

Investigating the Relation between Social Network Marketing and Brand Competitiveness and the Mediating Effect of Customer's Mental Image on it

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Abstract – Today, the social networks have turned into the inseparable part of business. Marketing through social networks is one of the marketing methods in the modern age that has a great effect on advancement of marketing strategies. Therefore, the current study is done with the aim of investigating the relation between social networks and brand competitiveness and the mediator effect of customer's mental image variable on this relation. This research from the point view of its practical goal, the descriptive research method and data collecting is a scrolling type.

The data collecting tools in this study is the standard questionnaire made by the researcher. In order to measure the validity of the tool and determine its stability we respectively used external validity and Cronbach alpha coefficient that was 0/91. Also in order to investigate the correlation between the research variables and test the hypothesis we respectively used Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling technique and LISREL software. According to findings, social network marketing has a positive and meaningful effect on brand competitiveness, while the mental image of customers has a positive and meaningful role as the mediator variable.

Index Terms – Social networks, mental image, brand competitiveness, information technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the virtual communication era, using social network services has been more popular every day and now social network sites have turned into the most used internet services. Although the main function of social networks is creating interaction and multilateral communications for users, other advantages like sharing interests, obtaining information in various fields and cases like these have extended the area of influence of these networks on the daily life of the community and have turned these networks into proper tools for advertisement and electronic commerce (Fisher 2011). This caused many small and large companies to benefit from the advantages of these networks to develop their business and increase products competitiveness and services in the target markets. Furthermore, the rate of growth and change in information technology and communication has made great changes in the

people's life style and the way of providing services for them. Due to the significance of modern social media that plays a role as an inseparable part in communication development in society, there are different insights about the function of these networks. Therefore, it seems that nature recognition and the function of modern social media and virtual networks in marketing and commercial activity fields may influence on the benefit gained from their positive outcomes in business improvement and increase the competitive ability of the companies. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to investigate the role of social networks in brand competitiveness and identify the effect of customers' mental image on it.

2. MARKETING IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks as the social structures made of nodes that usually connect people or organizations by one or more special relations like financial exchanges, friendship, business, feelings, prejudices, entertainments and habits. Today, a massive amount of information in social networks, weblogs, sites sharing information and the sites relating online games are available. Social networks are a set of individuals and communication nodes between them (Birsley 2012). In the studies done, from the point view of social factors, technology and biological factors, social networks are defined as a group of people that are in contact and have similar interactions. People established social networks to make connections in order to exchange information and also produce information networks.

Emergence of social networks has created new methods in business. Social networks have affected on social and economical life so they have not been away from smart managers' area of attention. From the point view of some managers, virtual social networks provide unparalleled opportunities to recognize the available orientations in the market. In a social network, individuals are not independent and due to the interactions and connections between them affect on each other's behavior in accepting a product. While the customers also dramatically change their behavior in line

with the technology and economical environment of the world. They obtain a large volume of information, become aware of companies products and services and have a higher trust in advertising, prefer their own products and services and choose their own shopping channels (Halsaple2001).

In the modern marketing methods, due to this feature and on the other hand massive presence of users and extensive interactions among them, social networks have provided hunting new ideas and finding their desirability as the best situation. The smart managers observe these networks to find individuals' interests, their desires and their thoughts. Then they use these ideas to create opportunities and produce or even test new products and services. Actually, businesses have used social network marketing as a way to contribute to the communications with customers to advertise their products and services and earn customers' loyalty. Business companies use the social network services to support their products and services or providing services for customers as a new orientation. Social media marketing is a marketing strategy that smart businesses use it in order to make connection to online virtual networks (Williams 2009).

Marketers have quickly understood the value of Facebook and other social Medias as a commercial opportunity. Social media marketing is getting popular because this marketing is a combination of tactics. In this method the generated electronic words are used as an output for information publication, the way to use them is simple, the environment is friendly and the price is reasonable. Most organizations use social networks as a form of social media marketing to interact to consumers or potential consumers. Like the traditional marketing, interacting to consumers using social networks may be an advertising tool to create information or active consumption.

1. Online Communities: A company or business uses social media to build a comprehensive online product or organization. Online vigorous societies lead to loyalty and encouragement of debates that improve business (Carinino, 98: 2000).

2. Interaction: A Facebook page or other social media can share a specific topic quickly and simultaneously to all users (Bersley et al., 2011). Social media provides a large and multifaceted interaction with online communities through the dissemination of up-to-date and relevant consumer information (akimova, 45: 2000).

3. Content Sharing: Next, Share Shows the rate of receiving, sharing and distributing content by a person in a social media (Feng, 69: 2011).

4. Access: Social media is easily accessible and the cost of using it at least and sometimes without cost. Also, the use of social media is very simple and does not require specialist knowledge and expertise (Topiar and Kanwar, 2012).

5. Credits: This dimension refers to providing the message clearly to the audience, creating credibility about what you say or do, creating emotional communication with target audiences, motivating buyers, and building loyal customers. Social media for all businesses (small and large) is the perfect place to access the target market and their audience, provide direct communication and build trust by listening to their needs (Topiar & Kanwar, 2012).

3. THE CUSTOMER'S MENTAL IMAGE

In the era of knowledge and information sharing with knowledge and assets, competition and the challenge of survival become very serious and failed organizations are quickly removed. In such a situation, optimizing the image of the organization towards customers is one of the most essential tools for promoting its programs; Because it creates the ability to resolve external challenges from within the organization itself. In general, the mental image function can be verified in both positive and negative terms.

It creates a positive mental image for motivational behavior and finds the person the right opportunity Encourages the manifestation of behavior and, as soon as he finds out, he does her behavior and then faces with positive feedback and satisfaction and satisfaction, thereby gaining a positive experience that increases his mental image. It creates a new motive and this cycle continues and improves. But the negative mental image has a reverse cycle and outcome; In that way, it eliminates or weakens the motive of the action, and as a result, the person loses opportunities and faces threats and forces them to react.

And then by receiving negative feedback, a negative experience is recorded in his mind and added to his mental image and his motive is weakened. The mental image of an organization is a small and intangible component that is of particular importance in the success of a business, because the image of the organization is one of its most valuable assets (Kaplan, 59: 2010). Positive and powerful mental images increase the purchase and repeat purchase of previous customers and attract new customers. Managing a mental image requires continuous investment in research and development, skilled advertising and such as providing outstanding customer service. And this requires maintaining customer awareness of the proper intuition of the quality and performance of the organization's products and other positive cases (Vojinfeng, 486: 2009).

The mental image can be expressed as a mental state, the consequence of which is the explicit explanation of the verbal or behavioral. What should be considered is that some of the mental images are collective and shared among the group (Bromley, 2003). Some experts believe that the company's mental image is the net result of the interaction of all experiences, perceptions, Beliefs, feelings and knowledge of

people about the company. Thus, these researchers consider the mental image as a non-touch concept, which everyone understands in its own way. Hence, the perception of each person is not the same with the other. The mental image reflects the issues that exist in the client's minds of the organization, Organizational image as a filter affects customer perceptions of the organization's operations.

So you can admit it That mental image forms in the minds of the client through process and procedure Whereby the information in the client's mind is organized in the form of defined and categorized meanings. Hence, marketing managers must, in addition to understanding the importance and impact of the customer's mental image, make decisions and take measures to control and eliminate negative factors and the spread of positive factors. One of these methods is the use of social media in the marketing and advertising process. Social media marketing is a marketing strategy used by smart vendors to connect to online virtual networks (Williams, 2009).

Marketers quickly understand the value of Facebook and other social media as a business opportunity. Social media marketing is becoming popular, because marketing is a combination of tactics. This technique uses the generated electronic words as an outlet for disseminating information and is easy to use It has a friendly environment and a decent price (Rare et al., 1394). Most organizations use social media as a form of social media marketing to engage with potential consumers or potential consumers. Similar to traditional marketing, engagement with consumers through social media can be a promotional tool for awareness or consumption (Newman et al., 2013). In this research, the company's image assessment is performed from the perspective of customers using the SERVQUAL model. In this model, customer satisfaction is measured by two concepts of perceptions and expectations.

4. BRAND COMPETITIVENESS

In the global economy, competitiveness means the possibility of obtaining a stable and stable position in international markets (Pena Wins, 2009). Competitiveness is a comparative concept that identifies the ability or performance of a company, an enterprise or a country in the marketplace to supply its goods or services to the market (Babaei, 109: 1393). Competitiveness is also a multi-dimensional concept, and organizations have to strengthen themselves in all its dimensions in order to develop competitive power (Akimiova, 2000). Competitiveness is a dynamic and evolving process that has a multi-functional structure Competitiveness is not merely the measurement of the level of competitiveness in an enterprise, industry or nation, but rather a long-term process that has a relative meaning. Competitiveness has become a major issue among business organizations today. Brand competitiveness Indicates the ability of the company to

compete in the market in such a way that it distinguishes that company from its competitors, and this distinction is derived from internal features, Technology, functionality and brand service are in a competitive market that attracts customers' interest in buying products (Topiar, 78: 2012). Brand competitiveness is the power that many factors play in creating and shaping it. In competitive markets, the key to the success of each company is the continuous development and promotion of brand competitiveness with the help of various resources and integrated capacities. Therefore, companies need to regulate, formulate and build their brand competitiveness in a way that maintains this competitive advantage (Boot, 28: 1998). Competitiveness is a multi-dimensional concept, and organizations need to strengthen themselves in all its dimensions in order to develop competitive power (Akimiova, 2000). Competitiveness is a dynamic and progressive process of multi-purpose structural competitiveness, ie competitiveness is not merely the measurement of the degree of competitiveness in an enterprise or industry or nation, Competitiveness is a long-term process and relative concept (Carneville, 87: 200). It is noteworthy that Brand Competitiveness is a relative problem. And dependent on the values of customers and stakeholders, the potential and flexibility of the workforce and technology to apply strategic and financial changes that determine the ability to act and react in a competitive environment. Therefore, an organization is competitive in the eyes of its customers, which has a good balance between the abovementioned factors and can provide a better value than its competitors.

5. ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF RESEARCH

a. Main assumptions:

1. Social network marketing has a significant impact on the client's mental image.
2. Social network marketing has a significant impact on brand competitiveness.
3. Social network marketing by interacting with customers' mental image has a significant bearing on brand competitiveness

B. Sub-assumptions

1. Customer's mental image has a significant impact on brand competitiveness.
2. Customer's mental image has a significant impact on brand competitiveness.
3. Customers' mentalimage has a significant impact on brand competitiveness.
4. Customer's mental image has a significant impact on brand competitiveness

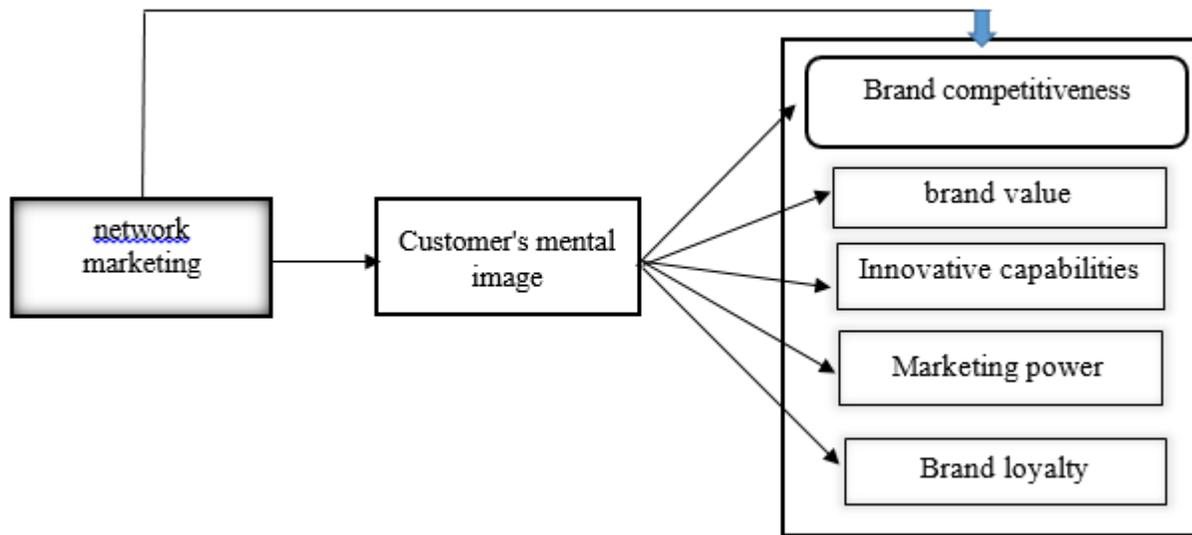


Figure 1. Conceptual model of research

6. RESEARCH METHOD

In terms of purpose, this research is descriptive in terms of research method and in terms of collecting survey data. Also, due to its aim to examine the fit and degree of approximation between variables, it is a type of correlation research based on the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population of this research is the directors and experts of marketing and sales of the top companies producing men's clothing in Tehran city. Which was considered as an example given the constraints of the entire society. The data gathering tool was a standard questionnaire and a researcher based on theoretical fundamentals of gathering. The validity of the tool was used for face validity. Accordingly, the questionnaire was provided to university professors and experts in this field According to their opinion regarding the questionnaire, necessary amendments were considered. Reliability measure was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and analyzed by SPSS software. Given that its value for all three social network marketing variables, customer image and brand competitiveness is higher than 1%, the questionnaire has a good reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the variables is shown in Table (1). Also, to examine the correlation between research variables, Pearson correlation coefficient and to test hypotheses, Structural equation modeling technique and LISREL software have been used.

Table 1. Reliability of the questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha coefficients	Dimensions	Variable
0/918	—	network marketing

0921	—	Customer's mental image
0/895	Brand Awareness	Brand competitiveness
0/932	Innovative capabilities	
0/875	Marketing power	
0/901	Sustainability	
0/910	—	Total questionnaire

7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

7-1. Descriptive findings

The descriptive findings of the general characteristics of the respondents include gender, age, educational level and their organizational side, as shown in Table 2 below.

7-2. Structural Model Review

7-2-1. Pearson correlation test

In this step, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure the correlation between variables. This coefficient calculates the correlation between two distances or relative variables, and the value is between 1+ and 1. Accordingly, if the value obtained is positive, it means that the changes of the two variables occur in the same way, that is, with the increase in each variable, the other variable also increases Conversely, if r is negative, that means two variables in the direction of the image, that is, by increasing the value of a variable, the values of another variable decreases and vice versa. Therefore, the obtained value of zero indicates that there is no relation between the two variables, the value of 1+ represents a positive

total correlation, and the value of 1 indicates a complete negative correlation. The test results at a confidence level of 0.95 and an error rate of 0.05 are shown in Table 3. According to the findings, while there is a significant correlation between all variables, two social networking and brand competitiveness index variables are most correlated with each other.

Table 2. Demographic data of research

Percent	Number	Components	Demographic indicators
27/7	41	Female	gender
72/79	107	Man	
21/92	32	Between 20 and 30 years	Age
42/56	63	Between 30 and 40 years	
29/05	43	Older than 40 years	
19/59	29	Diploma and diploma	Education level
33/78	74	Bachelor	
45/94	68	Masters and higher	
18/94	28	sales and marketing manager	organization level
58/78	78	Sales Expert	
22/30	33	marketing expert	

7-2-2. Factor Analysis

7-2-2-1. Assessing the overall fitness of the model

Deciding whether to fit a model is based on several indicators, not an indicator. So, to assess the fit of the model, A variety of indicators need to be reported. Because different indicators reflect different aspects of fitting the model Lisrel software provides coefficients and model errors for fit indices, which can be used to examine the overall model and its fit with these indices.

Since the chi 2 value is equal to 2.31 and less than 3, the model has a high degree of fidelity. In this model, the RMSEA index was equal to 0.98 and the GFI barrier index was 0.91. Due to the low RMSEA content and the GFI's top-of-the-90s, this model has a high degree of credibility and its analytical results can be relied upon.

7-2-2-2. Model Estimate Mode

In this study, to determine whether each of the research structures has been consistent with the markers selected for their measurement. Measurement model, or confirmatory factor analysis, was used to separate the dimensions of the study and its results were based on the amount of factor loads Selective markers have high accuracy for measuring research structures. After ensuring that they accurately measure the questionnaire of their structures. And obtaining construct validity at this stage can be used to test the hypotheses of the research in the form of path analysis. In order to show the significance of each of the parameters of the model, t statistic is used Which should be greater than 1.96 in the absolute value test t, so that these estimates are statistically significant. The test pattern of the research is shown in Figures 2 and 3. In this form of marketing of social networks with SNM, the customer's mental image with CMI and Bern's competition with REB are shown.

Table 3. Correlation between variables

Brand competitiveness	Customer's mental image	network marketing	Standard deviation	Average	Variables
0/541 *	0/386 *	1	0/78	2/38	network marketing
0/464 *	1	-	0/67	2/97	Customer's mental image
1	-	-	0/63	3/12	Brand competitiveness

Table 4. Necessary results fit the model indices

Result	Amount calculated	Allowed range	Indicator
acceptable	2/31	3 >	x2/df
A good fit	0/97	0/1 >	RMSEA

A good fit	0/92	0/9 <	AGFI
A good fit	0/95	0/9 <	IFI
A good fit	0/93	0/9 <	NFI
A good fit	0/95	0/9 <	NNFI
A good fit	0/91	0/9 <	RFI
A good fit	0/95	0/9 <	CFI

Figure 2. Modeling of Structural Equations in the Standardized Factor

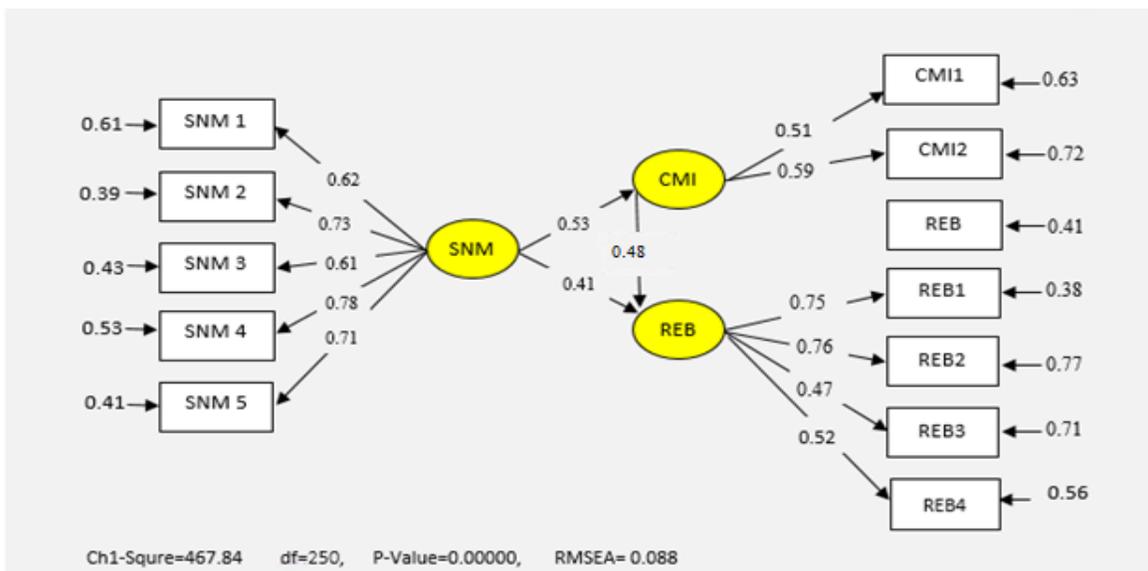


Figure 3. Structural Equation modeling test in the case of meaningful coefficients

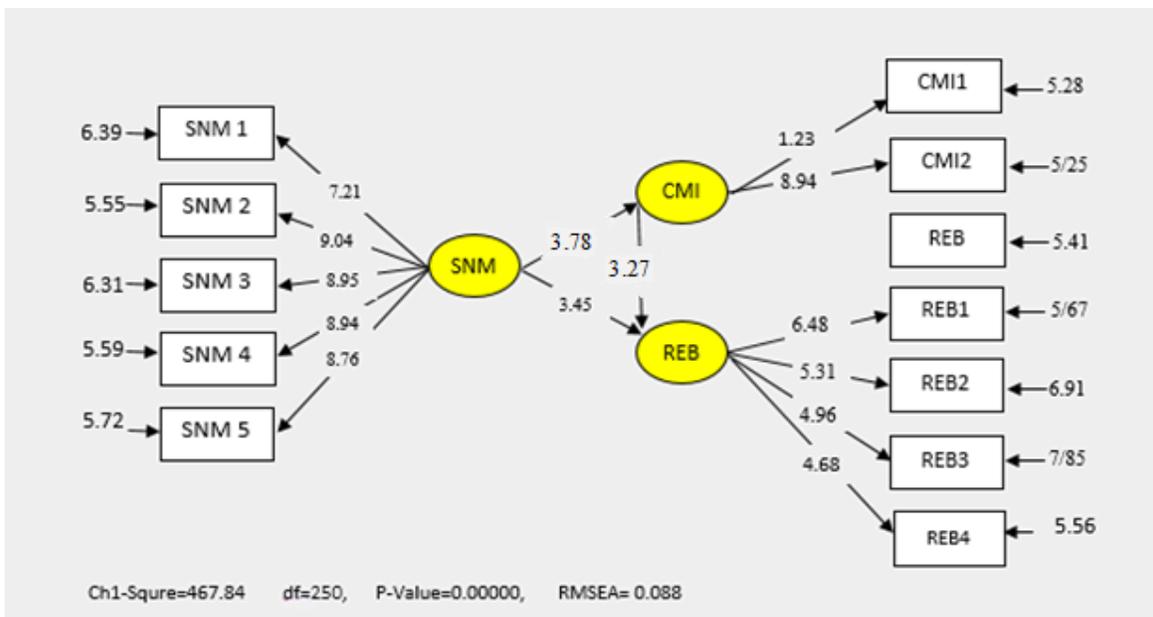


Table 4. Route coefficients and related significance values

Result	Significance level	t-value	Standard coefficient	Direction
Confirmation	0/000	3/45	%41	network marketing --> Brand competitiveness
Confirmation	0/000	3/78	%53	network marketing ----> Customer's mental image
Confirmation	0/000	3/27	%48	Brand competitiveness --> Customer's mental image

Table 5. Analytical role of customer image motivated interdependence on brand competitiveness

sig	R ²	R	β	B	The dependent variable	independent variable
0/000	0/302	0/551	0/551	0/398	Brand competitiveness	Social Networks
0/000	0/137	0/354	0/354	0/287	Customer's mental image	network marketing
0/000	0/217	0/463	0/463	0/430	Brand competitiveness	Customer's mental image
0/000	0/376	0/589	0/433	0/318	Brand competitiveness	Customer's mental image

Table 6. Results of the analysis of sub-hypotheses of the research

Result Test	Significance level	T-Value	Standard coefficient	Direction
Confirmation	0/000	3/78	83%	brand value<---- Customer's mental image
Confirmation	0/000	5/31	65%	Innovative customer <---- imagery image
Confirmation	0/000	5/43	61%	The mental image of marketing<---- power customers
Confirmation	0/000	6/45	87%	The image of brand<---- loyalty customers

The results of the path coefficient along with the significant values (t) are presented in Table 4. To test the significance of the hypotheses, a partial index of the value of the t statistic is used; As a result, when testing the hypotheses by using the structural equation model, the obtained coefficients are significant Whose meaningful test value is greater than 1/96 and less than 1/96. In the present study, the effect of social network marketing variable on brand competitiveness is 41% and its coefficient of significance is 3.45% The effect of social network marketing on customer image is 53% and significant It is 3.78 and the effect of customers' mental image on brand competitiveness is 48% with a significant coefficient of 3.27. Therefore, the main hypotheses are verified.

The results of the study of the role of the customer mediator in the relationship between the two social network marketing and brand competitiveness variables are shown in Table 5. Based on the results, although the variable placement of the client's mental image reduces the standard beta coefficient between these two variables From 551/0 to 433/0,

but their relationship is still meaningful. Therefore, the role of customer-focused mental image intermediation is confirmed on the relationship between social network marketing. The results of the review of the structural model of sub hypotheses are also presented in Table 6 for measuring the impact of customer image on brand competitiveness components.

According to the results of structural equation modeling (Table 6), the analysis of sub-hypotheses is as follows:

- The standard coefficient between the two variables of customers' mental image and brand value in the superior companies of men's clothing industry in Tehran is 83%, which is a significant correlation with t = 6.87 (greater than 1.96), this hypothesis is confirmed.
- The standard coefficient between the two variables of customers' mental image and innovative capabilities in the superior companies of men's clothing industry in Tehran is 65%, which is confirmed by a tangible coefficient of t = 31.5 (greater than 1.96).

- The standard coefficient between the two variables of customers' mental image and marketing power in the top companies of the men's clothing industry in Tehran is 61%. This relation is confirmed by a tangible coefficient of $t = 43.5$ (greater than 1.96).

- The standard coefficient between two variables of customers' mental image and brand loyalty in the top companies of men's clothing industry in Tehran is 87%. This relationship with a tangential factor of 6.45% (greater than 1.96), this hypothesis is also confirmed.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In the world of electronic marketing, new business models are introduced and new trends are emerging. One of the latest trends is the social networking websites that attract not only a large number of users and visitors It's also a place to put online advertising companies and companies. In fact, with the increasing expansion of the use of social networks, business and marketing through this mass-media, new industries have become more industrialized and using new tools, the loyalty of customers has become loud because these networks are actually a powerful tool for organizations to reach target audiences. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of social network marketing on customer image and brand competitiveness in garment manufacturers. The results of the research show that marketing of social networks has a positive effect on brand competitiveness and customer image. Also, customer's mental image has a significant positive effect on the brand competitiveness of these companies by a significant 3.7 percent; Moreover, marketing of social networks through the customer's mental image has a greater impact on brand competitiveness. Therefore, creating a positive mental image in customers is a feature in which specific and complex processes are involved. It is hard to imitate them for other companies; as a result, it is a source of competitive advantage that, in contrast to competitors, improves brand competitiveness. These companies will be. These findings are in line with the results of Brown and Lee (2007), Liba (2010), Wuwsocu (2010), Zhu, -Vogloufang, 2011), Zaglya (2013), Mouse (2012), Laroc (2012), Feizov et al. (1396) and Rosondel (1395). According to the results of the research, it can be admitted that the use of social network marketing with regard to effective factors in creating a positive mental image of the company in the minds of customers, it leads to improved brand competitiveness of men's clothing manufacturers in the market. In addition, creating a positive mental image in customers by improving the company's status in the field of brand value, Innovative capabilities, marketing power and customer loyalty are the necessary platforms for market development, creation and application of new ideas for continuous customer satisfaction, Increasing the company's marketing power coupled with the benefits of lowering marketing costs due to the large number of users and the ease

of access to them through social networks and at the close of maintaining and creating customers loyal to the products of the company.

- The use of appropriate social networks for marketing activities that, while reaching out to a large number of potential and actual audience, also have the ability and capacity to meet the expectations of the company's online customers.

- Companies' online marketing activities on social networks should reflect the importance of the quality of the products and services provided to customers and the client-side bias in the minds of customers.

- Using modern technologies in marketing activities and designing and developing new products for customers to attract and retain new customers.

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