

Original Article (Quantified)

The impact of brand sensory experience on brand loyalty with emphasis on drivers of brand equity, customer satisfaction, and customer emotional commitment

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of brand sensory experience on brand loyalty with an emphasis on the drivers of brand equity, customer satisfaction, and customers' emotional commitment. The research is applicable in terms of purpose, and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection method. The subjects of this study were 750 language learners of the Gilan Iranian Language Center. 261 people were selected as a statistical sample based on the Krejci and Morgan table and simple random sampling method, and answered the research questionnaires. The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed based on face validity, content, and confirmatory factor analysis. The reliability of the questionnaires was calculated and confirmed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient method. Data analysis was performed at two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics, including structural equation modeling, using the SmartPLS statistical software. The results showed that brand sensory experience has a significant effect on customers' emotional commitment with a path coefficient of 0.472. Brand sensory experience has a significant effect on customer satisfaction with a path coefficient of 0.575. Brand sensory experience has a significant effect on brand equity with a path coefficient of 0.264. Brand equity has a significant effect on customer loyalty to the brand with a path coefficient of 0.736. Emotional commitment has a significant effect on brand equity with a path coefficient of 0.207. Customer satisfaction has a significant effect on brand equity with a path coefficient of 0.274. Emotional commitment and customer satisfaction play a mediating role in the impact of brand sensory experience on brand equity.

Keywords:

Brand sensory experience,
Brand loyalty,
Brand equity,
Customer Satisfaction,
Emotional commitment.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Customer loyalty to a brand indicates the satisfaction of consumers with the quality and price of a brand's products and services (Chinomona, 2016). Brand loyalty is the attachment or dependence that a customer has to a brand. In fact, loyalty is the result of customer trust in the brand, which is a result of confidence from both parties (customer and brand owner) and will continue in the future as long as it leads to gaining points. As a result, trust and loyalty are two factors that are constantly in direct contact with each other. Just as trust encourages loyalty to a brand, it also reduces insecure relationships with that brand. This means that if a customer feels insecure about a brand, their willingness to buy or use that brand will also decrease (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Human societies are very effective through word-of-mouth information and its exchange, comparing experiences of purchasing a product, and encouraging social relationships among members, and these relationships between individuals and others in relation to a brand lead to the production of emotional relationships and ultimately lead to individual loyalty to a brand (Ahn & Back, 2018). However, researchers have also recognized the attitudinal or intention-based dimensions of loyalty and have defined brand loyalty in terms of the customer's willingness to recommend the brand to others, the preference for purchasing a brand over other brands, and the customer's feeling of attachment to the brand.

Many factors are associated with brand loyalty, such as brand equity (Iglesias et al., 2019). Researchers have conducted many studies on how consumers value brands and perceive multiple aspects of brand equity. A very important point in brand value is that all target markets need to understand their brand value in order to achieve significant success, and therefore, the assessment of a brand value should be based on customer observations.

Customer satisfaction is considered as a set of business beliefs that lead to creating value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations; a responsibility that leads to meeting their needs, and is considered as one of the most important criteria for determining the quality of a brand. In marketing literature, the concept of experience has been discussed and examined in various fields such as shopping experience, product experience, beauty experience, service experience, consumption experience, and consumer experience. In addition to customer satisfaction with brand equity, some researchers directly or indirectly link customer emotional commitments with brand equity. Researchers consider customer emotional commitment to be part of brand power. Researches have mainly linked emotional commitment to brand equity through the dimensions of brand equity. In some recent empirical studies, emotional commitment has been examined as a prerequisite for brand equity, because it is expected that when customers feel similarity to a particular brand and develop a strong emotional attachment to it, the value of brand equity will increase.

The researcher seeks to answer the question: does the sensory experience of the brand through customer emotional commitment, customer satisfaction, and brand equity have a significant effect on brand loyalty in the Iranian language center in Gilan province?

Theoretical framework

Brand loyalty:

Brand loyalty refers to a customer's enduring desire to purchase a particular brand repeatedly and prefer it over competing brands, even in the face of price changes or competitor promotions. This loyalty can be due to ongoing satisfaction, emotional connection, perceived quality, or buying habits. Loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases and

usually increase their purchase volume over time, leading to sustained sales growth (Ajalli et al., 2023).

Brand equity:

If we put different brand labels on two identical products, the brand with higher equity will attract more customers. Brand equity creates commitment and loyalty in customers, which leads to repeat purchases and maintaining market share. High equity leads to better brand recognition in the market, which in turn facilitates sales and attracts new customers. When brand equity is high, marketing efforts are more effective and help save on advertising costs (Tasci, 2021).

Emotional Brand Commitment:

Emotional customer commitment is the degree of attachment and emotional connection that a customer feels towards a brand, product or organization. This commitment goes beyond ordinary satisfaction and includes a sense of belonging, interest, and a desire to maintain a long-term relationship with the brand (Rehman & Shafiq, 2019). In other words, when a customer has a strong emotional feeling towards the brand, they not only buy, but also become attached and committed to the brand (Afshardoost et al., 2023).

Sensory Brand Experience:

Sensory brand experience refers to the set of perceptions and feelings that customers experience through the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) when interacting with the brand. Simply put, brands that use the customer's senses to create an experience can establish a deeper, more lasting and more emotional connection with customers (Zha et al., 2022).

Customer Satisfaction:

Customer satisfaction refers to a customer's positive or negative emotional feeling or reaction to their experience of purchasing a product or service. This feeling arises from a comparison between the customer's expectations and their perception of the actual performance of the brand or product. If the brand's performance is equal to or higher than the customer's expectations, satisfaction is achieved; if it is lower than expected, dissatisfaction is formed (Iglesias et al., 2019).

Imanian (2025) stated in a study that social media marketing activities have a positive and significant effect on customer brand loyalty through brand equity and fair value. Amiri & Dastranj (2024) stated that the level of perceived customer satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on their brand loyalty. Majidi Jamnani et al. (2024) conducted a study titled "Investigating the Effect of Brand Experience Dimensions on Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty with the Mediating Role of Brand Attitude and Brand Attachment" and concluded that brand attitude and brand attachment play a mediating role on the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Research Methodology

The present study is applicable in terms of purpose, and descriptive-survey in terms of data analysis. The statistical population of the study was 750 language learners of the Iran Language Center of Gilan. 261 people were selected as a statistical sample based on the Krejci and Morgan table and simple random sampling method, and responded to questionnaires taken from the research (Iglesias et al., 2019). Confirmatory factor analysis

was used to determine the validity of the research tool, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of them. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyze the collected data. To test the research hypotheses, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of the data distribution, and the structural equation technique was used to examine the effect of independent and mediating variables on the dependent variable using the SmartPLS statistical software.

Research Findings

Descriptive statistics related to demographic information are shown in Table (2). The results showed that 47.893% of the respondents were male and 52.107% were female. 1.916% of the respondents were aged 16 to 20 years, 32.95% between 21 and 30 years, 52.107% 31 to 40 years, 111.11% 41 to 50 years and 0.766% were over 50 years, and 149.1% did not respond to this option. 8.429% of the respondents were under diploma, 37.548% had a diploma, 8.046% had an associated degree, 29.885% had a bachelor's degree, 15.709% had a master's degree and above. 0.383% did not respond to this option. Marital status: 2.682% of respondents were single and 96.935% were married. Also, 0.383% did not respond to this option. Occupational status: 37.548% of respondents were housewives, 37.548% were employees, 18.391% were freelancers, 3.448% were students, and 1.916% were unemployed. Also, 1.49% did not respond to this option. The length of time they had been familiar with the Iranian language center brand was for 6.897% of respondents under 2 years, 34.1% 2 to 5 years, 42.912% 5 to 9 years, and 15.709% 9 years and above. Also, 0.383% did not respond to this option. As is clear from the data in Table (3), the mean score of the brand loyalty variable according to respondents is 3.999, the standard deviation is 0.649, and the variance is 0.422. Also, the lowest score related to this variable according to respondents is 1.667 and the highest score is 5. The mean score of the brand sensory experience variable according to respondents is 3.95, the standard deviation is 0.663, and the variance is 0.44. Also, the lowest score related to this variable according to respondents is 1 and the highest score is 5. The mean score of the customer emotional commitment variable according to respondents is 4.171, the standard deviation is 0.661, and the variance is 0.437. Also, the lowest score related to this variable according to respondents is 2 and the highest score is 5. The mean score of the customer satisfaction variable according to respondents is 3.958, the standard deviation is 0.745, and the variance is 0.555. Also, the lowest score for this variable from the respondents' perspective is 1.667 and the highest score is 5. The average score for the brand equity variable from the respondents' perspective is 4.197, the standard deviation is 0.773, and the variance is 0.598. Also, the lowest score for this variable from the respondents' perspective is 1 and the highest score is 5.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of brand sensory experience on brand loyalty with an emphasis on the drivers of brand equity, customer satisfaction, and customer emotional commitment. In this regard, it can be stated that the role of brand sensory experience in customer emotional commitment is very key and strategic; because sensory experience directly affects customer perception, feeling, and behavior; and can lead to the creation of a deep emotional relationship between the customer and the brand. The results of the second hypothesis test showed that brand sensory experience has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. In this regard, it can be stated that the role of brand sensory experience in customer satisfaction is very important and fundamental, because today's customers do not pay attention just to the quality of the product or service any longer,

but the overall experience of interacting with the brand is important to them; an experience perceived through the five senses and leads to the formation of positive emotions and ultimately satisfaction. The results of the third hypothesis test showed that the brand's sensory experience has a positive and significant effect on brand equity. In this regard, it can be stated that in today's competitive world, sensory experience is beyond a simple interaction with a product or service and has become one of the most important factors in building, strengthening, and differentiating brand equity. The brand's sensory experience is one of the most effective factors in building and promoting brand equity, because it directly affects customer perception, feelings, and behavior. The results of the fourth hypothesis test showed that brand equity has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty to the brand. In this regard, it can be stated that the role of brand equity on customer loyalty to the brand is one of the key issues in the fields of marketing, brand management, and consumer behavior. Research shows that brands with strong brand equity have a greater chance of retaining loyal customers and are even more resistant to competitors. The results of the fifth hypothesis test showed that emotional commitment has a positive and significant effect on brand equity. In this regard, it can be stated that emotional commitment, as a strong emotional bond between the customer and the brand, can play a significant role in the formation, strengthening, and sustainability of brand equity. Customer emotional commitment plays a key role in the formation and strengthening of brand equity. By creating loyalty, positive associations, emotional interactions, and brand recommendations, this commitment gives the brand more value from the consumer's perspective and stabilizes its position in the market. The results of the sixth hypothesis test showed that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on brand equity. In this regard, it can be stated that satisfied customers are not only more likely to repurchase, but also play an active role in strengthening the brand image, increasing loyalty, and improving the public perception of the brand, all of which are key components of brand equity. Satisfaction is the first step to creating loyalty. Satisfied customers are more likely to repeat purchases and prefer the brand over competitors, which is one of the most important components of brand equity. Satisfied customers perceive the brand as having higher quality than that of competitors, even if there is not much difference technically. The results of the seventh hypothesis test showed that emotional commitment plays a mediating role in the impact of the brand sensory experience on brand equity. In this regard, it can be stated that sensory experience alone increases brand equity, but when this experience leads to emotional commitment, its effect on brand equity will be much stronger and more sustainable. The sensory experience of a brand creates part of the brand value directly and part through the customer's emotional reactions (i.e., emotional commitment). The results of the eighth hypothesis test showed that customer satisfaction plays a mediating role in the impact of the sensory experience of a brand on brand equity. In this regard, it can be stated that when a brand can provide a pleasant experience through the five senses (such as beautiful design, pleasant sound or music, pleasant smell of the store, appropriate touch and taste of the product), this experience leads to a pleasant feeling, memory formation, and ultimately customer satisfaction. The sensory experience of a brand may directly affect brand value, but when customer satisfaction is included as an intermediary, this effect becomes more sustainable, deeper, and more predictable. It leads to behavioral and attitudinal loyalty, and ultimately transforms from a short-term experience into a long-term understanding of brand value. According to the results of the present study, the following suggestions and recommendations can be made: Considering the confirmation of the relationship between the sensory experience of a brand with emotional commitment and customer satisfaction, and brand equity, it is suggested that the managers of the Iranian Language Center try to define

human emotions for the Language Center brand by using advertisements and content presented in this format. For example, they can display the sense of being a pioneer, being luxurious, etc. in the form of images of people who play the role of language learners in outdoor or television advertisements, to implicitly instill in the audience that being in the center makes them a pioneer or luxurious, etc. One of the things that can be useful in this regard is the use of famous Iranian symbols and personalities to introduce the characteristics that customers tend to feel. These findings are consistent with the results of the Kaveh Haghghi (2021), Rehman & Shafiq (2019), and Khan & Fatma (2019). Regarding the limitations of the present study, it can be said that people have differences in terms of personality characteristics, which were not considered in this research. According to the view of Coelho et al., (2018), these personality differences can affect the results of hypothesis testing. Therefore, future researchers are advised to conduct similar research focusing on the personality characteristics of the respondents and compare their results with each other.