

Islamic Azad University Brand Dimensions and Their Effect on Selection of Azad University

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Abstract: Present research has identified and ranked effective dimensions of Islamic Azad University brand. The research objectives were: (1) to develop a model for Azad University brand; (2) to identify the personification dimensions of Islamic Azad University brand; (3) to determine the order of dimensions effect on selection of Azad University; (4) to examine the relation between Azad University brand and selection of Azad University as the target university. 450 questionnaires were distributed to departments of Azad University, Tehran Central Campus for the required data. 421 returned questionnaires were used for this study. Collected data were analyzed by using SPSS software. Pearson and Spearman correlation, multiple regression, and Friedman test were used for data analysis. The proposed model was confirmed with a correlation of 0.707, an error rate below 0.01 at 0.99 degrees of confidence. Sincerity obtained the highest score among Azad University brand personality dimensions. Multiple regression results indicate that brand dimensions can account for about 67% of dependent variable total variance. The residual variance is affected by influencing variables outside the model. The average priorities of brand dimensions obtained from Friedman test ranked dimension priorities from high to low as: brand equity, brand value, obvious brand structure, and non obvious brand structure.

[Soheil Sarmad Sa'eedi, Javad Faghihi Pour, Ali Akbar Sadeghi, Somaieh Faghihi Pour. **Islamic Azad University Brand Dimensions and Their Effect on Selection of Azad University.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):741-749] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 116

Keywords: Obvious Brand Structure, Non Obvious Brand Structure, Brand Value, Brand Equity.

Introduction

One of the current challenges of families, high school students, and university students in Iran is university selection for higher education. Institutions that help perspective college students to enter their preferred field of study at university have built up a successful business. There are many influential factors and parameters in selection of a target university. Some of these factors are brand name, geographical location, scientific level and ranking, tuition, experienced and competent faculty, as well as educational, research, and amenity levels.

From the interviews conducted with university students, specialists, and faculties, it seems that hardworking top students rarely select Azad University as their top choice. The first problem of this research is to find out why Azad University is not being selected as the target university by top students.

Azad University brand may have the potential to be selected more often by would be college students. The main questions in this research are:

- What are the influencing factors of Azad University brand?

- What are the priorities of these factors?

This research attempts to identify and rank various dimensions of Azad University brand in order to propose a solution to the study problems.

Literature Review

A. *Theoretical Background:*

Various definitions have been proposed for brand. An old definition of brand has defined it as a trade name for an organization. A newer definition defined it as a symbol of organization reputation. American Marketing Association defined brand in 1960 as a certain name, term, symbol, sign, or design, or a combination of them intended to differentiate products and services of a salesman or a group of salesmen from competitions (Esmatpour, 1384/2005, p. 188).

A brand, trade mark, or trade name may include (Ibid, p. 190):

- 1) A *brand name* that can be verbalized. For example Tide, Chevrolet, and Peugeot;
- 2) A *brand mark* that cannot be vocalized but is recognizable and a product can be identified by it. For example Mercedes

Benz logo or Islamic Azad University logo; and

- 3) A *trade mark* that is the registered brand name or a part of which is protected by law.

A brand name has two parts. The first part is its obvious structure and lies within marketing company domain. The obvious structure includes name, logo, color, design, and language. Many people focus on obvious structure when they hear a brand name. A brand name has a second part which is known as non obvious structure. This part of a brand name indicates that how the obvious part should be viewed. The most important non obvious structure of a brand name is its identity. A brand name remains powerful so long as it is loyal to its identity.

Brand name identity can be depicted in a hexangular shape with each angle representing one brand name characteristic.

- 1) **Body:** the essence of a brand name or a combination of differentiable characteristics that can immediately be recalled by looking at the brand name.
- 2) **Personality.** When a brand name is personified, that quality is recalled when talking about that specific product and service. Examples are: idealistic Citroen or conservative Peugeot.
- 3) **Culture.** Represents the value system that acts as a source of inspiration and energy for a given brand name. For example, Opel is a product of California culture representing new scientific discoveries.
- 4) **Relation.** Brand name is a relation and often provides a non obvious opportunity for people interaction. For example, Lavash Kirit is at heart of mother-child relation.
- 5) **Reflection.** A brand name reflects the picture of its main customers. For example, the reflection of Coca Cola is young people.
- 6) **Self-image.** A brand name creates a link for buyers to identify themselves with. For example, a customer creates internal feelings of belonging to a sports club by buying Locust products, even if they do not have any sport affiliations (Kapferer, 1385/2006, pp. 63-68).

Crosno et al, (2009) believed that brand equity is made of many parts including brand association, awareness, perceived quality, loyalty, and other proprietary assets. Aaker (1991) proposed five elements for brand equity including brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, association, and proprietary assets. Farquhar (1989) stated that brand

equity is the added value that a brand name gives to a product. Keller (1998) related brand equity to a differentiating effect which brand knowledge (i.e. awareness, implications, or associations) has on customer reaction. Aaker (1991) defined brand name equity as a collection of assets and liabilities related to brand name and brand mark that are added to or subtracted from the value of a company products or services (Ahmadi Nejad, 1388/2009, p. 66).

Brand vitality or brand power shows the market recognition of a brand as perceived by customers. Brand capability, brand stature, or brand value is determined by relative performance of a brand based on validity and knowledge criteria (Cutler, 1383/2004).

B) Experimental Background

Our search revealed that there has not been a study on Azad University brand within the framework defined for this research. A number of similar researches that were considered for this study are discussed below.

Chirany and Khadang (1388/2009) defined a model based on Aaker model to identify effective factors in the brand equity of hygienic products in Gilan Province from young customer points of view. They found out that company image had the highest effect and brand name had the lowest effect on product selection (Chirany and Khadang, 1388/2009, P. 89).

Kaffashpour, et al found out in a study that customer loyalty, satisfaction, commitment, trust, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand value affected service company image (Kaffash Pour, et al, 1388/2009, p. 137).

Javaheri et al studied brand identity background and outcome for Hacoopian brand and found out that prestige, customer satisfaction and company communication had positive effect on brand name identity. Brand name identity had positive relation with repeat purchase, advertising, or word of mouth recommendations (Javaheri, et al, 1388/2009, p. 138). Ghafele Bashi study found significant direct relation between perceived brand class and perceived quality; perceived quality and customer expected value; and customer expected value and the desire to purchase. They found significant indirect relation between price and fair price; price and customer expected value; customer expected value and the desire for shopping (Ghafele Bashi, 1388/2009, p. 139).

Rahmani study found positive relation between attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. This means that favorable attitude is associated with repeat purchase (Rahmani, 1387/2008, p. 4). Haghghi, et al studied the relation between brand name recognition and customer loyalty for Parsian

Bank. The result showed that brand name recognition had positive relation with customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction had positive relation with word of mouth support and customer loyalty, and had negative relation with customer desire to brand name change. Customer loyalty had positive relation with word of mouth recommendations. There was a positive relation between continued commitment and customer desire to trade name change (Haghighi, et al, 1388/2009, p. 43).

Research objectives

The primary objective of this research was the identification and ranking of Azad University brand dimensions. The following secondary objectives were pursued in this research:

- 1) To develop a model for Azad University brand,
- 2) To determine a personality dimension for Islamic Azad University brand,
- 3) To study the relation between Azad University brand and its selection as the target university; and
- 4) To prioritize brand dimensions on selection of Azad University.

Research Variables

Independent variable in this research is *Azad University brand*. The dependent variable is *the desire to select Azad University as the target university*. The independent variable is studied against:

- 1) The obvious brand structure or brand elements,
- 2) The non obvious brand structure or brand identity,
- 3) The brand equity, and
- 4) The brand value.

This research included library research into specialized literature, knowledge, and experts' information. The following model was developed for the study of Azad University brand.

Research Hypothesis

The primary hypothesis of this research was that Azad University brand dimensions affected the selection of Azad University. The secondary hypotheses of this research were:

- 1) Obvious brand structure of Azad University affects the selection of Azad University
- 2) Non obvious brand structure of Azad University affects the selection of Azad University.
- 3) Brand equity of Azad University affects the selection of Azad University.
- 4) Brand value of Azad University affects the selection of Azad University.

- 5) Brand equity of Azad University has the highest effect on the selection of Azad University.

Research Methodology

Research Method

This research is practical for its objectives; is a survey, descriptive, and correlation study for its timing of data collection; and is a field study for its data collection methods.

Data Collection Method

This research has used two data collection methods. The first method was library research involving available books, articles, and internet sites. They were used to build a theoretical framework, develop hypothesis, and formulate hypothesis. The second method was field study to collect the required data by means of a questionnaire to test research hypotheses.

Statistic Population

The statistic population included all female and male university students at various departments of Azad University, Tehran Central Campus during academic year 2010-2011. Tehran Central Campus has 11 departments and 30,000 students.

Sampling Method

Sampling method was stratified random sampling which was proportionately selected from the statistical population. The questionnaires were distributed among students from different departments. The departments at Tehran Central Campus were stratum in this research.

Sample Size

Base on a statistical population of 30000, the number of sample based on Krejcie and Morgan method was 379 and based on Cochran formula was 379.315, as shown below: Although the sample size was 379 according the above formula, but 450 questionnaires were distributed among students to increase accuracy of research findings. Finally, 421 questionnaires were received by researcher for final analysis.

Assessment tool

This research used a researcher made questionnaire for measurement and assessment of research variables. This questionnaire was made based on past scientific and research documents and backgrounds plus the experts' views. The questionnaire had 25 closed questions that were designed and developed using five Likert ordinal-qualitative scales (completely against, relatively against, almost, relatively for, completely for)

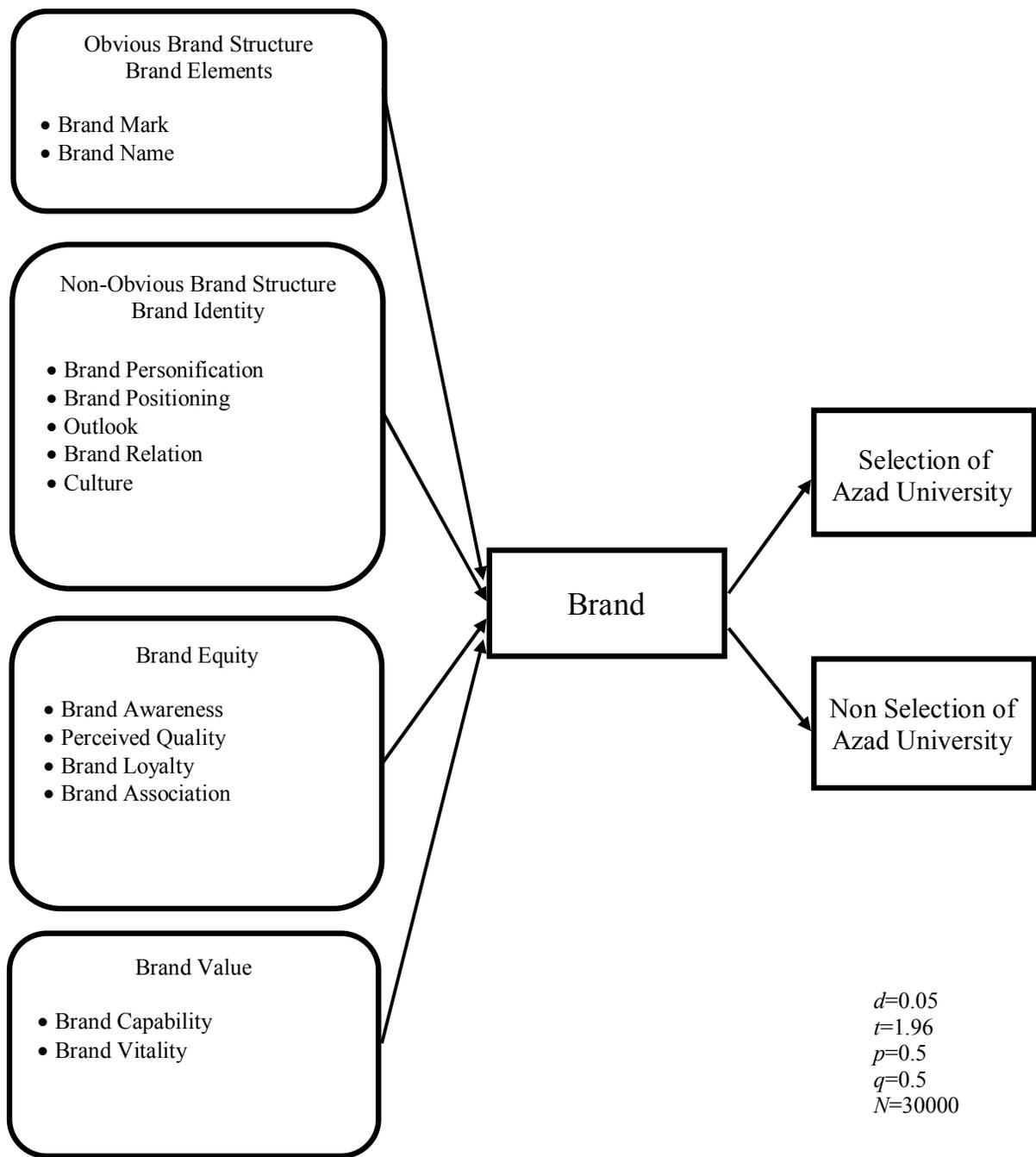


Figure 1: Researcher Made Model for Azad University Brand Dimensions

$$n = \frac{\frac{t^2 p q}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left[\left(\frac{t^2 p q}{d^2} \right) - 1 \right]} = \frac{\frac{(1.96)^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{30000} \left[\left(\frac{(1.96)^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} \right) - 1 \right]} = \frac{384.16}{1.012772} = 379.315$$

Validity and Reliability

Assessment tool was examined based on expert recommendations. Experts judged the questionnaire with content validity (face validity). This research used Cronbach Alpha to examine validity of a questionnaire through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). 38 questionnaires were distributed among statistical population. The reported Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was 0.909. The construct reliability of questionnaire was judged very high according to George and Mallery rule of thumb (2003) and a higher than 0.9 coefficient.

Data Analysis Method

The collected data from distributed questionnaires were analyzed in two descriptive and inferential statistical levels by using SPSS software. The present research used correlation test (Pierson and Spearman) to study the relationship between effective dimensions of Azad University brand. Multiple regression analysis was used to measure the degree of effects, and finally Friedman test was used to prioritize effective dimensions on Azad University brand.

Research Findings

Population Characteristics

The demographic information of statistical sample is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Population Characteristics of Statistical Samples

Description		Number	Percent
Gender	Male	216	51.3
	Female	205	48.7
Marriage status	Married	164	39
	Single	257	61
Employment	Employed	254	60.3
	Unemployed	167	39.7
Education	Technician and B.S	179	42.5
	M.S. and higher	242	57.5
Age	25 and lower	182	43.2
	26 - 30	156	37.1
	31 and higher	83	19.7

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of respondents based on their evaluations of obvious brand structure, non obvious brand structure, brand equity, and brand value. 71.5 percent of respondents evaluated Azad University brand as medium to high. Similarly, 79.3 percent of respondents evaluated non obvious brand structure, 85 percent brand equity, and 85 percent brand value as medium to high.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Divided by Dependent Variables

Variable		Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Total Number
Obvious Brand Structure	Number	34	86	181	105	15	421
	Percent	8.1	20.4	43	24.9	3.6	100
Non Obvious Brand Structure	Number	9	78	234	91	9	421
	Percent	2.2	18.5	55.6	21.6	2.1	100
Brand Equity	Number	15	48	207	144	7	421
	Percent	3.6	11.4	49.2	34.2	1.7	100
Brand Value	Number	15	48	195	151	12	421
	Percent	3.6	11.4	46.3	35.9	2.9	100

Inferential Statistics

Research hypothesis are non-directional when we consider inferential statistics of the field and subject of study. Therefore, correlation coefficient and linear regression tables are used to test hypothesis. Pierson and Spearman correlation coefficients are used to measure the degree of correlation.

Table 3 shows how selection of Azad University is related to obvious structure, non

obvious brand structure, brand equity, and brand value of Azad University. Brand equity had the highest relation with the selection of Azad University ($r=0.806$), which is statistically significant at 0.01 level. Non obvious brand structure ($r=0.489$), obvious brand structure ($r=0.427$), and brand value ($r=0.480$) ranked in order in terms of correlation with the dependent variable at 0.01 significance level.

Table 3: Correlation between Azad University Brand Dimensions and Azad University Selection

		Selection of Azad University
Obvious Brand Structure	Pierson correlation coefficient	0.427**
	Significance level	0.000
	number	421
Non Obvious Brand Structure	Pierson correlation coefficient	0.489**
	Significance level	0.000
	number	421
Brand Equity	Pierson correlation coefficient	0.806**
	Significance level	0.000
	number	421
Brand Value	Pierson correlation coefficient	0.480**
	Significance level	0.000
	number	421

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to measure the effect of each independent variable on dependent variable. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics resulting from multiple linear regression analysis. This analysis ranked brand elements based on their averages in order as obvious brand structure, brand value, brand equity, and non obvious brand.

This research used a regression model and the enter method to predict the dependent variable based on four independent variables.

Table 6 summarizes the values obtained from the model. Multiple R represents multiple-correlation between brand dimensions and the dependent variable. The reported R was 0.823 indicating a strong correlation between dependent and independent variables. R square or determination coefficient (R^2) shows the degree of dependent variable changes and variances that can be clarified by the independent variables.

Adjusted determination coefficient (R^2 adj) adjusts the determination coefficient for higher reflection of goodness of fit. This number is used to interpret the determination coefficient. Since determination coefficient has been adjusted by degrees of freedom, hence, the reported determination coefficient in this research is 0.674. It means that the four brand dimensions (obvious brand structure, non obvious brand structure, brand equity,

and brand value) can clarify 67% of the total variance of the dependent variable. The rest of variance depends on variables outside the model. Standard error of estimation was 9.872. It represents the strength of predictive regression equation.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Obvious Brand Structure	53.06	17.716	421
Non Obvious Brand Structure	50.43	13.776	421
Brand Equity	52.35	14.340	421
Brand Value	52.83	15.367	421
Selection of Azad University	48.54	17.290	421

Table 5: Considered Variables / Eliminated Variables

Considered Variables	Eliminated Variables	Method
Obvious Brand Structure, Non Obvious Brand Structure, Brand Equity, and Brand Value	-----	Enter

Dependent variable: Selection of Azad University

Table 6: Summary of Goodness of Fit Statistics

Multiple Correlation Coefficient	Determination Coefficient	Adjusted Determination Coefficient	Standard Error of Estimation
0.823	0.677	0.674	9.872

Predictors: Obvious Brand Structure, Non Obvious Brand Structure, Brand Equity, and Brand Value
 Dependent Variable: Selection of Azad University

Table 7 shows the result of analysis of variance with regression and residual as two source of variance for dependent variable. This table also shows sum of squares, degree of freedom, and mean square for each source of variance. Regression source represents information about changes of dependent variable resulting from research model. Residual source represents information about changes of dependent variable resulting from variables outside research model.

F (Fisher) statistics shows the suitability of the regression model, i.e. if the independent variables can explain the changes in the dependent variable. The value of F statistics is 218.090 and is significant at error level below 0.01. The regression model with one dependent variable and four independent

variables is a suitable model and independent variables can explain changes in dependent variable.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Statistics	Significance Level
Regression	85012.525	4	21253.131	218.090	0.000
Residual	40539.758	416	97.451		
Total	125552.283	420			

Predictors: Obvious Structure, Non Obvious Brand Str Brand Value
 Dependent Variable: Selection of Azad University

Table 8 shows the regression effect of each variable in the model and their correlation. This table contains two forms of regression effects, i.e. standardized coefficient (Beta) and non-standardized coefficient (B). The regression effect indicates the proportional effect of each independent variable of the model. Variable comparison shows that the effects of four independent variables on dependent variable are significant and the order of effects from high to low is brand equity (0.704), non obvious

brand structure (0.128), obvious brand structure (0.078), and brand value (0.029). As an explanation, an increase of one standard deviation in brand equity will increase the dependent variable by 0.704 standard deviation.

Table 8 shows three different correlations:

- 1) Brand equity has very high zero-order correlation with dependent variable. Non obvious brand structure, brand value, and obvious brand structure have high zero-order correlation with the dependent variable. Therefore, the ranking of correlations are brand equity (0.806), non obvious brand structure (0.489), brand value (0.480), and obvious brand structure (0.427).
- 2) Obvious brand structure and non obvious brand structure have relatively high partial correlations. Partial correlation is very high for brand equity and is low for brand value.
- 3) Semi partial correlation is high for brand equity and is low for obvious brand structure, non obvious brand structure, and brand equity variables.

Table 8: Regression Effect Coefficients

Model	Non Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Significance Level	Correlations		
	B	Standard error	Beta			Zero Order	Partial	Semi Partial
Fixed value	-9.764	2.216	--	-4.406	0.000	--	-	-
Obvious brand structure	0.076	0.031	0.078	2.440	0.015	0.427	0.119	0.068
Non obvious brand structure	0.161	0.048	0.128	3.379	0.001	0.489	0.163	0.094
Brand equity	0.849	0.040	0.704	21.034	0.000	0.806	0.718	0.586
Brand value	0.033	0.043	0.029	0.761	0.022	0.480	0.037	0.021

Dependent variable: Selection of Azad University

Table 9 shows the relation between Azad University brand and its selection. The results indicate that there is a significant direct relations ($r= 0.707$) between the two variables.

Table 9: Correlation between Azad University Brand and Its Selection

Azad University Brand	Selection of Azad University	
	Pierson correlation coefficient	0.707**
	Significance level	0.000
	Number	421

Azad University Brand personality dimensions are presented in table 10. This table shows that Azad University Brand personality dimensions can be ranked based on their scores in order from high to low as: sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Table 10: Azad University Brand Personality Dimensions

No.	Personality Dimension	Number	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Total Score	Average Score
1	Sincerity	421	4	1	5	1002	2.38
2	Excitement	421	4	1	5	923	2.19
3	Competence	421	4	1	5	961	2.28
4	Sophistication	421	4	1	5	856	2.03
5	Ruggedness	421	4	1	5	852	2.02

Friedman test results for prioritization of brand dimensions are shown in table 11.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics of Friedman Test

Brand Dimension	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentile		
						25 th	50 th	75 th
Obvious Brand Structure	421	53.06	17.0716	20	100	40	53.33	66.67
Non Obvious Brand Structure	421	50.43	13.776	20	87	41.20	51.47	58.67
Brand Equity	421	52.35	14.3400	20	100	45	55	60
Brand Value	421	52.83	15.367	20	90	40	55	60

Table 12 shows the average priorities of brand dimensions obtained from Friedman test. There are no significant differences between brand dimensions. The ranking of brand dimensions based on their score in order from high to low is: brand equity, brand value, obvious brand structure, and non obvious brand structure variables.

Table 12: Friedman Analysis of Variance for Brand Dimensions

Variable	Average Score
Brand Equity	3.19
Brand Value	3.06
Obvious Brand Structure	3.05
Non Obvious Brand Structure	2.70

Discussions and Conclusions

The number of respondents was 421 with almost equal proportion of females (216) to males (205). The sample included 164 married and 257 single individuals. 42.5 percent of respondents had technical and bachelor's degree and 57.5 percent had masters or higher degree. About 60 percent of respondents were employed and the rest were unemployed. 182 respondents were 25 years of age or younger, 156 were in 26 to 30 age group, and 83 were 31 years of age or higher.

The results of Pierson linear correlation test showed that obvious brand structure ($r=0.427$), non obvious brand structure ($r=0.489$), brand equity ($r=0.806$), and brand value ($r=0.480$) are correlated with the selection of Azad University at error rate below 0.01 with 0.99 percent degree of confidence. Their ranking based on correlation intensity ordered

from high to low is brand equity, non obvious brand structure, and obvious brand structure. The correlations confirm the dimensions of researcher made model.

The results of analysis showed that brand equity had the highest effect on the dependent variable with regression coefficient of 0.704. In other word, the highest influencing factor in Azad University brand is brand equity. There is a significant correlation between Azad University brand and selection of Azad University with an intensity of 0.707 and significance level of 0.01. Therefore, the primary research hypothesis was confirmed.

The significance level and correlation intensity between demographic specifications and research variables as determined by Spearman correlation coefficient are as follows:

- 1) Azad University brand is directly correlated to respondents' age at significance level 0.030 and intensity level of 0.106. Thus, respondents with 25 years of age or lower had more positive attitude towards Azad University brand;
- 2) Azad University brand is directly correlated to respondents' employment status at significance level of 0.036 and intensity level of 0.102. Thus, employed respondents had more positive attitude towards Azad University brand;
- 3) Azad University brand variable is indirectly correlated to respondents' education level at significance level of 0.021 and intensity level of -0.113. Thus, less educated respondents who were studying for technical and bachelor's degrees had more positive attitude towards Azad University brand; and

Single females of 25 years of age or younger had more positive attitude towards selecting Azad University. Similarly, employed respondents at 25 years of age or younger who were studying for technical and bachelor's degrees had more positive attitude towards Azad University brand.

Analysis showed that students attending departments at Tehran Central Campus of Azad University ranked Azad University brand personality dimensions in the order of importance from high to low as sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Multiple linear regression analysis measured the adjusted determination coefficient at 0.674. This means that brand dimensions can explain about 67% of total variance of dependent variable. Fisher statistics was 218.090. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the regression model was a good fit and the independent variables can collectively explain the changes in dependent variable.

Zero-order, partial, and semi partial correlations resulted from multiple regression showed that the four independent variables of obvious brand structure, non obvious brand structure, brand value, and brand equity have significant effects on selection of Azad University as the dependent variable.

The ranking of independent variables effect on dependent variable based on their regression coefficients ordered from high to low was: brand equity (0.704), non obvious brand structure (0.128), obvious brand structure (0.078), and brand value (0.029). The average priorities of brand dimensions obtained from Friedman test showed no significant differences between brand dimensions. The order of brand dimensions from high to low was brand equity, brand value, obvious brand structure, and non obvious brand structure variables.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are proposed based on the research hypothesis and the results obtained from data analysis.

- 1) Friedman test indicates that Azad University should focus on brand equity more than other dimensions to improve its brand;
- 2) Respondents at age of 25 years or younger had more positive attitude toward Azad University brand. Therefore, Azad University should focus its marketing activities on creating positive attitude among older students;
- 3) Employed respondents had more positive attitude toward Azad University brand. Therefore, Azad University should focus on employed individuals as its target market.
- 4) Respondents who were working toward technical and bachelor's degree had more positive attitude

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toward Azad University brand. Therefore, the Azad University should focus on individuals who are interested in continuing education;

- 5) Brand personality dimensions of Azad University in order of importance from high to low are sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness. Therefore, Azad University should focus on personifying its brand by sincerity and competence. The average scores for these two dimensions were 2.38 and 2.28 (out of 5), respectively. These two dimensions made up approximately 50% of the total scores. Hence, any improvement in these two dimensions can elevate the position of Azad University brand personality; and
- 6) The identified Azad University brand dimensions (i.e. obvious brand structure, non obvious brand structure, brand equity, and brand value) account for 67% of the total variance of selection of Azad University as the independent variable. Therefore, emphasizing on these dimensions can increase Azad University profitability.

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