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The Effect of Word-Of-Mouth Advertisements on the Responses of Clients (Case Study: Mobile Operators)

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Customer reviews in social media contain valuable electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information of products, which facilitates firms' business strategy and individual consumers' comparison shopping. This study examined the effects of eWOM motivations on customers' behavioral intentions in the Mobile operators setting. eWOM advertising is very important because nowadays many customer buying decisions are based on this type of information. Using simple random sampling, 430 questionnaires were distributed among the users of mobile operators, that 398 were fully answered and usable for the main analysis. Data analyses involved descriptive and inferential methods performed in SPSS and Smart-PLS software, respectively. The statistical analyses were based on partial least squares (PLS) method. Cronbach's alpha that measures reliability of the variables in the model is within the range of 0.803 and 0.899 for all constructs and their respective subscales, which is above the minimum level of 0.6, confirming internal consistency of the model's constructs. The research results have indicates that: Word-of-mouth advertisement has effect on the responses of clients. Link power has effect on word-of-mouth advertising. Link power has effect on the intent of protest, word-of-mouth on the intent of loyalty and protest, and satisfaction on the intent of out and the clients.

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Introduction:

Today, the organizations are always looking for a way to provide strategies for reaching the loyal clients for the organization, due to special and few clients and many sources for providing these clients (ImanKhan et al., 2001). The benefits of tangible services can effectively communicate with the consumers by relating the services with their life experiences. Thus, the real challenge for service advertising is how to capture and attract such personal and mental experiences effectively. Mitall (1999) states that advertisement should be passionate and joyful, real, strong, and ultimately valuable (Dehdashti et al, 2003). Word-of-mouth advertisement is a social behavior. The consumers interact usually with different people ranging from the strong (e.g. spouses) to weak (e.g. distant acquaints) in terms of the relationship severity. In the case of people with strong relation, it is more likely the information is sent to them and in fact, the information is provided for them. In addition, the word-of-mouth provided in the groups with stronger relations has been more than the groups with weak relation (Bone, 581:2010). Link power is defined as the severity of relation between the members of a network. While, it can be measured by using various variables such as the importance belonged to the social relations, the abundance of social relations and the kind of social relation between two people. Granovetter, in his study on the strong and weak relations, put most emphasize on the form of the relations between concentrated persons. That is, how much is the strength of this relation and how it can be measured. On his point of view, the relation is a combination of the duration of communication, the affection in the relationship, the intimacy between them, and how much two persons can support each other. After Granovetter, the concept of link power was also investigated in marketing and management literature such as the word-of-mouth advertisement framework and the interpersonal congruity by Brand (Rahim Nia et al, 2013).

This research primarily deals with the effect of word-of-mouth advertisement on the customer responses (the case study: mobile operators) and then provides practical strategies and recommendations in order to improving the status quo and mobile operators in Sari.

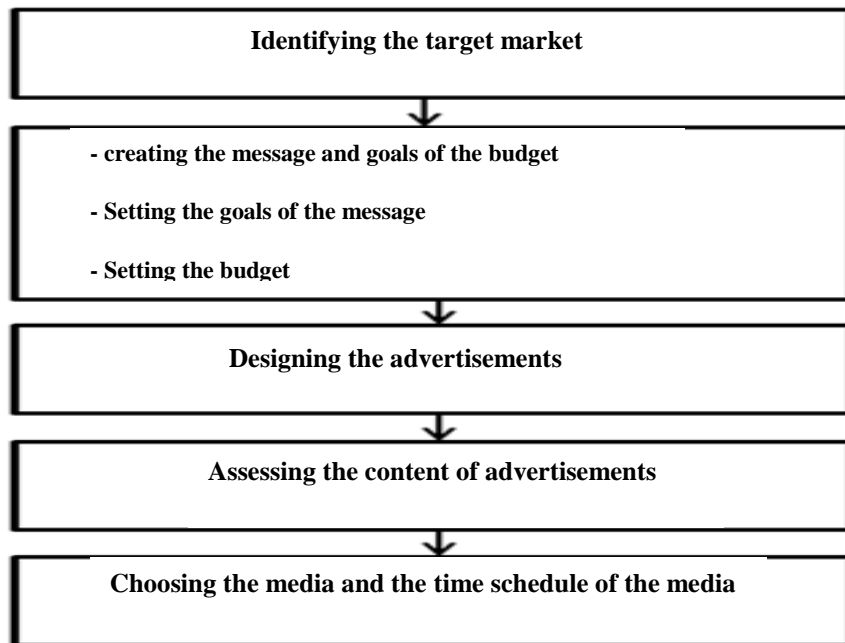


Figure: the stages of advertisement progress; resource: (Alipour et. al, 2010)

In order to identifying the target market, it is important to obtain information about the market segmentation. The segmentation is carried out based on variables which have been the first variable on demography and are investigated on the segmentation based on demographic features such as gender, the family structure, income and social class, race and ethnicity and finally geography through which the marketers are able to identify the clients with especial interests. The second variable of segmentation is psychologic basis that uses the demographic features for detecting psychologic data and clients' interests. The last variable is behavioral segmentation that is carried out based on how the consumers act for a product, how they feel or how they use it (Haenlin& Kaplan, 459:2012, 1).

Literature review

Word-of-mouth:

In general, positive advertisement by the costumer can be defined as a kind of personal relation between the parties for evaluating the commodities and services. The importance of this advertisement is that it is an effective factor in the decision of the new costumer for purchasing (Boush, 69:2013)

Since the clients are more trusted to personal and informal communication resources (other clients) in their purchasing decision than formal and institutional resources such as media

advertisement, the positive advertisement is very effective, because the information resource is someone who not benefit the costumer purchasing (Kassim& Nona, 352:2010).

On the other hand, the previous clients of the organization are presented as the more concrete in formation resource. It is better to said, such advertisement create more value, because they are more successful and trusty than other information resources (Mousakhani&TorkZadeh, 2011).

Katler (1974) defined the Customer Profitability in long-term as the earnings obtained in future through the customer relation with the company. In recent years, due to the today's organizations with the problems of resource allocation, the management scholars have mainly the models in which the focus is on the allocation of scarce resources utilizing the customer life cycle (Reinartz et al, 65:2005).

Customer satisfaction:

The customer satisfaction determines the success or failure of the organization activities. Thus, it is important to be aware of how much the clients are satisfied with the services, among which are to win the position of the company compared to the competitors, determine the customer satisfaction and taking corrective actions, timely deciding, in association with the support for staff services and increasing the relation between the organizations and clients and understanding their basic needs looking for complaints (Abdoli&Fereydounfar, 4:2008).

Comparing the customer satisfaction is necessary not only among the competitors, but among the various industries and organizations in order to utilizing the proper competitive strategies. However, doing so and collecting data for an organization is very expensive alone. Thus, in few recent years, customer satisfaction index have been nationally assessed and measured in various countries - both in manufacturing and in the service sector. The results from nationally customer satisfaction have easily provided a way to find the best and highest organizations and alignment variables and improved the competitive status easily (SaffariNejad&Rahimi, 43:2007).

Tie strength:

Link power is defined as the intensity of relation between the members of a network. However, the link power can be measured by using various variables such as the importance given to the social relations, the abundance of social relations and the kind of social relations between two people (Alire, 547:2007). Granovetter in his study on the strong and weak relations put most emphasize on the form of the relations between concentrated persons. It means that how much is the strength of this relation and how it can be measured. On his point of view, the relation is a combination of the duration of communication, the affection in the relationship, the intimacy between them, and that how much two persons can support each other. After Granovetter, the concept of link power was also investigated in marketing and

management literature such as the word-of-mouth advertisement framework and the interpersonal congruity by Brand (Assefa, 9:2013).

Word-of-mouth is a social behavior. Consumers are interacting with various people in terms of the relation strength ranging from strong (e.g. spouse) and weak (distant acquaintances). In the case of people with strong link power, it is more likely the flow of information is sent to them and in fact information is provided for them (Almani et al, 456:2012).

In addition, the word-of-mouth provided in the groups with stronger link power is more than the group with weak relations. Thus, considering to the link power, the communication has not been equal for all the separation situations and it is different based on the relation between the separated clients and the current ones. Because, at first, it is indicated that if the information is obtained from a strong resource (the strong link power), it has more effect on decision making than a weak information resource (the weak link power) (Boush, 69:2013).

Behavioral intentions:

Behavioral intentions are the perception of clients about the performance of service providers and whether the clients are willing to buy more from a special organization or they reduce their purchases. Behavioral intentions or intentions in the behavior are resulted from the customer satisfaction process. According to Fishbin&Ajzen (1975), the intention is: the perception and impression that a person has from a special behavior. In other word, the intention of a person is a subjective and potential situation that communicates between the person to his/her practice. In fact, the attitude of a person affects on behaviors through transforming the behavioral intentions (Rahim Nia et al, 2012).

We all are consumers; that means we use or consume the food, clothing, housing, education, services, ideas and so on according to a certain order. The decisions we make for consuming, demanding for raw materials, transporting, technical services or establishing and dedicating the resources cause to success of some industries or failure of others. So, the behavior of consumer is an important factor in recession or boom in commercial activities. The important factor in the success of marketing and advertising strategies is the correct understanding of consumer behavior. This case is important for profit and non-profit organizations. An organization can survive only when it is able to meet the consumer needs and requests with a correct and comprehensive understanding of its clients; indicating the importance of studying the consumer. It should also be kept in mind that all the marketing decisions and processes is on the basis of consumer behavior, and it is impossible to imagine making key marketing decisions without understanding consumer behavior (Saravi 2, 58:2007).

Methodology

The required data for test of the hypotheses and assessment of the assumed causalities between the researches key constructs, i.e. tie strength, satisfaction, WOM, loyalty intention, protest intention, and exit intention, were collected from the survey questionnaire. Since our

research hypotheses were not about differences between groups, it was chosen for simple random sampling. The use of simple random sampling allowed us to build a proportionally large sample ($n = 400$) and avoid potential biases in the sampling process by giving everyone an equal chance to be selected.

Measurement

The research constructs were operationalized using the proposed measures/proxies in the social psychology and marketing literature. Thus, the measures are all the main constructs/indicators previously defined and included in the proposed model. The required data for assessment of the research constructs and test of the hypotheses were collected by a questionnaire containing multiple choice queries graded on a 5-point Likert scale, with the options ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The second section of the questionnaire was dedicated to demographic information of the participants, such as gender and age. It should be noted that the questionnaire was distributed in native language of the participants (Farsi/Persian) and subsequently was translated into English for reporting in the paper.

Data collection and analysis

Using simple random sampling, 430 questionnaires were distributed among the users of mobile operators who voluntarily chose to participate in the survey. Of these questionnaires, after excluding the incompletely filled ones, 398 were fully answered and usable for the main analysis. This gave a response rate of 0.925 which was exceptionally large and representative.

Internal consistency of the constructs was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. Data analyses involved descriptive and inferential methods performed in SPSS and Smart-PLS software, respectively. The statistical analyses were based on partial least squares (PLS) method. PLS technique better explains complex relationships (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In addition, this technique is preferably used when the focus of research is on theory development (Cheung and Lee, 2012). Structural equation modelling is a method used to show linear relationships between latent and observed variables and its purpose is to estimate a set of structural equations coefficients.

Results

Sample profile

Of the 398 questionnaires completed by the participants, 228 belonged to male respondents and 170 to female respondents. Most of the participants were between the age of 18-20 years

old (n = 119). Majority of the sample students (n = 128) studied in junior year followed in size by the students in sophomore, freshman, and senior years, respectively.

Measurement model

The proposed structural model was estimated by structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. The estimation involved the model overall goodness of fit test and separate tests for its significance in estimating the assumed relationships between the variables. These tests confirmed the links between WOM satisfaction, tie strength, and exit, loyalty, protest intention. The model overall goodness of fit parameters and indices were estimated using partial least squares (PLS) method. Our sample in this research (n = 398) was large enough and greater than the recommended minimum sample size (n = 200) (Medsker *et al.*, 1994), so the PLS method was applicable. The indicator of the observed variables was continuous, and no violation of multivariate normality was found in the survey answers.

As is shown in table 1, Cronbach's alpha that measures reliability of the variables in the model is within the range of 0.803 and 0.899 for all constructs and their respective subscales, which is above the minimum level of 0.6, confirming internal consistency of the model's constructs (Hair et al, 1998).

Table 1 - Psychometric properties of measures

Construct	Item	Loadin g	t-value	Mean	St. Dev.	Cronbach's α
Protest intention CR=0.899; AVE=0.749	PI1	0.844	49.70	4.93	0.953	0.875
	PI2	0.896	84.72	5.68	0.913	
	PI3	0.854	65.56	4.90	1.054	
Satisfaction CR=0.912; AVE=0.775	SAT1	0.897	113.15	5.53	0.999	0.854
	SAT2	0.899	63.37	5.57	1.042	
	SAT3	0.844	73.36	4.77	0.891	
Exit intention CR=0.703; AVE=0.754	EI1	0.519	114.38	4.15	0.893	0.899
	EI2	0.581	41.70	4.86	0.934	
	EI3	0.868	93.61	4.61	0.979	
Loyalty intention CR=0.893; AVE=0.736	LI1	0.869	38.45	4.91	0.836	0.820
	LI2	0.851	140.47	4.13	0.884	
	LI3	0.854	99.31	4.90	0.985	
Tie strength CR=0.915; AVE=0.729	TS1	0.825	45.50	5.55	0.907	0.832
	TS2	0.878	37.21	6.37	0.828	
	TS3	0.813	32.84	4.75	0.897	
	TS4	0.896	70.19	5.64	0.921	
Word of mouth CR=0.885; AVE=0.719	WOM1	0.878	69.54	5.15	0.941	0.803
	WOM2	0.873	48.62	5.66	1.031	

WOM3 0.791 28.19 4.98 0.832

Notes: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Next, convergent and discriminant (divergent) validity of the constructs were estimated. Convergent validity was assessed using three indices: composite reliability (CR) which should be greater than 0.7 (Chin and Marcoulides, 1998); average variance extracted (AVE) which should be greater than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 1998); and all factor loadings which must be greater than 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 1998), or by other accounts, greater than 0.707 (Chin and Marcoulides, 1998). Convergent validity indices, i.e. CR, AVE and factor loadings, are provided in table 1. As we see in this table, the conditions of convergent validity are fully satisfied for all constructs.

Table 2 - Correlation matrix

	EI	LI	PI	SAT	TS	WOM
EI	0.874					
LI	0.592	0.858				
PI	0.450	0.427	0.865			
SAT	0.737	0.396	0.394	0.880		
TS	0.430	0.401	0.409	0.360	0.854	
WOM	0.388	0.422	0.360	0.277	0.335	0.848

Notes: Bold diagonal elements are the square root of AVE for each construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

Discriminant validity indicates that a construct has a low correlation with other measurement constructs. This is the case when the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation between that construct and other constructs. In table 2, square root of AVE for each construct is shown in bold on diagonals of the table. As is seen, square root of AVE for each construct is more than the correlation between that construct and other constructs, confirming discriminant validity of all constructs. In sum, the testing results indicate a satisfactory level of construct validity in terms of convergent and divergent validity, implying that the research constructs are adequately fit for assessment of the structural model.

Structural model

The structural model was assessed through test of the hypotheses underlying our research model. Figure 1 shows overall explanatory power based on the standardized regression path coefficients, indicating direct effects of the predictors on the estimated latent constructs in the model. Significance of each path was tested using bootstrap resampling procedure. The value of coefficient of determination (R^2 value) indicates the extent to which our model explains the variance in the outcome variables. In our model, 11% of variance in WOM behaviour and brand image and 30%, 28%, 60 of variance in consumer loyalty, protest, exit intention, respectively could be explained based on R^2 values (see figure 1).

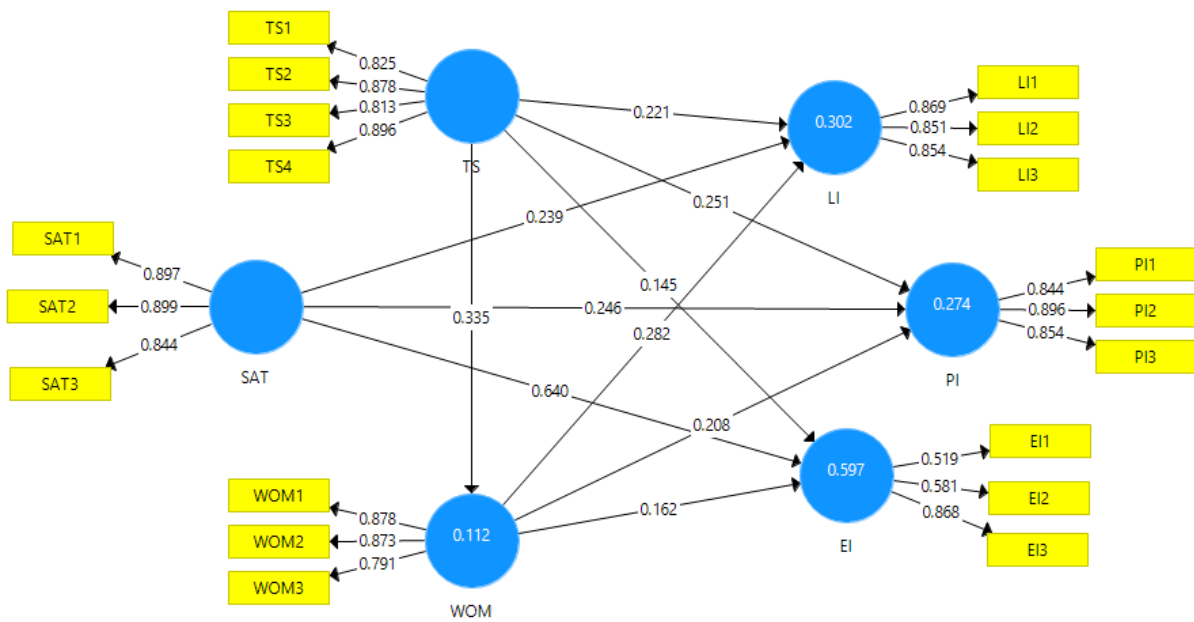


Figure 1 -Standardized regression coefficients of the proposed model

For assessment of the overall model fit, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was used for which the three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 correspond to weak, moderate, and strong fit respectively (Wetzels *et al.*, 2009). This index is computed as follows:

$$GFI = \sqrt{Communality \times R^2}$$

Communality and R² values are given in table 3. The resulting GOF value on the bottom line (0.427) indicates that the structural model was reasonably fit for the data.

Table 3 – The overall model fit

Research Constructs	Communality	R Square
EI	.583	0.597
LI	.529	0.302
PI	.642	0.274
WOM	.518	0.112
TS	.524	
SAT	.612	
Average	0.568	0.321
Gof	0.427	

Table 4 summarizes the results on test of hypotheses (bivariate correlations) which indicate significance of the relationships between the variables. According to these results, all the 10 hypotheses posited in this research were confirmed at 0.01 significance level.

Table 4 – Test of hypotheses

Hypotheses	St. estimate	Standard Error	T Statistics	ρ
SAT -> EI	0.640	0.047	13.653	0.000
SAT -> LI	0.239	0.057	4.169	0.000
SAT -> PI	0.246	0.057	4.352	0.000
TS -> EI	0.145	0.040	3.646	0.000
TS -> LI	0.221	0.057	3.897	0.000
TS -> PI	0.251	0.058	4.326	0.000
TS -> WOM	0.335	0.055	6.128	0.000
WOM -> EI	0.162	0.048	3.404	0.001
WOM -> LI	0.282	0.058	4.874	0.000
WOM -> PI	0.208	0.058	3.551	0.000

Conclusion and discussion

The relation between aforementioned variables is positive, that means it can be expected that the clients responses will increase by increasing word-of-mouth advertisement. It can be said that nowadays utilizing word-of mouth advertising plays more effective role in media and can deeply affect on the clients and make them optimistic or pessimistic toward the company services which can be coupled with customer loyalty or lack of loyalty. Hence, the aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the tie strength grows, the client loyalty is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that when clients have stronger relation with the company, they ignore the existing problems and protest less. Thus, they furthermore desire to be loyal and committed to the goals of the company.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the tie strength grows, the intention of protest by clients is also decreased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that today, subscribers and users of mobile operators expect to have services with quality and quantity; otherwise it can make them unsatisfied. But, according to the previous studies such as Rahim Nia et al (2013), if the clients have a strong relation with their desired company, they put less attention on the problems in providing service than the others and try not to protest. Because the clients with high tie strength consider themselves as a part of the company and believe in their goal is the company reach to its goal.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the tie strength grows, out intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it

can be said that today, the describers' satisfaction is an effective and positive factor on the performance of companies and it is developed a one of the most important variable related to the clients and subscribers in any company. Because, according to the research carried out on the importance of subscribers' satisfaction, when the consumers are satisfied with a company they will have positive emotional communication with it leading to their commitment to the brand and also positive promotion of repurchase and finally leads to developing committed links with the brand. Accordingly, it can be expected that as the expect increase, departure of describers and their use of other operators will decrease.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the tie strength grows, protest intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that one of the reason for client complaint and their protest to the provided services by the company, is their satisfaction weakness to the performance of the company. In fact, as long as the describers are not satisfied with the services of the company, one cannot hope to they remain silent to the existed problems and not to protest which leads them to exit the operator and not to use them. On the contrary, if the describers are relatively satisfied with the services of the company, they equally ignore the existing problems and do not protest.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the link power grows, out intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that today, telecommunication companies tend to provide a situation where the describers do not try for using another mobile operator by improving the conditions. Because the researches by Kang (2005) suggested that today one of the largest problems for the out of describers from the company is the factor for their dissatisfaction with the services.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the word-of-moth advertisement grows, loyalty intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that the importance of this kind of advertisement is that it is an effective factor in the shopping decide of new client, since the clients rely more on personal and informal communication resources (other clients) in their purchasing decisions than organizational and formal resources as media ads. Thus, it can be said that such advertisements create more values, because they are more successful and trustworthy than other information resources.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the word-of-moth advertisement grows, protest intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that word-of-mouth advertisements provides key information about the company for the clients which often helps clients make decisions about the company and its products; that is, word-of-mouth advertisements may be useful in transferring the brand and trademark. Thus, it helps the company to achieve new clients. On one hand, negative word-of-mouth advertisement described the client's active response to inform others of his dissatisfaction. This negative advertisement doesn't target product or

service provider, but directly target the current clients and the potential clients. Thus, positive word-of-mouth advertisement can prepare a situation where the clients, with a desirable image of the company in their mind, do not tend to protest against the problems because they understand that the company is trying to alleviate problems and provide more appropriate services.

The aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the word-of-mouth advertisement grows, the intent of the client is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that the previous studies present that word-of-mouth advertisements can remarkably affect on the behavior of consumers and their satisfaction with the products and services of the company, because most clients are more confident in the communications that are not from marketers. Hence, the aforementioned variables have positive relation, which means it can be expected that as the tie strength grows, word-of-mouth advertisement is also increased. In explaining this finding, it can be said that today when there is a desirable and appropriate relation between the client and the company, one can expect subscribers or clients to positively advertise for the services of the company.

Implications:

It is recommended to the qualitative growth of becomes more attractive for mobile operators in order to positive word-of-mouth advertisement. While, the describers needs should be considered in this process. A high level of relationship quality with the client and attracting the confidence of the clients to the service provider, satisfaction with the delivered services and retaining the created relation with the customer leads to customer loyalty. Thus, mobile operators can move in the direction of making clients loyal and more profitability along with the emphasis on developing desired relations and growing the connection between the client and the company.

It is recommended to mobile operators communicate more with their clients through modern marketing such as electronic marketing, while receiving their feedback and views to offer them more varied designs and services to enable greater customer loyalty. Considering to the results, mobile operators should increase the level of perceived quality from the services with emphasizing on communicating with clients and creating a high level of trust and satisfaction and commitment in relationships as a result of relation-based marketing activities so that provide a condition for reducing the describer's protest.

It is recommended to create a club for loyal clients, so that the clients join this club and enjoy special services and benefits. In this way, the company can interact and communicate more with the describers and as the interaction increase, the clients become more loyal to the company and it prevents from their leaving and joining to another mobile operator. Considering to the importance of providing services based on the describer's needs, the mobile companies evaluate and assess the needs of describers and provide services by using the results with the aim of satisfying clients in order to reducing their loyalty and exit from the company.

It is recommended to the company to implement the system of managing client complaints and fast feedback to them about the problems through which the describers be able to improve the performance of the company, and in other hand, provide for more commitment to the company and remaining in the company.

It is recommended that considering to the role of word-of-mouth advertisement in the loyalty of describer, staff and directors, the company should establish a close relation with the describers and listen to the client's request. This causes to make an emotional relation with the client leading them to enjoy this relation and have more desire to use the services of this company and in this way, become more loyal to the company.

It is recommended that the companies describe their services and performances by using advertising tools such as media with the aim of growing the word-of-mouth advertisements from the mobile describers despite the quality of services, through which the describers have more complete information about the services of the company beside the quality of services and try less to protest to the services by understanding the service diversity.

It is recommended that, with the aim of increasing the relation of client with the company to increase positive advertisement from them, the mobile operators use congratulation messages, post cards or like that for their clients in special occasions and advertise their performance in this field electronically or non-electronically (banners, posters, etc.) in the city.

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