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Moderating the Role of a Car in the Customer's Life

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ABSTRACT

Many empirical studies in the field of customer satisfaction revolve around the effect of the principal factors that include the product, sale and after-sale services on the level of the customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is embedded in the system of cause and effect relationships, which makes it the centerpiece in a chain of relationships running from the antecedents to the consequences. Also, the influence of well-known moderators like age, gender and education in this framework are frequently considered. In this paper, we used the gap analysis after measuring the satisfaction level with the three above-mentioned factors, as well as adding car accessories as the fourth dimension. This analysis was used to compute the level of overall customer satisfaction. We investigated the impact of expectations and perceived performance of the experience's factors on the level of customer satisfaction with both the experience and the factors involved. We also investigated the overall level of satisfaction using linear regression. We conducted the study using the Iranian automotive industry for our analysis. Results indicate a high correlation between customer expectations and perceived quality of the products and services, as well as the level of customer satisfaction. Moreover, the customer satisfaction with the product, sale and after-sale services is highly correlated with overall satisfaction in the automotive industry. This shows the necessity of considering car accessories as the distinctive factor, in addition to the three other traditional factors. This finding is one of our main contributions and lack of its consideration as a separate factor is observed in the literature. The role of a car in the customer's life serves as a moderator that influences the relationships between the customer's expectations and the perceived quality of factors, such as product, sale and after-sale services, with the overall level of satisfaction is also investigated in this study. This finding was obtained by using a large sample of customers of IKCO (Iran Khodro Company). The results were analyzed by applying a hierarchical regression analysis and a conditional correlation. This new moderator significantly influenced the relationships between the expectation and customer satisfaction, as well as the perceived quality and customer satisfaction with the technical and physical aspects of the car. With regards to the other factors involved, no evidence of correlation was observed.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important developments in the analysis of companies' performance in the last decade of the 20th century was the measurement of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has become one of the key elements of the core requirements for management systems.

In the final decades of the 20th century, we have witnessed a transformation in all sectors of the industry and services. The automotive industry, as manifested in various industries, is not exempt from this as the market becomes more competitive. Considerable and continuous effort in providing a variety of services and high-quality products has become a focus of successful businesses.

Many researchers have observed a direct relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty and profitability of organizations (Hallowell, 1996). An immediate reduction of complaints and an increase in customer loyalty is present as a result of increasing levels of customer satisfaction (Formell & Wemerfelt, 1987). A loyal and satisfied customer is a free source of advertising for the company, while a dissatisfied customer acts to the contrary by expressing his or her negative experiences (Hartline & Jones, 1996).

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Related to loyalty and profitability, studies have shown that even a 5% increase in customer retention (profitable customer) affects the profitability of the company by 25–95% in various industries (Richheld, 1995). However, the cost of attracting a new customer is five times more than the cost of retaining former and unsatisfied customers (Catler & Armstrong, 1991).

In the 90th decade, despite downsizing efforts, many companies saw a decline in their income. As a result, researchers in Sweden and the United States, followed later by other countries, proposed models to measure customer satisfaction in order to improve the situation through the introduction of three main categories: perceived quality, perceived value or quality received and the price. (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996). Also many researchers have discussed the influences of the value of quality products and services on customer satisfaction levels (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994).

By definition, customer satisfaction is the difference between customer expectations and the perceptions of the quality of services or product (Hayes, 1997). Thus the creation and implementation of means to monitor and measure customer satisfaction as the primary indicator of performance is a basic need of business organizations. In recent decades, many researchers have considered this fact.

Customers satisfaction in the automotive industry:

Population growth in the decades of 60th and 70th, as well as migration to major cities in order to obtain employment and livelihoods, caused changes in the social structure. As a result, there were then major changes in consumption patterns and family life. Due to the growing automotive demand, competition has now increased between automobile companies as they examine their strengths and weaknesses in order to increase competitive abilities and earn a greater market share.

Traditional models view customer satisfaction as the result of customer recognition, whereas the new concept suggests that recognition processes may significantly influence the explanation and prediction of customer satisfaction (Fornell & Werefelt, 1987; Oliver, 1997; Westbrook, 1987; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Especially with regard to the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, perceived satisfaction with the output of a single transaction may be too restrictive (Fornell, *et al.*, 1996). Hence, it is generally agreed upon that customer satisfaction should be understood as a multidimensional structure (Yi & Youjjae, 1990). Some authors have claimed that satisfaction needs to be considered from many different perspectives, based on the empirical experience of a particular product or service, rather than solely on a certain transaction phenomenon (Anderson, *et al.*, 1994; Bayus, 1992; Wilton & Nicosia, 1986). However, many studies have been conducted to determine the factors affecting customer satisfaction.

Accordingly, customer satisfaction is further determined by understanding and using effective evaluation instruments to judge the perceptions of actual performance with all the experience and satisfaction of the judgments obtained from a particular product, sales and after-sales service (Crosby *et al.*, 1990). Product quality, service quality and the quality of the relationship between customer and supplier (Hoisington & Naumann, 2003), as well as the customer expectations and company's image in terms of products and services are considered (Eskildsen, *et al.*, 2004).

Consumers' quality expectation levels have risen as consumers have gradually become more knowledgeable and sophisticated (Juttner & Wehrli, 1994). Considering that knowledge of customers and their needs gives car dealers a competitive advantage, (Chojnacki, 2000) it is important for dealers to understand that their good or bad performances will affect customer behavior (Illingworth, 1991). In an empirical study using Mitsubishi drivers in the Netherlands, dealer relationships (as opposed to price) represented a very important decision-making variable for customers when buying a car (Gaby *et al.*, 2003). The safety, vehicle performance, quality of parts and repair are introduced as the most effective criteria that influence customer satisfaction levels in the Iran automobile market (Hoseini, Asgharpour & Azizi, 2003). Factors that typically influence one's satisfaction with the product include durability, value for the money, ease of use and technical aspects (LaBarbera & Mazursky, 1983; Marr & Crosby, 1992). Other influential characteristics may include the interior quality of the car, easy set-up and use of the panel and quality of the driving experience (Hayes, 1998).

In the sales sector, an investigation was conducted in Fiat, Italy regarding satisfaction among car buyers in two areas: the satisfaction of the purchase and satisfaction of the delivery (Roschino, & Police, 2004). In addition, the influence of the selling behaviors of the sales person on customer satisfaction with products was reviewed. The findings indicate that customer satisfaction with a dealer is negatively related to a sales-orientation and positively related to a customer orientation (Goff, *et al.*, 1997). Finally, the after-sale services satisfaction is frequently considered as a dimension that usually is associated with overall customer perceptions of service quality and assessment with the service providers (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995). In a study conducted using the German automotive industry, the biggest gap between the expected level of service and the perceived quality, mentioned as signal that management uses to improve the customer satisfaction (Danher, 1997)

Conceptual Framework:

Satisfaction can refer to a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment that result from comparing a product's perceived quality or outcome with the customer's expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Customer satisfaction is defined by one author as "the consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual quality of the product or service as perceived after its consumption" (Tse & Wilton, 1988). Hence, it is important to consider satisfaction as part of an overall post-purchase evaluation by the consumer (Fornell, 1992). Customer satisfaction has also been defined as the extent to which a product's perceived quality matches a buyer's expectations (Kotler *et al.*, 2002).

Ho (1995) was quoted as saying, "You cannot manage what you cannot measure." After extensive field studies that were conducted for nearly a decade, the SERVQUAL method was designed as a tool to be used for measuring customer satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; 1988). Some researchers have objections and criticisms of this model. Criticism of the model is quite evident in the study by Cronin and Taylor (1994) that presented the SERVPERF model versus the SERVQUAL model. These researchers suggested that the current quality of the organization is an important basis for the evaluation, however customer expectations in terms of quality should be involved. Other researchers, such as Babakus and Buller (1992) and Teas (1993) have also criticized the SERVQUAL model, but Parasuraman continued to advocate for his model (Asubonteng & Mc Cleary, 1996).

In this paper, an extensive field study is performed using a weighted SERVQUAL model for measuring customer satisfaction. Due to the need to create a competitive advantage in products, sales and after-sales service, the expectations and perceptions of quality and value have been measured.

Questionnaires were designed and collected from different regions of Iran. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to check dimensionality of the measurements and the reliability is tested through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Testing of the hypothesis correlation and Hierarchical Regression Analysis (HRA) was performed using SPSS.

Measuring Tools and Study population:

In terms of customer satisfaction, 12 regional offices conducted empirical data collection from large-scale studies of IKCO's customers. IKCO was chosen because it is the largest carmaker in the Middle East and North Africa.

Up to 80% of existing criteria obtained from the operating instructions of the Iran Ministry of Industries and Mines were used to measure customer satisfaction in three areas: car quality, sales experience and after sale-services. Data was collected by conducting interviews and making phone calls every six months to Iranian carmakers in order to measure the level of customer satisfaction. However, in the current study, while existing criteria were kept, several important criteria were added, including the design of car, available options, marketing and branding concepts in sales and the length of warranty services in the after-sale service area.

After a brief summary of customer requirements derived from previous studies, the criteria for monitoring the quality, including customer perception of the product and the service received, as well as the questionnaire, were designed to include three main sections. The first part of the questionnaire included general information about the customer, such as age, states, and education level. Vehicle information was also obtained, including the vehicle type, fuel type, service status, the length of time the customer owned the newest vehicle, the length of time the customer owned his or her previous vehicle, whether the customer used IKCO products in the past, the customer's favorite car in terms of size and model, and what is the most used vehicle and where. The second section included five questions in order to try to understand the role of the car in the customer's life and realize what his or her vision was for the car in order to be able to respond to the obvious and latent needs of customers appropriately. In the third section, there were four main factors investigated, including the technical and physical aspects of car, accessories or options available for the car, the sales experience and the after-sales service. These factors were investigated using 37 items. To measure the degree of importance and perception of factors, five-point Likert scale was used. Its use was proposed for measuring customer satisfaction.

In the expectations questionnaire, a scale was used where a zero represented unimportant and a four represented critical importance, and for the perceptions of quality, a scale was used where a zero meant dissatisfied and a four meant completely satisfied with the items. After preparing the initial version of the questionnaire, duplicate and ambiguous questions were identified, and the final version was created by merging, deleting or modifying these items. A random sample of the population was used in this study, which involved conducting interviews with customers while those customers were receiving services in dealers. The general information related to first part of the questionnaire is available in the appendix. Information from both questionnaires, based on market share of each of the regional offices was gathered. The population included 1378 individuals and there was a 68.9% response rate.

Role of Car in Customer Life as the Moderator:

One of the issues which is addressed less often in the literature regarding customer satisfaction is the determination of customer satisfaction based on the characteristics and preferences of customers. This requires a detailed understanding of what the role of the product in their life is. Identification of customers is meaningful and useful and would be an important aspect of the evaluation in order to analyze the external validity of the study (Punj & Stewart, 1983).

The literature review related to the moderator variables that affect the relationship between customer satisfaction and the previous items, like expectation and perceived quality of the product, salesperson and after-sales services (Gilbert & Warren, 1995), as well as subsequent elements like loyalty (Homburg & Giering, 2001), complaints and recommendations to others, can be categorized using some demographic variable. The variable may include traits, such as gender. Categorizing the relationship by gender or other factors has caught the interest of some researchers (Jasper & Lan, 1992; Slama & Tashlian, 1985; Zeithaml, 1985). Researchers in the field have also categorized using age as a factor (Moscovitch, 1982; Roedder & Cole, 1986; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Walsh, 1982). In addition, Zeithaml (1985) categorized the relationship by level of education and income. In addition, psychological factors, like involvement in the process, have been studied (Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1988; Burton & Netemeyer, 1992; Kapferer & Laurent, 1993; Mittal, 1995; Zaichkowsky & Sood, 1988; Zzichkowsky, 1985). Finally, Faison (1977) researched the perceived need for variety in daily life as a factor in customer satisfaction.

The lack of consideration for the presented moderator as a separate factor is observed in the literature. To understand the importance of the role of a car in the customer's life, customers were asked to rate the following statements as true or false: A car is a means of self-expression to me, I like driving, I consider myself a car-specialist, I like to speak on cars with my friend and My car helps me to solve a lot of problems.

Research Methodology:

Mathematical model:

In order to use a mathematical model, Expectations (E) and Perception (P) from Item (I) are measured in the range of 0–4. The difference between expectations and perceptions is the existing gap (G) between the current and desired status ranges from 0 to 4 where 0 represents complete satisfaction and 4 represents complete dissatisfaction.

In order to analyze this number based on the degree of satisfaction, the result was subtracted from four to achieve the customer satisfaction level from item (I).

$$E_I - P_I = G_I$$

$$S_I = 4 - G_I$$

Survey Hypotheses:

The hypotheses for this study include the following:

H1.1–H1.4: The expectation levels of factors affect the level of related satisfaction.

H1.5–H1.8: The perceived levels of factors affect the level of related satisfaction.

H2: Satisfaction with the four independent variables affects the overall customer satisfaction.

These can be further divided into four hypotheses:

H2.1: Satisfaction with the technical and physical aspects of the car affects the overall customer satisfaction.

H2.2: Satisfaction with the car's accessories of affects the level of customer satisfaction.

H2.3: Satisfaction with sale affects the overall customer satisfaction.

H2.4: Satisfaction with after-sale services affects the overall customer satisfaction.

H3: The levels of importance of the role of the car in the customer's life affect the overall customer satisfaction.

H4: The levels of importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influence the relationship between the expectations and perception of factors and related satisfaction as the moderators.

Hypothesis H4 contains four additional hypotheses:

H4.1– H4.4: The levels of the importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influence the relationship between the expectation of factors and related satisfaction.

H4.5–H4.8: The levels of the importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influence the relationship between perception of factors and related satisfaction.

Hypothesis testing:

During the exploratory factor analysis, some items were deleted in order to provide the scale validation suggested by Churchill (1979). The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin revealed that the number of respondents was adequate ($KMO = 0.962$, $P < 0.01$). There was a total of 61% variance in customer satisfaction that may be explained by four main factors which contains 39 items. The items with adequate loading factors are presented in Table 1. The results of the exploratory factor analysis indicated that all of the sub items loaded their related factor with the loadings' values all being higher than .40. In the role of the car in the customer's life, there were

three items and in four of the main factors, nine items were eliminated.

According to Table 2, customer satisfactions have a positive correlation with related level of perceived quality and a negative correlation with related level of expectation in all four factors. The results are as follows: At the $\alpha=.01$ level, perceived quality of physical and technical aspects of car ($r=.384$, $p < .01$), perceived quality of options ($r=.409$, $p < .01$), perceived quality of sale ($r=.305$, $p < .01$), and perceived quality of after-sale services ($r=.305$, $p < .01$) have a positive correlation with the related levels of customer satisfaction. Also, expectation of physical and technical aspects of the car ($r= -.265$, $p < .01$), expectation of the options ($r= -.278$, $p < .01$) expectation of sale ($r= -.192$, $p < .01$), and expectation of after-sale service ($r= -.273$, $p < .01$), have a negative correlation with the related levels of customer satisfaction. This means that the higher level of expectation dropped the level of customer satisfaction and the higher level of perceived quality increased the customer satisfaction in the presented factors.

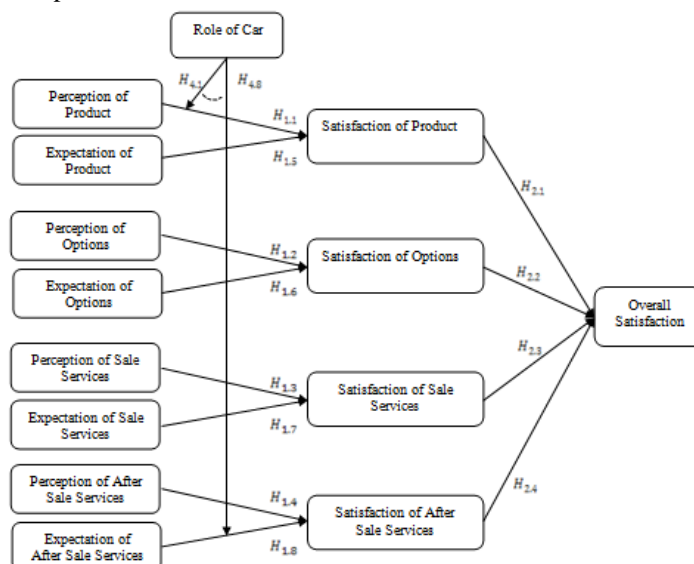


Fig. 1: Conceptual model of study.

Table 1: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Factor	Item	Loading Factor (λ)
Role of Car in the Customer Life	A car means of self-expression to me	.76
	I like driving	.45
	I consider myself as a car-specialist	.65
	I like to speak on cars with my friend	.47
	My car helps me to solve a lot of problems	.78
Satisfaction with Technical And Physical Aspect of Car	Body Design	.70
	Interior Designs	.76
	Interior Space	.69
	Engine power	.79
	Car Acceleration	.74
	Limitation Speed	.51
	Car Reliability	.55
	General and body Insurance	.50
	Driving Quality	.54
Satisfaction with car accessories (Options)	Audio system	.60
	Rims and tires	.70
	GPS	.79
	Electrically Adjustable side mirror	.80
	Electric Adjustable Seats	.80
	Cruise Control	.64
	Air Condition	.65
	Parking Sensors	.63
Satisfaction with Sales Services	Advertising	.73
	References and experiences	.72
	Conditional sales (Leasing)	.78
	Sale Discount	.57
	Selling on Credit	.71
	Sales Flexibility on your request	.50
Satisfaction with After Sales Services	Accessibility to Dealer	.65
	Quality of Repair	.74
	Cost of maintenance	.70
	The spent time for delivery	.74

	Complete register of your requests	.74
	Doing all of your requests	.79
	Responsibility of Dealers about services	.81
	Availability of Spare parts	.79
	Fees paid in proportion to the services	.77
	Spent Time in proportion to the services	.75
	about some Informing services that is out of warranty	.75

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), correlations matrix, and results of the reliability test (Cronbach's alpha) are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Division, Correlation Matrix of the variables, and Internal Consistency.

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	Age	1.958	.794															
2	Education	2.939	1.197															
3	RL	2.206	.686															
4	PTP	2.184	.796															
5	PO	1.953	.849															
6	PS	1.359	.912															
7	PAS	2.281	.827															
8	ETP	2.994	.755															
9	EO	2.981	.804															
10	ES	2.572	.779															
11	EAS	3.032	.788															
12	STP	2.804	.623															
13	SO	2.689	.627															
14	SS	2.521	.661															
15	SAS	2.746	.598															
16	CSI	2.715	.407															

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). () Cronbach's α
 Note: RL: role of car in customer's life, PTP: perceived quality of physical and technical aspects of car, PO: perceived quality of option, PS: perceived quality of sale, PAS: perceived quality of after sale service, ETP: expectation of physical and technical aspects of car, EO: expectation of option, ES: expectation of sale, EAS: expectation of after sale service, STP: satisfaction with physical and technical aspect of car, SO: satisfaction with option, SS: satisfaction with sale, SAS: satisfaction with after sale service.

Regarding the second assumption, the relationship between the level of satisfaction with four factors and the overall customer satisfaction, positive correlations were observed as follows: satisfaction with the physical and technical aspects of the car ($r=.622, p < .01$), satisfaction with options ($r=.638, p < .01$) satisfaction with sale ($r=.461, p < .01$), and satisfaction with after-sale service ($r=.775, p < .01$). Finally, the role of the car in the customer's life, at $\alpha=.05$, has a negative correlation with overall customer satisfaction ($r= -.062, p < .05$).

Separate regression analyses were performed with the following outcomes. With regard to Table 4, hypothesis H1 associated with eight sub-hypotheses: ($H_{1,1} - H_{1,8}$) and H2 associated with four sub-hypotheses: ($H_{2,1} - H_{2,4}$) were confirmed. A MANOVA test examined whether respondents' demographic characteristics have significant effects on study variables including STP, SO, SS and SAS. One advantage of conducting the MANOVA is reducing the accumulative error variance of a series of one-way ANOVAs. The results of the MANOVA indicate that age can positively affect STP ($\beta=.050, p < .05$), SO ($\beta=.044, p < .05$) and SAS ($\beta=.049, p < .05$). This is compatible with previous findings (Hulin & Smith, 1965; Hunt & Saul, 1975).

Table 3: Results of Linear regression.

Variable	STP(β)	T	Variable	CSI(β)	t
Age	.050*	2.233	STP	.626**	38.981
Education	.035	1.570			
ETP	-.322**	24.153			
PTP	.529**	14.716			
	SO(β)				
Age	.044*	2.032	SO	.638**	29.941
Education	.041	1.905			
EO	-.379**	-17.80			
PO	.545**	25.77			
	SS(β)				
Age	.039	1.748	SS	.461**	18.593
Education	.004	.190			
ES	-.389**	-17.862			
PS	.526**	24.081			
	SAS(β)				
Age	.049*	2.093	SAS	.775**	44.304

Education	.001	.040			
EAS	-.233**	-10.114			
PAS	.511**	22.271			

According to Table 3, a significant relationship between expectations and perceptions of quality with customer satisfaction in the relevant item is observed and the first hypothesis can be confirmed, as follows: H1.1:ETP ($\beta = -.322$, $p < .01$), H1.2:EO ($\beta = -.379$, $p < .01$), H1.3:ES ($\beta = -.389$, $p < .01$) and H1.4:EAS ($\beta = -.233$, $p < .01$) negatively and H1.5:PTP ($\beta = .529$, $p < .01$), H1.6:PO ($\beta = .545$, $p < .01$), H1.7:PS ($\beta = .526$, $p < .01$) and H1.8:PAS ($\beta = .511$, $p < .01$) positively affect the related satisfactions.

In addition, our second hypothesis (H2) is supported indicating more satisfaction with after-sale services, technical and physical aspects, car accessories and sale increased the overall satisfaction level. H2.1: STP ($\beta = .626$, $p < .01$), H2.2: SO ($\beta = .638$, $p < .01$), H2.3: SS ($\beta = -.461$, $p < .01$) and H2.4: EAS ($\beta = .775$, $p < .01$).

Moreover, hypothesis H3 investigates the levels of importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influenced the overall satisfaction level. Hypothesis H4, associated with eight sub-hypotheses ($H_{4,1} - H_{4,4}$), found that the levels of importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influenced the relationship between the expectation of factors and related satisfaction. Further hypotheses ($H_{4,5} - H_{4,8}$) found that the levels of importance of the role of the car in the customer's life influenced the relationship between the perception of factors and related satisfaction

To evaluate these hypotheses, hierarchical regression analysis is applied. A hierarchical regression analysis is conducted in three steps as following: step 1 evaluates the influence of the control variable on the satisfaction level of four factors, the independent and moderating variables at Step 2, and the interaction terms at Step 3. The results of hierarchical regression analysis for investigating the moderating of the role of the car in the customer's life and the relationship between expectations, perceptions and satisfaction are reported in Table 4.

In order to interpret the results, three branches of psychological theory (contrast theory, dissonance theory and disconfirmation of expectations theory) provided the basis for making specific statements about the relationship among expectation, perceptions and satisfaction.

Contrast theory implies that a customer who received a product or service less valuable than he expected will magnify the difference between the product and service received and the product and service expected. Those whose expectations were negatively disconfirmed viewed a reward less favorably than did subjects who expected and received the same reward (Spector, 1956). Dissonance theory implies that a person who expected a high-value product or service and received a low-value product would recognize the disparity and experience cognitive dissonance. The disconfirmation or expectations model holds that satisfaction/dissatisfaction responses arise from a cognitive evaluation process in which pre-purchase "expectations" or prior beliefs about the likelihood of product-related experiences or outcomes are retrieved from memory and compared to cognitions about the product-related experiences or outcomes actually realized in the consumption of the product. The result of this comparison is expectancy disconfirmation, which ranges from negative (expectations exceed realized outcomes) through zero (expectations just equal realized outcomes) to positive (realized outcomes exceed expectations) (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). Various studies have empirically confirmed the direct effect of disconfirmation or post-choice product evaluation (Cardozo 1968; Cohen & Goldberg 1970; Olson & Dover 1976) and satisfaction responses (Oliver 1980; Swan 1977; Westbrook 1980).

The relationship between expectations and satisfaction with the product is frequently addressed in the literature. Customer satisfaction is lower when the product does not meet the expectation than when the product meets expectations (Cardozo, 1965). Many researchers claimed that customer expectation is intuitive and fundamental and has a direct and negative effect on the perceived quality or performance, as well as on overall customer satisfaction.

Research comparing young and elderly customers has concentrated on the differences in information-processing abilities needed to evaluate a product (Moscovitch, 1982; Roedder & Cole, 1986; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Walsh, 1982). Most of these studies conclude that information-processing declines with age (Gilly & Zeithaml, 1985). Older people have restricted information-processing capabilities, therefore, their reaction to satisfaction shifts might also change (Homburg & Giering, 2001).

Perceived value has proven to be a difficult concept to define and measure (Holbrook, 1994; Woodruff, 1997; Zeithaml, 1988). For this investigation, perceived value will be defined as the consumers' overall assessment of what is received relative to what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). A perceived value is always based upon the expectations of the customer (Zeithaml, 1988).

Perceived value has been found to be a pre-requisite to customer satisfaction (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Dodds *et al.*, 1991; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Perceived value positively impacts customer satisfaction (Chang, 2009). Overall satisfaction of the customer is positively influenced by the perceived quality of the product (Helgesen, 2010).

The results from Step 1 indicated that age is significantly related to STP ($\beta = .112$, $p < .001$). Similarly, it is positively associated with other satisfaction aspects, including: SO ($\beta = .083$, $p < .05$), SS ($\beta = .055$, $p < .05$) and

SAS ($\beta = .061$, $p < .05$). Moreover, according to Table 2, the moderator negatively impacts the STP ($r = -.079$, $p < .01$), SS ($r = -.079$, $p < .01$) and overall customer satisfaction ($r = -.062$, $p < .05$), lending support to Hypothesis 3. The results from Step 3 indicated that five of the eight interactions between customer expectation and perceived value with satisfaction level are moderated by the role of the car in the customer's life.

Two hypotheses, $H_{4,1}$ and $H_{4,2}$, are supported as following: $H_{4,1}$: RL are moderating the relationship between ETP and STP ($\beta = -.789$, $p < .001$), $H_{4,2}$: RL are moderating the relationship between PTP and STP ($\beta = .523$, $p < .001$). Thus Hypotheses $H_{4,3}$, $H_{4,4}$, $H_{4,5}$, $H_{4,6}$, $H_{4,7}$ and $H_{4,8}$ are rejected. Summary of hypotheses results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of hypotheses testing.

Variables	STP (β)		
	step1	step2	step3
Age	.112**	.051*	.051*
Education	.047	.033	.036
ETP		-.323**	.084
PTP		.526**	.137
Role		.013	.241*
ETP*Role			-.789**
PTP*Role			.523**
R2	.013**	.375**	.410**
$\Delta R2$.362**	.048**
		SO (β)	
Age	.083*	.043*	.043*
Education	.019	.034	.035
EO		-.375**	-.349**
PO		.539**	.431**
Role		.024	.015
EO*Role			-.093
PO*Role			.134
R2	.007*	.412**	.414
$\Delta R2$.405**	.009
		SS (β)	
Age	.053*	.04	.04
Education	-.015	.001	.002
ES		-.366**	-.352**
PS		.501**	.383**
Role		.029	-.01
ES*Role			-.25
PS*Role			.135
R2	.002	.362**	.362
$\Delta R2$.360**	.002
		SAS (β)	
Age	.063*	.048*	.046*
Education	-.028	.002	.001
EAS		-.233**	-.179*
PAS		.508**	.381**
Role		.026	-.016
EAS*Role			-.096
PAS*Role			.175
R2	.005*	.314**	.315
$\Delta R2$.311**	.004

* $p < .05$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed test

Table 6: Results of Hierarchical regression analysis.

Hypotheses	Description	Result
$H_{1,1}$	The expectation of technical and physical aspects of car affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,2}$	The expectation of option affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,3}$	The expectation of sale affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,4}$	The expectation of after sale service affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,5}$	The perceived quality of technical and physical aspect of car affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,6}$	The perceived quality of option affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,7}$	The perceived quality of sale affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{1,8}$	The perceived quality of after sale service affecting the related satisfaction level	Accepted
$H_{2,1}$	The satisfaction with technical and physical aspect of car affecting the total customer satisfaction	Accepted

H _{2,2}	The satisfaction with option affecting the total customer satisfaction	Accepted
H _{2,3}	The satisfaction with sale affecting the total customer satisfaction	Accepted
H _{2,4}	The satisfaction with after sale service affecting the total customer satisfaction	Accepted
H ₃	The levels of importance of role of car in the customer's life affecting the overall customer satisfaction	Accepted
H _{4,1}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between expectation of technical and physical aspect of car and related satisfaction level	Accepted
H _{4,2}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between expectation of option and related satisfaction level	Accepted
H _{4,3}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between expectation of sales and related satisfaction level	Rejected
H _{4,4}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between expectation of after sale service and related satisfaction level	Rejected
H _{4,5}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between perceived quality of technical and physical aspect of car and related satisfaction level	Rejected
H _{4,6}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between perceived quality of option and related satisfaction level	Rejected
H _{4,7}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between perceived quality of sales and related satisfaction level	Rejected
H _{4,8}	The role of car in the customer's life moderates the relationship between perceived quality of after sale service and related satisfaction level	Rejected

Conditional correlation:

In order to accurately assess the eight hypotheses (4.1–4.8), which show the effect of the new moderator on the relationships between expectation and perceived quality with related customer satisfaction, the following steps were conducted. First, in order to gain further information regarding how customers gave scores, the following histogram was drawn in order to show the dispersion of the different levels of moderator variables.

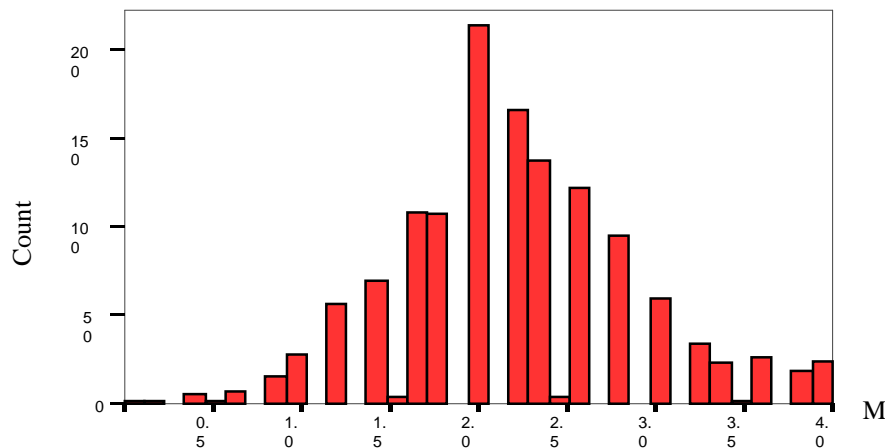


Fig. 2: Scattering the level of moderator.

Figure 2 represents the largest number of customers placed with an average rating of two. It also indicates that for most of the customers, the importance of a car in their life is higher than average. In the other words we can say that the average importance of a car in the customers' life is above average. Another remarkable point is the lack of customers in some intervals, which are used to separate customers into two parts with lower and higher levels of the specific of moderator.

According to Figure 2, 10 intervals for the moderator variable (R) are identified. Table 6 represents the correlations between expectation and perceived quality of all factors that are associated with customer satisfaction levels. To evaluate the effect of the rate of the moderator in correlations at each interval, the correlations for customers with a level of moderator (M) higher than R are calculated.

Table 6: Results of Conditional Correlations in different level of Moderator.

Moderator	ETP/STP	PTP/STP	EO/SO	PO/SO	ES/SS	PS/SS	EAS/SAS	PAS/SAS	
R1	>.5	-.304	.510	-.342	.533	-.362	.499	-.230	.501
R2	>.75	-.304	.509	-.342	.534	-.362	.500	-.230	.501
R3	>1.1	-.336	.532	-.341	.540	-.363	.502	-.239	.509
R4	>1.3	-.344	.536	-.346	.541	-.362	.506	-.247	.498
R5	>1.8	-.367	.543	-.340	.529	-.352	.515	-.242	.481
R6	>2.1	-.360	.608	-.343	.549	-.337	.517	-.236	.518
R7	>2.6	-.384	.691	-.317	.602	-.312	.486	-.235	.567

R8	>2.8	-.404	.721	-.304	.684	-.259	.536	-.292	.613
R9	>3.1	-.409	.720	-.304	.684	-.260	.537	-.288	.613
R10	>3.5	-.417	.770	-.274	.722	-.356	.477	-.292	.743

Table 6 shows the results obtained from the conditional correlations, which confirm the results obtained in the previous section. The correlation between expectations of the technical and physical aspects of the car and satisfaction of this factor is increased by increasing the level of importance of the car to the customer for the same observation in which the correlation between perceived quality of this factor and satisfaction level is accrued.

Table 6 shows the results obtained from the conditional correlations, which confirm the results obtained in the previous section. The correlation between expectations of the technical and physical aspects of the car and satisfaction of this factor is increased by increasing the level of importance of the car to the customer for the same observation in which the correlation between perceived quality of this factor and satisfaction level is accrued.

However, the moderator impact demonstrates a slight relationship between the perceived quality of accessories and the perceived quality of after-sale services and the related satisfaction level, but it cannot be considered as a moderator that significantly influences the relationships with any certainty.

The eight diagrams below where each figure corresponds to a factor with two diagrams help to provide a better understanding of the correlations between expectation and perceived quality of factors, and the level of customer satisfaction with the relevant factors when the rate of the moderator is changed.

In the Figures 3 and 4, the vertical axis belongs to the correlation between two factors and the horizontal axis is the importance role of the car in the customer's life.

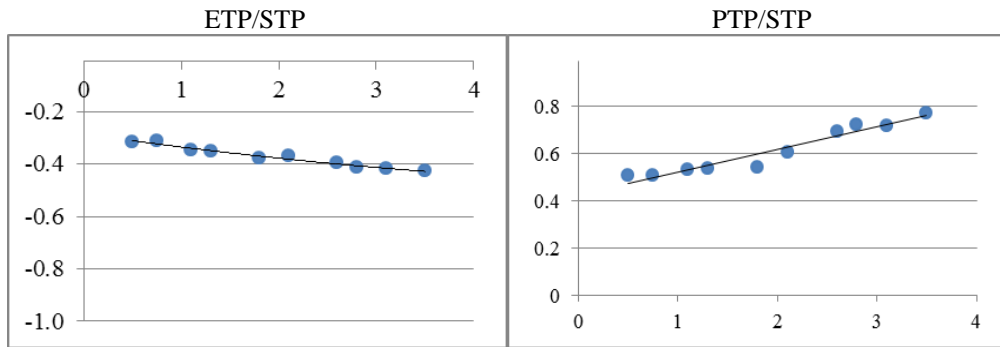


Fig. 3: The relationship between Moderator and Correlation for ETP, PTP and STP.

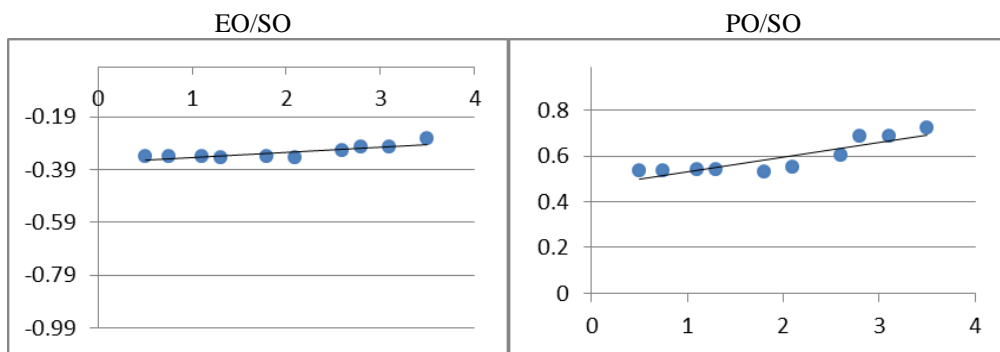


Fig. 4: The relationship between Moderator and Correlation for EO, PO and SO.

ES/SS

PS/SS

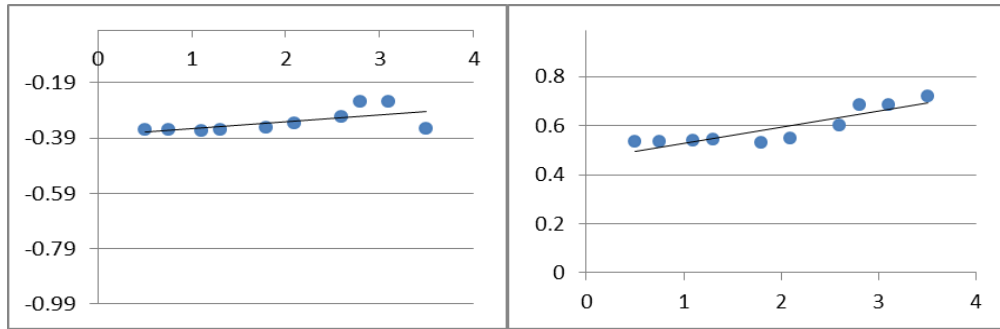


Fig. 5: The relationship between Moderator and Correlation for ES, PS and SS.

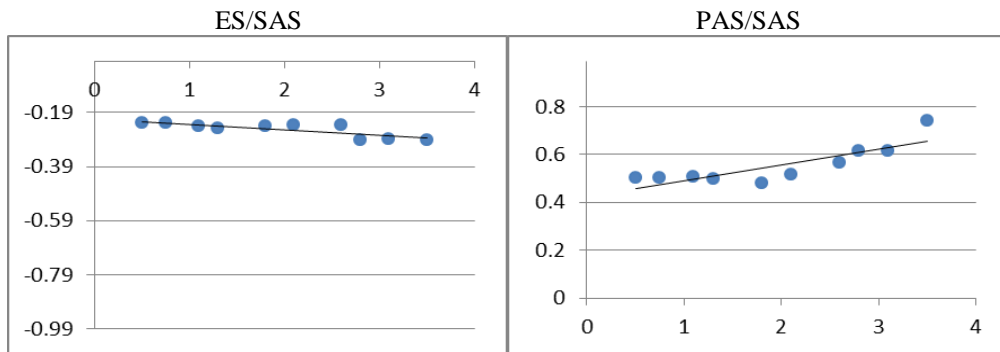


Fig. 6: The relationship between Moderator and Correlation for EAS, PAS and SAS.

One of the primary achievements of this research is the assurance of an existing positive direct effect of the moderating variables on the correlations between expectation and perceived quality of technical and physical aspects of car with the related satisfaction level. In future studies, investigating the other cases, such as the correlations between the perceived quality of accessories and the perceived quality of after-sale services with related satisfaction level, in which a slight impact of the moderator is observed, might be an interesting topic.

Discussion and managerial recommendation:

Based on the importance ratings by the customer, the needs of a customer can be organized into a hierarchy that includes primary, secondary and tertiary needs in order to properly define what is truly desired by the customer.

Researchers who work on customer satisfaction suggest that the qualitative attributes are divided into three categories: basic factors, performance factors and motivated factors (Anderson & Mittal 2000; Gale 1994; Johnstone, 1995; Matzler & Hinterhuber, 1998; Metzler *et al*, 1996 and Oliver 1997).

IPA metrics can be considered a simple but effective tool (Hansen & Bush, 1999). However, considering the importance of each of these criteria for our customers and their satisfaction of these criteria, four zones occur on the coordinate axes.

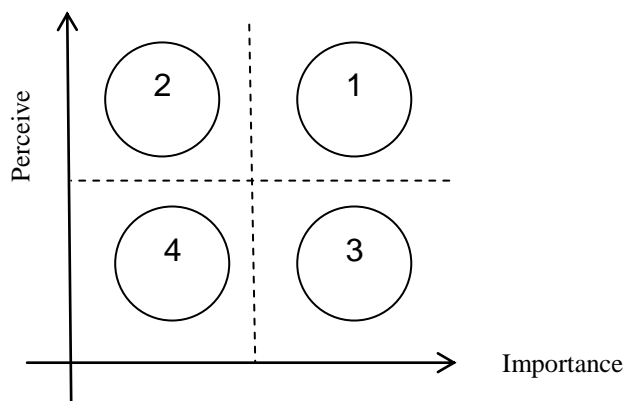


Fig. 7: IPA metrics.

District 1 – Important strengths: The criteria are those that are important to customers and have a high degree of customer satisfaction.

District 2 – Unimportant strengths: The criteria are those that, despite a high degree of customer satisfaction, they do not have much importance.

District 3– Important weaknesses: The criteria that are important to customers, but due to the poor performance of these criteria, the satisfaction level is low.

District 4– The criteria that the customer satisfaction level is low and the criteria for clients of lesser importance.

Understanding the criteria, which are in District 1, can be a big step in increasing customer satisfaction, retention and strengthening relations with those customers.

The test of the hypothesis shows a significant relationship between overall customer satisfactions and satisfaction with factors with a confidence level of 99%. The increase in each of the following variables will occur, however, the intensity correlation is different for each of these factors. The criteria that includes the technical and physical aspects and after sale-services have a greater impact on customer satisfaction, and by increasing the quality of each, customer satisfaction will be greatly increased. Other criteria, such as car accessories and option and sale, have a lower impact on customer satisfaction, and changes in any of these criteria will have little impact on customer satisfaction.

By using survey results, the criteria that impact the customer satisfaction are identified and knowledge of these factors helps to design better services and products. As a result, a more accurate theoretical model was designed to order to explain the nature of satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

In terms of customer expectations, the most important factors were after-sale services, physical and technical aspects, options and the sale experience. These factors demonstrated a high level of importance.

In terms of the sales person's performance, higher scores were present for after sale-services and technical and physical aspects. Finally, the highest gap occurred between the level of expectation and the perceived value of factors belonging to sale, car accessories, technical and physical aspects and the after-sale services. Results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of Importance and Perceived quality level of factors.

Factor	Factor title	Importance (Expectation)	Perceived quality	Gap
F1	Technical and physical aspect	2.99	2.18	.81
F2	Car accessories (Option)	2.98	1.95	1.03
F3	Sale	2.57	1.36	1.21
F4	After Sale Services	3.03	2.28	.75

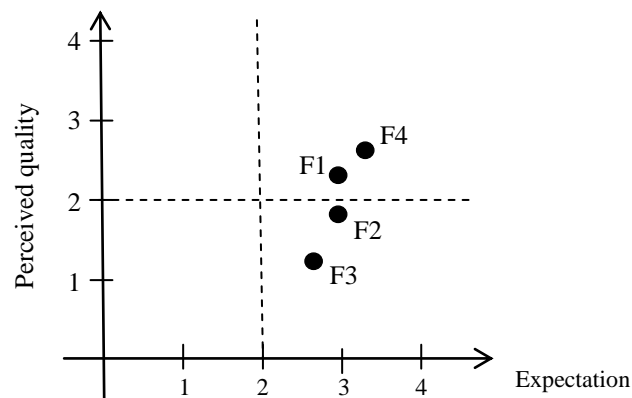


Fig. 8: IPA metrics for main factors in research.

Conclusion:

In this study, the satisfaction of Iran Khodro customers were measured on a large-scale study that included four areas of the car buying experience, including the technical and physical aspects of the car, the car's accessories or options, the sales experience and the after-sales service. The data was analyzed using a gap analysis with SERVQUAL.

For this purpose, we proposed several assumptions and tested the effects of feedback on the level of customer satisfaction as it relates to the quality of the product and services. Introducing the importance of a car in the customer's life as the expectation moderator, together with age and education level, has drawn the attention of researchers.

The effect of the four introduced factors on overall customer satisfaction and covering 61% variance of the independent variable, while also acknowledging the previous works carried out in this field, represents an important new knowledge of the role of car accessories as a differentiating factor in a competitive market. This

was one of our study's main contributions, and is an area that has not yet been considered as a separate factor in the current literature.

The gap analysis method and IPA matrix were found to be useful tools for managers in order to help them invest in areas that produce a higher level of customer satisfaction. Here, car accessories and sales are two factors with the biggest gap between expectation (importance) and perception, which shows that the Iranian carmakers are experiencing weakness in these areas.

Finally, as an achievement and significant contribution, our results show that the relationships between expectations and perceived quality of the technical and physical aspects of the car significantly influenced customer satisfaction.

Out of 21 proposed assumptions, 15 of them are confirmed, as shown in Table 5, and only moderating the relationship between expectations and perceived quality of car accessories, sales and after-sales service with related customer satisfaction by variable has not been confirmed. This indicates the complexity of the proposed factors, which could be of interest to researchers in future studies.

Moreover, the negative relationship between this moderator and the overall satisfaction is very noticeable, as shown in Table 2. It is demonstrated in the negative relationship between this variable and customer satisfaction in the physical and technical aspects of car and sales sectors.

As a topic for further research, investigating the effect of the presented moderator (the importance of product in the customer's life) in customer satisfaction for long-term and short-term useable products and services, as well as comparing the priorities in gap's factors that influence in the overall customer satisfaction in other types of markets can be taken to consideration.

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