Study of the Enhancing Brand Preference Through Corporate Social Responsibility in Banking Industry

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Abstract: In recent years, companies and financial institutes have special attention to corporate social responsibility. Corporate social responsibility refers to the relations between firms and the society in various dimensions. In fact companies have responsibilities toward individual in society in various aspects. So, CSR focus on the impact of organization's activities on society through their business. On the other hand, in today's competitive world creating a popular brand for each organization is most important. Corporate social responsibility initiatives as affirmative activities have good impact on enhancing brand preference in companies. Due to the significant role of CSR in businesses, this study seeks to discover the impact of corporate social responsibility initiatives on enhancing brand preference in Iranian banking industry-case of bank Pasargad. In this research, four type of CSR activities (according to Carroll's Model 1979) were tested against a predictor variable of perceived brand quality and moderated by age, education, familiarity with CSR and tendency to CSR. These dimensions of CSR activities are "economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic)". The research instrument of this study is the questionnaire which provides data from customers of bank Pasargad. Of 250 questionnaires distributed, 211 questionnaires were completed and returned. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was taken into account to examine reliability using SPSS21. Also for detailed examination of construct validity, parameters such as composite reliability, average variance extracted are calculated using standardized load factors from confirmatory factor analysis. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the present study to investigate the normal distribution of data that showed that the data has normal distribution. In the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaires, relevant analysis was done using inferential statistics. In the inferential section, the second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used. It was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares approach (PLS) to assess the fitness of research model accurately and with high quality. The results are showed that CSR activities have an effect on brand preference. Discretionary and legal responsibilities are ranked first and second in influencing the brand preference among CSR dimensions. Economic and ethical responsibilities, with the same effect, are next in rank. The effect of perceived brand quality on brand preference is much stronger than the effect of CSR on brand preference. Also age, education, tendency to CSR and familiarity with CSR don't moderate the relationship between the CSR activities and brand preference.

Key words: Corporate social responsibility, dimensions of CSR, brand preference, Iranian banks, economic

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, social marketing was born as a new concept by Philip Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman. This field as an independent scientific is different to the other aspects of marketing (Mirabi *et al.*, 2014).

In this marketing, at first companies should identify the needs of customers or clients. After that they try to respond and remove these demands in best way in compared with the competitors. By this way, the existence and prosperity of both customers and society will be provided (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). In fact, the purpose of social marketing is beyond the financial and commercial purpose. So, corporate social responsibility is a significant aspect of social marketing that can help firms to build a powerful brand for themselves.

The initial base "corporate social responsibility issue dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century"

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(Mirabi *et al.*, 2014). CSR has become one of the most extensive accepted notions in the world of business and commerce during recent years (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). There are numerous definitions of the concept social responsibility. Also scholar's approach to this concept has evolved over the years.

Corporate social responsibility refers to the relations between organizations and the society in different dimensions. In fact, companies have responsibilities toward individual in society in various aspects. So, corporate social responsibility focus on the impact of firm's activities on society throw their business. Noteworthy point is that economic markets are made by the society and because of that companies have responsibilities toward all stakeholders.

Smith has argued CSR has defined as "the integration of business operations and values whereby the interests of all stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors and the environment are reflected in the organizations policies and actions" (Adams and Zutshi, 2004).

This notion is beyond the financial and commercial interests. CSR refers to the implication that business has broader social benefits to consider not just the financial profits of the organization (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Each of the thinkers suggests have pointed to several aspects of CSR. But Carroll (1979)'s framework has been quoted as the widely concept. Carroll classified corporate social responsibility initiative into four categories. "Economic Responsibilities, Legal Responsibilities, Ethical Responsibilities, Discretionary Responsibilities (philanthropic)". Each of CSR initiatives can be assessed in these categories.

Creating a powerful and reliable brand as a safe investment is very important for managements in firms. Also researchers have used brand equity as an outcome measure to investigate the best approaches to brand building (Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010).

History of Bank Pasargad: Bank Pasargad as a private bank in Iran was established in 2004. In accordance with the Bank Pasargad article of association, banking services and operations should be in compliance with the rules and regulations legislated by the "Central Bank of Islamic Republic of Iran" (CBI).

This bank is for public without dependence on any agency or organization. Because the core founders of this bank including experts in banking industry such as former governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and senior directors of state-owned banks were decided to gather people from different levels such as doctors, engineers, academics, professors and etc. as the shareholders of

Bank Pasargad. So, this bank after a successful stock underwriting, was launched with capital of IRR 3,500 billion (Bank Pasargad, 2013).

Bank Pasargad's vision: Pasargad Bank has two main visions that all strategies and operations in this bank pursue these visions:

• Achieving the top rank among Middle East banks
• Achieving a proper place among the top global 500 companies (Bank Pasargad, 2012)

Bank Pasargad's mission: Bank Pasargad (2012)'s mission is adding value to stakeholders by:

• Relying on efficient
• Professional and innovative human capital
• Rich core values and corporate culture
• Inspiring stakeholders' needs
• Green banking and social responsibility

Clients have a special position in Bank Pasargad. To the extent that this bank has refined the belief that "the customer is the essence of the bank" from the common slogan of the "The customer is right", "to warrant sustainable national and international development of Bank Pasargad and to have an effective contribution to the economic growth of the country" (www.en.bpi.ir).

Corporate social responsibility in Bank Pasargad: As Bank Pasargad's mission, corporate social responsibility is one of the main issues in this bank. Given the importance of responsibility in this bank and also different dimensions of CSR, Bank Pasargad's directors after much investigation in theories, were designed the corporate social responsibility initiative programs according to carroll's model. Regarding to their reports, Bank Pasargad is the first bank in Iran which published the report of corporate social responsibility activities in this bank. Bank Pasargad in compliance with Carroll's model fulfills a lot of obligations. For example:

• Following the rules laid down in the Bank's activities
• Designing the code of ethic to adherence to moral norms
• Sponsorship of scientific meeting, conferences and seminars, sport activities, charities, prisoners with crime inadvertent and destitute families
• Holding degree and non-degree based banking and finance courses under license of international universities and institutes such as ACCA or banking course of university of Nice, France

- Granting scholarship to first, second and third ranked applicants of the university entrance examinations each year (www.en.bpi.ir).
- Investment on art works such as painting, films, statues, from Iranian and international exhibitions, festivals, in order to support artists. Investing on "Simin-Nader separation" film the winner of Oscar Award 2012 is one of its examples
- It should be mentioned that in 2011-2012 Bank Pasargad (2012) was accredited as one of platinum level approved employers in the world
- Protecting national sport teams in international competitions
- Organizing athletic contests and sport events within the banking industry" (www.en.bpi.ir)
- Conducting of training sessions for customers to acquaint them with effective use of E-banking services" (www.en.bpi.ir)
- International tourism and Hotel industry in Iran

Research objective: This research aims to discover the impact of corporate social responsibility initiatives on enhancing brand preference in the view of Bank Pasargad's customers. Also this project seeks to examine the power of CSR initiatives in enhancing brand preference in comparison with perceived brand quality.

This project also determines which type of corporate social responsibility is more significant in the view of clients in Bank Pasargad and creates more increase in brand preference. For evaluate this relationship, this study considers some customer characteristics such as age, education, familiarity with CSR and tendency to CSR.

For this purpose, Carroll's CSR pyramid (1979) is used. Carroll's CSR pyramid is one of the popular and classical concepts in CSR literature. Carroll (1979) categorized corporate social responsibility into four dimensions: "economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) responsibilities".

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of enhancing brand preference through corporate social responsibility practices in the view of Bank Pasargad's customers.

Research hypotheses:
- H_1: The corporate social responsibility activities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad
  - $H_{1.1}$: Economic responsibilities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad
  - $H_{1.2}$: Legal responsibilities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad
  - $H_{1.3}$: Ethical responsibilities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad

  - $H_{1.4}$: Discretionary responsibilities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad
- H_2: The perceived brand quality has higher effects on the brand preference in comparison with corporate social responsibility frameworks in Bank Pasargad
- H_3: The effects of CSR initiatives on brand preference in Bank Pasargad will depend on customer characteristics, such as age, education, familiarity with CSR and tendency to CSR

Literature review
Definition of CSR: There are different definitions and ideas about this concept. Also this conceptualization has been evaluated during these years and gradually new dimensions had been added to this notion. In another words, the literature of corporate social responsibility is fragmented. It means that according to Aguinis and Glavas (2012) researchers have studied corporate social responsibility concept from one level of analysis at a time. Also corporate social responsibility is mainly researched at the macro level compared to micro level.

So the different definitions of CSR are mentioned in blow: Bowen (1953) has argued corporate social responsibility refers to "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Moura-Leite and Padgett, 2011).

The interesting point is that Carroll (1999) as a famous researchers who has good findings about corporate social responsibility, described Howard Bowen as "the father of corporate social responsibility".

From the perspective of researchers, corporate social responsibility are associated with the part of the firm's activities which beyond the financial interest. Carroll and Shabana (2010) reported that "The idea that business enterprises have some responsibilities to society beyond that of making profits for the shareholders has been around for centuries". Davis has argued that corporate social responsibility refers to "businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest". Also Eells and Walton reported that "In its broadest sense, corporate social responsibility represents a concern with the needs and goals of society which goes beyond the merely economic" (Turker, 2009).

In the other words, McGuire explained that "the idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations" (Carroll, 1999).

Nonetheless, according to some ideas, corporate social responsibility has a close relationship with shareholder values. O'Rourke (2003) reported that "A

trend also noteworthy in the late 1990s was that of shareholder activists linking their environmental or social issue to financial performance and/or risks faced by the company". So, due to this assertion that environmental and social matters have a direct consequence on shareholder's value, O'Rourke (2003) argued that "shareholder activists are moving the rhetoric of their activism out of the realm of ethics or good versus bad behavior and into that of traditional issues of profitability, risk and shareholder value".

CSR in banking industry: In today's world, the scope of banking activities has widened. Given to this expand of activities, the impact of banks on society has increased. In this case, attention to corporate social responsibility initiatives is more important issue for banks.

McDonald and Rundle-Thiele (2008) demonstrated that "Banks globally are pouring millions of dollars into different kinds of CSR strategies in the race to strengthen their reputation and improve relationships with stakeholders including customers both business and retail".

According to Greenbaum and Thakor banks acts as financial middlemen in our community. They estimate and value financial assets, they administer the financial risks, they monitor borrowers, they structure the payment system and manage the financial risks (Scholtens, 2009). Due to these operations, banks have an essential impact on society.

Banks and other financial organizations are not only the recipient but they also have roles as the provider of socially responsible investments (Montgomery and Ramus, 2003).

So Heal, had argued that banks could obviously gain from exerting some of the most elementary ideas of corporate social responsibility to their own human resources policies and to ensure the quality community involvement (Khan *et al.*, 2009).

Also banks increasingly are implicated in financing economic activities that lead to sustainable development and offer microcredit to the poor and dispossessed (Scholtens, 2009).

Brand preference: There has been strong interest from researchers and marketers to find the main factors in formed consumer's brand preference toward a particular brand.

In fact, brand preference is one of the dimensions of brand that represents which company's products and services are preferred by consumers under the assumptions equality in price and availability. Brand preference is an essential point to understand main factors of selection brands in the view of consumers. In other words, "Brand preference is closely related to brand

choice that can facilitate consumer decision making and activate brand purchase" (Ebrahim, 2013).

The concept of brand preference presents that consumers tend to certain brands, even when the alternative options are objectively analogous (Bronnenberg *et al.*, 2010).

For example, a large proportion of consumers, purchase branded drugs, even if chemically equivalent generic alternatives are available at the same stores for much lower prices.

Bronnenberg *et al.* (2010) have argued that "theorists have long speculated that willingness to pay for brands today could depend on consumers' experiences in the past".

Past researches about brand preference represent that this concept is depend on some factors such as cultural, social, psychological, personal factors of consumers, price, advertising, promotion (Ebrahim, 2013).

It seems that the high level brand preference demonstrates the high level of customer loyalty. Because in high level brand preference consumers willing to use or buy products and services in a particular brand, even he or she has to pay more cost or more effort to receive them.

In this study, according to Yoo, brand preference defines as the relative preference for choosing and using the brand (Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010).

Perceived brand quality: Perceived quality is commonly used as a brand equity variable and various researchers have identified an association between quality and brand equity (Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010).

Aaker argued that five brand equity assets are the source of the value created. These assets include: brand loyalty, brand name awareness, Perceived brand quality, brand associations in addition to perceived quality and other dedicated brand assets (Christodoulides and Chernatony, 2010).

Aaker argued that perceived quality "is considered the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended" (Vantamay, 2007).

Also Aaker asserted that perceived quality lends value to a brand in several ways: high quality gives consumers a good reason to buy the brand and allows the brand to differentiate itself from its competitors, to charge a premium price and to have a strong basis for the brand extension (Tong and Hawley, 2009).

In other words, Zeithaml said that perceived quality is "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority".

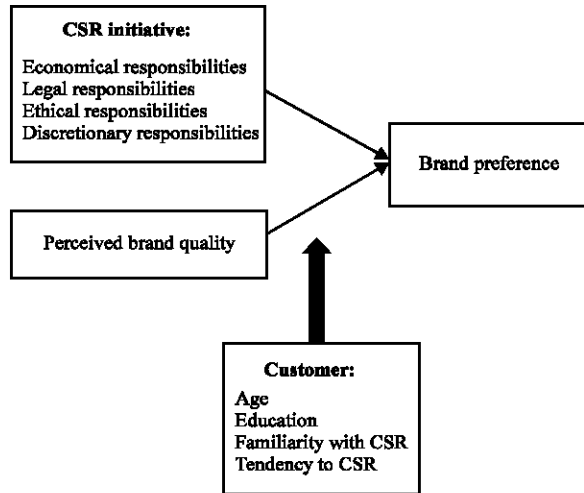Aaker and Joachimsthaler argued that perceived quality is "a special type of association, partly because it

Fig. 1: The conceptual model of the research

influences brand associations in many contexts and partly because it has been empirically shown to affect profitability" (Vantamay, 2007).

The conceptual model of research: According to some points such as history of corporate social responsibility in Iran, lack of information due to some security and strong competitive between banks in Iran, the culture of this country in field of significance of CSR and also some researches in past about the importance of different dimensions of CSR from the perspective of managers in Bank Pasargad, i try to make a model to achieve a practical and orchestrated model with Iran country. Finally, the following model was provided as the conceptual research model for this study (Fig. 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The statistical population: Given that Bank Pasargad has been chosen as the case study in this research, the statistical population is composed of all customers of Bank Pasargad in Tehran.

The statistical sample: The Cochran formula was used in this study to calculate the sample size:

$$n = \frac{Nt^2p(p-1)}{Nd^2 + t^2p(1-p)}$$

According to the above formula, if we consider the sample size with a demographic gap of 0.5 (p = 0.5 and 1-p = 0.5), acceptance of sampling error would be equal to d = 0.05. The result of this formula based on a population with an unlimited number of participants is = 386 customers.

Sampling method: In this study, simple random sampling method was used to select customers for the aim of collecting data to be used in the quantitative section of research.

Data collection tool: The questionnaire tool was used in the quantitative section of this research. The quality of questionnaires is very important in obtaining correct and generalizable data. Therefore, in preparing the questionnaire for this study, it was tried to design questions based on the research objectives and hypotheses, make it attractive and as brief as possible for the respondents and provide a brief instruction for the questionnaire.

This questionnaire contains two general parts (demographic questions and questions about the constructs) consisting of 34 principal items. Demographic questions include questions about age, gender and education.

Table 1 shows the dimensions of the questionnaire used in the present study, with a number of questions used to measure each of them.

In developing all questions, 5 point Likert scale was used; so that the importance of each factor was considered in a range between 5 (Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree).

Methods of data analysis: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the present study to investigate the normal distribution of data. In order to examine the data normalization, the null hypothesis indicating the normal distribution of the data was measured at the confidence level of 95%.

Thus if the test statistic is ≥0.05, then there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis and the data distribution is normal.

In the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaires, relevant analysis was done using inferential statistics. In the inferential section, the second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used. It was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares approach (PLS) to assess the fitness of research model accurately and with high quality.

In addition, the PLS Method has many advantages, the most important of which is the ability to analyze low-volume and abnormal data as well. Considering the volume of data, this is exactly the same capability that is needed in this study. Also, in the section of complementary analyses, student t-test and ANOVA were used to examine the impact of demographic variables. In order to investigate the mean difference between different gender groups and actually test the hypothesis that there

Table 1: Dimensions and items of the questionnaire

Dimensions	No. of questions	References
Corporate social responsibility	1-20	Carroll (1999)
Perceived brand quality	21-25	Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2010)
Brand preference	26-28	Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2010)
Familiarity with CSR	29-30	Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2010)
Tendency to social responsibility	31-34	Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2010)

are significant differences between gender groups in terms of studied variables, Paired-sample student t-test was used. ANOVA test was also used to check whether there are real differences between the sample means obtained from different communities and prove that the possible difference is negligible and it can be caused by accident.

The one-way analysis of variance (One-Way Anova) is to evaluate and compare the mean of a dependent variable in terms of a stratified independent variable with >2 levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data: For the field study, a questionnaire consisted of 34 questions was developed and distributed in person among customers of Pasargad Bank. Of 250 questionnaires distributed, 211 questionnaires were completed and returned. In this study, the sample size was calculated based on multiple variables. So 30 questionnaires for each variable is sufficient.

Examination of the status variables: In this study, the status of variables was evaluated in the form of descriptive statistics, through examining standard deviation and variance. The overall results are shown in Table 2.

According to Table 2, the mean, standard deviation, variance and dispersion coefficient of variables are different from each other. About standard deviation and variance of dimensions, it was revealed that none of the variables had the standard deviation >1. Therefore, the dispersion of answers was suitable. Also, analysis of variables in terms of the mean value revealed that their relatively high mean value is more than hypothetical mean of 3. This suggests that the risk of factors' impact is very high.

Normal distribution of data: The assumption of normality of the data is one of the fundamental issues in parametric analyses. This assumption should be tested prior to analysis. Three following methods are used to examine the normality of the data distribution: Skewness and Kurtosis of the data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and finally box plots diagrams, Q-Q and Stem and Leaves Plot. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the present study.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Changes coefficient	Variance
Corporate social responsibility	3.860	0.486	0.1259	0.237
Brand preference	3.696	1.017	0.2751	1.035

Table 3: K-S test results for all questions

K-S statistic	Significance level
1.166	0.132

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S): Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the present study to examine the normal distribution of data. In order to examine the data normalization, the null hypothesis indicating the normal distribution of the data was measured at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, if the test statistic is ≥ 0.05, there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis indicating the "equality of means". In another words, data distribution is normal. To test for normality, statistical hypotheses were set out as follows:

- H_0: The data distribution is normal
- H_1: The data distribution is not normal

Table 3 shows the results of K-S test conducted on the data within the framework of the classification of factors influencing the development of strategy.

In accordance with the above table, due to the significant level >0.05, it can be stated at the confidence level of 95% that the null hypothesis of normal distribution of data is confirmed.

Analysis of the main hypotheses: The first main hypothesis stated that the corporate social responsibility activities affect brand preference of Bank Pasargad.

Examination of significant coefficients (t-values) for the first hypothesis indicates that the significant coefficient (t-value) of this relation (t = 1.640) is less than the absolute value of 1.96. But because the recent theory was the research hypothesis and has an appropriate path coefficient and given that it is above the level of 1.6, therefore, it is confirmed at the confidence level of 0.9. Thus, it can be argued that the social responsibility programs affect the brand preference with the path intensity factor of $\beta = 0.108$. In this regard, the sub hypotheses associated with this main hypothesis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Examination of sub hypotheses associated with the first main hypothesis

Hypothesis	Independent variables	Dependent variable	Path coefficient	Sig. coefficient (t-value)	Result
H_1	Economic responsibility	Brand preference	0.118	1.631	Confirmed
H_2	Ethical responsibility	Brand preference	0.118	1.737	Confirmed
H_3	Legal responsibility	Brand preference	0.163	1.634	Confirmed
H_4	Discretionary responsibility	Brand preference	0.201	2.696	Confirmed

Table 5: Test for the equality of means between different gender groups

Parameters	------Levene's test------		t	Two-tailed significance	The mean difference	SE	The 95% confidence level	
							Lower limit	Upper limit
CSR	0.354	0.533	-0.556	0.578	-0.03878	0.06969	-0.17617	0.09861
			-0.559	0.577	-0.03878	0.06942	-0.17687	0.09830
Brand preference	0.012	0.913	-0.705	0.481	-0.10270	0.14563	-0.38978	0.18438
			-0.716	0.475	-0.10270	0.14563	-0.38608	0.18068

As can be deduced from Table 4, all sub hypotheses having significant coefficient (t-value) are confirmed. In the meantime, the greatest impact is associated with the relationship between human responsibility and brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.201 and the lowest is related to the relationship between economic and moral responsibility and brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.118.

The second main hypothesis stated that the perceived quality has a significant impact on the brand preference which can be statistically written as follows.

Examination of the second hypothesis indicated that the significant coefficient of this relation (t = 7.166) is greater than the absolute value of 1.96 and thus it is confirmed at the confidence level of 0.99. Therefore, it could be argued that the perceived quality affects the brand preference with the path intensity ratio of $\beta = 0.568$. Comparison between intensity ratios represents that the effect of perceived brand quality on brand preference is stronger.

The third main hypothesis stated that the impact of CSR activities on brand preference is moderated by variables such as familiarity with corporate social responsibilities or tendency to corporate social responsibility.

Examination of the significant coefficient (t-value) for the third hypothesis indicated that the significant coefficient of this relation (t = 0.723) is lower than the absolute value of 1.96; therefore, it is not confirmed at the confidence level of 0.99 and cannot be claimed that familiarity with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) moderate the relationship between social responsibilities programs and brand preference. On the other hand, examination of the significant coefficient (t-value) in order to evaluate the modulatory effect of tendency to corporate social responsibility showed that the significant level of related hypothesis (t = 0.476) is lower than the absolute value of 1.96 and the latter hypothesis is not confirmed.

In this regard, paying attention to the direct influence of these two variables on brand preference is also noteworthy. The variable of familiarity with social responsibility with significant coefficient of 2.095 and path coefficient of 0.155 has direct impact on brand preference variable.

But examination of the variable of tendency towards social responsibility suggested that the direct correlation of this variable with the variable of brand preference is not confirmed because it's significant coefficient (t = 0.178) is <1.96. Examination of R^2 coefficient, related to the endogenous variables showed that the independent variables explained 50% of changes in the brand preference and since this value is greater than the acceptable standard of 0.3, the model has high predictive power. Also, GOF index for the latter model was = 0.665 which represents the ideal fitness of model because it is beyond the 0.33.

Complementary tests
Student t-test: In order to investigate the mean difference between different gender groups and in fact for the aim of testing the hypothesis that there is a significant difference between gender groups in terms of studied variables, the paired sample student t-test was used, the results of which can be seen in Table 5.

According to the results (significance of the test is >0.05 and therefore the null hypothesis indicating the equality of mean is confirmed), it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between various gender groups in terms of the variables studied.

Analysis of findings: This study investigates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand preference from the consumer's perspective in the banking industry (In the case of Bank Pasargad).

The perceived brand quality is studied as the second variable directly affecting the brand preference and its effect is compared with the measures of social responsibilities. Several moderator variables are also included such as age, education, familiarity with CSR and also tendency to corporate social responsibility.

Carroll's Model, as one of the most popular models in the social responsibility topic, is used in dividing the CSR measures. As mentioned in the literature, Carroll divides the corporate social responsibility into four categories of economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities. Generally, the objectives of this research include the following:

* Studying the effect of CSR measures on brand preference
* Investigating the effect of perceived brand quality on brand preference and comparing it with the CSR effect on brand preference
* The awareness from the importance of CSR dimensions, according to Carroll Model, on brand preference from the customers' perspective
* Investigating the importance of variables such as age, education, familiarity with CSR and the tendency to this concept on the performance of CSR activities

Research findings show that CSR programs, by a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.108$ have a significant effect on brand preference from the customer's perspective. Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed, i.e., the CSR programs have a significant effect on brand preference of Bank Pasargad. Regarding the effects of various CSR aspects on brand preference, we can say:

* From the Carroll's perspective, economic responsibilities as the first class of social responsibilities affect brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.118
* From the Carroll's perspective, ethical responsibilities as the second class of social responsibilities affect brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.118
* From the Carroll's perspective, legal responsibilities as the third class of social responsibilities affect brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.163
* Finally and again from the Carroll's perspective, discretionary responsibilities as the fourth class of social responsibilities affect brand preference with a path coefficient of 0.201

The results confirm all the secondary hypotheses. This research also shows that the perceived brand quality affects the brand preference with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.568$. Accordingly, the second main hypothesis is approved, i.e., the perceived brand quality has a significant effect on the brand preference.

According to the research findings regarding the third main hypothesis, it cannot be claimed that familiarity with CSR moderates the relationship between the CSR

activities and brand preference. According to the results, one cannot argue that the tendency to CSR moderates the relationship between the corporate social responsibility activities and the brand preference. Therefore, the third hypothesis is not confirmed, i.e., the effect of CSR programs on the brand preference is not moderated through variables such as familiarity with CSR or tendency towards it. The noteworthy finding is that the variable of familiarity with corporate social responsibility directly affects the brand preference variable with a significance coefficient of 2.095 and path coefficient of 0.155. But, the same study regarding the tendency to corporate social responsibility does not confirm the direct relationship between this variable and the brand preference variable, because its significance coefficient $(t = 0.178)$ is <1.96.

The demographic research findings show that the majority of the sample is composed of male respondents, mostly in the age range of 30-40 years. Also, the education level of the sample is acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The following results were also obtained according to the research:

* From the customer's perspective, the effect of perceived brand quality on brand preference is much stronger than the effect of CSR on brand preference
* The research does not indicate a significant difference between the mean scores of the variables among different age and education groups of the respondents
* It can be said that discretionary and legal responsibilities are ranked first and second in influencing the brand preference among CSR dimensions. Economic and ethical responsibilities, with the same effect are next in rank

As mentioned in the literature, corporate social responsibility are considered by various businesses today and its importance is growing day by day and according to the conducted studies, as a competitive advantage, CSR measures can have a significant impact on building a strong brand. As a result, special attention of the managers of Bank Pasargad to this issue is unavoidable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the importance of the CSR concept and the impact factors of different paths in the obtained results,

we suggest the following to the Pasargad Bank: special attention should be paid to the quality of services and products and their adaptation to the customer's demands, because this factor contributes to the brand's perceived quality from their perspective. In comparison to the competitors, they should create a better image of their brand in the customer's minds through creativity and innovation in their products and services as well as correct management of the costs. They can also increase their customers trust towards the bank by increasing the level of services and targeted advertising. Regarding the significant effect of the perceived brand quality, the Bank Pasargad can therefore, increase the brand preference.

Considering the impact of corporate social responsibility on enhancing brand preference, this variable is ranked after the perceived brand quality and can therefore be considered as one of the strategic components of the Bank Pasargad. According to the research findings, discretionary responsibilities have special importance in increasing the brand preference. Hence, the Bank Pasargad can take some positive steps to increase its brand preference such as the following:

- Strengthening the commitment of the bank and its staff to the charitable organizations
- Strengthening the bank's commitment to improving the country's quality of art and culture. This can be done by investment and construction of exhibition halls, supporting the artists as people who can contribute to the society culture through their art and supporting the artistic workshops and various fairs
- Increasing voluntary contributions to the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- Increasing the bank supports from the projects that enhance life quality in the community
- Supporting people with disabilities and those who suffer from certain and hard diseases
- Promoting health and vitality in the community through investment in various sports, correctional and treatment centers such as the addiction treatment centers
- Improving the country's education level by building schools, training centers, libraries and providing educational facilities in disadvantaged areas
- Doing volunteer works in support of the environment and reducing air pollution through best quality E-banking services, improving culture, educating the services utilization and taking measures to prevent energy waste for achieving a green bank

- Call for the customers and make them aware of the society problems and social, cultural, educational deficiencies and attempting to correct them
- Targeted advertising in line with the bank's activities in the field of responsibilities

Following the philanthropic responsibilities, legal responsibilities have the greatest impact on increasing the customer's brand preference in the Bank Pasargad. Therefore, it is suggested to the bank to make more attempt doing the following:

- Improving the bank's commitment to abide by the rules and regulations set by the government and legal authorities in all matters and banking activities such as the provision of products and services
- Emphasis on the law and the rule of law in all parts of the bank
- Flexibility in the adoption of new laws and regulations, adapting the bank activities with these laws and requiring all employees to comply with the regulations
- Attempting for timely and deliberate access to the directives issued by the CBI and other relevant and regulatory organizations
- Paying attention to the criteria rather than relations in all matters relating to employees and customers
- Respecting the customers rights and preserving their legal rights through proper guidance and advice on various matters and informing them of their legal rights
- Respecting the employee's rights in affairs such as recruitment, pay and promotion

The ethical and economic responsibilities affect the brand preference of Bank Pasargad as the last dimension of corporate social responsibily. Hence, it is recommended that the bank considers the following.

Increasing the bank commitment towards profitability through increased market share compared to the competitors, enhancing competitiveness, increasing the quality of service and products, innovation, creativity and offering new products and services tailored to the needs of society, proper selection of the location and size of the various branches for optimal utilization of space and increased staff efficiency.

Making efforts to lower costs by reducing bureaucratic processes, reducing the time dedicated to various projects by eliminating redundant processes, increasing the quality of E-banking and administrative automations in order to reduce the costs of unnecessary trips for customers and employees .

Offering innovative projects in the form of services such as leasing, insurance, pension funds and incentive programs to attract more customers and increase profitability.

Institutionalizing a corporate culture based on the values and norms accepted in society and requiring employees to observe them.

Emphasizing and noting the social norms and ethical traditions at all bank levels including staff uniforms and behavior, branches decoration and interior design, advertising slogans, promotions and ads.

Paying attention to customer satisfaction and the delivery of services and products with good morals and respect.

Regarding to confirm the link between familiarity with CSR and brand preference, it's suggested that Bank Pasaragad try to increase the level of customers' familiarity with the concept of CSR through holding various courses. Also the targeted advertisement can help to increase the level of customers' information about CSR. As a result, it can help to enhance the brand preference. Future research can pay greater attention to the following:

- Providing a local model for developing social responsibility strategies in Iranian banks
- Separation of public and private banks and evaluating the effect of fulfilling social responsibilities in each
- Offering a model of strategic decision-making for implementation of social responsibility strategies.
- Examining the issue in service and non-service organizations other than banks
- Studying the effect of fulfilling social responsibilities on other brand aspects

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