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Studying the brands in Iranian apparel industry
(Comparing GERAD agency in Iran with other agents in Qom)

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ABSTRACT. Today, one can consider apparel industry as one of the most preliminary profession needed by human beings. In terms of brand, the industry enjoys good situation in the world. Brand and trademark issues are admired as a competitive advantage worldwide. Due to brand role in promoting, growing and progressing the products both qualitatively and quantitatively, it is accepted and used in all Iranian industries. Its importance in competition, the growth and development of companies and analyzing business environment has made attractive.

Present paper aims at studying the status of brands in Iranian apparel industry (Comparing GERAD agency in Iran with other agents in Qom) by using PEST method, SWOT analysis, CCFs and target market segmentation matrix. Based on conducted investigations to identify current barriers and challenges in apparel industry brands through interviews with senior managers of active companies in apparel and textile industry and a questionnaire submitted to them, 13 proper guidelines were achieved among which deregulation of prices strategy as well as four suggestion on trust building and promoting national and Iranian brands in domestic, regional and global markets were provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

In hyper-competition conditions of today markets, it is too vital to acquire a proper place in consumers' minds so that they would be loyal to a company. Concerning the factors effective in achieving such status one can refer to brand equity (Karbasivar and Yardel, 2011: 15) through brand promotion and, then, to achieve customers' brand trust.

Heraclitus believes that nothing is fixed and everything is changing in every moment. Consumers' conception on your brand and situation in competition scene differs day-by-day. On this basis and in the arena of continuous transformations, need to brand management is inevitable (Bathai, 2008: 1 – 3).

US Marketing Association defines brand as: "a trademark, term, symbol or design or a combination of them used to recognize goods and services of a seller or a group of sellers and distinguishing tem from rivals' goods/services" (Moghimi, 2013: 191). Brand is a part of trademark which can express by voice or gesture (Ebrahimi et al, 2009: 161) such as GERAD, Hacupian, etc.

Brand equity is one of the most valuable assets of any company. Aker defines brand equity as a set of relevant assets added to generated value by goods or service (Bill Xu & Chan, 2010). Computing brand equity would allow top management to assess the strengths of their brand(s) overtime and formulate their marketing strategies (Hsu et al, 2012).

Brand equity is generated by brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is a positive attitude toward a mark and a supportive behavior (Kumar Panchal et al, 20120.

According to abovementioned facts, one can learn the importance of brand and its value in industry in general and apparel industry in particular. In present study, we use PEST (political, economic, social and technological) and SWOT techniques (Moghimi, 2013: 48). Also, target market segmentation matrix and CCFs on Iranian apparel brands are studied and the role and importance of brand promotion and brand trust which lead into brand loyalty are discussed.

2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

The importance of apparel in human life is so high that The Divinity talks about in Holy Quran: "*children of Adam! We have sent down to you clothing that covers your nakedness, and feathers. But the clothing of piety that is better. That is one of the signs of Allah, in order that they remember.*" (Al-ARAF (THE HEIGHTS): 26). An industry with increasingly growth worldwide is apparel industry. Due to its comparative advantages in Iran, one can pave the way for its growth by creating necessary grounds and proper industrial factors to support domestic products, to export and attract more domestic and foreign investments.

One of the biggest aims of Iranian apparel industry is to improve domestic production and to expand Iranian well – known brands for which high steps are taken in recent years and by their innovation and creativity; many domestic companies are attempting to realize this goal. Among such companies, one can point out such companies as GERAD, Hacupian, Brandes, Maxim and so on.

One can define trust as customers' convenience in all steps of relying upon the seller to service delivery in promised time. Therefore, brand loyalty involves also brand trust. On this basis, building a trustworthy brand would retain the relation s of seller and buyer. Trust lays a vital role in building customer – brand strong relationship and it associates with brand loyalty positively (Sahin et al, 2011).

A reason that brand promotion is harder in the third world countries is that the name of manufacturing country is a negative and inhibitor factor rather than an aid. When consumers have weak information on a brand, their judgment will be based on manufacturing country. Brand promotion has national values.

By using analytical techniques and field studies, present study looks for studying and explaining brand status in Iranian apparel industry by comparing GERAD brand with other apparel brands in Qom and answering the question that what are the most important barriers against Iranian (made in Iran) brands? In other words, why Iranian apparel brands are not well – known both internally and externally? Finally, recommendations are provided to remove such barriers by using SWOT analysis and the findings of other studies.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What factors can be effective in selecting clothes by customers?
- What is GERAD's market segmentation?
- What guideline is recommended in GERAD market based on SWOT analysis?

Research goals

There are many studies on brand and its relationship to marketing factors while a few studies are conducted in apparel industry and the conducted studies have their own deficiencies. Past studies have been focused more on brand equity and brand comparative studies. Therefore, future studies should investigate on more marketing activities and they should not be limited to 4Ps; rather, they should cover all grounds of marketing and business like SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, CCFs and target market segmentation matrix. Present paper aims at studying the influence of marketing activities on brands in Iranian apparel industry.

The importance of present paper is that it studies brand status in Iranian apparel industry uniquely and attempts to provide marketers with information on the behavior of Iranian consumers and how to raise Iranian brands in national regional and international markets.

The main aim of the research is to analyze brand status and identifying brand building barriers in Iranian apparel industry, to identify the reasons of not propensity to use Iranian apparel brand in both internal and external markets and to provide recommendations on how to improve Iranian apparel brands' status in domestic, regional and global markets.

Population, sample and sampling method
Research population consists of consumers and customers of different apparel brands in Qom (Iran) that have used at least one product of these companies.
Since research population is unlimited, we use below equation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:
N : population size
n : sample size
Z^2 : normal variable value 1 - α confidence level
P : the value of variable property q = 1 – p
d^2 : the value of allowed error (0.05).
In confidence level of 95% and success ratio of 0.7%, sample size is computed as:

$$n = \frac{(1/96)^2 (0/7)(0/3)}{(0/05)^2} = 323$$

4. METHODOLOGY

According to research findings, we look for providing practical guidelines to improve status quo; as a result, this is an applied study in terms of purpose.
On the hand, since we analyze the items, this is descriptive study and it is periodical in terms of time.

Data collection method and research instrument
Two sets of data are collected:
Library study: relevant data was gathered by using library resources and databases.
Field study: it includes data collection, questionnaire distribution and polling from distribution and gathering and analyzing final information from research sample.
SWOT and strategy formulation are conducted through elites. On this basis, a questioner was devised and submitted to research sample (customers to identify affecting factors on customers' selection and GERAD market segmentation.

Theoretical basics
Brand was emerged by the entrance of packaged products in 19th century. By industrial revolution and increases in the production of companies and factories, they should insert the name and symbol on products so that one can determine a manufacturer's goods. Mass production emerged and such volume of production needed to be supplied and sold in a broader market. Thus, it became possible for companies to advertise their trademark in broader regions.
Brand is a concept more than a product or service. Today, products in different industries do not differ radically while these are brands which generate fundamental differences in many industries and markets. By such difference, many market pioneers view their brands as a competitive advantage (Mohammadian, 2010: 16). Generating a strong brand is paid attention by many companies overtime. Many firms have defined the enhancement of brand and minor products as an important part of their business strategy (Mohammadian, 2010: 15).
Today, brand is not simply an efficient tool in the hands of managers; rather it is a strategic necessity which helps organizations in creating more value for customers and sustainable competitive advantages for companies (Sun & Richard, 2010).
In addition to generate added – value and recalling the name of product in public mindset, building and developing national brands would have other advantages including conquering global, regional and internal markets. In fact, a set of infrastructures and conditions including laws and regulations and cultural issues are needed to achieve a national brand which should be studied one-by-one and step-by-step. It means that they should be analyzed in political, economic, social, technological,

spatial and legal terms so that one can identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in order to provide proper guidelines for each. On the other hand, one should treat such problems scientifically and professionally.

5. RESEARCH RECORDS

Studies indicate that no research on the title of current is conducted yet while similar studies are conducted as outlined in table 1.

Table 1:

Year	Author	Title	Result
2013	Majid and Mohammad Pakghalb Mohammadi	Studying the impact of brand on brand loyalty of men apparel customers in Iran	Confirming a positive and significant statistical relationship between brand impact measures (loyalty, perceived quality, awareness, association, consistencies)
2012	Naderh A-Sadat Najafizadeh et al	Studying the relationship between origin country and brand value (Case study: GERAD)	Confirming the relationship between the image of origin country and brand value
2012	Abduulhamid Ebrahimi et al	Studying affecting factors on consumers' attitude and intention to buy counterfeit luxury brand products in apparel industry (case study; Sari)	Such factors as personal satisfaction. Price/quality perception, value awareness, social impact, subjective norm, perceived risk and brand awareness have significant impact on attitude toward counterfeit products and attitude toward counterfeit product has positive impact on purchase intention.
2010	Hassan Saberi	Brand value generation in Iranian apparel market	Marketing activities have different impacts on brand value generation in Iranian apparel market. Different marketing strategies have different influential levels in different ways.
2010	Habibolah Doaei and Farzaneh Hassanzadeh Zhaleh	Comparative study of customers' attitude toward global apparel brands	The results indicate that brand association, brand general conception and brand commitment (brand loyalty only) have different impacts on each country.
2010	Mansoor Samadi and Zeynab Zyayi	Evaluating joint effects of cognitive and relational variables of brand on consumers' purchase behavior	1. Brand cognitive variables namely brand awareness and image impact positively on current and future purchases. 2. There is a

			positive and significant association between brand image and brand awareness. 3. Brand satisfaction and trust impact positively on tendency to future purchases while it has no significant impact on current purchases.
2010	Long – Yilin	The relationship between customers' personality traits, brand personality and brand loyalty	There is a positive relationship between customers' personality traits and brand

6. PEST analysis on GERAD

(a) Political and legal factors

Some barriers of brand building in Iran emanated from governmental policies and regulations include the impossibility of organizing fashion shows proportionate to Iranian local culture, the impossibility of using varied and especially happy colors in products, the impossibility of using English names for Iranian brands which is a barrier on transforming to a credible brand. In Iran, shop clothes cannot use English names while branding is a cross – border issue (Textile and Apparel Monthly, 2013: 68). As mentioned before, government's policy to control the prices of domestic products is another issue which can be contemplated since in the conditions that we witness the emphasis by all authorities on brand building, one should consider this right for companies that have found their brand status among people through years of efforts and heavy costs and allow them to sell their products with different prices compared to similar products to which buyer is also more tended. It is routine in all countries and we know that the sale price for global well – known products are not regulated based on their production final price.

Government's approvals: government's approval on the prohibition of importing products similar to domestic made ones can change the remained official apparel importation to smuggling. Now, many smuggled textile and apparel goods can be easily sold countrywide and no one can prevent it.

Government policy on eliminating subsidies and energy carrier prices: executing the law on controlling energy subsidies would increase the costs of manufacturing companies in two ways: direct (i.e. increases in the prices of power, gas, …) and indirect (i.e. increases in transportation fees, raw material, …) and such increases in costs and, consequently increases in the final price of manufactured products would mitigate profit, lead into losses and even bankruptcy of firms.

Similar to other manufacturing products, apparel industry has not been able yet to pass bottlenecks due to subsidy elimination and reforming the prices of energy carriers. The most important outcome of subsidy control is increase in final prices of production sector which would lead into mitigation of production and increases in merchandise smuggling and/or importation rising from official entry points which has negative impact on this industry.

(b) Economic factors

The impact on changes in the rates of foreign currencies and government's economic policymaking on apparel importation and textiles: lack of modifying foreign currency rates would improve demand for imported goods. Considering competitiveness in this industry, prices have their own margin costs and it is not economic to supply products with lower prices. As a result, their competitiveness would come down compared to imported goods and, consequently, production and workforce demand would mitigate. Decreases in workforce demand would increase unemployment at least in this industrial section.

Changes in foreign currency exchange rate have important impacts on the importation of textiles and apparel to Iran. Considering any goal setting through governmental policy making would have

no interests for such importation and it can also mitigated competitive power and the productivity of internal manufacturers (Sultani, 2014: 23 – 23).

The impact of inflation and customer's power purchase (household costs): inflation would improve the price of law materials to produce the goods and failure in buying raw materials and, consequently, rice increases. As a result, price increases would mitigate customer's power purchase. In long term, it would mitigate purchases by customers.

   (c) Social factors

Fashion is an affecting factor on apparel industry. Since youngsters constitute half of our population, paying attention to tem who follow fashions would guarantee a consuming market. As mentioned before, a company can encourage youngsters to use its products by proper propaganda through mass media and websites and improve its brand popularity. Internet propaganda is an effective communication tool to improve consumers' conception on brand and recalling it in Iranian apparel market. Also, it can make loyalty by shaping mutual relations.

The existence of cultural and educational locations including public and nonprofit universities, higher education institutes, banks and financial/credit institutes and different companies and organizations through the country and in Qom encouraged the management of the company to provide these proposals to supply the apparel for organizations and corporation in terms of easiness, quickness and satisfaction of employees: providing GERAD purchase bonus, providing purchase cards, GERAD joint online purchase, defining purchase draft, customization, respecting the cultural and social laws and values human dignity and honesty as beliefs by GERAD to build a proper ambience for grooming and development (Isfahanian, 2002).

   (d) Technology

Using new technology and machines as well as paying attention to production and development new works caused that GERAD can be recognized as the best second manufacturer in Iranian apparel industry despite of the existence of international rivals such as Hacupian, Maxim and Icut. GERAD has more sophisticated production line as well as software and hardware capabilities.

GERAD is the first Iranian manufacturer which produced suits for 95% of Iranian men in 9 size groups.

To promote qualitative level and proximity to global standard, the company was able to produce clothes with anti-spot, waterproof, anti-sensitivity, anti-sweating and anti-bacterial features. The tissues used in these clothes are emanated from nature and by using these clothes, per capita consumption of water and detergents will be mitigated which would improve cloth lifetime.

All people pay attention to their appearance and they will be GERAD today or tomorrow customers. To achieve and develop sustainable customers, GERAD should utilize modern technologies and management science since it looks for its competencies in flexibility, smart innovation and superior quality of products so that GERAD brand can be a synonym to innovation, good name and trust (Isfahanian, 2014).

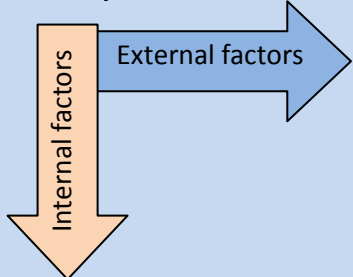## 7. SWOT analysis on GERAD Company

   SWOT or Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and it helps us to determine them.

Strengths and weaknesses are factors that the system in struggling with them currently while opportunities and threats are potential and one can use them to predict system status in future based on current situation.

Conducting SWOT and determining as strategy through interviews with senior managers of active companies in textile and apparel industry. To prioritize, a questionnaire was submitted to 323 customers to give their scores by Likert scale. The aggregative frequency of each factor was computed. Then, the numerical mean of expectations for each factor was computed by equation (1) (Abtahi and Samee', 2010). SWOT on GERAD was provided by the scores giver to each factor (table 2).

$$E(x) = x_i F(x_i) \tag{1}$$

Table 2: SWOT for GERAD Company

SWOT Analysis — Internal factors → External factors	Opportunities O:	Threats T:
	O_1: GERAD brand bright background O_2: government's supportive policy for domestic products O_3: proper prices compared to rivals O_4: the existence of numerous public and private entities (universities, banks, institutes, companies, etc.) O_5: customer – orientation approach	T_1: people's distrust to domestic products T_2: foreign brands (Turkish, …) T_3: foreign currency changes T_4: companies with specialized forces in the market T_5: policies to control the price of internal prices
Strengths S : S_1: GERAD Brand S_2: product quality S_3: CRM(polling, pursuing grievance and criticism, guiding customers, etc.) S_4: Customers' club (online sharing card) S_5: diversity in the sizes of products	**SO strategies:** 1. Expanding internal, regional and international markets by using brand (GERAD brand) (S_1, O_1) 2. Product cost mitigation, price mitigation and quality improvement by government's supportive policy on domestic products (S_2, O_2, O_3) 3. Using customer – orientation approach through diversity, quality, after sale services and pricing to improve brand (S_3, S_4, O_5)	**ST strategies** 1. After sales services and quality improvement to attract internal consumers' trust and brand loyalty (S_2, S_3, T_1) 2. Changing internal consumers' mindsets through trust to brand (S_1, T_1) 3. Deregulation on brands like GERAD (S_1, T_5)
Weaknesses W: W_1: low propaganda W_2: Impossibility to buy through Internet W_3: lack of organizing exhibition for company's products W_4: lack of attention to packaging desired by customers	**WO strategies:** 1. Organizing exhibitions by the cooperation of public and private companies in order to identify and advertise products (W_1, W_3, O_4) 2. Propaganda by considering government's supportive policy on internal products through mass media, journals, IRIB and cross-border networks (W_1, O_2) 3. Identifying market needs and delivering products in packages adapted to customers' interests (W_4, O_5) 4. The possibility of purchase and customize through company's website concerning the expansion of e-commerce in order to improve brand and customer satisfaction (W_2, W_4, O_1, O_5)	**WT strategies:** 1. Identifying rivals' propaganda techniques in internal, regional and global markets (W_1, T_2) 2. Familiarity with modern e-commerce techniques and using specialized forces familiar with modern techniques of marketing and propaganda (W_1, W_2, T_4) 3. Organizing exhibition in internal, regional and global markets to attract internal consumers' trust and identifying its brand in foreign markets(W_1, W_3, T1)

Upon analyses, 13 strategies were provided and the best one was deregulation from well – known brands like GERAD.

8. Customer Choice Factors (CCFs)

One of the factors of segmenting target market is customer choice factor. It means that why customer has selected us? When customer decides to buy, you as a seller like to be the first person he/she goes with. However, your rivals are ready to respond his/her needs. Which factors do cause that the customer selects among different competitions?

This is what occupies the mind of different companies. It is better to know that even customers often find no response (Samadi and Noory, 2011). Buying clothes by customers' needs to select and refer to a proper shop among different ones which provide all their considered factors. Some factors include: price, price and quality fitness, brand credit, company name, shop location (in crow or rich areas), personnel demeanor, products diversity and internal decoration of the shop.

The most important factors were selected and provided to ten customers in order to give scores to GERAD and its rivals (from zero to ten). The results are outlines in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

CCF	Weighting
Price	2
Brand	2.5
Price and quality fitness	3
Products diversity	1.5
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	1

CCF	Jamineh									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Price	7	5	6	7	4	5	3	7	6	5
Brand	6	5	6	8	5	6	4	7	7	5
Price and quality fitness	5	6	5	7	6	7	5	5	6	4
Products diversity	6	6	7	4	6	8	5	6	7	5
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	8	7	6	8	6	9	8	10	6	7

CCF	Brandes									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Price	3	4	5	4	6	5	6	4	7	5
Brand	4	2	1	2	3	1	2	5	3	1
Price and quality fitness	4	5	3	4	6	3	4	6	6	2
Products diversity	5	5	4	4	5	6	7	4	6	4
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	7	6	5	6	8	6	9	6	8	6

CCF	Karoos									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Price	5	7	7	6	3	5	3	8	6	5
Brand	4	5	3	6	1	2	1	4	2	3
Price and quality fitness	6	6	5	4	2	3	6	6	4	6
Products diversity	7	8	6	6	5	4	7	8	6	5
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	8	9	7	8	7	6	4	9	5	6

CCF	GERAD									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Price	7	6	8	7	5	8	6	7	6	7
Brand	5	7	6	8	4	5	7	8	6	8
Price and quality fitness	7	5	8	8	4	7	5	6	7	6
Products diversity	5	9	6	7	6	8	7	6	4	8
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	6	8	10	9	8	6	7	7	8	8

Table 4

CCF	Jamineh		Brandes		Karoos		GERAD	
	Weighted	From 10	Weighted	From 10	Weighted	From 10	Weighted	From 10
Price	5.5	11	4.9	9.8	5.5	11	6.7	13.4
Brand	5.9	14.75	2.4	6	3.1	7.75	6.4	16
Price and quality fitness	5.6	16.8	4.3	12.9	4.8	14.4	6.3	18.9
Products diversity	6	9	5	7.5	6.2	9.3	6.6	9.9
Personnel demeanor (customer orientation)	7.5	7.5	6.7	6.7	6.9	6.9	7.7	7.7
Total sum without weight	30.5		23.3		26.5		33.7	
Total weighted sum	59.5		42.9		49.35		65.9	

Above tables indicate that currently GERAD is in better situation that its rivals and its only main competitor is Jamineh. To this end, they should pay more attention to this rival.

9. SEGMENTATION MATRIX AND TARGET MARKET

To select markets and to provide suitable services, the company should identify main segments of the market and then produce products especially for such segments. In fact, it addresses market segmentation so that it can select a part of market which responds customers' needs better. Market segmentation means to evaluate the attractions of each market segment and to select one or more segments of the market (target market) (Parsian, 2004: 298) by highest potential income (Ebrahimi, 2004: 199). In fact, market segmentation is a process to identify and separate buyers' traits to select markets which organization want and can to supply its products. Likewise, product designing and marketing plans are considered to respond buyers' requirements (Roosta et al, 1999: 132 – 133).

Now, we categorize the customers of GERAD based on segmentation matrix and their important factors and then we determine target market for GERAD Company and branch through targeting decision matrix.

Segmentation matrix

List of all factors influencing customers' choice	Segment name	Characteristics	Profile	Principal benefits
Price	Young couples	Diversity in design, color and price are important for them	Organizational profile (diversity, price)	Diversity and price of products
Price & quality fitness	Students	Price is important for them	Organizational profile (price)	Price of products
Brand Products diversity	Travellers	Accessibility (shop location) and price are important for them	Psychographic, price	Shop locations and price of products
Shop's internal decoration Shop location	Organizations	Quality and price are important for them	Organizational profile (quality, price, brand)	Quality, price and brand of products
Personnel demeanor	Quality orientation	Quality and brand of product are important for them	Organizational profile (quality)	Product quality

Targeting decision matrix

Segment name	Segment attractiveness (High/medium/low)	Competitive position (Weak/moderate/strong)	Targeting decision (primary target market/secondary target market/do not target	For targeted segments only list key things you must offer to be successful (link back to customers' CCFs)
Young couples	High	Strong	Primary target	Diversity and price
Students	Medium	Moderate	Secondary target market	Price
Travelers	High	Weak	Do not target	Shop location and price of products
Organizations	High	Strong	Primary target market	Quality, price and brand of products
Quality seekers	High	Strong	Secondary target market	Quality of product

10. SEGMENT ATTRACTIVENESS

Young couples: proper price and diversity in color and design are important factors in selecting good apparel regarded by company. As mentioned before, price and diversity are strengths of GERAD Company attracted by customers and young couples and an important factor to acquire profit.

Students: as mentioned before, concerning the existence of universities, higher education institutes and nonprofit centers in Qom, the number of students has medium attraction and the company can attract a major part of this group concerning proper prices of the company if it conduct proper propaganda (low propaganda is a weakness of the company).

Travellers: since Qom is a city for pilgrimage and recreation and there are a lot of travelers throughout the year, it has higher attraction.

Organizations: the existence of numerous governmental and nongovernmental organizations, banks and financial institutes and companies with huge manpower have created high attraction.

Quality seekers: quality is an important and influential factor in selecting customers to which the company has paid sufficient attention and is considered strength against rivals.

11. COMPETITIVE POSITION

Young couples: competitive position of the company is stronger than rivals due to its high diversity and proper price.

Students: proper prices compared to rivals and special attention to this group of customers has led into high competitiveness of the company

Travelers: being far from Holy Shrine and downtown has caused that local shops are more successful than others in attracting this group.

Quality seekers: the company has attracted this group by manufacturing and supplying high quality products compared to other manufacturers and shops in Qom. This indicates its high competitiveness.

12. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Now, we provide research findings as below:

It is for many years that Iranian active companies are operating in domestic and regional markets but they have not unfortunately conducted effective actions on establishing their brands and it has caused that they had no exportation and even in domestic market, there are rarely credible brands. So, we are seeing that they are losing their domestic market share against foreign brands and counterfeit brands especially Chinese cheap products.

Noteworthy, there are many barriers in promoting this industry and national (made – in Iran) brands, the most important of which include inhibiting laws, government's policies on eliminating subsidies and reforming the prices of energy inputs, not respecting copyright laws, lowering the share of apparel in households' purchase basket due to home price increases and inflation, the prohibition of organizing fashion shows, lack of attention to aesthetical basics, dissemination of cliché designs without any invention and innovation, lack of manufacturers academic educations, not respecting the principles of packaging desired by customers, lack of encouraging customers, sanctions and lack of raw materials, instability of prices and failure in economic decision making, increases in importation tariffs which leads into smuggling growth and supplying foreign counterfeit products. Concerning above barriers, one can say that active companies in Iranian apparel industry are facing with three challenges in promoting their national brands, the most important of which is senior managers' attitudes and views, unfortunately, the managers and boards of many Iranian countries have a production – orientated attitude which frustrates manpower's energy incrementally especially management and, to the same reason, most managers have no room to show their creativity while modern companies try to penetrate in the minds of customers by building strong brands and customers' loyalty. Another challenge for Iranian companies is their success in domestic market through internal reforms such as culture building to use national brands (mad – in Iran) which needs national will to promulgate consumption culture of Iranian products. This is an important task of total system especially IRIB, Ministry of Guidance, Ministry of Industries and other relevant organizations. In addition to culture building, it is necessary to acquire credit in domestic markets permanently not in a short period and to provide the market with their qualitative products and services so that their quality is retained. In this way, they acquire credit in markets and they can monitor on rivals' operations since neglecting rivals equals with losing the status in competitive market.

Now, if the aim of the company is to export Iranian brands to regional and global markets, its challenge is to confront negative mindset because of anti-Iranian and anti-Islamic propaganda by western countries against Iran. In this regard, companies cannot proceed alone and it is the task of Ministry for Foreign Affairs and IRIB to modify such negative mindset through political initiatives, proper networks and proper cross-border programs.

Another important point in entering foreign markets is preciseness in selecting target market. It means that those markets should be selected in which Iranian products are distinguishable and can provide the society with different value. In this vein, marketing researches are too important. For

instance, through a precise marketing, China exported a major part of black shirts to Iran used in Moharam month.

Noteworthy, what important in present and future economy is brands and their status compared to rivals. To this end, a multilateral effort and national will is needed to promote Iranian brands which can improve the status of made – in Iran products and services. Iranian apparel industry should improve Islamic and Iranian brands to global levels by relying upon national knowledge and increasingly requirements by young apparel audiences.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

To promote Iranian brands in apparel industry, below recommendations are provided:

- It is recommended to establish an independent organization as apparel brand policymaker.
- It is recommended to eliminate price controls and discretionary treatments with national brand companies.
- It is recommended to create a shop distribution network for domestic brands and to help Iranian brands to have direct supply.
- It is recommended to support national brands legally (e.g. eliminating added – value tax for apparel industry)
- It is recommended to use IRIB and other media more effectively in changing the mindset and improving the credit of Iranian products (i.e. apparel) in both regional and global levels.

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