

Identifying and Prioritizing the Factors Affecting the Customer's Loyalty to the Brand of Audio and Video Products, A Case Study of Sony and Sanam Brands.

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ABSTRACT

The current research investigated and identified factors affecting customer loyalty to Sony and Sanam brands, and also evaluated the level of loyalty to Sony and Sanam brands. The statistical population included customers of Sony and Sanam brand audio-visual devices in Tehran, among which 268 questionnaires were distributed to Sanam consumers and 300 questionnaires were distributed to Sony consumers using a stratified and accessible method. The research method in this research is exploratory, field, applied, and descriptive, the sampling method is accessible and stratified, and the statistical population is unlimited. After collecting data and analyzing them using factor analysis in the SPSS environment, factors such as the country-of-origin image, brand switching cost, product quality, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference groups, variety of models, brand awareness, hedonic utility, matching brand personality with consumer personality, product performance, advertising, distribution channel, brand trust, price, seller behavior, and brand reputation were identified. Then, using multivariable regression and data analysis in SPSS showed a significant relationship between the factors affecting customer loyalty and Sanam brand loyalty. In addition, the results of data analysis showed a significant relationship between the factors affecting customer loyalty and Sony brand loyalty, but on the contrary, there was no significant relationship between brand switching cost, hedonic utility, advertising, distribution channel, and brand reputation with Sony brand loyalty.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Audio and video products, Sony and Sanam brand

INTRODUCTION

A loyal customer repeatedly buys goods and services from a seller and has a positive attitude towards him, and strongly recommends his acquaintances to buy from him. A 5% increase in customer loyalty increases the profit of the company by 25 to 85 percent. This percentage is called loyalty cost. For this reason, wise and far-sighted businessmen always rely on the depth of relationships during their business relationships and consider these customers as their main allies and deal with them in complete honesty and trust because they are sure that they will fall if the behavior is suspicious (Mohammadi 2003).

According to Acker, the value of a brand is more dependent on the number of people who regularly buy, and this is the concept of brand loyalty. Frequent customers have considerable value because they create a regular flow for the company. Therefore, the concept of brand loyalty is a vital part of brand value. There is a direct and positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand value (Davis, 2009). These all show the high importance of customer loyalty for a company. Strong brands (brands with more loyal customers) help companies to create personality and identity in the market (Elena, 2005). In addition, this issue helps companies to have less vulnerability in competitive activities and have higher profit margins, support, and development of brand opportunities (Eva, 2009).

Novo defines brand loyalty as follows: Loyalty is defined as the customers' willingness to choose a product or a business among other products to satisfy a particular need (Frank and 2006). Loyal customers have many advantages. They help organizations predict the flow of sales and profits, and also buy more goods and services to increase the organization's income. Customers who are familiar with the organization's brand most likely told it to their relatives and friends and are considered in the feedback and evaluation cycle of the organization's product, which has a significant role in today's business environment. (Hassin, 2008).

The problem is that Iranian companies do not believe in branding and strengthening loyalty to their brands, or they cannot perfectly implement it. Seemingly, Sanam company, which is one of the producers of audio and video equipment, has not been successful in this field among market competitors. Many buyers and customers in the Iranian market tend to buy foreign goods and even avoid domestic goods and products.

This research was planned and carried out due to the dominant trend of customers and consumers in the audio and video field towards the products of Japan and Korea. This issue is happening while several Iranian companies have also entered this field and started manufacturing televisions and audio and video equipment with Iranian brands. The importance of brand loyalty increases due to the orientation of consumers and this research aims to address this issue.

It is often believed among consumers and customers in the Iranian market that foreign products are better than Iranian products and the quality of foreign products is much higher than Iranian products. This issue is much more in industries such as textile, audio and video, automotive, pharmaceutical and electronic, and especially technological goods. This belief indicates that companies and producers of goods and services in Iran have not been able to create loyalty among their customers. Based on this, the current research aims to identify and prioritize the factors affecting customer loyalty to the brand of audio and video products, a case study of Sony and Sanam brands.

Customer loyalty

when it comes to relationships with customers, it is necessary to mention loyalty, which is at the center of developing relationships with customers. As the glue keeps a collection together regularly for a long period, it is also agreed that true customer loyalty to a company is a very valuable asset for companies (Jin, 2008). Although much of the literature related to customer loyalty include brand loyalty, it is necessary to mention that a very broad field of action for brand loyalty can be imagined, from re-purchases to customer retention and long-term relationships. Loyalty can be differently investigated for example showing a preference and commitment to a company in front of competitors (Martina 2006), repurchasing a product or service from a company (Norjaya 2007), and increasing the exchange with the company in the future.

Dick and Basu identified the nature of customer loyalty and distinguished between "disloyalty", "hidden loyalty", "fake loyalty" and "real loyalty". Many companies consider their customer's loyalty to be real, but the reality is that many consumers have fake loyalty within themselves, which is shown as behavioral loyalty and is based usually on tangible rewards. This issue represents behavioral loyalty, not attitudinal loyalty. Therefore, companies should consider programs for those customers who are truly loyal, rather than targeting all of their customers (Saper 2007).

Acker defines brand loyalty as the degree of dependence of the consumer's feeling on the target brand and considers 6 dimensions: consumer's willingness to re-purchase, price advantages, satisfaction rate, switching costs, preference for other brands, and amount of brand commitment. Oliver also defines brand loyalty, as when the customer's loyalty to the brand originates from the degree of his commitment to the brand, and this commitment leads to re-purchases by the consumer. Therefore, loyalty can be defined from two attitudinal and behavioral aspects (Bijin 2009).

Champitaz defines a loyal customer as "a customer who always and full-time uses a company's products and services to satisfy all or part of his needs." A loyal customer will turn to competing companies only in special cases to satisfy their needs. For example, when a chain hotel or a bank does not have any branches where the customer is, the customer may turn to competitors to meet their needs (Champitaz 2004). Elsewhere, brand loyalty is defined as "preferential, attitudinal, and behavioral responses to one or more brands in the form of a product or service expressed by a customer over a period (Beth, 2008).

Customer loyalty is a complex concept and includes different dimensions expressed by behavioral and attitudinal approaches. The literature of various researches mostly emphasizes the behavioral dimension of loyalty. Behavioral definitions are expressed based on repurchase behavior such as purchase amount, and repeat purchase (number of purchase times), and can be measured through observation techniques. The model presented by Hellbrook in 2001 indicates that behavioral loyalty leads to greater market share, while attitudinal loyalty leads to brand valuation by customers (Pierre 2009).

Factors affecting customer loyalty



1. Customer satisfaction

Regarding the concept of customer satisfaction, marketing theorists have presented different definitions. Cutler defines customer satisfaction as the degree to which a company's actual performance meets customer expectations. Cutler states that the customer feels satisfied if the company's performance meets the customer's expectations, otherwise, he will feel dissatisfied (Diwandari and Zarif 1388, 188). Customers who are satisfied and happy with their buying or receiving services are less willing to change their seller and get their goods and services from another source. A lot of happiness and satisfaction creates not only a logical preference but also a type of emotional attachment to the brand name of goods and services. This emotional bond leads to very high customer loyalty (Jung Kun Park 2009).

Jamal and Nasser define customer satisfaction as the feeling or attitude of a customer towards a product or service after using it. These two researchers state that customer satisfaction is the main result of the marketer's activity, acting as a link between the different stages of the consumer's buying behavior. For example, if customers are satisfied with certain services, they will likely repeat their purchase. In addition, satisfied customers are likely to talk to others about their experiences, which results in positive word-of-mouth advertising. On the other hand, unsatisfied customers are likely to abandon their relationship with the company and get involved in negative word-of-mouth advertising. In addition, behaviors such as repeated purchases and word-of-mouth advertising directly affect the survival and profitability of a company.

2. Trust

Price competition and product innovation increase as soon as markets mature. Companies are forced to emphasize less on products and services and more on customer relationships. Companies may successfully build loyalty to develop and enhance customer relationships, while companies may pursue several strategies to build loyalty. Some experts presented trust as one of the basic factors in building relationships with customers (Russell 2007).

3. Brand equity

The concept and nature of brand equity have been studied from different aspects and with different goals. It is possible to study brand equity from the point of view of the manufacturer, retailer, and customer. Manufacturers pay attention to brand equity because of its strategic values, but investors consider the financial value of the brand.

Supporters of the financial aspect consider brand equity from a financial perspective and offer a different definition: Brand equity is the cash flows that branded products generate for the company more than non-branded products (Shang 2002).

When marketing managers talk about "brand equity", they mean "brand equity from the customer's point of view", which distinguishes it from the financial view of the brand. Brand equity from the customer's point of view looks at the brand category from the customer's point of view, whether it is an individual or an organization. This group of experts believes that a brand is valuable if it has value from the customer's point of view. In addition, the power of a



brand is in the learned, feelings, seen, and heard of customers as a result of experiencing the brand over time. If the brand has no meaning for the customer, its other definitions are essentially meaningless. Therefore, Keller (2003) defines brand equity from the customer's point of view as follows: "The different effect that brand awareness creates on the customer's response to the marketing of that brand".

David Acker (1991) defined brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities that are associated with a brand, its name, and logo, and add or detract from the value provided by the product or service to the customer or company". "Two dominant professors of Stanford University have conducted separate research in the field of brand and branding and have published books and articles in this field, which constitute the source and reference for their subsequent research. Almost all the scientific research articles published in international prestigious journals have used their definitions and conceptual models. David Acker (1991) names the dimensions of brand equity as brand awareness, brand connections, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other brand assets. In addition, Keller (1993) has two main approaches to measuring brand equity (direct and indirect) and emphasizes two components of brand equity from the customer's point of view: brand awareness and brand image. Keller's direct approach includes marketing measures such as distribution channels and effective marketing communications and the indirect approach of customer response considers various elements of the company's marketing plan (Zohre, 1981).

Marketing alone cannot create lasting loyalty. Customers remain loyal due to the promotional activities and marketing programs, and the value they receive. The value is created by a set of features such as product quality, service, sales support, and availability. Therefore, marketing mainly controls the tasks of all departments of an organization so that their cooperation leads to providing a unique value and creates a higher value that ultimately leads to customer loyalty.

4. Quality of goods and service

Satisfaction requires the experience of consuming goods or services in the past and depends on the price but the quality does not require previous experience and can be understood before consumption and depends on the price. The price acts as an indicator of quality when little information is available to the customer and it is difficult for him to judge. According to Joseph Juran (1998), Quality has two main components: To what extent a product or service meets the customer's needs and to what extent a product or service is flawless (Pu Tsang 2010).

5. Trust

Morgan and Hunt expressed the necessity of trust in the formation of relational commitment between customers and organizations. They define the trust concept as follows: "Trust exists when a party to the exchange has confidence in the credibility and honesty of the other party." A customer should ensure that a supplier company has considered his interests when consuming and using the product or service. This confidence exists only when the consumer perceives the product or service offered as a reliable and high-honest option. These two basic characteristics of the trust-based relationship between the product or service provider and the consumer are closely related to characteristics such as stability, competence, honesty, fairness,



responsibility, helpfulness, and benevolence (Hossein Hue 2006).

To create trust, companies are required to expand their interactions with customers beyond business relationships based on transactions and exchanges. The most reliable companies focus their efforts on establishing and building a supportive relationship with customers, where both parties feel that they have worked for success. According to experts, understanding the following drivers may facilitate the creation of effective techniques for expanding customer relationships and creating trust.

Brand trust is the core of brand equity because it is a key factor in any successful long-term relationship. Trust is the main driver of loyalty because it creates exchange relationships with high value. In this field, brand loyalty is not focused on repeated purchases, but is focused on the internal positions and attitudes of consumers regarding the brand. As a result, brand loyalty is a field for the continuous process of maintaining communication and value created by the brand trust. According to the review of research literature, the following items were suggested in Figure (1).



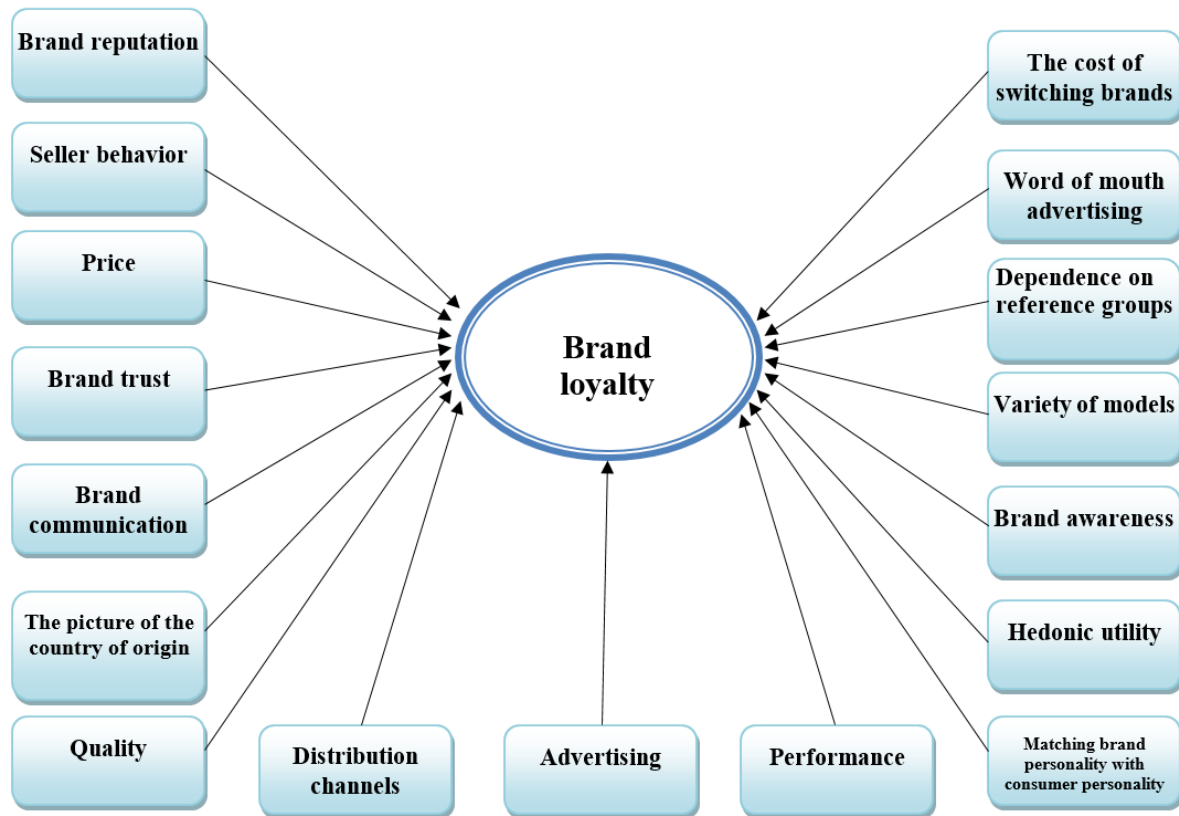


Figure 1: The model presented by the researcher

Research method

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive in terms of method. The present research is exploratory research at the same time because it examines and finds the factors influencing brand loyalty. In this research, the statistical population will be the customers of Sony and Sanam branded audio-visual devices in Tehran. The sample size is also considered to be at least 500 samples according to using factor analysis technique and 2 investigated brands. A questionnaire was distributed among 300 Sony brand customers and 268 Sanam brand customers in this research and information were collected. Among the distributed questionnaires, 18 and 22 questionnaires were returned regarding Sony and Sanam brands, respectively.

In this research, the sampling method is available and stratified, and the statistical population is unlimited. A questionnaire was used to collect the data for this research. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability and validity of the research tool. In this research, factor analysis, multi-variable regression, single-variable regression, and Laserl or Imus software were used to analyze the data.



Findings

All 281 respondents to the questionnaire, who were consumers of the Sony brand, answered the questions of gender, age, and education. Four people have not mentioned their income and 8 people have not mentioned their job. The highest frequency was men with the number of 234 people out of 281, which includes 83.3% of all Sony brand respondents. In addition, 47 people were women, which is equivalent to 16.7% of the respondents related to the Sony brand. The highest frequency was with the number of 101 people out of 281 people who had a bachelor's degree. This amount is equivalent to 35.9% of all Sony brand respondents. Sixty respondents had a diploma education, which is equivalent to 22.1%. Fifty-two people, equivalent to 18.5% of the respondents, had associate degrees. Thirty-nine people had a bachelor's degree, which is equivalent to 13.9%. Finally, 27 people, equivalent to 9.6%, had a master's degree or higher, which is the least frequent. The highest frequency with number of 89 people out of 281 people had an income of 750 to 950 thousand tomans. The highest frequency with 146 people out of 281 people had free jobs. The highest frequency with the number of 215 people out of 245 people were men, which includes 87.8% of all Sanam brand respondents.

In this research, the questions related to the independent variables of the research were 85 questions, which have been factored 17 times. These 17 factors explain and cover 66.887% of the total variance. Finally, after the factor analysis and according to the content of the questions in the questionnaire, the indicators belonging to each factor were extracted from the questionnaire as follows and were named the determined factors. These factors include the country-of-origin image, brand switching cost, product quality, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference groups, variety of models, brand awareness, hedonic utility, brand personality matching with consumer personality, product performance, advertising, distribution channel, brand trust, price, seller behavior, and brand reputation.

Table 1: Loyalty to the Sony brand

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error in the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.839(a)	0.704	0.678	0.37375	1.966

According to Table (1), the correlation between the 17 identified factors with brand loyalty is equal to 0.839 according to the R-value. In addition, the identified factors explain Sony brand loyalty to the extent of 0.704, which shows that according to the previous research, up to 0.704 variances by the factors of the model explain Sony brand loyalty.

Table 2: Correlation coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	Regression constant value	4.375	0.029		150.129	0.000
	Country-of-origin image	0.198	0.032	0.264	6.273	0.000
	The cost of switching brands	0.003	0.028	0.005	0.118	0.906
	Product Quality	0.228	0.034	0.285	6.646	0.000
	word of mouth advertising	0.334	0.030	0.463	10.995	0.000
	Brand communication	0.218	.029	0.316	7.514	0.000
	Dependence on reference groups	0.181	.030	0.264	6.089	0.000
	Variety of models	0.110	0.033	0.145	3.327	0.001
	Brand awareness	0.241	0.030	0.337	8.085	0.000
	Hedonic utility	0.054	0.032	0.076	1.715	0.088
	Matching brand personality with consumer personality	0.082	0.034	0.104	2.403	0.017
	Product performance	0.141	0.033	0.176	4.332	0.000
	Advertising	-0.027	0.033	-0.037	-0.815	0.416
	Distribution channels	0.039	0.026	0.064	1.532	0.127
	Brand trust	0.101	0.030	0.142	3.369	0.001
	Price	-0.141	0.033	-0.186	-4.309	0.000
	Seller behavior	0.055	0.025	0.089	2.178	0.031
	Brand reputation	0.018	0.027	0.028	0.670	0.504

a Dependent Variable: VABASTE



In the output of Table (2) and in column B, constant value and regression coefficients are respectively presented. Therefore, the regression equation is as follows, but the equality of the β coefficients and the constant value must be tested with zero, the results of which are observed in the sig column, and its explanations are given below.

(Estimated) $Y = Y = 4.375 + 0.198 x_1 + 0.0003 x_2 + 0.2280 x_3 + 0.334 x_4 + 0.218 x_5 + 0.181 x_6 + 0.110 x_7 + 0.241 x_8 + 0.054 x_9 + 0.082 x_{10} + 0.141x_{11} - 0.027 x_{12} + 0.039 x_{13} + 0.101 x_{14} - 0.141x_{15} + 0.055 x_{16} + 0.018 x_{17}$

Table 3: Customer Loyalty to Sanam Brand

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error in the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.907(a)	0.823	0.801	0.41781	1.769

According to Table (3), the degree of correlation between 17 identified factors, including the country-of-origin image, the cost of switching brands, the quality of products, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference variables, variety of models, brand awareness, hedonic utility, matching brand personality with consumer personality, product performance, advertising, distribution channel, brand trust, price, seller behavior and brand reputation with brand loyalty is equal to 0.907 according to the amount of R. In addition, the identified factors explain brand loyalty to the extent of 0.823, which shows that according to the previous research, up to 0.823 variances by the factors of the model explain brand loyalty.

Table 4: Correlation coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	Regression constant value	4.459	0.044		101.993	0.000
	Country-of-origin image	0.164	0.031	0.199	5.295	0.000
	The cost of switching brands	0.048	0.043	0.049	1.125	0.262
	Product Quality	0.180	0.030	0.230	5.981	0.000
	word of mouth advertising	0.362	0.032	0.425	11.126	0.000
	Brand communication	0.254	0.035	0.283	7.307	0.000

		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower
Brand loyalty	Equality variances assumed	14.137	0.000	-4.927	524	0.000	-0.3286	0.06670	-.45965	-0.19758
	Equality variances not assumed			-4.833	447.925	0.000	-0.3286	0.06800	-.46224	-0.19498

According to Sig Table (5), the mean equality test with the assumption of variance inequality is less than 5%. Therefore, the loyalty to the Sony brand is more than the loyalty to the Sanam brand.

Conclusion

The current research aims to identify and prioritize the factors affecting customer loyalty to the brand of audio and video products, a case study of Sony and Sanam brands. After collecting data and analyzing them using factor analysis in the SPSS environment, the following factors were identified: country-of-origin image, cost of switching brands, product quality, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference groups, variety of models, brand awareness, hedonic utility, brand personality matching with consumer personality, product performance, advertising, distribution channel, trust in the brand, price, seller's behavior, and brand reputation.

These 17 factors explain and cover 66.887 percent of the total variance and have specific values of 19.826, 6.109, 5.162, 4.361, 2.947, 2.573, and 482. 2, 2.017, 1.680, 1.644, 1.343, 1.264, 1.201, 1.148, 1.065, 1.029 and 1.002. In addition, the ratio of variances explained by these 17 factors is 23.325, 7.187, 6.073, 5.130, 3.467, 3.027, 2.921, 2.373, 1.976. 1.934, 1.580, 1.487, 1.413, 1.350, 1.253, 1.210, 1.179.

Regarding the prioritization of factors affecting brand loyalty, the equity of the first to seventeenth factors was examined. The results showed that the country-of-origin image factor with an equity of 19.826 ranks first and has the greatest impact on brand loyalty. The cost of switching brands with equity of 6.109 is ranked second in terms of intensity of influence on

brand loyalty. The quality of products with an equity of 5.162 ranks third in influencing brand loyalty.

Regarding what extent each of the identified factors explains the dependent variable of customers' loyalty to Sanam and Sony brands, data analysis using SPSS software showed a significant relationship between country of origin image, product quality, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference groups, variety of models, brand awareness, hedonic utility, matching brand personality with consumer personality, product performance, advertising, distribution channel, trust in brand, price and brand reputation with loyalty to the Sanam brand. On the contrary, no significant relationship was found between the cost of switching brands and the seller's behavior with loyalty to the Sanam brand. In other words, the variables of brand switching cost and seller's behavior do not affect loyalty to the Sanam brand. In addition, the results of data analysis showed a significant relationship between the country-of-origin image, product quality, word-of-mouth advertising, brand communication, dependence on reference groups, variety of models, brand awareness, brand personality matching with consumer personality, product performance, brand trust, price and seller's behavior with Sony brand loyalty. On the contrary, no significant relationship was found between brand switching cost, hedonic utility, advertising, distribution channel, and brand reputation with Sony brand loyalty. In other words, the variables of brand switching cost, hedonic utility, advertising, distribution channel, and brand reputation do not affect Sony brand loyalty.

Based on the T-test, a significant difference was found between the brand loyalty of Sony and Sanam, and the brand loyalty of Sony is more than the brand loyalty of Sanam. This result shows the importance of the efforts and attention of the managers and planners of the company Sanam competes with foreign companies in acquiring and maintaining loyal customers.

In Hunt and Morgan's research, trust is known as one of the factors affecting loyalty. The current research introduced trust as one of the influencing factors on brand loyalty. In addition, Matzler introduced brand trust in his model as one of the influencing factors on brand loyalty. Acker presented a conceptual framework of brand equity (1991), in which value, trust, and switching cost were recognized as influencing factors on loyalty and it is consistent with the findings of this research. Based on Birley and Aydin's findings, switching cost was introduced as one of the factors affecting brand loyalty, and the findings of this research are also consistent with their results.

According to Martins, Montaner, and Pina, product performance is one of the factors affecting loyalty, and the findings of this study are consistent with their study. According to the findings of Weiss et al, brand reputation affects customer loyalty. The findings of the current research are also consistent with the findings of Weiss. Jeffrey Steven Pudushan, whose research results were published in the Journal of Consumer Marketing, states that word-of-mouth advertising is one of the most important factors affecting brand loyalty, and the findings of the present research are also consistent with their findings.



This research tried to obtain a reliable result by using sufficient sample population information, but it is still limited to access this statistical sample population. Sony's audio and visual product sales managers and employees can be aware of the oral messages that are circulating and transmitted in society about audio and visual products by examining the level of consumer satisfaction and obtaining their feedback. It is also possible to systematically collect feedback from consumers by compiling and implementing a program. For example, through this company's website, it is possible to collect consumer opinions and classify and analyze consumer feedback information and transfer it to the relevant managers for analysis to make the necessary decisions to improve the products and services of the products. The casts in the sale of audio and video products of Sony company can also ask customers for their opinions in the after-sales service and communication with customers department. This feedback request can be obtained by sending a feedback form via e-mail or by post and other methods to consumers who have purchased the product and have used it for some time. It is also possible to allocate prizes for filling and sending these forms, which are distributed among consumers to measure word-of-mouth messages(word-of-mouth advertising).

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