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## THE CASUAL RELATION BETWEEN BRANDS' EMOTIONAL ASPECTS AND BRAND LOYALTY AMONG SPORT CONSUMERS

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### ABSTRACT

This research is concerned with investigation of the relation between brands' emotional aspects and brand loyalty among the consumers of sportswear brands in the city of Tehran. In terms of purpose, it's an applied research and in terms of nature, it's a correlative-casual research carried out under field methods. The population is consisted of the entire consumers of sportswear in the city of Tehran who purchase clothes with special and credible brands such as Adidas, Nike and Puma. Among the population, a number of 386 individuals were selected as the sample through a random sampling method. The data collection instrument was a standard questionnaire with calculated validity of 0.81 and a suitable level of reliability. Results were drawn through modeling of structural equations and the software of SPSS and Amos Graphics. Conclusions revealed that all three variables of brand passion, self-link and emotional attachment have positive and meaningful effects on brand loyalty among consumers. In addition, with respect to calculated route coefficients from the method of modeling structural equations, it can be said that the share of the variable of brand passion is more than the other two variables in consumers' brand loyalty (the route coefficient is larger) and also the share of emotional attachment is less (the route coefficient is smaller) than two other variables.

**Keywords:** Emotional Aspects, Consumer Behavior, Brand Loyalty, Self-Link, Emotional Attachment, Brand Passion

### INTRODUCTION

Today, the most obvious professional skill of marketers might be their capability in formation, maintenance and promotion of trade marks. Determination of a trade mark is the art and the basic of marketing. The trade-mark provides the seller or producer with the opportunity to be known. A trade-mark could be a name, a symbol or any other type of identifier. According to trade-mark related regulations, the seller is granted with a life-time privilege for using the brand name.

A brand name necessitates the permanent commitment of a seller for providing a series of special features, advantages or services for his costumers. The very best trade-marks include quality assurance, although a brand-name could be the symbol of even more complicated subjects. A brand-name includes certain components and dimensions. The nature and identity of the brand is the essence of the brand or in other words, is the most important and unique features of the brand (Bavelby, 1979).

#### **Customer's Interest and Brand Passion**

Almediya and Nick (2005) have shown that when a customer is happy with a brand, he is then likely to develop an emotional attachment with that specific brand. Kumar (1996) has stated that customer's interest is an emotional level which is determined at high levels of joy and amusement in terms of any consumption. Therefore, it is suggested that this effective customer interest can turn into passion, because brand passion is a potential and effective focus (Carla and Ahoy, 2006).

#### **Brand Passion and the Intent for Paying High Prices**

If in terms of emotions, someone is attached to a brand, then he or she is likely to pay high prices for purchasing from that brand (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Brand passion is a combination of feeling and intimacy for a brand (Carla and Ahoy, 2006). Therefore, if the consumer loves a brand, then he or she will also pay higher prices for that specific brand.

## **Research Article**

### **Brand Passion and Brand Loyalty**

If a consumer starts loving a brand, he or she will become extremely emotional regarding the brand and formation of intimacy between him/her and the brand (Carla and Ahoy, 2006). As a result of this strong emotional attachment, they continue purchasing goods from their loved brand without considering other brands. Therefore, passion and love for brand is oriented towards loyalty (Carla and Ahoy, 2006).

In most countries and for most people, brands are symbols of consumer society. They shape their power through advertisements and being committed towards consumers. Today, an inseparable and close relation is witnessed among brands and people.

Loyalty to a trade-mark means repetition of purchase which is caused by several processes. In other words, repeated purchase is not merely an optional reaction, it's rather the result of psychological, emotional and normal factors.

The role of psychological skills for measurement of psychological activities, especially its mental aspects has gained more importance than other skills. Therefore, issues of Motivation, self-confidence, concentration, imagination, controlling psychological states and purposiveness which are the variables of psychological skills are highly applicable in sports activities (Yahola and Hatfield, 1994; Stephen, 1999; Taqian, 2002).

Shimp and Madan (1988) have proposed a conceptual model of relations between subject and consumer which is inspired from the triangular love (passion) theory. In this theory Steinberg's three components of passion (intimacy, emotion and decision, collaboration) are considered as the components of tendency in the concept of consumption. These three components are potentially related to the feeling of loyalty and are also stated regarding the issue of consumption. Recently, marketing researchers have performed researches regarding the concept of brand passion. Fournier (1998) has answered a question in this context. The question that if consumers can also feel love or passion towards brands too? He explained that feelings are likely to be present and also consumers may establish strong relations with a brand. Carla and Ahoy have defined brand passion as a degree of conjunction of passionate feelings which a person holds for a special brand. Consumers' passion includes the following features: 1) emotion for the brand, 2) being attached to the brand, 3) positive evaluation of the brand, 4) positive emotions in responding to the brand and 5) clarification of passion for the brand.

Rizzo *et al.*, (2012) carried out a research aimed at analysis of sales and consumers' comprehension of promotion of sales and its relation with brand loyalty. Their questionnaires were distributed among a 200 individual sample and their results also indicated that advertisements were more important among external factors.

Benet *et al.*, (2007) conducted a research under the title of "engagement and satisfaction in small businesses". In this research they investigated the relation between attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty in small businesses. They also tried to investigate two important priorities in brand loyalty in these businesses. Results of their work exhibited that attitudinal loyalty is the most important variable in anticipation of behavioral loyalty and that the high levels of attitudinal loyalty are prior to high levels of behavioral loyalty. In addition, in this research a significant relation between attitudinal loyalty and previous researches regarding purchase satisfaction and class conflict was stressed out.

Lawrence *et al.*, (2005) have declared that costumers can be emotionally attached to using things including special brand names. Results of their research indicated that the former is positively related to commitment and investment. The limitations of scale and their marginal terms of application have also been discussed.

Mohammadpouri *et al.*, (2015) they were concluded that demographic features of consumers are appropriate guidance for selection and application of strategies related to brands. Accordingly, paying attention to each functions of brand associations and consumers' understandings of these functions are affective in attraction and maintenance of consumers' interests and loyalties to a brand.

Cadgon and Foster (2000) conducted a research under the title of "relational sale and customer loyalty". In this research they studied customers' loyalty and impressibility in two different states of relation with the company. Their findings indicate that a strong relation between the seller and customer leads to

## Research Article

development, amplification and better evaluation of the producer company by the customers. In addition, the aforementioned two levels of relation have a positive effect on possibility of occurrence of customers' behavioral loyalty. Bachman (1988) in his studies investigated the features of customers who had possessed a different level of loyalty towards a specific service. Ultimately, he has categorized customers' levels of loyalty into four categories of extreme loyalty, fake loyalty, hidden loyalty and weak loyalty. Hackett *et al.*, (1994) have proposed a model under the title of service and profit chain. This model shows the manner of effectiveness of quality of services on improvement of satisfaction of the staff and their efficiency and the resultant increase in customer satisfaction levels to the extent that it ultimately leads to loyalty and profitability of companies (Palmer, 2000). Pritchard *et al.*, (1992) conducted a research aimed at investigating the relation between customer engagement, comprehended quality of services, satisfaction and loyalty. In this research they tried to propose an instrument for measurement of psychological commitment with the ability for evaluation of components of attitudinal loyalty. Dahlgren (2011) carried out a research under the title of brand loyalty and collaboration in different levels of a service oriented brand. He concluded that the data used in this article are collected through an online questionnaire. Findings of cluster analysis indicate that establishment of differentiation between behavioral and attitudinal loyalty is an effective categorization instrument.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In terms of purpose, it's an applied research and in terms of nature, it's a correlative-casual research carried out under field methods. The population is consisted of the entire consumers of sportswear in the city of Tehran who purchase clothes with special and credible brands such as Adidas, Nike and Puma. Among the population, a number of 386 individuals were selected as the sample through a random sampling method. The data collection instrument was a standard questionnaire made by the researcher. The applied questionnaire in this research is comprised of 5 sections. The first section included 6 questions and is concerned with demographic information of the respondents. The variable of brand passion includes 10 questions, the variable of self-link included 4 questions and the variable of emotional attachment also included 3 questions. The variables of brand loyalty included 11 questions the face validity of the questionnaire was calculated as 0.81 and through the application of Cronbach's alpha method, the reliability of the questionnaire was scrutinized. Results indicated that the entire indexes were of a suitable level of reliability. The highest level of calculated alpha was related to the variable of brand loyalty with the coefficient of 0.90 and also the lowest level of calculated alpha was related to the variable of emotional attachment with coefficient of 0.783. For the purpose of analysis of collected data, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were employed. In terms of inferential statistics, for the first step, the normality of data were investigated through the Kolmogorov-Smirnoff test. Further, for analysis of two-variable relations and investigation of hypotheses, the Chi-Do square and Cramer's test were applied. Statistical analyses were performed by the software of SPSS and Amos Graphics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings of the Research

#### Multi-variable Analysis of Data

Table 1 is concerned with analysis of confirmatory factor

#### Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Emotional Aspects of a Brand

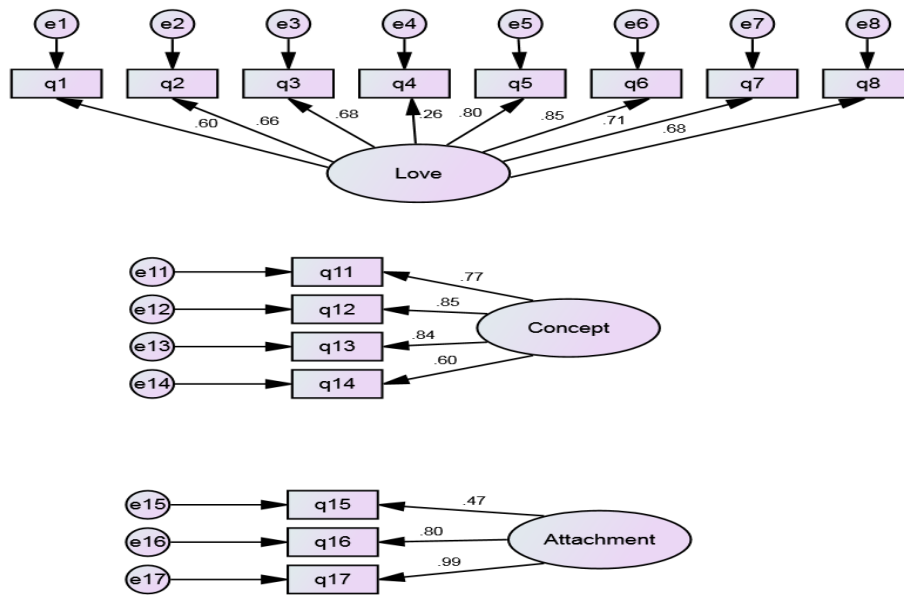
**Table 1: Indexes of evaluation of model fitness for emotional aspects of a brand before exercising reformations**

| Fitting index    | $\chi^2$ | Df | p-value | CMIN/DF | RMSEA       | PNFI       | PCFI       | CFI       |
|------------------|----------|----|---------|---------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Acceptable Value | -        | -  | -       | 3-1     | RMSEA ≤ 0.1 | PNFI ≥ 0.5 | PCFI ≥ 0.5 | CFI ≥ 0.9 |
| Observed Value   | 707.741  | 90 | 0/000   | 7.864   | 0/134       | 0/65       | 0/67       | 0/78      |

**Research Article**

As you can see in table 1, the indexes of model fitness indicate a weak fitness of the model. Because in this model, some of the fitness indexes are not in acceptable range. With respect to the output of Amos software, the amount of calculated X2 is equal to 707.741. Although the indexes of PNFI and PCFI are in an acceptable range, the indexes of Chi-square are obviously outside the boundaries of acceptable range and also the index of CFI with cut point of 0.9 is considerably distant. The amount of RMSEA is equal to 0.134 which is higher than the acceptable value for this index. This shows the weakness of the mentioned model.

In addition, in figure 1, we can see the factor loads related to observed variables of model of measurement of emotional aspects of a brand. On this basis, it is seen that a number of load factors are set lower than the acceptable limit of 0.5. With respect to all these results, it is necessary to reform the model of measurement of brands' emotional aspects.



**Figure 1: The load factors of the model of evaluation of Brands' emotional aspects prior to execution of reformations**

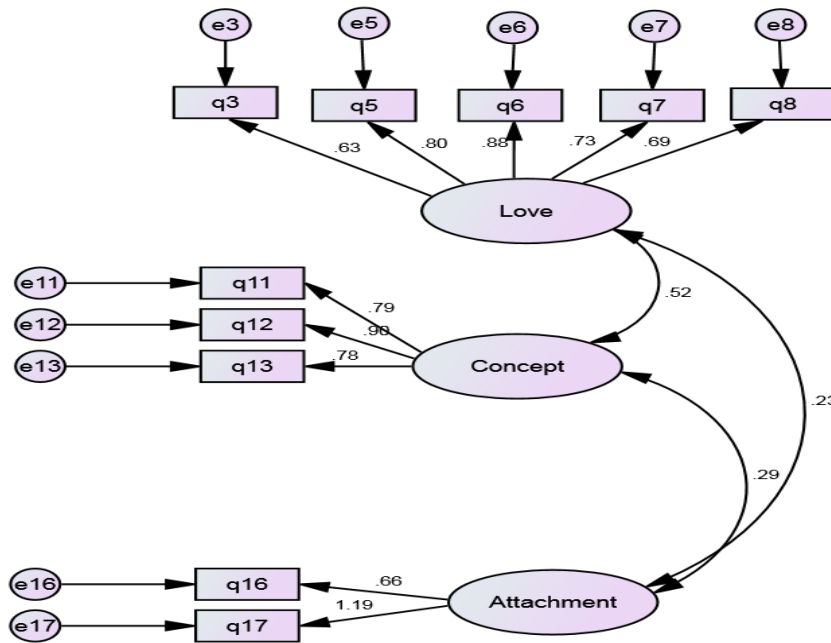
**Table 2: Indexes of fitness of the model of measurement of brands' emotional aspects**

| Fitting index           | $\chi^2$ | Df | p-value | CMIN/DF | RMSEA     | PNFI      | PCFI     | CFI     |
|-------------------------|----------|----|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| <b>Acceptable Value</b> | -        | -  | -       | 3-1     | RMSEA≤0.1 | PNFI ≥0.5 | PCFI≥0.5 | CFI≥0.9 |
| <b>Observed Value</b>   | 63.377   | 32 | 0/001   | 1.981   | 0/05      | 0/68      | 0/70     | 0/98    |

Results of this table indicate that after execution of a series of reformations on the measurement model and elimination of those variables who possess weak load factors, the fitness indexes of the model have shown a significant improvement. Because in the reformed model, the entire indexes of fitness are in an acceptable range. With respect to the output, value of calculated X2 is equal to 63.377. The low value of this index reveals the negligible difference between the conceptual model and the data of this research. Also the value of RMSEA is equal to 0.05 which is a sign of fitness of the model. In addition, the indexes of PNFI, PCFI, CFI and Chi-square are all in an acceptable range. Therefore, it could be concluded that the model of measurement of brands' emotional aspects is fit to the data of this research.

In addition, in figure2, we can see the load factors of aforementioned variables. According to obtained results, it can be said that the entire related load factors are in an acceptable (higher than 0.5) range.

**Research Article**



**Figure 2: The load factors of the model of evaluation of Brands’ emotional aspects after execution of reformations**

**Table 3: Indexes of fitness of the model of measurement of brand loyalty prior to execution of reformations**

| Fitting index    | $\chi^2$ | Df | p-value | CMIN/DF | RMSEA            | PNFI            | PCFI            | CFI            |
|------------------|----------|----|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Acceptable Value | -        | -  | -       | 3-1     | RMSEA $\leq$ 0.1 | PNFI $\geq$ 0.5 | PCFI $\geq$ 0.5 | CFI $\geq$ 0.9 |
| Observed Value   | 442.607  | 43 | 0/000   | 10.293  | 0/156            | 0/63            | 0/64            | 0/83           |

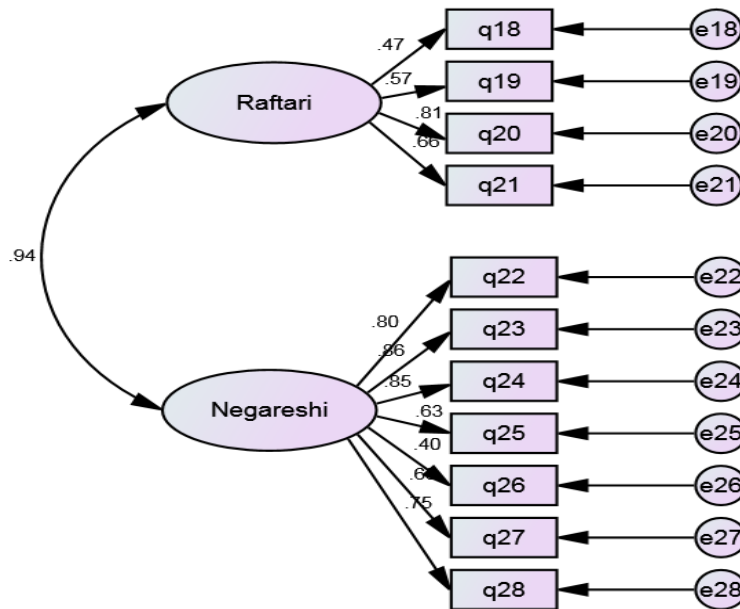
Results indicate that model’s fitness indexes point out the weak fitness of the model because in this model some of the fitness indexes are not in an acceptable range. With respect to the output of Amos software, the value of calculated X2 is equal to 442.607. Although that the indexes of PNFI and PCFI are in an acceptable range, the index of Chi-square (CMIN/DF) is much larger than the acceptable range and the index is also distant from the cut point of 0.9. In addition the value of RMSEA is equal to 0.156. This value is higher than the acceptable range for this index and this shows the weakness of this model.

In addition, in figure3, we can see the load factors related to observed variables of the model of measurement of brand loyalty. On this basis, it can be seen that a number of load factors are smaller than the acceptable range (0.5). With respect to all these results, reformation of the model of measurement of brand loyalty is necessary.

**Table 4: Fitness indexes of the model of measurement of brand loyalty after execution of reformations**

| Fitting index    | $\chi^2$ | Df | p-value | CMIN/DF | RMSEA            | PNFI            | PCFI            | CFI            |
|------------------|----------|----|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Acceptable Value | -        | -  | -       | 3-1     | RMSEA $\leq$ 0.1 | PNFI $\geq$ 0.5 | PCFI $\geq$ 0.5 | CFI $\geq$ 0.9 |
| Observed Value   | 124.546  | 19 | 0/000   | 6.555   | 0/12             | 0/63            | 0/64            | 0/94           |

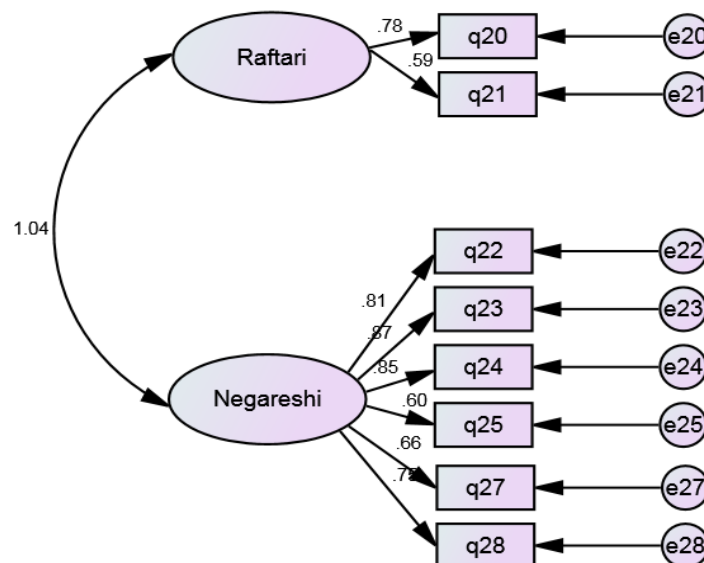
**Research Article**



**Figure 3: Load factors of the model of measurement of brand loyalty prior to execution of reformations**

As you can see in table 4, after execution of a series of reformations on the measurement model and elimination of those variables which possessed weak load factors, the model’s fitness indexes have shown a significant improvement. Because in the reformed model, most of the fitness indexes are in an acceptable range. With respect to the output, the value of calculated X2 is equal to 124.546. This index’s low value shows a negligible difference between the proposed conceptual model and observed data of this research. Also the value of RMSEA is equal to 0.12 and it shows the average fitness of the model. Also the indexes of PNFI, PCFI and CFI are in an acceptable range. On this basis, it can be stated that the model of measurement of brand loyalty is of an average fitness.

Furthermore, in figure 4, we can see the observed load factors for variables. According to yielded results, it can be said that the entire related load factors are in an acceptable (higher than 0.5) range.



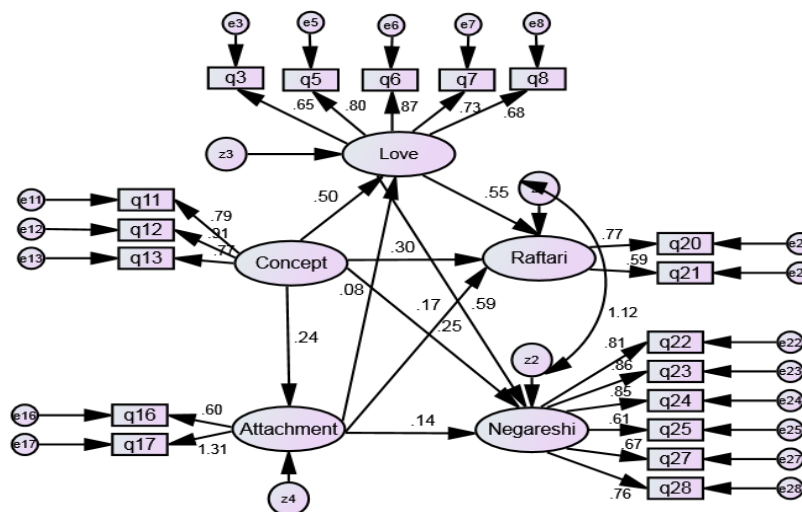
**Figure 4: Load factors of the model of measurement of brand loyalty after reformations**

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**Table 5: Fitness indexes for structural model of the research after execution of reformations**

| Fitting Index    | $\chi^2$ | Df  | p-value | CMIN/DF | RMSEA            | PNFI            | PCFI            | CFI            |
|------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Acceptable Value | -        | -   | -       | 3-1     | RMSEA $\leq$ 0.1 | PNFI $\geq$ 0.5 | PCFI $\geq$ 0.5 | CFI $\geq$ 0.9 |
| Observed Value   | 376.309  | 125 | 0.000   | 3.01    | 0/07             | 0/74            | 0/76            | 0/94           |

With respect to the outcome of the software of Amos Graphics, the value of calculated X2 is equal to 376.309. The low value of this index is a sign of negligible difference between the conceptual model and the observed data of this research. Also the value of RMSEA is equal to 0.04 which indicates the suitable fitness of the model. In this regard, it could be summed that the structural model of this research is with a desirable fitness. Figure5, shows the structural model of research after execution of reformations.



**Figure 5: Structural model of research after execution of reformations**

**Table 6: Research hypotheses test through the modeling of structural equations**

| Research Hypotheses                       | Nonstandar d Impact Factor | Standard Impact Factor | Sig    | Typ e Imp act | Result              |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|--------|---------------|---------------------|
| brand passion →Behavioral loyalty         | 0.95                       | 0.55                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |
| Brand passion →Attitudinal loyalty        | 0.96                       | 0.59                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |
| self-link→ Behavioral loyalty             | 0.26                       | 0.30                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |
| self-link →Attitudinal loyalty            | 0.20                       | 0.25                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |
| emotional attachment →Behavioral loyalty  | 0.17                       | 0.17                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |
| emotional attachment →Attitudinal loyalty | 0.13                       | 0.14                   | P<0.01 | +             | <b>Verification</b> |

Based on yielded results from testing research hypotheses through the modeling of structural equations which was summarized in table 6, it can be said that all three variables of brand passion, self-link and emotional attachment have a significant and positive effect on customers' loyalty to a brand. Therefore, the entire hypotheses of this research are accepted and validated.

### **Research Article**

Plus, with respect to standardized route coefficients, it can be said that the share of the variable of brand passion is higher than the shares of the other two variables in terms of loyalty to a brand by consumers. Also the share of the variable of emotional attachment is less than the other two variables in this regard.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In summary, the present research is aimed at determining the casual relation between emotional aspects of a brand and brand loyalty among the consumers of sportswear throughout the city of Tehran through modeling of structural equations. Results of this research indicated that both factor and structural models of the research were of suitable fitness after execution of a series of reformatations. Because in these models, the entire fitness indexes were in an acceptable range. In addition, according to yielded results of hypothesis testing through modeling of structural equations, it can be said that the entire three variables of brand passion, self-link and emotional attachment have a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty among consumers. Therefore, the entire hypotheses of the research are validated and accepted.

In this regard, new scientific studies and articles in the context of branding have directed more attention towards emotional aspects of brands. Aspects such as a feeling of attachment and continuity with the brand (self-link) (Fournier, 1998), perception of one's closeness with the brand (emotional attachment) (Fournier, 1998) and the feeling of passion for the brand (brand passion) (Carla and Ahoy, 2006; Fournier 1998).

Carla and Ahoy (2006) have described the positive effects of brand passion on brand loyalty in a great detail and they have also shown that a similar effect is also present regarding Luxuries. Not only in terms of inter-personal relations, but also in terms of the relation between consumer and brand, passion is a highly powerful emotional experience (Fluorine 1998; Schultz 1989). Passion in the texture of brand and branding describes the feelings of consumers regarding special things (Klein, 1995). Also this basic theory has been suggested that customers' purchases are to some extent as a result of tendency for creation of self-link as well as one's expression of him or herself through using products with specific brand names.

Finally, what is revealed by the results of this research is that the entire three variables of brand passion, self-link and emotional attachment have a significant and positive effect on loyalty to a specific brand by customers and consumers. Plus, with respect to calculated route coefficients through modeling of structural equations, it can be said that the share of the variable of brand passion is more than the other two variables in terms of loyalty to a brand (the route coefficient is larger) and also the share of the variable of emotional attachments is less than the other two variables (the route coefficient is smaller) in this context. On this basis and according to managerial application view, findings of this research indicate that acceptance of emotional aspects is a necessary and important act for consistency of sports brands. In addition, this research revealed that probably customers show their passion to those sportswear brands which they have a strong feeling of love for. Also brands which have points in common with self-links of the consumer and costumers feel really emotionally attached to them.

Today, customer loyalty is considered as the key to business success because loyal customers create more profitability, they also make more repeated purchases and therefore increase the market shares of the brand and in addition, they make the company familiar for more other people (Hamidi Zadeh and Qamkhari, 2010). For this reason, managers should concentrate their efforts on loyalty of customers, because if the brand loyalty is increased, it will have a positive effect on special value of the brand. Brand loyalty is also associated with certain strategic benefits including obtaining more market shares and new customers, supporting the development of the brand, reduction of marketing costs and reinforcement of the brand against competitive threats.

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