ADIDAS Sportswear Brand Popularity Model in Iranian Consumers

Vahid Saatchian[1] , Bahador Azizi[2*] , Mahdi Talebpour[3]

[1] Assistant Professor in Sport Management, Sports Sciences Group, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran.
[2] PhD Student, in Sport Management, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, Iran.
[3] Professor in Sport Management, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research aimed to test the influential factors that lead to the popularity of sportswear brands like Adidas AG in consumers from the perspective of physical education students.

Methodology: The methodology utilized in this research was descriptive and based on a survey. The data collection tools used for brand popularity took from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) questionnaires. The statistical population of the study included 457 students of physical education at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. According to the Cochran formula, 210 samples were chosen by a simple random sampling method. The K-S test, T-test, and SEM were used for the confirmatory factor of data analysis.

Findings: The results revealed a significant positive correlation of factors affecting brand popularity. The affection to a brand had a significant impact, while the attitude strength component had the most negligible influential effect on the popularity of a brand. Thus, sportswear apparel manufacturers may plan and apply these components to increase the popularity of their brand. The sportswear industry could improve along with brands increasing their market share in competitive markets through the affection of consumers and implementing other components of brand popularity.

Originality: For the first time, the popularity of a reputable sports brand in the world has been investigated in Iran.

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1. Introduction

Individuals' need to be covered has been easily fulfilled for several years as ready-to-wear has become widespread. However, due to technological developments, various benefits besides covering function are expected from clothes. Different wardrobes for different parts of life such as work, sports, and daily wear are required. People who live in cities do exercise to control stress, but without leaving the city. Recently, it is known that training provides the situation and contributes to the general image of the individual, which is an essential element in social life. The increasing trend of wearing Sportswear in daily life in addition to sports has been increasing. Thus, the target group of sportswear companies has expanded from people who train to another group who are young and follow trends.

The increasing prominence of health psychology has been paralleled by developments in the psychology of health-related exercise. Evidence has been amassed that supports the efficacy of regular physical activity in reducing the risks of some debilitating health conditions such as coronary heart disease and obesity and the promotion of physical function and mental well-being (Biddle & Fox, 1989). The development of technology and the increase of living standards have raised the expectations of Sportswear. People expect durability, design, style, and the functionality and comfort of clothing (Çivitci & Dengin Sevinir, 2014).

In the textile industry, the active market for Sportswear has grown globally. Competition in this sector forces manufacturers to meet the demands of consumers in the field of clothing comfort and beauty, so the convenience of clothing has become more critical in sportswear research (Güneşoğlu, 2005).

Clothing comfort is associated with rising living standards, so research on this issue has attracted both researchers and manufacturers (Öner & Okur, 2010). Slater (1985) defines the comfort of clothing as "a desirable state of physiological, psychological, and physical harmony between man and the environment" (Okur et al., 2008).

Characteristics expected from Sportswear are stated below according to the research on clothing comfort: Efficiently moving away sweat from the skin, Quick-drying, Breathability, Balancing body heat by moving away moisture and ventilating the body's critical heat areas. Presently, Sportswear has become mainstream because it gives the youth a comfortable and diverse lifestyle. Consumers wear Sportswear not only during athletic activities but also at home, school and workplace. In addition, the tendency has always been towards wearing raiment, which is both athletic and perfectly fitting. Sports lovers combine their exercise routines with their favourite clobber to be fashionmongers.

A brand was considered a part of product physics only, and the definitions included a term, a name, and a trademark (Bornmark et al., 2006). A brand is far more than these statements. It is the perception of a long-term relationship between a business and consumers (Oliver, 1999; Shevchenko, 2014). The knowledge of branding is the most valued characteristic of a company created via investment in marketing plans (Brady et al., 2005). A brand's strong presence in the market could be the only characteristic that distinguishes a product or a service from its competitors. In such situations, acquiring a

place in a consumer's mind that persuades him to be loyal to the company is of great importance (Azadi et al., 2015).

The brand name consists of a name, phrase, term, sign, design, or combination. It introduces a product or a service that a seller or a group of sellers offer, differentiating it from competitors (Keller, 2008). A division of athletic products which played a vital role in the implementation and development of sports and gained global attention is athletic clothing and footwear (activewear) (Cowie, 2001). In this regard, the novel area of brand popularity has become an essential domain in marketing research. Within the last few years, love and enthusiasm towards a brand have been considered one of the main elements of a consumer's relationship (Ahuvia, 1993).

The factors influencing brand affinity include inherent fit, long-term emotional relationship, positive affection, and unexpected unhappiness about the absence of a brand, overall strength, certainty, confidence and creating a positive connection with the brand. The consequences of brand affinity consist of a tendency to pay more, reliability and verbal propaganda of the brand.

Albert and Merunka (2013) investigated the role of brand love on the relationship between the brand and its consumers. Their studies indicated that brand identity and trust had a positive and significant impact on brand commitment and love. In turn, brand commitment and passion had a positive and meaningful effect on verbal propaganda and was marked by a tendency to pay for higher prices. Ismail and Spinelli (2012) investigated the impact of brand love, brand personality and brand image on verbal propaganda in their research. Their studies showed that brand love and brand image had a positive and meaningful effect on the oral propaganda of the brand. Aron et al. (1995) studied the relationship between the brand's social mentality and brand love. According to their findings, brand love was reflective of higher identity. Kheiry et al. (2013) found out during their research that the attitude and experience of the consumers affect the formation of an emotional dependency on the brand. Also, it proved that consumers having a passionate relationship with the brand demonstrate a higher level of loyalty. Marinejad Asl and Vazifehdoost (2015) realized that brand image had a positive effect on brand love. Azizi et al. (2012) reported in their project that the most crucial factor in the growth and retention of a brand is creating loyalty in consumers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

The results have shown that the four dimensions of responsively, dynamic, emotion and audacity impact attitude loyalty and attitude loyalty influence the behaviour of the brand. However, the simplicity of a brand doesn't affect attitude loyalty. Shafaie et al. (2016) showed that by focusing on the mentioned dimensions and variables in the advertisements, sport managers and marketers could attract more fans, earn income and gain the top spot in the market. By adapting the company and products to the mentioned variables, sponsors can also have an excellent interactive relationship. Currently, no existing brand has proposed the challenges in exporting sports goods (Shafaie et al., 2016). However, no research in the past has been specifically focused on how a consumer purchasing a specific brand can help a company distinguish itself in the market and satisfy its consumers exclusively. The creation of a brand was not a choice but an inevitable necessity to increase the competition in the world market. Otherwise,

it may lead to monopolization of the national market by imports and obsoleting the exports. Adidas® AG is a well-recognized name in global brands that have found exceptional popularity among consumers. The investigation of the factors that have propelled Adidas' popularity is necessary for domestic sportswear industries to understand and implement these factors for the flourishing of the domestic market and burgeoning export of sports clothing. Nowadays, the brand process is extended from regular advertisements to social media strategies sharing values and generates identities (Mataruna-Dos-Santos & Pena, 2017; Mataruna et al., 2015).

With regards to the explanations above, performing research in the area of sportswear brand popularity is indispensable. In addition, the study and assessment of a sportswear brand's favour from the viewpoint of students and graduates of sports science who deal with relatively all athletic fields may evaluate and guide sportswear and equipment producers' activities in Iran to create a strong brand presence. This article tries to examine the popularity of the Adidas brand among consumers. With headquarters in Herzogenaurach (Germany), Adidas Group is the largest company in the sports footwear and apparel industry in Europe and the second-largest globally. With total revenues of EUR 19.3 billion in 2016, its product range covers the entire spectrum of apparel and footwear goods, from casual sportive fashion to high-performance products for competitive athletes.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate the question: What factors have led to the popularity of sportswear brand Adidas AG?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Brand name

The brand name consists of a name, phrase, term, symbol, sign, design, or a combination that serves the purpose of introducing a product or a service that a seller or a group of sellers offer and differentiates it from competitor companies (Keller, 2008). A business's brand name is a modelled commitment by a company to support its consumers (Rowley, 2004). In other words, the branding of a business gives consumers the signs of product core and protects both the consumer and producer against competitors that try to produce analogous ones. Branding a business is defined as a set of experiences formed by connecting links between the company and consumer (Ghodeswar, 2008).

2.2. Brand popularity

Brand popularity is defined as accumulating market acceptance and brand goodwill over time (Kim & Chung, 1997). It is said to positively influence a brand's loyalty, increasing its number of users (Raj, 1985). Also, it is helping to garner more favourable evaluations and larger market shares, provide better value to consumers and improve its overall performance by creating a clear brand image (Kim & Chung, 1997). In this study, the brand popularity concept is used within a cue utilization theory, which suggests that products consist of an array of cues (both extrinsic and intrinsic) that serve as indicators of quality for consumers as they consider their product purchase decisions (Cox, 1967;

Olson, 1972; Purwar, 1982). In addition, the theory suggests that when a brand is famous, consumers assume a certain level of trust and confidence in the brand, which reduces their level of uncertainty (Dean, 1999). Thus, it is clear that brand popularity, when used as an extrinsic cue in advertising, may stimulate more favourable assessments, provide consumers with the product's value, and even create the perception that unpopular brands are riskier options than popular ones.

2.3. Sportswear

Developments in technology and escalating standards of life have raised expectations from Sportswear. Individuals expect durability, design, and fashion and demand performance and clothing comfort (Çivitci & Dengin Sevinir, 2014). In the textile industry, the active Sportswear's market has grown globally. Competition in this sector compels manufacturers to fulfil consumers' demands of clothing comfort besides Aesthetics. Therefore, clothing comfort of sportswear researches has become more critical (Güneşoğlu, 2005). Clothing comfort is related to raising standards of life; thus, studies on this subject have drawn both researchers and manufacturers (Öner & Okur, 2010). Clothing comfort is defined by Slater (1985) as "a pleasant state of physiological, psychological and physical harmony between a human being and the environment" (Okur et al., 2008).

2.4. Brand loyalty

Customer brand loyalty came into enterprisers' eyes for several years. It plays a more and more critical role in modern global marketing. To maximize profit, people try different strategies, among which a large amount of people in business recognizes loyalty. On the other hand, some may assert that it is a challenge to achieve it. Most of all, by finding the elements and effects of loyalty, business people may better understand the nature of consumer faith (Mao, 2010). Brand loyalty has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention, and Perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty and purchase intention. Brand loyalty can mediate the perceived quality of purchase intention, while perceived quality can mediate brand awareness of purchase intention (Noorlitaria et al., 2020). Under high-involvement conditions, the loyalty program's value perception influences brand loyalty directly and indirectly through program loyalty. Under low-involvement conditions, value perception has no direct effect on brand loyalty (Yi & Jeon, 2003).

Schultz and Block (2015) show that manufacturer brands are challenged, not by private label, but by no brand preference in the category (Schultz & Block, 2015). The influential factors in brand loyalty of dairy products in the Tehran city market sequenced as follows: Price, Taste, Advertising, Packaging, Availability and word of mouth. In the end, the summarizing, concluding and suggesting were accomplished (Hoseini & Rezaei, 2011).

2.5. Emotional connection

A consumer evaluates the quality aspects of a specific brand and purchases a brand that satisfies their emotional needs. The emotional value to a brand is accompanied by positive affection of using the brand (such as joy and pleasure). It leads to an increase in a tendency to buy that brand again. In other words, consumers that have a good feeling in purchasing a product (feel-good factor) from a brand may buy that brand again (Kumar et al., 2009; Shevchenko, 2014).
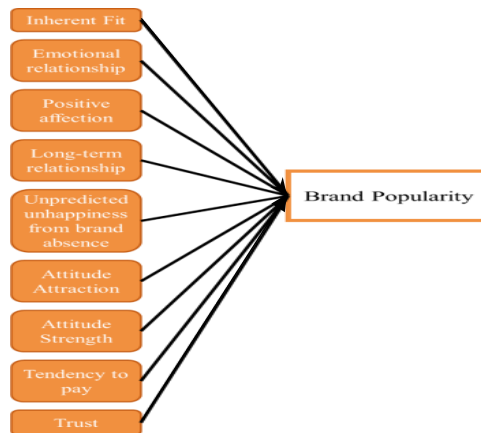

Figure 1. A conceptual model of Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) research on brand popularity.

2.6. Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** There exists a relationship between inherent fit and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There exists a relationship between emotional connection and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 3:** There exists a relationship between positive affection and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 4:** There exists a relationship between long-term relations and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 5:** There exists a relationship between unexpected upset because of brand absence and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 6:** There exists a relationship between overall attraction attitude and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 7:** There exists a relationship between attitude strength: certainty/confidence, and brand popularity.
- **Hypothesis 8:** There exists a relationship between brand popularity and the tendency for paying more.
- **Hypothesis 9:** There exists a relationship between brand popularity and trust.

3. Methodology

The current paper is practical research regarding the research goal because the findings are used for existing questions. The nature of research is descriptive and cohesion type that is considered under the covariance investigation. The statistical community of this research were the students of sports science at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad enrolled in the 2nd semester of the academic year 2016-2017, consisting of 457 people. The attitude of students towards the products of Adidas was also assessed. Two hundred twenty people participated in the study. The survey consisted of two main sections, which have been achieved through a thorough research in this field. In the first section (general questions), an attempt was made to gather comprehensive and demographic information related to the respondents. In the second section (technical questions), research variables were studied.

The brand popularity questionnaire of Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) was utilized for information gathering. The survey questions are arranged in a 5-point Likert spectrum, one of the most popular measuring scales. The stability of the survey was calculated via Cronbach's coefficient for brand popularity (α=0.787). Moreover, a respondent's group features such as gender, employment status, level of education and level of family income were investigated in the descriptive statistics section for data analysis. For the inferential statistics section, we used the Kolmogorov Smirnov, Pearson correlation, simultaneous regression, and confirmatory factor analysis by LISREL software.

4. Results

According to the results, 45.0% of the respondents are male, 55.0% female, 21.9% employed and 78.1% unemployed.72.4% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, and 27.6% have a Master degree. Furthermore, from the student's point of view (both male and female), the most critical statement in brand loyalty was "How much do you value for him/her?" ($\bar{x} = 4.35, \text{SD} = \pm 0.70$). and the last one was " How much of using this brand is due to your friends' group acceptance?" ($\bar{x} = 2.94, \text{SD} = \pm 1.21$).

Table 1. Brand loyalty.

Standard deviation	Mean value	Statements related to brand loyalty	Level of importance
1.80	2.94	How much of using this brand is due to you being admitted to your friend's group?	Least importance
1.70	2.96	How much do you use this brand to match your favourite group?	
1.20	2.97	This brand is a scientific and emotional experience.	
0.70	4.53	How much do you value him in your life?	Most important
0.80	4.33	How much does seeing him/her excites you?	
0.80	4.32	How much keeping a relationship is essential to you?	

In addition, descriptive findings on the importance of various brand popularity dimensions are listed in Table 2. In the following, the importance and circumstance of brand popularity components will be discussed according to a normal distribution

of the obtained data using a single T-sample test and dedicating score three as the hypothetical indicator.

Table 2. The circumstance of brand popularity components importance.

	The concept	Hypothetical mean value	Observed mean value with a standard deviation	T statistic	Degree of freedom	Significance level
1	Inherent fit	3	3.98±0.53	108.2	219	0.05
2	Emotional relation	3	4.11±0.75	81.3	219	0.05
3	Positive affection	3	4.2±0.75	83.02	219	0.05
4	Long-term relation	3	3.74±1.07	51.57	219	0.05
5	Predicted unhappiness	3	3.50±0.65	79.54	219	0.05
6	Attraction attitude	3	3.3±0.89	54.57	219	0.05
7	Strength attitude	3	3.15±0.86	54.15	219	0.05
8	Tendency to pay	3	3.36±0.74	66.6	219	0.05
9	Trust	3	3.34±0.85	58.1	219	0.05

As it can be inferred, the highest mean value is related to positive affect, and the lowest mean value is for strength attitude. According to the results of Table 3, it can be observed that a meaningful difference exists between hypothetical and observed mean values. Therefore, the difference between the theoretical mean value and the observed mean value of every component is of a considerable level. In the following, a conceptual model of research using LISREL software will be presented. The standardized output coefficients of LISREL are plotted in the diagram related to the T score of each coefficient. In addition to the LISREL output, path coefficients are set on the conceptual model of research. The following discussions are presented for every relationship between components and statements.

Table 3. Indicators of model's goodness fit.

Fitness level	Desirable value	Obtained value		Fitness statistics
Acceptable	Lower than 0.05	0.05		Root mean error
		Lower limit	Upper limit	
		0.49	0.07	
Desirable	Lower than 3	2.66		Chi-square to the degree of freedom ratio
Desirable	Higher than 0.9	0.91		NFI
Desirable	Higher than 0.9	0.94		CFI

According to the mean values for nine components of brand popularity and the LISREL's output data presented in Figure 2, the calculated x2∕df is 2.66, which show suitable model fitness. Also, the root of the mean square error approximation in the model

is 0.05, and the value of GFI, AGFI, NFI, and CFI components was obtained 0.77, 0.74, 0.91, and 0.94, respectively. In addition, the RMR value of this model was 0.05. Therefore, according to the indicators and model outputs, the obtained data relatively coincides with the model. Furthermore, the presented indicators demonstrate that the proposed model is suitable and experimental data coincides with the model nicely.
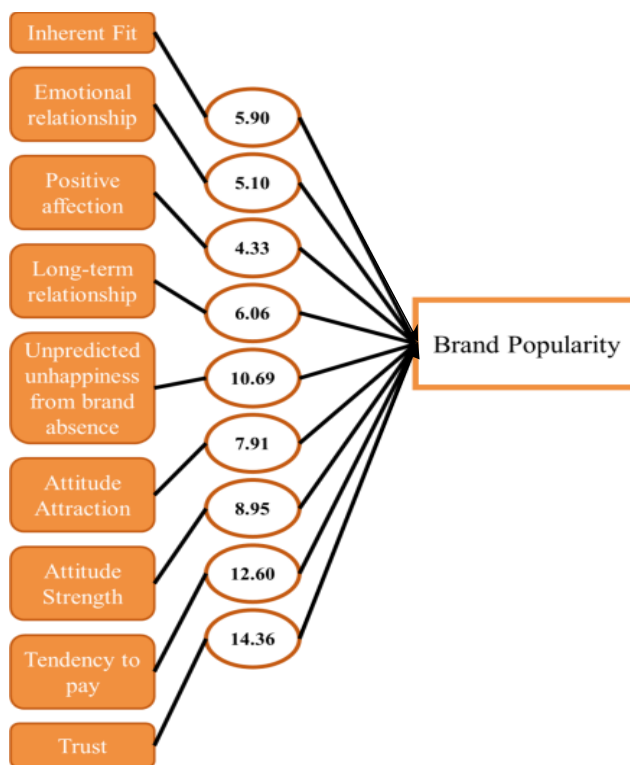
Figure 2. The diagram of research model analysis along with the factor loading.

5. Managerial implications

The most element in brand popularity is trust. In other words, customers say the most meaningful aspect for them is trust in the brand to which they decided to be a loyal customer. After that, the unpredictable unhappiness of the brand absence, tendency to pay, and attitude strength. As we know, loyal customers are the most valuable assets of a business. So, a businessman needs this information, and the customer needs to have more success in his job.

6. Discussion and conclusion

According to the data analysis results, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between inherent fit and brand popularity. This research follows (Albert & Merunka,

2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). They believed that matching an inherent fit of a brand and presenting an identity similar to a desired identity from the consumer can influence brand love and even brand loyalty. In addition, if the consumer feels the same as the brand, they will have a higher enthusiasm to have the brand. Thus, forming a negative opinion known as a psychological motivation in a consumer's behaviour can provide an opportunity for popularity and help improve the sports industry's domestic production. Researchers believed that brand identification could enhance dependency and nurture an emotional connection in consumers loyal to the brand. It seems that the consumer loves the brands that create a feeling of true identity. Thus, forming a positive and desirable surface that is discerned from the inner dimensions of a consumer can provide an opportunity for the introduction and verbal propaganda of the brand.

According to the results, there exists a relationship between a long-term relationship and brand popularity. These research results are under Fournier (1998), which showed that consumers have a strong brand relationship. Thus, brand love brings about a long-term relationship between the consumer and the brand. According to the research, a brand can create a sense of love and interest by helping the social identity of the consumer. Therefore, creating social relations such as running campaigns and social networks usefully helps the long-term popularity of the brand.

There exists a positive and meaningful relationship between predicted unhappiness due to the absence of the brand and brand popularity. This item was only investigated in Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)'s research and indicated that if less popular brands enter production, the opportunity for increasing brand popularity increases. Therefore, brand success allows marketers to create a competitive advantage by showing flexibility against pressure and creating barriers for a competition of domestic producers.

There exists a positive and meaningful relationship between general overall attraction attitude and brand popularity. The result of this research follows Kheiry et al. (2013), which has found out that the experience and mood of the consumers influence the formation of a favourable attraction and emotional dependency with the brand. Many research discussed the existence of colour psychology in marketing. Thus, creating psychological behaviours can enhance this attraction. In addition, results show that consumers who have gained emotional dependency on the brand deliver a higher level of loyalty. There exists a positive and meaningful relationship between attitude strength (certainty/confidence) and brand popularity. Through conducting this specific study, a review of a wide range of literature in the field of management studies was conducted, especially in marketing. In addition, applying the purchase decision model to practice in the marketing industry with empirical research and hypothesis testing contributed to this study to assert the firmness of purchase decisions and initially make it more applicable in marketing (Khuong & Tram, 2015).

The results show a positive and meaningful relationship between brand popularity and the tendency to pay more. The findings of this research are per (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Jalali et al., 1390), which belief that perceived value, quality, and specific value influence loyalty and the tendency to buy again from a brand. According to the results, loyal consumers buy only from one brand despite various existing brands. They may buy a product with up to 20 % higher price. Thus, it seems that if a consumer gains an

advantage as a result of their shopping, they may be ready to buy again. Accordingly, complementary attractions in shopping such as motivational and attractive packages (small gifts and postal cards) can provide this opportunity.

There exists a positive and meaningful relationship between trust and brand popularity. The result of this research is under (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Kafashpour et al., 2009; Motaharinejad et al., 2014; Yasin & Shamim, 2013), which all indicate that experience, reliance, and emotional commitment to the brand has a positive and meaningful relationship on consumer's shopping intention. Shopping intentions have a positive and significant effect on brand love and verbal propaganda. According to the obtained results, attachment to the brand is the result of the brand's trust and satisfaction. Thus, trust is considered the most crucial factor in creating a positive and desirable mental image in the consumer's mind. Building trust is the last chain in brand development, is the most influential factor in building brand love, and facilitates verbal propaganda.

Recommendations arising from the research findings

Research is significant and applicable only if the results can offer suggestions and practical solutions. Now with the cultivation of examining hypotheses and determining how factors may influence the research procedure, these results may help sports managers, producers, and even consumers of domestic Sportswear. In this regard, the following suggestions are recommended:

- **Brand-consumer relationship management -** It is suggested to the sportswear producers to establish a long-term relationship with their consumers by implementing a Consumer Relationship Management (CRM) program, regulated marketing techniques, and creating a positive experience for the consumer.
- **Advertisements -** Pleasant emotions accompany emotional dependency, and this dynamic relationship results in higher brand popularity. Therefore, it is advised to the sportswear producers to create hype and excitement by investing in various advertisements in mass media. It makes an emotional dependency on consumers.
- **Product quality –** The results showed that the sportswear producers enhance the quality of products according to the consumer's needs to increase the brand popularity, resulting in the establishment of a long-term relationship of consumers with their products (especially physical education students).

According to the results, popularity factors have a positive effect on brand popularity. Sportswear producers can enhance their brand popularity by implementing desired plans and applying these factors, resulting in an up-gradation of their brand in the sportswear industry and increasing their position in the competitive market.

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مدل محبوبیت برند ورزشی آدیداس در مصرف کنندگان ایرانی

وحید ساعتچیان¹ ⬚، بهادر عزیزی²* ⬚، مهدی طالب‌پور³ ⬚

¹ استادیار مدیریت ورزشی، گروه علوم ورزشی، دانشگاه بین‌المللی امام رضا(ع)، مشهد، ایران.

² دانشجوی دکتری مدیریت ورزشی، دانشکده علوم ورزشی، دانشگاه فردوسی، مشهد، ایران.

³ استاد مدیریت ورزشی، دانشکده علوم ورزشی، دانشگاه فردوسی، مشهد، ایران.

چکیده

هدف: هدف پژوهش حاضر، ارزیابی عوامل مؤثر بر محبوبیت برندهای لباس ورزشی مانند آدیداس بر مصرف‌کنندگان از دیدگاه دانشجویان رشتۀ تربیت‌بدنی و علوم ورزشی بود.

روش: این پژوهش به روش توصیفی و از نوع پیمایشی انجام و داده‌های آن به‌صورت میدانی جمع‌آوری شدند. ابزار پژوهش پرسشنامۀ محبوبیت برند (کارول و آهوویا، ۲۰۰۶) بود که از معادلات ساختاری برای تائید ابزار پژوهش استفاده شد. جامعۀ آماری پژوهش شامل ۴۵۷ نفر از دانشجویان رشتۀ تربیت‌بدنی دانشگاه فردوسی مشهد بودند. بر اساس فرمول کوکران، ۲۱۰ نفر از این تعداد بهروش نمونه‌گیری تصادفی به‌عنوان نمونۀ آماری انتخاب شدند. برای تحلیل داده‌ها از آزمون‌های کلموگروف اسمیرنوف و تی تک نمونه‌ای استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: نتایج پژوهش نشان داد همبستگی مثبتی بین عوامل مؤثر بر محبوبیت برند وجود دارد. میزان علاقه به یک برند، دارای بیشترین و نگرش قدرت، کمترین تأثیر را در محبوبیت یک برند دارند. تولیدکنندگان پوشاک ورزشی می‌توانند از این مؤلفه‌ها برای افزایش محبوبیت برند خود استفاده کنند. صنعت پوشاک ورزشی، نیز می‌تواند در کنار افزایش سهم برندها از بازار خود از بازار رقابتی و از طریق تأثیرگذاری مثبت بر مصرف‌کنندگان و استفاده از سایر مؤلفه‌های محبوبیت برند توسعه یابد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: در این پژوهش، برای اولین بار در کشور ایران به بررسی محبوبیت یک برند ورزشی معتبر در سطح جهان پرداخته شده است.

✉ **تماس با نویسنده مسئول: بهادر عزیزی** bahador.azizi@mail.um.ac.ir