

Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies and Corporate Image on Brand Equity as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

Having favorite corporate image and powerful brand equity build a strategic position in market for corporations. This position plays vital role of sustainable advantage. Therefore, we focus on the impacts of marketing strategies such as channel performance, value-oriented price, promotion, and after-sales service on brand equity directly and by corporate image indirectly. The explored results of Chi-square test analysis show that all the marketing-mix efforts positively affect the overall value of brand equity, which is a proxy of market performance, via the three dimensions of brand equity. Corporate image mediates the effect of the marketing-mix efforts on the three dimensions of brand equity.

Keywords: Marketing Mix, Corporate Image, Brand Equity, Competitive Advantage

Introduction

Brand equity is a valuable intangible asset for many successful companies in marketplace competition (Voleti, 2008). The brand equity generates a type of added value for products which help companies' long term interests and capabilities (Chen, 2008).

Establishing strong brand is a strategic priority for many companies since general beliefs indicate that powerful brands can be a strength point and a competitive advantage for companies in their target markets. Therefore, brand distinguishes product from a similar one and penetrates into the way of consumers' perception and cognition. When brand Elements are ideal in consumers' minds, brand equity is deemed positive and it is considered as negative if it is not ideal in their minds (Amini, 2010). This competitive advantage is seen in the format of product ideal price, increasing the productivity of marketing strategies, increasing profit margin and cash flow, rising in demand and customers' satisfaction, facilitating brand expansion, bargaining power, less risk-taking than rivals (Bekhradi, 2009), entry-barriers, and retaining customers, reducing customers' gaining costs and value-generation for shareholders (Laboy, 2005). As brand strength increases, industrial buyers become more likely to repurchase and pay a price premium (Bendixen et al., 2004; Roberts & Merrilees, 2007; Taylor & et al., 2007). Higher brand reputation would lead to more assurance of the Industrial product quality (Cretu & Brodie, 2007).

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Borghini and Cova (2006) explain that Brand equity is a basis for sellers' cultivating relationships with buyers. Webster and Keller (2004) also explain that sellers with higher brand equity are more likely to develop and maintain their relationships with buyers. A strong brand helps sellers to reinforce their control over the relational exchange with buyers. For example, Intel successfully launched the "Intel Inside" campaign, which brought Intel more of such control. In sum, brand equity is instrumental to making the buyer-seller relationship stronger, and in turn, this stronger relationship leads to the higher brand equity (Kim & Hyun, 2011). When the brand equity of a product is high enough, target buyers behave positively towards the product. For example, they pay more for the product, purchase it repeatedly, and engage in favorable word-of-mouth behaviors, and so on. In this respect, a firm can enhance its competitive position and increase financial performance by making its brand stronger (Keller, 2008).

Beside of Brand equity, marketing mix concept determines organization performance path by using controllable variables in where it has many uncontrollable factors (e.g., market) (darani, 2010; Jandaghi & et.al, 2011b, p.5). Customer purchase persuasion can be stimulant or synthetic of under control or out of control stimulants (Agrawal & Schmidt, 2003, p.34). Customers' loyalty is the result of strategic and favorites marketing activities as well as the environmental impacts and marketing affairs potentially lead to alter customer behavior (Taylor, 2004, p.218). This loyalty, on one hand, causes to repurchase that expands the product market share, and on the other hand, provides situations that lead to higher pricing brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p.92). Brand equity and marketing strategy have mutual relationship. As Jandaghi & et.al (2011a) and Seyyed Javadein & et.al (2011) imply that Brand equity has a considerable importance in marketing strategy and it has vital role in attracting, retaining, and supporting customer. Brand equity has strategic role and importance in gaining competitive advantage and corporations strategic management decisions.

Corporate image also is an intuitively appealing concept. A favorable image can boost sales through increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Many firms now realize the importance of actively attracting and retaining highly skilled, quality employees as a necessary component of their competitive advantage (Kim & et.al, p.1207).

Home appliance and Video & Audio Products market is, inter alia, a market where brand equities and corporate image are highly important and customers' decisions are too sensitive in such market since, in one hand, home appliance is considered as sustainable goods and consumer wants to use for several years and, on the other hand, consumer should pay a relative high price. Thus, he/she tries to evaluate the options carefully to achieve the highest ideality. The brand equity is a tool which helps consumer in such situations (Amini, 2010). Then, in order to direct this subject, we pay to assay effectiveness of marketing strategies in framework of mix marketing in direct to create positive corporate image and powerful brand equity in order to obtain sustainable position and competitive advantage in market and increase their productivity of performance.

Research theoretical framework and Conceptual Model

1. Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA)

Because of the importance of SCA to the long-term success of firms, a body of literature addresses its content as well as its sources and the different types of strategies that may help companies to achieve SCA (Kim, 1999). A firm has a sustained competitive advantage when a firm is implementing a unique value creating strategy which any current or potential competitors do not implement simultaneously and when these other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy. In clear phase, sustainable competitive advantage is the

long-term benefit of implementing some unique value creating strategy which any current or potential competitors do not implement simultaneously, along with the inability to duplicate the benefits of this strategy (Kim & et.al, 2011, p.1207). If companies want to obtain sustainable competitive advantages, they can implement strategies that exploit their internal strengths and external opportunities and avoid their external threats and internal weaknesses (Chen & et.al, 2009). Having SCA is the most important value for companies. One of the factors that make SCA is Brand and corporate image. The creation and maintenance of brands are becoming more important in today's intensely competitive environment. Investing in branding activities creates brand equity (Seetharaman & et.al, 2001, p.245).

2. Brand Equity

Brand equity can be regarded as a managerial concept, as a financial intangible asset, as a relationship concept or as a customer-based concept from the perspective of the individual consumer (Tuominen, 1999, p.73). In marketing literature, brand equity is being operational in two manners: those who have considered consumer's perceptions such attitude on brand, brand awareness, brand association, and conceived quality; and those who have addressed consumer's behaviors such as loyalty to brand, extra payment, etc. Both methods calculate brand equity via consumer's perspective (Bahreinizadeh, 2006; rahmanseresht & Bahreinizadeh, 2006).

Equity exists when the customers are aware of the brand, loyal to the brand and perceive the brand as having quality. Awareness, loyalty, and quality perception are three main components of a successful brand (Seetharaman & et.al, 2001, p.245). Aaker (2006) expresses that there are three dimensions of brand equity included brand awareness with associations (brand awareness and brand association), perceived quality, and brand loyalty as shown in figure 1.

Brand equity makes value for both customer and firm. Brand equity creates value for customer by increasing process of efficiency information, making sure in decision-making, reinforcing purchase, and contributing to self-respect and trust. In addition, for a firm, brand equity creates loyalty to brand, improvement of benefit margin, obtaining influence lever between retailers, and accessing to difference competitive advantage in rivalry field (Amini, 2010, p.46). According to Yoo & et.al (2000), the overall value of brand equity is adopted as a proxy of market performance. In an overall view, brand equity is defined in terms of the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand. That is, Brand equity relates to the fact that different outcomes result from the marketing of a product or service because of its brand element, as compared to outcomes if that same product or service did not have that brand identification (Tuominen, 1999, p.72).

One reason for studying brand equity arises from a strategy- oriented incentive in order to provide marketing productivity. Having more values, larger rivalry, and immense demand in most markets, has been able to increase efficiency of marketing expenses. Therefore, marketers need to take consumers behaviors as a base for making better strategy decision about target market and positioning. In order to obtain productivity in marketing, perhaps one of the most precious assets of one corporation is knowledge and awareness of brand that was made in consumer mind about investiture in corporation obvious marketing plans (Amini, 2010, p.45).

3. Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy is the overriding principle a firm uses to organize and allocate its resources to generate profit from customers that are, in the aggregate, part of the market, with

reasonably clear parameters concerning its size and components (Kim, 2004). Aaker (2009) notes that marketing strategy can involve a variety of functional area strategies including positioning, pricing, distribution, and global strategies. Successful marketing strategy needs SCA in its planning and implementation. Marketing mix concept determines organization performance path by using controllable variables in where it has many uncontrollable factors (e.g., market) (darani, 2010, p.5). Costumer purchase persuasion can be stimulant or synthetic of under control or out of control stimulants (Agrawal & Schmidt, 2003, p.34). Costumers' loyalty is the result of strategic and favorites marketing activities as well as the environmental impacts and marketing affairs potentially lead to alter costumer behavior (Taylor, 2004, p.218). This loyalty, on one hand, causes to repurchase that expands the product market share, and on the other hand, provides situations that lead to higher pricing brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p.92).

It is essential to mention that every one of the marketing mix elements is potential source for competitive advantages as it may be needed different combination of them in dissimilar situation of market. For example, price will be important for prospering in some market. In other some, distribution may be important and in some cases, reputation and reliability can be the best base for competition. Marketer duty is to observe costumer and competitor and develop mix or synthetic of activities which both they have competitive advantages and they presume quite utilization from organizational capabilities (Jandaghi, 2011b, p.4).

Economic and generative managers must be sensitive toward these elements and consider to each one that cause to increase or decrease production, degrade or upgrade product quality, decelerate and accelerate distribution, increase or decrease price, stop or grow sale and lose or gain brand validity (Jandaghi, 2011b, p.5).

4. Corporate Image

Corporate image is a valuable asset that companies need to manage (Abratt & Mofokeng, 2001). A favorable image can boost a firm's sales through increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as attract both investors and future employees. It weakens the negative influence of competitors, enabling organizations to achieve higher levels of profit (Kim & et.al, 2011, p.1208).

Corporate image can be defined as a particular type of feedback from those in a given market regarding the credibility of the identity claims that the organization makes (Cretu & Brodie, 2007).

Corporate brands serve as a powerful navigational tool for a variety of stakeholders ranging from investors and employees to consumers (Bridson & Mavondo, 2011, p.190). In today's competitive environment, many companies need to project a strong and positive reputation to their stakeholders, namely the employees, consumers, investors and the public. Companies must try to project an image that is stable yet exciting, aggressive, yet public-oriented, diversified yet focused on some specialized areas, and generous to employees yet shrewd in its investments. The ability to satisfy the needs of the different stakeholders helps to generate positive feelings towards the company. Examining corporate image from the employees' perspective is important for several reasons. Employees are essential to an organization's performance as their perceptions of corporate image are related to their work attitudes and behaviors, and an organization's image can affect organization performance. Image perception can greatly influence the actions of employees. This is because corporate image contributes to an employee's sense of self and they use image to gauge how outsiders are judging them (Fatt & et.al, 2000, p.29).

Conceptual Model

Based on Kim & Hyun (2011) model, the marketing-mix efforts affect the three dimensions of brand equity both directly and indirectly through corporate image. In turn, these three dimensions affect the overall value of brand equity. Marketing mix efforts include channel performance, value-oriented price, promotion, and after-sales service. They are structured in a hierarchy: brand awareness with associations affects perceived quality and brand loyalty; perceived quality affects brand loyalty. The purpose of this study is assessing the relationship between constructs of this model in formation of brand equity within the context of Video & Audio Products.

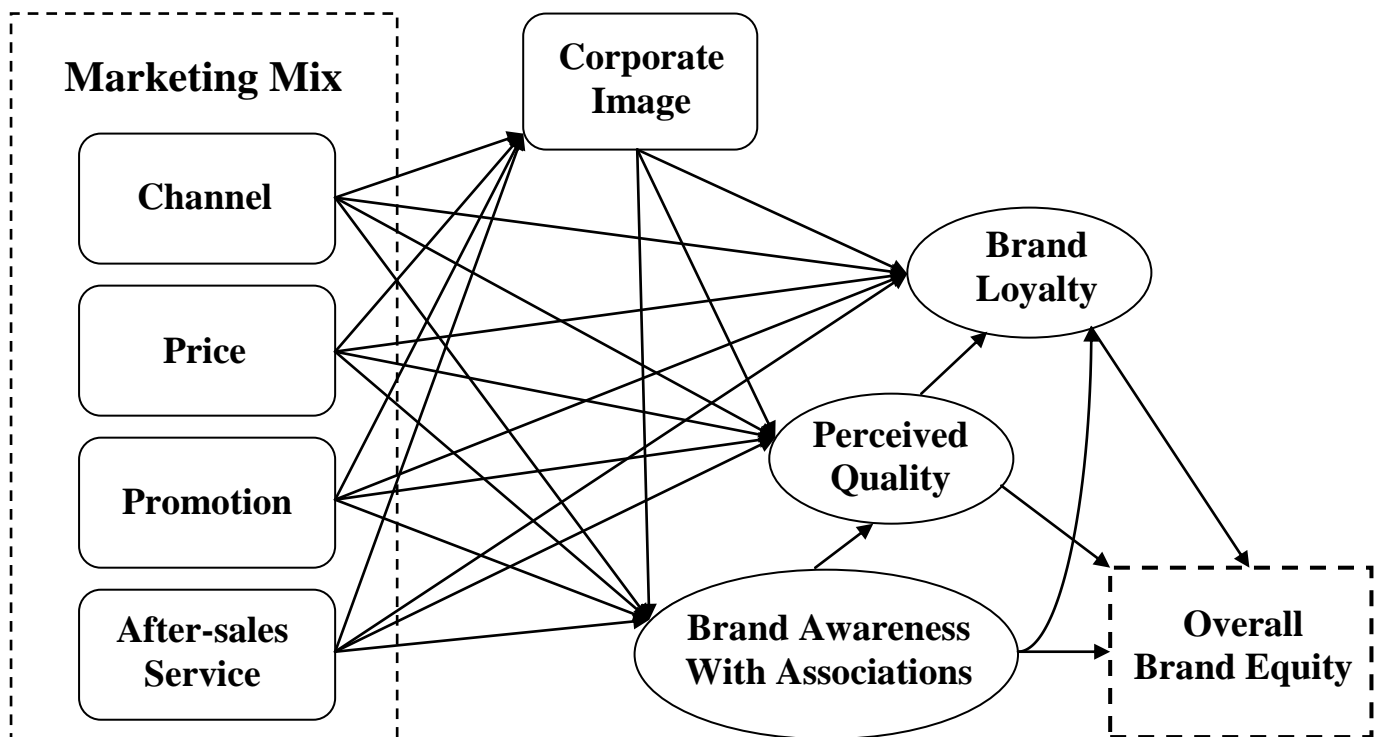


Figure.1: Research Conceptual Model

Research hypotheses

1. Channel

In marketing literature, it expresses that channel performance contributes to corporate image and building brand equity. Good distribution channel not only attracts more attention, interests, and contacts from potential consumers, but also increases consumer satisfaction and positive word of mouth. Thus, it levels up brand awareness with associations and brand loyalty. In addition, distributing through good channel signals that a brand has good quality. Distribution intensity also has a positive impact on dimensions of brand equity because high distribution intensity increases the probability of buying a brand wherever and whenever consumers want. Specifically, since the increase in distribution intensity reduces consumer

efforts for finding and acquiring a brand, consumers are likely to perceive it as more valuable, which in turn increases consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Yoo et al., 2000). Considering all this, we may formulate the following hypotheses:

- H_{1a}. Channel performance positively affects the corporate image.
- H_{1b}. Channel performance positively affects brand awareness with associations.
- H_{1c}. Channel performance positively affects perceived quality.
- H_{1d}. Channel performance positively affects brand loyalty.

2. Price

As the impact that the price has on brand equity varies depending on market characteristics, van Riel and et.al use value for the money as an antecedent of dimensions of brand equity instead of the price. They demonstrate that value for the money has a positive impact on brand satisfaction and causes to form corporate image, which in turn increases brand loyalty. It is likely that the value-oriented price would be a salient characteristic of the brand, and thus grab attention while motivating consumers to think more about the brand. On the other hand, it would undermine higher quality perception although it tells that product quality is fair for the price. Brand has premium quality (Kim & Hyun, 2011, p.429). With all this in mind, we develop the following hypotheses:

- H_{2a}. The value-oriented price positively affects the corporate image.
- H_{2b}. The value-oriented price positively affects brand awareness with associations.
- H_{2c}. The value-oriented price negatively affects premium-quality perception.
- H_{2d}. The value-oriented price positively affects brand loyalty.

3. Promotion

Prior research has found that promotional offer is well received by consumers because of the additional pleasure they feel (Yeung & Yee, 2010, p.292). It includes advertising, promotional events, personal selling, Website-based communication activities, and so on. In consumer marketing, the positive effects of advertising on the dimensions of brand equity have been fully substantiated (Kim & Hyun, 2011, p.430). Promotional events with long-term goals could build brand equity through offering actual product experience that helps to create strong, favorable, and unique associations (Keller, 2008). On the other hand, short-term price reductions such as cent-off deals might not be desirable for building brand equity, even though they boost sales in the short run (Yoo et.al., 2000). Research shows that sales representative is a major source of information for increasing buyers' awareness and promotion has a positive influence on corporate image and brand loyalty as well as perceived service quality (Kim & Hyun, 2011, p.430). Therefore, the following hypotheses are devised:

- H_{3a}. Promotion positively affects the corporate image.
- H_{3b}. Promotion positively affects brand awareness with associations.
- H_{3c}. Promotion positively affects perceived quality.
- H_{3d}. Promotion positively affects brand loyalty.

4. After-Sales Service

One of the most important factors, which are considered it today, is after-sales service of corporation brand. This factor cause to reciprocate the defect of qualitative control of product. This factor is more important in setting of durable products (Amini, 2010, p.180). Research shows that satisfaction with support service has a positive effect on brand loyalty and prepare corporate image. Excellent support service is expected to be a memorable characteristic of a brand, leading to the creation of favorable brand associations and corporate image (Kim & Hyun, 2011, p.430). Thus, we arrive at the following hypotheses:

H_{4a}· After-sales service positively affects the corporate image.

H_{4b}· After-sales service positively affects brand awareness with associations.

H_{4c}· After-sales service positively affects perceived quality.

H_{4d}· After-sales service positively affects brand loyalty.

5. Corporate Image

Good corporate image is likely to give trustworthiness and credibility to consumers or industrial buyers, which in turn leads to an increase in the perceived quality of a brand (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Research shows that company reputation affects purchase intention directly as well as indirectly through the quality expectation of offering in a business insurance market. Good corporate image also serves as entry barriers against potential competitors. In addition, good corporate image is particularly important when buyers need to evaluate a new supplier or product since it reduces uncertainty and rationalizes the selection process. Corporate image is a key driver for creating relevant associations in buyers' minds (Kim & Hyun, 2011, p.431). Thus, we address the following hypotheses:

H_{5a}· Good corporate image positively affects brand awareness with associations.

H_{5b}· Good corporate image positively affects perceived quality.

H_{5c}· Good corporate image positively affects brand loyalty.

6. Brand Equity Dimensions

According to Aaker (2006), brand equity is achieved by Brand associations, loyalty to brand, brand awareness, and conceived quality (Jandaghi & et.al, 2011c, p.788). The three dimensions of brand equity are brand awareness with associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These are adapted from Aaker (2006), and Yoo and et.al (2000). The positive effects of the three dimensions of brand equity on the overall value of brand equity are found in researches. Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H_{6a}· Brand awareness with associations positively affects the overall value of brand equity.

H_{6b}· Perceived quality positively affects the overall value of brand equity.

H_{6c}· Brand loyalty positively affects the overall value of brand equity.

Yoo & et.al. (2000) suggest interrelations among three dimensions of brand equity. Applying the hierarchy-of-effects theory, our model lays out three causal paths: from brand awareness with associations to perceived quality, from that awareness to brand loyalty, and from perceived quality to brand loyalty. These causal relationships are supported by the CBBE pyramid (Keller, 2008). Thus, we arrive at the following hypotheses:

H_{7a}· Brand awareness with associations positively affects perceived quality.

H_{7b}· Brand awareness with associations positively affects brand loyalty.

H_{7c}· Perceived quality positively affects brand loyalty.

Methodology

This is a descriptive survey which defining relationship between known elements contribute to marketing Mix, Brand Equity and intermediate role of corporate image in the context of Video & Audio Products . For assessing this relationship, the questions of Kim and Hyun questionarie has been adopted and a questionarie was designed with items involve five-item Likert-type scale items. Validity was confirmed by experts and Bartlett Test. The results in Table 1 demonstrate that the measures used in the current study all exceed the commonly accepted standard of coefficient alpha . 0.7 Note that this will only support our arguments for measure reliability.

Variable	Channel	Price	Promotion	After-Sales Service	Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Loyalty	Brand Equity	Corporate Image
coefficient alpha	.73	.75	.82	.78	.87	.71	.71	.80	.72

Table.1: Reliabilty of study measure (coefficient alpha)

Statistical Population, sample size, sampling method

Data was collected from consumers of Video & Audio Products of Samsung in flower bazaar of Imam Reza in tehran city. Sample size consist of 317 consumers who were selected random sampling method. Based on collected data from 30 questionarie distributed, population variance was estimated and then sample size was calculated by sampling formula.

Results

From 317 send questionaries, we received back 296 (93%) usable responses. Then, it's our database for resulting in this research. First we present descriptive and inferential statistics. We will also present test of hypothesis and path analysis.

1. Descriptive statistics: Mean age of respondents was 35 years. Education of respondents was 53.4% diploma and under, 37.8% high deploma and BSc, 8.8% higher. Their monthly incomes was 13.5% 320\$ and under, 41.5% between 320 and 640 Dollars, and 44.9% higer.
2. Inferential statistics: Independent and dependent variable was tested using Chi-square test, using SPSS. Error and confidence interval was respectively 5% and 95% which has demonstrated In Table 2.

$$H_0: P(A \cap B) = P(A) \cdot P(B)$$

$$H_a: P(A \cap B) \neq P(A) \cdot P(B)$$

Hypothesis No.	Dependent V.	Independent V.	χ^2	df	Sig.	Results	Pearson's Correlation
H _{1a}	Corporate Image	Channel	3.407	117	.000	Supported	.23
H _{2a}		Price	2.346	91	.000	Supported	.34
H _{3a}		Promotion	3.343	169	.000	Supported	.37
H _{4a}		After-Sales Service	3.844	169	.000	Supported	.22
H _{1b}	Brand Awareness	Channel	2.748	90	.000	Supported	.33
H _{2b}		Price	2.036	70	.000	Supported	.42
H _{3b}		Promotion	2.470	130	.000	Supported	.37
H _{4b}		After-Sales Service	5.268	130	.000	Supported	.41
H _{5a}		Corporate Image	2.972	130	.000	Supported	.24
H _{1c}	Perceived Quality	Channel	285.854	126	.000	Supported	.27
H _{2c}		Price	246.433	98	.000	Supported	.28
H _{3c}		Promotion	442.080	182	.000	Supported	.14
H _{4c}		After-Sales Service	498.681	182	.000	Supported	.26
H _{5b}		Corporate Image	631.828	182	.000	Supported	.52
H _{7a}		Brand Awareness	475.487	140	.000	Supported	.37
H _{1d}	Brand Loyalty	Channel	290.017	99	.000	Supported	.34
H _{2d}		Price	230.976	77	.000	Supported	.37
H _{3d}		Promotion	270.060	143	.000	Supported	.11
H _{4d}		After-Sales Service	378.270	143	.000	Supported	.40
H _{5c}		Corporate Image	463.719	143	.000	Supported	.40
H _{7b}		Brand Awareness	373.632	110	.000	Supported	.38
H _{7c}		Perceived Quality	1012.596	154	.000	Supported	.60
H _{6a}	Brand Equity	Brand Awareness	255.800	110	.000	Supported	.27
H _{6b}		Perceived Quality	352.558	154	.000	Supported	.36
H _{6c}		Brand Loyalty	382.000	121	.000	Supported	.31

Table 2 : The results of Chi-square test

As seen in table 2, the results of Chi-square test for all hypotheses are in significant level. Thus all null hypotheses were rejected and alternative hypotheses were accepted, significant at 5% level.

First matter: Corporate Image (CI) as a dependent Variable;

All of elements of marketing strategies can build a good corporate image in Video & Audio products industry but some is Stronger than others. The result of Chi-square test for relationship between CI and marketing mix dimensions indicated that these dimensions have positive impact on CI. The correlation coefficients column of table 2 show that promotion is the most influential, followed by value-oriented price and Channel performance and after-sales service. All of elements of marketing strategies can build a good corporate image in Video & Audio products industry but some is Stronger than others.

Second matter: Brand Awareness as a dependent Variable;

According to result, the value-oriented price and After-Sales Service positively influence brand awareness with associations in which of most effect. Promotion and Channel performance place in the next. Although corporate image influences brand awareness with associations but this effect is relatively less than elements of marketing mix that are surveyed.

Third matter: Perceived Quality as a dependent Variable;

Except value-oriented price which has negative effect on perceived quality, as expected, marketing strategies such as channel performance, promotion and after-sales service play positive role in formation of perceived quality of brand. Except promotion, others have almost equal effects on perceived quality and this effect is less for promotion. We observe high correlation between corporate image and perceived quality in the result of chi-square test in table 2. Finally, brand awareness with associations play significant role in perceived quality of brand.

Fourth matter: Brand Loyalty as a dependent Variable;

There are positive impacts between all four elements of marketing strategies and brand loyalty as Chi-square test result shown. But this effect is the greatest by After-Sales Service and other elements effects are next places. Corporate image has positive relationship with brand loyalty as well as Brand Awareness but Perceived Quality has a higher significant correlation with brand loyalty.

Fifth matter: Brand Loyalty as a dependent Variable;

The relationships of the overall value of brand equity with the three dimensions of brand equity are all positive and significant. Brand awareness with associations has both direct and indirect strong impact on the overall value of brand equity as it is related to the other two brand equity dimensions - i.e., perceived quality and brand loyalty. Perceived quality has significant positive impact on the overall value of brand equity in a direct manner. It also positively affects the overall value of brand equity indirectly via brand loyalty.

Discussion and Conclusion

Following to research purpose to survey the effectiveness of marketing strategies and corporate image on brand equity as a sustainable competitive advantage in the context of Video & Audio Products, the results reveal that all elements of marketing strategies affect directly three dimensions of brand equity per determined weak and intense and they have positive effect on these dimensions indirectly via corporate image. Marketing strategies in

framework of mix marketing efforts include channel performance, value-oriented price, promotion, and after-sales service. Moreover dimensions of brand equity are applied the hierarchy-of-effects as following: brand awareness with associations cause perceived quality, awareness cause brand loyalty, and perceived quality cause brand loyalty. Then, brand awareness and perceived quality have significant positive impact on the overall value of brand equity in a direct manner. They also positively affect the overall value of brand equity indirectly via brand loyalty.

In competitive situation, corporations try to obtain sustainable advantage in order to have consistent market position. Although each one of the variables which we regarded is solely a potential source to aim this position, a good synthesis of elements of marketing mix in corporation business plan can inquire vision and mission of corporation. As we explored in this research, marketing strategies can build a favorite image of corporate that promote market performance and they (i.e., marketing strategies and corporate image) can also influence brand equity totality and dimensions to reinforce purchase, costumer loyalty and satisfaction. Then, managers should pay attention to handle them and allocate appropriately resource and energy in order to present their corporation capable in competitive battlefield.

With regarding this research and same others, Managers should consider that these assayed effects differ in different industrial contexts, different productions, and even different cultures and locations. The variables of this research give instrument which contributes managers to improve factors that influence costumers' perception from corporate image and brand equity and omit factors that debilitate suitable perception of them.

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