

Full Length Research Paper

Evaluation of the effects of product involvement facets on brand loyalty

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Brands are viewed as the main asset of businesses. Marketers believe that branding is the art and cornerstone of marketing. But branding is not an easy task and several factors must be considered. Product involvement is an important factor in brand attitude and consequently in brand loyalty. This study was performed to investigate the effects of product involvement on brand loyalty. Data was collected from a sample of 379 questionnaires and was analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results showed that three dimensions, namely purchase interest, purchase pleasure, and sign value had a direct effect on brand loyalty. The two other dimensions of product involvement, which are risk probability and risk importance, had no effect on brand loyalty. So far, few studies have investigated the relationship between dimensions of product involvement and brand loyalty. Many researchers have considered involvement as a dichotomous concept, including low and high involvement. However, the most important contribution of this study is that it takes into account the various dimensions of product involvement. Thus, in order to present an appropriate picture of those consumers who are most likely to become involved with a product, we have to study the dimensions that might influence consumer involvement.

Key words: Consumer involvement, product involvement, brand loyalty, consumer attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Product involvement and brand loyalty are two important concepts believed to explain a significant proportion of consumer purchase choices. Aaker (1992) suggests that brand loyalty leads to brand equity, which leads to business profitability. Brand loyalty makes a critical valuable contribution to competitive advantage. Marketing costs render it expensive to introduce new customers and loyal customers are less likely to switch brands. High brand loyalty is an asset that lends itself to extension, high market share, high return on investment and ultimately high brand equity (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Understanding the drivers for brand loyalty is the first step to understanding how to influence them and thus increase profitability. Several studies (Traylor, 1981, 1983; Park, 1996; LeClerc and Little, 1997; Iwasaki and Havitz, 1998; Quester and Lim, 2003) have examined the

the relationship between product involvement and loyalty. It is believed that product involvement is the basic factor that can affect brand loyalty. In this regard, the study has investigated the influence of product involvement on brand loyalty.

The central premise of the literature examining the relationship between loyalty and product involvement is that consumers who are more involved with a particular brand are also more committed and hence more loyal to that brand. High involvement has also been suggested as a precondition to loyalty. Indeed, some authors have argued that the cognitive definition of brand loyalty represents commitment and therefore, involvement with the brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The product involvement/brand loyalty link: A review

Since products mean different things to different people,

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consumers form differing attachments to them. An individual's attachments may be quite different from their family or friends in intensity and nature. Understanding consumers' varying attachments and how they form, are maintained and are influenced, is of interest to consumer researchers (academics) and practitioners (managers) alike. In an attempt to more fully understand the behavior of consumers related to possessions, consumer researchers have often invoked the construct of involvement (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; Mittal and Lee, 1989; Ohanian, 1990; Slama and Tashchian, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1986). The considerable empirical and theoretical effort devoted to this construct since the mid 1960s, has been driven by consumer behavior researchers' desires to understand the ways in which consumers become involved with products.

Quester and Lim (2003) used a convenience sample of 253 students to test the relationship between product involvement and brand loyalty with ball point pens and sports shoes or sneakers. They used Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) consumer involvement profile (CIP), which identifies five antecedents of product involvement: interest, pleasure, sign, risk importance and risk probability.

Essentially, Quester and Lim (2003) found that while involvement is not the only determinant factor of brand loyalty, it does appear to play a significant role, regardless of the level of involvement associated by consumers with the product category in question.

In a rare empirical examination of the issue (an experimental study of free-standing insert coupons in newspapers), LeClerc and Little (1997) found that brand loyalty interacted with product involvement. The authors stated that repeat purchase behavior for a high-involvement product was an indicator of brand loyalty, whereas repeat purchase for a low-involvement product was simply habitual purchase behavior, without elaborating clearly on the relationship between these constructs. In a similar vein, Park (1996), in a study on leisure activities, found that involvement and attitudinal loyalty were highly correlated. However, Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) later argued that Park's findings of a correlation between involvement and attitudinal loyalty did not determine whether involvement precedes loyalty. Rather, they proposed that individuals go through sequential psychological processes in order to become loyal participants in leisure or recreational activities. Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) also argued that highly loyal people tended to exhibit high levels of involvement and that individual and social-situational factor, such as personal values or beliefs and social and cultural norms influenced the feedback effects of behavioral loyalty. To date, however, this framework has remained untested.

The general convention in the literature appears to be that one's involvement in a product class is directly related to one's commitment (or loyalty) to a brand within that product class. Furthermore, the more focal a product class is to an individual's ego or sense of identity, the

stronger the psychological attachment he/she will exhibit to a particular brand within that product class. Conversely, the more peripheral the product class is to the individual's ego, the lower the attachment to the brand. One reason for this is that a consumer exhibiting a low involvement in a given product category would more probably have a large consideration set and therefore his or her brand commitment would be low. Hence, brand switching would be more frequent compared with another consumer for whom this product category is highly involving. This suggests that consumers with smaller consideration sets of highly involving products would also exhibit higher brand commitment. This view, however, is also rather simplistic, relying on the size of the consideration set rather than the actual relationship between the constructs.

In a later work, however, Traylor (1983) stated that brand commitment is generally not directly related to product involvement, suggesting that it is possible to consider cases where low brand commitment is coupled with high product involvement and high brand commitment with low product involvement. This is because involvement and loyalty are consumer defined phenomena, as opposed to product-defined. As a result, Traylor (1983) believed that involvement and commitment could each be thought of as a continuum along which consumers are distributed.

Product involvement

Involvement originates from social psychology and the notion of "ego involvement," which refers to the relationship between an individual and an issue or object. This conceptualization has been the basis for applying involvement in consumer behavior. However, the many and varied definitions and treatments of involvement in social psychology mean that its application in this domain remains complicated. The involvement construct became linked to marketing and consumer behavior following Krugman's (1967) measurement of involvement with advertising (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006).

Since then, and specifically through a period of increasing consumer research activity in the 1980s, attention has focused on the conceptualization and measurement of involvement in relation to "objects" such as a product, message, purchase task, advertising or activity.

The concept of product involvement has been studied by numerous researchers in consumer behavior and offered as a useful way to understand characteristics of various consumer groups as well as their behavioral tendencies.

Product involvement involves an ongoing commitment on the part of the consumer with regard to thoughts, feelings, and behavioral response to a product category (Miller and Marks, 1996; Gordon et al., 1998). Product involvement is independent of situational influences

Table 1. The consumer involvement profile scale: the five facets/antecedents of involvement.

Facets of involvement (CIP)	Description of facets
Interest	The personal interest a person has in a product category, its personal meaning or importance
Pleasure	The hedonic value of the product: its ability to provide pleasure and enjoyment
Sign	The sign value of the product: the degree to which it expresses the person's self
Risk importance	The perceived importance of the potential negative consequences associated with a poor choice of the product
Risk probability	The perceived probability of making such a poor choice

Source: Laurent and Kapferer (1985, 1993).

(Rodgers and Schneider, 1993; Miller and Marks, 1996). Richins and Bloch (1986) note that consumers with high product involvement would find the products interesting and this would occupy the consumers' thoughts without the stimulus of an immediate purchase. Such interest in the product category may arise from the consumer's perception that the product class meets important values and goals. This study is concerned with the construct of product involvement, a more permanent and consumer-based construct.

Many researchers have discussed product involvement in a dichotomous form when measuring the construct, despite the risk of oversimplification that this may entail. Furthermore, terms such as high or low product involvement are necessarily semantically inaccurate since products are not inherently involving or un-involving. "Only consumers can be involved" (Traylor and Joseph, 1984). This suggests that a dichotomous measure would be inadequate and that product involvement would be best conceptualized based on consumer characteristics.

According to earlier work by Laurent and Kapferer (1985), different involvement profiles can, and should, be developed for each individual consumer. Using cluster analysis, these authors found empirical support for 10 involvement profiles. The two profiles on the extreme ends were coined "total involvement" and "minimal involvement," while those in between were labeled "contrasted profiles" (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). In a "minimal involvement" type of profile, consumers score lowest on all five dimensions (Table 1), whereas a "total involvement" profile is that of consumers who score highest on all dimensions. With "contrasted profiles" there are some respondents who may score high on certain facets of involvement while low on others. In an empirical study involving a 20-product survey of 1,568 observations, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) found that the "minimal" and "total" involvement types of profiles represented only a total of 25% of the sample, while the remaining 75% presented "contrasted profiles." Based on

this finding, they argued that it is the subjective situation created by the interaction of facets that leads to specific behavioral outcomes. The existence of these "contrasted profiles" suggests that involvement does not lie along a continuum but rather that varying profiles of involvement exist along this continuum.

The concept of involvement is well established within the theory of consumer behavior. According to Antonides and van Raaij (1998), involvement "is the level of a consumer's personal relationship with a product or service including perceived importance, value, and risk." The significance of the concept derives from the fact that antecedents ("causes") as well as consequences ("effects") have been detected.

Accordingly, involvement should be examined as a multi-dimensional construct since a single dimension would seem insufficient to capture the richness of the concept. For example, "perceived importance" of a product alone does not capture the full meaning of involvement. An understanding of the sources of involvement is also important to provide a dynamic picture of the consumer's subjective situation. This supports the notion of the CIP advocated by Laurent and Kapferer (1985), who suggested that involvement should be analyzed along its five dimensions (or facets) in order to better explain the nature of the relationship between a consumer and a product category. Table 1 lists the five dimensions of involvement as used in the CIP. All facets of the involvement profiles must be considered simultaneously because different facets have different influences on selected aspects of consumer behavior.

Brand loyalty

One of the brand assets at the source of value (Aaker, 1992) brand loyalty implies both a consistent pattern of purchase of a specific brand over time and a favorable attitude toward a brand. Brand loyalty develops when the

brand fits the personality or self-image of the consumer or when the brand offers gratifying and unique benefits that the consumer seeks. In both instances, personal attachment develops toward the brand. The literature shows two alternative approaches to the construct of brand loyalty. The first one is concerned with “a consistent purchase behavior of a specific brand over time.” This is a behavioral approach to brand loyalty and has been widely used to define the construct. The second one relies on “a favorable attitude toward a brand.”

Many researchers (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Kahn et al., 1986; Ehrenberg, 2000) believe that repeat purchasing can capture the loyalty of a consumer toward the brand of interest. Similarly, Sharp et al. (2002) suggest that attitude is not relevant to determining brand loyalty. It was Newman (1966) who first challenged the approach of equating behavior patterns with preferences to infer loyalty. Other researchers (Day, 1969; Coulson, 1966) have highlighted the distinction between “spurious loyalty” as captured by the behavioral patterns, and “true/intentional loyalty” that extends beyond the regular purchasing of a brand. In a more recent study, Oliver (1999) suggested that customer satisfaction developed by way of product usage is a necessary step in loyalty formation. However, it becomes less significant as loyalty begins to set through other mechanisms such as individual fortitude (that is the degree to which the consumer resists competitive pressure to switch over to another brand) and social bonding (that is the degree to which the community or the society supports the consumer to remain loyal).

Existence of situational factors (such as stock-out and non-availability), intrinsic factors (such as individual fortitude) or socio-cultural factors (such as social bonding), which can differentiate between repeat purchase and brand loyalty, have prompted recent works that have called for understanding and operationalizing brand loyalty beyond behavioral measures. For example, Dick and Basu (1994) stressed the need to extend the concept of brand loyalty to include attitudinal influences.

The need for the inclusion of “attitude” along with behavior to define brand loyalty has been felt by many researchers. Day (1969) was perhaps the first to recognize and articulate this need. Thereafter, Jacoby and Kyner (1973) defended Jacoby’s (1971) definition of brand loyalty. This definition was expressed as a set of six necessary and collectively sufficient conditions. According to them, brand loyalty is (1) the biased (that is nonrandom) (2) behavioral response (that is purchase), (3) expressed over time (4) by some decision making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes. The authors stated that it is the evaluation process (the sixth condition) that makes an individual develop a commitment toward a brand. It is this notion of commitment, they argued, that provides an essential basis of differentiating brand loyalty from other forms of repeat

purchasing behavior.

According to this conceptualization, to exhibit brand loyalty implies a repeat purchase behavior that is based on cognitive, affective and conative components of attitude (Jacoby, 1971). The literature suggests that a consistency exists between the cognitive, affective and conative components of attitude, meaning that a change in one attitudinal component tends to produce related changes in the other components. Thus, in order to capture the rich dynamics of brand loyalty, a comprehensive measure of the construct would need to include all three components of attitude.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The review of the literature provided in the earlier highlighted that high product involvement is tacitly considered a precondition to brand loyalty. For product categories that are highly involving, Dick and Basu (1994) suggest that consumers’ (favorable) relative attitudes toward specific offerings of a product are likely to contribute most to repeat patronage and be less susceptible to situational influences. The literature takes the view that product involvement and brand loyalty are positively related and that high product involvement precedes the development of brand loyalty. Studies examining the relationship between product involvement and brand loyalty have tended to treat product involvement in a dichotomous manner. A representation of product involvement as high or low, however, seems too simplistic. If involvement is a multi-dimensional construct, it may be better viewed in terms of an involvement profile. As previously noted, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) developed a CIP scale measuring involvement along five dimensions/facets, namely, “interest,” “pleasure,” “sign,” “risk importance,” and “risk probability.” They demonstrated that different facets of involvement have influence over certain aspects of consumer behavior such as information search. An involvement profile is argued to be able to clearly explain the nature and the consequences of involvement. The hypothesis for this study can be stated as follows:

- H₁: Interest is positively associated with brand loyalty.
- H₂: Pleasure is positively associated with brand loyalty.
- H₃: Sign is positively associated with brand loyalty.
- H₄: Risk probability is positively associated with brand loyalty.
- H₅: Risk importance is positively associated with brand loyalty.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The questionnaire

The CIP scale of Laurent and Kapferer (1985) was used to measure product involvement in this study. The current CIP scale

Table 2. Fit index.

Index	Allowance range	The obtained figures
The ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom	$\chi^2/df < 3$	2.96
<i>p</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value < 0.05	0.00
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.05 < RMSEA < 0.08	0.072
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	More than 0.9	0.92
Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	More than 0.9	0.90
Comparative fit index (CFI)	More than 0.9	0.95

comprises 16 Likert-type, five-point statements, ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. Only minor modifications were made to the scale.

Finally, Jacoby and Kyner's (1973) model formed the basis of Quester and Lim's (2003) questionnaire as it related to brand loyalty. Most significantly, this scale considers Jacoby and Kyner's (1973) and Dick and Basu's (1994) argument for the importance of relative attitude. Their research attempted to address the measurement issue by developing a scale, which encompassed the three components of attitude (cognitive, affective and conative). Most of the items in this scale, with the exception of item 13, were adapted from pre-existing scales separately measuring each attitudinal component as well as from other relevant measures. Based on the argument of relative attitude, the items in the questionnaire were designed and worded in a manner to ask the respondents to keep brand comparisons in mind. Item 13 was developed based on the sixth condition of Jacoby and Kyner (1973), conceptual definition, which states that brand loyalty is a function of psychological processes. The final scale was made up of four items for the cognitive component, five items for the conative component and seven items for the affective component.

The sample

The questionnaire was administered on a non-probability sample of 379 undergraduate students. The average age was 21 years. Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table.

The questionnaires were administered in January 2011 to the students who entered the central university library. Every fourth student who entered the library was asked to participate in our research. They were asked to respond to each question to the best of their ability. It took the authors four weeks to collect 412 usable questionnaires in order to reach the estimated sample size.

RESULTS

Data analysis

For questionnaire justifiability, it is worth mentioning that it was in an appropriate level both in content and in structure. The questionnaire structure justifiability was obtained by probative factor analysis. In that analysis process, we omitted some questions having lower factor charge and commons in order to create an appropriate way to confirmatory factor analysis. The researcher used a structural equation model to do this analysis (using Lisrel software).

Structural equation modeling was selected as the most

appropriate method of analysis. The main advantages of this method include simultaneous estimation of multiple and interrelated dependency relationships, representing an unobservable (latent) concept, and accounting for measurement error in the estimation process (Hair et al., 1998).

In the meaningful model research, there are six hidden variables including interest, pleasure, sign, risk probability, risk importance and brand loyalty. In this part, we will study precision of measurement models with its special index, relation with *t*-value and the cohesion amount.

After modeling the first question, which is whether the measurement model is a suitable one (correctness of the model) to investigate this case, we use a special index including the ratio of χ^2 to free degree that should be lower than the allowance amount, which is 3. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which has an allowance lower than 0.08, and *p* that should be lower than 0.05, goodness of fit index and the adjustment one should be higher than 0.9 due to the present index Table 2. One can say that the research model has a suitable fitness.

The observed indices, when compared with the desired values according to a fitted model, show an appropriate fit for the model. In the next step, we must test the significance of the figures obtained from the model. The significance model shown in Figure 1 depicts the significance of the correlations in this study.

In the meaningful number relation, the numbers are between 1.96 and -1.96 because the confidence level is 0.95 in the hypothesis testing. In the significance model, all the relations are significant, except the variables for risk probability and risk importance. In the next stage using the model in standard form, we can investigate the hypothesis results and the line coefficient. The model is as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the structural line coefficient. According to H_1 , interest in buying definitely affects brand loyalty. The diagram in the standard form shows that interest in buying defined 75% of changes in brand loyalty, so H_1 was confirmed. High interest in buying cell phones among the students resulted from adjustment of cell phones with individual goals and important values in life.

Richnis and Block (1986) believe that more individual

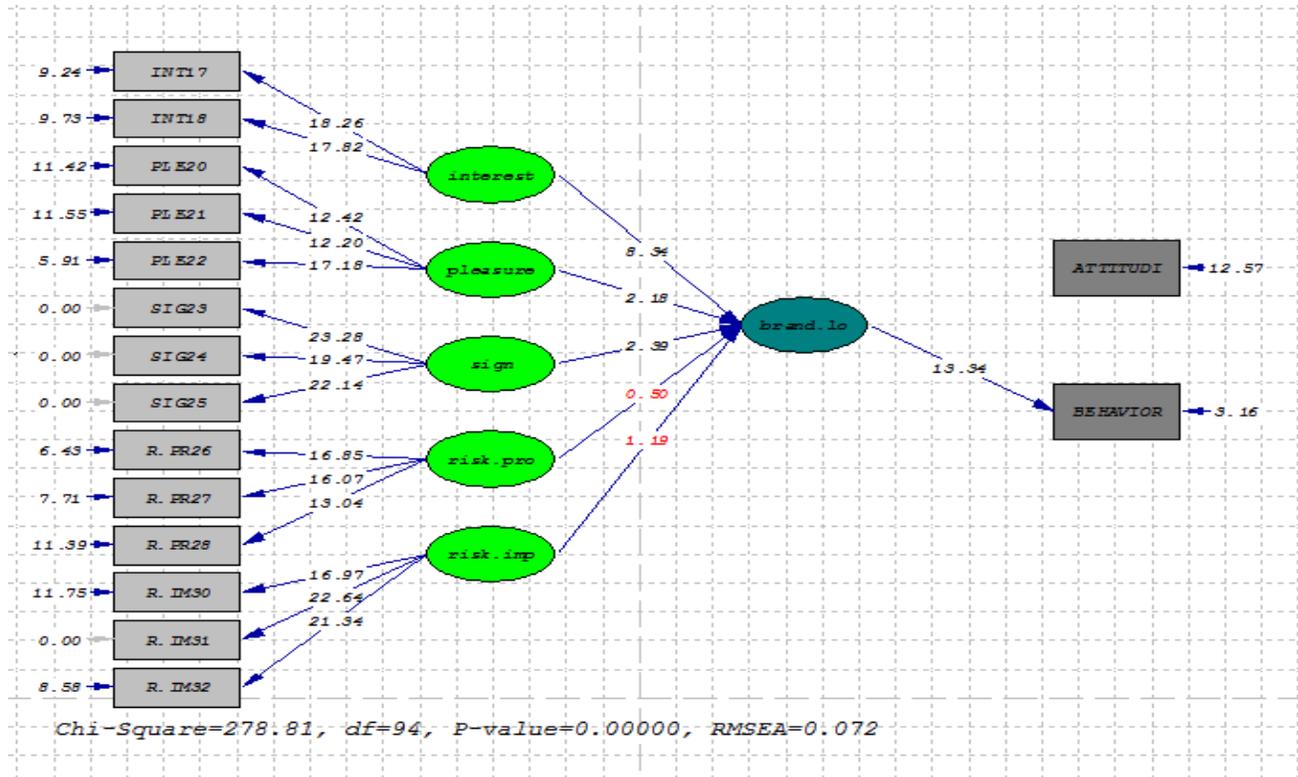


Figure 1. Structural model with t values.

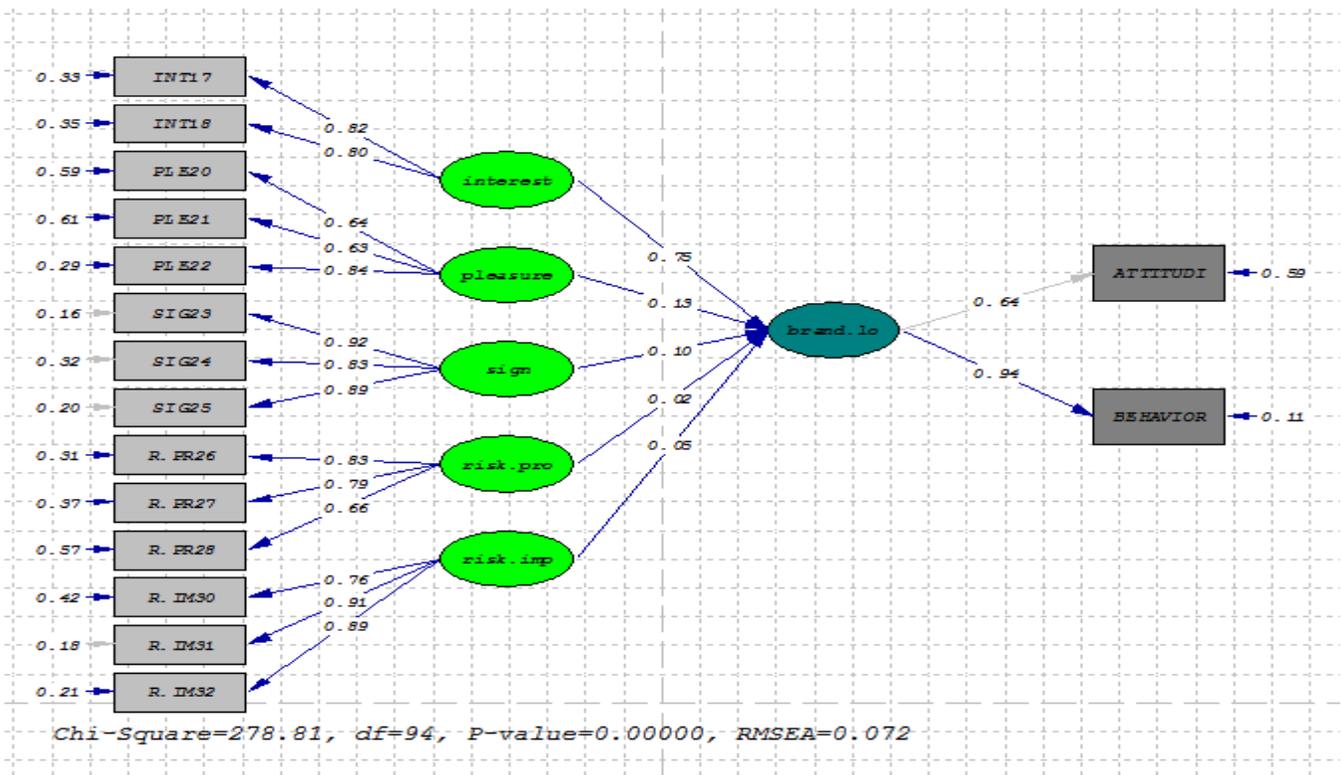


Figure 2. Model in standard form.

product meaning for a person, leads to more mental attachment to a specific product brand. As expected in H_2 , the value in the product pleasure has a direct effect on loyalty. Increasing product pleasure brings more brand loyalty to a specific product. The interest in buying defines 13% of changes in brand loyalty. According to H_3 , the relationship between sign and loyalty is positive and meaningful. However, risk probability and importance do not exhibit the same characteristic. Therefore, H_5 and H_4 were not accepted. In other words, the studied risk probability and importance do not have any effect on loyalty.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002) believe that higher pleasure power and sign value for a product brings users a feeling of more risk while buying. On the other hand, lack of significance of the effect of perceived risk on brand loyalty in the purchase of cell phone, which is a high involvement gadget, partly shows that consumers believe that any model or brand will have the expected functionality. As a result, the importance of functional risk is limited. However, the results show that the user's understanding can be different for different products, and the different complexity dimensions can have different effects on user behavior. We can determine the users who have high scores in different products in some dimensions and low scores in some other dimension.

DISCUSSION

This study attempts to provide insight into the influence of product involvement on brand loyalty in Iran. Building brand loyalty is not an easy task. Most importantly, the factors that can affect brand loyalty have to be taken into consideration. It is believed that product involvement is one of the most important dimensions in building brand loyalty.

This research seeks to explore the relationship between product involvement and brand loyalty. Quester and Lim (2003) tested this relationship using Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) CIP scale, consisting of five constructs antecedent to product involvement: interest, sign, pleasure, risk probability and risk importance. Consistent with others (Iwasaki and Havitz, 1998; Jain and Srinivasan, 1990; Rodgers and Schneider, 1993), they found that interest and pleasure merged for sports shoes/sneakers but sign and pleasure merged for ball point pens. To consolidate these issues, this research went back to the beginning, using all five facets most commonly agreed to be antecedent to product involvement; interest, pleasure, sign, risk probability and risk importance to retest the relationship of involvement with brand loyalty with a different sample using different product and different methodology.

This research attempted to eliminate potential bias in Quester and Lim's (2003) research by incorporating quantitative data analysis to determine suitable product

for testing and more robust sampling techniques to add rigor and generalizability.

Our results lend some support to previous findings that a relationship exists between product involvement and brand loyalty (LeClerc and Little, 1997; Iwasaki and Havitz, 1998). Consistent with Quester and Lim (2003), the relationship between perceived risk and brand loyalty was insignificant for the high-involvement product, mobile phone. Quester and Lim discovered that risk played a bigger part for their low-involvement product (ballpoint pens) than it did for their high-involvement product (trainers). The interesting point about this discovery is that it relates (or may well relate) to product performance considerations. Buyers of trainers are more concerned about the image, pleasure and sign of the product than about its performance characteristics. Under such circumstances brand will tend to dominate choice, since brand promotions will focus on personal meaning, pleasure and self-concept more than on functional or utilitarian considerations. We can see that risks related to product purchase (for example it might not work) are of a different order from risks associated with brand choice (for example it might look unfashionable). As a result, our marketing efforts need to distinguish between the elements of involvement that are more significant.

Clearly, our results are limited by the nature of our sample and the choice of product included in this study. However, given the direct relevance of the product to the population sampled in this study, this study should be replicated with a more representative sample and several other product categories in order to provide further evidence of the complex nature of the product involvement/brand loyalty link.

Although the nature of the product characteristics may allow the researcher to think in terms of a "total" or "minimal" involvement type of product category, our results show that consumers' perceptions can differ with respect to different products and that the same facets of involvement do not necessarily contribute in the same manner to explain brand loyalty toward different products. As previously argued, some consumers may also attribute high scores to some facets and low scores to other facets with respect to different products. Overall, our results indicate that assuming or oversimplifying the link between product involvement and brand loyalty in a dichotomous manner obscures much of the understanding of the relationship. The implication is that a simple relationship does not exist between product involvement and brand loyalty. Rather, different facets of the consumers' involvement have different influences on brand loyalty.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations given the nature of the sample. However, it should be noted that other involvement

research and measurement (Mittal, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1985) have also been developed using student respondents (O'Cass, 2000). However, as identified earlier, the sample is acceptable for theory testing (Calder et al., 1981). The study may also be limited by the use of a single product (mobile phone). However, other studies have also used single products (Arora, 1982; Fairhurst et al., 1989; Mittal and Lee, 1988; Slama and Tashchian, 1987; Tigert et al., 1980).

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