EFFECT OF DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY ON THE BRAND EQUITY IN THE FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Due to the increasing competition in the industry and service sectors, creating the powerful brands has great importance in these industries. One of the main factors that help to create a powerful brand is investment and improving the quality of services. Nowadays, the competition for improving the quality of services is raised as a key strategic issue for organizations that operate in the services sector. The aim of these researches to investigate how the dimensions of service quality affect the brand equity in the fast food industry. The customers of fast food industry (Restaurant Raphael) in Boushehr constitute the statistical population of this research. Given that the statistical population is unlimited, through sampling 390 questionnaires were distributed, collected and analyzed. For analyzing the data, the structural equations modelling was used by help of the software smart PLS. The results show that the entire dimensions of service quality of model SERVQUAL (tangible factors of services, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) have a positive and significant impact on the brand equity. It also became clear that among the five dimensions of quality of services, the tangible factors of services have the most impact on the brand equity in the fast food industry. So implementing the programs to enhance the quality of services will have to a very large extent a positive effect on increasing the brand equity in the fast food industry.

Keywords: Service quality, Brand equity, Fast food industry

JEL classification numbers: M31, D12, D22, D63

1. Introduction

The brand is the most valuable asset of an organization and as a tool that investigates the difference and uniqueness of products, it has been recognized for consumer's choice (Aaker, 1991); whereby the consumers are ensured for facilitating the decision-making process, some of the difficulties related to the experience and the

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quality of beliefs are reduced (Chung &Chieng,2013). In the current competitive environment, most researchers believe that the brand is an important part of a business and assets of a firm; a lot of businesses are interested in learning how to build a successful brand. The strategy to create brand equity as another competitive strategy can help the different businesses and organizations in achieving the performance goals. Therefore, organizations need to be aware of the way of creating their brand equity (Aaker, 1996). One of the requirements for creating a strong brand is to recognize the factors causing the brand equity (Rousta and Madani, 2010). The brand equity has many advantages especially for companies and producers. For example, if a brand is of particularly high value, the target consumer will have a positive behavior towards the brand; consequently he/she will be ready to pay a high price for product, repeat his/her purchase and do the word of mouth advertising for the product (Kim&Hyun, 2010).

Due to the increasing competition in the industry and services, creating the powerful brands in these industries has great importance. One of the main factors that help to create a powerful brandis investment and improving the quality of services (Edward &Wang, 2015). Today, the competition is raised to improve the quality of services as a key strategic issue for organizations that operate in the services. Organizations that achieve the higher levels of services quality attract the higher levels of customers' satisfaction as a base for achieving the sustainable competitive advantage (Guo et al., 2008). Although the consumer-based brand equity in the field of services is essentially different from the product-based brand equity and with regard to the importance of the fast food industry ready for customers and considering that the branding is considered as a factor for creating competitive advantage in the service industries, the majority of the researches have focused on the development of the service quality criteria in the specific fields such as retail industries (Dabholkaret al., 1996), online services (Rabinovich, 2007) and have more focus to examine the behavioral consequences of quality of services such as positive verbal advertising, loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 1996) and associating the quality of services with other marketing important concepts, such as the perceived value and customer's satisfaction (Caruana et al., 2000);fewer previous researches have investigated experimentally the correlation between the perceived service quality of the restaurant customers and the customer-based brand equity(Berry, 2000; He& Li, 2011; Jensen&Klastrup, 2008).For example, Edward and Wang (2015) have examined the impact of services on the foodstuffs brand equity in the brand preference, Sasmita and MohdSuki(2015) have investigated the effect ofyoung consumer's insight on the brand equity and White et al. (2013) the effects of services on the brand equity in several retail channels. Therefore, the experimental evidences that support the direct relationship between the dimensions of the quality of services and brand equity need to further investigation. Due to the importance of brand equity for companies, investigating the effect of the dimensions of service quality on the brand equity is necessary. Therefore, the main objective of this researches to investigate the dimensions of quality of services and the amount of effect of every one on the brand equity in the fast food industry, so that we can in this way determine the influential dimensions of service quality on the brand equity and branding. On this basis, the present research revolves around this issue whether the quality of services in the fast food industry has an impact on the increase in the brand equity? And do the dimensions

of the quality of services (tangible factors, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) have positive and significant impact on brand equity?

2. Literature review and background of study

2.1. The brand equity

According to Aaker (1991), brand is: a set of assets and obligations which is linked with the brand name and symbol; it is added to or lowered from the value that is provided by a product or service to the company or the company's customers. Keller (1993) suggested that consumers' brand awareness is based on the set of dependency related to properties, advantages and general characteristic. In the other words, the brand equity is defined as the customers' subjective and intangible evaluation of brand(Ryan et al., 2005).The brand equity is a value that is created by increasing the effectiveness of marketing activities, creating a higher degree of brand preference, the desired purchase intent and increase in the market share of a firm, (Bailey &Ball, 2006;Aaker, 1996;Berry, 2000; Chang&Chieng, 2006; Farquhar, 1996).Keller (1993) sees the consumer-based brand equity as the recognition of the brand impact relating to the consumer on the consumer's reaction towards the company's compound marketing strategy. The four dimensions of the brand equity that was provided by the Aaker (1991) are as follows: the perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty.

- ***Perceived quality:*** Zeithaml (1998) has defined the perceived quality as customers' judgment towards the advantage, superiority, credit and the difference of a brand compared to other rival brands. Perceived quality affects not only on other dimensions of brand, but also the classification of products from a customer's perspective (Aaker&Joachimsthaler, 2000).
- ***Brand associations***: according to Aaker (1991), brand associations consist in anything in memory that is related to brand. Consistent and brand association may be observed as the forms and characteristics related to a product or to the independent aspects of a commodity itself that the stays in customer's memory (Chen, 2001).
- ***Brand awareness:*** Aaker (1991) defines the brand awareness as an ability of a potential buyer for recognizing or reminding a brand that is a member of the particular commodity class. In fact, awareness is defined an area in which the customers recognize and remind the brand and can identify the products and services related to the brand (Aaker&Joachimsthaler, 2000).
- ***Brand loyalty:*** according to Aaker (1991), brand loyalty is a situation that indicates how is likely a consumer to change a brand, especially when that brand causes a change in the price or features of products and services. Loyalty is defined as a behavioral response as well as a physiological function. Brand loyalty is a descriptive variable that reflects the unique differences of behaviors and purchase style of customer in a specific product class (Gounaris&Stathakopoulos, 2004).

2.2. Quality of services

Gefan (2002) defines the quality of services as a subjective comparison that customers make between the quality of services that they prefer to receive and what they actually achieve. The literature relating to the definition of the quality of services is

widely classified into two technical and functional perspectives. The technical perspective gives the nature of the provided services, while the functional one investigates themode of services (Grönroos, 1983). In General, marketers defend the functional approach when they want to measure the quality of a company's services. The main reason for this preference is based on the argument that a consumer has typically a different perception of the quality of services compared to a technical expert. Therefore, for measuring the consumer's perception of the quality of services, the use of technical method is not appropriate (Donabedian, 1980). Some researchers have defined the quality of services based on different theoretical hypotheses. For example, Parasuraman (1990) believes that the quality of services consists in the existing difference between the expectations and the customers' perception of received services.

In recent three decades, the different models were provided by the experts and scientists for measuring the quality of services. One of the most prestigious and the most famous of them is the measurement model of quality of services of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991) called the SERVQUAL model. SERVQUAL is regarded as an acceptable model for the measurement of an organization's quality of the services. As a tool for measuring the quality of services, Parasuraman et al. (1991) have provided a questionnaire. The SERVQUAL questionnaire includes 22 items that measure five dimensions of the quality of services. These dimensions consist in the tangible factors, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuramanet al., 1991).

- ***Tangible factors***: tangible factors include appearance, physical possibilities, equipment, employees and communicative commodity. All these dimensions provide an image that the customer considers for evaluating the quality; like the amenities in the physical environment of the organization.
- ***Reliability***: reliability means the ability to perform services in a safe and reliable way, so that the customer's expectations are satisfied. For example, customers who go to a restaurant have the expectations such as doing quickly the orders and cleanliness of the surroundings. Other meaning of the reliability is keeping commitments. In other words, if the organization promises some services in the field of time of presenting services, way of doing those and cost of them, it have to keep them.
- ***Responsiveness***: responsiveness refers to the desire to assist customers and provide quickly the services. This dimension of the quality of services emphasizes on demonstrating sensitivity and vigilance in exchange for customer requests, questions and complaints. For example, in a restaurant if a customer gets into difficulty in connection with the food order request and requests for help, the length of time that he/she should wait for the fixing it, will represent the amount of employees' responsiveness.
- ***Assurance***: the reliability of the knowledge and employees' polite behavior refers to competence and merit of services to suggest assurance and self-assurance. This dimension of the service quality is especially important in those cases in which the risk is high. For example, according to the sensitivity of the lives of people in food intake, in the restaurant and fast food industry this component is of great importance.
- ***Empathy***: empathy means the individual care and attention to the services that are provided to their customers. It means that despite the individuals' spiritually each of

them is conducted in a special manner, so that customers are convinced that the organization has understood them and they are important for the organization.

2.3. Research experimental background

In relation to the subject of this research, the various researches have been done in Iran and other countries; in the following we refer to a few of the most relevant new ones. Iranzadeh et al. (2012) carried out a research entitled as the effect of marketing compound on the brand equity. The aim of their research was to determine the way of creating the value by the elements of the marketing compound for the brand. The results showed that the elements of the price and product have a positive and significant impact on the entire dimensions of brand equity. Two elements of distribution and promotion activities are also among the factors influencing the brand awareness and association. Rousta and Madani (2010) conducted a research entitled as the relationship between the quality of services and the customer's decision-making on the brand equity. The aim of their research was to investigate the impact of the quality of services on the brand equity, taking into account the mediator variable of the customer's decision-making. The results showed that the quality of services is one of the most important factors influencing the brand equity and by considering the mediator variable of the customer's decision-making this relationship become indirectly stronger.

Su (2016) in his research stated that a positive relationship exists between the brand awareness and perceived quality. The results of his research also showed that a positive relationship exist samongawareness, quality and loyalty. Dib and Alhaddad (2014) in another study showed that the dimensions of service quality include the tangible factors (equipment and facilities), the quality of the employees, and the quality of the performance. They pointed out that dimensions of the quality of services have a significant and positive impact on customers' assurance, satisfaction and loyalty. The results of the research of Imran et al (2007) show that the dimensions of the quality of providing services (tangible factors, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) to the customers will cause their satisfaction and loyalty.

Edward and Wang (2015) conducted a research entitled as the impact of services of the foodstuffs brand equity on consumer's perception of nutritional value, physical risk and brand preference. The aim of their research was to investigate the impact of the dimensions of the foodstuffs brand equity (brand awareness and brand image), the consumer's perception of the nutritional value and the physical risk of foodstuffs on the brand preference. The results showed that the awareness of the brand services and the brand image have the different effects on consumer's perception of nutritional risk and value. Brand awareness has a positive impact on consumer's perception of the nutritional value, but is not influenced by the perceived physical danger. In contrast, the brand image has a negative impact on the perceived physical danger and a positive impact on brand preference. Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015) did a research entitled as young consumers' insight on the brand equity. The aim of their research was to investigate the effects of brand association, brand loyalty, brand image and brand awareness on the brand equity among young consumers. The results showed that the brand association, brand loyalty, brand image and brand awareness have an impact on the brand equity and

the brand association has positively associated with the brand equity and the young consumers have assurance to the companies owning a specific product or brand. Usually, young consumers consider the brand that they know as first choice and compare it with other products or brands, lowering the possible risks to a minimum. The young consumers who are aware of a particular product can recognize the brand in social media in comparison with rival products. They are also aware of unique image of a product compared to the other products.

Sadiaet al. (2013) carried out a research entitled as how the quality of services affects the brand equity. The purpose of their research was to investigate the direct effect of the quality of services on the brand equity, along with the mediator role of the validity of great companies and perceived value. The results showed that the perceived value and the validity of the great companies affect in a fully mediated way the relationship between quality of services and customer-based brand equity. Also in the banking industry, the quality of services leads not only to satisfy the customer's expectations of standard services, but also it causes to enhance the assurance to abilities of a brand. Venkatesan et al. (2015) carried out a research entitled as the effects of services on the brand equity of retail channel. Their research aimed to investigate the reciprocal effects of quality of services and the quality electronic services on the retail brand equity as well as the effectiveness of the service environment on the retail brand equity. Research results showed that the consumer's perception of quality of services and the quality e-services have on a positive influence on the retail brand equity. Their research also showed that the quality of online services has more impact on the consumer's perception of retail brand equity in comparison with the offline one. Tuan (2014) conducted a research entitled as clinical governance, companies' social responsiveness, health of quality of services and the brand equity. The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of the quality of the patient care services on brand equity of hospitals. The results showed that the high quality of services causes to make sure the patients of the performed services and recommend the hospital to others. In this research, the dimensions of the quality of services included the cleanliness of departments, advanced medical equipment, proper acceptance procedure and behavior of the hospital personnel.

2.4. Hypotheses and the research conceptual model

According to the proposed researches, it became clear that each of the researchers have dealt with the brand equity with a specific approach. However, the history of the research shows that in the sector of food industry services there is a need for examining the impact of providing the services of quality on the brand equity due to the importance of paying attention to the quality and high competitiveness. Studying the theoretical and experimental history of the research subject and taking into account the results of researches of Edward and Wang (2015), Sasmita and Mohd Suki(2015), Tuan(2014), Ryan et al. (2013), Iranzadeh et al. (2012) and Rousta and Madani (2010), the following hypotheses were formulated for this research.

- ***H_1:*** The tangible factors for the service quality in fast food services have a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.
- ***H_2:*** The customers' assurance to the employees of fast food services has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.

H3: Responsiveness of the employees of fast food services toward customers has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.

H4: The customers' assurance to the employees in environment of fast food services has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.

H5: The empathy of the employees of the fast food services with customers has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.

Being identified the fundamental variables of the research subject and becoming clear the relationships among them based on the theoretical and experimental history, the conceptual model and framework for this research was compiled. In conceptual model of this research, dimensions of brand equity have been extracted from Aaker's model (1996) which includes the perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty. The dimensions of the quality of services have been extracted also from the model of Parasuraman et al. (1991) that includes the tangible factors of services, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Because this research aims to investigate the effect of dimensions of service quality on the brand equity, the dimensions of service quality have been considered as the independent variable and the brand equity as dependent one. The conceptual framework of this research has been provided in Figure (1).

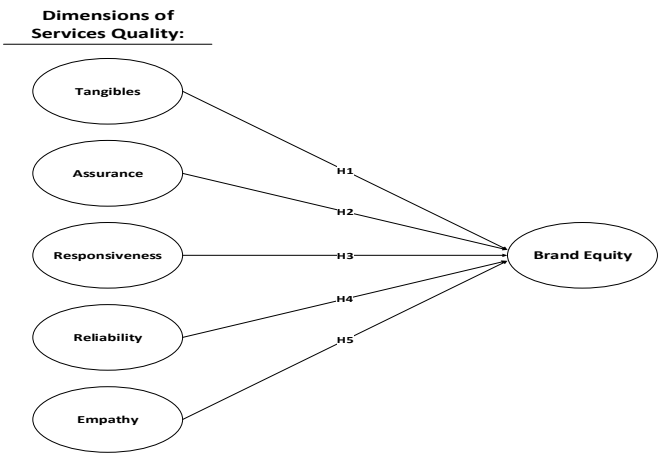

Figure 1: Research conceptual model

3. Research Methodology

The present research is an applied research in terms of results and in terms of nature and methods of implementation is a descriptive-survey and co relational. The statistical community of research is the customers of the fast food industry (*Restaurant Raphael*) in Boushehr. Since the full information about the exact number of consumers is not available, the statistical community of research has been considered unlimited. Based on Cochrane sampling formula of an unlimited community and at the assurance level of 95%, the agreement ratio of 50% and the sampling error of 5%, the statistical sample size suitable

for research was determined 384 people. Due to the large population and the lack of the possibility of developing the statistical population framework, in this research the non-random sampling method and the convenience sampling has been used. The research data collection tool was a response-based questionnaire. The questionnaire of this research has been composed of three parts: introduction, demographic questions and the questions of measurement of the research main variables. For measuring the research main variables, 35 questions were formulated through the integration of two questionnaires of measuring the SERVQUAL service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and a brand equity measurement questionnaire (Aaker, 1996). The scale of measurement of the variables in this research is Lickert's five options spectrum (from I agree completely to I disagree completely). With a presence in fast food industry (Restaurant *Raphael*) during the seven days of a week, 430 questionnaires were distributed among customers of this restaurant as an convenience sampling of which eventually the full 390 questionnaires were given back.

Given that the questionnaire of this research has been design on the standard questionnaires and their validity has already been assessed, it can be said that the questionnaire is of the necessary validity. Despite this, to determine the validity of the research questionnaire, the method of content validity was used again. For this purpose, the designed questionnaire was provided for a number of university professors in the field of marketing management and customers of the fast food industry and they were asked to comment about the questionnaire validity. After collecting the opinions, the final questionnaire was prepared. To measure the reliability of the research questionnaire, the most common method of evaluation of the reliability of the questionnaire i.e. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all variables was higher than0.7and for the total questionnaire was also equal to 899% that isan appropriate coefficient and suggests that the reliability of the research tool is in the appropriate level. Also, in order to measure the validity of the questions of the questionnaire the indicator of the average variance extracted (AVE) and for measuring the reliability of the questionnaire the coefficient of composite reliability (CR) has also been used. Table (1) shows the necessary information regarding the design of questions of the questionnaire and the results of the questionnaire reliability and validity indicators.

Table 1: Research variables and items extraction resources and the results of the reliability of the data collection instrument (questionnaire)

Variable		Cronbach's alpha coefficient	CR	AVE	Items extraction resource	Number of items(question)
Dimensions of services quality	Tangible factors	0.867	0.900	0.600	Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988	6
	Reliability	0.791	0.929	0.767		4
	Responsiveness	0.923	0.943	0.769		5
	assurance	0.702	0.889	0.631		5
	Empathy	0.939	0.953	0.804		5
Brand equity		0.959	0.964	0.731	Aaker, 1996	10
Questionnaire as total		0.899				35

Source: Provided by authors.

In order to calculate the convergent validity, the criterion of AVE was used. According to Hair et al. (2011) If AVE is at least equal to 5.0, this indicates that the variables are of the suitable converge validity. This means that a hidden variable is able to explain on the average more than half of the variance of its indices (the obvious variables). Given that in this research the average indicator of the extracted variance (AVE) is higher than 5.0for all research variables, the convergent validity of the model variables is confirmed. The combinatory reliability coefficient (CR) and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, evaluates the reliability of the measurement tool. As table 2 shows, given that the value of the combinatory reliability coefficient (CR)and Cronbach's alpha coefficient are higher than 0.7 for all variables of research, the reliability of the questions of the variables in the questionnaire is acceptable.

To test the hypotheses and the research conceptual model, the structural equations model (the method of partial least squares) has been used by the help of Smart PLS software. The reason why we used the Smart PLS software was that data of this researches not of normal distribution and so by Lisrel and Amos software we are not able to test the conceptual model of research.

4. Research Findings

For analyzing the demographic variables of the research, the descriptive statistics was used. Table (2) is related to the demographic variables that have been analyzed through collecting about 390 questionnaires.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic variable	Levels	Percentage of frequency
Gender	Male	51.8
	Female	48.2
Education	Diploma and lower	28.5
	Associate	25.9
	Undergraduate	33.3
	Graduate and higher	12.3
Age	Lower than20 years	13.6
	21 to 35 years	57.9
	36 to 50 years	21.9
	Over 50 years	6.6
History of consumption of fast food services (*Restaurant Raphael*)	less than 1 year	11.5
	1 to 3 years	30.2
	3 to 5 years	26.7
	Over 5 years	31.6

Source: Provided by authors.

As the table (2) shows, the largest number of respondents is man (52%). Also, most individuals of the sample (31.6%) with a history of more than five years use the fast foodservices (*Restaurant Raphael*). Most individuals of sample (57.9%) are young as well as largest number of sample (33.3%) is bachelor.

Based on the method of structural equations modelling, the research conceptual model and hypotheses were tested by the help of the smart PLS software. The structural equation modelling helps the researcher to test and investigate generally and particularly

the theoretical pattern that has been formed of various components. In the structural equations model, all variables are divided in to two categories of latent and apparent variables. The observed variables (rectangle) are measured directly by a researcher, whereas the latent (oval) or non-observed variables are not measured directly, but based on the correlation or relations between the measured variables they are inferred. The latent variables indicate a series of theoretical constructs that are not directly observable and through other variables are constructed and observed. Figure 2 and 3showsthe research conceptual model in the way of estimating the standard path coefficients.

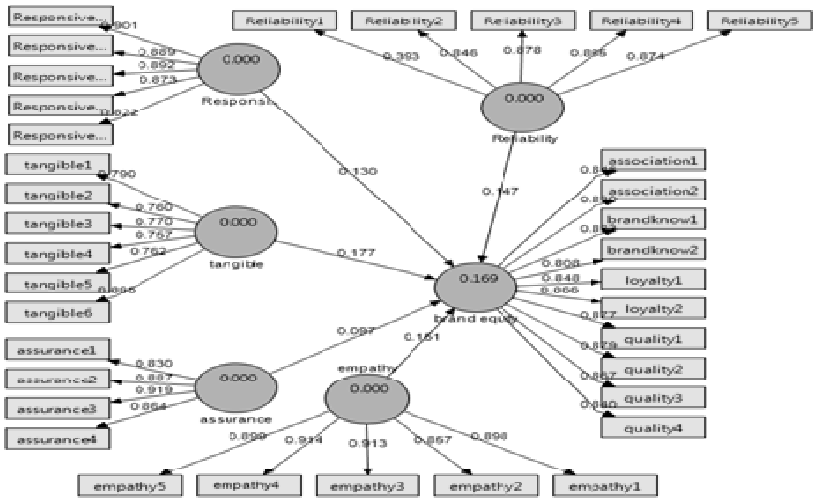

Figure 2: The confirmatory factor analysis, structural and measurement model along with the values of the standardized coefficients

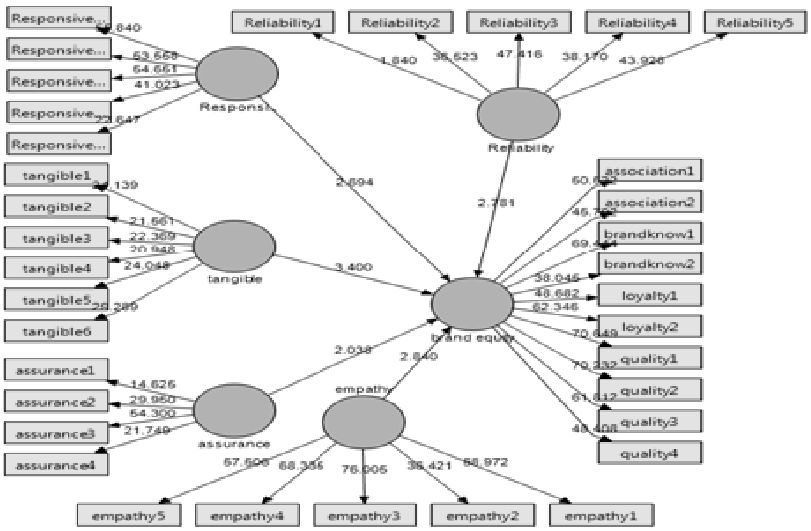

Figure 3: The confirmatory factor analysis, structural and measurement model along with the values of the significance coefficients (t-value)

Figure 3shows the research different model on the absolute value of significance coefficients (|t-value|). This model tests in fact all the measurement equations (the factor loading) and the structural equations (the path coefficients) by using statistic t. According to this model, if the value of the statistic t is larger than 1.96for paths, the path coefficient and factor loading is significant in the assurance level 95% and if the value of the t-statistic is less than the value of the 1.96for paths, as a result in factor loading or path coefficient is not significant. Also, if the value of the statistic t is more than 2.58, the path coefficient and factor loading is significant in assurance level 99%.

The model fitness indicators are one of the most important stages in the analysis of structural equation modelling. These indicators answer this question whether the model represented by data verifies the conceptual model of research? In order to examine the fitness of measurement model and inner compatibility of the questionnaire questions, some coefficients like Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and extracted variance were calculated; the results of these data have been provided in the table (1). In investigating the fitness of structural model also the two variance rate indicators were explained and indicators of participation and increase were calculated in the Stones-Gayser test was calculated. Another indicator that was used for assessing overall the structural model is GOF (Hair et al., 2011). The calculated amount for model is 0.155 which implies a goodness of the model fitness.

As it was determined, indicators of fitness of the measurement and structural model show the good fitness condition of the model. But, the overall confirmation of the research conceptual model does not mean all relationships in the model have also been confirmed. After the overall fitness of the model, you must also test whether the defined relationships in the model are approved or not. After the extraction of structural equations model data, we can test the research hypotheses. The main research hypotheses test results have been shown in table (3).

Table 3: Testing the main hypotheses of the study

Hypotheses	Standardized path coefficient	T-value	P-value	Result
H_1: The tangible factors in fast food services have a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.	0.177	3.400	0.000	Accepted
H_2: The customers' assurance to the employees of fast food services has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.	0.097	2.038	0.000	Accepted
H_3: Responsiveness of the employees of fast food industry toward customers has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.	0.130	2.694	0.000	Accepted
H_4: The customers' assurance to the employees in environment of fast food services has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.	0.147	2.781	0.000	Accepted
H_5: The empathy of the employees of the fast food services with customers has a significant and positive impact on its brand equity.	0.151	2.840	0.0000	Accepted

Source: Provided by authors.

Implementing the structural equations model shows there is a significant and positive relationship among the elements of the different layers of conceptual model of research. According to the results obtained from the standard path coefficients and the significance coefficients or statistic t (Figure 2& 3) and according to what has come in table 5, it can be said that the dimensions of the service quality (tangible factors, responsiveness, reliability and empathy) on assurance level of 99% have a positive impact on the brand equity. The assurance variable on assurance level % 95 has a significant and positive impact on the brand equity, as well.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

The aim of the present research was to investigate the impact of the quality of service on the brand equity in fast food services industry of Boushehr. After studying the theoretical literature and history of researches done in this field, the hypotheses and the conceptual model of research were designed; then through the structural equations modelling by the help of the Smart PLS software, they were tested. As table 5 shows, the findings of this research represent a significant and positive impact of tangible factors on the brand equity. Researches done by Tirado et al. (2016), Kashif et al. (2016), Edward and Wang (2015) confirm this hypothesis. They expressed in their results of their research that the quality of services and its dimensions have a positive and significant impact on the brand equity. The customer wants in exchange for his/her payments get more value; therefore, it is recommended the restaurant's managers and employees to provide the service easily and faster, so that a stronger brand is occurred to customers. With regard to the positive impact of the services' tangible factors on the brand equity, it is recommended the restaurant's managers and employees to use the suitable and attractive decoration for restaurants, so that t provides a relaxed atmosphere and convenient for our customers; it is recommended the employees pay attention to their appearance. The managers are recommended that they use the marketing tools such as the placement of the tableaus to help customers.

According to the results extracted from table 5, it can be said that the assurance has a positive impact on brand equity. The findings of researches conducted by Iranzadeh et al. (2012), Jahanzab et al. (2013), Tuan (2014),Edward and Wang (2015) confirm this hypothesis. In the results of their research they expressed that the quality of services and the marketing mixture and its dimensions have a significant and positive impact on brand equity. The difference of their researches with this research was that most of researches have been carried out in organizations and service companies like the Banks. It is recommended that marketers and managers of chain restaurants industry try for introducing the chain restaurant brand and creating a positive image in the minds of customers and making sure their marketing is based on the customers' social and age characteristics and their buying habits. Also donating gifts to children, for example, or providing conditions for taking pictures of families who come to the restaurant for the special ceremonies, they try for creating a positive image from the chain restaurants brand. The positive impact of the customers' reliability to the services of restaurant shows that the restaurant's employees must try to be punctual in providing services and correct their mistakes. For attracting customers' attention to providing of the quality

services by the restaurant's managers, it is recommended that the employees, if necessary, listen patiently to their complaints and try to fix it.

The findings of this research represent a significant and positive impact of responsiveness on the brand equity. The value of the path coefficient of this hypothesis shows that if the responsiveness to customers in the restaurant is increased by 1%, the brand equity will increase by 13%. Researches done by Rousta and Madani (2010), Ryan et al (2013) confirm also the result of the test of this hypothesis. They expressed in the results of their research that the quality of services and the marketing compound and its dimensions have a significant and positive impact on the brand equity. Customers under influence of their perception of quality of the restaurant increase their loyalty and pave the way for word of mouth advertising. Use of the up to date and efficient services, the appropriate conduct of employees, responsiveness etc., makes not only to achieve goals, but creates a more powerful image of brand in the mind of customers. In order to increase the brand equity of fast food services industry, it is recommended that management appoints to communication those customers who have the necessary patience and meet the needs of customers as possible.

Other research finding also indicates that the reliability has a positive and significant impact on the brand equity. The value of the path coefficient of this hypothesis (0.147) shows that if the customer's assurance to restaurant services is increased by 1%, the brand equity will increase by 0.147. Researches done by Tirado et al. (2016), Ryan et al. (2013) and Tuan (2014) confirm also the result of the test of this hypothesis. They expressed in the results of their research that the quality of services and the marketing compound and its dimensions have a significant and positive impact on the brand equity. It is recommended that the owners of the chain restaurants by offering the quality food at reasonable price and providing the better services to customers cause to increase the business value and assist to customers' loyalty to restaurant's brand. For example, employees should be selected from among highly experienced individuals and be sure that they can solve as much as possible the unforeseen problems and respond to customers' demands. With regard to the positive impact of the assurance on the increase of brand equity, it is recommended the employees take full responsiveness for their works. If the customer is a little time, we advise the employees try to meet his/ her need so that the customer gets satisfied from the provided services.

The results of this research show that empathy of the restaurant's employees with customers has a positive and significant impact on brand equity. Researches done by Tirado et al. (2016), Kashif et al. (2016), Edward and Wang (2013) confirm also this hypothesis. They expressed in the results of their research that the quality of services and its dimensions have a positive and significant impact on the brand equity. Satisfied and loyal customers are ready to pay a higher price to achieve their desired brand. The more the brand is important for customer, a higher price for it he is ready to pay, because the brand creates value for him/her. Therefore, it is recommended that to the suggestions and critiques on behalf of the customers are paid attention. In order to increase the restaurant's brand equity through empathy, the employees must be of humility in providing services, allocate enough time for customers and respond to their request; they should guide them in choosing their desired foods and listen carefully the customer's words.

Limitations and future suggestions: Research activities in implementing face always restrictions that can be of impact on the results of research and reduce its generalization and capability. This research is not also an exception. For example, the tool of collecting the data of this research was questionnaire. The questionnaire as a data collection tool is of defects that can affect the results of this research. Also, the data of this research have been collected through completing the questionnaire in the environment of Boushehr City*;* therefore, during completing questionnaire the respondents may be influenced by the environment of the restaurant. Also this research has been conducted in a limited area of Iran namely in a restaurant located in Boushehr. Therefore, in generalizing the findings of this research should be a little deliberation.

The findings of this research show that the five dimensions of service quality (tangible factors, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) affect the brand equity of the fast food industry only by 17 percent. This result indicates that 87 percent of the factors influencing the brand equity are related with the factors and variables to which were not paid attention in this research. Therefore, it is recommended that in the future researches the researchers examine other factors and variables that can influence the brand equity.

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