
	0.57	6. These products are well priced.	
	0.72	7. With regard to the benefits that I get from the products, buying is a good deal.	
	0.75	8. The brand has a high-value and it's excellent.	
	0.62	9. In comparison with the money paid, more value obtains of purchasing of the products brand.	
0.868	0.73	10. I trust in the products of brand.	Brand Trust
	0.61	11. I've never had a bad experience in the use of the products of brand.	
	0.60	12. The brand has a good reputation and prestige among customers.	
	0.66	13. If the brand has any claim about its products and activities, it is quite true.	
	0.71	14. The brand is honest.	
0.911	0.72	15. When someone criticizes my mobile phone, I consider it as a personal insult.	Brand Identification
	0.67	16. I am very interested to know what other people think about my mobile phone brand.	
	0.85	17. I consider the successes of the brand as successes mine.	
	0.84	18. When someone admire my mobile phone brand I consider it as a personal admiration.	
	0.76	19. If it criticized in the media, I feel ashamed.	
0.872	0.78	20. I'm quite satisfied with this mobile phone.	Customer Satisfaction
	0.78	21. Services provided by my mobile phone brand are excellent.	
	0.77	22. I am confident that I will always feel satisfied with the products of this brand.	
	0.77	23. I am happy and satisfied with the products of this brand.	
	0.69	24. I know that it will satisfy me in the best way.	
0.793	0.63	25. Characteristics of the products of brand are well in accordance with what I like.	Brand Loyalty
	0.73	26. I prefer the products of this brand to the products of other brands.	

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0.14	27. I have no negative attitude toward the brand.
0.63	28. I like the features and performance of the brand.
0.70	29. The performance of brand is frequently higher than other brands.
0.74	30. I always prefer the recommended products of brand to other brands.
0.62	31. I'm always willing to test the new products provided by the brand.

As we mentioned standardized questionnaires of DehdashtiShahrokhet *al.*, (2012); Shirazi, *et al.*, (2013) and He *et al.*, (2012) are the data gathering tools for this study that validity and reliability of every single components has already proven and it is valid.

Opinions of supervisors and specialist consultants in the field of Business Administration were used in order to evaluate the validity of content and final confirmation and some experts and sellers of mobile phones were used to assess the structural validity of questionnaire.

The reliability of the method was investigated by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this research, 35 customers were randomly selected before the final distribution of questionnaire and then it contributed. After collecting the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated by using Spss software that 0.946 was obtained for the entire questionnaire that indicated the above questionnaire has the necessary reliability.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of variables

Brand loyalty	Customer Satisfaction	Brand identification	Brand Trust	Perceived value	Brand identity	Statistical indicators
3.62	3.85	2.82	3.78	3.67	3.72	Average
0.88	0.81	1.09	0.86	0.84	0.86	Standard deviation

As can be seen from Table 1, customer satisfaction variable with a mean of 3.85 has the highest average and Brand Identification with a mean of 2.82 has the lowest average among research variables. Customer satisfaction and brand Identification variables with 0.81 and 1.09 SD have the lowest and the highest standard deviation.

Fitting Model

Confirmatory factor analysis and different fitness indicators have been considered in order to determine study's fitting model that are shown in Table 3.

Each of the obtained indicators are not the reason of model fitness or its lack of fitness by itself, we should interpret the indicators next to each other.

As can be seen from Table 3, all indicators are at their permitted limits, therefore, it can be concluded that the model has appropriate fitting.

Table 3: Fitting Indicators Model

Indicator	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI
Value	980.12	421	2.32	0.059	0.95	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.86	0.83
Permitted Range			Less than 3	Less than 0.1	Higher than 0	Higher than 0.9	Higher than 0	Higher than 0	Higher than 0	Higher than 0.8

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Data Analysis and Research Hypotheses Test

Structural equation modeling was used for data analysis. The results of data and research hypotheses test are shown in the table below.

Table 4: The summary of research hypotheses test results (direct impacts, indirect and total)

Results	Types of impacts			Hypothesis (Path)
	Total	Indirect	Direct	
Accepted	0.70	-	0.70	Brand Identity → Perceived value
Accepted	0.42	-	0.42	Brand Identity → Customer Satisfaction
Accepted	0.38	-	0.38	Brand Identity → Brand Trust
Accepted	0.35	-	0.35	Brand Identity → Brand Identification
Accepted	0.13	-	0.13	Brand Identification → Perceived value
Accepted	0.12	-	0.12	Brand Identification → Customer Satisfaction
Accepted	0.11	-	0.11	Brand Identification → Brand Trust
Accepted	0.34	-	0.34	Value → Satisfaction
Accepted	0.17	-	0.17	Value → Trust
Accepted	0.49	-	0.49	Satisfaction → Trust
Accepted	0.82	-	0.82	Trust → Loyalty
Rejected	0.04	* 0.35) (0.13	-	Brand Identity → Brand Identification → Value
Rejected	0.04	(0.12 * 0.35)	-	Brand Identity → Brand Identification → Satisfaction
Rejected	0.03	(0.11 * 0.35)	-	Brand Identity → Brand Identification → Trust
Accepted	0.2	0.34 * 0.13) * 0.49 * (0.82	0.19	Brand Identification → Value → Satisfaction → Trust → Loyalty
Accepted	0.08	0.13 * 0.35) 0.49 * 0.34 * (0.82 *	0.08	Brand Identity → Brand Identification → Value → Satisfaction → Trust → Loyalty

According to the proposed model and the structural equation among variables and the effects of direct and indirect and total variables on each other, it can be examined efficacy of all variables. Path analysis was used to confirm the relationship between the variables and the overall review of the proposed model. In this regard, research hypotheses were expressed from the aspect of effectiveness of these variables on each other.

1. The First Hypothesis Test (H1a): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between perceived value and brand identity and the standard coefficient of path is 0.70, this means that, perceived

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value will be changed to 0.70 unit for each unit change in brand identity, therefore the hypothesis is confirmed.

2. The First Hypothesis Test (H1b): The results show that brand identity is positively correlated with customer satisfaction and the standard coefficient of path is 0.42, this means that customer satisfaction will be changed to 0.42 unit for each unit change in brand identity. The example suggests that any increase in brand identity increases customer satisfaction and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

3. The First Hypothesis Test (H1c): The results show that there is a positive relationship between brand identity and brand trust and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.38, this means that brand trust will be changed to 0.38 units for each unit change in brand identity. The example suggests that any increase in brand identity increases brand trust and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

4. The Second Hypothesis Test (H2): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand identity and brand identification and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.35, this means that brand identification will be changed to 0.35 unit for each unit change in brand identity. The example suggests that any increase in brand identity increases brand identification and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

5. The Third Hypothesis Test (H3a): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between perceived value and brand identification and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.13, this means that perceived value will be changed to 0.13 unit for each unit change in brand identification. This example suggests that any increase in brand identification increases perceived value and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

6. The Third Hypothesis Test (H3b): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand identification and brand satisfaction and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.12, this means that brand satisfaction will be changed to 0.12 unit for each unit change in brand identification. This example suggests that any increase in brand identification increases brand satisfaction and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

7. The Third Hypothesis Test (H3c): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand identification and brand trust and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.11, this means that brand trust will be changed to 0.11 unit for each unit change in brand identification. This example suggests that any increase in brand identification increases brand trust and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

8. The Fourth Hypothesis Test (H4): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between perceived value and brand satisfaction and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.34, this means that brand satisfaction will be changed to 0.34 unit for each unit change in perceived value. This example suggests that any increase in perceived value increases brand satisfaction and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

9. The Fifth Hypothesis Test (H5): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between perceived value and brand trust and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.17, this means that brand trust will be changed to 0.17 unit for each unit change in perceived value. This example suggests that any increase in perceived value increases brand trust and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

10. The Sixth Hypothesis Test (H6): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.49, this means that brand trust will be changed to 0.49 unit for each unit change in customer satisfaction. This example suggests that any increase in customer satisfaction increases brand trust and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

11. The Seventh Hypothesis Test (H7): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.82, this means that brand loyalty will be changed to 0.82 unit for each unit change in brand trust. This example suggests that any increase in brand trust increases brand loyalty and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

12. The Eighth Hypothesis Test (H8a): The obtained results show that there is no meaningful relationship between brand identity and perceived value via brand identification and the indirect standard

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coefficient of path is equal to 0.04, that is, brand identification haven't had effective mediated role between variables of brand identity and perceived value. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.

13. The Eighth Hypothesis Test (H8b): The obtained results show that there is no meaningful relationship between brand identity and customer satisfaction via brand identification and the indirect standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.04, that is, brand identification haven't had effective mediated role between variables of brand identity and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.

14. The Eighth Hypothesis Test (H8c): The obtained results show that there is no meaningful relationship between brand identity and brand trust via brand identification and the indirect standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.03, that is, brand identification haven't had effective mediated role between variables of brand identity and brand trust. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.

15. The Ninth Hypothesis Test (H9): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.19, this means that brand loyalty will be changed to 0.19 unit for each unit change in brand identification. This example suggests that any increase in brand identification increases brand loyalty and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

16. The Tenth Hypothesis Test (H10): The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between brand identity and brand loyalty and the standard coefficient of path is equal to 0.08, this means that brand loyalty will be changed to 0.08 unit for each unit change in brand identity. This example suggests that any increase in brand identity increases brand loyalty and vice versa, therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

Therefore, 13 Research Hypotheses of 16 Hypotheses were confirmed and 3 hypotheses were not accepted.

CONCLUSION

The present study have examined the impact of brand identity on customer loyalty toward brand and it is important for the following aspects: identifying and assessing the impact of brand identity on variables of customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, brand trust, perceived value and brand identification and as well as obtaining research fitting model using by structural equation modeling. The obtained researches in the field of brand loyalty and the factors influencing the formation of brand loyalty emphasize on the role of the external factors influencing loyalty such as customers in general. But it should be noted that the root of the formation of loyalty, namely brand identity is generally emanated from employees and within companies and organizations. This is brand identity that affects customers and provides introduction of loyalty. Brand identity is shaped by company owner and grows by customers. Companies should not only use brands for creating awareness, rather investments in the field of brand should get special attention to develop brand identity next to customers. Brand identity is an essential tool for effective product superiority and brand management. Brand loyalty by consumers for companies in order to achieve competitive advantage is strategically important, because it's a market-oriented relational source that not duplicated by competitors easily. Therefore, recommended cases are as follows:

- Using modern technologies, improving quality in accordance with payments, supplying customer's needs and after-sales services, appropriate behavior with employees in order to maintain and strengthen customers in building trust and customer satisfaction.
- Conducting multilateral researches and understandable about particular goods and consumer cultures and their social identity in order to avoid incompatibility of products and their brands with identities.
- Avoiding unrealistic and exaggerated deceptive advertising claims and creating a positive and realistic brand image in the consumer's mind to reinforce brand identity.
- Improving organizations interactions with customers through surveys of products and showing respect to the opinions of customers and applying these opinions in products and setting up and sustaining a system in order to respond to customer problems by telephone, in person and online.
- Eliminating defects of available versions in the market and improving quality and products features in comparison with competitors, because of receiving more value than brand by customers.

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- Producing mobile phones in accordance with diverse interests; with distinct quality and appearance for customers wishing to have a distinct identity and prestige than others.
- Creating credibility and distinctive brand visibility in order to identify the brands without any quality in the market.

It is hoped that this study will help reveal importance of concept of brand identity in shaping and developing of brand loyalty and endorse the fact that brands can be differentiated by the identity from other brands and causing loyalty. In all of the researches that are conducted, the constraints are integral part of the research, because these are the limits which provide grounds for new researches. There are limitations in this study that future researchers should pay attention to them. The variables such as perceived value, brand trust, customer satisfaction and brand identification were used as a mediated variable in this study. Researchers can consider other variables such as brand awareness, brand personality and brand association as a mediated variable in future studies, and assess their impacts on brand identity and loyalty. Mobile phones brands such as Nokia, Sony, Samsung, Sony Ericsson, HTC and GLX have been selected to study as the statistical population, other researchers can use other brands that are new in Iran, in their research or can conduct in the same way with same title in other provinces or in field of services and other products and then compare them with each other.

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