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The Impact of Prestige, Consumer Personality and Self-Concept on Brand Loyalty

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Abstract:

Nowadays customers are looking for creating dignity and higher social status using products and prestigious brands. Brand loyalty is also a fundamental concept of marketing that firms plan their marketing strategies to enhance it. The present study is set to investigate the effect of prestige on customers' loyalty in Mobile phone industry; as well as the effect of individual and social self-congruity on brand prestige and the customers' loyalty. We did this by using structural equation modeling (SEM) and PLS software. Research data through 443 questionnaires distributed among Tehran residents between August till October 2014 were collected. Results indicated a significant and Positive relationship between individual and social Self-congruity with brand loyalty in the mobile industry. Also, the results indicated the role of the mediation for brand prestige variable in this relation

Keywords: *Prestige, self-congruity, brand loyalty*

1. Introduction

American Marketing Association defines brand as: "a name, term, design, symbol or anything that differentiates a vendor's goods or services from other vendors" (Johansson 2007). Brands have the capability to embody the ideal identity of the individual, and make it known. Researchers believe that people, based on their social identity choose brands; and they choose the one that reflect their identity (Alam et al. 2012). Self image congruency and brand prestige are the variables that in various studies have influenced customer identification by brand. In general, we can say that consumers tend to understand authentic brands as symbol of social status, wealth or power. Thus, authentic brands are constantly bought and connect between the individual self- perception and social image (Beak et al, 2010). Self-image congruence refers to the cognitive match between consumers' self-concept (individual self and social self) and a product/brand image, store image, destination image or user image of a given product/brand/service (Sirgy and Su, 2000). In many of the past studies, the relation between brand prestige with costumers' behavior (Erdogmus et al. 2012, Zhou et al 2008, Mulyanegara et al. 2009) and Self - congruency with brand loyalty (Sirgy and Su 2000, Kressmann et al. 2006, He et al 2007) were investigate.

The goal of this research includes investigating the effect of brand prestige on costumers' loyalty in mobile phone industry. Also, the individual and social Self - ongruency compatibility on brand prestige and brand loyalty has been looked at closely. This article starts with discussing the theoretical principles and literature of the research, and then it addresses the development of conceptual theories and models, and after describing the research design, the results are presented.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical principles of the present research focus on brand prestige, brand-customer personality congruency and brand loyalty. In continue we provide the conceptual model of the research which consists of the research's assumptions. This research deals with investigating the relation between brand prestige and brand loyalty. Also, the individual and social dimensions' effect of the brand-customer personality compatibility on brand prestige and brand loyalty has been investigated.

2.1. Brand Prestige

Prestige brand implies the relatively high importance of positioning of the product associated with a brand (Beak et al 2010, Steenkamp et al 2003). Generally, we can say that consumers tend to consider the prestigious brands as a sign of the social status, wealth or power; therefore prestigious brands are being bought frequently and they are linked to the person's perception of himself

and his social image; so, it has a positive and meaningful effect on the costumers' tendency and loyalty (Beak et al. 2010, O'Cass and Frost 2002).

Brand prestige has five benefits for the consumers that they can be classified in two categories (Johansson, 1999): the first category is related to the social and impersonal effects that include The Perceived conspicuous value, Perceived unique value and Perceived social value. the second category is related personal effects that include Perceived hedonic value and Perceived quality value.

The Results from Baek et al (2010) show uniqueness is dependent on its scarcity that brand prestige is a construct of the meaningful elements associated with the purchase done by the consumer. Regarding the known products that lead to high self-assertion, it is said that prestige has a great effect on the costumer's tendency toward purchasing a specific goods, in a way that it causes the constant use of that certain brand.

The past researches imply the effect of brand's image on the purchase (Steenkamp et al³, 2003; Zhou et al. 2008; Malik and Merunka 2010), brand loyalty (Choi et al. 2011, Erdogmus et al. 2012), and brand tendency (Yu and Dong 2010)

2.2. *Self-Congruities*

Customers personify the brands when they give the personality, and the marketers create or reinforce these perceptions using positioning. Brand personality provides a symbolic concept or emotional value that can lead to the customer's perception of the brand and become more permanent than functional characteristics (Rajagopal, 2008).

One of the most comprehensive and reliable definitions that have been presented so far about the brand personality is presented by Professor of Marketing at the University of California, Jennifer Aaker (1997), that describes it as "a set of human characteristics associated with the brand". For the first time Aaker provides a conceptual framework based on the five human personality in terms of five dimensions and expands it in to 42 properties that are: sincerity (domestic, honest, genuine, cheerful), excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up to date), competence (reliable, responsible, dependable, efficient), sophistication (glamorous, pretentious, charming, romantic) ruggedness (tough, strong, outdoorsy, rugged).

When a brand with personality is used, the consumer is involved with the process of identifying brands which are consistent with his self mental image. In this process is called self-congruity (Sirgy, 1985).

Sirgy et al (1982, 1985 and 1986) have identified four dimensions of self-concept, including:

Actual self: how consumers actually see themselves

Ideal self: how consumers would like to see themselves.

Actual-social self: how consumers think others see them

Ideal-social self: : how consumers would like others to see themselves

Therefore, individual self-congruity includes actual self, ideal self and social self- congruity includes actual social self , ideal social self dimensions.

The importance of self-perception is well dealt with in the theory of social identity which expresses that self-perception is the individual's personal and emotional view of himself. This theory includes two elements, individual identity and social identity. Individual identity refers to the individual's ranking according to specific features (shyness, kindness, etc) while social identity refers to the individual's self description in terms of social classes (Underwood et al. 2001). Self-congruency plays an important role on influencing consumer behavior (Kressmann et al., 2006, Sirgy and Samli, 1985, Sirgy et al., 1991). For instance, research finds self-image congruence affects brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006). Extant research also reports a strong relationship between self-image congruence and satisfaction (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007; Sirgy et al., 1997).

2.3. *Brand Loyalty*

The concept of brand loyalty is analyzed extensively in marketing literature (Dick and Basu, 1994; Evanschitzky et al 2006, Harris and Goodeet 2004). Although there are many definitions in terms of brand loyalty, the best definition of loyalty has been provided by Oliver (1999). Based on the definition of Oliver customer loyalty means "A strong commitment to repurchase a product permanently in future despite the environmental impact of various marketing efforts to create potential shift towards other brands". Recent studies in this field have shown that the experts have adopted two main approaches to loyalty including: Behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994; Bandyopadhyay et al. 2007). It should be noted in order to measure loyalty in terms of behavior; researchers use variables such as the possibility of repurchase and the possibility of choosing the brand for a long period (Clotey et al., 2008) while the attitudinal loyalty is activated by preferring a brand over the others and through emotional commitment so through the "intention to repurchase" the resistance against other brands is replaced and the intention of marketing is measure with word of mouth (Anisimova et al., 2007).

3. The Research Model and Hypotheses Development

The results from Mulyanegara et al (2012) on clothing, in Turkey, approve of a positive and meaningful relation between self - congruency and brand prestige. Also the research done by Quester et al (2000) shows that there's a positive and meaningful relation between self congruency and brand prestige .Accordingly, the first and second assumptions of the research are defined as following:

- H1: individual self-congruity has a positive and meaningful effect on brand prestige.
- H2: social self-congruity has a positive and meaningful effect on brand prestige.

Results from the research done by Hwang and Han (2014), show the effect of prestige on costumers' loyalty on luxury cruises. Other studies also approve of the positive and meaningful effect of prestige on loyalty (Mulyanegara, et al. 2012; Zhou et al 2008) and

customers' behavior such as brand preference and purchase intention (Mulyanegara et al. 2009, Akram. et al., 2011). Accordingly, the third assumption of the research is defined:

- H3: brand prestige has a positive and meaningful effect on brand loyalty.

Kressmann et al (2006) investigated the direct and indirect effect of self-congruity on brand loyalty. This research was conducted on the owners of private cars and the results confirm a positive and meaningful relation between self-congruity and brand loyalty. Many other researchers have been done by Sirgy and Su 2000, Sirgy et al. 2008, Liu et al 2012, Ahan et al. 2013 and Davis et al., 2013 confirm the relation between self-congruity and brand loyalty or costumers' buying treatment. Also the studies done by He and Mukherjee. 2007, Han and Back, 2008 confirm the effect of a positive and meaningful relation between individual and social dimensions of self-congruity on brand loyalty and satisfaction. Accordingly, the fourth and fifth assumptions of the research are defined:

- H4: individual self-congruity has a positive and meaningful effect on brand loyalty.
- H5: social self-congruity has a positive and meaningful effect on brand loyalty.

To demonstrate the relation between the research's conceptual model variables, we used past researches and researchers' analysis and considering the research's assumptions shown figure 1.

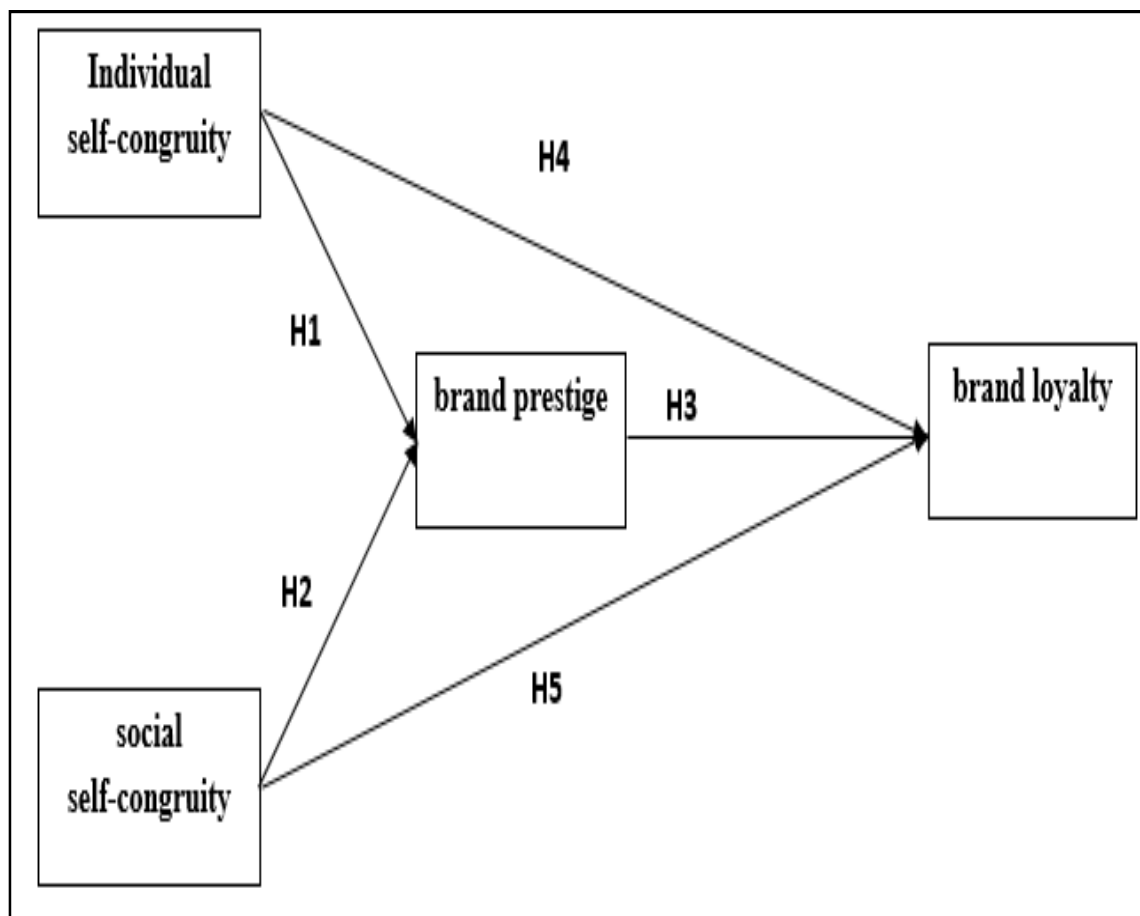


Figure 1: Conceptual model

4. Method

The current research is a kind of applied research. Considering the kind and nature of the question, the objective and the questions of the research, this research is a descriptive research and from a correlation field. The statistical population of this research is the owners of mobile phones in the city Tehran. Out of 470 questionnaires distributed, 443 of them were returned, complete and used.

The study constructs were operationalized using items from previous empirical studies. The following information provides details of the scales used for measurements, including the independent and dependent variables used in the analytical model. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included the 16 items. The construct of individual and social self-congruity was derived from previous research by Sirgy and Su (2000), 4 items were used to measure individual self-congruity and 4 items were used to measure social self-congruity. 4 items adapted from Han and Terpstra (1988) to capture Brand prestige. Brand loyalty was measured by 4 items noted by Oliver (1999). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess overall measurement reliability and validity. Table 1 shows the details of the measurement properties.

Variable	Item loading	t-statistic	Cronbach's alpha coefficients	AVE	CR
individual Self-congruency :			0.86	0.61	0.79
ISC1	0.75	23.13			
ISC2	0.75	22.31			
ISC3	0.79	30.69			
ISC4	0.81	31.25			
social self-congruity:			0.90	0.69	0.85
SSC1	0.78	30.13			
SSC2	0.84	46.02			
SSC3	0.85	52.79			
SSC4	0.85	48.16			
Brand prestige:			0.87	0.62	0.80
BP1	0.67	17.21			
BP2	0.83	39.53			
BP3	0.83	30.3			
BP4	0.80	33.66			
Brand loyalty :			0.87	0.62	0.79
BL1	0.76	32.83			
BL2	0.84	51.01			
BL3	0.75	23.68			
BL4	0.79	30.98			

Table 1: Reliability and validity tests

Using teachers and marketing experts' ideas and also application of scales and standards, the reliability of the research was estimated satisfactory. Convergent validity of the research was also developed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and the construct validity was investigated using factor analysis. Fornell and Larcker (1981) found out that the high extent of 0.5 is enough for AVE. Hulland (1999) saw the high value of 0.4 acceptable for questions' factor loadings.

Reliability research questions were also investigated by two common standard criteria of Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) and Composite Reliability CR (Werts et al., 1974). The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients which shows an acceptable reliability is higher than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951). Whereas the value of CR for each construct increases above 0.7 (Nunnally 1967), it implies a good internal stability for the measured models, and the values lower than 0.6 implies lack of stability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The values of validity and reliability are provided in table 1. Regarding the said research standards, the validity and reliability of questions and variables associated with all the said criteria enjoy an appropriate measure.

5. Results

50% of 443 questionnaires were distributed among make subjects. In terms of age distribution the research population is young and middle age citizens because 42 per cent of the population was under 30 and about 32% of the samples were subjects between 31-40 and 19% were people between 41-51 years old. In the study of educational status, the highest percent belonged to the level of people with bachelor's degree who formed 43% of the population. Also in terms of mobile phone brand, Samsung with 26% is in the first place and Nokia, Sony and Apple fall the following ranks.

5.1. Testing Hypotheses

The conceptual model test using the partial least squares method was performed using SMART PLS Version 3 software and the outputs are presented in table (2) and Figure (3). In order to test the significance of the relationship the T-Values must be addressed. The value above absolute 1.96 indicates the significance of the relationships. So it can be concluded that all relations are significant at 5% error, therefore in order to analyzed the level of significance refer to correlation coefficient values in Figure (2). Also Figure (2) presents the R² values of the dependant variables and t factors of the research.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t - value	Test result
H1 Individual self –congruity → involvement	0.127	2.623	Supported
H2 social self –congruity → involvement	0.419	8.132	Supported
H3 brand prestige → Brand loyalty	0.316	7.727	Supported
H4 Individual self –congruity → brand loyalty	0.279	6.407	Supported
H5 social self –congruity → Brand loyalty	0.265	6.436	Supported

Table 2: Hypotheses and results

R^2 values obtained for the variables of the study indicate that individual and social self-congruity explain 23.7% of the brand prestige variance. 46.6% of the loyalty variable can be predicted by independent and intermediate variables in this study. Falk and Miller (1992) have suggested that R^2 should be higher than 0.1 so that it could measure the variance of the dependent variables within the desirable level. The lower level has lower level of prediction. The obtained results indicate the desired values of R^2 for the dependent variables of brand prestige and brand loyalty.

According to the results presented in Table 2 it can be said that the individual and social self-congruity with the path coefficients $\beta=0.127$, $T=2.623$ and $\beta=0.419$, $t=8.132$ have a positive and significant effect on brand prestige. Also the results revealed a positive and significant relationship between brand prestige and brand loyalty $\beta=0.316$, $T=7.727$. Also the results revealed a positive and significant relationship between individual and social self-congruity and brand loyalty with path coefficients $\beta=0.279$, $T=6.407$ and $\beta=0.265$, $t=6.436$.

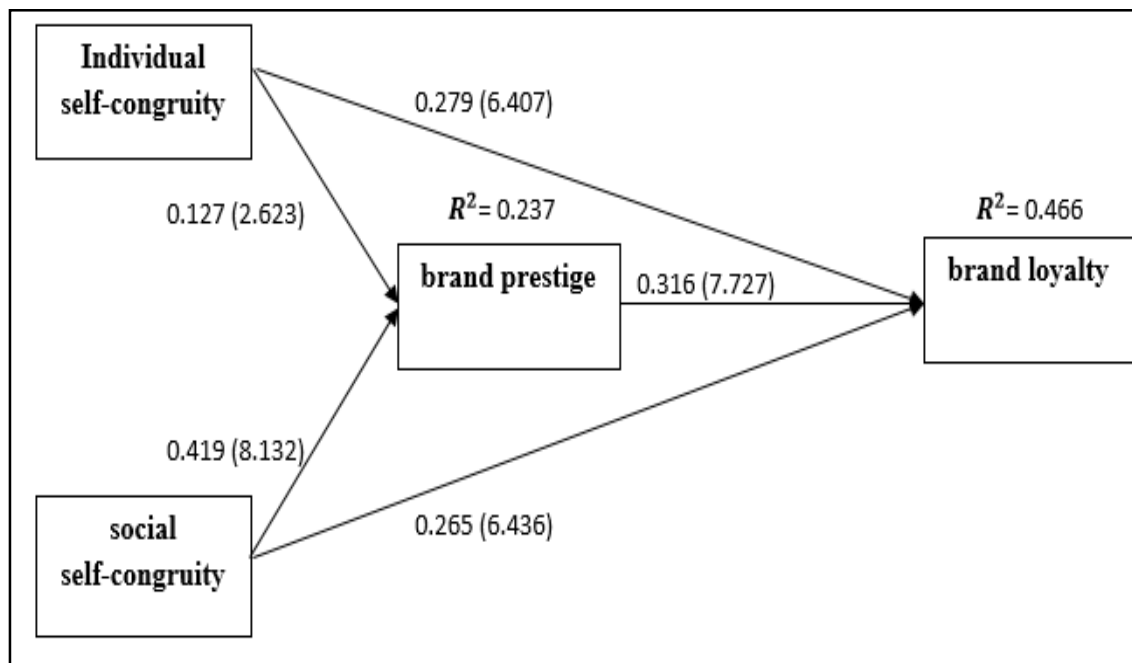


Figure 2: Results for the hypothesized model

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Brand is increasingly finding its place as a key source of the customer choice among other brands. Brand is not just merely a physical product, but also a unique property. It develops and improves through the time and obtains tangible and intangible assets. Brand causes a split between similar products over time. David Aaker says “brands with a human personality for themselves give their customers their words. This research deals with investigating the effect of individual and social self-congruency on the customer’s loyalty in mobile phone industry. Prestige variable is also considered as the mediator variable in this regard.

The first and second test hypotheses are representative of the positive and meaningful relation between individual and social self-congruency with brand prestige. In this relation, the effect of social self-congruency on prestige ($\beta=0.419$) is stronger, compare individual self-congruency ($\beta=0.127$). This result approves of the appreciated social value concerning brands with prestige; this is consistent with Johnson’s description (1999). This assumption was also confirmed by past researchers. Some of these studies include studies done by Erdogmus et al., 2012. Therefore, it is suggested that companies act in compliance with individual and social self-congruency and specially the social aspect to create prestige for their brand and make it distinguished.

The test hypothesis of the third assumption shows that brand prestige has a positive and meaningful effect ($\beta=0.316$) on loyalty, implies the high congruence of these two variables. This assumption has been approved of by the past researchers. These researches include, studies done by Hwang and Han (2014), Erdogmus et al., 2012 and Zhou et al 2008. Many studies are representative of the effect of prestige on the customers’ behavior for example, brand preference and purchase intention (Mulyanegara et al., 2009; Akram et al. 2011). Accordingly, therefore we can consider creating customers’ loyalty towards the brand focusing on brand prestige and factors influencing it.

The test hypothesis of the fourth and fifth assumptions of the research implies the positive and meaningful effect of individual ($\beta=0.279$) and social ($\beta=0.265$) self-congruency on brand loyalty. These researches include, the studies done by Hay et al. 2007, Han et al. 2008. These studies confirm the positive and meaningful relation between individual and social self-congruency on brand loyalty and satisfaction. Many previous studies proved the significant positive correlation between self-congruency (without assume its dimensions) and brand loyalty including Kressmann et al (2006), Ekinici et al. (2013) Liu et al. (2012) and Sirgy, et al (2008). Accordingly, it is suggested that companies set their advertisements and marketing activities such as identifying the market sectors,

target markets and positioning according to the characteristic features of the brand and individual and social self-congruency, to achieve their goal towards having loyal customers.

It is recommended to the future researchers to use the model of this study to analyze other products as well and also measure the self-congruity on other variables including brand preference and intention to repurchase. Also previous research (Sirgy et al. 1991, 2000) confirms functional congruity on the behavior of customers. Functional congruity means the match between the ideal expectation of the customers about brand and product ideal characteristics with their perception about these characteristics. Therefore it is recommended that in addition to between brand-customer personality consistency, future studies would also consider functional congruity.

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