

## Consumers' Clustering Based on Effective Criteria in Brand Positioning of Iranian Car Industry

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**Abstract:** It is evident that in the current world of business anybody has recognized the importance of choosing the appropriate brand for the products and presented service in the field of marketing. Appropriate brand for the product can affect its positioning in the market which is effective in the rate of the success and also obtaining more marketing shares. In the branding process for a company it is tried to establish a specific position for product or the service which are critical in the competition. Therefore, importance issue in the positioning is the consumers' viewpoints about a brand which involves a kind of value comparison towards other similar products with different brands. The purpose of this paper is clustering of consumers according to Effective criteria in Brand positioning that existing In the Car industry of Iran. In this study, the conjoint analysis approach was used. Accordingly, 5 main factors were specified which any factors included 3 criteria by considering the experts' viewpoints. The population of the current study is all the consumers of Car industry in Tehran. In this study by using the cluster sampling the sample was selected. Since Tehran has 22 districts, any district has been considered as a cluster and 4 districts were randomly selected (3, 8, 11, 14) and in any district 70 questionnaires were distributed. To analyze the data, the conjoint analysis technique was used. In this study to do the conjoint analysis the syntax command of the SPSS software package was applied. The results showed that different brands' users consider the relevant criteria to the company's service as the most important effective factor in the brand positioning of Iranian car industry. However, among the three criteria with this factor, the car guarantee criterion by the desirable coefficient of 0.402 has had the most utility. Also, the fourth cluster of the present individuals in sample (cluster of appearance-oriented people) has had the most individuals among the obtained clusters.

**Key words:** Brand • Brand positioning • Conjoint analysis • Cluster analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, consumers deal with a lot of information, information which is inculcated in their minds through the media, news, advertisements and the product. On the other hand, based on the obtained results from the study of Rise and Trout (2001) [1] the people's mind is able to process a limited amount of information simultaneously and in this way some of the given information is ignored. This issue is the base and foundation of the positioning. Also, the brand positioning is the first and most important stage in the brand management [2]. Many brands stay in the competitive for a long time, while others achieve a kind of success and rapidly fade away. Except the issues related to the business developments, there is another

factor which leads to collapsing or the stability of the brands and this factor is the consumers' views which is resulted from a position which they consider in comparison to other brands.

Besides, the consumers may have a different understanding on the marketing performance and the obtained information about the company's brand and consider it with different attitudes and preferences. It seems that companies do not care so much about the consumers' views and merely care about the performance and their own resources. However, with respect to the existing literature, once a company's position is in accordance with the consumers' views it could be concluded that the company has been successful in choosing and transferring it to the consumers.

After positioning by company, this position will be inculcated to the customers' minds which this matter is implemented by planning through marketing mix [3].

#### **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

**Brand:** Brand is so important for any company and establishing and keeping an appropriate position in the consumers' mind is one of the marketers' essential goals. According to Steven King, brand is the thing which customer buys and the product is another thing which is manufactured in the factory [3]. Also, the product can be imitated by rivals but brand is something exclusive to the companies. Today, the contest among the companies is occurred less in the level of the products and is more based on the functional abilities and the particular emotional services which a brand represents. These functional and emotional values which are presented by a brand help the company in achieving the competition advantage [4].

According to the BRAND word was proposed for the first time at the time of ancient Nordics (the old Scandinavian residents). They built ships in thousands years ago and branding them. Malonis (2000) [5] also has stated that branding in the old time was aimed to signing the livestock in order to state their possession. They branded figures on the animals' skins. Now one of the meanings of brand is *to brand!*

Kotler and Keller (2007) [6] have defined the brand as: "a name, phrase or term, sign, mark, symbol, design or a combination of these which aims to introduce a product or service presented by a seller or a group of them and this make them distinguished from other competitive companies. Aaker (2004) [7] also called brand as "a symbol which is joined to a number of properties and mental obligations and its goal is the product identification and differentiation."

**Positioning:** Positioning is one of the strategy development stages of marketing. Positioning strategy stages are proposed following the market segmentation and targeting. According to Kotler (2003) [3], three major marketing strategies are in this form that firstly the segmentation of the market is done, then targeting is followed and finally the positioning is implemented. In order to be successful in the market, the marketer is required to identify the market segments which he/she intends targeting and also positioning the brand in this market. This process is called STP. STP suggests three activities which often are investigated consecutively.

According to Arnott (1993) [8], positioning is the process of advancing and researching for describing, changing and observing the consumers understandings about a sellable thing in the market. Miller and Muir (2004) [9] defined positioning as "opening the way to enter into the consumers' minds and also stamp in their minds." In positioning, the company tries to differentiate its own brand from other companies' and fill the gap between the consumers need and products and service presented by the competitors.

**Brand Positioning:** Creating a strong brand is considered a strategic priority. All the implemented studies adhere to this fact that positioning is a fundamental part of the modern marketing management [3]. Dovel (1990) [10] states that positioning should not be only a part of the strategy, but it should be the spine of the firms business. An effective positioning for the brand makes the consumers able to understand the exclusiveness and the strength of the brand [11]. Perreault & McCarthy (1999) [12] have defined the brand positioning as "the way that consumers imagine the brand existed or proposed in the market". Mardsen (2002) [13] also has suggested that brand positioning concept is how the brand is formed in the minds of the consumers and this is done through the consideration of values which make that brand differentiated in a way that consumer think about it as their own property. Similarly, Lee and Liao (2009) [14] also state that brand positioning implicitly indicates the way of consumers attitudes towards the information content related to a specific brand. The newest studies about the brand positioning are presented as following.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

About the nature, this study is among the mixture (combined) research. Since the qualitative and quantitative research methods cannot investigate the constitutive and componential issues complexities of the product and service without cross-studying, the combination of these two methods have been applied and it is called the mixture method. Mixture researches are kinds of research which combine two sets of quantitative and qualitative research methods [15]. From the viewpoint of goal, the current study can be called an applied research. Regarding the data collection and the components the current study also is a kind of descriptive-survey research.

Table1: literature review of this paper

Kotler (2003)	Competitive advantage of company's products is defined towards the competitors' in four characteristics: technology, expenditure, quality and service. The results showed that the target company should take action for service improvement and this improvement should be the subject of its advertising.
Knox (2004)	Four factors investigated in the Knox study include reputation, the product and service function, share basket and the network management and service. His study's results showed that the successful organizational branding and positioning means caring about service quality, supplier's functions and relationships with the customers.
Keller & Lehman (2006)	From these two researchers viewpoint, five fundamental concepts which exist in brand management decision making and related activities are: brand positioning improvement, brand integrated marketing, brand functional evaluation, developing and growing the brands and brand strategic management.
Sagar <i>et al.</i> (2006)	These researchers believe that five basic effective factors on brand positioning are: brand awareness, brand identity, brand image, brand personality and brand communications.
Fuchs & Diamantopoulos (2009)	Types of investigated strategies in this study are: real traits, mental traits, direct benefits, indirect benefits and successor's position. Results showed that the type of used positioning strategy effects on the brand positioning.
Lee & Liao (2009)	The goal of this study was investigating the way of traits effects related to the beverage industry on the consumers understandings about the brands positioning and also the differences and competitions among these brands. The obtained characteristics in this study are: brand awareness, the market potential demand and the competitive brand conditions.
Sagar <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Five fundamental components of brand positioning investigated in their study were the same investigated aspects in Sagar, <i>et al.</i> (2006) which were combined with three ethical, beliefs, values and traditions components.
Konuk & Altuna (2011)	These two researchers have investigated the positioning of seven brands in the Turkey's shampoo market. The obtained results from this study indicate that among the shampoo consumers in Turkey two dimensions of brand emotional and trust and the presented service were the most important ones.

**Population, Sampling Method and the Sample Mass:**

The population of the current study is all the consumers of Car industry in Tehran. In this study by using the cluster sampling the sample was selected. In a situation that the population's members are not available clustering is used and in this way among the clusters the sampling is implemented [16]. With respect to the greatness of the population the number of the sampling is calculated based on the following formula:

$$\frac{Z_{\alpha}^2 \times p(1-p)}{\epsilon^2}$$

Where  $\alpha$  is the error amount,  $Z_{\alpha/2}$  is the normal variable of the corresponding unit with the assurance level  $(1-\alpha)$ ,  $\square$  is the allowed wrong amount or the estimation accuracy and  $p$  is the success ratio. By considering the error level ( $\alpha$ ) equals 0.05, estimation accuracy ( $\square$ ) is 0.02 and also by considering the success ratio ( $p$ ) with 0.5 which causes the maximum of variance, the number of the needed sample is about 240 persons and for more relying on the results and the probability of the questionnaires unreturning, 280 questionnaires were distributed. Since Tehran has 22 districts, any district has been considered as a cluster and 4 districts were randomly selected (3, 8, 11, 14) and in any district 70 questionnaires were distributed.

**Instrument:** The instrument applied in this study is a researcher-made questionnaire. The main questionnaire used in this study is a conjoint questionnaire. Conjoint questionnaire is a kind of questionnaire which is designed to obtain the research goals. The first part of the questionnaire contains questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second part a question has been designed to investigate the consumers' awareness, the current used brand and also the rate of loyalty to that brand. Finally, in the third part some kind of packages for pair-wise between two brands has been presented. In any part of the third section of the questionnaire, there is a package for each of the brands which in all of the packages all four obtained criteria (characteristic) are presented. The difference between any packages with other packages is in the criteria which are considered. Respondents should mark their preference rate for any presented packages on the 9-choice-Likert spectrum. This should be repeated for each of the packages. The most effective approach for presenting the questions for conjoint study is the pair-wise [17]. However, this approach may be harder for the respondents, because in this approach any respondent should understand two concepts instead of one. Two kinds of plan are available, full profile and fractional. In the full profile plan, all the levels of characteristics are considered which creates many packages and with regard to this fact that in this research the investigated brand numbers were 3, the number of

factors was 4 and about each factor, there are three levels then we have  $3*3*3*3=243$  packages which their analysis is so hard. Accordingly, in this research the fractional plan was used. In this plan only the main and basic effects are investigated which based on the presented design the number of the packages are 16.

To remove the existed problems in the presented questionnaire, this questionnaire was distributed among 30 people of the respondents which fortunately no mistakes and vagueness for the respondents were observed. The investigated people in pre-test had similar characteristics with the original population of the research. In order to be sure about the content validity, the questionnaire was distributed among 5 professors of the Administration group of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz which this fact confirm the reliability of the questionnaire. To investigate the reliability of the research instrument the Cronbach alpha was used based on the primary results which the obtained results of the Cronbach alpha ratio was equal to 0.97 which indicates the most favorite reliability of the research instrument.

**Data Analysis:** To analyze the data, the conjoint analysis technique was used. In this study to do the conjoint analysis the syntax command of the SPSS software package was applied.

The conjoint analysis technique is used for identifying the fact that which presented factors and what combination of criteria (characteristics) are appropriate for the best brand positioning operation. By using this technique it will be specified that which costumers prefers which brands and criteria. The conjoint analysis is an approach related to the Multi-dimensional Scaling (MDS) which is used particularly for measuring the understandings and preferences of the people [18]. Churchill, & Lacoboucci (2002) [19] state that, the conjoint word is used because this technique investigates the relative value of the things permanently and if these things will be investigated simultaneously they are not measurable.

The basic steps in conjoint analysis are: choosing the factors, specifying the existed levels in any part, specifying the characteristics combinations (package providing), choosing the way of conjoint questions presentation, decision making about entering the respondents answers in the analysis process and choosing the appropriate analysis for conjoint analysis [19].

Choosing the selected conjoint analysis approach depends on the way of data collection. Thus, in this study investigating the importance of any package in comparison to other packages is the goal, so the ordinary linear regression analysis is used to estimate the desirable values of each level of the applied characteristics. The ordinary least squares can calculate the utility of any part properly, also in most of the conjoint studies this technique is used [17].

The correlational coefficient indicates the rate of congruence of the data with the presented plan. More Closer this coefficient to the 1, more congruence with the presented conjoint plan. In this study the total correlational coefficient was 0.87 which confirms the congruence of data with the conjoint presented plan.

The obtained results from conjoint analysis was applied as the clustering analysis input which at first the number of optimized clusters was done using MATLAB software and based on K-means approach and the main analyzes were done after that.

## DISCUSSION

**Demographic Results:** The total demographic result related to the respondents is illustrated in Table 1. The results have showed that most of the respondents belonged to the age range under the 30 years old and they have been graduated with MA/MS degree. Also the usual income of the respondents was between 500,000 through 1000,000.

**Emographic Results of Irankhodro:** The demographical results related to the respondents which now are using the products under the brand of Irankhodro indicate that most of them are 30 years old and have the MA/MS degree. Also, most of them have an income of 500000 through 1000000. Therefore, 56% of the respondents who use this brand prefer to use this brand in future while 44% of them do not like to use this brand product in future (Table 2).

**Demographic Results of Saipa:** Demographical results related to respondents who are using the products under the brand of Saipa show that most of them are 30 years old and also have the MA/MS degree with an income of 500000 through 1000000. Interestingly, most of the respondents who use this brand do not tend to use this brand's products in the future (Table. 3).

Table 1: The total demographic results

Index		Frequency			
		Male	Female		
Gender		69.6%	30.4%		
Age	Until 30 years old	30-40 Years old	40-50 Years old	50-60 years old	Above 50 years old
	54.2%	29.7%	12.8%	11.2%	4.4%
Degree	Lower than Diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	Doctor
	6%	16%	36.4%	37.6%	4%
Marriage status	Single	Married			
	73.6%	26.4%			

Table 2: Demographical results relate to Irankhodro

Index		Frequency			
		Male	Female		
Gender		63%	37%		
Age	Until 30 years old	30-40 Years old	40-50 Years old	50-60 years old	Above 50 years old
	56%	13%	12%	12%	7%
Degree	Lower than Diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	Doctor
	10%	12%	38%	36%	4%
Marriage status	Single	Married			
	76%	24%			

Table 3: Demographical results relate to Saipa

Index		Frequency			
		Male	Female		
Gender		71.6%	28.4%		
Age	Until 30 years old	30-40 Years old	40-50 Years old	50-60 years old	Above 50 years old
	56.8%	14.7%	13.7%	11.6%	3.2%
Degree	Lower than Diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	Doctor
	5.3%	20%	36.8%	34.7%	3.2%
Marriage status	Single	Married			
	78.9%	21.1%			

Table 4: Demographical results relate to Parskhodro

Index		Frequency			
		Male	Female		
Gender		61.8%	38.2%		
Age	Until 30 years old	30-40 Years old	40-50 Years old	50-60 years old	Above 50 years old
	43.6%	23.6%	16.4%	12.7%	3.6%
Degree	Lower than Diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	Doctor
	0%	16.4%	32.7%	45.5%	5.5%
Marriage status	Single	Married			
	60%	40%			

Table 5: The results of the Freedman test

Factors	Mean
The related criteria to the company's marketing	
Reputation	3.63
Price	3.30
Promotion	2.73
Advertising	2.70
Place	2.63
The related criteria to the car Appearance	
Safe	3.97
Designing	3.23
Convenience	3.13
Options	2.53
Size	2.13
The related criteria to the technical features	
Total quality	3.75
Fuel consumption	3.67
Speed	2.68
Power	2.68
Amount of pollution	2.22
The related criteria to the Service of company	
Services after selling	5.27
Availability of Spare parts	4.78
Garranty	4.63
Access to Dealers	3.68
Services of Car delivery	3.60
Methods of Car payment	3.20
Methods of Car order	2.83

**Demographic Results of Parskhodro:** Demographical results related to respondents who are using the products under the brand of parskhodro show that most of them are 30 years old and also have the MA/MS degree with an income of 500000 through 1000000. The interesting point here is that among the respondents there is no one with the degree under the diploma who uses the product under the brand of the Parskhodro. Also, high percentages (67%) of the respondents who use this brand tend to use the products of this brand in the future (Table. 4).

**The Results of the Freedman Test:** In order to get the best criteria in any part the views of experts were applied. Accordingly, a questionnaire was designed and the rate of the importance of each criteria based on the 9-choice-Likert spectrum (from 1 less important to 9 very important)

was measured. The number of the experts was 30 people which included the chief managers of Irankhodro, 8 people of Saipa chief managers, 4 of PhD students and 6 of Economic Sciences and Marketing majors. The Freedman test results were illustrated in Table 5 respectively.

However, in the part of the criteria related to the technical features of the cars and based on the experts' views the innovation criteria with two other criteria (total car quality and the fuel consumption of the car) were considered. The obtained criteria in any part (3 criteria in any part) were considered to the next investigations.

## RESULT

After data collection and encoding, the relevant codes were written and the results obtained. The results related to the relative importance of any major factor totally and also about the respondents who use any brand are presented in the Table 6 separately.

As the obtained results show, generally, respondents consider the related criteria to the corporation service as the most utility factor in the car industry. This result also is being seen about the relative importance of the brands separately. However, the criteria related to marketing have been called the least important factor.

After investigating the results related to the relative importance of the main factors, the relative utility of any criterion in any part was considered separately. Table 7 illustrates the related results to the utility of any criteria. Among the criteria related to the company marketing, the reputation and the background of the company have the most utility among all of the respondents. However, from the viewpoints of the respondents who uses Saipa brand, selling promotion has the most utility. The reason for the negative utility of the price is that the less the price of the car, the most utility for the respondents will be provided. Among the criteria related to the car appearance, the Safe criterion with the coefficient of 0.314 has the most utility. Also, the reason for fuel consumption criteria to be

Table 6: Conjoint analysis result related to the relative importance of factors

Factors	Total utility	Utility of Irankhodro	Utility of Saipa	Utility of Parskhodro
Brand	16.11%	13.98%	14.39%	10.25%
The related criteria to the company's marketing	5.07%	9.17%	6.92%	17.96%
The related criteria to the appearance features	29.18%	15.81%	28.51%	27.93%
The related criteria to the technical features	16.43%	29.48%	13.05%	15.62%
The related criteria to the services of company	33.19%	31.54%	37.10%	28.22%

Table 7: Conjoint analysis result related to the utility of any criteria

Factors	Criteria	Total utility	Utility of Irankhodro	Utility of Saipa	Utility of Parskhodro
The related criteria to the company's marketing	Reputation	0.041	0.081	0.038	0.026
	Price	0.012-	0.091-	0.043-	0.011-
	Promotion	0.023	0.072	0.087	0.027
The related criteria to the appearance	Safe	0.314	0.202	0.092	0.319
	Designing	0.226	0.251	0.151	0.223
	Convenience	0.088	0.089	0.161	0.216
The related criteria to the technical features	Total quality	0.242	0.111	0.144	0.145
	Fuel consumption	0.131-	0.077-	0.131-	0.125-
	Innovation	0.173	0.256	0.114	0.08
The related criteria to the services of company	Services after selling	0.213	0.241	0.336	0.364
	Availability of Spare parts	0.189	0.344.	0.261	0.189
	Garranty	0.402	0.358	0.397	0.305

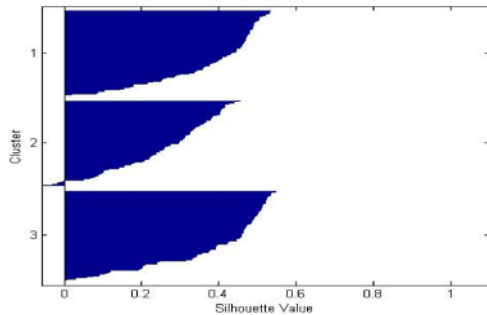


Fig. 1: Profile diagram relevant to cluster 3

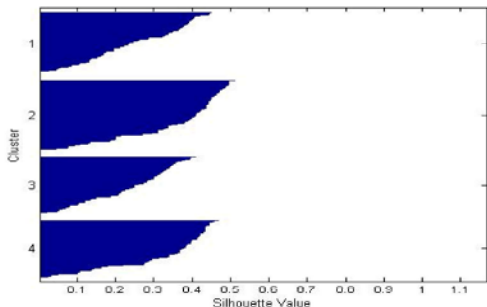


Fig. 2: Profile diagram relevant to cluster 4

negative is that the less the fuel consumption, the more utility will be obtained. Finally, among the criteria related to the company service the guarantee criterion with the utility coefficient of 0.402 has the most utility. This indicates the car guarantee importance for the respondents.

**Cluster Analysis Results:** To determine the numbers of optimized clusters the profile diagram is used. This diagram indicates the proximity of each cluster's properties to the neighbor clusters. This degree of proximity is a range between -1 and +1 which +1 indicates

that the cluster property (thing) is very far from the neighbors clusters, 0 indicates that the cluster's thing is not close either to itself or the neighbor and -1 indicates that probably the thing has been assigned to a wrong cluster.

The distance from the center of Manhattan is the most accurate distant determining criterion. Accordingly, based on the distance from the center of Manhattan and the number 3 of clusters the results of profile diagram have been determined which are illustrated in Figure 1. Since there are negative amounts in value amounts relevant to the second cluster it does not show the optimized number of clusters and there are number of better clusters than these.

In the next step, the number of clusters has been considered to be 4 and the results are provided in Figure 2. As it is shown the negative amounts are not seen in clusters' value, thus there are some local optimized clusters. To be sure about the optimization of clusters' numbers the sum of distance from the clusters' center in each repetition has been presented in Figure 3. As the diagram shows in 17 repetitions the most optimized position has been achieved in each repetition the distance from the center has been dwindled and in the last repetition the least distances' sum from the clusters' center has been established, accordingly, the number of optimizations is equal to 4.

If the numbers of clusters are optimized, with increasing the clusters the relevant value to the clusters still will have negative amounts which the results relevant to 5 clusters have been provided in Figure 4 and as it is clear the negative amounts are being observed in diagram. Thus, the optimized number of clusters is equal to 4 and this number is used in K-means.

The K-mean method has been done using SPSS software. Clusters' centers in each criterion are provided in Table 8. As the results show, the individuals in the first

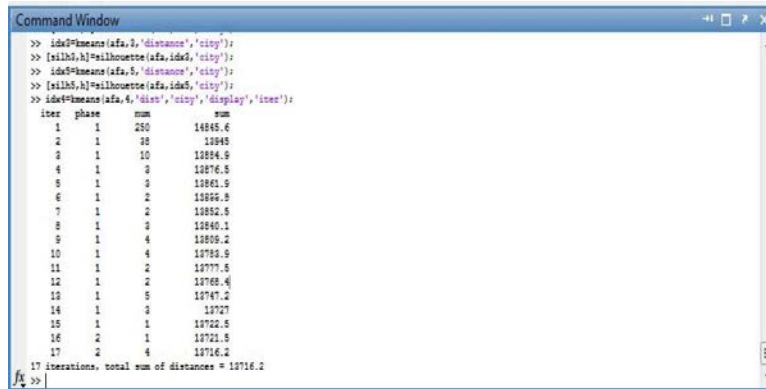


Fig. 3: Results of distance from the clusters' center repetitions

Table 8: Results of obtained clusters' centers from cluster analysis

	Brand-oriented peoples	Technical-oriented peoples	Service-oriented peoples	Appearance-oriented peoples
	-----Clusters-----			
	First cluster	Second cluster	Third cluster	Fourth cluster
Brands	32.69	16.65	13.78	12.75
The related criteria to the company's marketing	18.94	14.68	24.32	14.87
The related criteria to the car appearance	17.18	15.54	18.15	37.07
The related criteria to the technical features	17.27	21.47	28.57	17.16
The related criteria to the company services	13.90	31.70	15.16	18.15

Table 9: The number of individuals in each cluster

Clusters	The number of individuals in each cluster
First cluster (brand-oriented)	48
Second cluster (service-oriented)	71
Third cluster (technical-oriented)	48
Fourth cluster (appearance-oriented)	83

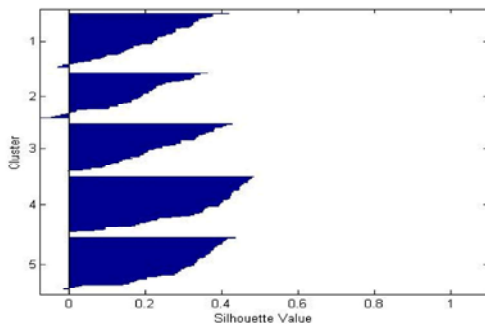


Fig. 4: Profile diagram relevant to cluster 5

cluster tend more to brands, in second cluster they tend more to the services criteria and in third cluster they tend more towards the car technical criteria. Also, the individuals in fourth cluster tend more towards the appearance criteria of the cars.

Also In Table 9, the individuals in each cluster have been specified which the maximum number of individuals is in the fourth cluster (appearance-oriented).

### CONCLUSION

The aim of the current study is to investigate the effective criteria in existing brand positioning of Iranian car industry and also the customers preference about any of the investigated factors. The obtained results from the Freedman test have showed that among the related criteria to the company's marketing, the reputation and background, car price and selling promotion of the company criteria have got the greatest points. Among the related criteria to the car appearance, the car Safe, car designing and also the car convenience got the highest average of points, respectively. Among the related criteria to the technical features of the car the general quality criteria of the car, the fuel consumption and the car speed



got the highest points which based on the experts views the car speed criterion of was replaced by the car innovation criteria and finally among the criteria related to company's services after selling, the availability of spare parts and the guarantee have got the highest points.

The results related to the conjoint analysis indicated that generally, the criteria related to the company service, have the most importance to the respondents and after this factor, the related criteria to the appearance characteristics have the most importance to them. However, the criteria related to the company's marketing got the least importance by the respondents. Also, among the related criteria to the company service the car guarantee criterion with the coefficient of 0.402 got the highest utility for the respondents.

Therefore, the results of cluster analysis showed that firstly, the optimized number of cluster for the investigated individuals has been equal to 4 and among the existed clusters the appearance-oriented individuals has had the most individuals in.

Based on the obtained results the following suggestions can be offered for each of these companies:

**Irankhodro:**

- ✓ Special care about the convenience of the consumers about the cars
- ✓ Producing less fuel consuming cars
- ✓ Providing better service after selling

**Saipa:**

- ✓ Using equipment such as airbag and ABS break in order to improve the cars' Safe
- ✓ Special care about the produces cars designing
- ✓ Making use of the fuel consumption advantage under this brand to improve the company's position

**Parskhodro:**

- ✓ Try to enhance the company's background criteria by using the superior products
- ✓ Focus on more innovation presentation about the produced cars
- ✓ Establishing the authorized dealers which merely provide the spare parts of this company

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