INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR CREATING BRAND LOYALTY TO EUROPEAN CARS IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This research seeks to obtain understanding of the extent to which car factors and psychological factors can create brand loyalty on its own or through integrated marketing communication tools. The data were collected by questionnaire survey to 480 European car's owners of top four European brands in Thailand. Personal characteristics are described in terms of frequencies and percentages. The four measurement models consist of Car Factors, Customer's Psychological Factors, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Tools and Brand Loyalty are specied by Conrmatory Factor Analysis, Path Analysis while the structural equation model specied the causal relationships among the latent variables. The statistical model developed by this research shown the ability to predict value perception to acceptable degree with a multiple correlations squares (R^2) of 89 %, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.95, Chi-Square = 114.93, df = 96, P-Value = 0.091, and RMSEA = 0.020. Research nding showed that integrated marketing communication tools are considered to be key success factors for creating brand loyalty for European passenger cars in Thailand.

Keywords: Car factors, Psychological factors, Integrated marketing communication tools, Brand Loyalty, Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงสำรวจเพื่อทำความเข้าใจว่า ปัจจัยทางด้านรถยนต์ (Car factors) และ ปัจจัยทางด้านจิตวิทยา (Psychological factors) สามารถสร้างความจงรักภักดีให้กับแบรนด์ ได้โดยตรง หรือโดยอ้อมผ่านเครื่องมือการสื่อสารการตลาดเชิงบูรณาการ ข้อมูลจากการสำรวจด้วยแบบสอบถาม ไปยังกลุ่มเจ้าของผู้ใช้รถยนต์ยุโรปสี่แบรนด์หลักในประเทศไทย จำนวน 480 ตัวอย่าง ประกอบด้วยคุณลักษณะส่วนบุคคลของกลุ่มตัวอย่างซึ่งจะอธิบายด้วยของความถี่และร้อยละ ในขณะที่ตัวแปรแฝงในโมเดลการวัดทั้ง 4 โมเดลซึ่งประกอบด้วย ปัจจัยทางด้านรถยนต์ปัจจัยทางด้านจิตวิทยาของลูกค้า เครื่องมือสื่อสารการตลาดเชิงบูรณาการ และ ความจงรักภักดีต่อแบรนด์ จะใช้ การวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบเชิงยืนยัน CFA และการวิเคราะห์เส้นทาง Path Analysis จะใช้ในการประมาณค่าระหว่างตัวแปรสังเกตได้และตัวแปรแฝง และอธิบายความสัมพันธ์เชิงสาเหตุระหว่างตัวแปรแฝง โดยใช้โมเดลสมการโครงสร้างตามลำดับ โมเดลทางสถิติที่ได้จากงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ แสดงค่าการทำนายด้วยค่า multiple correlations squares (R^2) of 89 %, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.95, Chi-Square = 114.93, df = 96, P-Value = 0.091, and RMSEA = 0.020. ซึ่งการวิจัยพบว่า เครื่องมือการสื่อสารการตลาดเชิงบูรณาการเป็นปัจจัยหลักของการสร้างความจงรักภักดีในกลุ่มลูกค้ารถยนต์ยุโรปในประเทศไทย.

Background and Rationale to the Research

Automobile industry in Thailand had shaped up in 1961. It was the turning point of Thai's economy from an agricultural to industrialized country. Today Thailand automobile industry is one of the major players in the industrial sectors and contributes heavily to the nation's economy (Hanley, 2009). Previously there were 15 assembly factories in Thailand, and four were Europeans' (Panjakajornsak, 2010). They were Mercedes Benz, BMW, Volkswagen and Volvo. Now Volvo moved their operation to Malaysia while Volkswagen ceased operation in Thailand and turn to China. There are only two European factories still in operation, BMW and Mercedes Benz, but they have been operating at much less than their production capacities (Oica, 2010; Auto Bild, 2011). Many other European brands are considering establishing their factories in ASEAN emerging countries because they possess higher market shares for European cars due to the increase in domestic demand as well as their low labor cost than Thai-

land (Asean Auto Biz, 2010). If the European car market shares in Thailand expanded and the existing European factories would have been able to utilize their capacities, the ceased European manufacturers will consider re-establishing or building new plants instead of investing in other countries, which would result in more jobs for local workers. The effect from creating brand loyalty to European car's consumer through IMC tools can help in increasing market share for European passenger car in Thailand.

Objectives of the Research

This research aims to explore the personal characteristics in terms of age, gender, education, occupation and income of Thai consumers of European cars and to identify various factors those are critical to establish brand loyalty to European cars in Thailand. The study involves the analysis of car factors and customers' psychological factors that affect Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

tools, which in turn impact the brand loyalty for European car business as well as identifying an integrated marketing communication model for European car companies to create brand loyalty.

Review of Related Literature

Automobile makers are competing intensively to persuade customers to purchase their brands. There are many factors that affect consumers' decision to buy. Major forces inuencing the consumer behavior in the psychological factors are motivation, perception, learning, personality, and attitudes (Kotler & Keller, 2006). After review previous researches of Govers (2004); Cengiz & Yayla, (2007); Johri & Sangkhawasi (2007); Tanmay, Shradha & Krishnan (2009) and Thanasuta, Patoomsuwan, Chaimahawong, and Chiaravutthi (2009) they didn't mention that perception and learning are concerned in this business. In the automobile context, Hjalte and Larsson (2004), and Baltas and Saridakis (2009) found that brand image, satisfaction, and product quality can develop and enhance attitudinal brand loyalty. Attributes of the car can established brand loyalty, as from a research of Devaraj, Matta, and Conlon (2001) and Jasfar (2001) found that product and service quality, product and service prices, and brand reputation play vital role in creating brand loyalty. Country of origin (COO) and resale value are also a powerful image that facilitates brand loyalty from the consumer as from research of Fan (2007) and Thanasuta, et al. (2009)

Marketing theories emphasize on keeping current customers because nding new customers would cost ve times more than retaining

current customers (Aaker, 2004). Integrated marketing communication tools are one of the best arsenals that have been proven to be effective in creating customer loyalty (Dewhirst & Davis, 2005). A well-planned integrated marketing communication strategy can create impact on customer's willingness to purchase and become loyal to a brand through satisfactory experience (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Brand loyalty can be developing based on the application of modern integrated marketing communication tools; such as, advertising, event, sponsorship, customer relationship management and so on (Charles, H.P. & Charles, F. F., 1988)

According to Aaker (2004), brand loyalty of a consumer can be measured in two different dimensions; attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal loyalty is a favorable evaluation that held sufcient strength and stability to promote a repeatedly favorable response towards a product or brand. In the automobile context, Hjalte and Larsson (2004), and Baltas and Saridakis (2009) found that brand image, satisfaction, and product quality can develop and enhance attitudinal brand loyalty. The
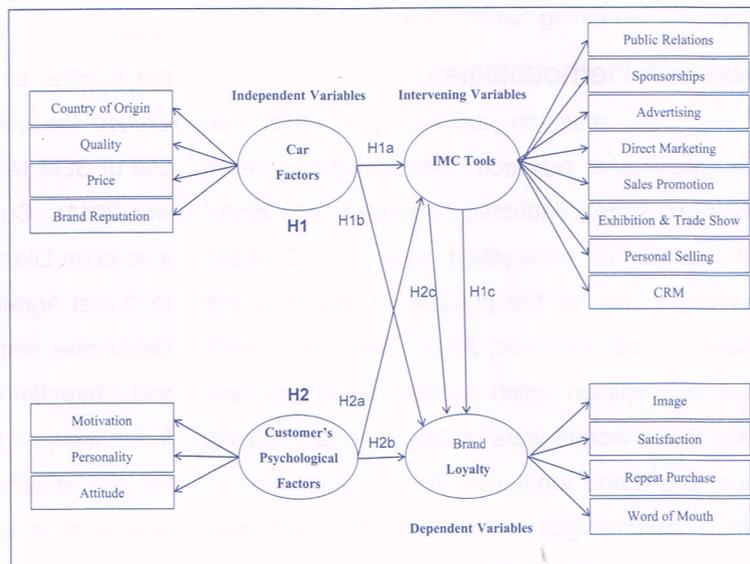

Figure 1. Research conceptual framework

Note: IMC: Integrated Marketing Communication

behavioral brand loyalty relies on a customer's actual conduct, which means a customer is loyal to a brand if he or she buys from it, then continue to buy from it, and spread good word about it (Allen, Ng & Wilson, 2002). Customer satisfaction will ignite repeat purchase, referrals and positive word of mouth (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Research Hypotheses

H_1a: There are direct effects between car factors and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools.

H_1b: There are direct effects between car factors and brand loyalty.

H_1c: There are indirect effects between car factors and brand loyalty through Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools.

H_2a: There are direct effects between customer psychological factors and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools.

H_2b: There are direct effects between customer psychological factors and brand loyalty.

H_2c: There are indirect effects between customer psychological factors and brand loyalty through Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools.

Research Methodologies

This research applies both qualitative and quantitative research methodology. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect data about the factors that established loyalty to European passenger cars for the purpose of designing the research tools (Creswell, 2003). The nine experts gave their opinion which concluded that the variables in car factors were country of origin, quality, price, and brand reputation. The variables in customers' psychological factors were motivation, personality, and attitude. The variables in integrated marketing communication (IMC) tools were public relations, sponsorship, advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, exhibitions and trade shows, and customer relationship management and lastly the variable in brand loyalty consisted of brand image, customer satisfaction, repeat purchase intention, and word of mouth.

The quantitative data were collected by questionnaire survey to 480 European car owners of BMW, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, and Volvo, from the year 2007-2010 which was 30,244 car owners (Thai Yarnyon, 2011).

The questionnaire was reviewed and resulted in IOC index in every item greater than 0.6. A tryout with a sample of 30 European car owners showed the total value of all variables equaled to 0.950 which greater than the minimum requirement for the test at 0.80 (Malhotra, 2004). The multistage random sampling was applied; starting with the process of stratied the population showrooms by brand. The sample showrooms of 16 were selected proportional to size of the population showrooms. The minimum requirement of 30 samples per showroom was multiplied to the number of sample showrooms of each brand. The nal calculated sample of 480 was allocated according to the number of showrooms for each brand which exceed the minimum requirement of 460 for the use of SEM (Angsuchoti, Vijitwanna & Pinyopanuwat, 2011). Customers rated the questionnaire on a ve-point Likert scales from "Extremely Agree" (5) to "Least Agree" (1) (Malhotra, 2004; U-On, 2007). Descriptive statistics of percentage and frequency and inferential statistics of correlation, conrmatory factor analysis for second order (CFA), path analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) were applied to investigate all of the objectives of this study.

Data Analysis Results

Part 1: Results of the exploration of the customer's personal characteristics

Personal characteristics of the 480 respondents of the European car owners, majority is male with the percentage of 55.6. The largest age group is between 31-40 years old with the percentage of 37.7. According to the results 64.4% has bachelor degree and 39.6% are entrepreneur. The highest monthly income level is between 50,001-100,000 baht per month with 34.6%.

Part 2: Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Car factors: Chi-Square = 45.46, df = 41, χ^2/df = 1.109 (45.46/41), P-Value = 0.29158, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, RMR = 0.026, and RMSEA = 0.015. Psychological factors: Chi-Square = 18.03, χ^2/df = 1.00 (18.03/18), P-Value = 0.45, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.98, RMR = 0.018, and RMSEA = 0.002. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools: Chi-Square = 413.51, χ^2/df = 1.49 (413.51/278), P-Value = 0.00, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91, RMR = 0.046, and RMSEA = 0.032.

Brand loyalty: Chi-Square = 36.71, χ^2/df = 0.97(36.71/38), P-Value = 0.053, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, RMR = 0.021, and RMSEA = 0.00.

The statistical value of all the four latent variables show χ^2/df value in the range of 2 to 1 Carmines and McIver (1981), P-Value > 0.05 except for the latent IMC Tools, GFI > 0.90 Hu and Bentler (1999); Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006), AGFI > 0.90 Segars and Grover (1993); Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham, (2006), RMR < 0.08 Schmacker and Lomax (1996), and RMSEA < 0.05 Hair, et al. (2006) which means that the empirical data have good t with the model. The result indicates that the observed variables are the components of the latent variable and in line with the studied concepts, theories, and related researches.

Part 3: Results of the Path Analysis. (Hypotheses testing results)

Hypothesis 1a: Supported. The path coefcient results show direct and positive effects (DE) of 0.61 and total effect (TE) of 0.61 at the signicance level of 0.01 between the tested variables.

Hypothesis 1b: Supported. The path coefcient results show direct and positive effects (DE) of 0.54 and total effect (TE) of 0.65 at the signicance level of 0.01 between the tested variables.

Hypothesis 1c: Supported. The path coefcient results show indirect and positive effects (IE) of 0.11 and total effect (TE) of 0.65 at the signicance level of 0.01 between the tested variables.

Hypothesis 2a: Rejected. The path coefcient results show no direct effects (DE) between the tested variables at the signicance level of 0.05. Hypothesis 2b: Supported. The path coefcient results show direct and positive effects (DE) of 0.32 and total effect (TE) of 0.33 at the signicance level of 0.01 between the tested variables.

Hypothesis 2c: Rejected. The path coefcient results show no indirect effects (IE) between the tested variables at the signicance level of 0.05.

Results of the Path Analysis

Variables	IMC (IMCTOL)			LOYALTY (BRALOY)		
	TE	IE	DE	TE	IE	DE
Car factors (CARFAC)	0.61** (0.11)	-	0.61** (0.11)	0.65** (0.10)	0.11** (0.02)	0.54** (0.10)
Customer's psychological factors (PSYFAC)	-	-	-	0.33** (0.10)	0.01 (0.02)	0.32** (0.10)
IMC Tools (IMCTOL)				0.17** (0.04)	-	0.17** (0.04)

Chi-Square = 114.93, df = 96, P = 0.09, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.95, RMR = 0.037, RMSEA = 0.020

Variables	COO	QUA	PRI	REP	MOT	PER	ATT			
R² for X	0.33	0.61	0.32	0.49	0.45	0.72	0.55			
Variables	PRS	SPO	ADV	DIM	PRO	EXH	PSS	CRM	IMG	SAT	REC	WOM
R² for Y	0.77	0.61	0.70	0.57	0.26	0.44	0.74	0.36	0.39	0.60	0.51	0.51

Squared Multiple Correlations Structural Equation	IMCTOL	BRALOY
R²	0.32	0.89

Correlation Matrix	IMCTOL	BRALOY	CARFAC	PSYFAC
IMCTOL	1.00			
BRALOY	0.66	1.00		
CARFAC	0.57	0.91	1.00	
PSYFAC	0.47	0.85	0.80	1.00

Remarks: ** P < 0.01
In parenthesis means Standard Error (SE)
TE = Total Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, DE = Direct Effect

Table 1. Result of Path Analysis

The hypotheses testing concluded that car factors have direct and positive effects on integrated marketing communication tools as well as brand loyalty and also have indirect and positive effects on brand loyalty through integrated marketing communication tools. Psychological factors do not have direct effects on integrated marketing communication tools, but have direct and positive effects on brand loyalty and also do not have indirect effects on brand loyalty through integrated marketing communication tools.

The latent variables in the model display the value Squared Multiple Correlations Structural Equation (R2) of 0.89 which implies that the variables of car factors, customer's psychological factors, and integrated marketing communication tools in the model can explain the variable brand loyalty at 89 percent. The correlation matrix reveals the path coefcient among the latent variables at the value between 0.47 and 0.91 in positive direction.

Part 4: Results of the Integrated Marketing Communication Model for Creating Brand Loyalty to European Cars in Thailand

Result of the analysis of Goodness of Fit showed the value of Chi-Square = 114.93, degrees of freedom = 96, Chi-Square/df = 1.187, P = 0.091, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.98, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.95, Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.015, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.020 and Critical N (CN) = 532.16 which indicates the good t of model. A Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) represents the overall degree of t that predicted by the proposed model ranging in value from 0 (poor t) to 1.0 (perfect t) Hu and Bentler (1999). The Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) is an extension of the GFI which recommends the acceptance level

at the value greater than or equal to 0.90 (Hair et al, 2010). Initial scales for proposed model provide AGFI of 0.95 that is higher than the recommended acceptance level of 0.90. All the relevant statistical measurement values indicating that the empirical data t with the constructed model.

Discussion of the research findings

The majority of European car owners is male age between 31-40 years, own business, high monthly income and got Bachelor degree and higher. The findings are in line with Kotler and Keller (2006), and Johri and Sangkhawasi (2007), that when people possess higher level of educations, grow older and, move up in their job positions, their income will increase resulting in more consumptions of more prestigious products.

Car factors and Integrated Marketing Communication Tools

Car factors are increased when IMC tools are implemented to convey and let more people aware of the attributes of the car, quality of the brand, reputation of the brand, and so on. The nding is supported by the studies of Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000), and Ragas and Roberts (2009) that decision to buy an automobile come from the active information from direct and indirect sources.

Car factors and Brand Loyalty

As owner of a European car's brand who are satised with the quality of the product or service and the image will develop positive attitude about the brand. Then he will be motivated to refer the brand to other and repurchase in the future. Yoon and Kim (2000), and Hjalte and Larsson (2004) stated that when a consumer is attached to a brand because of the image or satisfaction he receives, he will give positive word of mouth about his loyalty to the brand to others.

Psychological factors and Integrated Marketing Communication Tools

Psychological factors do not have direct effects on IMC tools and consequently no indirect effects on brand loyalty. IMC tools are not the major driving force to stimulate customer's interest to buy a European car, because Thai customers already have positive psychological beliefs towards European cars. The nding is in line with the researches of Thanasuta, et al. (2009), and Lee (2009) that, European car, in context of high import taxes countries; such as, Thailand, Malaysia, and Korea, the psychological factors that entice purchases did not come from marketing communications from the car companies. Customers are motivated to buy because of the urge to show off their life achievement through materialism, and the European car brand images can answer their needs. This nding is not in line with the studies of Govers (2004), and Ataman, Heerde, and Mela (2010) in the context of cars purchase in Western countries. They found that integrated marketing communications are necessary to stimulate customer's purchase by distinguishing the brand from its competitors.

Psychological factors and Brand Loyalty

Psychological factors have direct and positive effects on brand loyalty, but do not have indirect effects on brand loyalty through IMC tools. Positive attitude can turn customer to be an advocate of a car's brand through their long term experience with the quality of the product and service, Johri and Sangkhawasi (2007) found that in Thailand, European car buyers always buy European cars when they want to change to a new one. Cengiz and Yayla (2007) found that customer loyalty can be specied as their attitude towards the product and service where loyalty has been described in term of repeat purchase behavior

Integrated Marketing Communication Model for Creating Brand Loyalty to European Cars in Thailand

The research ndings show that all eight Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools have impact on the brand loyalty to European cars in Thailand. The result is supported by integrated marketing communication concept of Pickton & Broderick (2005), and the customer relationship management concept of Kotler and Keller (2006). In this research, public relations play the most importance role in creating brand loyalty, which is in line with Ragas & Roberts (2009) who stated that public relations have advantage over other forms of communication media in its credibility. Personal selling come in the second place as the researches of Ramsey and Sohi (1997) and Palmatier, Scheer, and Steenkamp (2007) supported that the qualities of salesman have impact on loyalty of the customers towards the company and product.

Tanmay, Shradha, Krishnan (2009) found that advertising could indirectly create brand loyalty as well as direct marketing which communicate on a one to one basis with prospects to generate sales. Sirgy, Lee and Tidwell (2008) found that sponsorship event contributes signicantly to brand loyalty, especially when the customers are involved in that sponsored event. Exhibitions and trade shows can build loyalty because its strategy in creating direct live experience to customers (Whelan and Wholfeil, 2006). This research found that European car owners in Thailand pay low attention to CRM program because each brand cannot distinguish themselves from their rivals through their CRM strategy. Sales promotion was found to be the least effective tool in building brand loyalty which is in line with the study of Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000), and Ataman, van Heerde, and Mela (2010) that sale promotion can bump up sales in the short run.

Application of the research model

Public relation strategy: General public believe that public relations are the most reliable and credible sources of information for the brand or product because its nature of being unpaid media. European car companies should constantly release news concerning its latest innovations and brand activities even not available to sell in Thailand in order to update interesting and impactful messages to their loyalist. The increase in public relation channels and activities such as, press test drive or factory visit are also necessary for building relationship with the members of the media.

Personal selling strategy: The sales force must be regularly trained both in terms of technical and marketing. Their personality and appearance must be on par or above the brand image because it reects the brand personalities. The quality of personnel performance plays a critical role in the purchase decision process, and is essential to win and retain customers.

Advertising strategy: Thais have learnt since childhood and perceive that the image of European car brands will reect their success in life. A European car brand should advertise its high status country and brand image to stimulate prospects to purchase the brand via magazine advertising and bill board. Car features and advance technologies should be advertised in TV commercial and newspaper in order to imprint the quality of the products.

Sponsorships strategy: Global sponsorships have impact on European car owners, so, the company should consider holding sponsorships campaign in Thailand. It can be in the macro picture such as national conferences or sport event and micro scheme by organize apprentice sponsorship programs with technical colleges to create young blood workforce.

Direct marketing strategy: A special privileged card with alliance to other line of business; such as, hotels, banks, or restaurants can be given to the customers to let them fulll their lifestyle, instead of owning only the car.

Exhibition and tradeshow strategy: A European car brand should participate in motor shows with the advancement of the display booth that designed in association with the brand global standard in order to show the high standard brand image of a European brand.

Customer relationship management (CRM) strategy: Given the importance of positive word-of-mouth, it is necessary for European car brand to come up with innovative CRM strategy in order to distinguish the brand from its rivals. The customer data base must be handled with appropriate and reliable software and consistently monitored. A call center is needed to assist customers in the regular service reminder program till emergency cases.

Sales promotion strategy: Sales promotion was founded to be the least important factor in the European customers' view point, European car company should periodically offer special sales promotional campaigns for special periods or special models both of new or used car will expand the customer base for European cars and increase the possibility of turning Japanese car users to buy European car.

The ndings model of this research will enable European car companies to use appropriate IMC tools to create brand loyalty which will result in reducing the customer defection rate and get new advocates, and consequently increase market share and increase production units to reach their capacities through the effective marketing communication model. The customers will also benet

from the research due to the improvement of the brand loyalty building programs of the European car companies which will lead to customer satisfaction. The Nation will also benet from new investment from European cars' company which will result in more job opportunities for Thai's workers and related industries as well as getting new technology transfers and increase the export value of the country.

European car customers on IMC tools that affect psychological factors is recommended as well as a research on innovative CRM program for high-ended passenger car users.   A comparison study on import tax rate among new emerging Asian countries are also interesting and will benet for the automobile investor who is interest to invest in this region.

Suggestions of future research

This research focused on finding integrated marketing communication tools that create brand loyalty of European car customer in Thailand. Qualitative research studies on the advocate

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