

IDENTIFYING AND REVIEWING THE FACTORS AFFECTING FOREIGN BRANDS PREFERENCE, COMPARED WITH IRANIAN BRANDS

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Abstract

Nowadays, using cosmetics is a social need. Iranians tendency to use foreign cosmetics, is incomparably more rigorous than using domestic products. One significant reason for their enthusiasm for using foreign cosmetic products, goes back to the subject of brand. One of the problems in Iran is people's deep believe in foreign products due to their popularity. Current study compares the affecting factors in foreign brands preferences, rather than Iranian brands throughout cosmetics industry. For this a descriptive research design is adopted. The 100 consumers for selected randomly for data collection. Data analysis was done using SPSS. In this study, factors such as perceived quality of the brand, brand loyalty, brand exclusiveness, brand-related evokes, social value, emotional value and functional value are considered as the affecting factors in foreign brand preferences. Findings of this study indicate that among Iranian consumers, the need of being exclusive, perceived quality of brand, brand loyalty and brand-related associations, are directly related to using foreign products. Among the various influencing factors on purchasing foreign products, both emotional value and social value had the most influence on purchasing foreign products, while, the relationship between functional value and purchasing foreign goods not confirmed.

Keywords: Brand, being exclusive, social and emotional value, perceived brand quality, brand loyalty, brand-related associations

INTRODUCTION

Today, using cosmetics has become as an integral part of life for some people, turning Iran into the second largest consumer of cosmetics in the Middle East, and the world's seventh largest importer of cosmetics. For some girls and women, cosmetics has become a necessity, decreasing the age of using cosmetics under fifteen years old, while, in developed countries, you'll see this tendency more among older women. Several factors affect the tendency to use cosmetics. Nowadays, using cosmetics is a social need, sometimes considered as an origin, from which, beauty needs stem (Mojdeh Kiany, and Fariba Moogouei, 1392). In this while, the tendency to use foreign cosmetics is incomparably more than domestic ones. Maybe one significant reason of consumers in not using local products cosmetics, and their passion for foreign ones, is referred to brand. One of the existent problems in the country, is people's deep belief that foreign products due to their famous brand, are much better than local products, and this, unfortunately, such deeply rooted in our general culture, that even smuggled products may sometimes be more preferred than domestic ones. The Middle East, is one of the biggest cosmetics consuming markets, and in this regard, Iran and Saudi Arabia have gone ahead of the other countries. Accordingly, disregarding Saudi Arabia female population, Iran remains the first big end market for cosmetics in the Middle East; This means that each year 14 million Iranian women make 2.1 billion dollars from 7.2 billion dollars of selling cosmetics through Middle East (Khadija Safiri, Mahnaz Ghobadi, 1392). According to unofficial statistics, in other words the only statistics available on the use of cosmetics in the country, Iranian women on average buy 300 dollars of cosmetics a day, having become the first cosmetics consumers in the region. Accordingly, Iranians make up for 29% of the market in the Middle East. Based on many experts and practitioners in this market, usually, about 90% of cosmetic products on the market are smuggled, being any supervision device on the import of them. Unfortunately, Iran has not yet owned its potential world-class in the cosmetics industry. One of the factors causing this globally failure through the industry, is it's not having a competitive brand, equal to other global brands. In this study, the factors influencing the choose and preference of foreign brands, than domestic brands, has been discussed. This industry has such a high importance, which one can say that sanitary products consist part of country's financial circulation, while cosmetics occupy the first item in this list, and having little support can make a strong communication chain and play a big role in preventing the exit of currency from the country, through production growth and branding. We can say that Iran enjoys a good quality in production, but there is no worthy brand, being able to compete with global brands. That is, the only problem posed upon Iranian cosmetics, is the subject of brand and branding, causing them still not reaching its actual position through the world. Creating new brands, and supporting current brands to exclude them

from pricing, is the underlying factor in developing domestic production, boosting national industry development, and even export. If Iran have no problems supplying raw materials, can reach further growth and development in the cosmetics industry and seeks to achieve its goals and improve its economic conditions (Yaser Sobhanifard, 2010). In order to increase their market share, the managers of cosmetics producing companies, should consider consumer's attitude shaping factors, and pay to their behavior and decision-making style while buying cosmetics. So, being able to develop their strategies to attract and retain customers. Consumption of foreign products in Iran, is not just due to its high quality, but these products matter to consumers, in terms of social status are importance. So, domestic producers must try to make their consumers of that not only the quality of Iranian products is better than its foreign competitors, but also it is in the same level of brand and status. So he should try to know well the environment, competitors and his consumers' needs to know. With the development of communication and globalization, global companies and brands have been faced with new opportunities. On the other side, the acceleration of globalization and information tools such as satellite and Internet, has made consumers more aware, with choices. In the meantime, developing countries enjoy a special status, and the world well-known brands have detected a special status for manufacturers in these countries. The large number of potential customers, high economic growth, and rapid rising of people expectations in developing countries, has created a good target market of these countries, for developed countries (Meyer, Klaus E & Yen Tran. (2006)). In Iran, like other developing countries, despite the throngs below the poverty line, a large number of people -some even of low purchasing power- usually choose foreign brands as a way to gain some kind of dignity and style for their own, and this tendency is more intense among young people. The aim of current study is to examine the various factors influencing consumers preference of foreign brands in the cosmetics industry (Sanaaye'ee Ali and Ketabi Saeed, 1384). In general, individuals' purchases are affected by various cultural, social and psychological factors (Philip Cutler, Gary Armstrong, 1379). Today, trade brands have turned into independent forces in modern economy. A suitable brand, will create a variety of privileges, including financial benefits for a company, and value for shareholders, while attracting elites (Young-Kyung Kim et.al (2008)). Brand, gives identity to the product, and ensures its sales. Some important factors should be considered in choosing a brand. These important factors include having short name, being creative, being indicative of products' characteristics, and having relevance to different cultures with different pronunciations. Totally, it can be said that consumers choose a product, based on their sense and attitude towards a brand (Hawkings et.al, 2006).In fact, attitude is a strong factor in understanding consumer's total evaluation of a product or service and his behavioral intentions (Kwan Joon, D (2010)).

Today, companies spend remarkable budgets on creating and developing a good image of their brand, in consumer's mind. Being a well image of brand in consumer's mind, facilitates business development. Consumers attitude, is one of the affecting factors on shaping a brand image in consumer's mind (Salinas, E., Perez.J (2009)).

There are significant backgrounds about factors influencing the selection. In this section we'd refer to some of them. In a study conducted on young consumers in Croatia, the authors have compared their tendency to domestic and foreign products in a group of food products. They have concluded that the manufacturer and brand, were two variables influencing consumer's purchase decisions. Findings of this study indicate that customer's mentality of the manufacturer country, brand, and price, are affecting on the evaluation of domestic and foreign products (Ozretic- Dozen & et al. (2007)).

Another similar research is by Kumar et. al in India. Through this study, effects of individual variables, the need for uniqueness, and brand-specific variables, perceived quality, also emotional value, have been investigated, in purchasing American goods compared with Indian goods. According to this research, among Indian consumers, there is a positive relationship between the need for uniqueness, and the desire for purchasing American products; also the desire for American products with perceived quality and emotional value; while this relationship is negative about Indians brands (Kumar. A. lee, & et.al (2009)).

In another work, the effect of brand image and consumer perception of the company's reputation, on consumer's perception of the quality of products and services, customer value and customer loyalty have been discussed. The results of this study showed the impact of brand image on customer's perception of the quality of products and services. Also, company's reputation has a significant impact on customer loyalty and perceptions (Roderick J Brodie & et al (2007)).

In another study, they investigated the effect of consumers' general characteristics (impact of personality norms and brand awareness), brand-related variables (perceived quality), and emotional value on decision to purchase American brand goods such as shoes and clothing by Mexican students. Based on the results of this research, variables of personality norms, affect brand awareness, and brand awareness has a positive impact on the value of an emotional value; while, having no positive impact on perceived quality of American brands. Emotional value had a positive effect on the intention to purchase USA goods, while perceived quality having a negative effect on purchase intention (Pelton, Lou & et.al, (2008)). A similar study, has been done by Lee and his colleagues. In this study, the reaction of consumers in three countries: Mexico, Japan and South Korea, to American global brands, compared to domestic brands, has been discussed. Findings of this research, brand image and its

manufacturer country, affect the brand-specific features, including emotional value and perceived quality, the general feeling about the brand, commitment and loyalty to the brand (Lee, Min-Young & etal. (2008))

Hypotheses

The good and comparable quality of Persian sanitary-cosmetics products, compared to similar foreign products, stimulates the managers, to make a deeper investigation in the depth of consumers' beliefs and causes facing foreign products. In the meantime, and to assess the factors affecting the choices of consumers, the following assumptions may be numbered, concerning Iranians selection type in this area:

- For consumer, perceived quality of foreign products is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- Consumer loyalty to foreign products is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- Product-related evocations in foreign products is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- Consumer need to Uniqueness with foreign products is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- For consumer, functional value of foreign products is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- For consumer, social value of foreign products, is more than Iranian products, in comparison.
- For consumer, emotional value of foreign products, is more than Iranian products, in comparison.

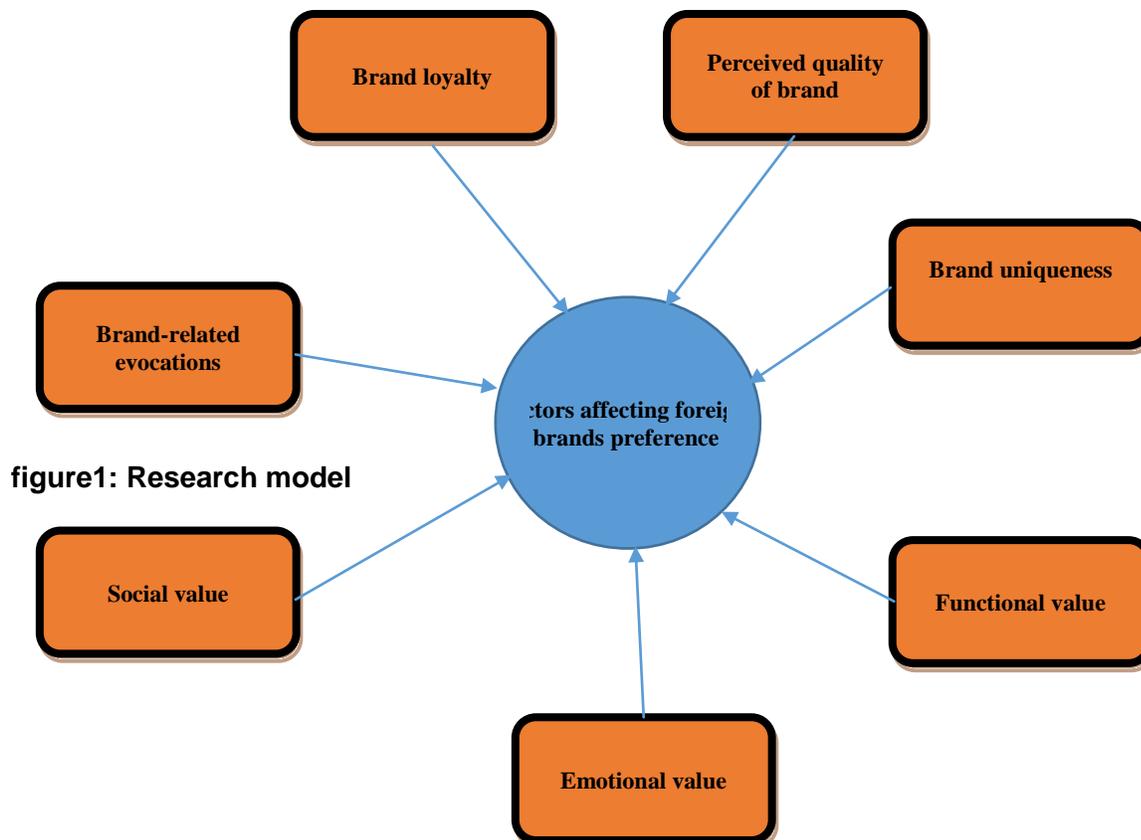
Objective of the study

To Identify and review the factors affecting foreign brands preference, compared with Iranian Brands

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive research, based on the nature and method, and based on the concept of time, was cross-sectional, and in the view of data type, is a quantity research. The purpose of this study was practical, and according to the method of data collection, was a survey, using questionnaires. The sample of the study consisted of 100 consumers selected randomly. A questionnaire including questions related to the Identifying and reviewing the

factors affecting foreign brands preference, compared with Iranian Brands in the cosmetics industry was designed, carried out in a period of one year (2015-2016). Also, some demographic information such as gender and education level were recorded. We used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess reliability, while data were analyzed using SPSS software.



A questionnaire was designed, according to experts' opinion, using a Likert 5 option, most effective in behavioral researches. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. First part consisting of demographic characteristics of the sample, and the second part, containing main research questions to measure the variables.

Brand loyalty

Emotional closeness of a brand, to customers, so that this near sense results to repeat the purchase of that brand. Brand loyalty is one of the most important factors in estimating the value of a brand (Lee, Y.K. Back et.al. (2009)), which is a deep commitment to repurchase or buy a lot

of a superior product or service. Unlike the environmental impacts, having the potential to change the behavior (Oliver, R, (2009)). Brand loyalty is an indicator of the possibility of turning customer to another brand, especially after making changes in the price or other aspects of the product (Asker, J.L (2007)).

Brand-related evocations

Images, memories, and ideas having been mixed with the name of brand in the mind of the customer, supposed as a brand in the eyes of the customer as well as anything that is directly or indirectly related with brand in consumers' memory (Asker, DA (2006)).

Perceived quality of the brand

Consumers' assessment of the quality of the brand, based on their expectations and desires of it. Also referred to as the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service, considering the competing options, and the goal of that product or service (Keller. K.L (2008)).

Brand Uniqueness

Features distinguishing a brand from other relevant brands. In this section, features like high standards, the variety in colors and designs, high prestige, as well as others' definition about a particular brand, is intended. Usually, younger consumers are more eager to brand uniqueness. In general, people in developing and undeveloped countries, are favored to foreign goods, because some of them believe that using foreign goods, brings them a special social status (Kumar. A. lee et.al. (2009)).

In the present study, 3 affecting dimensions of customer perception are also considered as follows:

Functional value:

Means the benefit of perceived quality and expected performance of foreign brands.

Emotional value:

Implying certain emotional states, caused by foreign brands.

Social values:

Sensed social benefits felt in using foreign brands (Wang, Yonggui, (2004))

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive results of demographic characteristics

	Variable	Quantity	Frequency	%frequency
1	Education	Diploma and under diploma	12	24
		Associate's degree	6	12
		bachelor's degree	27	55
		Master degree	5	10
2	Age	Under 25	24	48
		26-35	15	30
		36-45	10	20
		Above 45	1	2

As seen in the table above, most people have a bachelor's degree, 10 percent of bachelor's degree or higher, 24 percent and 12 percent lower than diploma and degree requirements. 48% of persons less than 25 years, 30% between 26 and 35, 20 percent between 36 and 45, and 2% have more than 45 years of age.

Before testing research hypotheses, we investigated the reliability, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Table 2 shows the reliability of variables along with the mean and standard deviation variables.

Table 2. descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation	coefficient of variation	Variance	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Perceived quality of foreign product	4.37	0.66	0.167	0.44	0.805
brand Uniqueness	4.36	0.66	0.175	0.44	0.926
Brand-related evocations	4.31	0.67	0.174	0.45	0.887
Brand loyalty	4.1	0.69	0.168	0.47	0.870
Emotional value of brand	3.9	0.66	0.169	0.43	0.842
social value of brand	3.7	0.67	0.181	0.44	0.802
functional value of brand	4.37	0.66	0.167	0.44	0.805

The above table represents the variation coefficient, obtained after the standard deviation divided by the average. As we know, the less the variation coefficient, the better. Here 0/166 is the lowest and 0/181 is the highest variation coefficient. According to the table, the value obtained of Cronbach's alpha for all variables, is above 0.7, indicating the desirable tool for data collection tool. It can be said variables have acceptable reliability.

Table 3. Validity, reliability and descriptive indexes

Variables	Mean variance asserted	Combined reliability	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Mean
Perceived quality of foreign product	0.858	0.924	0.835	3.329
brand Uniqueness	0.837	0.911	0.805	3.285
Brand-related evocations	0.772	0.944	0.926	3.359
Brand loyalty	0.816	0.930	0.887	3.282
Emotional value of brand	0.721	0.895	0.870	3.329
social value of brand	0.863	0.927	0.842	3.762
functional value of brand	0.834	0.910	0.802	3.616

Using average variance extracted (AVE) index, it was found that all studied structures have an average variance extracted above 0/5. Indicators of composite reliability (CR), were also used to test questionnaire reliability, and reaching a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 7.0, indicates the reliability of the measurement tool. Last column of the table, shows the mean value of the responses, and considering the use of Likert 5scale to each question of research variables, must investigate the value of respondents' views, until it becomes clear whether the average of their responses is different to the average value of 3 (the middle number of Likert scale), or not? As can be seen, all the variables have been evaluated above-average, showing a favorable situation within the organization. Generally we can relate the weakest assessment to emotional value, and the most favorable assessment to the perceived quality.

For the above model, the quantity of goodness of fit index is equal to 0/567, showing the proper fit of the model. To put it simply, research data have a good fit into the factor structure, and theoretical foundation of the research, indicating the questions being in line with the theoretical constructs.

Table 4. Inferential Statistics (a)

variable	Mean rank	Mean difference	Relevance coefficient(R)	T statistics	Sig
Perceived quality of foreign product	4.5				
Perceived quality of local product	2.9	1.6	0.676	22.25	0.000
foreign product loyalty	4.31				
local product loyalty	3.13	1.18	0.520	17.67	0.000
Evocations of foreign product	4.36				
Evocations of local product	2.7	1.66	0.508	19.38	0.000
Foreign product Uniqueness	4.37				
local product Uniqueness	2.78	1.59	0.630	22.66	0.000

As you can see, all the above correlation coefficients are greater than 0.5. Therefore, we can say that there is relatively direct and strong correlation between all variables, except for the functional value and foreign brands preference.

• First hypothesis

The perceived quality of foreign products in comparison with Iranian products is more for the consumer.

The first hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between perceived quality of foreign products, and preference for foreign brands.

• Second hypothesis:

Consumer loyalty to foreign products is more than Iranian products.

The second hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between foreign products loyalty, and preference for foreign brands.

• **Third Hypothesis:**

For consumer, evocations of foreign products, compared to Iranian products, is more.

Third hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between evocations of foreign products, and preference for foreign brands.

• **The fourth hypothesis:**

For consumer, the need for uniqueness with foreign products is more in comparison with Iranian products.

Fourth hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between foreign products' uniqueness, and preference for foreign brands.

Table 4. Inferential Statistics (b)

Variable	Mean rank	Mean difference	Relevance coefficient(R)	T statistics	Sig
foreign product Emotional value	4.1				
domestic product Emotional value	2.5	1.6	0.595	22.10	0.00
foreign product social value	2.3				
domestic product social value	4.1	1.8	0.566	21.6	0.00
foreign product functional value	3.2				
domestic product functional value	2.7	0.5	0.189	20.10	0.06

• **Fifth hypothesis:**

for consumer, functional value of foreign products, is not more than Iranian products.

Because of the sig. more than 0.05 in testing this hypothesis, fifth hypothesis is rejected.

• **Sixth hypothesis:**

for consumer, social value of foreign products, is more than Iranian products.

sixth hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between foreign products' social value, and preference for foreign brands.

• **Seventh hypothesis:**

for consumer, emotional value of foreign products, is more than Iranian products.

seventh hypothesis is not rejected, since sig. is less than 0.5, and the external factors' mean is greater than internal factors, so, there is a positive difference and t statistics is greater than 1/96, so, it can be said that external factors' impact is more than internal factors. Also, as the correlation coefficient is more than 0/5, there is a relatively strong and direct correlation between foreign products' emotional value, and preference for foreign brands.

CONCLUSION

According to test results and data obtained, also based on the opinions of the participants in this study, it appears that all factors affecting Iranians consumers' preferences for foreign sanitary-cosmetics products, such as perceived quality of brand, brand loyalty, uniqueness, Evocations of brand, social value, emotional value, and functional value, have a special place in consumer's selection and preferences, while all of the above –except for the functional value- test sig was less than 0.05, and the external factors' mean was greater than internal factors, so, there was a positive difference, asserting further importance of external factors, compared with internal factors; As well as t statistics greater than 1/96, meaning more impact of external factors, than internal factors. But given the amount of functional value sig test, more than 0.05, you cannot assume more impact for external factors than internal factors. Current study may be useful to Iranian manufacturers, as its results gives some information about customer preferences. These companies can identify the most important factors to promote the brand, using the results of this study. Different variables influencing the brand choice by Iranian consumers, were studied in this research. Results showed that the more the need for uniqueness among Iranian consumers, the more willing to use foreign goods (cosmetics) in them. Also, among the factors that affect purchasing foreign products, emotional value and social value are more important. Findings of this study, no relationship between functional value and deciding to purchase foreign products was approved. But generally, based on the results of previous studies, it can be

concluded that emotional and intangible dimensions of brand, affect the brand image and consumers' mentality, than tangible and functional factors. According to the findings of this study, like other developing countries, in Iran too, image and prestige of brand, is considered as an important factor in the preference for foreign brands, compared to domestic brands, while taking purchase decision. In addition to what was presented in this study, other factors also affect the purchasing decisions of consumers and choosing foreign products, not been addressed in this study. Given the numbered items and results of this study, also, considering the models and concepts of the process of identifying affecting factors in brand preference, it can generally be concluded that the main factors affecting brand preferences, are perceived quality of brand, brand loyalty, uniqueness, brand-related evocations, social value, and emotional value. But the relationship was not confirmed between functional value and foreign brand preference.

According to the results we can say that our current need to take people trust, is to create international brands, especially in the field of cosmetics and health products. Reputable manufacturers should work on their brands, increase their quality, and shout their potentials before the eye of everyone. Although our cosmetic products' status is so limited, their potentials for development is evident, and maybe even achieve an international reputation in little time. Meanwhile, small businesses may not have international competitiveness power. But gradually, with the arrival of large companies, it would be easier to compete with global brands. From the customer perspective, brand concept encompasses a set of functional and emotional benefits. Due to the inability of local leaders, in Iran, currently there is no credible and competitive brand in Iran. That's why foreign companies, realizing the potentials of the Iran's market, conduct market researches, and with un understanding of Iranian desires, personality and motivations, make new brands and send their goods to Iran markets, according to their international experience, and unfortunately soon grab a big share of it. It shall be noted that to use the research results practically, some affirmative and practical researches is needed. So, the following suggestions are delivered:

- 1) The necessity of managers, to constantly investigate customers' new perceptions, also the importance of the impact of intangible and emotional dimensions of value, on the customer perception, rather than noticing just some factors like quality and price. In a way that deciders and marketing managers make further reflect and analysis, regarding markets getting more competitive, and its rapid changes, as well as with respect to various aspects of value, and its impact on the decision to buy the product, and appropriately identify and define these relevant factors about existent products, for example, do market research every 3 months.

2) The necessity of managers, to notice to advertisement and allocate adequate funding to it, as the primary means of communicating with customers; as well as designing a trademark so that defines their product. It is recommended that companies select their target markets through segmentation and identification of right markets, then modify their advertisement according to those features. In this regard, the effects of advertisement are ensured in three areas: awareness, encourage and reminding.

3. Continuous and tangible induction of quality, promoting good organizational culture to create a spirit of criticism, and customer orientation as an important factor in increasing customer loyalty, and applying a greater emphasis on this aspect in advertising, then getting feedback from them, using customer relationship management systems (CRM). In this context, managers have to properly identify the relations budget, quality and time, and through increasing the effective investment that increases the dividend profit of financial shares, increase the quality of their products and services, without negative effects on the budget and time.

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

1. Possible effects of cognitive errors and biases on results.
2. Students' reluctance to fill out questionnaires, due to high occupancy.
3. Having no focus on a special product or brand.
4. The importance of the researcher appearance and personality, on student's collaboration.
5. Lack of investigating the significance of a specific brand of a product, in the process of being chosen by customers.

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