Investigating the Effect of Brand Personality on Customer Satisfaction: Evidence from Iran

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Abstract: One of the main topics in marketing area is customer satisfaction. The literature is full of research in this regard and this term is highly cited in marketing research articles related to consumer behavior. Brand personality is a new term in comparison to customer satisfaction. Despite customer satisfaction which has been in place for more than a decade, brand personality has just been introduced and hence there is a dearth of research in literature for this term. Therefore, the aim of this study is to see what the effect of brand personality on customer satisfaction is. Since one important variable which is highly effective is demographic variables, in this study we will see the effect of this variable as a moderator on the relation between customer satisfaction and brand personality. Results showed that brand personality has a direct effect on customer satisfaction and demographic variable has moderator effect on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand personality; Customer satisfaction; Demographic characteristics.

1. Introduction

Although the development of brand personality scale is exploratory in nature, it brings together important areas of research that have been shown to be useful in business strategy and marketing applications. In relation to this brand personality issues, Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2001) noted that, in order to reach customer satisfaction, companies should be able to consider brand personality as a strategic tool. Yi and La (2002) propose that brand personality influences brand identification, and then brand identification has a direct impact on brand loyalty, as well as an indirect impact via brand relationship satisfaction. Moreover, Park S. and Lee (2005) have proved that there is a significant influence of brand personality towards satisfaction in specific brand. In a recent brand personality dimension study done by Lin (2010) on apparel buyers revealed that the brand personality dimension of competence and sophistication can effectively boost customers' true loyalty toward the brand. In other words the higher the brand personality congruence, the more likely that the customer will experience higher levels of satisfaction.

In branding research, a considerable amount of attention has been given to brand personality construct (Avin, 2012), which refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). However, previous empirical research on the relationship between brand personality and satisfaction has largely neglected the issue of moderator variables. Previous studies have highlighted the lack of demographic variables importance (Awad, 2011; Homburg and Giering, 2001; Roberts and Bacon, 1997). Similarly, Caprara *et al.* (2001) pointed out that further investigation is needed in assessing personality characteristics capability of affecting purchasing decision. Furthermore, Feingold (1994) noted that because "personality inventory norms had not been broken down by ethnicity or geography", an important future topic for research is the potential "moderation of gender differences by race" (p. 450). Recently, the study of age, income, and education by Awad (2011) mentioned that although there is marginal variance but it still helps in defining the consumer characteristics. In addition, Mittal and Kamakura (2001) has found the relationship between satisfaction and customer behavior (repurchase intention and retention) is moderated by demographic characteristics. Thus, the objective of this study is to provide additional insight into the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction by examining the moderating effects of demographic characteristics on this relationship. Specifically, the link between brand personality and customer satisfaction in the context of sportswear products will be studied, and the impact of demographic characteristics on this relationship will be investigated. This study addresses the question of "how do demographic

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characteristics influence the strength of the relationship between brand personality and satisfaction?" The extant literature related to this issue is restricted to theoretical discussion (Dick and Basu, 1994) and very limited empirical evidence (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995; Kasper, 1988).

In subsequent sections of this paper we explain the theoretical background of our study, describe variables and measurement tools under study and test our conceptual model, and this paper ends with discussions of theoretical and managerial implication of the results.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development
2.1. Brand Personality and Customer Satisfaction Relationship

Brand personality - is defined formally as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997) that serves a symbolic or self-expressive function for the consumer (Keller, 1993). While perceptions of human personality are developed through a person's behavior, attitudes and beliefs (Park W. C. *et al.*, 1986). perceptions of brand personalities are formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact that a consumer has with a brand (Plummer, 2000). In a way, brand personality summaries the brand-user-imagery attached to a brand over time. A brand personality is described by demographics and psychographic characteristics because of its grounding within brand-user-imagery. For example, in developing a measure of brand personality, Aaker (1997) identified five key dimensions of brand personalities, as depicted by Figure 1; they are *Sincerity*, *Excitement*, *Competence*, *Sophistication*, and *Ruggedness* as a framework for brand personality.

Figure-1. Brand Personality Dimension
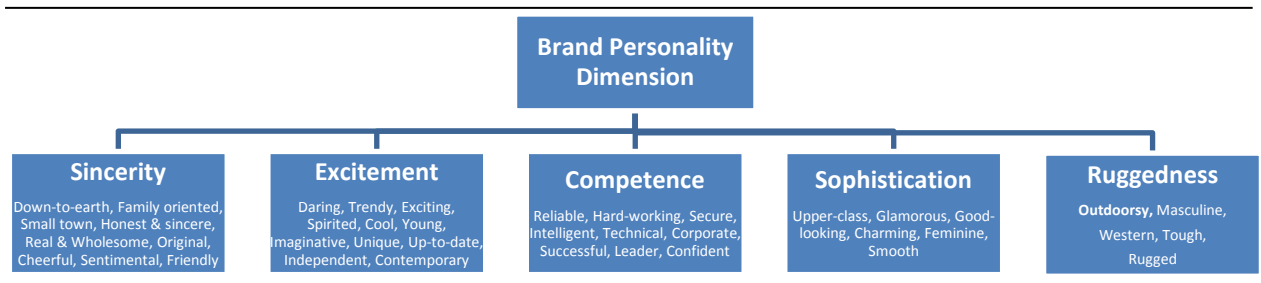
Source: Aaker (1997); (Aaker *et al.*, 2001)

Previously, researchers have focused on how the personality of a brand enables a consumer to express his or her own self (Belk, 1988), an ideal self (Malhotra, 1981; Sirgy, 1985) or specific dimensions of the self (Kleine *et al.*, 1993) through the use of a brand. However, research on brand personality becomes more interesting when the researchers focused on the research towards the application of brand personality with other constructs. For example, studies on purchase intention (Wang and Yang, 2008), brand preference (Mengxia, 2007), brand loyalty (Lin, 2010), trust, attachment, and commitment (Louis and Lombart, 2010), customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kim *et al.*, 2004), and many more.

Customer satisfaction - generally means customer reaction to the state of fulfilment, and customer judgment of the fulfilled state (Oliver, 1997). In addition, this satisfaction is "determined by the overall feelings, or attitude, a person has about a product after it has been purchased" (Solomon, 2002). Customer satisfaction study is critical to any product or brand because satisfaction is important to retain existing customers and adding new customers. Once consumer purchase and use a product, they may then become either satisfied or dissatisfied. "Many researchers have uncovered several determinants which appear to influence satisfaction, which include, demographic variables, personality variables, expectations, and other factors" (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993). Given the focus of this study on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction, we would expect that brand personality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H1:** There is a positive correlation between brand personality dimension and customer satisfaction.

2.2. Demographic Characteristics

Based on a review of the literature related to personal determinants of buying behavior, five demographic characteristics are proposed to have a moderating impact on the linkage between brand personality and customer satisfaction. The items in these five demographic characteristics were chosen based on the Aaker (1996). human personality definition that leads to brand personality formation. Aaker defines the associated personality of a brand as a set of "human demographic characteristics like age, gender, race and income". Each of these factors has been found to be relevant in the context of customer satisfaction and previous studies. A brief discussion of each of the potential moderators follows.

2.3. Gender

Study on gender influence toward consumer buying behavior has attracted some research interest (Chen and Dhillon, 2003; Jasper and Lan, 1992; Matzler *et al.*, 2006; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2001). For instance, Homburg and Giering (2001) indicate that satisfaction with the product has a significant effect on the intention to repurchase at the same distributor for men but not for women. However, Slama and Tashlian (1985) mentioned that women is more involved in purchasing activities and pay more attention to the consulting services compared to men (Gilbert and Warren, 1995). These arguments lead to the suggestion that gender might moderate the linkages between brand personality and satisfaction. As an example, one might predict that the loyalty effect of satisfaction with the sales process is stronger for women than for men, whereas the impact of brand personality to product satisfaction might be stronger for men. Another good example is masculine (e.g. Malboro) and feminine (e.g. Virginia Slims) brand personality lends itself to the creation of brand fit in a brand extension and increased purchase intentions. Given that most previous studies have shown that personality and gender are associated with levels of satisfaction, this study assumes that the effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increase with the consumer's gender. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H2:** The effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increase with consumer's gender.

2.4. Age

Age factor is another demographic characteristic that has attracted considerable research attention (Bauman *et al.*, 2005; Cooil *et al.*, 2007; Homburg and Giering, 2001; Smith and Baltes, 1990). Most of these studies conclude that information processing declines with age (Gilly and Zeithaml, 1985). Older people have restricted information-processing capabilities; therefore their reactions to satisfaction shifts might also change. Similarly, Henry (2002) mentioned that younger people pay more attention to expressive product aspects than older people. In relation to brand personality, study done by Goldberg *et al.* (1998) finds average correlations across the four demographic variables including age factor and the five personality dimensions. In addition, Caruana (2002) identified that education and age play a major role in determining the different perceptions of customers about service quality, satisfaction and loyalty. Hence, age is suggested to be another moderator of the linkages between brand personality and satisfaction. As an example, one might predict that the satisfaction effect of brand personality with brand identity is stronger for older man compared to younger one. For instance, *IBM* is 'older' while *Apple* is 'younger'. With reference to the above discussion this study assumes that the effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increase as consumers become older. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H3:** The effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increase with the consumer's age.

2.5. Income

Income is another important characteristics and it is assumed to have a strong impact on choice decisions (Zeithmal, 1985), where higher income households are more likely to respond to promotion of larger and more expensive items (Kalyanam and Putler, 1997). In the Irann environment, income proved to have a significant impact on brand selection (Yee and Sidek, 2008). Additionally, Iranns are similar to Hong Kong people when choosing branded sportswear (Lau *et al.*, 2006), because they tend to prefer brand names when making a purchase. Hence, income is suggested as another demographic characteristic that might affect the consequences of (dis)satisfaction. Therefore, given that higher-income people have greater opportunities for more diverse branded products, there is greater competition for their business and their selection of branded products has a direct income-relevant component that may offset time costs. This study assumes that the effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decrease with the consumer's income level. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H4:** The effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decrease with the consumer's income level.

2.6. Race

In spite of the number of researches investigating the race effect on portraying the marketing and branding issues (Kang and Kim, 1998; Neal, 1998; Yee and Sidek, 2008), the results of race-based investigations are still far from convincing and need further empirical investigation. Based on Kang and Kim (1998) study, they found that "each Chinese, Japanese and Korean immigrant exhibits significant differences in terms of how much he or she is affected by the different sources of reference group, media, and store attributes" (1998, p. 113). Additionally, Neal (1998) found that "dress serves as the visual expression of that ethnicity" (p. 32). In Irann sportswear market, among the three major races in Iran, Indians favour brand names more compared to the other races (Yee and Sidek, 2008). The findings from previous study have supported that race as demographic characteristic has been significant as an influential variable on consumer buying behavior. Thus, this study suggests that race is one of important variables that should be studied by marketers and academics. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H5:** The effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decrease with different consumer's race.

2.7. Education

According to Capon and Burke (1980) people with higher education levels are believed to engage in greater information gathering and usage before making a decision. Customers' with greater education are more sophisticated buyers of services (Andaleeb, 1994). As a result, more highly educated consumers have greater awareness of alternatives. Furthermore, people with higher levels of education tend to be associated with higher income levels (Farley, 1964), and as we noted previously, higher income can be associated with lower levels of loyalty (Chance and French, 1972; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Murphy, 1978) Given that most previous studies have shown that higher levels of education are associated with lower levels of satisfaction, this study assumes that the effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decrease as the consumer become more educated. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H6:** The effects of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decrease as the consumer become more educated.

3. Theoretical Framework

Figure-2. Theoretical framework of the study
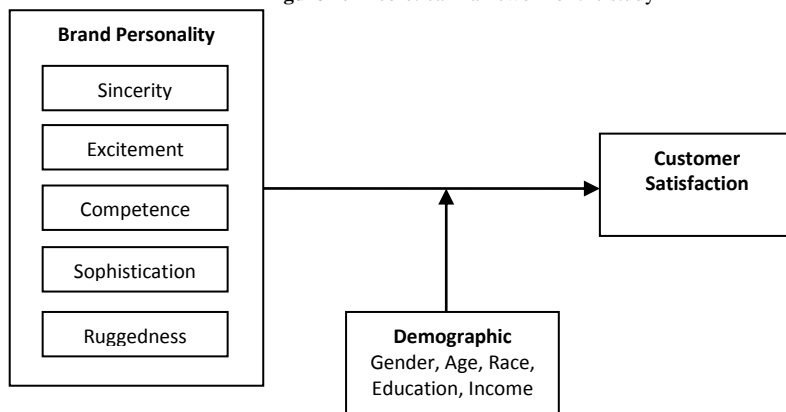
As mentioned earlier, the objective of this study is to provide additional insight into the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction by examining the effects of moderating factors on this relationship. Specifically, the link between brand personality and customer satisfaction in the context of sportswear products will be studied, and the impact of demographic characteristics on this relationship will be investigated. Therefore, the above theoretical framework is developed (Figure 2). The instrument used is adopted from Aaker (1997), Westbrook and Oliver (1981) earlier related studies.

4. Methodology
4.1. Sample and Data Collection Method

A structured self-administered questionnaire using 7-point Likert scale was used in assessing the consumers' self-reported experiences and feedbacks. Subjects for the study were randomly selected people that have been approached during shopping hours in shopping malls of two cities (Tehran and Mashad). Data collection took place between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. The interviewers randomly selected passers-by, asked them to participate in the study and to complete the standardized, self-administered questionnaire. As an incentive, interviewees received a pen.

4.2. Instrumentation

The following Table 1 indicates the measures of the study variables used in the study. The instrument items were adopted from previous studies by Aaker (1997) and Westbrook and Oliver (1981). Dimensions of brand personality were measured with the brand personality scale (BPS) with seven-point Likert scale (1 being "strongly agree", 7 "strongly disagree"). Customer satisfaction was measured on five-item scale developed by Westbrook and Oliver (1981). This scale comprised a seven-point Likert scale (1 being "strongly agree", 7 "strongly disagree").

Table-1. Instrumentation of the study variables

Study variables	No. of items	Sources of scale	Type of scale
Brand Personality	42	Aaker (1997)	7-point Likert scale
Customer Satisfaction	5	Westbrook and Oliver (1981)	7-point Likert scale
Demographic Characteristics	5	Aaker (1997); Sekaran (2003)	

5. Finding & Discussion

In order to test the hypotheses, SPSS (version 18.0) was used. This study found several interesting and important results in relation to the hypotheses. Before we present the main findings, however, we show an initial analysis procedure and some findings related to the sample description and correlation analysis between brand personality dimension and customer satisfaction. Reliability and correlation analysis of the measures used are also presented in the main analysis.

5.1. Sample Description

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed for this study, and 294 valid questionnaires were collected, which represented a valid return rate of 98 per cent. As shown by the valid samples (refer to Table 2), the proportion of male (149: 50.7%) is higher than that of their female counterparts (145: 49.3%). Their ages are mostly in the range between 21-25 years old (165: 56.1%), followed by 26-30 years old (23.6%), 31-35 years old (32:10.9%) and 36-40 years old (18:6.10%).. Furthermore, over 41.5% of respondents are undergraduates, 20.7% are graduate respondents with 13.9% holding Master degree and 6.8% PhD holders.

Table-2. Respondent profile

Respondents characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	149	50.7
Female	145	49.3
Age		
21-25	165	56.1
26-30	69	23.5
31-35	32	10.9
36-40	18	6.10
Education		
SPM		
STPM	17	5.80
Diploma	30	10.2
Degree	64	21.8
Master	122	41.5
PhD	41	13.9
	20	6.80

5.2. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's alphas were determined in order to test the reliability of the variables. The results (refer to Table 3) indicated that the measures of the key variable in this study are highly reliable. The results shows that the Cronbach's alpha value of Brand personality is 0.833 (*Sincerity = 0.862; Excitement = 0.928; Competence = 0.965; Sophistication = 0.930; Ruggedness = 0.966*) and Customer Satisfaction is 0.842.

Table-3. Reliability of items

Constructs	Total Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's (α)
Brand Personality	**42**		**0.833**
Sincerity		0.978	
Excitement		0.989	
Competence		0.994	
Sophistication		0.972	
Ruggedness		0.961	
Customer Satisfaction	**5**		**0.842**
I am satisfied with my decision to buy this brand		0.821	
I have truly enjoyed with this brand		0.614	
I feel good about my decision to buy this brand		0.931	
Using this brand has been a good experience		0.869	
I am sure it was the right thing to be a customer of this brand		0.818	

5.3. Correlation Analysis

This study uses Pearson's correlation analysis to confirm the correlation of two construct and the correlation coefficients of respective variables. Based on the data shown in Table 4, competence (0.961; p = 0.000),

sophistication (0.986; p = 0.000), and ruggedness (0.875; p = 0.000) show significant positive correlation with customer satisfaction. The other 2 dimensions of brand personality (Sincerity and excitement), do not show significant correlation.

Table-4. Pearson correlation analysis between brand personality and customer satisfaction

Variables	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness	Customer Satisfaction
Sincerity	1.000					
Excitement	0.967** (0.000)	1.000				
Competence	0.069 (0.241)	-0.017 (0.778)	1.000			
Sophistication	- 0.111 (0.057)	0.022 (0.704)	0.976** (0.000)	1.000		
Ruggedness	0.058 (0.325)	-0.001 (0.983)	0.958** (0.000)	0.882** (0.000)	1.000	
Customer Satisfaction	0.067 (0.254)	-0.005 (0.928)	0.961** (0.000)	0.986** (0.000)	0.875** (0.000)	1.000

Notes: $**p \leq 0.05$

5.4. Hypotheses Testing

The relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction.

Table 5 shows the regression analysis for the influence of brand personality on customer satisfaction. Based on the result shown in Table 4, each dimension of brand personality has significant influence on customer satisfaction: Sincerity (β = -0.214, t = 5.703, p = 0.000 < 0.05); Excitement (β = 0.157, t = 4.050, p = 0.000 < 0.05); Competence (β = -0.777, t = -5.802, p = 0.000 < 0.05); Sophistication (β = 1.471, t = 18.503, p = 0.000 < 0.05), and Ruggedness (β = 0.334, t = 5.409, p = 0.000 < 0.05). These figures have statistical significance which means that brand personality with dimension of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness have a significant influence on customer satisfaction is supported. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H1* is fully supported.

Table-5. The regression analysis for the influence of brand personality on customer satisfaction

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Beta (β)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Customer Satisfaction	Sincerity	-0.214	5.703	**0.00****
	Excitement	0.157	4.050	**0.00****
	Competence	-0.777	-5.802	**0.00****
	Sophistication	1.471	18.503	**0.00****
	Ruggedness	0.334	5.409	**0.00****

Notes: $p \leq 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.981$, $R^{2} = 0.981$, $F = 2977.244$, $p = 0.000$

The moderating effects of demographic characteristics on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction.

The regression analysis for the influence of demographic characteristics on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction is shown as Table 6. The result shown in Table 6, β = 0.123, t = 3.204, p = 0.02 < 0.05 and β = -0.153, t = -3.925, p = 0.00 < 0.05, have reached statistical significance. It means that 'gender' and 'race' have a significant moderating influence on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. The other 3 demographic characteristics do not support the moderating influence between brand personality-customer satisfaction relationships.

Table-6. The regression analysis for the effects of demographic characteristics on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction.

Model/Construct	Moderating variable	Beta (β)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Brand Personality, Customer Satisfacton	Gender	0.123	3.204	**0.02****
	Age	-0.052	-1.353	0.17
	Race	-0.153	-3.925	**0.00****
	Income	-0.043	-1.114	0.26
	Education	-0.014	-0.365	0.71

Notes: $p \leq 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.548$, $R^{2} = 0.581$, $F = 68.77$, $p = 0.000$

H2: *The effect of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increases with the consumer's gender.*

We tested for moderation effect of gender using hierarchical regression. Based on the results, we conclude that gender (β = 0.123, t = 3.204, p = 0.02**) moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H2* is fully supported.

H3: *The effect of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction increases with the consumer's age.*

We tested for moderation effect of age using hierarchical regression. Based on the results, we conclude that age (β = -0.052, t = -1.353, p = 0.17) does not moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H3* is not supported.

H4: *The effect of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decreases with the consumer's income level.*

We tested for moderation effect of income using hierarchical regression. Based on the results, we conclude that income (β = -0.043, t = -1.114, p = 0.26) does not moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H4* is not supported.

H5: *The effect of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decreases with different consumer's race.*

We tested for moderation effect of race using hierarchical regression. Based on the results, we conclude that race (β = -0.150, t = 3.850, p = 0.00**) moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H5* is fully supported.

H6: *The effect of brand personality towards consumer satisfaction decreases as the consumer become more educated.*

We tested for moderation effect of education using hierarchical regression. Based on the results, we conclude that education (β = -0.014, t = -0.365, p = 0.71) does not moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Thus, according to the results of above test, *H6* is not supported.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. The Positive Influence of Brand Personality Dimension on Customer Satisfaction Is Fully Supported

The correlation analysis shows that only 3 dimensions (Competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) of brand personality are found to have significant positive correlation for customer satisfaction. However, the hypothesis that sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness of brand personality have a significant influence on customer satisfaction is fully supported. This is probably due to the fact that, in an effort to fulfill consumer's needs, most sports brands emphasize on each dimension to ensure that the consumer will consider their brand to be superior in terms of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. At the same time, consumers with higher degree of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness of brand personality know the sports brand very clearly because this sports brand have well-rounded marketing programs to build strong relationship between brand and satisfaction. This finding is line with the results found by Guo (2003) and Lin (2010). As indicated in the study conducted Kumar *et al.* (2006), a successful brand requires the building of distinct brand personality, which has to be markedly different from other brands to make consumer notice its brand personality (Peter, 1990).

6.2. The Relationship between Brand Personality and Customer Satisfaction is Partly Moderated by Demographic Characteristics

The hypothesis that the demographic characteristic moderates the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction has been partly supported. Generally, different gender and race factors contributes significantly in shaping the purchasing pattern of consumers (Kang and Kim, 1998; Neal, 1998; Yee and Sidek, 2008). However, knowing these differences will help the marketers to develop promotional campaigns that are precisely directed to the target groups. The study at hand proves that 'gender' and 'race' have a significant moderating influence on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. This is probably due to the fact that, in an effort to differentiate from other brands, most sports brand in Iran emphasizes on sophistication (*Upper-class, glamorous, good-looking, charming, feminine, smooth*) and ruggedness (*Outdoorsy, masculine, western, tough, rugged*) which makes consumers consider sports brand superior in terms sophistication and ruggedness, and not so in term of sincerity, competence, and excitement. Consequently, this has lead to the result that the moderating effect of demographic characteristics on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction is not completely supported. As indicated in the personality and social psychology literature, gender significantly influences the perception of competence, integrity (Chen and Dhillon, 2003).

Overall, the results of this study provide encouraging empirical support both for theory development as well as for hypothesized moderating effects of demographic characteristics on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, brand managers can assess demographic characteristics variations in demand and marketing mix in order to implement micromarketing strategies.

7. Limitation and Recommendation for Future Research

This study represents an exploratory study on the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction of sports brand in Iran. The current study investigates the impact of moderator variables (only on selected demographic characteristics) that have an effect on the strength of the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction. Such limitations give room for further analysis of whether these variables also

affect the functional form of the link between satisfaction and loyalty. Another potential area for future research is the potential effect of product involvement and product category on this relationship. Is there any discrepancy between gender dimensions of brand personality and gender perceptions associated with a product involvement and product category? (e.g., for a low-masculine/high-feminine brand of power tools) (Grohmann, 2009).

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