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ABSTRACT

of the dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**"EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF BRAND STRATEGIES
ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR"**

Speciality: 5312.01 - "Field Economy"

Field of science: Economy sciences

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Baku – 2025

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GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORK

The intensifying competition in global markets, observed with each passing year, alongside the rapid pace of scientific and technological advancement and structural transformations in production processes, has led to a substantial increase in the variety and assortment of goods. Consequently, it has become increasingly challenging for both producers and consumers to distinguish among the multitude of products available in the marketplace. This situation has compelled producers to adopt diverse marketing and communication strategies aimed at differentiating their products and enhancing their visibility in the market and product branding is one of these strategies.

In the "Strategic Roadmap for the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan," approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 6, 2016, the promotion of the "Made in Azerbaijan" brand is identified as one of the key strategic priorities. The document states that *“a national marketing campaign will be implemented in selected markets, and a national brand for domestic products will be developed. In the process of brand creation and the execution of promotional activities, elements reflecting the country’s identity and distinctive features will be utilized to enhance the visibility of products in the marketplace. Furthermore, national marketing initiatives are planned to be carried out in relevant international markets for the branding of selected Azerbaijani products”*¹.

At the same time, the promotion of the "Made in Azerbaijan" brand in foreign markets was also identified as one of the main priorities in the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated January 18, 2016, titled *“On Additional Measures for the Promotion of Non-Oil Exports”*². Additionally, the Presidential Decree dated April 1, 2005, titled *“On the Regulation of the Export of Food Products from*

¹ “Strategic Roadmap for the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan”, // Presidential Decree dated 6 December 2016. // Baku. 2016, p. 280

² Presidential Decree of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Additional Measures for the Promotion of Non-Oil Exports” // Adopted on 18 January 2016. – Baku: e-Qanun, No. 1713, [<https://e-qanun.az/framework/31869>]

the Republic of Azerbaijan to the European Union Member States,” outlines the key provisions concerning the establishment of export mechanisms, quality standards for food products across the country³.

Although modern market consumers enjoy a broader range of choices, the price and quality of products often fail to align with their actual needs and expectations. This mismatch can be attributed to the ambiguity of the products' technical and functional attributes, as well as deficiencies in the communicative effectiveness of brand strategies. Under such conditions, analyzing the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior, along with the processes of product presentation and brand image formation, becomes particularly relevant and significant. This issue is of particular importance in Azerbaijan's food industry. Rising income levels contribute to the development of consumer awareness. As a result, effective branding strategies play a crucial role not only in shaping consumer behavior but also in promoting economic diversification, enhancing domestic production, and expanding export opportunities.

Against the backdrop of competition both among local enterprises and with international companies, enhancing the level of branding, analyzing the factors influencing consumers' product choices, and aligning these criteria with appropriate strategic approaches—as well as assessing the export potential of local products—further underscore the relevance and scientific-practical significance of this dissertation topic. Proper formulation of branding strategies not only enables enterprises to increase their market share but also serves as a critical tool for protecting consumer rights, ensuring product safety, fostering a reliable information environment, and supporting the sustainable development of the market. Therefore, the empirical analysis and theoretical justification of consumer responses to branding strategies emerge as a vital direction for this research.

Research on the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior has been conducted by numerous prominent economists. In the context of Azerbaijani economic science, valuable contributions in

³ Decree “On the Regulation of the Export of Food Products from the Republic of Azerbaijan to the European Union Member States” // Baku, 1 April 2005

this field have been made by distinguished scholars such as Academician Z.A. Samadzadeh, Professors E.A. Guliyev, A.K. Alaskarov, B.Kh. Atashov, I.H. Ibrahimov, N.J. Gafarov, S.I. Valiyeva, A.F. Abbasov, N.B. Kamalov, F.V. Guliyev, R.R. Abutalibov, M.J. Huseynov, and E.H. Akbarov. Among international researchers, leading experts in the field include Western economists such as D.A. Aaker, T. Bagga, M.A. Bhatt, F.R. David, Gerrit Antonies, and W. Fred Van Raaij; Turkish scholars such as Yavuz Odabaşı, Gülfidan Barış, Turhan Erkmen, and Cenk A. Yüksel; as well as Russian academics including A.E. Minko, V.D. Shapiro, N.V. Antonova, and O.I. Patosha.

All these approaches and scholarly works indicate that the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior is a multidimensional and complex issue that necessitates in-depth scientific investigation at both local and international levels. This research has emerged in response to that need and aims to address an existing gap in the academic literature.

The object of this research is the food industry of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The study primarily focuses on the product offerings, production capacities, market relations, and systems of interaction with consumers within enterprises operating in this sector.

The subject of this research is the identification of the impact of branding strategies, currently applied in Azerbaijan's food industry, on consumer behavior. In this context, the socio-economic essence of this impact, its theoretical and methodological foundations, practical implementation mechanisms, as well as the tools and methods of influence, constitute the core components of the research subject.

Research aim and objectives. The main aim of the research is to determine the theoretical and methodological foundations of the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior in the consumer market, to analyze the current state of branding strategies and consumer behavior in enterprises operating within Azerbaijan's food industry, to evaluate the interaction between these elements, and to develop scientifically grounded practical recommendations for the formulation of effective strategies.

Research objectives. In order to achieve the stated aim of the

research, the following objectives have been defined:

- To analyze the conceptual frameworks of branding strategies that influence socio-economic development in the modern era;
- To identify the theoretical foundations of brand attributes (logo, slogan, value, etc.) and international branding strategy practices in the consumer market;
- To study the process of brand equity formation and evaluation at the enterprise level;
- To reveal current trends by analyzing indicators that reflect the key characteristics of branding strategies and branding activities;
- To develop a methodology for modeling and assessing the impact of branding strategies on consumer purchasing behavior;
- To substantiate directions for improving branding mechanisms influencing consumer behavior in Azerbaijan's food industry;
- To determine the development prospects and directions of brand equity in food industry enterprises;
- To propose recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of branding strategies based on consumer research.

Methodological foundations of the research. Within the framework of the dissertation, a variety of methods and approaches have been employed. These include, as the theoretical and methodological basis, contemporary economic science and conceptual approaches from the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. As the source base, the study draws on the scientific works of both Azerbaijani and foreign scholars, presidential decrees and orders, strategic documents, and normative legal acts. In terms of research methods, the study utilizes systematic and functional approaches, comparative analysis, empirical observation, economic-statistical methods, social surveys, and modeling using the SPSS software.

The main propositions submitted for defense are as follows:

- The regulatory function of branding and its role in consumer choice under conditions of diverse consumer behavior and limited product information;
- The study of the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior in international practice and the justification of their applicability in the national context;

- The role of descriptive attributes (logo, symbol, color, name, etc.) in brand recognition and differentiation by consumers, and their influence on economic sustainability;
- Scientific analysis, evaluation of consumer behavior based on social surveys regarding branded and non-branded consumer goods;
- Statistical analysis of the level of competition in the consumer market-scientific justification of the results of Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI), market concentration ratios, and decomposition analysis;
- Identification of key factors influencing consumer behavior through processing of survey results in SPSS and optimization of branding strategies;
- Presentation of an improved model of brand equity components (brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty) and the development of practical recommendations.

The scientific novelty of the research is as follows:

- A conceptual approach to the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior has been improved. Different scientific approaches have been systematically summarized, and a model has been developed to explain the influence of key elements of an enterprise's branding strategy (value proposition, target audience, communication method, sustainability, and credibility) on consumer behavior.
- The structure of retail turnover by product groups has been assessed using the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI). The findings reveal that there is a tendency toward market concentration in the domestic food market, which is among the factors increasing the influence of branding strategies on market behavior.
- The market concentration coefficient for retail turnover across economic regions has been calculated. The research shows that a moderate level of concentration exists in Baku, which helps to explain the regional differentiation of consumer behavior.
- A decomposition index of trade turnover was calculated and compared with the results of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index. This ensured greater accuracy and methodological consistency in assessing the level of market concentration.

- A social survey was conducted to study the impact of branding strategies on consumer behavior, and the results were processed using SPSS software. Based on the findings, the main factors shaping consumer behavior were identified and their role in the formulation of branding strategies was substantiated.

- The development directions of brand equity in food industry enterprises have been systematized on a scientific basis. Improved approaches to the core components of brand equity-awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty-have been proposed, and practical recommendations for each component have been developed.

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research. The theoretical-methodological approaches and well-substantiated scientific findings obtained as a result of the research contribute to the expansion of existing scientific knowledge in the areas of brand strategy formation and consumer behavior analysis within the country's food industry. The conceptual generalizations and modeling carried out serve as a theoretical foundation for understanding the mechanisms of brand influence on consumers and can be utilized in further research in this field.

At the same time, the findings and recommendations obtained are also of practical significance. In particular it can be used by relevant state authorities and private sector representatives in decision-making on issues such as:

- increasing the export potential of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- expanding the production of branded products;
- regulating access opportunities to foreign markets.

The results and main propositions of the research can also be used as practical recommendations and a methodological basis in the following areas:

- in the teaching of relevant subjects such as “brand management,” “marketing strategies,” “consumer behavior,” and others at economics-oriented higher education institutions;
- in conducting research on this subject at scientific research institutes;
- in the development of marketing strategies and making consumer-oriented decisions within food industry enterprises.

Approval and Implementation. The main findings of the research have been presented in the form of 23 scientific articles, conference materials, and theses at various national and international conferences, as well as in domestic and international journals. 10 articles were published within the country, and 2 articles were published in internationally indexed journals. Additionally, four presentations were delivered at international conferences and seven at national-level conferences. Among the key scientific works reflecting the research findings are: "Evaluation of the Branding Process and Its Stages" (Baku, 2019), "Improving Branding Activities in Azerbaijan's Food Industry" (Baku, 2019), "COVID-19 Impact on Brand Preference in Consumer Purchasing Decisions on Food Products in Azerbaijan" (Turkiye, 2021), "Effects of Brand Perception and Brand Image on Consumer Behavior in Azerbaijan" (Baku, 2023), "The Influence of Brand on the Purchase of FMCG in Azerbaijan: An Empirical Study" (Baku, 2023), "Impact of Branding Strategies on Consumer Behavior in Azerbaijan's Food Industry: An Evaluation of Demographic Factors" (Russia, 2025), "Use of Brand Personality as an Important Element in Creating Strong Brand Equity" (Baku, 2021), "Factors Influencing Brand Equity of Food Companies in Azerbaijan" (USA, 2022), "Impact of Brand Experience in the Food Industry of Azerbaijan on Consumer Purchasing Behavior" (Austria, 2022), "Theoretical Aspects of Influence of Branding on Consumer Behavior" (Germany, 2022), etc.

Name of the institution where the dissertation was carried out: Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University.

Total volume of the dissertation and volume of structural sections separately (with indication). The structure of the scientific work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references used, and appendices. The total volume is 326673 characters, including: Introduction (16845 characters), chapter I (115982 characters), chapter II (55353 characters), chapter III (60064 characters), conclusion (12878 characters), list of references used (22347 characters), and appendices (10801 characters). The total number of characters in the dissertation, excluding tables, figures, list of references used, and appendices, is 261122 characters.

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- Ошибка! Закладка не определена.**

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MAIN CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

In the "**Introduction**" section of the dissertation, the relevance and the level of study of the research topic, the object and subject of the research, the aim and specific objectives, the scientific methods used, the main propositions submitted for defense, the scientific novelty, the theoretical and practical significance of the research, as well as detailed information regarding the approval of the work, have been clearly defined.

In the first chapter of the dissertation titled "**The theoretical and methodological foundations of the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior**" the scientific foundations of brand strategy formation, the mechanisms through which brand strategies influence consumer behavior, as well as brand strategies and consumer behavior in international practice, have been examined and analyzed from a scientific perspective.

A well-known scholar in the field of food safety and food supply, Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor E.A. Guliyev notes that "*purposeful measures are being implemented in our country to elevate the safety and competitiveness of food products to a global level, as well as to bring these products to international markets under recognized brand names*"⁴.

In this context, Aaker defines a brand as "*a set of brand equity elements that add value to the name and slogan of a product or service offered to customers*"⁵. Aaker's approach makes it clear that he emphasizes the specific relationships formed between the customer and the brand. Kapferer and Jean-Noël, on the other hand, characterize a brand as "*an entity with unique values that creates distinguishing features in long-term relationships*"⁶. According to Kotler and Keller, branding is the strengthening of products and services through the

⁴ Guliyev, E.A. Problems and Strategic Directions of Strengthening Food Safety. // Baku, 2020, p. 464.

⁵Aaker, David A. Managing Brand Equity. - New York: Free Press. - 1991

⁶ Kapferer J-N., The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights and Strategic Thinking, 5th Edition, Kogan Page, 2012, ISBN 978-0-7494-6515-5

power of the brand⁷. David Ogilvy describes a brand as “*the consumer’s perception of the product.*” Based on the above approaches, it can be concluded that the brand represents the intangible, abstract value of a product, while the product itself serves as the physical carrier and proof of that value⁸.

Research shows that the name plays a key role in brand identification. A brand name reflects the essence of the product and facilitates its recognition and connection with the consumer. A successful name should generate trust and confidence, and it can consist of a word, image, attribute, color, or a combination of these elements. In practice, brand names are formed according to various types:

1. Generic brand - uses names that are identical or closely related in meaning to the product type. Examples: “Aura” and “Sun” for napkins by Azersun Holding; “Jalə” for fruit juices by Qabala Canning Factory.

2. Descriptive brand - names that directly express the product type and its function. Examples: “Burger King”, “Nescafe” (coffee).

3. Randomly chosen brand – names that have no direct connection to the product’s features but are memorable and distinctive. Examples: “Camel” (cigarettes), “Apple” (computers and mobile technology).

4. Invented brand – names that have no specific meaning but possess a unique sound. Examples: “Exxon,” “Sony,” “Kodak,” “Beko.”

5. Combination brands - formed by merging two different concepts. Examples: “Swatch” (Switzerland + Watch), “Duracell” (Durable + Cell).

6. Root word-based brands – names created by modifying specific root words. Examples: “Excellect” and “Excelerate” (from Excellent), “Selectium” (from Select), “Developia” (from Development).

7. Lookalike or soundalike brands – names that are phonetically or visually similar to existing brands. Examples: “Sunny” (Sony), “Armine” (Armani), “Bolmart” (Walmart), “Westgold” (Best Cow).

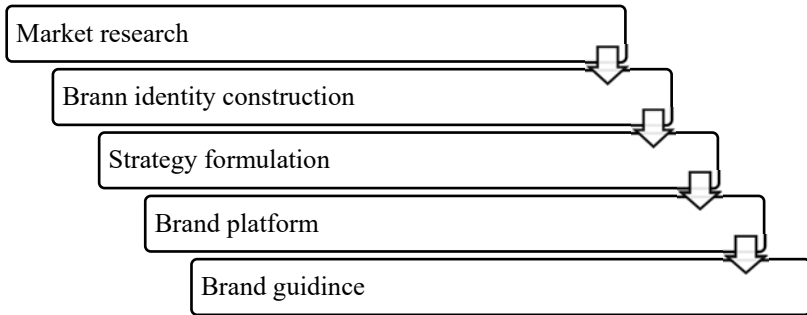
8. Country or identity-based brands – names emphasizing geographic or cultural identity. Examples: “British Airways,” “French

⁷ Kotler P., Keller K.L., Marketing Management (15th Global ed.), Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, 2016

⁸ Ogilvy, D., Ogilvy on Advertising. New York: Random House, 1983

Connection,” “Turkcell,” “Azercell,” “Azersun,” “AZAL.”

Branding plays a decisive role in the long-term success of enterprises. Although branding may appear simple, in reality, it is a multi-stage and complex process. The process of brand formation is visually illustrated in scheme 1 below.



Scheme 1. Branding process

Source: Kotler P., Keller K.L., *Marketing Management (15th Global ed.)*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, 2016.

Each stage reflected in the diagram ensures the structuring of the branding process, and the activities to be carried out at each of these stages are explained under the corresponding headings ⁹.

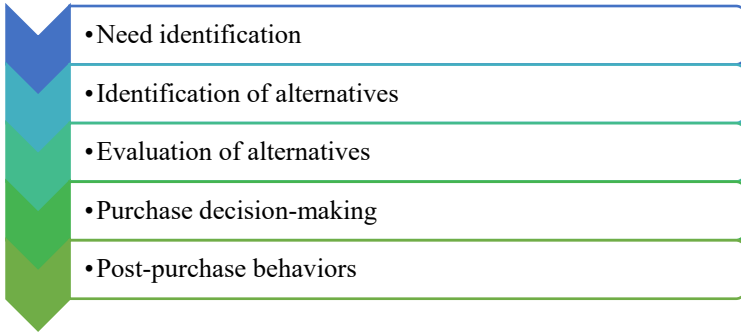
Brand equity is analyzed by different researchers based on various approaches and is explained within different models. A well-known scholar in the field of branding, D.A. Aaker, presents brand equity in his scientific works as a complex concept consisting of five main components. These components include perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets (such as trademarks, patents, symbols, relationships with distribution channels, etc.)¹⁰.

The purpose of analyzing consumer behavior is to understand, explain, and predict their behavioral patterns. Consumers’ decision-making and purchasing behavior are primarily driven not by conscious reasoning, but

⁹ Wheeler A., *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team* (4th ed.), John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New Jersey, 2013

¹⁰ Aaker, David A. *Managing Brand Equity*. - New York: Free Press. - 1991

by subconscious thoughts, emotions, and feelings¹¹. Brand strategies influence consumers' purchasing decisions. From this perspective, properly designed and implemented strategies enable the management of consumer behavior. In order to understand these behaviors, it is essential to analyze consumers' decision-making processes.



Scheme 2. Stages of the purchase decision-making process

Source: Kotler P., Armstrong G., Principles of Marketing, Pearson Education Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2006.

According to scheme 2, either a purchase decision is made, or the purchase does not occur. In the final stage - post-purchase behavior - the consumer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the purchased product becomes evident.¹²

According to the frequency of the decision and the amount of information required, consumers' purchasing behavior manifests in three forms: habit-based behavior, limited problem-solving, and extensive problem-solving behavior. In habit-based behavior, consumers purchase frequently used products reflexively, without much thought. This behavior applies to inexpensive, frequently purchased, and easily accessible products such as bread, milk, salt, detergents, cigarettes, fuel, etc. This process is also known as routine purchasing behavior. In limited problem-solving, consumers make

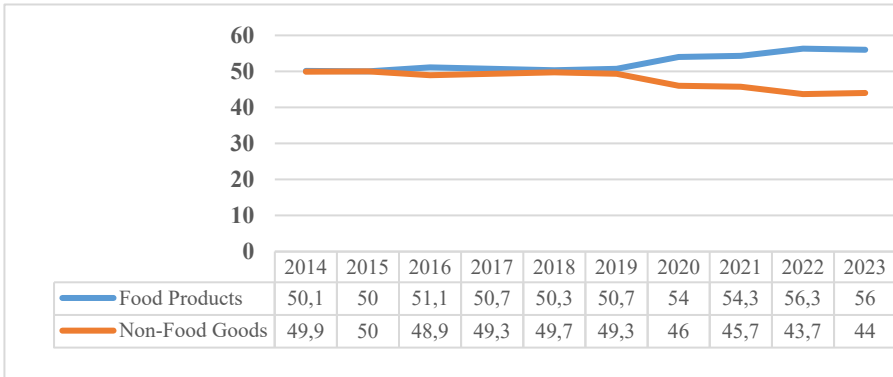
¹¹ Zaltman, G. How Consumers Think (Trans. A. Semih Koç), MediaCat Publishing, Istanbul, 2004, p. 42.

¹² Gürbüz, A., Ayaz, N., & Albayrak, M. The Consumer Purchase Decision Process in E-Commerce: The Salzburg-Ankara Case // Journal of Business Research, 7(3), 2015, pp. 377–394.

decisions based on their previous experiences. Extensive problem-solving behavior occurs when purchasing high-priced and unfamiliar products. In this case, consumers evaluate various criteria before making a decision.

In 2024, Nestlé led among food brands with a brand value of USD 20.8 billion and a brand strength index of 79.7. The company maintained its stability over four years following COVID-19 in terms of growth, profitability, and return on investment¹³. At the same time, there are now locally established brands with successful branding strategies, such as ASAN Service, Azercell, Azərçay, Matanat A, Kapital Bank and Birbank, Azərsun, and Azərsüd, which stand out in this regard. Additionally, “Jalilabad strawberry,” “Quba apple,” “Lankaran tea,” “Ordubad lemon,” and “Goychay pomegranate” have emerged as potential regional brands.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, titled “**Analysis of brand strategies and consumer behavior in the food industry of azerbaijan**” the current state of the food products market is evaluated, an empirical analysis of the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior is conducted, and the relationship between brand strategies and consumer behavior is modeled and analyzed.



Graphic 1. Retail trade turnover by food and non-food products (%)

Source: “Trade in Azerbaijan,” Statistical Yearbook, Baku, SSCRA, 2024, p. 19

¹³ Brand Finance, Food and Drink industry brands, 2021 Report // August 2021. [<https://brandirectory.com/download-report/brand-finance-food-and-drink-2021-preview.pdf>] Accessed on: 21.03.2022

As shown in graphic 1, the share of food products in total retail trade turnover remained above 50% throughout the entire analysis period. This fact underscores the necessity of conducting a comprehensive market analysis to evaluate the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior in the food industry.

Since 2021, following the pandemic, growth has been observed in industrial production. While in 2012, total industrial output amounted to 34.6 billion AZN, with the food industry accounting for 2.8 billion AZN (8%), by 2021 these figures rose to 55.2 billion AZN and 5.7 billion AZN respectively (12.7%). In 2022, total industrial output reached 86.4 billion AZN, while the food industry amounted to 6.2 billion AZN (7.2%).

In assessing the influence of brand strategies on consumer behavior, the market concentration ratio (CR) is taken into consideration. An analysis of retail trade turnover by economic regions and administrative units shows that Baku city is characterized by a moderately concentrated market structure (table 1).

Table 1.

Concentration ratio

Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<i>CR – Market Concentration Ratio</i>	CR=56.1	CR=56.4	CR=57.4	CR=57.4	CR=58.1	CR=60.3

Source: “Trade in Azerbaijan,” Statistical Yearbook, Baku, SSCRA, 2023, p.105

To determine the competitive structure of the market, one of the statistical indicators - the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) - was applied. The analyses revealed the existence of concentration trends in the trade turnover of food products. For a more precise assessment, a decomposition index reflecting the market’s distribution structure was also calculated, and a comparative analysis with the HHI confirmed a parallel relationship between the results of both indicators.

In order to measure the influence of brand strategies on consumer behavior within Azerbaijan's food industry, a sociological survey was conducted between January 18 and May 25, 2024, involving 1005 respondents. Among them, 51.9% were male and 48.1% female,

representing various age and education groups. The most influential factors in brand choice were identified as quality (38.9%) and price (30.1%), followed by shelf life (12.5%), trust in the producer (11.6%), and packaging (6.9%).

The survey did not target the general population but specifically focused on consumers of food products. However, to ensure the validity of the research, the minimum sample size was calculated using statistical methods at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error ($n = 384$). The actual number of respondents significantly exceeded this minimum.

This study, aimed at evaluating the influence of brand strategies on consumer behavior, falls under the category of descriptive research, as it examines the relationships between independent and dependent variables, forms hypotheses, and applies statistical analyses. A 5-point Likert scale was used in the survey. After coding, the data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27 software. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05, and the analysis included parametric methods, normal distribution testing, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, and factor analysis.

Initially, the influence of brand strategies was evaluated across 6 factors. Following factor analysis, the structure was partially revised, and the final model was formed based on the updated 6 factors. Three main hypotheses were proposed, H1 consisted of 7 sub-hypotheses, H2 and H3 each contained 6 sub-hypotheses. To test the hypotheses, t-tests, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analyses were applied.

The selection of statistical methods applied is based on the normal distribution characteristics of the data. When normal distribution is observed, parametric methods are used; otherwise, non-parametric methods are applied. In regression and ANOVA analyses, the normal distribution of errors is considered a fundamental assumption¹⁴. The normal distribution of the data was assessed using two different methods: based on Skewness and Kurtosis indicators, as well as through the identification of outliers.

¹⁴ Wijekularathna D., Manage A., Scariano S., Power Analysis of Several Normality Tests: A Monte Carlo Simulation Study // Communications in Statistics-Simulation and Computation, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2019, pp. 757-773.

In the analysis of normal distribution, the initial research model included variables such as functionality, psychological branding, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. During the initial phase of analysis, normal distribution was not achieved due to the presence of outliers. Based on Z-score testing, 103 survey responses that fell outside the -3 to +3 range were excluded from the analysis, and the normality check was repeated. The resulting data are presented in Table 2.

Before proceeding with factor analysis, the suitability of the dataset was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. The KMO coefficient, which ranges between 0 and 1, is used to determine whether there is sufficient correlation among variables for conducting factor analysis.

Table 2.

Results of the final normality analysis

Factor	Skewness (S)	Kurtosis (K)
Functionality	-0,050	0,403
Psychological	-0,193	0,620
Brand awareness	0,144	1,356
Brand association	-0,137	1,344
Perceived quality	-0,364	0,554
Brand loyalty	-0,341	1,383
Purchase intention	-0,050	1,640

Source: Table prepared by the author based on the analysis of survey results.

In the factor analysis, “Principal Component” and “Direct Oblimin” rotation methods were applied to represent multidimensional data using a reduced number of factors. The KMO coefficients were 0.870 for the independent variables and 0.825 for the dependent variable, while the Bartlett’s test ($p < 0.05$) confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The initial 6-factor model was preserved, though some items were combined under a newly defined factor titled “Physical Functionality.” As a result, the six factors explained 71.9% of the total variance for the independent variables and 74.6% for the dependent variable, which demonstrates the statistical reliability of the model. Factor loadings ranged between 0.5 and 0.9, indicating strong

and meaningful relationships among items. To assess reliability, Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted, and a high reliability level of $\alpha = 0.824$ was identified for the "Brand Strategies" scale.

Based on Table 3, it can be stated that the "brand strategy" scale and its underlying factors demonstrate a high level of reliability, as the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is considered satisfactory when it is 0.50 or higher. In this case, the alpha values exceed that threshold, confirming the internal consistency and reliability of the scale¹⁵.

To conduct the testing, three main hypotheses were formulated. Subsequently, 7 sub-hypotheses were developed for H1, and 6 sub-hypotheses each for H2 and H3.

Table 3.
Reliability coefficients of the brand strategy scale

Scale factor	α
Physical functionality	0,833
Psychological	0,885
Brand awareness	0,857
Brand association	0,807
Perceived quality	0,723
Brand loyalty	0,776
Purchase intention	0,886

Source: Table prepared by the author based on the analysis of survey results.

Hypothesis 1: *“Consumer behavior of survey participants differs according to demographic variables.”*

In the research, the main hypothesis H1 and its sub-hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA/Welch tests. For the gender-related hypothesis H1a, the result of the t-test was $p=0.967$ ($p>0.05$), thus no statistically significant difference was found and the hypothesis was rejected. Welch tests were conducted for the other hypotheses and the following results were obtained: for monthly income (H1b) $p=0.012$, for marital status (H1c) $p=0.006$, for age (H1d) $p=0.005$, for education level (H1e) $p=0.001$, for employment

¹⁵ Büyüköztürk, Ş. Data Analysis Handbook for Social Sciences, Pegem Academy, Ankara, 2011, p. 171.

status (H1f) $p=0.001$, and for sector of employment (H1g) $p=0.001$. Since these values are ($p<0.05$), statistically significant differences were identified in consumer behavior for each of them, meaning the hypotheses were confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: *“There is a relationship between the factors considered in the formation of brand strategies and consumers’ purchasing behavior.”*

According to the correlation analysis, there is a positive, moderate, and statistically significant relationship between the key factors forming brand strategies and consumers’ purchasing behavior (all r values are between 0.3 and 0.7; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$). The analysis results show that brand loyalty ($r = 0.430$) is the most influential factor on purchasing behavior, with an explanatory power of 18.5%. Brand association (13.9%), psychological factors (11.9%), brand awareness (10.8%), perceived quality (9.7%), and physical functionality (9%) also significantly explain purchasing behavior.

These results indicate that different components of brand strategy individually affect consumer behavior, and this effect is statistically valid. Thus, the main hypothesis H2 and its sub-hypotheses H2a, H2b, H2c, H2d, H2e, and H2f are accepted, confirming that brand strategies have a significant impact on consumer behavior.

Hypothesis 3: *“Brand strategies have an impact on consumer behavior.”*

In the study, a regression analysis was conducted to measure the influence of the factors comprising brand strategies on consumers’ purchasing behavior. Within this framework, the main hypothesis H3 and its corresponding sub-hypotheses were tested. It was determined that psychological factors (H3a), physical functionality (H3b), brand awareness (H3c), brand association (H3d), perceived quality (H3e), and finally, brand loyalty (H3f) have a positive effect on consumer behavior.

The effect of each factor was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). In particular, brand loyalty stood out as the most influential factor on consumer behavior ($\beta = 0.246$; $p = 0.001$). Other factors such as brand association ($\beta = 0.162$; $p = 0.001$), brand awareness ($\beta = 0.142$; $p = 0.001$), and perceived quality ($\beta = 0.085$; $p = 0.010$) also

had a positive and significant impact. The influence of psychological factors ($\beta = 0.083$; $p = 0.030$) and physical functionality ($\beta = 0.070$; $p = 0.046$) was likewise confirmed.

As a result, the main hypothesis H3 and its sub-hypotheses were statistically accepted, confirming that brand strategies have a significant and positive effect on consumers' purchasing behavior.

In the multiple linear regression analysis, collinearity was assessed and no multicollinearity was detected. All VIF values ranged between 1 and 2, not exceeding 5, which indicates no risk. The tolerance coefficients were all above 0.1, further confirming the absence of collinearity problems. The correlation coefficients between variables ranged from 0.188 to 0.565, not exceeding 0.9. These results confirm that the model is statistically reliable and suitable for interpretation.

Based on the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, the linear regression model of this study is as follows:

$$Y = 1.171 + 0.83X_1 + 0.07X_2 + 0.142X_3 + 0.162X_4 + 0.085X_5 + 0.246X_6$$

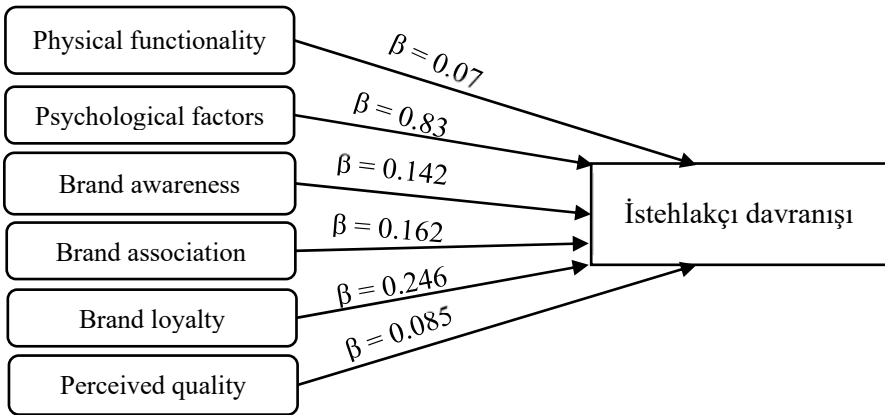
If each variable is substituted, the linear regression model of this study is as follows:

$$\text{Purchase behavior} = 1.171 + (0.083 \times \text{Psychological}) + (0.070 \times \text{Physical Functionality}) + (0.142 \times \text{Brand Awareness}) + (0.162 \times \text{Brand Association}) + (0.085 \times \text{Perceived Quality}) + (0.246 \times \text{Brand Loyalty})$$

The interpretation of each coefficient in this model is as follows:

When there is a one-unit increase in each factor, the corresponding increase in purchase behavior is 0.083 for psychological, 0.070 for physical functionality, 0.142 for brand awareness, 0.162 for brand association, 0.085 for perceived quality, and 0.246 for brand loyalty.

The final schematic representation of the research model is as follows (scheme 3):



Scheme 3. Final Graphical Representation of the Research Model

Source: Diagram prepared by the author based on the analysis of survey results.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, the topic “**Improving the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior**” was explored. This chapter substantiates the enhancement of the implementation mechanism for brand strategies, the development prospects of brand equity in the food industry, and the optimization of influence mechanisms based on consumer research.

The role of local characteristics in brand formation is emphasized, with particular attention given to the importance of national cuisine, traditional heritage, and cultural values. The strategy for improving branding should incorporate the following key principles:

- Giving priority to national resources and local flavors in the production of food products;
- Developing marketing campaigns aligned with local culture (e.g., based on national holidays and traditions);
- Strengthening cooperation with local producers and expanding branding initiatives such as "Product of Azerbaijan," "Azerbaijani Brand," and "Made in Azerbaijan."

These approaches enable the development of brand strategies in a more effective and culturally rooted manner.

Based on the results of statistical analyses, it can be stated that

competitiveness in Azerbaijan's food industry is increasing, and that consumer needs and preferences are changing rapidly. To be prepared for this shifting demand and dynamic consumer trends, brands and brand managers must be ready for rapid changes, and it is therefore crucial to develop the ability of brands to respond with agility:

- Conducting market research, analysis, and establishing analytical systems for food products in response to changes occurring in the market;
- Rapidly collecting customer feedback and opinions, and using this information in the development of branded products;
- Designing fast and agile marketing campaigns and adopting a flexible approach to innovations (e.g., seasonal offers, quick adaptation to new food trends, etc.).

It should also be noted that healthy nutrition and environmental sustainability are essential for any brand. The increasing consumer shift over time toward organic and natural products confirms this trend. Therefore, enterprises operating in Azerbaijan's food industry must take into account the offering of healthy and eco-friendly products in their brand strategies:

- Promoting the development and production of brands focused on organic and naturally composed food products;
- Obtaining relevant certifications related to food safety and quality, and emphasizing these certifications in branding and marketing activities;
- Replacing plastic packaging with recyclable and natural packaging technologies.

As in the rest of the world, sales and digital marketing on digital platforms are rapidly developing in the Azerbaijani market as well. To keep up with this trend and become one of the digital brands, the role of digital tools in brand strategies must be enhanced:

- Promoting the brand through digital platforms, especially via social media and influencer marketing;
- Creating innovative, creative, and engaging content on digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook);

- Improving customer experience and online services (such as fast delivery, easy ordering systems, etc.).

Conducted research shows that although certain steps have been taken to improve brand strategies in Azerbaijan's food industry, the implementation of targeted and effective mechanisms remains essential for increasing customer loyalty and strengthening the brand–customer relationship. In this context, the following measures are recommended:

- Implementation of incentive (reward-based) programs to strengthen brand loyalty;
- Provision of special customer services that ensure a personalized approach;
- Execution of personalized marketing strategies tailored to consumer needs and preferences.

Research conducted in 2024 has shown that Azerbaijan's trade activity is primarily concentrated in Baku (CR = 60.3). This indicator highlights the importance of considering market concentration in brand strategies. Under such conditions, it is recommended to implement targeted measures aimed at increasing brand recognition in Baku and strengthening brand image in the regions.

The Herfindahl-Hirschman index and decomposition indicators confirm the existence of an oligopolistic market structure in the country's food sector. In a market with limited choice, strategies such as creating differentiation, enhancing functional advantages, selecting the right target market, and implementing loyalty programs should be prioritized to gain competitive advantage.

The main components of brand equity - awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty - have been shown to have a statistically significant impact on consumer behavior:

- Awareness ($r = 0.328$, $\beta = 0.142$) and association ($r = 0.373$, $\beta = 0.162$) showed a moderate positive correlation. To strengthen these components, it is important to organize local initiatives, launch social responsibility campaigns, and foster positive brand experiences.
- The perceived quality factor ($r = 0.312$, $\beta = 0.085$) can be enhanced through improving the actual quality of the product, emphasizing social values, and obtaining relevant certifications.

- Loyalty ($r = 0.430$, $\beta = 0.246$) was identified as the most influential factor. In this area, loyalty programs, improvement of user experience, and social responsibility actions play a significant role.

The survey results revealed a moderate positive relationship between psychological factors and consumer behavior ($r = 0.344$; $\beta = 0.83$; $p = 0.030$; $R^2 = 0.283$). Therefore, it is recommended to integrate experiences that create emotional attachment, social values, and elements of national identity into brand strategies. Emotionally impactful advertisements and offers that target psychological motivation can be effective in building brand loyalty.

At the same time, physical functionality showed a weak but positive effect on consumer behavior ($r = 0.280$; $\beta = 0.07$; $p = 0.046$). In this regard, practical design, multifunctional products, and ease of use not only enhance the brand's appeal, but also play an important role in differentiating brand image when functional advantages are combined with emotional and aesthetic values.

RESULT

In the research conducted to examine the influence levels of factors contributing to the formation of brand strategies that affect the purchasing behavior of Azerbaijani consumers in the food industry, scientific analysis was carried out based on statistical data and consumer purchasing experiences. As a result, both practical and scientific-theoretical findings were obtained, and relevant recommendations were developed.

The main objective of the research was to determine the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior and to develop scientifically grounded proposals for improving this influence. Based on the findings, the following key conclusions were reached:

1. The brand is perceived by consumers as an inseparable part of the product and adds extra value to it. On this basis, factors influencing consumer behavior must be identified and evaluated in the formation of brand strategies. In addition to physical factors, abstract elements that create emotional attachment must also be considered, and appropriate strategies should be developed accordingly.

2. Competition and brand value: Brand is a source of value and

power for enterprises seeking competitive advantage. Brands must differentiate through various factors to gain a leading position in the market. Currently, no single unified model exists for brand strategies. Therefore, understanding and analyzing the behavior of the target audience is essential, followed by the development of a tailored branding strategy model.

3. According to statistical data, over the past twenty years, more than 80% of household consumption expenditures have been allocated to food products. A comprehensive market analysis is essential to evaluate the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior in the food sector. Income level influences market development and consumption patterns. Thus, when developing brand strategies, differences in consumer income segments must be considered, and appropriate approaches must be applied.

4. According to the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, the consumer confidence index for domestically produced goods is 34.2%. This indicates that although domestic production has increased, there are still serious challenges in forming food products as brands and in consumers' perception of them as brands.

5. During the assessment of the impact of brand strategies on consumer behavior, the market concentration ratio was calculated. For 2023, the concentration level across the country was determined to be moderate ($CR = 60.3$; $40\% < CR < 70\%$). This result underscores the importance of considering the reality that trade is highly centralized in Baku when developing brand strategies.

6. To analyze market structure, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) was calculated for retail trade turnover. The analysis showed that the food sector is concentrated. The decomposition index was also calculated to verify the result of HHI in markets dominated by a small number of firms. In 2023, both indices aligned. The analysis confirmed an oligopolistic market structure, where a few large companies dominate. This limits consumer choices and is a key factor influencing the brand formation process and the creation of differentiated advantages.

7. In the survey conducted to model and evaluate the relationship between brand strategies and consumer behavior, the minimum

research sample was determined scientifically. Based on the survey results, the main factors influencing brand choice in food purchases were identified as: quality (38.9%), price (30.1%), shelf life (12.5%), trust in the producer (11.6%), and packaging (6.9%).

8. The study used a deductive approach to test the influence of several concrete and abstract factors on consumer behavior. A multiple linear regression model comprising 6 factors was proposed. A total of 19 hypotheses were tested; only one — that consumer behavior differs by gender — was rejected. In the formulation and measurement of hypotheses and regression modeling, four abstract components of Aaker's brand equity model, along with two concrete components, were used. These components were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The results indicated that each component of brand equity significantly influences consumer behavior.

9. After confirming the normal distribution of the survey data, parametric statistical methods were applied. These included factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, difference tests (t-test and ANOVA), correlation, and regression analyses. Results showed that, except for gender, statistically significant differences exist in purchasing behavior across various demographic variables. This confirms the importance of considering demographic characteristics of the target audience when developing brand strategies, in line with theoretical approaches.

10. Hypothesis analysis showed that psychological factors, physical functionality, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty respectively explain 11.9%, 9%, 10.8%, 13.9%, 9.7%, and 18.5% of purchasing behavior. A moderate ($0.3 < r < 0.7$), positive, and statistically significant ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$) linear correlation was found between these factors and purchasing behavior. It is recommended that the impact strength of these factors be taken into account in the development of brand strategies.

Based on the above-mentioned research findings, the following aspects should be particularly taken into account in the process of developing brand strategies aimed at influencing consumer behavior in Azerbaijan's food industry:

- In the branding of food products, it is essential to prioritize the

use of local resources and national culinary traditions. Additionally, marketing campaigns tailored to the local culture (e.g., based on national holidays and traditions) should be emphasized. Strengthening cooperation with local farms and producers, and promoting branding concepts such as “Azerbaijani Product,” “Azerbaijani Brand,” and “Made in Azerbaijan” should be central to the strategy.

- It is important to conduct regular market research on food products in line with market changes and to establish analytical systems. Feedback and suggestions from customers should be collected quickly and applied effectively in product improvement. At the same time, the development of fast and flexible marketing campaigns and the ability to adapt to market innovations (e.g., seasonal offers, quick response to new food trends, etc.) should be a key component of the strategy.

- The formation and promotion of brands based on organic and natural food products, as well as the acquisition of relevant certifications confirming food safety and product quality, are essential. These attributes must be specifically emphasized during branding and marketing activities. Moreover, in line with environmentally sustainable approaches, it is necessary to replace plastic packaging with recyclable or environmentally friendly packaging technologies, which should be considered a fundamental requirement.

The use of digital platforms and social media influencers is essential for brand recognition. It is necessary to develop creative content on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, and to offer efficient online services (e.g., fast delivery, user-friendly ordering systems). The concentration of trade in Baku provides food industry brands with access to a large audience. To strengthen the brand, ensure top-of-mind awareness, increase purchase frequency, and maintain customer loyalty, marketing campaigns must be implemented in a strategic and measurable manner. Due to the limited number of companies in the market, many brands appear similar to consumers, making brand selection difficult. Therefore, a brand’s uniqueness, history, social responsibility, and emotional values must be emphasized. This approach influences consumer behavior and yields effective results.

- In markets with a limited number of companies, it is crucial for brands to possess unique characteristics in both physical and emotional components in order to gain greater market share and differentiate from competitors. Going beyond simply showcasing the product's functionality, establishing emotional connections with customers can offer a competitive advantage. To emphasize the brand's distinctiveness, differentiating elements such as leadership, exclusive guarantees, and personalized offers should be utilized.

- Food industry enterprises must implement consistent and in-depth marketing programs to increase brand recognition and competitiveness. To maintain the brand's relevance, regular events, campaigns, and promotions on digital media should be organized.

- Delivering consistent and memorable experiences is essential for creating positive brand associations. The brand should be continuously aligned with qualities that are positively remembered by consumers. To build a strong image of quality among the target audience, customer feedback, international certifications, and expert evaluations should be integrated into the brand strategy. These efforts enhance consumer trust and confidence in the brand.

Establishing emotional connections with consumers is one of the main directions of brand strategies. The formation of strong emotional impressions significantly influences the consumer's purchasing decisions. In this context, highlighting brand experience, incorporating social values, and using message elements associated with positive memories can strengthen emotional attachment and positively shift the consumer's attitude toward the brand.

- As social beings, consumers place special importance on safety needs. Therefore, the choice of safe and reliable food products plays a significant role in their purchasing behavior. To address this psychological need, certificates and visual indicators reflecting product quality and safety should be presented as part of brand communication.

- The impact of branding on consumers can be expanded through advertising and promotional campaigns that highlight both the functional and emotional advantages of the brand. The brand's physical features and its suitability for demonstrative consumption

may appeal particularly to consumers who value appearance and status. At the same time, sharing real user experiences can emphasize the social and practical value of the brand, positively influencing consumer decisions.

- Income-level-based segmentation should be considered in brand strategies. For consumers in the low-income group, affordable yet functional and accessible products should be offered, with a clear emphasis on their usefulness. For middle-income consumers, the price-quality balance should be maintained. For high-income consumers, exclusive and premium category products should be offered, with effective communication of their unique features and high value.

- Age-based approaches are also important in the formation of brand strategies. For young consumers aged 16–24, social influence and demonstrative consumption behaviors are primary. Reaching this audience through social media platforms and influential public figures may be more effective. They should be offered innovative, multifunctional, and trendy products. For middle-aged consumers, quality, functionality, and health benefits are key decision factors. Therefore, the brand should emphasize ease of use and contribution to a healthy lifestyle. Older consumers place more importance on health and safety criteria. Offering them organic, eco-friendly, and natural products can positively influence their behavior.

- Considering the psychologically stability-oriented behavior of consumers working in the public sector in Azerbaijan, brand strategies targeting this group should emphasize consistent quality, reliability, and long-term usability. Such an approach can foster trust in the brand and lay the foundation for long-term loyal relationships with this consumer segment.

The main points, results, and recommendations of the dissertation are reflected in the following published scientific works:

1. Guliyev S.M., Mammadov Q. “The Impact of Brand on the Consumer’s Emotional Decision-Making Process: A Study from Azerbaijan’s Food Sector.” // – Ganja: Scientific News of Azerbaijan

Technical University, No. 3 (26), 2018, – pp. 85-98.

2. Guliyev S.M., Mikayilov V. “Development Directions of Azerbaijan’s Food Industry.” // – Baku: Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific Conference of Young Researchers, 2018. – pp. 619-621.

3. Guliyev S.M. “The Importance of Brand for the Food Industry.” // – Baku: Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific Conference of Young Researchers, 2018. – pp. 661-663.

4. Guliyev S.M. “Evaluation of the Branding Process and Its Stages.” // – Baku: Journal of Baku Engineering University, Economics and Administration, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2019, – pp. 121-129.

5. Guliyev S.M., Abutalibov R.R. “The Impact of Brand Equity on the Operational Indicators of Daily Consumer Goods Enterprises in Azerbaijan.” // – Baku: Journal of Baku Engineering University, Economics and Administration, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2019. – pp. 110-120.

6. Guliyev S.M. “Improvement of Branding Activities in Azerbaijan’s Food Industry.” // – Baku: Audit Journal of Baku Business University, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2019. – pp. 86-94.

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12. Guliyev S.M. “An Emerging Consumer Experience: Emotional Branding.” // – Baku: Book of Proceedings of the Conference on Current Problems and Prospective Directions for the Development of the National Economy in the Context of Modernization, 2018. – pp. 113-115.

13. Guliyev S.M. “Factors Affecting Consumer Purchasing Behavior.” // – Baku: Book of Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific Conference of Young Researchers, 2019. – pp. 666-668.

14. Guliyev S.M., Agayeva M. “Brand Equity and Its Effect on Consumer Preferences in Fast Food Consumption.” // – Baku: Book of Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference on the Role of Engineering in Innovative Development of Azerbaijan: Aims and Perspectives, 2019. – pp. 358-362.

15. Guliyev S.M. “Use of Brand Personality as an Important Element in Creating Strong Brand Equity.” // – Baku: Book of Proceedings of the Scientific Conference of Young Researchers and Doctoral Students Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, 2020. – pp. 1036-1040.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Guliyev', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on 24 September 2025 at 16:00 at the joint meeting of the ED 2.46 Dissertation Council of the Azerbaijan Cooperation University and Baku Business University, operating under the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

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The dissertation is available for review at the library of Azerbaijan Cooperation University.

The electronic version of the abstract is posted on the official website of Azerbaijan Cooperation University (www.aku.edu.az).

The abstract was sent to the necessary addresses on 08 July 2025.

Çapa imzalanıb: 03.07.2025

Kağızın formatı: 60 x 84 1/16

Həcm: 46110 işarə

Tiraj: 20