

Investigation of the Effective Factors on Iran Khodro Co. Brand Image in Iran

Tooraj Sadeghi and M.S. Gholamreza Ghorbani

Department of Business Management, Neyshabur Branch,
Islamic Azad University Pajohesh Avenue, Zip code: 9319613668, Neyshabur, Khorasan Razavi, Iran

Abstract: In the present regime of the international economics in which economical operations/ equations increasingly cooperate with a more integrated structure, the importance of active companies in commercial scopes is increasing. The theory that in the new economics, various countries of the world are identified by their companies and the importance of companies is considerably more than the importance of their governments in commercial scopes is manifested tangibly. Every day companies try to increase their shares in commercial markets. They continuously offer their goods and services with better quantity and quality [1]. Naturally extensive competition is an inseparable part of this process. Based on the statistics published so far, at present there are more than 40 thousands multi-national companies with 180 thousands branches throughout the world that are continuously eager to own increased shares in the market. These companies are identified by their brands and symbols [2]. This study aims to measure the effective factors on the image of Iran Khodro's brand in Khorasan-e-Razavi province and also measure the defined effective factors in this company by using Kapeferer's Identity and Image Model [3]. Based on six main concepts, the model used in this research includes the brand identity, Mimicry, opportunism, idealism and brand image [ibid]. The method used in the study is descriptive/ applied technique for which a questionnaire is prepared and distributed among the customers. The sample under investigation consists of 310 people of Iran Khodro Co.'s customers. Finally it analyzes the data obtained and concludes.

Key words: Brand's image • Brand's identity • Identity and image model • Iran Khodro Co

INTRODUCTION

For companies, brands are as an image and ID card which must be established to identify the attractiveness, quality and its presentation as a separate and compete-able symbol with others. The importance/ effectiveness of brands is such that if at first it is the desirability of goods and services that introduces the brands in minds, with the continuation of presence in the market in middle-term, it is the brands that confirm the quality/acceptability of goods and services [4]. Desirable brands may draw reliable benefits of commercial companies securing the products offered from negative competitions and possible frauds. These brands help companies always stay loyal to their commitment to offer their products desirably and think about their establishment in global markets leading the competition with the leaders of the market [5].

Brands have become such important that perhaps today we cannot find any product without a brand. Brands help the buyer identify the products which are useful in different ways. In addition, a brand may give information about the product to the buyer. A buyer who always purchases a product with a sort of brand knows that whenever he/she buys these products, they would have given properties, advantages and quality [5].

In a more integrated view, brands of all signs are related to a product or service. Kotler knows the brand as a part of a brand which is declarable, i.e. is said with voice or sound [6].

In addition, Kotler knows a brand as the part of a brand which is not declarable, but necessitates the identification of a brand such as sign, scheme, colors or the alphabets (for example, the red K letter on a Kodak photography tape box). One of the very important decisions in products marketing is to determine the brand or mark (ibid).

Corresponding Author: Dr. Tooraj Sadeghi, Department of Business Management, Neyshabur Branch,
Islamic Azad University Pajohesh Avenue, Zip code: 9319613668, Neyshabur, Khorasan Razavi, Iran.
Tel: (+98) 551-6621901-10, Fax: (+98) 0551-6615472.

The selection/ design of a brand is one of the most important stages of making a new product, since before the product is explained and its advantages/ functions are declared, the brand is manifested. For this reason, a brand may be given to companies as a powerful tool. Valid brands have the consumer's score which means that customers show their loyalty to those brands. Even if other substitution goods with lower prices are offered in the market, a considerable number of customers would demand the same brands [7].

Brand is one of the assets of a company which increases the value of the final product. A brand strategy makes considerable benefits for the stake-holders of a well-known company [8, 9].

Dimensions of a Brand: When people choose a brand, they do not solely pay attention to one of its features, but they consider multiple properties in relation to the type of the product and the degree of the participation of their minds according to which they decide to buy it. Also they cannot recall all of these properties in their minds immediately and evaluate them, but they just consider some of their properties. They evaluate them according to some of their main properties in the ranking of the choices (brands) [10].

The order of brands is the same ranking which forms in the mind that may influence the final decision. Now in order that the probability of purchasing the product is increased and the choice of a special brand would have a better ranking when producing the choices, it is necessary to increase the superiority of the product by using advertisements, i.e. we can increase the probability that the brand occurs in consumers' minds before other choices (ibid).

The above-mentioned properties about the product are different from services. Guzman has shown that the following dimensions are more important in the consumers' minds about the product [11].

- Performance: such as the highest car's speed
- Properties: such as the automobile has stereo tape-player or convenience seats
- Reliability: whenever you start the car, there would be no problem
- Conformity with the properties declared: if we declare it consumes little gas, it should be always so.
- Repair ability
- Durability
- Beauty
- Fame

The properties which are important about cars in consumers' points of view:

- Tangible properties: such as physical facilities, tools and the appearance of the staff who present the service
- Trust ability
- Responsibility
- Confiding the customer
- Having mutual understanding and respect the customer
- Now if evaluation is to be done that in what circumstances the customer choose a brand, the answer is that they usually decide according to two fundamental dimensions which include the above-mentioned factors [12]:
- Logical evaluation: including all factors in which the customers expects a desirable "performance from the product. Issues such as performance (high speed of the car), reliability (it always works well) and taste (such as Coca Cola). Indeed this evaluation is related to wisdom decision-making topics.
- Sensational evaluation (or representative).
- Includes all items in which the consumer chooses a brand based on his/her sensational evaluation which may not be so conformed to wisdom criteria.

According to the definition, it is obvious that each of these factors is independent and the consumer may rarely use just on of them. In fact the consumer classifies any brand which is in his/her selection list based on each of these dimensions. This ranking is indeed under the influence of various factors among the most important of which we can point to promotional factors that due to the powerful role of advertisements in localizing a brand, its effect on the selection of a brand is decomposed and the way of its influence on selecting a brand is examined [5].

In marketing literature, the center of attention is on the image of a brand which is studied from the standpoint of the company and the consumer. The corporation viewpoint leads to the improvement of marketing activity which is related to the localizing strategies of the brand and keeping the image of a positive brand. The consumer's viewpoint is formed based on his/her idea about the manipulation of the image and the value of the brand. The importance of a brand in the market is influenced by the ability of companies to evaluating the fact that the consumers' manipulation of the image of the brand and the company's ability to performing strategic localizing management of the brand [7].

Table 1:

Concepts of brand's image	Main definition	Sources
Brand's image is not an understandable simple phenomenon influenced by the advertizing activity of a company, but it is the consumer understands of the whole collection of the brand which is extended by companies. Understanding the brand reflects the partnership of the consumer's knowledge.	operational, symbolic and experimental image	Park, 1986
How is a brand understood by the consumer	Common sense	Keler, 1998 Aaker, 2002

Marketing literature provides large numbers of definitions of brands' images. The following Table presents the concepts of brand's image prepared by various scientists which are currently used. Table 1 shows the concepts of brand's image when performing the analysis.

Other authors [3] indicate a third category which is defined as an experience. These viewpoints relate consumer's feelings and experience to the goods/ services they consume. Kevin Keller (1993-1998) presented more than one theory which is the concept of brand that combines the final evaluation of the brand with the consumer. Brand's viewpoints play an important role in strategic development of a brand [13]. Another researcher – David Aaker [10] - declares that brand's viewpoints have meanings that need to be classified. These meanings should determine the localization of a brand, so brands which are localized well provide an attractive collection of strong viewpoints.

Classification of Brands

Corporate Branding: It is the task of using the title of the company as the product's brand. This process is an attempt to strengthen the value of the company's brand for creating knowledge of the product's brand whose product is a sort of family branding or umbrella branding [11]. For example, Disney brand consists of the word Disney which is the name of some of its products. Among other examples, Pepsi, Coca Cola may be mentioned. Corporation branding may lead to a meaningful saving in a field, since an integrated advertizing program may be used for different products. It also facilitates the acceptance of the new product, because potential buyers are already familiar with its name. In general, corporation branding solution is only useful when the company is already known by a very positive image in the target market [14].

Premium Brand: The value of a premium brand is somewhat higher than other products of the same level.

Average Brand: Is a brand which is targeted with high price tension in a segment of the market.

Fighting Brand: Is a brand that is made absolutely for fighting the threats of the competitors.

Family Branding: Is when the name of a brand is used for several inter-related products.

Individual Branding: Is when all products of a company have different brands.

Brand Leveraging: Is when a company uses the value of a brand related to the existing brand to introduce a new product or production line.

Private Branding: is when big retailers buy mass products for suppliers and put their brands on them.

Co-Branding: Is when two or more brands work together to market their products.

Brand Licensing: Is when a company sells its rights for using a brand to another one to use it for a no-competitive product or another geographical region [15].

Types of Images: Five elements are the most important ones in imaging, i.e. brand imaging, product's image, recalling image, user image and usage image which must be used for making a unit/integrated image [11].

Brand Image: For Starbucks, what is deterministic is its brand, i.e. a black and green citron, coffee packets and dark wooden front offices. The image produced by them indicates that whenever you see them, you certainly would drink high quality fresh fried coffee beans. When you think of Kodak, its trade mark is yellow boxes. During years of experience and advertisement, people have concluded that yellow packaging is a mark of good quality [13]. What is said so far is what forms the core/ material of a brand. During the course of time, brands form according to shapes, operations and events with a special meaning for current or future customers.

They form a bank that whenever to extend you production line or offer another product, you can utilize it [2].

Product Image: Indeed a limited number of companies know what their brands are and where unique quality, uniqueness and identity are located. The identification of this lack of knowledge is generally felt when the company decides to o a mutual fight on its brand besides its products [3].

Identity and Image: What role can identity play that the brand's image cannot? Despite this, companies spend large amounts of money for measuring their brand's images.

The image is at the side of the receiver. It is concentrated on a method in which a certain number of people bring a product, a brand, a political famous person, a company or a country or alike to the image. Image is known as a procedure in which these people decode all signs sent by the brand via products, services and its communication program. This is a concept of reception [15].

Identity is related to the other side, i.e. the sender whose responsibility is to determine the meaning, purpose and ob of the brand. The image and its result is a sort of decoding. In terms of brand's management, identity necessarily exceeds the image. Before drawing an idea in the public's mind, it should be first determined exactly what should be drawn. As Kapeferror's model shows, the customer forms an image via combining all signs sent by the brand (the name of the brand, visual signs, products, advertisements, sponsorship, support and formal declarations and alike).

The image is the result of a decoding, a meaning extraction and a manipulation of signs. Where do these signs come from? Two sources are possible for them in which brand's identity is the most obvious one. However, external effects (noise) along with parasite factors may exist too whose purpose may be to be far away from brand's identity, however it works like a spokesman so that the brand can reach its meaning (ibid).

What are these external effects? First some companies tend to imitate without having a clear idea about their brand's identity. They imitate the communications of their so-called competitors.

Then they forget to try to please all distributions in order to reach their "brand". When in Rome, they do as Romans do!

Conceptual Model of the Research: Kapeferror recommends this model for investigating the effective factors on brand's image by using its effective parameters in all industries. Identity and Image Model tries to examine the brand's image from the standpoint of consumers. In this model, the image is concentrated on a method in which a certain number of people draw a brand product and the like [3].

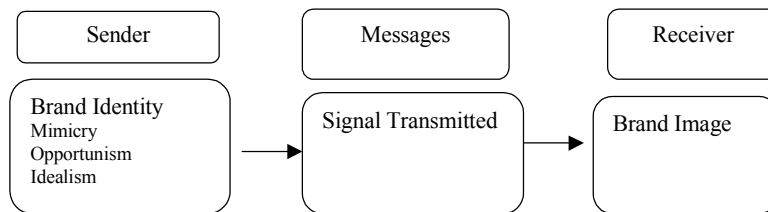
Image is known as a procedure in which these people decode all signs sent by the brand via products, services and its communication program. In this model, the image is received and manipulated by the consumer. On the other hand, identity is related to the other side, i.e. (The Company). The senders' responsibility is to determine the meaning, purpose and ob of the brand.

Brand's image is a collection of beliefs that consumers have about a brand whose result is a sort of viewpoint. In terms of brand's management, identity necessarily exceeds the image. Before drawing an idea in the public's mind, it should be first determined exactly what should be drawn. In this model, the customer forms an image via combining all signs sent by the brand (the name of the brand, visual signs, products, advertisements, sponsorship, support and formal declarations and alike) (ibid).

Brand Identity: The way of the company's communication with its surroundings such as the staffs, customers and stake-holders [6].

Brand Image: The appearance of the company from the standpoints of the people outside the organization.

Mimicry: Copying the competitors' marketing and advertizing policies by the company.



Source: Kapferer J.N; Strategic Brand Management; 2008(13)

Opportunity: The utilization of companies of opportunities and making attractiveness in advertisements in order to encourage the customers to do purchase.

Idealism: Considering a dreamful image of a brand and satisfying the expectations of all customers in an ideal manner.

Signal Transmitted: Messages sent by the company to the target market such as the advertisements of legal representatives and the media.

Evaluation of the Effective Factors on the Brand's Image of Iran Khodro from the Standpoints of the Customers

Research Method: The research method used in this study is descriptive/ applied technique for which a questionnaire is prepared and distributed among the customers. In order to design the questionnaire, the questionnaire of Kapeferer study in 2008 was used which consists of three main parts. The first part is related to brand identity variables, mimicry, opportunity and idealization. The second part includes sent signs and the third one shows the brand's image. The questionnaire is set by seven-item Likert scale the scoring order of which to the questions is from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

In the second part, general questions of the questionnaire are declared that evaluate the responder's sexuality, age, marital status, education and job.

At last the responders of this questionnaire are asked to present their suggestions/ guidance (if any) for presenting better services by Iran Khodro Co. since the questionnaire may be distributed among the responders directly or via mail, the author of this research distributed the questionnaire directly among branches and individuals who buy one of Iran Khodro Co.'s products in the statistical society and then collected them after being completed. In general, collecting the completed questionnaires took about 2 months. The regional spectrum of the study is Khorasan-e-Razavi province. In addition, each participant only answers questions the about sale and after-sale services received from Iran Khodro Co.

The sample of this study consists of Iran Khodro Co.'s customers in Khorasan-e-Razavi province. The value of permissible error in estimating the parameters should be considered in order to determine the number of samples required for estimating the target parameter. The value of permissible error (d) is usually declared as

the difference between the parameter and its estimation. Since the purpose of the study is to estimate the variable's properties ratio, Cocran's formula was used to determine the sample's volume. The method of determining the sample's volume is in the form of the following formula:

$$N = \frac{pqZ_{1-\alpha/2}^2}{d^2}$$

N= Sample's volume

P= Estimation of variable's properties ratio. Therefore the value of P obtained includes (q = 0.28 and p = 0.72).

On the other hand we get:

$$\alpha = 0.05, \frac{\alpha}{2} = 0.025 \Rightarrow Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.96$$

And d = 0.05. Therefore:

$$N = \frac{0.72 \times 0.28 \times 1.96^2}{0.05} = 309$$

According to the above-mentioned information, the sample of this study includes 310 people of Iran Khodro Co.'s customers (users of Iran Khodro Co.'s products in Khorasan-e-Razavi province).

Validity: Validity means whether the measurement tool can measure the properties/ specifications to which the tool is designed for or not. The importance of validity is that improper/ insufficient measurements may invalidate/ instable any research.

Different types of the validity of the research's variables were examined by using 28 questions with a sign in five main parts of the questionnaire according to structure validity method in terms of factor analysis technique.

Reliability (Stability): Test's reliability is a scale by which the degree of reliability of the results of the test is determined. The main method of estimating stability coefficient is Cronbach alpha

$$\alpha = \left(\frac{k}{k-1} \right) \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k S_i^2}{St^2} \right)$$

In this study, Cronbach alpha method is a test sample consisting of 15 items was used whose stability coefficient is obtained separately for each scale. It is worth mentioning that the total stability of the tool was calculated by Cronbach alpha method which is equal to 0.825.

Table 2: Cronbach alpha of each variable

No.	Variable Name	Cronbach alpha	Questions Examined
1	Brand Identity	0.930	1-6
2	Mimicry	0.685	7-11
3	Opportunism	0.598	12-16
4	Idealism	0.797	17-21
5	Signal Transmitted	0.912	22-24
6	Brand Image	0.843	25-28

Table 3: Distribution of the sexuality of the responders of the questionnaire

Gender	Absolute Distribution	Relative Distribution Percent
Male	205	66.5
Female	105	33.5
Total	310	100

Table 4: Age Distribution of the Users of Iran Khodro Co.'S Products

Relative distribution percent	Absolute distribution	Age
8.1	25	< 25
57.7	179	25-34
23.2	72	35-44
9.7	30	45-60
1.3	4	> 60
100	310	total

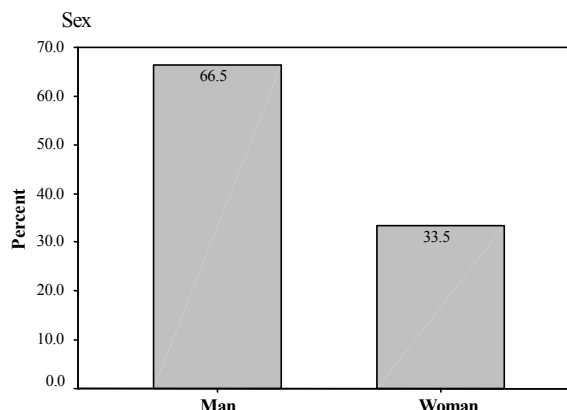
Sexuality Statistical Distribution:

Table 3 shows the distribution of the sexuality of the users of Iran Khodro's Co.'s users in the statistical society.

Table 4: Indicates the age distribution of the users of Iran Khodro Co.'s products

- Research subject: In terms of subject, this research evaluates the effective factors on the image of Iran Khodro Co.'s brand by using Kapeferror's Identity and Image Model in Iran Khodro Co.
- Statistical society: the society under investigation in this research consists of the customers of Iran Khodro Co.
- Sample's volume: the sample of this research consists of 310 people of Iran Khodro Co.'s customers. In addition, its sampling method is multi-stage cluster.
- Research tool: this research uses a questionnaire tool in which 28 questions are presented.

Researches' Purpose: The main purpose of this research is to determine the effective factors on the image of Iran Khodro Co.'s brand. For this purpose, five main factors are identified which affect the image of the brand based



Graph 1: Column graph of the percentage of Iran Khodro Co.'s users according to their sexuality Age statistical distribution

on which (he identity of brand, imitation, opportunity, idealization, signs sent and the image of the brand formed) some assumptions were presented in order to be examined.

Assumptions of the Research:

- There is a meaningful relationship between the identity of the brand and the signs sent from the media.
- There is a meaningful relationship between imitation and the signs sent from the media.
- There is a meaningful relationship between opportunity and the signs sent from the media.
- There is a meaningful relationship between idealization and the signs sent from the media.
- There is a meaningful relationship between the signs sent from the media and the image of the brand.

Assumptions Test Methods: Structural Equations modeling (SEM) method was used to examine the assumptions of the research which was analyzed by using SPSS and Lizrel software method.

The Result of the First Assumption: It is clear by examining the questions of this assumption that brand's identity has a positive effect on the signs sent from the media and the theory of brand's identity and the signs sent from the media is accepted.

The value of the path coefficient ν values of brand's identity on the signs sent in Iran Khodro Co. as much as $T = 3.45$ is on a positive/ meaningful level, therefore the above-mentioned assumption is accepted.

We can conclude that zero assumption is rejected, while the opposite one, i.e. the existence of a meaningful relationship between brand's identity and the signs sent is accepted.

The Result of the Second Assumption: It is clear by examining the questions of this assumption that imitation has a positive effect on the signs sent from the media.

The value of the path coefficient variables of brand's identity on the signs sent in Iran Khodro Co. as much as $T = 3.76$ on $P < 0.05$ level is on a positive/meaningful level, therefore the above-mentioned assumption is accepted. We can conclude that zero assumption is rejected, while the opposite one, i.e. the company's copy of the innovations/policies of competitors is directly effective on the messages sent to the target market is accepted.

The Result of the Third Assumption: It is clear by examining the questions of this assumption that opportunity does not have a positive effect on the signs sent from the media. The results of the examination of assumption 3 show that the variable path coefficient of opportunity on the signs sent to the consumers of Iran Khodro Co. as much as $T = -5.45$ on $P < 0.05$ level is on a negative/meaningless level, therefore zero assumption is accepted as an accurate assumption with probability of 95%. The utilization of opportunities and advertisements by the company is not directly effective on messages sent by the company to the target market.

The Result of the Forth Assumption: It is clear by examining the questions of this assumption that idealization has a positive effect on the signs sent from the media. Indeed the declaration of satisfying all customers' expectations and the imagination of an ideal brand on messages sent to the target market is confirmed.

According to the information/results of the test done in assumption 4 it is clear that the path coefficient variable of idealization on the signs sent as much as $T = 7.14$ on $P < 0.05$ level is on a positive/meaningful level, therefore the above-mentioned assumption is accepted and the opposite one, i.e. the existence of a meaningful relationship between idealization and the signs sent is accepted.

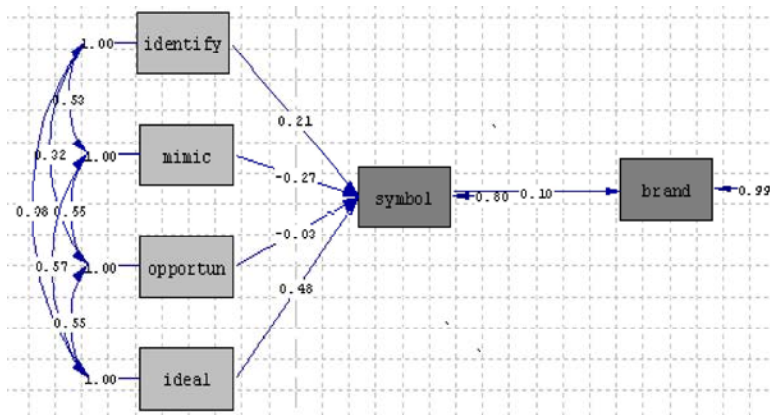
The Result of the Fifth Assumption: It is clear by examining the questions of this assumption that the signs sent are not directly effective on the image of the brand. According to the information/results of the table and the test done in assumption 5 it is clear that the internal path coefficient variable of the signs sent as much as $T = -1.68$ on $P < 0.05$ level is on a negative/meaningless level, therefore the zero assumption is accepted and the opposite one is rejected, i.e. the messages sent to the target market are not directly effective on customers.

The following graph shows Estimate Factor Analyses values which are values that show raw scores of the predicted factor. These scores are inserted into the formula and than Lizrel software estimates them as T test statistics observed for the researcher.

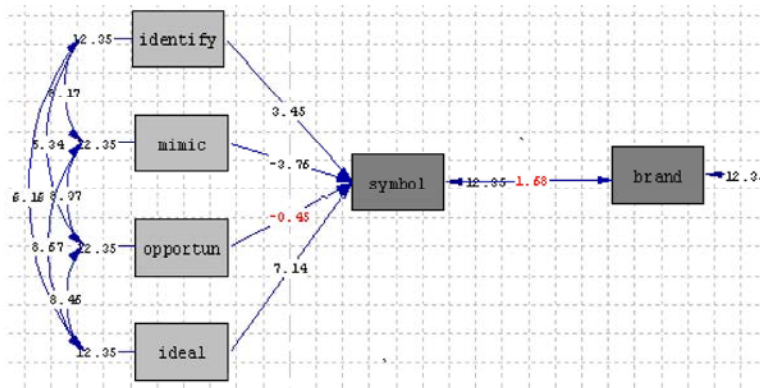
Here a T value observed is obtained via the values of the raw data for every parameter whose analysis is as below: when the number of samples is higher than 30 and T value observed is 2-5, the relationship obtained is meaningful with the reliability over 0.95. The following graph shows T values of the research's model.

Statistics of the accuracy of the model's fitting are calculated by Lisrel software. Table below shows the statistics of the accuracy of the model's fitting.

The above table indicates that the pattern/model has a good relative fit to the data.



Graph 2: Estimated values of analysis factors



Graph 3: Meaningfulness values of path coefficients between the research's variables

Table 5: Statistics of the accuracy of the model's fitting

Value	Fitting statistics
21.79	K2 square
98	Degree of freedom (DOF)
0	Meanfulness level
0.12	RMSEA
0.060	RMR
0.98	GFI
0.88	AGFI

Table 6: Covariance/cohesion matrix of the research variables (p-value < 0.05) **

Variable of the research(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
1-Brand Identity	3/21	5/28	4/39	1/59	3/80	4/30
2-Mimicry	0.5539**	6/29	5/23	2/50	6/26	3/2
3-Opportunity	0.690**	0.870**	5.58	2.23	4.33	5.11
4-Idealism	0.363**	0.523**	0.224**	4.20	2.45	4.41
5- Signal Transmitted	0.497**	0.328**	0.457**	0.264**	12.64	2.21
6- Brand Image	0.518	0.416	0.71	0.618	0.556	5.16

Cohesion Matrix of the Research Variables: The basis of analysis in Lisrel program is covariance/cohesion matrix between internal and external variables.

Table 4-6 shows the covariance or cohesion matrix between internal variables.

The data on the diagonal of the matrix and above it show covariance and under it the cohesion matrix between the research's (internal and external) variables. The values of common distribution between internal variables (covariance) are considerable according to Table 4-6. In addition, the information obtained from cohesion matrix (data under the diagonal of the matrix) show that all relationships among internal and external variables are meaningful.

Results and Recommendations: It is clear according to the extensive conditions of business competitions that the lack of investigation of the image of a brand leads to destructive results. Brands.

Brands have become such important that perhaps today we cannot find any product without a brand. Brands help the buyer identify the products which are useful in different ways. In addition, a brand may give information about the product to the buyer. A buyer who always purchases a product with a sort of brand knows well that whenever he/she buys these products, they would have given properties, advantages and quality. Therefore considering effective factors on the customer's mind when selecting a brand in automobile industry, especially Iran Khodro Co. that anyway considers the management of its brand seems very necessary [3].

According to the results of the research and experiences gained during the research, the author presents the following suggestions:

- The necessity of shifting the viewpoints of senior mangers (especially operation managers) from production- orientation to market-orientation
- Having an ideal/goal to create/make a customer-oriented brand
- Stability/integration in using the purpose, target and values governing a brand as the necessary infrastructures and its improvement
- The existence of belief and commitments of the senior managers of organizations (especially operation managers) in making a brand and their direct participation in this job [9]
- Intelligent leadership which is deemed as the most important factor of the success of brands in the future
- Modification of the combination of the board and the membership of an expert in their marketing committee.
- Modification of the organizational structure along the management of the brand.

- Responsiveness to the expectations of the public and the customers.
- Control/administrating of Iran Khodro Co. authorized dealers in sale processes and after-sale services.
- Preventing advertisements without the necessary support and therefore making expectations in the customers.
- Decision-making about marketing strategies and the brand based on the findings of the market's researches.
- Continuously measurement of changes in needs, demands and behaviors of the consumers.

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