

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)



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ABSTRACT: Today, brand is a strategic requirement for organizations, which allows the creation of greater values for customers and sustainable competitive advantages of companies. Creating a strong brand in the market is the primary goal of many organizations. A strong brand can build up customer confidence for the purchase of goods and services, giving them a greater appreciation of the intangibles. Given the importance of the brand in marketing studies, this paper was conducted to investigate the effect of brand ambidexterity on brand performance and commitment. The research population consists of all customers of Kaleh brand in Rasht, Iran. Since the population size was not known, a sample size of n= 384 people was selected using the Cochran's formula for infinite population as well as Krejcie & Morgan table to ensure sampling adequacy. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using partial least squares (PLS) method were also used for data analysis. The results show that brand ambidexterity (exploitation and exploration) affects brand performance. The results also suggested that brand performance affects brand image, brand reputation and brand commitment.

KEY WORDS: brand ambidexterity, brand performance, brand reputation, brand commitment.

INTRODUCTION

In today's complex and challenging world, individuals and business managers have an increasing number of options at their disposal, making efforts to reduce decision-making and selection time. One major task of the senior management in any organizations is to establish a strong brand, which while fulfilling their promises and commitments, fosters their capacities over time. By creating perceptual distinctions between products through branding and amassing loyal customers, marketers create value beyond financial returns for the organization (Rasouli and Esfandiarpour, 2018). As one of the most important communication tools in the customer relationship management (CRM), brand is valuable to customers for two reasons: it diminishes consumer risk and cuts decision-making costs. Brand is also one of the key factors in the market, which is exploited by companies to compensate for information asymmetry in the market (Chiang et al., 2013). Brand is part of the operational and emotional characteristics attributed to a product or service by customers, serving as a tool that guides customers' purchase decision (Chang and Ma, 2015). Iranian dairy industry is currently dealing with a dilemma. The price spike induced by the rising price of milk and therefore the higher price of dairy products together with increased tariffs on exporting dairy products to Iraq are among the critical challenges facing dairy companies in Iran. The price of purchasing raw milk has soared dramatically in recent months, to the extent that some dairy companies refuse to produce certain expensive products these days. Moreover, since production is not economically viable, the production capacity has been reduced. The dairy industry also deals with the problem of rising export tariffs to Iraq. With the spike in tariffs, exports to Iraq is no longer economically justified. However, although dairy exports have a low profit margin, selling a share of product to Iraqi market will generate revenues that can partially make up for company expenses in other areas.

Accordingly, dairy companies need to pay a greater attention to issues such as branding and organizational ambidexterity. Hence, considering the above points and the growing importance of the brand concept, this study seeks to investigate the impact of brand ambidexterity on performance, reputation and commitment to the brand of Kaleh Company.

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

LITERATURE AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

One of the key concepts associated with brand is "brand commitment ". Commitment has been defined as the relative strength of consumer positive emotions towards a brand (Lassar et al., 1995). Brand commitment is the "persistent desire of consumers to sustain a relationship with the brand" (Erciş et al., 2012), so that they forge a close emotional connection with the brand that inspires a sense of pleasure and happiness (Keh et al., 2007). Customer brand commitment is a relatively new concept. The customer's expected outcomes and the consequences of purchasing a product have a bearing on brand identity brand. According to Moorman et al. (1992), customer commitment is "a firm attitude or desire towards a particular company or brand to the extent that customers, as members of an organization, become psychologically dependent on that organization, its brand or products, and their relationship with the organization is strengthened by a desire to maintain membership (Samadi et al., 2009). Brand commitment is initiated with consumers with a low level of commitment. These consumers opt for and purchase a brand based on its price. The second group are regular buyers, i.e. those who prefer a specific brand but are drawn to competitors as a result of their promotional sales activities. The next group consists of buyers who are committed to the brand (Crosby and Taylor, 1983).

One of the major factors that influence customer commitment to products and services in particular, and to a brand in general, is brand reputation and brand image. As defined by American Marketing Association, brand reputation describes the status of a company's brand. This status may appear as leading market in terms of quality, price, innovation, originality, etc. In another definition of brand reputation, Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever (2000) describe brand reputation as the attributes that people associate to a brand. Finally, Siltaoja (2006) posits that brand reputation is an indicator of the brand's success in fulfilling promises and meeting the expectations of stakeholders in the past and predicting their behavior in the future. Melo & Garrido-Morgado (2012) argue that a brand typically gains reputation when it succeeds to distinguish itself from competitors by offering unique features such as innovation, high-quality service, distinctive and comprehensive service, etc. This reputation can be a source of remarkable competitive advantage for the brand. The importance of brand reputation is underlined by the fact that consumers trust a brand reputation, making decisions about its purchase when they have little information about the product (Schinietz & Epstein, 2005). Another point about brand reputation is that it is not easily imitated (Smaiziene & Jucevicius, 2009).

Also, Keller (1993) offers a definition of brand image: "It is a perception of the brand that is formed by the associations of the brand concept in the customer's mind." The brand image in the customer's mind is shaped by their beliefs about a particular brand, which are in turn influenced by a customer's perception of the characteristics of a product or service (Michaelidou et al., 2015). Brand image is the emotional and logical perceptions of consumers in connection with a particular brand (Keller, 1993).

Marketing studies have shown that "brand performance" is another variable that can explain brand reputation, brand image and brand commitment". The success of a business is undoubtedly linked to its brand performance (De Chernatony et al., 2004). The need to measure organizational performance from diverse aspects and levels has often been stressed in the marketing literature as a dependent variable. Hence, there is a view that evaluates performance through products and services provided by an organization called "brand performance" (Chirani et al., 2012). There is no inclusive approach to evaluating and measuring brand performance in the marketing literature (Ambler, 2003). However, a broad range of measures has been used to investigate brand performance. A framework including three dimensions of customers, finance and employees has been proposed for organizing, introducing and reviewing brand performance. Since the introduction of marketing organization, researchers have mainly examined brand performance from the standpoint of customers (Coleman, 2010). Non-financial indicators can provide a clear picture of marketing activities and strategies compared to financial indicators (Ambler, 2003). De Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003) assert that most business performance evaluations have been developed for manufacturing organizations and both service organizations and employees play a key part in such assessments.

In addition to the above, brand ambidexterity is another variable that has received growing attention on the account of its impact on brand performance. Organizational ambidexterity can be defined as an organization's ability to focus on both exploitation and exploration activities (March, 1991). In fact, ambidexterity represents one of the fundamental ideas of organizational management. According to this notion, the organization should be able to draw on its existing capabilities, endeavoring on acquire new fundamental capabilities in addition to the implementation of its previous activities (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). At the psychological and behavioral levels, individuals capable of using both hands with equal dexterity are called ambidextrous. In organizational theory, the concept of organizational ambidexterity is used as a metaphor to describe organizations that are able to perform two distinct tasks simultaneously (Hoefs, 2012). Duncan (1976) conceptualizes organizational ambidexterity as the ability of an organization to align the management of today's business demands with environmental change at the same time (Duncan, 1976). Tushman, & O'Reilly (1996) describe this concept by focusing on how organizations can manage both evolutionary and revolutionary changes (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013). Although the conceptual framework of ambidexterity was first proposed

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

by Duncan, it was March who developed the concept in 1991. According to the literature, an organization is called ambidexterity when it is capable of "exploiting existing competencies" and "exploring new competencies". Also, achieving ambidexterity enables an organization to boost its performance and gain competitive advantage (Membini et al., 2015).

There are extensive studies on brand ambidexterity, brand reputation, brand performance and brand commitment, some of which are briefly listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Review of Research Background.

	Authors	Year	Title	Results
1	Nguyen et al.	2016	A review of the university's ambidexterity strategy and its effect on the brand image, reputation and commitment in postgraduate course	Ambidexterity leads to the improvement of the brand image through exploration and exploitation strategies with indirect effects on commitment
2	Poonjiseri et al.	2009	Investigating the role of internal branding in brand supportive behavior	Internal branding has a positive effect on brand supportive behavior. Brand performance leads to improved brand commitment.
3	Hosseinnejad et al.	2018	The effect of exploration and exploitation strategies on brand image and customer commitment through brand performance	Exploration and exploitation strategies have a substantial effect on brand performance. The impact of brand performance on commitment and brand image is positive.
4	Khalilian Ashkazari and Konjkav Monfared	2018	Investigating the effect of brand ambidexterity strategies on brand performance	Exploration strategies and ambidextrous exploitation exert a positive effect on brand performance
5	Darzi et al.	2017	Explaining the effect of brand ambidexterity on brand performance of Mazandaran University	Exploration strategies and ambidextrous exploitation are positively related to brand performance.
6	Azizi and Asnaashri	2013	Internal branding and brand performance in banks: the moderating role of competitive atmosphere and job satisfaction	There is a relationship between internal branding and brand identity and commitment. Also, brand performance and brand commitment are related.
7	Parhizkar et al.	2013	Investigating the effect of brand on customer loyalty in the Iranian food industry	Brand image had a significant relationship with brand reputation, but brand image and reputation were not significantly related to customer loyalty.

Given the relationships between research variables, the conceptual model of this study could be drawn as follows:

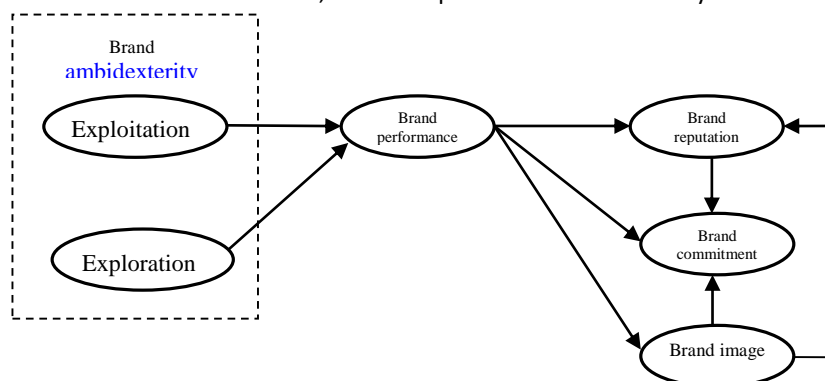


Figure 1. Conceptual model of research.

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

According to the conceptual model of the research, the research hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Brand exploitation (of existing competencies) has a positive effect on the performance of Kaleh brand.

H2: Brand exploration (new competencies) has a positive effect on Kaleh brand performance.

H3: Brand performance has a positive effect on Kaleh brand reputation.

H4: Brand performance has a positive effect on commitment to Kaleh brand.

H5: Brand performance has a positive effect on Kaleh brand image.

H6: Brand image has a positive effect on Kaleh brand reputation.

H7: Brand image has a positive effect on commitment to Kaleh brand.

H8: Brand reputation has a positive effect on commitment to Kaleh brand.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a descriptive-applied study that utilizes a survey research method for data collection. The statistical population of the study comprises all customers of Kaleh brand products in Guilan province, Iran. Cluster sampling method was used for sampling. The sample size of the study was estimated at 384 with 5% error level using the Cochran's formula. For data collection, a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5) was developed. The localized questionnaire developed by Nguyen et al. (2016) was employed to measure the research variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all research variables was higher than 0.7, and therefore acceptable. The validity of the measurement tool was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis and convergent and divergent validity assessment methods by PLS software. The results are presented in the research findings section (measurement model test)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM). This method tests the model in two stages, which include measurement and structural models.

MEASUREMENT MODELS

The measurement model involves an assessment of reliability and validity. To examine the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the average variance extracted (AVE), index, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were used. The results are shown in Table 2. Fresnel and Larker (1981) suggested values greater than 0.5 for the AVE. As shown in the table below, all values are greater than 0.5. Since a value of 0.5 or higher is desirable for composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, all values obtained in our study were acceptable.

Table 2. Validity and reliability indices of the research.

Variable	Number of items	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Brand performance	4	0.85	0.89	0.54
Brand ambidexterity (exploitation)	3	0.84	0.73	0.58
Brand ambidexterity (exploration)	6	0.75	0.81	0.51
Brand reputation	4	0.87	0.82	0.69
Brand commitment	3	0.77	0.76	0.55
Brand image	3	0.81	0.71	0.52

STRUCTURAL MODEL TEST

After ensuring the suitability of the measurement model, we tested the structural model. The model fitness and structural model testing are performed by the PLS method, and research hypotheses are tested by examining path coefficients (Beta) and R^2 values (explained variance). (Table 6) Also, Boot Strap method with 200 sub-samples was employed to calculate the values of t-statistic in order to determine the significance of path coefficients, the results of which are presented in Table 3:

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

Table 3. Explained variance of research variables.

Variable	(R ²) Explained variance
Brand ambidexterity (exploration)	-
Brand ambidexterity (exploitation)	-
Brand performance	0.74
Brand image	0.29
Brand reputation	0.36
Brand Commitment	0.28

Table 3 displays the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. According to the findings of this study, 28% of brand commitment, as the dependent variable, could be explained by independent variable. In other words, independent variables explain 28% of variation in commitment to the Kaleh brand. Table 7 presents the path coefficients and test results of the research hypotheses. Another measure of the association between constructs in the structural model is t-statistic. In this statistic, values greater than 1.96 exhibits the accuracy of the relationship between the structure, which thus confirms the research hypotheses at a 95% confidence level (Davari and Rezazadeh, 2013).

Table 4. Path coefficients and test results of research hypotheses.

Hypothesis	From	To	Path coefficient	T statistics	Result
1	Ambidexterity (exploitation)	Brand performanc	0.64	19.74	Confirmed
2	Ambidexterity (exploration)	Brand performane	0.31	8.75	Confirmed
3	Brand performance	Brand Reputation	0.01	0.19	Rejected
4	Brand performance	Brand Commitme	0.17	2.96	Confirmed
5	Brand performance	Brand image	0.54	12.52	Confirmed
6	Brand image	Brand Reputation	0.58	12.81	Confirmed
7	Brand image	Brand Commitment	0.08	1.37	Rejected
8	Brand Reputati	Brand Commitment	0.38	6.74	Confirmed

Figure 2 shows the conceptual model of the research in terms of path coefficients and factor loading of items. The numbers displayed on the paths show path coefficients between the independent and dependent variables. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, the direct effect of brand performance on brand commitment is not significant. With the exception of this path, other paths are significant at the 0.01 level.

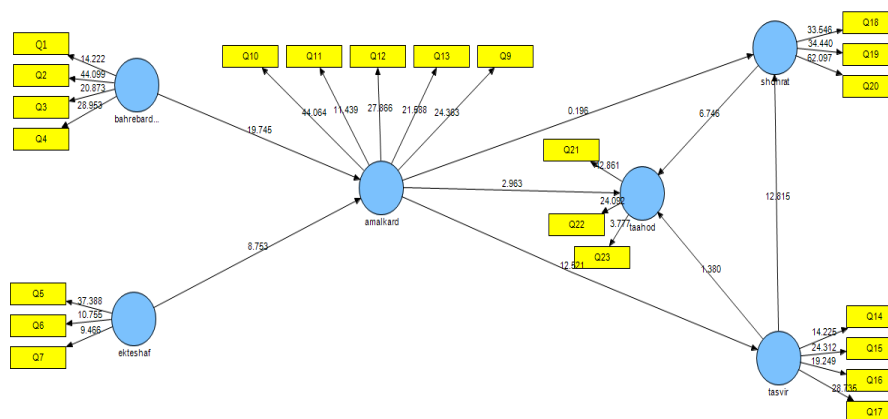


Figure 2. T statistics of the structural model of research.

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

According to the first research hypothesis, brand ambidexterity (exploitation) has a significant effect on brand performance. Based on the results of assessing the fit of the structural model concerning the relationship between brand ambidexterity (exploitation) and brand performance, it can be argued that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.64$) and its significance number ($t=19.74$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is confirmed. That is, with improved brand ambidexterity (exploitation), the performance of Kaleh brand is upgraded. The second research hypothesis posited that brand ambidexterity (exploration) has a significant effect on brand performance. According to the results of evaluating the fit of the structural model of the research regarding the relationship between brand ambidexterity (brand exploration) and brand performance, it can be concluded that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.31$) and its significance number ($75.75 T = 8$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the second research hypothesis is confirmed, meaning that with improved brand ambidexterity (exploration), the performance of Kaleh brand is boosted. According to the third hypothesis of the research, brand performance has a significant effect on brand reputation. Based on the results of measuring the fit of the structural model concerning the relationship between brand performance and brand reputation, it can be concluded that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.01$) and its significance number ($t = 0.19$) are not significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the third research hypothesis is rejected, meaning that improved performance of the Kaleh brand does not contribute to its reputation. The fourth research hypothesis asserted that brand performance has a significant effect on brand commitment. According to the results of measuring the fit of the structural model of the research regarding the relationship between performance and brand commitment, it can be argued that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.17$) and its significance number ($t = 2.96$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the fourth research hypothesis is confirmed, meaning that improved brand performance fosters brand commitment. According to the fifth research hypothesis, brand performance has a significant effect on brand image. Based on the results of measuring the fit of the structural model of the research concerning the relationship between performance and brand image, it can be argued that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.54$) and its significance number ($t=12.52$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the fifth research hypothesis is confirmed, meaning that improved brand performance promotes the desirability of the brand image. The sixth hypothesis of the research states that the brand image has a significant effect on brand reputation. According to the results of measuring the fit of the structural model regarding the relationship between image and brand reputation, it can be concluded that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.58$) and its significance number ($t=12.81$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the sixth research hypothesis is confirmed, meaning that enhanced desirability of the brand image bolsters brand reputation. According to the seventh research hypothesis, brand image has a significant effect on brand commitment. As suggested by the results of assessing the fit of the structural model concerning the relationship between image and brand commitment, it can be argued that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.08$) and its significance number ($t = 1.37$) are not significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the seventh research hypothesis is rejected, meaning that the brand image does not affect commitment to Kaleh brand. The eighth research hypothesis assumes that brand reputation has a significant effect on brand commitment. According to the results of assessing the fit of the structural model of the research on the relationship between reputation and brand commitment, it can be concluded that the path coefficient of this relationship ($\beta = 0.38$) and its significance number ($t=6.74$) are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the eighth research hypothesis is confirmed, suggesting that improved brand reputation fosters commitment to Kaleh brand.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For many marketers, the business world is a relentless battleground for market expansion, and the most influential companies are those with the strongest brands. A prestigious brand is one of the main factors of competitive advantage, acting as the main source of future income for the organization. The study of brand performance can provide profound insights for managers and marketers to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their brands and compare them with other brands. In this regard, the brand ambidexterity, i.e. exploration and exploitation strategies in the organization, can have a significant impact on market performance. Ambidextrous companies are able to merge exploration and exploitation strategies, so that by enhancing efficiency and revenues, they can improve their performance in the short term. Besides, through flexibility and adaptation to environmental developments, they can explore new structures to ensure their long-term growth and survival.

The marketing unit have a tendency for exploration strategies and the sales department prefers exploitation strategies. In this study, the positive coefficient of the path indicates that with greater adoption of exploration and exploitation strategies, brand performance improves. The results of testing the first hypothesis are aligned with those reported by Khalilian Ashkzari and Konjkav Monfared (2018), Darzi et al. (2017) and Nguyen et al. (2016). The results suggested that improved company's performance in fulfilling brand promises will strengthen company's commitment to the brand. This finding is consistent with the

A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

study of Azizi and Asnaashari (2013) and Poonjansiri et al. (2009). Moreover, the results of the present study revealed that brand performance has a significant effect on brand image. A desirable brand image comes from the evaluation of the appropriate performance. When brand performance is acknowledged, it leaves a positive impact on brand image. Therefore, a desirable performance creates a positive image of Kaleh brand in the mind of customers, contributing to the company's reputation and attraction of new customers. This finding aligns with the reported by Hosseinnejad et al. (2018) and Nguyen et al. (2016). On the other hand, the results showed that the brand image significantly affects the brand reputation. A positive image amplifies the pleasure of shopping experience, thus contributing to customers' experiences of social enjoyment and emotional outcomes. Ultimately, persistent shopping can promote brand reputation in the eye of customers. This finding is in agreement with the study of Parhizgar et al. (2013).

In general, the study of path coefficients and research hypotheses suggested that the strongest correlation between variables was related to the effect of ambidexterity (exploitation) on brand performance. For that reason, the management of Kaleh Company is suggested to improve their performance by focusing on utilization of their existing capacities. The second greatest impact was exerted by two variables of brand image and brand reputation. The effect of brand image on Kaleh brand reputation was estimated to be 0.58. According to this finding, Kaleh brand managers are recommended to promote their brand image in the community by adopting an effective strategy.

According to the research findings, food industry brands, including Kaleh, are suggested to expand exploration and exploitation activities within the framework of brand ambidexterity in order to improve their performance. They are also recommended to foster brand commitment to their brand by promoting commitment to quality, building a technical support system, and supporting after-sales service and online services. Brands should effectively expand or limit the range of services offered in the form of new products in response to customer demand. For this reason, they are suggested to employ creative techniques and sustainable improvement methods to upgrade products and product technology (exploration). Also, by drawing on marketing and advertising methods, while promoting the reputation of their brand, they can bolster customer commitment to the brand.

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A Study of The Effect of Brand Ambidexterity on Brand Performance, Brand Reputation and Brand Commitment (Case Study: Kaleh Brand in Iran)

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