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INVESTIGATING AND EXPLAINING THE FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER LOYALTY (CASE STUDY: CONSUMERS OF BEHNOOSH COMPANY PRODUCTS IN GACHSARAN)

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ABSTRACT

The overall and essential goal of this research is to evaluate and determine the factors affecting customer loyalty. This research was a case study conducted among the Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. Statistical sample size equals to 120 clients of Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran and study period is 2014. The research method in terms of conducting is correlation method and is an applied one. The results showed that there is a statistically significant and direct correlation between trust, satisfaction and brand reputation with customer loyalty. In other words, these variables are considered as the determinants of customer loyalty for consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. It seems that managers' attention to the size and structure of these variables can have a major role in the preservation of customers. While according to the findings, there is no significant relationship between quality of service and perceived value with customer loyalty. This suggests that perhaps, Behnoosh Company has not been successful in effective service delivery and promoting the implied values of the products.

Keywords: *Loyalty, Trust, Satisfaction, Reputation, Service Quality, Perceived Value*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations in the past were only thinking to find new customers, and growing customers, have had no meaning. Access to every newcomer was considered as a victory, and particular attention was not paid to existing customers. This situation has changed now and maintenance and growth of profitable customers is the primary goal of organizations, So, Kotler (2000) defined marketing as knowledge and art of finding, keeping and growing profitable customer. At one point of time, the production unit and its related activities, was considered as the heart of the organization and all of the organization's goals and strategies were around this section. After a while, the focus was more on the financial sectors and the goals and strategies of the organization were set in direction of financial goals and strategies. But today, at least in developed and developing societies, customer was considered as a key factor in organizations and orientation of all the goals, strategies and organizational resources to attract and retain customers is profitable (Kristyans *et al.*, 2001).

The issue of maintaining and strengthening customer loyalty for companies that concern maintain and develop their competitive position in the market place, has been a strategic challenge and they cost too much to the understanding the concept and achieving practical approaches to strengthen it; because by intensifying the competition and closeness to the quality and quantity level of goods and services in the area of customer's choice, providing goods or services that may be of interest to our customers and make them as regular customers for organization products is considered to be critical affair. Also creating a positive mentality in customers to the goods or services of a commercial brand creates this competitive advantage that if the organization plans to enter new markets or provide goods or services, easily find the

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ability to communicate with clients and customers can decide about products or services more easily (Saghaei *et al.*, 2002).

Different factors and parameters in various internal and external texts have been proposed as factors affecting maintaining and strengthening customer loyalty, that according to its particular characteristics and conditions each case can be considered. In theoretical bases two major aspects of loyalty are emphasized. First, the customer will be willing to buy again from the supplier and second, the customers offer the item s/he wants to someone else. Identifying factors affecting customer loyalty will enable the managers of profit units to improve marketing and customer policies and provide the organization's success. Behnoosh Company of Gachsaran is a production unit that its products are distributed domestically and abroad. Therefore, given the wide range of Consumers of Behnoosh Company products, factors affecting their loyalty, are ambiguous. The basic question of this research is to explain these factors and the main research question is as follows. What factors are affecting loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran?

Research Literature

Loyalty indicates a position where a consumer has a large dependence on a supplier and his repurchase rate is high at the unit time. In other words, how customers show tendency in buying from a brand or specific stores or companies. In the present study, loyalty is examined based on two criteria of repurchase goods and recommend to others (Devine *et al.*, 2004).

Loyalty is defined as a structure to measure the likely of buyers' return and repurchase. Some authors (Bolton *et al.*, 2003; Lepirer *et al.*, 1999, Vivanue, 2004; Zitmel *et al.*, 1996) point to the same sense as behavioral intentions including recommitting, providing advice and increasing support. The researchers don't accept the difference between commitment and loyalty. Most researchers believe that these structures are interrelated but with the difference is that commitment, triggers loyalty (Dash and Mahaptra, 2006). When we want to express the difference between commitment and loyalty we can note that commitment is mainly cognitive and it refers to the attitude power. On the other hand, loyalty is behavioral response that is subordinate of mental processes (Fornell *et al.*, 1996). The major difference between loyalty and commitment is that commitment includes stimulus and attitude of continuity of the relationship (This attitude is made up of different components), while loyalty is a blend of attitude and behavior and is often defined as repeat patronage and referral behavior.

Relationship between Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Nuryaki (1991) presented a model in which the relationship between quality and customer satisfaction can be divided into three categories as follows.

- 1- The expressed quality:** Characteristics and features that customers request them from the supplier. The relationship of this quality with customer satisfaction is direct.
- 2- The expected quality:** The characteristics that the client does not express them, it is obvious that the requested goods or services must have those characteristics. Failure to provide this kind of quality causes severe dissatisfaction; but providing them does not increase the degree of satisfaction largely.
- 3- Exciting quality:** The characteristics and qualities that customers don't express them and they don't expect it too, but when they find them in purchased goods or services they will be surprised (Sultani, 1991).

It is worth noting that research on the drivers of commitment stimuli and commitment components and evaluation of commitment components to customer loyalty from the customer's perspective in the service sector of companies in Eastern Europe and Central Europe have been done by Cater and Zabkar (2008). In this study, based on social psychology's findings, commitment has been divided to three components including emotional, normative and calculation commitment. These research findings showed that the positive relationship between trust and affective commitment is confirmed and a negative relationship between trust and calculation commitment and a positive relationship between the trust and normative commitment was not confirmed. The positive relationship between satisfaction and affective commitment

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and a negative relationship between satisfaction and calculation commitment was confirmed and the positive relationship between satisfaction and normative commitment was not confirmed. Based on these research findings the positive relationship between affective commitment and loyalty was confirmed and positive relationship between normative commitment and loyalty was not confirmed and the relationship between calculation commitment and loyalty was not significant. The positive relationship between affective commitment and normative commitment was confirmed (Kotter *et al.*, 2008).

Customer Loyalty and its Relationship with Satisfaction Concept

Experts believe that loyalty and customer satisfaction are associated with irregular and uncertain, although most of loyal customers are satisfied but satisfaction doesn't always result to loyalty. According to one of the new perspectives, satisfaction does not lead necessarily to loyalty. In fact, the findings of Russell *et al.*, (2007) corresponded with the term "satisfaction trap". Using Marketing Consulting Group data they found that 65% to 85% of consumers who claim that are satisfied or very satisfied with a product or service leave it alone. Rychheld (2006) in his article suggests that much focus of companies on customer satisfaction lead to ignoring their loyalty. It is also argued that customer satisfaction does not convert to their loyalty (Russell *et al.*, 2007).

Davis and colleagues (2007) suggested that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty of behavior isn't linear and has two critical threshold levels. Figure 1 show when satisfaction reaches above the level of a certain threshold (confidence region) purchasing behavior rapidly increases.

When satisfaction reduces to the lower level (flight area) purchasing behavior rapidly decreases. Purchasing behavior is constant between the threshold levels (reflecting area). They believe that satisfaction should be high enough to stimulate behavioral loyalty or it should be low enough to reduce it (Boodet, 2008).

Factors Affecting the Relationship between Satisfaction and Loyalty

1- The cost of change: One of the factors influencing the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is cost changes. Companies can keep their clients (to increase their loyalty) without increasing their consent. The cost of change includes the psychological and economic costs that will be perceived by changing from an alternative (brand) to the other alternatives (brands) by the consumer. Examples of cost of change include benefits that are achieved by continuing the relationship with the supplier But it is lost by switching supplier such as discounts at the time of purchase that mostly are related to people who are returning customer. Psychological costs associated with the perceived risk of the time of changing the brand, the cost of evaluation and research before changing the brand, the cost of filing a new form like to change your bank and.... Lorasi and Kennedy (2002) showed that the barriers to change are important factors in customer retention. Even with encountering dissatisfied customers, customers will also continue to stop their support to the supplier, because it is easier to repurchase (Cohen *et al.*, 2004).

2- Demographic factors: Mittal and Karmakura (2004) concluded in their findings with the same satisfaction because of characteristics of respondents such as age, education, financial status, gender and place of residence there were significant differences in behavioral loyalty (repurchase). This study suggests that, consumers with different properties have different threshold levels and therefore are likely to buy differently. This research has expressed the effect of demographic factors on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty.

3- General satisfaction: Before 1990 satisfaction criteria were focused on a particular product or service (satisfaction of a particular transaction), that were defined as evaluative judgments after selecting on a particular purchase decision. Another concept that has emerged recently is in connection with all previous experiences of customer from services and products collectively. Overall satisfaction is a collective effect of a series of separately offered services or transactions with service providers in over a period of time. It seems that overall consumer satisfaction is a better predictor for his behavior and intentions. The following figures show the effect of general satisfaction on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Boodet, 2008).

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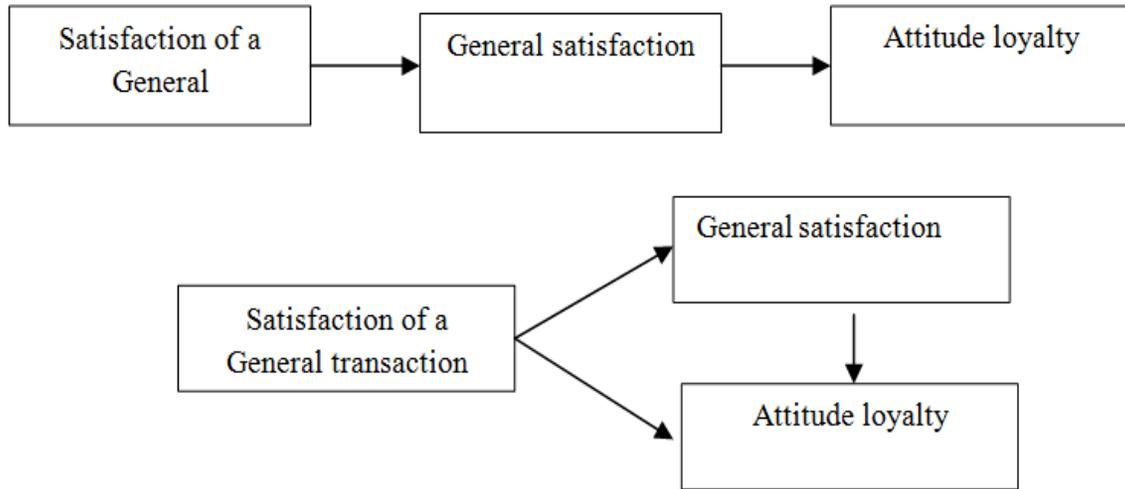


Figure 1: Model of the relationship between General satisfaction, satisfaction of a General transaction and attitude loyalty

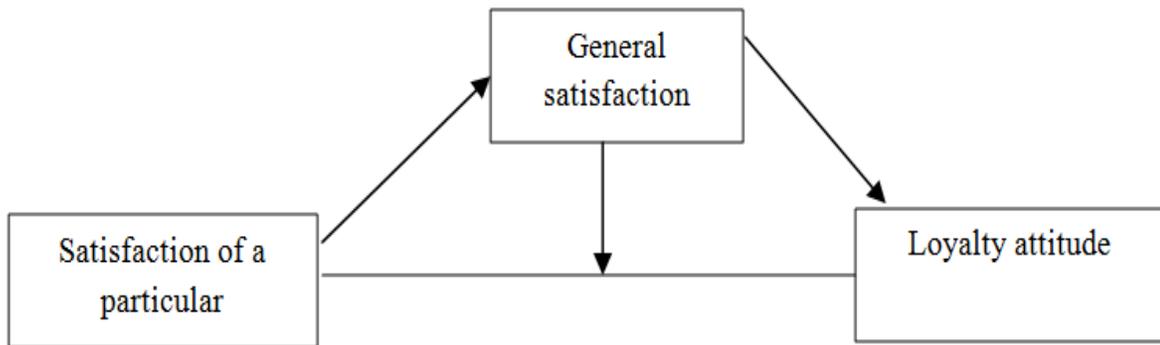


Figure 2: Model of the partial relationship of satisfaction of a particular transaction, General satisfaction, loyalty attitude

In these models, the overall satisfaction acts as a moderator of the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in a special deal, thus it is possible some clients refer to service supplier (product) even if they are not satisfied with a particular service experience (due to the general satisfaction of the Supplier) (Boodet, 2008).

4- Consistency effect: Johnson (2005) research showed that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is influenced by two factors: A "quality". (B) Easy analysis and comparison of qualitative differences between different brands.

According to compatibility hypothesis, when the information about the quality and price are equal the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty increases. This research express the reason for the negative relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in this form that characters used in satisfaction are different from those used in loyalty. For example, consider an insurance client who is satisfied due to high quality service, he will decide whether or not to continue his association with the company. While because of little information the client is not able to differentiate between different qualities, the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty decreases. According to this theory, if quality is important and assessment of critical qualities is easy; Quality is likely to be used in assessing the satisfaction and loyalty alike. As a result, the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty increases.

RQI= Quality Importance

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EQ = easily comparing the quality

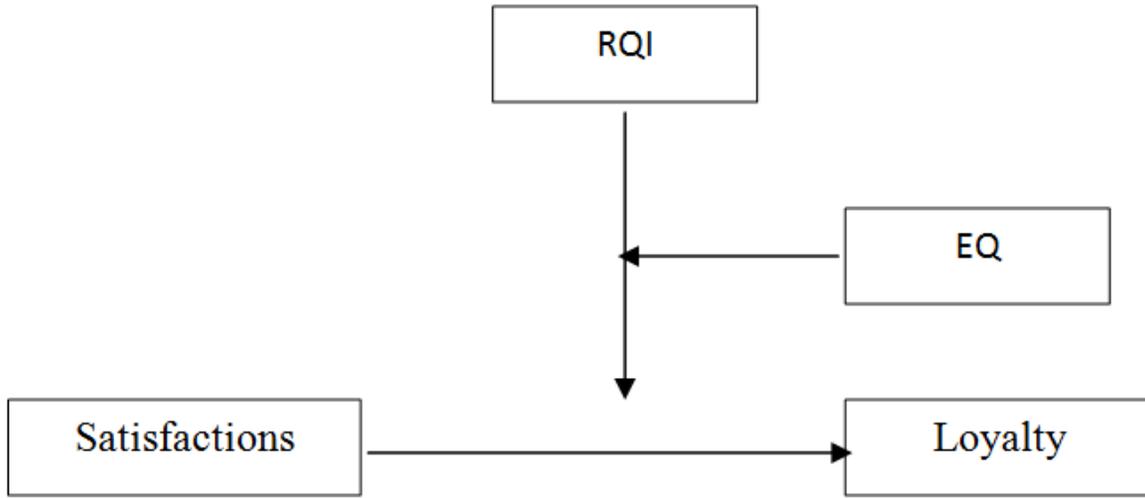


Figure 3: Effect of compatibility and relationship between satisfactions – loyalty

5- Other factors: the literature on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, have shown modifier variables effect such as: properties of consumers, understood importance of the product, the relationship period, the mood of a consumer, acquisition of value and uncertainty of purchase (Davis *et al.*, 2007). In this study, the following factors are considered as factors affecting customer loyalty:

Trust

The company's ability to provide goods to customers reliably and correctly, in this regard, delivering goods on the promised time, showing a sincere interest in solving customer problems, making amendments to the defect in the first time, providing the proper and without defect reports. This variable reflects a customer satisfaction from the purchase he has done (Sajedi *et al.*, 2012).

Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as customer feeling or attitude to one dimension of using it. Customer satisfaction is the main result of marketer activity that serves as a link between the various stages of consumer buying behavior. Increasing customer satisfaction leads to behavioral outcomes such as commitment, desire to stay (customer retention), bidirectional link between the service provider and the customer, the customer's increased tolerance to failures in service and positive mouth advertising (Arasli *et al.*, 2005).

Brand Reputation

The concept refers to a brand reputation among buyers and consumers. In other words, the influence of the goods among consumers and its market share compared to other competitors reflects the reputation of the goods. Theoretically, it is expected that the goods with higher reputation, be more successful in customer retention (Delkhah and Divandari, 2005).

Quality of Service

Quality of service is as mind comparison that customers make between the quality of service that they want and what they actually get. Quality of service can be the difference between customer expectations of service performance before receiving the service and their perceptions of what they received from the service (Chen, 2008). In fact, providing efficient service, knowledge and skill required to perform the service, the staff ability in the use of communication skills and the ability to identify customers reflect the quality of service from the perspective of the present study.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is the customer expression about his reasons for buying this product. This can be caused by several factors. Among these factors standard product, high quality, customer satisfaction of using it,

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superiority to other similar products, compatibility with complementary products and the impossibility of replacing it by other products can be cited (Chen, 2008).

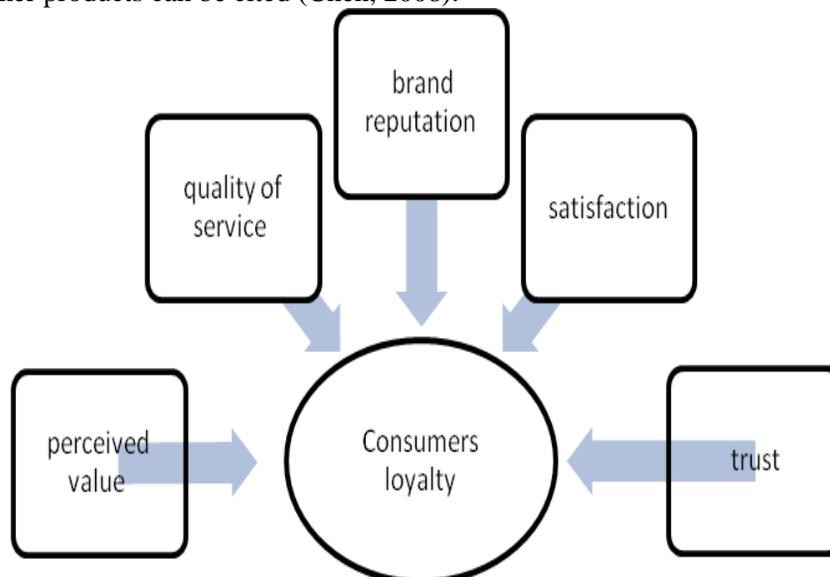


Figure 4: Conceptual research model

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between trust and loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran.
2. There is a significant relationship between satisfaction and loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran.
3. There is a significant relationship between brand reputation and loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran.
4. There is a significant relationship between quality of service and loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran.
5. There is a significant relationship between perceived value and loyalty among Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was an applied research and in terms of data collection it is descriptive-survey and in terms of data analysis is a correlation research. The present study examines the relationships between variables, and consequently, it seeks to prove the existence of this relationship in present. Therefore, it can be classified as post-event causal.

The research population, include Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran that their number is infinite and unknown. To determine the number of samples and examine its adequacy, the Cochran method is used. The optimal sample size deriving from calculation by the above method is 96 observations. Due to the possibility of loss or non-receipt of some of the questionnaires or incomplete responses, the sample size is considered 120 and the questionnaires were prepared and distributed according to it. The Cronbach's alpha for the 42 questions in the questionnaire is 0.792. Since the hypotheses of this study are based on relationship between fundamental variables; correlation coefficient is used to test them. Therefore, the correlation between customers' loyalty with their factors are estimated and according to the obtained coefficient the role of each of these factors on customer loyalty is decided.

Data Analysis

Studying the Normality of Research Variables

In this study, the KS test is used to check the normality of the data.

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H₀= distribution of data is normal.

H₁= distribution of data is not normal.

Table 1: Test results of the research variables normality

Variable	KS test		
	The test statistic	Freedom degree	Significance level
Trust	0.003	120	0.103
Satisfaction	0.000	120	0.164
Reputation	0.000	120	0.117
Service quality	0.002	120	0.106
Perceived value	0.004	120	0.102
loyalty	0.000	120	0.174

According to the obtained significance level by SK test for research variables that are less than the experimental error ($\alpha=0.05$) the test hypothesis H₀ cannot be accepted. So the values of the research variables do not follow a distribution close to the normal distribution and parametric tests cannot be used to test the hypotheses. Accordingly, the Spearman correlation coefficient (as a nonparametric test) has been considered to check the hypotheses.

The First Hypothesis

Table 2: Results of the first hypothesis test

Trust	statistics	
0.653	Spearman correlation coefficients	Customer loyalty
0.000	Significance level	

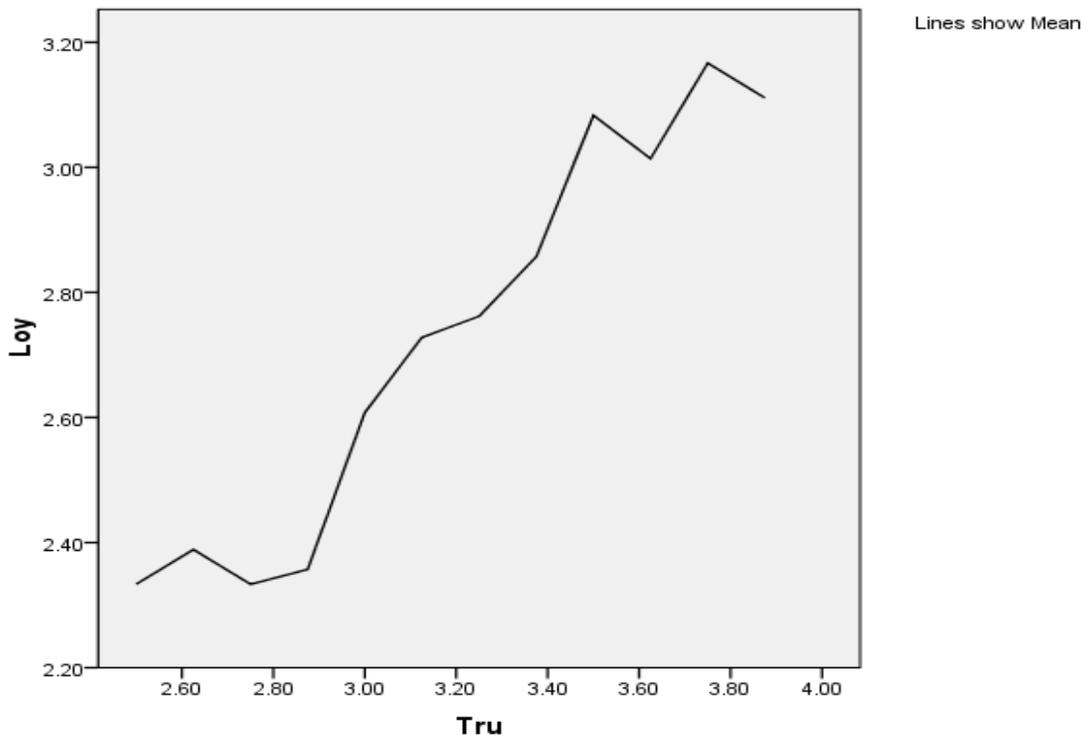


Diagram1: Relationship between the variables trust and customer loyalty

Statistical assumptions about the correlation coefficient are as follows.

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$H_0: P=0$

$H_1: p \neq 0$

The results in table 2 show that the Spearman correlation coefficients for variables of customer loyalty and trust are 0.653 at a significance level of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 (test error). This finding suggests that the H_0 is rejected and suggests that there is a statistical direct significant correlation among these variables during the study period. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is accepted at the 95 percent confidence level.

In line with the findings of correlation test between variables of the first hypothesis, correlation diagram is presented above (diagram 1).

The above diagram shows the relationship between the variables of trust and customer loyalty. Statistical analysis results showed a significant direct correlation between the variables. As it can be seen, the resulting graph has positive and significant slope and this implies the existence of such a relationship between the variables.

The Second Hypothesis

Table 3: Results of the second hypothesis test

Satisfaction	Statistics	Customer loyalty
0.247	Spearman correlation coefficients	
0.006	Sig	

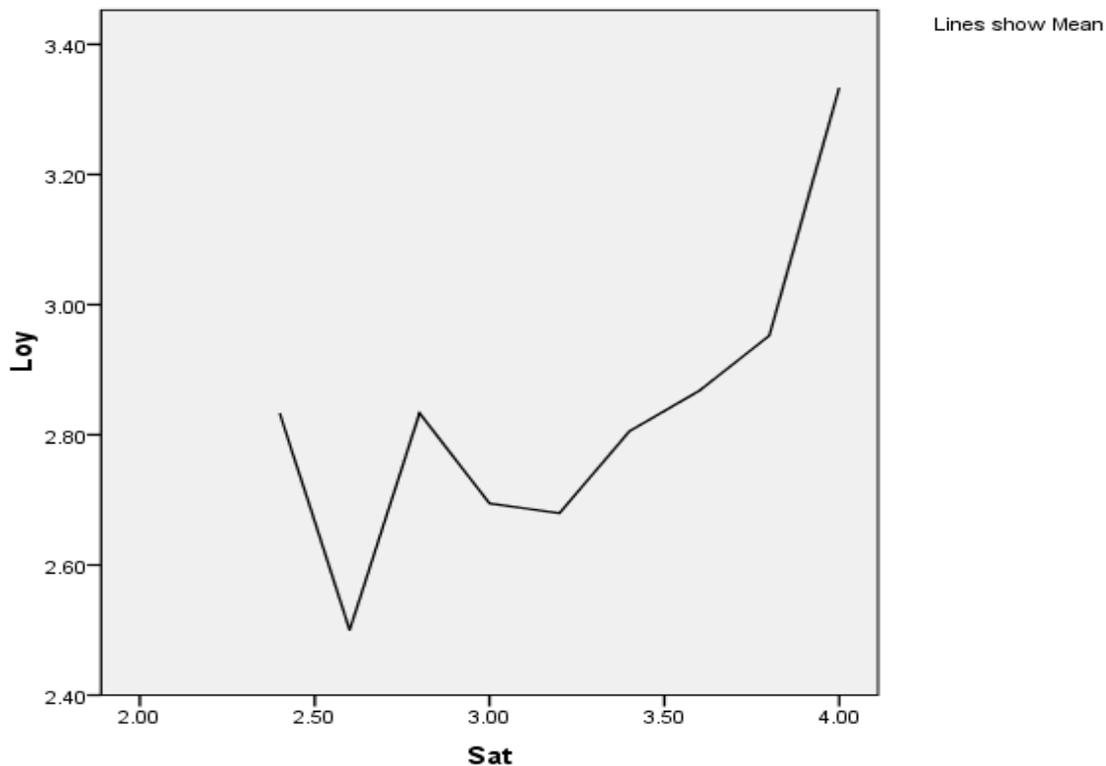


Diagram 2: The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty

Statistical assumptions about the correlation coefficient are as follows.

$H_0: \rho=0$

$H_1: \rho \neq 0$

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The results in table 3 show that the Spearman correlation coefficients for variables of customer loyalty and satisfaction are 0.247 at a significance level of 0.006, which is less than 0.05 (test error). This finding suggests that the H_0 is rejected and suggests that there is a statistical direct significant correlation among these variables during the study period. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is accepted at the 95 percent confidence level.

In line with the findings of correlation test between variables of the second hypothesis, correlation diagram is presented above (diagram 2).

The above diagram shows the relationship between the variables of satisfaction and customer loyalty. Statistical analysis results showed a significant direct correlation between the variables. As it can be seen, the resulting graph has positive and significant slope and this implies the existence of such a relationship between the variables.

The Third Hypothesis

Table 4: Results of the third hypothesis test

Brand reputation	Statistics	
0.174	Spearman correlation coefficients	Customer loyalty
0.047	Significance level	

Statistical assumptions about the correlation coefficient are as follows.

$H_0: \rho=0$

$H_1: \rho \neq 0$

The results in table 4 show that the Spearman correlation coefficients for variables of customer loyalty and brand reputation are 0.174 at a significance level of 0.047, which is less than 0.05 (test error). This finding suggests that the H_0 is rejected and suggests that there is a statistical direct significant correlation among these variables during the study period. Accordingly, the third hypothesis is accepted at the 95 percent confidence level.

In line with the findings of correlation test between variables of the third hypothesis, correlation diagram is presented below.

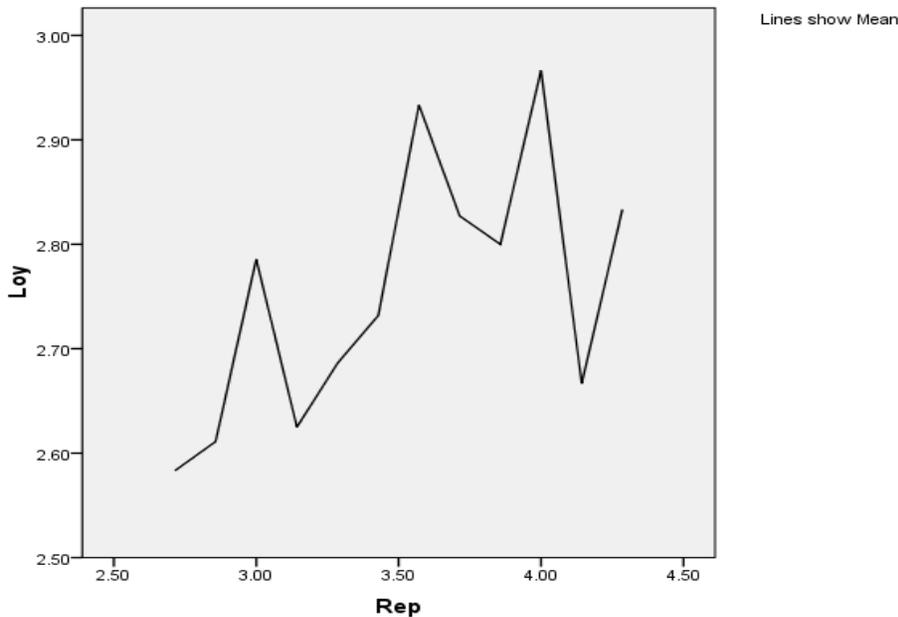


Diagram 3: The relationship between brand reputation and loyalty

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The above diagram shows the relationship between the variables of brand reputation and customer loyalty. Statistical analysis results showed a significant direct correlation between the variables. As it can be seen, the resulting graph has positive and relatively significant slope and this implies the existence of such a relationship between the variables.

The Forth Hypothesis

Table 5: Results of the third hypothesis test

Service quality	Statistics	Customer loyalty
0.071	Spearman correlation coefficients	
0.442	Significance level	

Statistical assumptions about the correlation coefficient are as follows.

$H_0: \rho=0$

$H_1: \rho \neq 0$

The results in table 4-7 show that the Spearman correlation coefficients for variables of customer loyalty and service quality are 0.071 at a significance level of 0.442, which is higher than 0.05 (test error). This finding suggests that the H_0 is accepted and suggests that there is no statistical direct significant correlation among these variables during the study period. Accordingly, the forth hypothesis is rejected at the 95 percent confidence level.

In line with the findings of correlation test between variables of the forth hypothesis, correlation diagram is presented below.

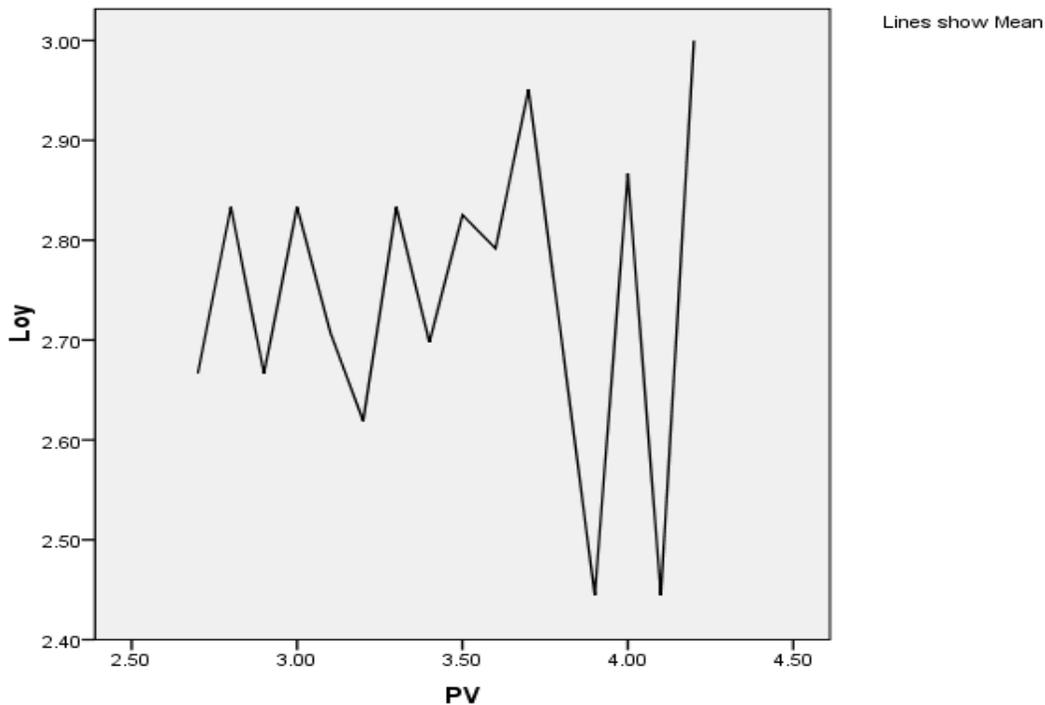


Diagram 4: The relationship between service quality and loyalty

The above diagram shows the relationship between the variables of service quality and customer loyalty. Statistical analysis results showed no significant direct correlation between the variables. As it can be seen, the resulting graph has no positive and significant slope and this implies lack of such a relationship between the variables.

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The Fifth Hypothesis

Table 5: Results of the third hypothesis test

Perceived value	statistics	
0.104	Spearman correlation coefficients	Customer loyalty
0.257	Significance level	

Statistical assumptions about the correlation coefficient are as follows.

$H_0: \rho=0$

$H_1: \rho \neq 0$

The results in table 5 show that the Spearman correlation coefficients for variables of customer loyalty and perceived value are 0.104 at a significance level of 0.257, which is higher than 0.05 (test error). This finding suggests that the H_0 is accepted and suggests that there is no statistical direct significant correlation among these variables during the study period. Accordingly, the fifth hypothesis is rejected at the 95 percent confidence level.

In line with the findings of correlation test between variables of the fifth hypothesis, correlation diagram is presented below.

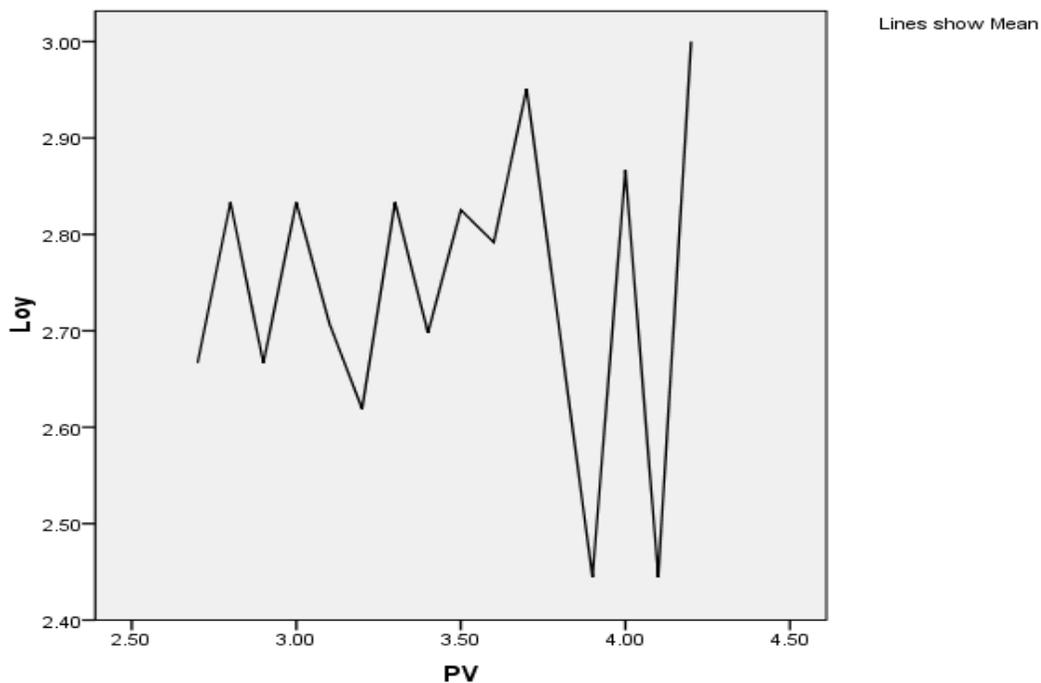


Diagram 5: The relationship between perceived value and loyalty

The above diagram shows the relationship between the variables of perceived value and customer loyalty. Statistical analysis results showed no significant direct correlation between the variables. As it can be seen, the resulting graph has no significant slope and this implies lack of a relationship between the variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The First Hypothesis

Results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between trust and customers' loyalty in Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. In this study, measures of purchase security

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and performance after purchasing, has been considered to explain reliability and some questions were raised on the basis of this criterion. The results showed that the studied factors have played important role in gaining customer loyalty. In relation to the first hypothesis it can be argued that, given that much of Behnoosh customers, are main buyers and distributors of products and this group does their purchases mainly in the form of distance shopping, having a secure system for registering and posting orders accurately and in a timely manner, can be used as a competitive advantage, creating customer loyalty that seems it is true in the studied sample.

The Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis test showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between satisfaction and customers' loyalty in Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. Accordingly, for the findings of the second hypothesis, it could be argued that firstly, managers of Behnoosh Company in Gachsaran, potentially, have considered customer satisfaction indicators and may have tried to improve them. Secondly, from the perspective of customers, the company's focus on measures of satisfaction plays an important role in their loyalty to this company's products.

The Third Hypothesis

Results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between brand reputation and customers' loyalty in Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. This approach is significantly related to customers' mentality of a special brand. Since, brand reputation, is measured based on the criteria of good penetration and good background, It can be concluded that from the perspective of customers, the Behnoosh Company is considered as a famous brand in the sample. Accordingly, for the findings of the third research hypothesis, we can cite to two argument points. First, probably Behnoosh Company products, as compared to other similar products are more popular among the sample. This is only affected by the company's brand. Second, Behnoosh Company products have a positive history in users, views. Such a history is resulted from the utility of the company's product during its life and shows that access to loyal customers in a short period of time, is not possible.

The Forth Hypothesis

Results showed that there is no significant relationship between service quality and customers' loyalty in Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. To illustrate the impact of service quality on customer loyalty how to assess the quality of services should be considered. Factors relevant to the quality of services include customer care and appropriate behavior.

The Fifth Hypothesis

Results showed that there is no significant relationship between perceived value and customers' loyalty in Consumers of Behnoosh Company products in Gachsaran. The perceived value potentially focuses on Physical and nonphysical factors of the product from the customer's perspective and the fifth hypothesis findings of the research suggest that probably the value that customers emphasize to buy this product again has not been evident. It should be noted that the customers typically perceive the perception of value of goods based on comparison of their features with other similar products. In this sense, for the fifth research hypothesis, it can be argued that it is possible Behnoosh Company customers have had no reluctant to compare these products with other similar products or by doing such a comparison, they have not observed a special superiority in physical and nonphysical aspects of Behnoosh Company products.

Suggestions

- 1- According to the findings of the first hypothesis, it is suggested that they provide the mechanisms necessary for the timely presentation of the goods and provide and also defect reform so that they can promote customer confidence.
- 2- According to the second hypothesis findings, it is suggested that they try to analyze the customers' complaints and to resolve problems that cause such reluctance.
- 3- According to the third hypothesis, it is suggested that, through using Media and advertising facilities and attention to the quality of goods and services, they improve the company's brand.
- 4- According to the findings of the forth hypothesis, it is suggested that try to consider cases related to ease of the exchange of information and provide conditions for registering and posting order in absentia.

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5- According to the findings of the fifth hypothesis, It is recommended to wholesalers and consumers of goods and services that evaluate a company's order structure and reputation before choosing a brand. Also, considering the physical and non-physical characteristics of the product is essential to achieve the desired product.

6- According to the findings based on the experiences of the researcher, it is recommended to the managers of profit and production units to strengthen the marketing, sales and distribution units in order to achieve stable clients and maintain former clients, and tries to periodically evaluate the performance of these units.

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