The Impact of Branding on Customers' Attitudes toward Banking Services

(The Case of Iran's Melli Bank)

Mohammad Reza Jalilvand[1]

Farhad Ebrahimabadi[2]

Neda Samiei[3]

Abstract: The aim of applying branding is to differentiate a product or service from others and creating a unique brand image of a certain product or service in the minds of target market. Furthermore, customers' attitudes have been shown to influence and predict behavior. This research integrates consumer-based brand equity and the theory of planned behavior in evaluating the performance of Iran's Melli bank in branding and measures the impact of branding on customers' attitudes. A field survey was conducted on Iran's Melli bank in Isfahan, the biggest national bank in Iran. Data are collected and analyzed from 314 prospective customers. Findings indicate that Iran's Melli bank has performed unsatisfactorily in presenting a desired image to the target market. As a result, Melli bank needs to strengthen its brand loyalty by improving its quality of banking services and marketing communications.

Key words: Branding; Brand equity; Attitude; Banking services; Iran

INTRODUCTION

Brand is a simple but very confused word with multiple meanings. Within this field, there are a number of generally accepted definitions. These variously refer to the brand as "a product or service, which a customer perceives to have distinctive benefits beyond price and functional performance" (Knox et al., 2000) or "a symbol serving to distinguish the products and services of one company from another" (Kapferer, 1997). A brand may have many other meanings depending on the role it plays, the value it has and more importantly, to whom it is related. To brand owners, a brand is mainly a differentiation device: the living memory and the future of its products (Kapferer, 1997). To brand users, a brand may create an emotional bond with them which turns the brand into an icon. In the most developed role, brands represent not only the products or

---

[1] Corresponding author. Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Azadi square, Isfahan, Iran
 E-mail: mrjd_reza2006@yahoomail.com
[2] Department of educational Sciences, University of Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: farhadebrahimi2010@gmail.com
[3] Department of Economic, University of Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: nedasamiei@gmail.com

services a company provides but the firm itself, the brand is the company and brands become a synonym of the company's policy (Goodyear, 1996; de Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). In product-based marketing, the term brand is defined as "a distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors" (Aaker,1991, p.7). Branding is a key function in marketing that means much more than just giving a product a name. The conventional wisdom of branding believes that the ultimate aim of branding is to command a favorable position in the mind of consumers, distinct from competition (Ries and Trout, 1982). The objectives in branding can be summarized as follows:

· To dominate the market (to reduce or eliminate competition);

· To increase customer loyalty (by increasing the switch cost);

· To raise the entry barriers (to fend off potential threat).

Branding yields different advantages for firms. Organizations develop brands as a way to attract and keep customers by promoting value, image, prestige, or lifestyle. By using a particular brand, a consumer can cement a positive image (Ginden, 1993). Brands can also reduce the risk, consumers face when buying something that they know little about (Montgomery and Wernerfelt, 1992). Once consumers become accustomed to a certain brand, they do not readily accept substitutes (Ginden, 1993). A brand is also flexible, allowing firms to position and appeal to different segments in different markets. A successful brand is believed to bring its owner great financial value in terms of either higher sales or premium prices and give employees the satisfaction and confidence in their products or services (O'Malley, 1991). Strong branding can also accelerate market awareness and acceptance (Berry, 1993) of new products entering the market. It seems that consumer's attitudes and opinions have an important role in branding research. In psychology, attitude is believed to be the major determinant of future decision-making (Ajzen, 1991; Fishben & Ajzen, 1972; O'Leary & Deegan, 2003). However, little is known about the relationship between branding and customers' attitudes. In this study, we test the applicability of Konecnik's customer-based brand equity for a tourism destination (CBBETD) framework in the context of banking services and impact of its dimensions on customers' attitudes. In sum, Konecnik's work and Ajzen's (1985, 1987, 1991) theory of planned behavior have provided useful guidance for the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPEMENT

2.1 Customer-based brand equity model

Aaker (1991, p.15) introduced his model of brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol". He argued these assets and liabilities will add or subtract from the values provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". Aaker's model (1991, 1996) consists of five components: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets. He pointed out that a good branding strategy should concentrate on attempts to achieve name awareness, perceived quality and brand association in order to win high loyalty to the brand product. He added, brand loyalty can strengthen the other components of brand equity and increase the brand's competitiveness on the target market. Aaker (1991) said that a well-structured brand may become an evoked set through the attachment of symbolic attributes. Such action will motivate him to like the specific brand and eventually purchase its representative products. Aaker (1991) also suggested that standards procedures of quality inspection be in place to maintain the stability of product quality. Upshaw Also (1995) presented a branding model for screening brand elements and assigning branding functions by studying customers' response to a particular product brand. Brand equity, as defined by Keller (1993), occurs when a brand is known and has some strong, favorable and unique associations in a consumer's memory. Keller (2003a) put forwarded a conceptual model of customer-based brand equity (CBBE), which highlights "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand" (p.60). As shown in Figure 1, the CBBE model identifies four steps for building a strong brand. In this branding ladder, each step is dependent on successfully achieving the previous. These steps in turn consist of six brand building blocks – salience, performance, imagery, judgments, feelings, and resonance.

The ultimate aim is to reach the pinnacle of the CBBE pyramid – resonance – where a completely harmonious relationship exists between customers and the brand. Brand salience, brand performance, and brand imagery constitute the foundation of brand construct, in which the brand needs to establish its own identity and meaning with consumers. The first step in building a strong brand is to ensure the correct brand identity. The purpose is to create an identification of the brand with customers, and an association in their minds with a specific product class or need. To do this, brand salience must exist, which represents aspects of brand awareness and the range of purchase and consumption situations in which the brand comes to mind. The salience building block is therefore made up of two sub-dimensions – need satisfaction and category identification. The second step establishes brand meaning by linking tangible and intangible brand associations. Brand meaning is therefore characterized in either functional (brand performance) or abstract (image-related) associations. Functional attributes are: 1) primary ingredients and supplementary features; 2) product reliability, durability and serviceability; 3) service effectiveness, efficiency and empathy; 4) style and design; and price. Image associations relate to the extrinsic properties of the product: 1) user profiles; 2) purchase and usage situations; 3) personality and values; and 4) history, heritage and experiences (Keller, 2003b). In using appropriate brand associations, performance, and imagery can exert greater influence on customers' response (Keller, 2003b). Many of these are consistent with Keller's brand meaning construct, but attributes such as technical capability, delivery reliability and responsiveness are not included. Keller also, ignores the customer relationship with the sales team due to his concentration on consumer markets. A buyer's purchase choice depends not only on their assessment of the product's functional benefits, but also on their evaluation of the company's sales people (Michell et al., 2001). Brand response is the third step in the Keller model and represents opinions and evaluations of the brand based on a combination of associations identified in brand meaning. These judgments include overall quality, credibility, consideration and superiority. Brand feelings are customers' emotional responses and reactions to the brand. Keller (2003b) identifies six types: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self respect. Consumer judgments and feelings tend to be positive once brand reliance is transmitted and received. Brand relationships constitute the final step in the pyramid where brand response is converted to create an intense, active loyalty relationship between customers and the brand. The pinnacle of the pyramid is resonance, which refers to the nature of the relationship between the customer and the brand. It is described as having four elements: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement (Keller, 2001). This is the stage in which a prolonged relationship is developed between the brand and its loyal customers. Overall, Keller's model provides consumer feedback into improving branding measures.
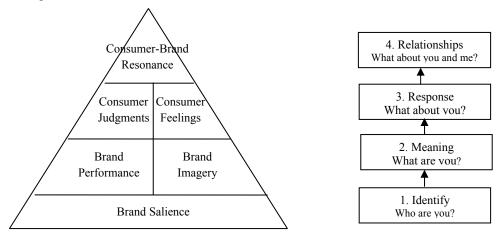

Figure 1: Keller's customer-based brand equity pyramid (Source: Keller (2003b))

Based on Aaker's (1991) brand equity and Keller's (1993, 2001, 2003b) customer-based brand equity(CBBE), Konecnik (2006) identified the major influencing factors of brand awareness, image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty in her evaluation model of customer-based brand equity for a tourism destination (CBBETD). In the CBBETD model, above mentioned dimensions measure branding effects through tourists' perceptions of destinations. Konecnik (2006) viewed the dimension of brand awareness as

the extent of brand recognition and recall of brands. She added to it the aspect of "brand familiarity". She adopted Keller's (1993, 2003a) brand image as the second dimension and viewed brand image as the perceptual linkage between brand associations and the brand. Patterson (1999, p.419) states "brand image is a consumer's perceptions of brand attributes and associations from which those consumers derive symbolic value". Perceived quality referred to customers' judgment about the superiority of brands. And brand loyalty was considered the core of brand equity and conceptualized as different levels of attitudinal phase toward the brand. Therefore, Konecnik's (2006) CBBETD conceptual model provided a multidimensional perspective as the research foundation to approach the brand construct and branding for destinations evaluations that we applied it in the context of banking services.

2.2 The theory of planned behavior (TPB)

While applying the term "attitude" to the research of branding, it is necessary to understand the formation of consumers' attitudes. Ajzen (1985, 1987, 1991) in the theory of planned behavior (TPB), proposed adding perceived behavioral control to the analysis of how attitude and behavior are formed (see Fig. 2).

2.2.1 Attitude towards behavior

Attitudes, which are relatively permanent and stable evaluative summaries about an item, are an important psychological construct because they have been found to influence and predict many behaviors (Kraus, 1995; Olson & Zanna, 1993). The term "attitude" is categorized into a trio of affection, beliefs, and values, and cognition (Fishben &Ajzen, 1972; Olson & Zanna, 1993). In the affective aspect, the term "attitude" shows the individual's favorability to objects, events, or other persons (Ajzen, 1991; Fishben & Ajzen, 1972). The cognitive aspect of subjective norms and perceived behavioral control help individuals evaluate or judge situational conditions and consequences, such as the possibility or difficulty to implement one particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977; Fishben & Ajzen, 1972). Boundary of social norms and personal ability may transgress the individual's affections and cognitions and contribute to the final intention of making or not making a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, beliefs and values are supposed to offer "cognitive and affective foundations" to the attitudinal determinants in identifying individuals' considerations of behavioral decisions (Ajzen, 2006, p.7). TPB defines attitude toward a behavior as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). In general, the more favorable the attitude toward the behavior, the stronger will be an individual's intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In our case, the target behavior is the intention to refer to Iran Melli bank, and the attitude is toward Melli bank. Attitude toward Melli bank reflects feelings that performing a behavior would lead to a particular, and desirable, outcome, as a result of performing that behavior. Thus it is hypothesized that:

H_1: Brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have significant impact on affective attitude.
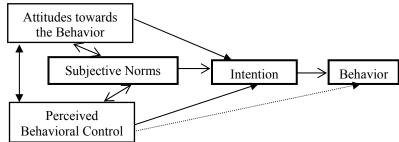

Figure 2: From "Theory of planned behavior" (source: Ajzen, 1991, p. 182).

2.2.2 Subjective norm

TPB postulates a second determinant of intention, subjective norm. Within TPB, subjective norm is defined as "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior" by the individual (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). A component of subjective norm is normative belief, or the individual's perception of a significant referent other's opinion about the individual's performance of the behavior. TPB views the role of social

pressure to be more important when the motivation to comply with that pressure is greater. Motivation to comply is the extent to which the person wants to comply with the wishes of the other party (Mathieson, 1991). Thus it is hypothesized that:

H_2: Brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have significant impact on subjective norm.

2.2.3 Perceived behavioral control

Finally, Perceived behavioral control refers to (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188): "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior". Moreover, perceived behavioral control (p. 122) "is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and consequences". According to TPB, it is the perception of behavioral control, as opposed to the degree of actual behavioral control that directly impacts both intentions to perform a behavior, as well as the actual performance of that behavior. Ajzen's view of perceived behavioral control is similar to Bandura's (1977, 1982) notion of perceived self-efficacy, which is "concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Bandura's research has demonstrated that people's behavior is strongly affected by their confidence in their ability to perform that behavior. When behaviors are perceived as challenging or there are barriers to performance, however, perceived behavioral control becomes a more important factor predicting behavior. Ajzen (2002) argues that perceived behavioral control is related to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) in that both reflect the perceived ability to perform a behavior. Thus it is hypothesized that:

H_3: Brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have significant impact on perceived behavioral control.

2.2.4 Behavioral intention

In TPB, behavioral intention is central to the model and represents the extent of the individual's intentions to perform or not to perform one certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, perceived behavioral control, together with behavioral intention, can be used to directly predict actual behavior. However, the predictive power of perceived behavioral control on actual behavior can be significantly muted, and rendered unrealistic, when, as examples, a person has little information about the behavior, or when mergent, new, and unfamiliar elements impinge on the situation. Furthermore, the influence of perceived behavioral control on behavior is more important as the behavior becomes less volitional. When the person has complete control over the behavior in question, that is, when the behavior is completely voluntary, intentions alone should adequately predict behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Behavioral intention has long been recognized as an important mediator in the relationship between behavior and other factors, such as attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). According to the model, the stronger a person's intention to engage in a behavior, the greater the likelihood the particular behavior will be elicited. Thus it is hypothesized that:

H_4: Brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have significant impact on behavioral intention.
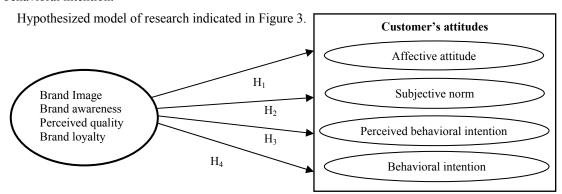
Hypothesized model of research indicated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Hypothesized model about impact of branding on customer's attitudes

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling

To achieve research goal, a survey research design was used at Isfahan, Iran. The target population was prospective customers who had referred to Melli bank's agencies in Isfahan during a six-week period of research in April and May 2009. According to Iran's Melli bank (2010), there are 88 agencies in Isfahan state that provide banking services to customers. A confidence interval approach was used to determine the sample size, suggested by Burns and Bush (1995). The sample size was set at 314 at the 95% confidence level (Burns & Bush, 1995). We used cluster sampling plan. Customers who were referred to Melli bank's agencies selected randomly to achieve estimated sample.

3.2 Instrument

The survey questionnaire consisted of two major sections. The first section is the model of CBBETD adapted and modified for banking services context by the researcher. This section concludes dimensions of image, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. Eighteen questions were adopted and modified in this section, including four items for brand awareness, five items for image, five items for perceived quality, and four items for brand loyalty. A five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree) was employed to measure the performance of Iran's Melli bank. The second section contains the scale of customers' attitudes including behavioral intention; affective attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, which modified by the researcher and used 12 questions to measure these dimensions (see Table 1.). A combined seven-point semantic-differential rating scale and a seven-point rating scale were employed to measure the above determinants. A pilot test was performed to assess how well the survey instrument captured the constructs it was supposed to measure, and to test the internal consistency and reliability of questionnaire items. The first draft of the survey instrument was distributed to 20 randomly selected customers who were referred to central agency lied in Sepah Street, the biggest agency among other agencies of Melli bank in Isfahan in terms of the number of referrals. A total of 20 questionnaires were collected at the site. Cronbach's alpha was used to verify the internal consistency reliability. The CBBETD model's dimensions including image, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness show a significant internal consistency of .79, .74, .81, .73, respectively. In Kassem and Lee's (2004) study, the Cronbach's coefficients of behavioral intention, affective attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control were .92, .92, .83, and .73, respectively. Based on the results of the pilot test, the final version was modified considering questionnaire design, wording, and measurement scale.

3.3 Data analysis

For hypothesis testing, descriptive statistics, Pearson r correlation, and hierarchical (forward) linear regression were used. The data was processed with the statistical software of SPSS 16.0.

4. RESULTS

To examine and explain the impact of branding on customers' attitudes toward Melli bank (the biggest Iranian bank), there are 30 questions. Based on Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller's (1993, 2003b) propositions of brand equity, Konecnik (2006) proposed CBBETD model that includes brands awareness, image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty dimensions as a instrumentation to evaluate the overall performance of brands. These four dimensions are independent variables. The attitudinal scale model was adapted by Kassem and Lee (2004). They found that the TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 1987, 1991) provided an appropriate perspective to examine the attitude-behavior relations of consumption behaviors. The researcher adapted and modified the attitudinal scale model to measure affective attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. The dependent variables are customers' attitudes. As shown in Table 1, the highest and lowest means of variables, standard deviations, and cronbach's α values of the eight variables used in this study had listed. To test hypotheses, and to find the best exploratory model for the relationships among brand awareness, Brand image, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and dimensions of

the attitudinal scale model, we used Pearson r correlation and hierarchical linear regression. Based on the order of Pearson r correlation from strongest to the weakest, these variables were entered into a forward regression model one at a time, until the model with the highest explanatory power (R^2) was produced. Each step partialled out previously entered explanatory variables until the addition of a variable no longer increased the explanatory power of the model significantly (R^2 and adjusted R^2), or until all variables were entered. In addition, the *F* and *P* values compared between models. The sample size in all regressions was 364. In testing H_1, there were significant correlations found with the subscale of affective attitude ($p<0.001$): brand awareness (r=0.208, p=0.000), image (r= 0.429, p=0.000), perceived quality (r= 0.341, p=0.000), and brand loyalty (r=0.397, p= 0.000) (see Table 2.). The best explanatory model of these dimensions with three explanatory variables including image, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, produced the highest R^2 (0.206) and adjusted R^2 (0.199) among other models (Table 3.). To analyze the individual predictors in this model, t-statistics were significant for image (positively related, t=4.074, p=0.000) and brand loyalty (positively related, t=4.645, p=0.000) variables ($p<0.05$), but not significant for perceived quality (t=1.260, p=0.208). According to β, the order of relative importance of the predictor variables in explaining affective attitude was image (β=0.258) followed by brand loyalty (β=0.237). According to findings, H_1 was partially supported (F=33.844, P=0.00). Overall, image and brand loyalty were selected as the positive significant explanatory variables of the CBBETD scale, explaining a range of 19.9 % to 20.6 % of the variance in affective attitude. Similarly, there were significant correlations found with the subscale of subjective norm ($p<0.001$): brand awareness (r=0.153, p=0.000), image (r= 0.333, p=0.000), perceived quality (r= 0.378, p=0.000), and brand loyalty (r=0.198, p= 0.000) (see Table 2.). The best explanatory model of these dimensions with four explanatory variables including perceived quality, image, brand loyalty, and brand awareness, produced the highest R^2 (0.153) and adjusted R^2 (0.146) among other models (Table 3.). To analyze the individual predictors in this model, t-statistics were significant for perceived quality (positively related, t=5.088, p=0.000) and image (positively related, t=2.866, p=0.004) variables ($p<0.05$), but not significant for brand loyalty (t=-0.272, p=0.786) and brand awareness (t=-0.781, p=0.435). According to β, the order of relative importance of the predictor variables in explaining subjective norm was perceived quality (β=0.271) followed by image (β=0.181). According to findings, H_2 was partially supported (F=23.398, P=0.00). Therefore, image and perceived quality were selected as the positive significant explanatory variables of the CBBETD scale, explaining a range of 14.6 % to 15.3 % of the variance in subjective norm.

Table 1-a: Descriptive statistics for survey variables

A. Questions relate to customer based brand equity	Mean	SD	α
Brand awareness			0.73
1. I have heard of Melli bank	4.31	1.098	
2. Some characteristics about Melli bank come quickly to my mind	3.85	0.939	
3. I can recognize the name of Melli bank among other banks	3.87	0.909	
4. I can recall Melli bank's symbol or logo	3.00	1.158	
Image			0.79
1. There are unique banking services at Melli bank's agencies	3.60	0.801	
2. There are considerable cash and payment facilities at Melli bank's agencies	3.57	0.864	
3. There is no financial risk	3.56	0.793	
4. There is good physical environment at Melli bank's agencies	3.36	0.879	
5. There are friendly personnel at Melli bank's agencies	3.65	0.787	
Perceived quality			0.74
1. There is a high level of cleanliness at Melli bank's agencies	2.98	0.658	
2. There is a high quality of financial and physical safety at Melli bank's agencies	3.78	0.771	
3. There is a high quality of accommodation at Melli bank's agencies	3.44	0.780	
4. There is a high quality of banking services at Melli bank's agencies	3.13	0.747	
5. There are low costs of banking services at Melli bank's agencies	3.16	0.832	
Brand loyalty			0.81
1. I would like to refer to Melli bank again in the future	3.94	0.842	
2. I intend to recommend Melli bank to my family and friends	3.76	0.814	
3. Melli bank provides more benefits than other similar banks	3.49	0.778	
4. Melli bank is one of the preferred banks I want to refer	3.68	0.844	
B. Questions relate to customers' attitudes			

Table 1-b: Descriptive statistics for survey variables

Affective attitude			0.92
1, 2. What do you think about Melli bank? Please answer each 3 descriptions	5.27	1.150	
	5.03	1.277	
	5.30	1.471	
Subjective norm			0.83
1. Important people in my life say I ought to refer to Melli bank again	4.50	1.459	
2. How much pressure do you feel from other people to refer to Melli bank?	2.94	1.796	
3. Most people who are important to me think I should refer to Melli bank again.	4.95	1.386	
Perceived behavioral control			0.73
1. How much control do you have over referring Melli bank again?	5.83	1.487	
2. If I chose to, I would be able to refer to Melli bank again	5.34	1.514	
3. For me referring to Melli bank again would be…	5.46	1.463	
Behavioral intention			0.92
1. I intend to refer to other Isfahan's banks in the future	5.58	1.631	
2. How likely is it that you will refer to Melli bank in the future	5.10	1.523	
3. if everything goes as I think, I will plan to refer to Melli bank in the future	5.25	1.510	

In testing H_3, there were significant correlations found with the subscale of perceived behavioral control ($p<0.001$): brand awareness ($r=0.267$, $p=0.000$), image ($r=0.345$, $p=0.000$), perceived quality ($r=0.199$, $p=0.000$), and brand loyalty ($r=0.482$, $p=0.000$) (see Table 2.). The best explanatory model of these dimensions with three explanatory variables including brand loyalty, brand awareness, and image, produced the highest R^2 (0.210) and adjusted R^2 (0.204) among other models (Table 3.). To analyze the individual predictors in this model, t-statistics were significant for brand loyalty (positively related, $t=8.535$, $p=0.000$) and brand awareness (positively related, $t=2.048$, $p=0.040$) variables ($p<0.05$), but not significant for image ($t=0.821$, $p=0.413$). According to β, the order of relative importance of the predictor variables in explaining perceived behavioral control was brand loyalty ($\beta=0.432$) followed by brand awareness ($\beta=0.097$). According to findings, H_3 was partially supported ($F=35.113$, $P=0.00$). In sum, brand loyalty and brand awareness were selected as the positive significant explanatory variables of the CBBETD scale, explaining a range of 20.4% to 21% of the variance in perceived behavioral control. Finally, there were significant correlations found with the subscale of behavioral intention ($p<0.001$): brand awareness ($r=0.254$, $p=0.000$), image ($r=0.283$, $p=0.000$), perceived quality ($r=0.172$, $p=0.000$), and brand loyalty ($r=0.402$, $p=0.000$) (see Table 2.). The best explanatory model of these dimensions with three explanatory variables including brand loyalty, brand awareness, image, produced the highest R^2 (0.168) and adjusted R^2 (0.161) among other models (Table 3.).

Table 2: Pearson r coefficient for hypotheses testing

Variables	Affective attitude		Subjective norm		Perceived behavioral control		Behavioral intention	
	r	*P*	r	*P*	R	*p*	r	*p*
Brand awareness	0.208	0.000	0.153	0.000	0.267	0.000	0.254	0.000
Image	0.429	0.000	0.333	0.000	0.345	0.000	0.283	0.000
Perceived quality	0.341	0.000	0.378	0.000	0.199	0.000	0.172	0.000
Brand loyalty	0.397	0.000	0.198	0.000	0.482	0.000	0.402	0.000

Note: $p<0.001$ is significant (one-tailed)

To analyze the individual predictors in this model, t-statistics were significant for brand awareness (positively related, $t=2.016$, $p=0.043$) and brand loyalty (positively related, $t=7.351$, $p=0.000$) variables ($p<0.05$), but not significant for image ($t=0.731$, $p=0.456$). According to β, the order of relative importance of the predictor variables in explaining behavioral intention was brand loyalty ($\beta=0.365$) followed by brand awareness ($\beta=0.096$). According to findings, H_4 was partially supported ($F=27.827$, $P=0.000$). Thus, brand loyalty and brand awareness were selected as the positive significant explanatory variables of the CBBETD scale, explaining a range of 16.1% to 16.8% of the variance in behavioral intention.

Table 3: Hierarchical regression for hypotheses testing

	B	SE	β	t	P-value	F	P	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Variables			Affective attitude			33.844	0.000	0.206	0.199
constant	4.286	1.077	-	3.962	0.000				
Image	0.098	0.034	0.258	4.074	0.000				
Brand loyalty	0.272	0.061	0.237	4.645	0.000				
Perceived quality	0.042	0.036	0.067	1.260	0.208				
			Subjective norm			23.398	0.000	0.153	0.146
Constant	2.671	1.126	-	2.373	0.018				
Perceived quality	0.184	0.036	0.271	5.088	0.000				
Image	0.072	0.025	0.181	2.866	0.004				
Brand loyalty	-0.017	0.063	-0.014	-0.272	0.786				
Brand awareness	-0.044	0.057	-0.037	-0.781	0.435				
			Perceived behavioral control			35.113	0.000	0.210	0.204
Constant	5.822	1.221	-	4.782	0.000				
Brand loyalty	0.565	0.076	0.432	8.535	0.000				
Image	0.021	0.026	0.049	0.821	0.413				
Brand awareness	0.132	0.063	0.097	2.048	0.040				
			Behavioral intention			27.827	0.000	0.168	0.161
Constant	5.212	1.348	-	3.828	0.000				
Brand loyalty	0.560	0.760	0.365	7.351	0.000	**Note:** Significant at the level of *P*<0.001			
Image	0.022	0.030	0.046	0.731	0.456				
Brand awareness	0.139	0.069	0.096	2.016	0.043				

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of research results

This study measured branding impacts in the four brand equity components: brand awareness, Brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty against the attitudinal dimensions of behavioral intention, affective attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. An integrated instrumentation was synthesized, drawing on Konecnik's (2006) CBBETD model and Kassem and Lee's (2004) attitudinal scale model. All research hypotheses were partially supported.

5.2 Research implications, limitations and future research

The most notable theoretical implication of this study is that the proposition of the impact of branding on attitudes. Brand awareness, image, and brand loyalty were found very strong in Melli bank's agencies of Isfahan. That was partially consistent with Aaker's (1991, 1996) proposition that appropriate brand awareness and image bring out the loyalty of brands. But, most customers remained neutral toward perceived quality. In the Awareness 4, more than 20% of all respondents said they could not recall Melli bank's symbol or logo. This implies that Melli bank's managers should revive its symbolic attributes into the meaning of its brand. Furthermore, the finding on Awareness 2 was consistent with the proposition of brand equity (Aaker, 1991, 1996) in that most customers could identify the name of Melli bank from many other banks. In summary, Melli bank has performed successfully in brand recognition, but greater efforts must be made to improve its symbolic attribute and function of recall. The current findings indicated that Melli bank is slightly above the average point of 3 in all image items analyzed. This fact calls for more efforts to improve Melli bank's image rating by upgrading its service quality. Melli bank's management may need to consider two measures: First, it must strengthen its brand construct and available resources to enhance and consolidate its brand differentiation from other competitor banks. Second, Melli bank's management can borrow from Fakeye and Crompton's (1991) three-stage evolution image and information promotion in an effort to transmit its desired image to the target market. Based on Gunn's (1988) proposition of evolving brand images (organic, induced, and complex), Fakeye & Crompton (1991) proposed that image promotions can be developed through informative, persuasive, and reminding messages. During informative stage, the formation of organic image is dependent on the exposures of

general information sources, such as newspapers, magazines, television or other media (Gunn, 1988). This informing process coincides with name awareness for promoting brand recognition and brand recall (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001, 2003b). Fakeye & Crompton (1991) insisted that effective informing can impress prospective customers with brand messages in their minds. They believed that persuasive promotions can be achieved by the use of commercial advertisements or posters to motivate potential customers to choose a specific brand. Thus, this stage helps prospective customers refine their perceptions of brand images (Goodrich, 1978). This is also where induced images form by the comparison of organic images, word of mouth, and marketing promotions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). The reminding promotion is to retain the image in customers' minds, which may lead to repeat referrals. The complex image forms after customers have service experiences to judge and help readjust the bank brand (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Just as the complex image can change by the frequency of referral, service experiences can influence customers' original perceptions or attitudes toward the brand (Pool, 1965). Therefore, a successful image promotion at this stage lays the groundwork for brand loyalty through positive reminders (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). In view of the above three types of image formation, banks should seek effective communication channels. Brand messages or information as the form of brand knowledge may facilitate memory reinforcement to prospective customers (Keller, 2003b). Therefore, marketing communications has become important for organizations to promote their band identity and brand image to target audiences (Fakeye& Crompton, 1991). Participants seemed to have problems with the level of cleanliness at Melli bank's agencies because they rated Quality 1 below the average point of 3. On the other quality items, participants rated neutral about banking services (Quality 4) and low costs of banking services (Quality 5). This implied that Melli bank's management must strengthen its perceived quality. Customers' attitudes toward Melli bank revealed their future bank choices. Regarding customers' attitudes, behavioral intention was investigated by the use of two predictors (Intention 1, Intention 2) on customers' Intention to refer Melli bank in following days. Potentially, Melli bank is losing its loyal customers, which concern was confirmed by behavioral intention tested. In affective attitude, two differential descriptions were used to investigate the customers' preferences. The mean of each description item was slightly over the average. Regarding subjective norm, most respondents said they had referred to Melli bank under no outside pressure. In perceived behavioral control, the customers' self-control, self-realization, and personal capability concerning referring bank were all fairly rated over the average point of 4. It was found that the most participants were able to make their own decision to refer bank, which suggest that most customers were independent thinkers and decision-makers in bank choice. In sum, Melli bank was better than the average in most investigation items. Brand awareness existed thanks to a fair amount of name recognition. But weakness were exposed in the recall function and perceived quality. Also, it was found unsatisfactory in maintaining good symbolic attributes. Isfahan needs to position itself better in the market by incorporating an appropriate identity into its image. By Aaker's (1991) brand equity, Melli bank's management should establish a standard process of service delivery to ensure customers with a satisfactory experience. Most services are intangible and simultaneous production and consumption (kotler & Gertner, 2002). In the satisfaction-based services, banks need to realize that the quality of service delivery is substantial for meeting customers' expectations and requirements. Thus, the proposition of service quality (SERQUAL) (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991) provides a direction for establishing satisfactory banking services. Parasuraman et al. introduced the model of SERQUAL. By emphasizing reliability, responsiveness, and assurance, they anticipated service delivery to be consistently dependable, efficient, and trustworthy. They also called for services to be caring and customized so as to cater to different needs and requirements. The focus of SERQUAL provides practical guidance to process the quality of banking services. This suggestion is necessary because brand awareness and perceived quality directly affect customers' perception of Melli bank. Thus establishment of unique bank image, supported by quality and brand equity, plays an important role in implementing banks commitments and communications with target markets. In sum, marketing communications (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1988, 1991) influence on organization performance and consumers' attitudes. An optimal branding campaign should build both functional and symbolic attributes into the brand construct to bring about a memorable experience. The Integrated scale model used in current study may need to examine the psychometric qualities of scales, with an emphasis on the CBBETD scale and awareness subscale. The study was conducted only at Isfahan's agencies. Then, results and findings are insufficient to generalize about other Melli bank's agencies in other states of Iran. For future research propose that efforts should be made on ways to effectively blend an

organization's uniqueness into its abstract or symbolic attributes and enhance customers' psychological associations with brand identity.

REFERENCES

Aaker, D. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of the brand name*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Aaker, D. (1996). *Building Strong Brands.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Ajzen, I. and Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In Kauhl & Beckman (Eds.), *Action Control: From Cognition to Behavior* (pp.11-39). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer

Ajzen, I. (1987). Attitudes, traits, and actions: Dispositional prediction of behavior in personality and social psychology. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *20*, 1-63.

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Process*, *50*(2), 179-211.

Ajzen, I. (2002). Perceived behavioral control, self-efficacy, locus of control, and the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *32*, 665-683.

Ajzen, I. (2006). *Constructing a TPB questionnaire: Conceptual and methodological considerations.* Available at: http:// www.people.umass.edu/ajzen/tpbrefs.html (19 February 2010).

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*(2), 122-47.

Berry, J. (Ed.) (1993). Brand equity. *Brand week, 34*, 20-24.

Burns, A. C., & Bush, R. F. (1995). *Marketing research*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

De Chernatony, L. and McDonald, M. (Ed.). (2003). *Creating Powerful Brands (3rd)*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.

Fakeye, P. C. & Crompton, J. L. (1991), Image differences between prospective, first-time and repeat visitors to the lower Rio Grande Valley. *Journal of Travel Research, 30*, 10-16.

Fishben, M. & Ajzen, I. (1972). Attitudes and opinions. *Annual Review of Psychology, 23*, 487-544.

Ginden, R. (1993). The name game. Cheers, 59-62.

Goodrich, J. N. (1978). The relationship between preferences for perceptions of vacation destinations. *Journal of Travel Research, 17*, 8-13.

Goodyear, M. (1996). Divided by a common language. *International Journal of Market Research Society, 38*(2), 110-122.

Gunn, C. A. (Ed.). (1988). *Vacations cape: Designing tourist regions (2nd)*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Iran's Melli Bank. (2010). Available at: http://www.bmi.ir/Fa/ShowBmiStateInfo.aspx?tid=50&sid=8&AspxAuto DetectCookieSupport=1, (15 March 2010)

Kapferer, J. N. (1997). *Strategic Brand Management*. London, England: Kogan Page.

Kassem, N. O. & Lee, J. W. (2004). Understanding soft drink consumption among male adolescents using the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 27*, 273-296.

Keller, K.L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1-22.

Keller, K.L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity. *Marketing Management, 10*(2), 14-19.

Keller, K. L. (2003a). *Strategic Brand Management-Best practice cases in branding: Lessons from the world's strongest brands*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Keller, K. L. (2003b). *Strategic Brand Management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity (2nd.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Knox, S.D., Maklan, S. and Thompson, K.E. (2000). Building the unique organization value proposition. In Schultz, M., Hatch, M.J. and Larsen, M.H. (Eds), *The Expressive Organization* (pp. 138-156). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Konecnik, M., & Ruzzier, M. (2006). The influence of previous visitation on customer's evaluation of a tourism destination. *Managing Global Transitions, 4*, 145-165.

Kotler, P. & Gertner, D. (2002). Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management, 9*, 249-261.

Kraus, S. J. (1995). Attitudes and the prediction of behavior: a meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21*, 58–75.

Mathieson, K. (1991). Predicting user intentions: comparing the technology acceptance model with the theory of planned behavior. *Information Systems Research, 2*(3), 173-191.

Michell, P., King, J. and Reast, J. (2001). Brand values related to industrial products. *Industrial Marketing Management, 30*(5), 415-425.

Montgomery, C. and Wernerfelt, B. (1992). Risk reduction and umbrella branding. *Journal of Business, 65*, 31-50.

O'Leary, S. & Deegan, J. (2003). People, pace, place: Qualitative and quantitative images of Ireland as a tourism destination in France. *Journal of Vacation Marketing, 9*, 213-226.

Olson, J. M. & Zanna, M. P. (1993). Attitudes and attitudes change. *Annual Review of Psychology, 44*, 117-154.

O'Malley, D. (1991). Brand means business. *Accountancy, 107*, 107-108.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing, 49*, 41-50.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing, 64*, 5-6.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1991). Refinement and reassessment of SERQUAL scale. *Journal of Retailing, 67*, 420-450.

Patterson, M. (1999). Re-appraising the concept of brand image. *Journal of Brand Management, 6*(6), 409-426.

Pool, I. D. (1965). Effects of cross-national contact on nation and international image. In H. C. Kelman (Ed.), *International Behavior: A Social Psychological Analysis* (pp.105-129). New York, NY: Holt.

Ries, A. and Trout, J. (1982). *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. New York, NY: Warner.

Upshaw, L. (1995). *Building brand Identity: A strategy for success in a hostile marketplace*. New York, NY: John Wiley.