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Sports Business Journal

Scientific Quarterly Journal
of **Alzahra University**

Autumn 2023

Vol. 3, Issue. 4, Serial Number 8

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Editor-in-Chief Note

In The 5th issue of the **Sports Business Journal** was published, and more audiences know it today. The number of fast-rejected papers has decreased because the journal's scope has found its position among its audience. We are honored that today researchers in the sports business scopes can publish their research results in a specialized journal with the highest qualitative and structural forms.

Through this issue, not only the grammatical editing of the articles with high precision has been done, but all the references have been controlled and automated with End note software. So, all references in the text of the articles have linked to their original pages on the Internet. This quality obtains by spending a lot of time and with high precision, like the other high-quality journals worldwide. This effort makes the sources and references with the minimum errors in each paper, and incorrect references are corrected carefully. Also, all the articles will be carefully uploaded on the researchers' Publons, Research gate, and Google Scholar pages. As well as, every time one of them has been cited by any author around the world, they will be informed. In addition, the journal's reviewers can inform other editors and researchers of their activities by recording their reviews on their personal Publons pages and thus receive the possibility of more review invitations from the different international chief editors.

In addition, sharing articles and journal issues on its social media have increased its and the authors' visibility, increasing the journal's H-index to 8. This growth is a good statistic for a short period from its started activity. In this way, we have tried to register the journal in valid scientific indexes. By the grace of God and the cooperation of dear authors, we hope it succeeds in receiving the highest scientific rank in Iran. Furthermore, we will coordinate that Iranian writers and researchers cooperate more and better with foreign researchers in conducting research work and writing joint scientific articles.

In this way, we are incredibly grateful to the support of the Vice-Chancellor of Research and the Publications Department of **Alzahra University**, who did not hesitate to do everything they could and needed by the executive team of the journal. Also, we are grateful to the dear referees for their careful and compassionate reviews of the articles, the authors of this issue for submitting their valuable papers, and the detailed answers to the corrections requested by the referees, improving the quality of the articles. In line with our mission and to responding the young researchers' requests, we hope to plan and hold two workshops to help young researchers conduct high-quality research and write quality articles in English and at the level of international indexes and promote the articles.

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Developing the Brand Equity of Football Clubs: The Partial Role of Identity Distinction, Identity Attractiveness, and Fan-Team Identification (Case Study: Iranian Premier Football League)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study aimed to develop the brand equity model of football clubs in the Iranian premier football league. We emphasized the partial role of identity distinction, attractiveness, and fan-team identification.

Methodology: The research method was quantitative, correlational, and practical. The participants consisted of football fans in the Pro League of Iran, and a sample of 450 fans was selected through random sampling in virtual pages attributed to chosen clubs. The research tool was a combination of standard questionnaires. Their content validity was verified using marketing experts' comments, and the structural validity was verified using confirmatory factor analysis. According to Cronbach's alpha equal 0/82, the questionnaire's reliability was confirmed. Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) by AMOS software has been applied to use the validity of the results.

Finding: The results showed that identity distinction and attractiveness significantly and positively affected fan-team identification. Fan identification also had a substantial and positive impact on brand equity. The effect of identity distinction and identity attractiveness on fan-team identification and fan-team identification on brand equity demonstrated the importance of psychological and social elements in football club branding.

Originality: Trying to make the identity of Iranian football clubs attractive and different can provide the necessary ground for the unity of the fans with the clubs and facilitate the branding by improving brand equity. This research can be one of the few studies conducted in the field of sports brands in Iran by combining identity distinction, identity attractiveness, fan-team identification, and brand equity as a comprehensive model.

Keywords

Customer
Customer Satisfaction
Structural Equation
Modeling
Target Market

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/02/16

Accepted: 2023/06/25

How to cite this article:

Jaber¹, A. (2023). Developing the Brand Equity of Football Clubs: The Partial Role of Identity Distinction, Identity Attractiveness, and Fan-Team Identification (Case Study: Iranian Premier Football League). *Sports Business Journal*, 3(4), 13-28. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.42889.1073>



1. Introduction

Creating powerful brands and managing their various dimensions to create brands with high brand equity in the minds of sports fans has attracted a lot of attention in the field sports industry (Ma & Kaplanidou, 2021). Paying attention to sports organizations and clubs as commercial brands have forced sports managers to see sports as an attractive industry and seek effective management of its relevant dimensions (Ghasemizsdeh Nugh et al., 2022). The brand of sports teams can provide the basis for using strategies to build powerful and attractive positions of sports clubs among the fans. Every brand evokes certain features in the minds of its audience (Wakefield et al., 2021); therefore, attention should be paid to the management of concepts such as the attractiveness of the brand identity, the distinction of the brand identity, the fan-team identification with the sports teams, and finally the brand equity in the minds of sports fans. The attractiveness and recognition of the brand identity, the title of fans with sports teams, and the brand equity of sports teams can provide sports managers with comprehensive information about the characteristics and tendencies of their fans. Studying these variables that lead the fans towards greater integration with the sports teams may establish positive behaviors and emotions toward the sports team (Tarighi et al., 2021).

Brand equity can create significant potential in the actions and reactions of fans towards sports teams. Wakefield et al. (2021) emphasize that the brand equity of sports teams has considerable potential in managing fans' buying behaviors, attending matches, and watching sports events (Wakefield et al., 2021). Creating a higher commitment to sports teams and increasing loyalty and emotional attachments of fans to sports teams can be defined as the consequences of strengthening the exceptional brand value of sports teams and clubs. Chen and Tseng (2010) have paid attention to brand equity as a source of competitive advantage for organizations (Chen & Tseng, 2010). In brand management, brand equity development will lead to greater penetration of the brand in the market and an increase in the brand's share in the market (Pina & Dias, 2021). The brand equity of sports teams is one of the most vital and critical aspects of business management in sports organizations (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007) that provides a competitive advantage in the changing market (Kiani & Nazari, 2022). The main goal of brand management is to create exceptional brand value for products or services. Since achieving unique brand value and differentiating sports brands can be defined as the goal of sports managers and marketers (Rezaei & Sharifian, 2021), the special attention of sports managers to this crucial goal and the study of factors affecting it can be of great importance.

Research conducted in the social identity field has pointed out the importance of identity distinction in creating a superior brand identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). People like to be with teams or people with values, distinguishing them from others (Ahearne et al., 2005). Brand identity can be critical in developing customers' commitment to football brands (Asadollahi et al., 2020). Mariutti and Giraldi (2020) believe credibility and prestige will improve the brand's value. Therefore, the distinctiveness of sports teams as a social institution can lead fans to be closer to these teams and ultimately strengthen the exceptional value of the sports teams' brand in the fans' attitude and behavior (Mariutti & Giraldi, 2020). Cucka (2005) also emphasizes that displaying an identity that expresses

distinction is necessary for an organization to become attractive (Cucka, 2005). According to Carlson et al. (2002)'s findings, identity distinction and prestige effectively affect fans' identification with their favorite team, purchases, and attendance of fans in stadiums. The distinctiveness of a sports team brand can provide the ground for more identification with the sports team and increase the presence of fans and the amount of their purchases. Ma and Kaplanidou (2021) believe that the nature and identity of the performance of sports teams play an essential role in the development and expansion of sports brands. According to the findings of Mazloomi Soveini (2022), fan-team identification had a positive effect on the brand equity of the Persepolis football team. Ronaldo (2020) considers brands' identity and credibility adequate in engineering brand value. The findings of Jaber et al. (2020) revealed that self-definitional needs, including similarity identity, distinction identity, and prestige identity, had positive and significant effects on the brand equity of football teams.

On the other hand, the attractiveness of identity in marketing and business is considered one of the necessary conditions for fan-team identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Researchers have revealed that the level of identification of people with an organization depends on the level of organizational attractiveness (Dutton et al., 1994). Therefore, to take advantage of the benefits of fan-team identification (such as higher loyalty and brand development), sports organizations and clubs should seek to formulate and implement effective strategies to make their identity more attractive to their fans. Ahearne et al. (2005) have defined the attractiveness of identity as the degree of preference and support of individuals towards a company (Ahearne et al., 2005). The beauty of brand identity is one of the elements that lead to customer identification with a brand (Marin & Ruiz, 2007). Ashforth and Mael (1989) believe that people cognitively identify with successful organizations to satisfy their internal needs, such as self-esteem and distinction. According to Osborne and Cowen (2002), recognition can be considered an effective way to attract customers in organizations with a high-performance level. Since the level of attractiveness of an organization is adequate in meeting at least one of the audience's self-expressions needs (identity similarity, identity distinction, and identity prestige) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), sports managers should pay attention to the fans' wishes and motivations in supporting the team. Sports events are of great importance in meeting fans' expectations and ultimately making the identity of sports clubs attractive to fans. Hodson (2021) considers creating a connection between brand identity and customer-oriented brand value is necessary.

The identification and sense of belonging of fans to sports teams is also considered one of the key concepts in developing sports brands (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). Fan-team identification is a fan's unity and close connection to a particular team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Identification with a sports team is an example of organizational identification (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007), and this issue has attracted the attention of many researchers who pay attention to sports fans as sports customers (Chen & Tseng, 2010). The reasons why fans identify with sports teams can be different according to the various motivations of people towards sports teams. Fans who are very serious and fanatical usually show stronger loyalty and consider team identity an essential part of their identity (Brondoni, 2001). The findings of Jaber et al. (2019) demonstrated that

attractiveness and distinction significantly affect fans' identification with football teams (Jaberi et al., 2019). In addition, fans identified with sports teams have a more positive attitude towards their team. For example, this group of fans will have a greater desire to consume the products of the companies sponsoring their team (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). The more the fans identify with their favorite team, the more attitudinal and behavioral loyalty they will have toward their teams. The research literature on fan-team identification has shown that the two indicators of prestige and distinction are predictive elements of fan-team identification (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). The research of Jaberi et al. (2014) has also revealed that fan-team identification has a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of football fans. According to He et al. (2012), fan-team identification is an essential predictor of fan attendance at university sports events. Liaogang et al. (2007) also emphasized the effect of identification on ticket and product sales. Based on their findings, Wu et al. (2012) stated that sports organizations should devote their primary resources to developing identification with fans. This phenomenon can significantly increase the desire for support among sports fans. To develop fan-team identification, sports teams should focus on improving the fans' trust in the team. Increasing the interaction of fans with sports teams and organizations can also strengthen fan-team identification (Wu et al., 2012). It seems that achieving a team brand image that fans like to identify with can make fans spend more time and money on their team and related products (Carlson et al., 2002). Sport marketers can be more efficient in sports by concentrating on the identification concept (Jaberi & Barkhordar, 2022).

The survival and continued success of sports teams and clubs as commercial organizations in the sports industry is guaranteed by their ability to create higher equity (Holt, 1995). In other words, the performance and actual value of sports organizations and teams are determined by intangible assets such as brand equity. Fortunato (2008) believes that the development of brand awareness can strengthen the brand image, and the strengthening of the brand image may lead to the improvement of brand equity and, finally, the increase of the loyalty of the fans. Mahlangu et al. (2013), in a study to evaluate fans' perceptions of brand equity, found that brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association were respectively the most important in creating brand equity from the fans' point of view. The results of the research conducted by Mahlangu et al. (2013) showed that to reach loyal fans, and sports marketers should resort to multi-faceted branding strategies because this issue can lead to the sustainable success of sports team brands. Holt (1995) believes that images, logos, and symbols effectively create exceptional brand value in sports. Ross (2006)'s research has also shown that brand awareness and associations are critical in creating brand value in sports. Ventura and Dedeoglu (2013) found that sports venues, star players, and team successes were the most important in creating the brand value of football teams in Turkey. Underwood et al. (2001) presented a model in which identification is defined as a mechanism to create an emotional connection between fans and services related to the brand. These researchers believed that the more fans experience a higher identification with their favorite team, the higher value they will place on the brand of their favorite team. In addition, Underwood et al. (2001) believe that some characteristics of sports services can lead to fans' identification with sports teams. In sports, brand equity is particularly

effective in the financial success of sports teams (Ross, 2006). Therefore, if sports managers and marketers have a complete and better understanding of the importance of the brand value of sports teams and the factors affecting it, they will be able to achieve better competitive advantages and more loyal fans.

With the professionalization of sports and, primarily, football in recent years in Iran, paying particular attention to the factors affecting the financial development of sports clubs can provide the basis for strengthening the economic foundation of sports teams. Although Iranian football clubs enjoy considerable popularity among fans, and this issue has created exceptional potential for team branding and revenue generation, the lack of ability of clubs to manage incomes against expenses has put football clubs in an unstable financial condition. Moreover, the solid economic dependence of most Iranian football teams on government and quasi-government budgets and their inability to generate income have made it inevitable to pay attention to the concepts related to sports branding in the current situation. In this regard, studying the process relevant to strengthening the brand equity of sports teams will be an increasing need in the sports field in Iran. Despite the studies that have been conducted in the field of Iranian football marketing, the examination of psychological and sociological factors, including fan-team identification, identity attractiveness, identity distinction, and brand equity through a comprehensive model for explaining the relationship between fans and sports teams in the direction of branding has been neglected. The current research combining marketing concepts (brand equity) with psycho-social concepts (fan-team identification, identity attractiveness, and identity distinction identity) can be considered an essential step in covering this research gap in the research literature in the domestic sports market.

Having a comprehensive understanding of the process of creating identification and developing the brand equity of sports clubs provides the opportunity for sports marketers and managers to present their sports goods and services in a way that satisfies the needs of their fans and covers their needs and demands effectively. Even though significant research has been conducted in the field of brand equity in the Iranian football setting, this research is considered one of the few studies in the field of sports brands in Iran with a combination of identity distinction, identity attractiveness, fan-team identification, as well as brand equity in the form of a comprehensive model. In other words, Iranian football marketing has observed no research with this combination of the so-called variables through the proposed model. According to the research literature reviewed above in previous sections, the relationships between the variables are drawn and investigated based on what is presented in the conceptual model shown in Figure 1. In the framework of this model, the impact of components such as identity distinction, identity attractiveness, and fan-team identification on the brand equity of Iranian football clubs will be studied. In other words, the researchers seek to answer the following question: what is the role of distinction identity, identity attractiveness, and fan-team identification in explaining the brand equity of the brand of football clubs in the Iranian premier league?

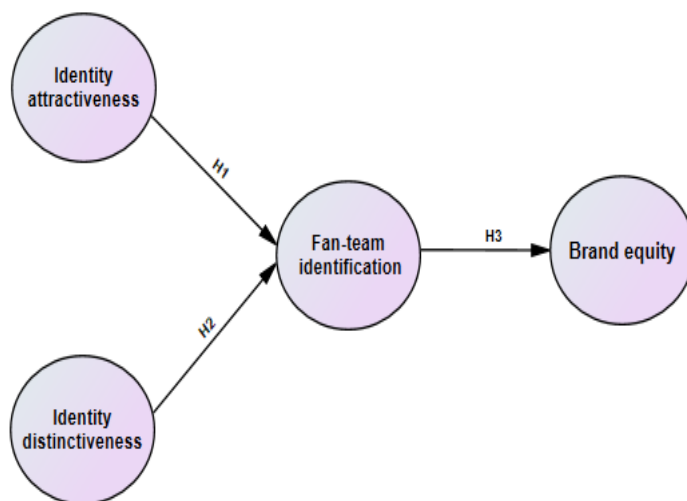


Figure 1. The research conceptual model.

2. Methodology

The research was a quantitative, correlational, and practical study conducted in the field. This research was an applied study in terms of purpose. Library studies and a field study among the statistical population (football fans in the Iranian premier league) have been used to collect the research data. In this research, library methods were mainly used to collect data related to the research literature and background, and the field method was used to collect data to confirm or reject the relationships among the research variables. Standard questionnaires designed based on the 5-point Likert were used as the research tools. In general, the questionnaire included four variables with 13 items. Data collection tools were [Bhattacharya and Sen \(2003\)](#)'s identity differentiation questionnaire (three items), [Ahearne et al. \(2005\)](#)'s identity attractiveness questionnaire (three items), [Mael and Ashforth \(1992\)](#)'s fan-team identification questionnaire (three items), and [Yoo and Donthu \(2001\)](#)'s brand equity questionnaire (four items). The content validity and confirmatory factor analysis methods were used to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. The content validity was verified by inserting the opinions of seven sports marketing experts. Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the reliability of scales. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to verify the construct validity of the questionnaire. The confirmatory factor analysis results demonstrated the questionnaires' structural validity (factor loadings for all items were evaluated as more than 0.50). The results of confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha value have been presented for each construct in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. The result of CFA and reliability values of the research constructs.

Construct	Items	OL (>0.70)	α (>0.70)
Identity attractiveness	Q1	0.80 ^a	0.81
	Q2	0.81 ^a	
	Q3	0.82 ^a	
Identity distinctiveness	Q4	0.83 ^a	0.83
	Q5	0.81 ^a	
	Q6	0.86 ^a	
Fan-team identification	Q7	0.83 ^a	0.80
	Q8	0.81 ^a	
	Q9	0.80 ^a	
Brand equity	Q10	0.82 ^a	0.82
	Q11	0.83 ^a	
	Q12	0.81 ^a	
	Q13	0.86 ^a	

Notes: a: $P < 0.05$. OL= Outer Loading. α = Cronbach's Alpha.

As Table 1 shows, the values of indices all reach the acceptable amount and indicate a good model fit.

Based on the history of the clubs, winning the championship, the number of fans, participation in the Asian Champions League, the activity of the club's website, and the amount of media attention paid to the clubs, the fans of Esteghlal Tehran, Persepolis Tehran, Sepahan Isfahan, Tractorsazi Tabriz, and Foolad Khuzestan were selected as statistical population. Morgan's table evaluated the number of suitable samples for the research as 384 people. Due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the absence of fans in the Premier League matches during the research period, virtual pages attributed to the clubs were used to collect data. For this purpose, to reach a suitable and sufficient number of samples, considering the possibility of non-return of the questionnaires or invalidity of some of the questionnaires for various reasons, 450 questionnaires were randomly distributed among the fans on virtual pages attributed to the clubs (via email and social media). To do this, the research group sent a message involving the research aim and the fans' consent form for the selected fans on virtual pages, and after getting their telephone numbers and email addresses, the questionnaires were sent to them via email and social media (Whatsapp, Instagram, and Telegram). From the distributed questionnaires, 398 items were returned, and 388 were qualified for data analysis after the initial review. SPSS version 23 and AMOS version 24 were used for data analysis.

3. Results

The demographic features of the research sample have been given in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Demographic features of the research sample.

Demographic features		Percent %
Employment status	Employed	42%
	Not employed	58%
Age	18–29	54%
	30–39	29%
	40–49	15%
	>=50	2%
Education	University degrees	80%
	Diploma & high school degrees	20%
Favorite team	Esteghlal FC	28%
	Sepahan FC	19%
	Perspolis FC	30%
	Tractorsazi Tabriz	15%
	Foolad Khoozestan	8%
Marital state	Married	37%
	Not married	63%

Structural equation modeling has been used to test the relationships among the research constructs. [Table 3](#) presents the general fitness indicators of the research model.

Table 3. General indicators of research model fit.

Index	CMIN/Df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Final model	2.82	0.91	0.91	0.90	0.91	0.088
Acceptable	<3	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	0.10<

According to [Table 3](#), the general indicators revealed excellent fitness for the research model. In other words, the collected data support the research model. The structural equation model of the research, along with the regression coefficient, has been presented in [Figure 2](#).

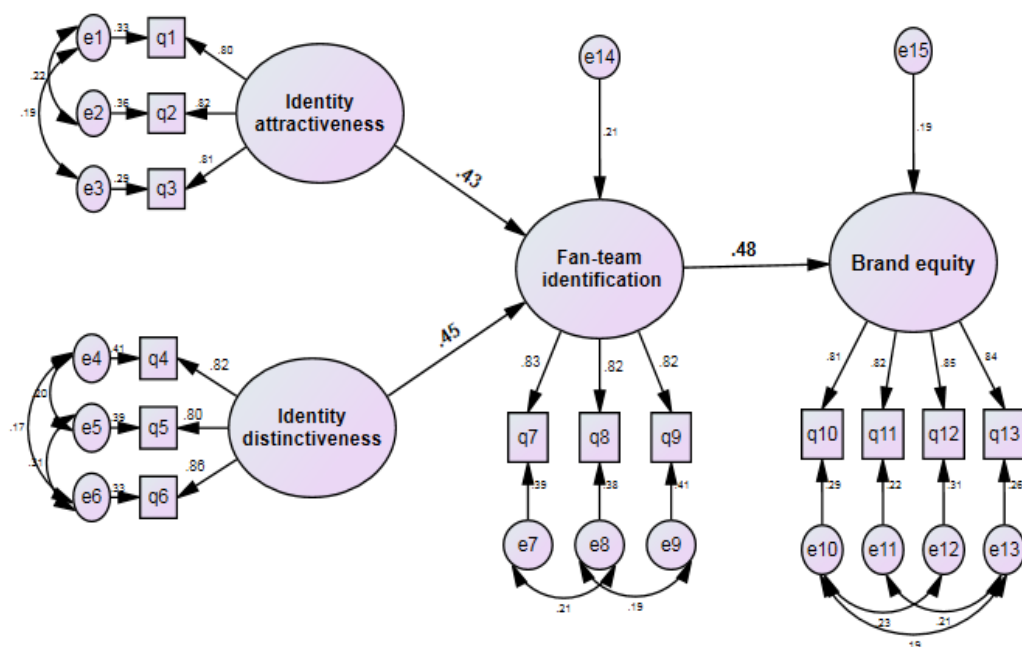


Figure 2. Structural equation of the research model

Critical value and p-value have been used to test the significance of the relationship among the constructs. Based on the significance level of 0.05, the critical value should be greater than 1.96. Less than this value, the model's relevant parameter is insignificant. Also, values less than 0.05 for p value indicate a significant relationship. Table 4 shows the relationships among the constructs in the research model along with regression coefficient values.

Table 4. Regression coefficients and test results of relationships.

Number	Exogenous variable	Path	Endogenous variable	Beta coefficient	Critical value	Significance level	Result
1	Identity distinctiveness		Fan-team identification	0.43	13.96	*	Supported
2	Identity attractiveness		Fan-team identification	0.45	17.63	*	Supported
3	Fan-team identification		Brand equity	0.48	16.87	*	Supported

0.05 < p *

4. Discussion and conclusion

Building powerful brands has become the marketing priority of many organizations due to the significant advantages it creates. Strong brands can create a distinctive and attractive identity for sports clubs among fans. Creating suitable fields to respond to the growing needs of fans as customers and the core audience of football has forced the managers of sports and marketing to evaluate and satisfy the needs of fans and, in this way, create the

ground for increasing attendance (Ahearne et al., 2005). Bringing the identity of sports brands closer to the identity needs of fans will provide the basis for more communication between fans and sports clubs and will lead to strengthening the fan base and the brand equity of sports clubs. Therefore, one of the requirements of positioning sports brands is investigating fans' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors towards sports clubs through marketing studies and brand equity development.

Based on the research findings, identity distinction can provide the basis for developing the attractiveness of the brand identity of Iran's premier football league teams among fans. This finding is consistent with (Ahearne et al., 2005; Cucka, 2005). People like to show their characteristics different from similar groups by being members of other teams and meeting the need to differentiate their identity. The distinctiveness of a sports team can provide the basis for developing a stronger identity with the sports team and increase the presence of fans and the amount of their purchases (Carlson et al., 2002). Having special and unique features such as employing famous players, using attractive and unique colors and designs in team uniforms, and providing services and facilities that are different from other competitors can be considered essential in addressing the differentiation needs of the football fans' identity. Ashforth and Mael (1989) believed that people often cognitively identify with winning and successful teams and people, which leads to satisfying their self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner (2004) emphasized that people need to differentiate themselves from others. People want to be associated with teams or people with specific values that distinguish them from others (Ahearne et al., 2005). Cucka (2005) also emphasizes that displaying an identity that expresses distinction is necessary for an organization to become attractive. In organizations with a high-performance level, difference can be considered an effective way to attract customers (Osborne & Cowen, 2002).

Moreover, the findings of Jaberi et al. (2020) demonstrated that distinction identity positively affected the brand equity of football teams. Therefore, identity distinction is considered one of the essential factors in the attractiveness of an organization's identity, which can influence the tendency of sports fans and spectators towards sports teams as attractive brands. Suppose a sports team displays its unique characteristics as an organizational brand. In that case, it will create particular values in the minds of fans and spectators and make the ground for fans to connect with the team. According to Carlson et al. (2002) findings, identity distinction is practical in fan-team identification, purchases, and presence of fans in stadiums. Since high levels of personality and brand identity dimensions can increase brand prestige and excellence (Carlson et al., 2002), managing brand identity dimensions and drawing a strong identity of sports clubs in the minds and perceptions of fans can lead to strengthening prestige and the perceived distinction of fans from sports clubs and to provide the basis for increasing the identification of fans with sports clubs.

Part of this research revealed that the attractiveness of the identity has a positive effect on fan-team identification. Therefore, increasing the factors related to the attractiveness of the fans of Iranian football clubs can improve the identification and integration of fans with the sports clubs, and this phenomenon can lead to the creation of significant potential in the development of the fan base and generating more income for sports clubs. This

finding supports the results of studies by [Jaberi et al. \(2014\)](#); [Marin and Ruiz \(2007\)](#) and is consistent with them. [Ashforth and Mael \(1989\)](#) believe people cognitively identify with successful organizations to satisfy their inner needs. Therefore, paying attention to fans' emotional and psychological needs can be of particular importance in developing the brand of sports clubs and increasing fan-team identification. The research of [Ahearne et al. \(2005\)](#); [Ashforth and Mael \(1989\)](#); [Bhattacharya and Sen \(2003\)](#); [Dutton et al. \(1994\)](#); [Osborne and Cowen \(2002\)](#) also confirm this part of the findings. According to the results, it can be said that the provision of attractive elements in a way that makes the sports club and team different and beautiful compared to the competitors can create the ground for the fans to feel more identified with the clubs. If such a psychological and social relationship is established, the fans will feel their favorite clubs are a part of their existence and will support their club with all their heart. Undoubtedly, creating such conditions will create a platform for developing the clubs' brand equity and, as a result, generate more revenue from the fans' channel.

To develop fan-team identification, sports organizations should focus on increasing the fans' trust in the clubs. Increasing fans' interaction with sports clubs can also strengthen fans' identification ([Wu et al., 2012](#)). Using places and ceremonies that make the participation and presence of fans in football sports events attractive for fans can be effective in creating the identification of fans with their favorite clubs. If the identity of a sports team includes features that satisfy the fans' intrinsic needs and if the club's identity has values that distinguish that team from other competitors and at the same time have higher prestige than competitors, in this situation, the fans perceive their favorite clubs as an attractive club. They can identify with their clubs and are more committed to their favorite team ([Jaberi et al., 2014](#)).

Another part of the findings showed that fan-team identification had a positive and significant effect on the brand equity of the Iranian football clubs among the fans. Identification with favorite teams is a tool managers can use to reduce fans' sensitivity to the price of goods ([Tajfel & Turner, 2004](#)). [Carlson et al. \(2002\)](#) also believed that brand equity positively relates to the level of identification with the sports clubs. [Underwood et al. \(2001\)](#) found that the greater the identification between the customer and the product, the higher the brand equity value will be. The research of [Jaberi et al. \(2014\)](#) has also shown that fan-team identification has a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of football fans. Fan-team identification is an essential predictor of fan attendance at university sports events ([He et al., 2012](#)) and ticket and merchandise sales ([Liaogang et al., 2007](#)). [Mazloomi Soveini \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that fan-team identification is critical in improving the brand equity of the Persepolis football club ([Mazloomi Soveini, 2022](#)). Developing the fan-team identification level can also affect the behaviors of football fans toward sponsorships in the Football context ([Jaberi & Barkhordar, 2022](#)). Because a brand with a higher value can be the basis for more loyalty among consumers, sports managers, and marketers should use the brand equity of the brand as a significant competitive advantage to effectively manage the behavior and attitude of fans to attract more loyal fans and generate more revenue. In sports, which is considered a competitive setting for sports clubs, creating a distinct identity for teams and clubs can help strengthen clubs as commercial brands. Sports organizations should devote their primary resources to

developing identification with fans because this phenomenon can significantly enhance the desire for support among sports fans (Wu et al., 2012). By strengthening the identification of fans with sports teams and, as a result, improving their brand equity in fans' minds, sports teams can hope for higher revenue generation by having more loyal fans. Achieving a team brand image that fans want to identify with can make fans spend more time and money on their team and related products (Carlson et al., 2002).

Observing the attitudes and tendencies of the fans to match the identity of football clubs with the fans' wishes can be a crucial element in bringing the essence of the clubs closer to the fans. Using the fans' opinions and approaching them using different communication channels to make them participate in the management process of football clubs can provide the necessary opportunity to create fan-team identification. Creating an attractive and distinct identity requires a detailed assessment of the psychological, social, and cultural tendencies of the fans, and therefore, trying to address the fans' preferences can play a crucial role in creating and strengthening the brand of Iranian football clubs. The use of different approaches in the management of football clubs and fans and the use of socio-psychological experts in managing the behavior and emotions of fans can lead to improving the attractiveness of football clubs and ultimately improving their brand equity. Increasing the attractiveness and distinguishing the identity of football clubs, the use of attractive and famous players and coaches, as well as paying particular attention to visual elements in the design of places and uniforms attributed to football teams and clubs, can address part of the internal needs of the fans and provide the ground for the identification of the fans with football clubs. Sports marketing can be defined as a managerial-social process.

Therefore, a deep and detailed study of the marketing process for the sports industry will not be possible without considering sociological and psychological concepts. Effective communication management with fans in sports requires assessing fans' needs and evaluating their sociological and psychological needs. Considering the importance of relationship management with fans (as the core customers of the sports setting) in strengthening the brand equity of sports clubs and, as a result, increasing the revenue generation of sports clubs, the use of such studies can be one of the critical elements in the field of sports industry. Without a doubt, the correct management of CRM in sports will be impossible without paying attention to the sociological and psychological components governing the relationship between fans and sports clubs. Therefore, studying psychological and sociological aspects as a critical prerequisite in sports marketing in Iranian sports and conducting quantitative and qualitative studies to explain the different parts of fans' relationships with sports clubs is suggested. Considering that the brand equity of sports teams and clubs is a subjective and intangible concept, examining the process of developing the brand equity of sports clubs centered on fans in the sports field by conducting profound qualitative studies is recommended.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We are sincerely grateful to all experts and football fans who participated in the process of conducting his study.

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توسعه ارزش ویژه برند باشگاه‌های فوتبال: نقش نسبی تمایز هویت، جذابیت هویت، و هم‌هویتی هوادار-تیم (مطالعه موردی: لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران)

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کلیدواژه

ارزش ویژه برند
برندسازی
برند ورزشی
تمایز هویت
جذابیت هویت
هم‌هویتی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف از انجام پژوهش حاضر توسعه مدل توسعه ارزش ویژه برند باشگاه‌های لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران با تأکید بر نقش نسبی تمایز هویت، جذابیت هویت و هم‌هویتی هوادار-تیم بود.
روش: روش انجام تحقیق حاضر کمی-پیمایشی، از نوع همبستگی و با هدف کاربردی بود. جامعه آماری تحقیق شامل هواداران باشگاه‌های منتخب لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران بودند که تعداد ۴۵۰ نفر به عنوان نمونه آماری به طور تصادفی در صفحات مجازی منتسب به باشگاه‌های منتخب مورد مطالعه قرار گرفتند. ابزار تحقیق ترکیبی از پرسشنامه‌های استاندارد بود که روایی صوری و محتوایی آن با استفاده از نظرات متخصصان و روایی سازه با استفاده از تحلیل عامل تأییدی بررسی گردید. پایایی آن بر اساس آلفای کرونباخ معادل ۰/۸۲ محاسبه و مورد تأیید قرار گرفت. برای سنجش روایی و برازش مدل از روش مدلسازی معادلات ساختاری با نرم‌افزار ایموس استفاده گردید.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها نشان داد که تمایز هویت برند و جذابیت هویت برند تأثیر مثبت و معناداری بر هم‌هویتی هواداران داشته است. هم‌هویتی هواداران نیز دارای تأثیر مثبت و معناداری بر ارزش ویژه برند بوده است. تأثیر تمایز هویت، جذابیت هویت بر هم‌هویتی هوادار-تیم و تأثیر هم‌هویتی هوادار-تیم بر ارزش ویژه برند، حاکی از اهمیت عناصر روانشناختی و جامعه‌شناختی در فرایند برندسازی باشگاه‌های فوتبال بوده و نشان دهنده لزوم توسعه چنین رویکردی در حوزه‌های پژوهش و اجرا می‌باشد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: تلاش برای جذاب و متمایز ساختن هویت باشگاه‌های فوتبال ایران می‌تواند زمینه لازم را برای هم‌هویتی هواداران با باشگاه‌ها فراهم ساخته و برندسازی از باشگاه‌ها را از طریق افزایش ارزش ویژه برند تسهیل می‌کند. این تحقیق از معدود مطالعاتی محسوب می‌شود که در حوزه برندهای ورزشی در کشور ایران با ترکیب تمایز هویت، جذابیت هویت، هم‌هویتی و ارزش ویژه برند در قالب یک مدل منسجم صورت گرفته است.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۱/۱۱/۲۷

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۴/۰۴



The Role of Color in the Brand Commitment of Sporting Good's Consumers: Mediating Role of the Brand Equity

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Color is commonly regarded as the primary symbol that elicits customers' attraction, interest, or aversion. This research examines brand characteristics concerning color: Brand Commitment and Brand Equity.

Methodology: The statistical population consisted of all customers of sports shopping stores in Jahrom City. Due to the uncertainty of the number of the statistical population, 384 questionnaires were distributed by convenience sampling, 300 of which were analyzable. The Color questionnaires based on Haji Hassani et al. (2018), the Brand Equity questionnaire (Aaker & Keller, 1990), and the Brand Commitment questionnaire (Momen, 2014) were used for data collection. The face and content validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by sports management professors who were experts in sports marketing, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient confirmed the reliability of the questionnaires. Cronbach's alphas of questionnaires achieved 0.89 for color, 0.92 for brand equity, and 0.87 for brand commitment. PLS software was used for fitting and testing the hypotheses using structural patterns.

Findings: The results showed that color directly and significantly affects brand equity and commitment (Path coefficient = 0.50, t-value = 7.96). The mediating role of brand equity value on the role of color in brand commitment in sporting goods buyers is also confirmed (Path coefficient = 0.84, t-value = 6.50). The model fit analysis also showed that the proposed model has a goodness of fit (GOF = 0.57). According to the research findings, manufacturers and sports executives must always consider the importance of color, which is far more than its aesthetic aspect, in choosing a practical and comprehensive brand strategy.

Originality: Color in sports is presented as a unique symbol that often affects the biases of sports fans and excites them. According to this issue, the effect of color on the brand of sports goods was investigated in this research, which has been given less attention in the reviewed literature.

Keywords

Brand Attitude
Brand Commitment
Brand Strategy
Sports Branding
Symbol

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/07/30

Accepted: 2023/11/11

How to cite this article:

Rahmati, S., Safari Jafarloo, H. R., & Afroozeh, M. S. (2023). The Role of Color in the Brand Commitment of Sporting Good's Consumers: Mediating Role of the Brand Equity. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(4), 29-48. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.44525.1114>



1. Introduction

In contemporary society, advertising is considered the most effective way to convey the message of commercials to its audience (Kim & Jun, 2016), and one of the most influential and decisive issues in advertising is color (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Color is the spirit of advertising and the first symbol for attracting or repelling customers. Color is called a silent seller, which should attract the customer at first sight and help in the purchase process (Mohammadi Far, 2012). A customer expresses their opinion about a product in less than 90 seconds, and about 90-62% of cases, color was the only decision-making factor (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Colors leave a unique frame in the human mind, and therefore, the wise use of color can differentiate between competitors' products (Jin et al., 2019). Often, color attention is limited to aesthetic issues, technical issues, and harmony, and little attention is paid to its psychological and marketing effects (Mohammadi Far, 2012). Psychologists categorize colors into warm colors (yellow and red) and cold colors (blue and green), which can be used in a variety of ways according to different situations and contexts (Hamidavi, 2014).

Brand is one of the most essential areas in which color can have a great variety, which plays a vital role in the growth or decline of their products and services (Jin et al., 2019). As the most important visual component of communication, color is the basis of the brand's visual identity (Ghasemi, 2015). Chang and Lin (2010), in an article entitled The Effect of Color Characteristics on the company's brand, have confirmed that color influences every aspect of branding and advertising (Chang & Lin, 2010). Color can effectively implement the goals of a Lego, which are communication and marketing, and significantly impact the audience's purchase decision and attitude (Huang et al., 2008). The brand in marketing consists of elements that help it to be recognized in the target society (Walsh et al., 2012).

Along with the choice of a brand name, the choice of color is also considered an essential component in recognizing a brand's identity and communicating with the brand image (Abril et al., 2009). Color is one of the elements of brand design that can improve people's understanding of the brand and, as a result, of the relevant organization or product and help differentiate the brand from competitors (Walsh et al., 2012). Color conveys the brand's meaning and creates brand identity, advertising, packaging, distribution, and design (Lieven et al., 2015). In examining the dimensions of color in marketing and brand design, the importance of color for the audience (such as the bias of fans on a particular color), the attractiveness of color (such as the use of colors according to their philosophy), and color compatibility (such as using the right color combination with Paying attention to the cultural and age conditions of the audience) are three influential components that have been the focus of researchers (Haji Hasani et al., 2018). Different color classes in the brand design can affect the perception and preferences of the brand, especially among different genders (Lieven et al., 2015). For example, Klink (2003) states that women are often more receptive to bright colors than men in brands. Using color as an aesthetic stimulus can influence individuals' psychology through embodied and referential meaning (Labrecque et al., 2013). Embodied meaning pertains to the biological predisposition that leads individuals to

physiologically respond to specific colors (e.g., red evokes a heightened sense of arousal). On the other hand, referential meaning refers to the learned associations between colors and corresponding concepts or definitions (Wang et al., 2022).

In the first studies on color in marketing, Cutler and Hocker (1974) showed that sound, size, shape, scent, and color can attract attention, convey messages, and create emotions that increase the likelihood of buying. Singh (2006) believes that color affects customers' feelings and can affect their patience and enjoyment of shopping. In a new research, Haji Hasani et al. (2018) concluded that product preferences and color matching significantly affect customers' intention to buy clothes. Also, (Hamidavi, 2014) showed that color is a powerful marketing tool that substantially impacts customers' willingness to accept.

In business and advertising, brand is one of the essential areas in which color can have a great variety, playing an important role in the growth or decline of their products and services (Jin et al., 2019). As the most important visual component of communication, color is the basis of the brand's visual identity (Ghasemi, 2015). Chang and Lin (2010), in an article entitled The Effect of Color Characteristics on the Company's brand, have confirmed that color influences every aspect of branding and advertising (Chang & Lin, 2010). Color can effectively implement the goals of a Lego, which are communication and marketing, and significantly impact the audience's purchase decision and attitude (Huang et al., 2008). The brand in marketing consists of elements that help it to be recognized in the target society (Walsh et al., 2012).

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Studies show that people remember only 10% of what they hear and 20% of what they read, while they remember 80% of what they see. Also, marketing research indicates that 80% of visual information is conveyed to people by color. The use of color attracts more attention and increases communication through visual and copying of components by the brain (Lohse & Rosen, 2001). Like other communication methods, color conveys a meaningful message to the audience by stimulating all the senses. Hoegg and Alba (2007) found that using different colors also affects the perceived taste, and each color induces a type of taste in the consumer and stimulates part of the taste. In their experiments, participants perceived a considerable difference in the taste of two completely identical

samples of orange juice with different colors. In addition to the fact that color plays a significant role in creating communication and messaging, it has been used as an emotional, cultural, ethnic, and national symbol in different societies. Research shows that color can have different meanings according to age, gender, culture, and industry, impacting feedback or attracting their opinion. As a result, people make decisions and choices. For example, among young people, red symbolizes love; for older people, it is associated with danger, violence, and revenge. Color can sell products. Also, as an effective marketing tool, it significantly impacts customers' purchase decisions. In other words, 85% of the reason for a customer's purchase decision is based only on its color (Hemphill, 1996). When it is difficult to differentiate products based on their tangible qualitative characteristics, or even when the offered goods and services are similar, buyers react differently to the image (Keller, 1993).

A part of people's qualitative evaluation of the brand is based on color, so the judicious use of color can arouse customers' desires. Also, brand color can be an effective tool to help make the final purchase decision, identify the product's position on the shelf, provide the possibility to identify the product, and provide information about the contents. Ridgway and Myers (2014) also investigated the influence of personality traits on color choice. They stated that green often shows male characteristics such as stoutness, roughness, and stubbornness, while red shows leadership, hard work, success, and trust. Yellow shows coolness, imagination, and uniqueness; pink shows tenderness, youth, and fashion. The psychology of colors can be constructive in choosing the right color for a brand according to different cultures (Ridgway & Myers, 2014). Maroto and De Bortoli (2001) consider red, black, and blue colors to represent love, power, and peace in most cultures and state that in choosing a brand or product, these colors represent uniqueness, expensiveness, and high quality (Maroto & De Bortoli, 2001).

Labrecque et al. (2013) state that the color and shape of the brand, especially matching the package's color with the brand's characteristics, can affect consumers' purchase intention. Keimasi and Khoshnevis (2017) also concluded that in addition to the high image of the brand, observing the appropriate color creates a good feeling, which also improves the brand's image. Recent research has shown that brand color can also affect brand association (Jin et al., 2019) and brand loyalty (Jin et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2019). Sun and Kim (2023) investigated sustainability and brand equity, with the mediating role of brand color and brand gender. In this study, the green color was proposed to symbolize stability and brand equity, although the brand's gender (female or male) can affect this issue. Rodriguez (2023) states color psychology can influence many branding decisions and ultimately motivate a customer to buy a particular brand. Brand identity, recognition, and awareness originate from the relationship between color and brand. Colors are often used in logos and branding to communicate customers' emotions. The effects of colors on branding are essential because they shape how marketers brand products and how consumers interact with them. Color modifications, as one of the brand elements, are widespread among sports logos and brands (Williams et al., 2021).

Non-product-related brand traits like color can primarily affect fan arrogances and behavior (Bauer et al., 2008). It has also happened in sports that some teams only emphasize changing the logo's color, such as Phoenix Suns, which changed its logo's color

(Williams et al., 2021). According to Hynes (2009), colors are often one of the most critical factors in consumers' brand attitudes and today, well-known brands have logos with unique colors. According to Williams et al. (2021), color modification in sports logos significantly affects fans' brand loyalty, which indicates that the brand's color plays a vital role in the relationship between fans and their loyalty in sports. Perhaps the reason for this can be the strengthening of brand association and, as a result, the increase of brand knowledge among consumers.

In some cases, the color change in brands is mistakenly considered a minor modification, while based on studies, changing the logo's color should be regarded as a revolutionary strategy that can positively or negatively affect brand equity and consumer commitment. Brand colors should be considered a valuable resource for sports brands, especially regarding brand management. Phoenix Suns and Utah Jazz were among the sports brands that used this strategy to rebrand. Of course, this case in Iran can be shown to famous sports teams, for example, the Esteghlal team is always renowned in blue color, and the Persepolis team in red color among their fans, and the change of color for these teams gives a big blow to the history and identity of these clubs. Using color as an aesthetic stimulus can influence individuals' psychology through embodied and referential meaning (Labrecque et al., 2013). Embodied meaning pertains to the biological predisposition that leads individuals to physiologically respond to specific colors (e.g., red evokes a heightened sense of arousal). On the other hand, referential meaning refers to the learned associations between colors and corresponding concepts or definitions (Wang et al., 2022).

So, the literature review showed that, since brands are one of companies' most important intangible assets, color might help companies succeed in the market and increase brand equity and commitment. Brand equity value has long been an essential and influential issue in brand management and refers to customer response (Sarker et al., 2021). Brand equity is the brand's popularity and reputation, leading to greater profitability. Although a definition of brand equity is not universally accepted, the latest research on its literature defines it by four main elements: perceived quality, brand communication, brand awareness, and brand loyalty (Chi et al., 2020).

The concept of brand equity is more than the confidence or liking that consumers have for a brand. This confidence or interest slowly leads to a positive image, superior perceived values, and increasing consumer commitment or loyalty (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). Brand equity refers to the additional value that a specific brand brings to a company's products (Rojas-Lamorenna et al., 2022). Put simply, it is the impact of brand knowledge on consumer response to the brand's marketing efforts (Keller, 1993; Rojas-Lamorenna et al., 2022). Branding aids consumer decision-making by serving as a distinguishing factor that influences choices based on past experiences and the perceived credibility of the brand (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015). Brands with high levels of brand equity are likely to have higher profit margins, more effective communication strategies, and more significant influence on consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Buil et al., 2016).

Research has shown that there is a direct relationship between increasing brand equity with company profitability (Liu, 2020), market and customer growth (Wang et al., 2008),

trust (Ebrahim, 2019), purchase intention (Liu et al., 2020) and positive word-of-mouth communication (Sun & Kim, 2023). Aaker (1992) also states that brand equity is a set of assets and liabilities associated with a name and symbol that add or subtract to the value created by a product or service for the company or its customers. He classifies brand equity into five areas: brand awareness, brand association, perceived brand quality, brand loyalty, and the desire to expand the brand (Aaker, 1992). Brand equity is a distinct and positive effect that recognition of that brand has on the consumer's reaction to the product or service, and it has many achievements for the company, including brand commitment (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010).

Commitment to a brand is a psychological dependence on all brand components, including color, which causes a lasting desire and commitment to that brand (Alavi & Khodadadeh, 2017). Commitment is a fundamental aspect of relational marketing, as it pertains to the willingness of customers to maintain a long-term relationship with a supplier. Specifically, commitment represents customers' emotional attachment to a brand or product, resulting in continuous usage of the product or service (Bodaghi Khajeh Noubar et al., 2020). Committed consumers engage in a relationship with a brand through their purchasing, use, and experience of that brand. This commitment is an interactive process between consumers and brands, treating them equally. According to Kim et al. (2008), brand equity can be established through customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment in the relationship, ultimately enhancing the reputation of hospitals. Zhang et al. (2014) researched brand community and discovered that brand equity significantly impacts commitment and value creation. Momen et al. (2015) expresses two types of continuous and emotional commitment concerning the brand. Passionate commitment, which is indicative of an emotional connection with the brand and is formed based on shared identity and values with the brand (Pring, 2007), and continuous commitment, the desire to have a constant relationship with the brand, which is rooted in transportation, economic and psychological costs and lack of alternatives (Fullerton, 2003). Even though some studies in non-sports fields, such as the leather industry or the market, show that brand equity and brand commitment have a relationship (Altaf et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023), or some new studies in sports point to brand equity (Asgari, 2023; Jaber, 2023; Kiani & Nazari, 2022) but study that examines this relationship in the field of sports was not found, and the need for more studies in this field is evident. Especially in the current research, color is considered an influencing factor in these two variables in sports goods brands.

Due to sports' turbulent and exciting environment, sports brands inherently follow the feelings and perceptions of fans and can be affected by visual elements, especially color. A simple example can be seen in determining the color of clothes, logos, flags, etc., sometimes creating a lot of commotion and discussions in this field. Through color, a sports brand can create a compelling visual identity, establish strong relationships with a target market, and position itself among competitors. Research that directly deals with the issue of color in sports branding was not found. Still, in some close studies on the issue of color in sports marketing, Armstrong (2008) research showed that color can be effective in sports events according to various cultural factors and cause different consumption behaviors. Also, Breuer and Rumpf (2015) state that although the competition in attracting

viewers' attention to sponsorship signs in sports communication has become an increasing issue in sponsorship-related marketing research, it still does not address how sponsorship signs are created enough. Based on this study, it was found that both color and animation significantly affect the attention of sports viewers. The role of color in marketing and branding is highly significant (Breuer & Rumpf, 2015). Brand names, logos, packages, and other visual elements utilize iconic colors to enhance a brand's connection, recognition, and recollection. These colors symbolize the unique identity of each brand (Sun & Kim, 2023). It seems that the contrast or fit of the color and sports environment can decrease or increase the attraction of people to a sports brand, which requires more research in this field. Despite the many investigations that exist in the area of color in the brand, according to the literature review, it seems that this field has been less concerned in sports studies. Therefore, the current research seeks to investigate the role of color in brand commitment with the mediating role of brand equity in sports goods buyers in Jahrom City. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the research.

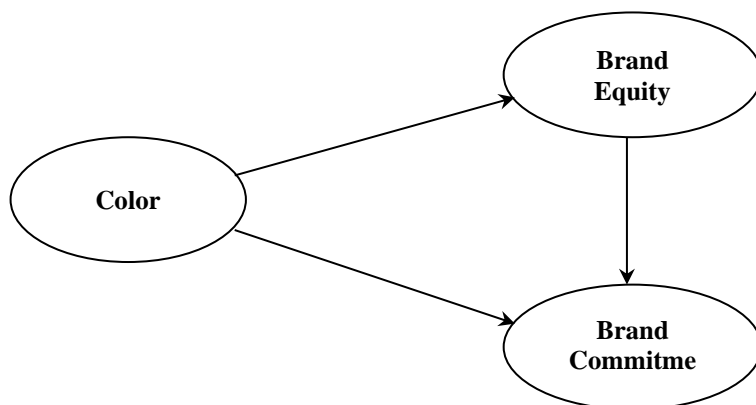


Figure 1. The research conceptual framework.

2. Methodology

This research is practical in terms of purpose and descriptive correlation in terms of method. The study's statistical population was all the buyers of physical sports products in Jahrom city; their number was unlimited. So, according to Morgan's table, the number of samples was 384; finally, 300 questionnaires could be analyzed. Convenience sampling was used to collect data. The data collection tool included three questionnaires. First, the questionnaire on color based on (Haji Hasani et al., 2018) included 12 questions and three dimensions (importance of color, attractiveness of color, and appropriateness of color). Second, Momen et al. (2015)'s brand commitment questionnaire has eight questions, including two dimensions (Emotional commitment and continuous commitment). Third, the Brand Equity Questionnaire of Aaker and Keller (1990) had 32 questions and five dimensions (brand loyalty, perceived brand quality, brand association, brand awareness, and willingness to expand the brand). The reliability of the questionnaires was determined and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha Test and Composite Reliability. Cronbach's alphas

of questionnaires achieved 0.89 for color, 0.92 for brand equity, and 0.87 for brand commitment. Confirmed values were reported in the findings section (Table 2). The face and content validity of the questionnaires were confirmed by seven sports management professors who were experts in sports marketing. Nike, Adidas, Reebok, New Balance, Puma, and Under Armour were among the most influential brands investigated in this research. Also, after collecting the information from the completed questionnaires and considering the non-normality of the data, using SPSS software and PLS modeling software, the data were subjected to statistical analysis.

3. Results

The statistical sample of this research included 174 women (58%) and 126 men (42%). The most frequent age category of the respondents was between 21 and 30 years old (163 people), and the most frequent occupation status of the respondents was student, with 90 people (30%). Most of them were studying at the undergraduate level. After students, athletes, and sports coaches, 74 people (24%) accounted for the highest percentage of sports equipment users. The first step examines factor loadings, reliability (Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability), and validity (Convergent and Divergent). In the second section, the model fit (measurement, structural, and overall model) and then the results of research hypotheses are given. Table 1 shows the factor loadings. They are related to the reflexive variables listed in the corresponding column of that variable. If this value is above 0.4, we do not need to remove it from the model.

Table 1. Coefficients of factor loadings of research variables.

Variables	Sub variables	Question No.	Loading factors
Color	Importance of color	1	0.735
		2	0.815
		3	0.814
		4	0.691
	Attractiveness of color	5	0.728
		6	0.824
		7	0.795
		8	0.758
		9	0.763
		10	0.733
	Appropriateness of color	11	0.799
		12	0.785
		13	0.614
		14	0.763
15		0.755	
16		0.816	
17		0.823	
Brand Equity	brand loyalty	18	0.845
		19	0.858
		20	0.840
		21	0.754

Variables	Sub variables	Question No.	Loading factors
	perceived brand quality	22	0.840
		23	0.812
		24	0.866
		25	0.837
		26	0.868
		27	0.847
		28	0.809
	brand awareness	29	0.800
		30	0.834
		31	0.832
		32	0.873
		33	0.848
	brand association	34	0.844
35		0.812	
36		0.824	
37		0.740	
38		0.874	
39		0.893	
willingness to expand the brand	40	0.833	
	41	0.780	
	42	0.798	
	43	0.842	
	44	0.837	
Brand commitment	Emotional Commitment	45	0.777
		46	0.750
		47	0.808
	Continuous Commitment	48	0.828
		49	0.859
		50	0.833
		51	0.895
		52	0.926
		53	0.890

In this factorial model, all the questions are higher than the 0.4 criteria and show the questions' appropriateness. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to confirm the reliability of the measurement tool. The overall reliability of the questionnaire is 0.931, which was obtained after experts' opinions (content validity), convergent validity, and divergent validity. The more details are given in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and convergent validity.

Variables	Composite reliability	Alpha level	Sub-variable	Composite reliability	Alpha level	AVE
Color	0.903	0.893	Importance of color	0.927	0.898	0.684
			Attractiveness of color	0.896	0.848	0.634
			Appropriateness of color	0.874	0.817	0.731
Brand equity	0.899	0.927	Brand loyalty	0.875	0.810	0.653
			Perceived brand quality	0.815	0.702	0.638

Variables	Composite reliability	Alpha level	Sub-variable	Composite reliability	Alpha level	AVE
Brand commitment	0.886	0.879	Brand association	0.925	0.869	0.634
			Brand awareness	0.866	0.821	0.731
			Willingness to expand the brand	0.909	0.834	0.753
			Emotional commitment	0.909	0.896	0.667
			Continuous commitment	0.875	0.859	0.696

According to the values of Cronbach's alpha, the composite reliability reported in Table 2, as can be seen; all variables have Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability above 0.7, indicating the model has good reliability.

Table 3. Discriminant validity based on Fornell-Larcker Criterion Matrix.

Fornell-Larcker criterion	Color	Brand commitment	Brand awareness	Brand loyalty	Perceived brand quality	Importance of color	Attractiveness of color	Emotional commitment	Continuous commitment	Brand association	Appropriateness of color	Brand equity	willingness to expand the brand
Color	0.725												
Brand commitment	0.228	0.838											
Brand awareness	0.554	0.229	0.826										
Brand loyalty	0.493	0.127	0.613	0.796									
Perceived brand quality	0.405	0.106	0.671	0.581	0.788								
Importance of color	0.558	0.125	0.657	0.484	0.491	0.808							
Attractiveness of color	0.278	0.794	0.322	0.197	0.232	0.240	0.834						
Emotional commitment	0.512	0.284	0.755	0.614	0.651	0.466	0.379	0.816					
Continuous commitment	0.429	0.126	0.632	0.785	0.643	0.509	0.252	0.642	0.855				
Brand association	0.370	0.399	0.531	0.469	0.421	0.405	0.483	0.544	0.484	0.805			
Appropriateness of color	0.507	0.156	0.729	0.734	0.658	0.569	0.227	0.701	0.745	0.479	0.883		
Brand equity	0.392	0.101	0.584	0.503	0.688	0.529	0.111	0.454	0.566	0.291	0.616	0.869	
willingness to expand the brand	0.424	0.180	0.721	0.623	0.629	0.561	0.262	0.634	0.705	0.513	0.838	0.584	0.868

Based on the results obtained in Table 3, the relationship of a structure with its indicators is given in comparison to the relationship of that structure with other structures. Divergent validity is acceptable if the AVE root value (values placed on the primary diameter) for each construct is greater than the shared variance between that construct and other constructs in the model, all of which are met.

Based on Table 4, the criterion value of R2, which is used to connect the measurement part and the structural part of the structural equation model, it is given that it indicates confirmation that an exogenous variable has an introjected variable.

Table 4. Coefficients of Determination (R^2).

Variables	Coefficient of Determination	Variables	Coefficient of Determination
Brand awareness	0.746	Importance of color	0.545
willingness to expand the brand	0.698	Attractiveness of color	0.812
Emotional commitment	0.885	Appropriateness of color	0.713
Continuous commitment	0.530	Brand loyalty	0.582
Brand commitment	0.283	Perceived brand quality	0.700
Brand equity	0.257	Brand association	0.672

The redundancy index calculates the quality of the structural model. The purpose of this index is to check the ability of the structural model to forecast by Blindfolding. The most famous and well-known measure of this ability is the Stone-Geisler Q2 index, and based on this criterion, the model should predict the indicators of the reflective endogenous variables. Regarding the predictive power index, three values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are introduced as the weak, medium, and strong criterion values (Henseler et al., 2015). Q2 values above zero indicate that the observed values are well reconstructed and the model has predictive ability. Therefore, based on Table 5, the section related to the predictive power factor of the structures has been estimated at a powerful level.

Table 5. Index (predictive power of the conceptual model) Q^2 .

Variables	Predictive power of the conceptual model
Brand commitment	0.438
Brand equity	0.514
Color	-----

The last step in structural equation modeling analysis is to examine the overall research model. The goodness of fit index (GOF) was used to check the comprehensive research model. This index is used to measure the overall performance of the model. The limits of this index are between zero and one, and three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 represent weak, medium, and strong values for GOF, respectively. The GOF index for the research model is equal to 0.57, which indicates the general desirability of the research models.

Table 6. Significance of path coefficients at the 95% confidence level.

Confirm/reject	A significant amount	Path coefficient	Relationships
Confirm	7.962	0.506	Color and brand equity
Confirm	6.506	0.845	Color and brand commitment
Confirm	7.506	0.554	Brand commitment & Brand equity

Based on the significant results of the path coefficients that investigate the direct relationship of each variable, the effect of all relationships has been modeled.

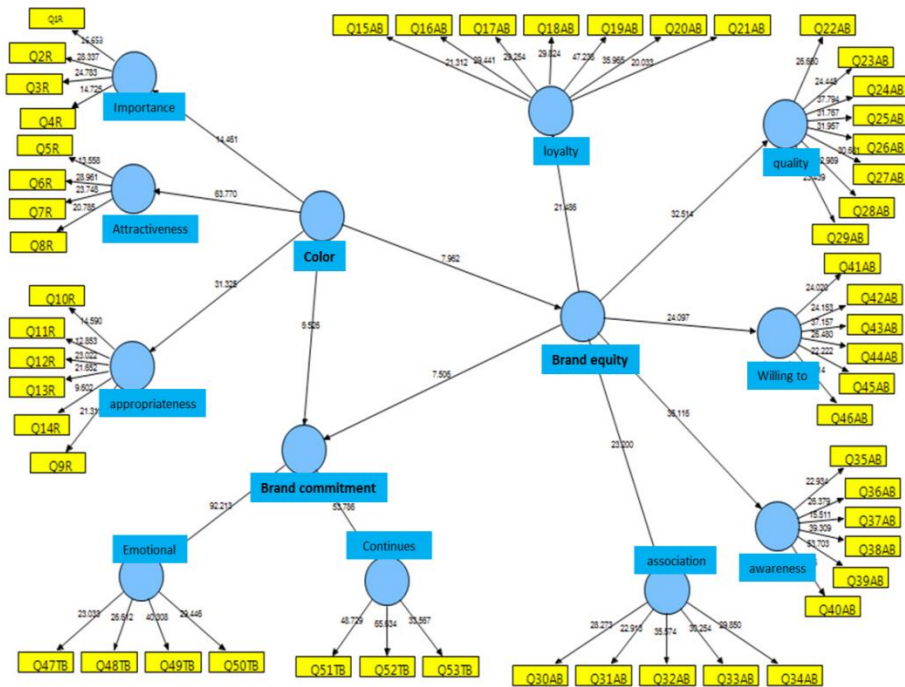


Figure 2. T-value statistic for testing research hypotheses.

Finally, the Sobel test was used to investigate the influence of the mediator variable. In the Sobel test, a value that is obtained exceeds 1.96; the significance of the mediator of a variable can be confirmed at the 95% confidence level.

Table 7. Mediating hypotheses of the research

Mediating hypotheses	A significant value of Sobel	Result
Color → brand equity → brand commitment	5.73	Confirmed

4. Discussion and conclusion

Many businesses strive to reinforce their corporate and brand identity with a unique symbolic meaning to help consumers identify their products among a variety of products in today's crowded marketplace and to create images associated with that brand in their minds (Jin et al., 2019). One of the most critical factors that can influence this issue is color. Because this issue has not been addressed in the literature related to sports brands, this research aimed to model the effect of color on brand commitment with the mediating role of brand equity in the buyers of sports goods in Jahrom City.

According to the findings, the dimensions of color significantly contribute to explaining the brand equity among the buyers of sporting goods in Jahrom City. In line with these findings, Garber and Hyatt (2003) considered color as a carrier of brand value due to the creation of a visual association. Color is a product's most prominent and meaningful visual feature that can be seen at first glance. It makes it a convincing, visible

sign to create values such as giving identity, meaning, or novelty to an object or idea. [Lieven et al. \(2015\)](#) also considers the elements of a brand design, such as size and color, along with the brand's shape, name, and font, to be the most critical factors for creating a deep understanding of brand quality, which ultimately, according to [\(Aaker, 1992\)](#), causes the brand equity of the brand. [Ridgway and Myers \(2014\)](#) state that the color matching of products can make consumers feel good and, according to the age or gender of these consumers, increase their willingness to expand this brand, which ultimately causes brand equity in different strata.

[Sondoh Jr et al. \(2007\)](#) also believe that brand image components, such as color and design, can strengthen brand loyalty among consumers, ultimately creating brand equity in the audience's minds. This loyalty can be seen in the brand of many sports teams whose fans are unwilling to buy competing brands because of their commitment and love for this brand. Of course, this value and loyalty to color are sometimes related to the critical role that color plays in a personal space, evoking a memory or a good feeling in people [\(Mortazavi Far et al., 2017\)](#). As one of the most important visual components of communication, color is the basis of the brand's visual identity [\(Ghasemi, 2015\)](#). Sporting goods manufacturers should keep in mind that color reflects everything that a logo, packaging, product, environment, and marketing communications are trying to achieve, and therefore, in all these cases, the appropriateness and attractiveness of color should be used. Color can significantly impact the purchase decision and the audience's attitude toward a product because a part of people's qualitative evaluation of the product is based on color. Therefore, its judicious use can lead to arousing the desires of customers.

On the other hand, the study showed that the dimensions of color affect the commitment to the brand among the buyers of sporting goods in Jahrom City. Among the related research, we can mention [\(Walsh et al., 2012; Walsh, 2005\)](#) and [\(Das et al., 2019\)](#), who considered the role of color in brand commitment to be necessary. Also, [Gencay and Kurakucuk \(2005\)](#) found that the color combination is the most attractive in Turkish professional football clubs, which causes customers to be attracted to and loyal to these clubs [\(Gencay & Kurakucuk, 2005\)](#). In explaining the results, it should be said that the brand is not only for recognizing a product but also helps to differentiate it from competitors in the market, increasing the importance of customer commitment to the brand. According to scholars, commitment to a brand creates a kind of psychological dependence concerning brand elements, which makes a person permanently attached to that brand [\(Alavi & Khodadadeh, 2017\)](#).

Among the brand elements, color can be very decisive, considering that it is directly involved with people's mental and emotional states [\(Haji Hasani et al., 2018\)](#). Color is closely related to consumer behavior and can influence communication when direct and specific verbal expression is complicated [\(Labrecque et al., 2013\)](#). Color is a visual language that can produce the most information quickly for the sense of sight, the most potent human mind [\(Bottomley & Doyle, 2006\)](#). Even color plays a vital role in re-designing brands, and it is possible that buyers do not have attachment and commitment to that brand as they did in the past [\(Walsh, 2005\)](#). Part of the pleasure of a sports brand is related to its attractiveness and matching color, which makes buyers always look for a particular brand because of this pleasure. Often, the color of products is one of the

things that buyers discuss with others and defend in most cases, creating more commitment in them. At the same time, it should be noted that many consumers are unwilling to change the color of the products they buy so quickly due to cultural, religious, and environmental issues, and with a pleasant experience in one color, they try to repeat it or colors that match it.

In another research finding, the results of the Sobel test showed that color can indirectly affect buyers' commitment to sports goods brands through brand equity. In confirmation of this finding, [Jin et al. \(2019\)](#) believe that color in marketing creates a competitive advantage, and by creating competitive values compared to competitors, consumers' dependence on goods or services increases. Color, as one of the most essential components of design, makes a good feeling in customers and increases the quality of the product in their eyes ([Panigyrikis & Kyrousi, 2015](#)). Considering the critical role of color in the brand, the results obtained from this research show the relationship between color and commitment to the brand based on the appropriateness of the perception of the color used in a particular brand. In other words, when the color matches the sports product, it leads to commitment to the brand. From further parallel research, we can refer to [Hun Jin et al. \(2019\)](#)'s study, which concluded that the subcategories that make up the structure of color fit are strongly related to the components of the brand name.

All components, including brand naming and attitude, positively affect automatic brand recognition. Therefore, manufacturers can increase the value of the brand, attract the commitment of customers, and improve their sales against competitors by observing the appropriateness of the color of their product with the type of product, sales conditions, or the suitability of colors together, such as cold and warm or dark and light. Factors such as culture, religion, friend's recommendation, and individual interest are often influential in observing the appropriateness of product color, which manufacturers should pay attention to because any brand that follows these factors better has more customer acceptance and finds an exceptional value among them. The value each brand has for customers can improve that brand's position in customers' eyes. By arousing interest, color can increase the desire to buy the product and improve the business by increasing the effectiveness of advertising to remove brand ambiguity and even generate new revenue.

In general, the results showed that the dimensions of color include proportion, attractiveness, and importance of color directly or indirectly. Influencing brand equity, including loyalty, association, awareness, perceived quality, and willingness to extend the brand, affects the continuous and emotional commitment of the brand. In other words, color has an essential place in the brand's value and loyalty to the brand among the buyers of sports goods in Jahrom city. According to the obtained results, it can be suggested that every Jahrom seller of the brand in sports should provide a variety of sports goods, especially in color. The sports stores of Jahrom city should pay more attention to the customers' tastes in choosing different colors, and by creating contexts for the sports good's consumers of this city, they can generate a commitment to brands in various colors among their customers, which in the long run will lead to They sell more. Almost all the brand influence and product sales process is completed as soon as a customer moves towards the product with his favorite color spectrum. Sports producers of Jahrom should never forget the importance of color, which is far more than its aesthetic aspect, in

choosing a practical and comprehensive strategy for the brand. Customers get the first understanding and recognition of the brand with the help of color, which is one of their essential criteria in choosing a brand or sports product. In the end, considering that every brand can have a correct image of its impact on the audience through appropriate colors, it is necessary to do more detailed research on different color spectrums and variables in the future. Because this research was not focused on a specific brand, it is possible to research popular sports brands and compare them. Also, since this research was limited to the city of Jahrom, it is possible to study this theme on a broader scale. Considering that this research was limited to a quantitative method, it is possible to use qualitative methodologies to identify more components and develop related concepts.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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اثر رنگ بر تعهد به برند در خریداران کالاهای ورزشی: نقش میانجی ارزش ویژه برند

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چکیده

هدف: رنگ معمولاً به عنوان یک نماد اصلی است که باعث جذب، علاقه یا بی‌بازی مشتریان می‌شود. در این تحقیق ارتباط رنگ با دو ویژگی برند یعنی تعهد به برند و ارزش ویژه برند مورد بررسی قرار گرفته است.

روش: روش تحقیق مطالعه حاضر، توصیفی-همبستگی بود که به صورت پیمایشی انجام شد. جامعه آماری را کلیه مشتریان فروشگاه‌های ورزشی شهرستان جهرم تشکیل می‌داد. با توجه به نامشخص بودن تعداد جامعه آماری، تعداد ۳۸۴ پرسشنامه به روش در دسترس توزیع شد که ۳۰۰ پرسشنامه قابل تحلیل بود. برای جمع‌آوری داده‌ها از پرسشنامه رنگ (بر اساس مطالعه حاج حسنی و همکاران، ۱۳۹۷)، پرسشنامه ارزش ویژه برند (آکرو کور، ۱۹۹۰) و پرسشنامه تعهد به برند (مومن، ۱۳۹۳) استفاده شد. روایی صوری و محتوایی پرسشنامه‌ها توسط اساتید مدیریت ورزشی و بایایی پرسشنامه‌ها هم از طریق ضریب آلفای کرونباخ مورد تأیید قرار گرفت. آلفای کرونباخ برای پرسشنامه رنگ ۰/۸۹، برای ارزش ویژه برند ۰/۹۲ و برای تعهد به برند ۰/۸۷ به دست آمد. برای برازش و آزمودن فرضیه‌ها با استفاده از الگوهای ساختاری، از روش حداقل مربعات جزئی با استفاده از نرم‌افزار پی‌ال‌اس استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: نتایج نشان داد که رنگ تأثیر مستقیم و معناداری بر ارزش ویژه برند و تعهد به برند دارد (۰/۵۰ = ضریب مسیر، $t\text{-value}=7/96$). همچنین نقش میانجی ارزش ویژه‌ی برند در نقش رنگ روی تعهد به برند در خریداران کالاهای ورزشی مورد تأیید است (۰/۸۴ = ضریب مسیر، $t\text{-value}=6/50$). بررسی برازش مدل نیز نشان داد مدل ارائه شده پژوهش از برازش مطلوبی برخوردار می‌باشد ($GOF=0/57$). با توجه به یافته‌های تحقیق، تولیدکنندگان و مدیران ورزشی در انتخاب استراتژی موثر و جامع برای برند، باید اهمیت رنگ، که به مراتب چیزی بیش از جنبه زیبائشناختی آن است، را همواره در نظر داشته باشند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: رنگ در ورزش به عنوان یک نماد منحصر به فرد ارائه می‌شود که اغلب بر تعصبات طرفداران ورزش تأثیر گذاشته و آنها را به هیجان می‌آورد. با توجه به این موضوع، در این تحقیق تأثیر رنگ در برند کالاهای ورزشی مورد بررسی قرار گرفت که در ادبیات بررسی شده کمتر به آن توجه شده است.

کلیدواژه

استراتژی برند

برندسازی ورزشی

تعهد به برند

سمبل

نگرش به برند

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۵/۰۸

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۸/۲۰



Customer Behavior and Brand Promotion in Professional Sports Clubs: Developing Social Networks Marketing Model

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research has been conducted to develop a social network marketing model for Sepahan Sports Club based on customer behavior and brand promotion.

Methodology: The research was descriptive and conducted by a survey. The statistical population of this research includes the users and active members of the Sepahan sports club on social networks. Three hundred eighty-four people were selected by random sampling. Data collection was done using standard questionnaires, and data analysis was done using structural equation modeling using Smart PLS and SPSS software.

Findings: We showed that the antecedents of social network marketing include social business drivers, brand experience, and perceived values from branded web advertisements, which have a positive and significant effect on customer business relationships and brand health through customer brand engagement and brand attitude. Also, we showed that the customer's brand engagement and attitude lead to brand promotion. Making the right decision for clubs regarding social networks is very important.

Originality: We showed that social networks cause the message to reach a group of contacts and improve the attitude of customers towards the club and its services, raise the level of awareness of the customers about the club and improve the mental image of, increase customer loyalty and finally the value of the customer.

Keywords

Brand Attitude
Customer Attitude
Customer Engagement
Professional Sports Club
Sports Industry

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/07/26

Accepted: 2023/11/09

How to cite this article:

Nazari, R., Moshkelgosha, E., & Loqhmami, M. (2023). Customer Behavior and Brand Promotion in Professional Sports Clubs: Developing Social Networks Marketing Model. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(4), 49-69. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.44499.1113>



1. Introduction

Among the essential issues in business policy in recent years is promoting a sustainable brand for professional sports clubs (Colignatus, 2020). The growing trend of global trade has gained increasing momentum by taking advantage of active commercial strategies, the revolution in information and communication technology, and removing barriers at international levels. Therefore, an active presence in global trade does not need to be justified (Sohrabi et al., 2023).

The sports field constantly changes, and the business environment has become complex (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021). The world faces new and rapidly spreading "social media" phenomena in virtual space. Social media has transferred the power from the company to individuals and communities, or in other words, creative users, which has caused very successful or disastrous effects on famous brands. Effective organization in social media creates advantages for organizations (Gurău, 2008). Therefore, companies have recently turned to social media to attract customers (Arman & Javidfar, 2017). Interaction is essential in social business drivers for success, especially online communication (Park & Yoo, 2020). Therefore, previous research has defined the need for interaction as a level of social business drivers predicting the initial engagement with the brand in social network marketing. There is a concept worthy of attention concerning conflict, especially customer conflict with a brand in social networks. Engagement is the understanding of participation based on internal needs, values, and interests (McClure & Seock, 2020). It is worth mentioning that there is a need to determine the type of influence of social media on brands and the relationship between different variables to promote a brand. The customer must recognize the marketers' brand name and add to their previous knowledge about the brand.

Social networks are tools that companies can use to strengthen and complete marketing research techniques and processes (Vera & Trujillo, 2017). These networks have created an intelligent environment with countless connections and an infinitely wide participation capacity (Mohan & Sequeira, 2016). The rapid development of digital technology has changed people's lives in various fields (Prabowo et al., 2020). The Internet emerged as the most significant source of information in the new century. The emergence of the website has changed global business (Zubair et al., 2022). Social media networks represent new communication marketing networks for organizations to communicate with customers, especially virtual communication with customers. Businesses have started using social networks to help connect employees and customers, obtain information about their interests and characteristics, and provide services to customers in an attractive and attractive technology environment (Ismail, 2017).

Since sports clubs do not have governmental financial support (Mohammadian Moghadam & Nazari, 2023), for solve the problems, and pay attention to organizational strategies, including the development of a strategic plan for public participation in the sports clubs and the use of control and evaluation tools to ensure the effectiveness of teamwork (Azadi et al., 2023). The most important strategic factors include supporting public and private bodies, enhancing cultural and social responsibility, developing media awareness, managing systems and processes, developing appropriate infrastructure, improving

financial and environmental impacts, and security was identified as being consistent with the club's sustainable development (Nazari & Hajiheydari, 2021). As a result, it can be said that to develop the productivity of sport clubs, marketing, supportive propellants, and planning and talent development, practical factors that are both effective and influential should be on the agenda of sports managers (Yabalooie et al., 2022).

Companies create this relationship between brands and customers, who may become more loyal to the brand. However, today, businesses use social networks for brand management (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2018), consumer trust (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019), e-commerce and social commerce (Tajvidi et al., 2020), new product development and innovation (Du et al., 2016), knowledge sharing (Leonardi, 2017). They use electronic word-of-mouth advertising (Wakefield & Wakefield, 2018), customer relationship management (Agnihotri et al., 2017), and sales growth (Kumar et al., 2017). Social networks and their increasing influence among users worldwide have made these networks suitable tools for advertising, e-commerce, and, most importantly, customer participation and engagement. Customers who engage more on social media are likely to increase brand loyalty. In general, one of the ways to earn money for professional football clubs is the brand (Smith et al., 2017).

As a result, professional football clubs should look for multiple methods and solutions for sustainable financing (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021). In the business world, leveraging has a far more surprising effect, one of the most essential principles to achieve financial freedom. Knowing "leverage" and using it in business (Aaker, 2010) is also based on this. The brand potentially leverages the product or service's value (Sudaryanto, 2015). The sports environment is one of the most essential environments with countless uncertainties and a very complex and constantly changing one (Nazari & Shahvali, 2022). In professional sports clubs, development is considered a fundamental issue, and the concept of development in sports is inextricably linked with the component of professional sports. Sustainability and progress in professional sports are two fundamental issues that depend on policymaking (Sohrabi et al., 2023).

In sports, globalization is described as related to economic considerations and more than anything else, although cultural elements also play a role in this area (Nazari & Hajiheydari, 2021). Despite the importance of culture in globalization discourses in sports, economic considerations play an essential role. The need to develop markets and earn more profit by clubs through the financial support of sports shows the place of economy in international sports. The economic impact of sports is felt in media, financial support of companies and influence, branding and credit culture, and the general sense of commercialization of sports (Bonakdarchyan et al., 2020). Changes have occurred in sports as managers seek diversification in assets, capital flows, and new markets to enter existing products or product alliances (Sohrabi et al., 2023). The recent official statistics show that Iran's professional clubs are constantly growing and developing because they have been financially profitable.

Globalization in recent years has required business companies to look for new opportunities in international markets in addition to their domestic and traditional markets (Chang & Fang, 2015). It seems that brands in sports are widely considered nowadays, so in the period of recession and crisis, these are potent brands that face the most negligible drop and problems due to gaining consumer trust. Building a strong brand is the ultimate

goal of many sports organizations and clubs. Brands are more valuable than all company assets and increase their owners' economic and strategic value. Therefore, according to the above topics and also referring to the crucial goals of sports marketers in retaining customers and promoting the brand and considering the high importance of social networks in today's society, the purpose of this research is to eliminate the existing gap (which has become widespread due to the vagueness of this issue) by explaining the model of relationships between social network marketing and customer behavior to promote the brand in the sports industry and to perform an experimental analysis. This research will attempt to analyze the various dimensions of capabilities and the impact of social networks on the behavior of customers and brands in the sports industry through document study. Since social media marketing enables organizations and private organizations to create a new channel for customer support, and this means competitive belief and insight and gaining more customers, this is one of the most effective ways to achieve and maintain a reputation on the web and the key to its success is establishing effective communication with customers and showing the amount of value that every business places on its customers.

2. Literature review

The higher the degree of customer regret, the more sensitive the customers' reactions are to mixed promotions, leading to a rapid increase in switching intentions among customers. This study expands sales promotion knowledge by offering ample evidence of customer behavior and provides sustainable insights for hospitality managers responding to member customers' demands (Zhi & Ha, 2023). Explores the boundary conditions of the sustainability marketing–responsible, sustainable consumer behavior link. Hotels can foster responsible consumer behavior by executing sustainability marketing and engaging in corporate social responsibility activities (Jia et al., 2023). Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of their purchases' environmental and social consequences. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how attitudes toward green advertising and sponsorship affect various elements of green brand equity, green purchase intention to generate and manage green brand equity, and green purchase intention (Dinh et al., 2023).

The Internet, especially the broad network communication environment with uncertain infinities (Xiao et al., 2017). Research findings also show the role and influence of social networks and media on customer rights (Kim & Ko, 2012) and purchase intention (Park & Yoo, 2020). Still, they couldn't comprehensively examine the consequences of it, which leads to the promotion of a brand. The main difference between social media and other conventional media such as television, newspapers, magazines, and billboards are that social media provides two-way communication between the company and the customers, while traditional media establish one-way communication. Social media improved interaction among online brand communities by establishing a two-way relationship (Zollo et al., 2020).

Zubair et al. (2022) states that team branding is crucial in attracting corporate sponsorship for the multi-billion-dollar sports business. Branding can increase the probability of choosing a logo and brand (a special team) from among different brands, the desire to pay extraordinary and higher costs (such as buying a ticket for a team's game at a higher-than-average amount), the effectiveness of marketing communications and

increasing the team's popularity among fans and society. In fact, through a strong brand personality, opportunities can be created to expand sub-products beyond the main products. Because of the loyal and permanent fans of the clubs, even when the team does not get good results, they buy secondary products related to their groups, such as tickets and shirts (Bonakdarchyan et al., 2020). Consumer brand knowledge cannot be reliably determined; however, appropriate analytical measurements should be made. In this context, the most crucial factor is how the brand is recognizable to the audience. It depends on the marketer's effort to establish continuous brand communication to create brand awareness and involvement to promote the brand (Zubair et al., 2022). Some researchers have also shown the role and influence of social media in brand engagement and attitude (Park & Yoo, 2020).

In other research, it has been stated that social media use may influence customers' purchase intention (Toor et al., 2017). However, they have not investigated the effect of these factors on brand promotion. Today, people pay less attention to commercial advertisements. They are more interested in other people's opinions about the products and services offered to them (Izadi et al., 2019), which should be given a lot of attention in today's era. Social networks are a turning point in communication between customers in establishing communication and positively and negatively affecting their behavior. The issue of branding and brand management has attracted many fans in the marketing world today. Many theorists, managers, and researchers have called the future of marketing the world of brand management and branding activities. Perhaps no capital is more effective than a robust, credible, value-creating name for organizations. Less vulnerability in competitive market conditions, higher profit margins, stronger connections with the back and front links of the production chain, etc., are other benefits of brand development (Carlson & Donavan, 2013).

Due to the emergence and creation of a new structure and technology in the service provision sector, organizations have been competing to attract customers' attention and marketing. In the meantime, the needs of the sports industry require marketers in this field to use new methods and methods to sell products and provide services. In many cases, sports organizations, whether clubs or sports product stores, do not have proper sales or cannot retain their old customers. This issue has become more prominent with the development of social networks and various types of advertisements of different sports organizations through these media in sports marketing.

3. Methodology

The current research is of an applied type that was carried out with a descriptive-correlational survey method. The statistical population of the recent study includes users and active members of the Foad Mubarak Sepahan cultural and sports club in social networks. In this research, the size of the statistical population and the number of the population are not known. Three hundred eighty-four people based on Morgan's table were selected as samples. The samples were selected by random sampling method. A standard questionnaire containing 52 items with a 5-point Likert scale was used to collect information.

Table 1. The structure of the questionnaire.

Source	Objects	Components
Huang et al. (2013), Kang et al. (2016), Baum et al. (2019)	10	Social business drivers (engagement, marketing campaign, and personalization)
Prebensen and Rosengren (2016)	8	Previous experience (emotional value and social value)
Gan and Wang (2017), Hanaysha (2018)	7	Perceived importance of web brands
Kosiba et al. (2018)	9	Customer brand engagement (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral)
Lee et al. (2017)	5	Attitude towards brand position (attitude towards advertising, purchase intention)
Yazdanparast et al. (2016)	4	Business-customer relationships
Molinillo et al. (2017)	9	Brand health (brand awareness, brand connection, and brand loyalty)

Cronbach's alpha test was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reflects the internal correlation between the questions of an examination. For this purpose, 30 people from the statistical population of the research were randomly selected. The relevant questionnaires were distributed among them, and the obtained data were evaluated, and Cronbach's alpha value was calculated. The obtained results confirmed the reliability of the questionnaires, and the questionnaires were found to have good reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained for the questionnaires was reported to be more than 0.7. A preliminary questionnaire was prepared to assess the validity and given to university experts (doctoral professors of physical education majoring in sports management). They were asked to comment on the questions' appearance and the tools' content. The experts agreed on the validity of the questionnaire in 98% of cases. The preliminary study examined the validity of the content and form of this questionnaire (structure, clarity, and comprehension of the questions).

The data collection method was a survey. After the questionnaire was prepared, considering that the sample should be taken from people with social networks, it was given to the subjects through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. After completing the questionnaires, the data was extracted and prepared for statistical analysis. Also, the present research used library study and review to use information related to theses, research projects, books, publications, and other related documents. The Internet was also used to obtain information from domestic and foreign electronic books, journals, and other scientific papers. To analyze the data, descriptive indices (prevalence, mean, and standard deviation) and structural equation analysis (confirmatory factor analysis and path coefficient) were used, and the relationships between variables were investigated through SPSS and Smart PLS software.

4. Results

Statistics of frequency distribution of gender of respondents: 72.9% of respondents are male, and 27.1% are female.

Table 2. frequency and percentage of respondents to the questionnaire in terms of the type of social network.

Type of social network	Frequency	Frequency Percent
Instagram	298	77.6
WhatsApp	86	22.4
Total	384	100

Descriptive statistics of the kind of social network used by the respondents are shown in [Table 2](#). As can be seen, the most used social network by the respondents is equivalent to 77.6 percent of WhatsApp. For convergence validity, the AVE standard has been used. The results of the concurrent validity analysis in the current research are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Convergence validity results.

Variables	Convergent Validity (AVE)	Variables	Convergent Validity (AVE)
Interaction	0.776	Intention to Buy	0.825
Marketing Campaign	0.839	Customer Business Relationships	0.828
Personalization	0.870	Brand Awareness	0.797
Emotional Value	0.850	Communication with the Brand	0.873
Social Value	0.863	Brand loyalty	0.847
Perceived value of web-based Brands	0.750	Social Stimuli	0.661
Emotional	0.804	Previous Experience	0.830
Cognitive	0.743	Customer Brand Engagement	0.695
Behavioral	0.792	Attitude towards the Brand	0.722
Attitude to Advertising	0.806	Brand Health	0.737

Divergent validity is the third measure of validity in the PLS method. This matrix is shown in [Table \(4-7\)](#). This model has acceptable divergent validity if the numbers included in the primary diameter (AVE root) are more significant than their underlying values.

Table 4. Correlation matrix and divergent validity check.

	Interaction	Marketing Campaign	Personalization	Emotional Value	Social Value	Perceived value of web-based Brands	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral	Attitude to Advertising	Intention to Buy	Customer Business Relationships	Brand Awareness	Communication with the Brand	Brand loyalty	Social Stimuli	Previous Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	Attitude towards the Brand	Brand Health
Interaction	0.875																			
Marketing Campaign	0.614	0.916																		
Personalization	0.508	0.710	0.932																	
Emotional Value	0.690	0.624	0.663	0.922																
Social Value	0.609	0.624	0.570	0.538	0.929															
Perceived value of web-based Brands	0.609	0.664	0.652	0.607	0.665	0.866														
Emotional	0.474	0.724	0.614	0.666	0.597	0.647	0.897													
Cognitive	0.589	0.606	0.716	0.563	0.612	0.677	0.651	0.862												
Behavioral	0.485	0.699	0.677	0.610	0.545	0.534	0.664	0.624	0.517											
Attitude to Advertising	0.621	0.601	0.604	0.558	0.617	0.691	0.687	0.624	0.593											
Intention to Buy	0.642	0.762	0.666	0.639	0.653	0.638	0.645	0.664	0.475	0.558	0.617									
Customer Business Relationships	0.667	0.588	0.517	0.473	0.489	0.614	0.530	0.724	0.547	0.699	0.677	0.610								
Brand Awareness	0.618	0.550	0.593	0.629	0.695	0.683	0.660	0.606	0.716	0.563	0.612	0.558	0.617							
Communication with the Brand	0.565	0.572	0.475	0.479	0.517	0.611	0.570	0.699	0.677	0.610	0.545	0.601	0.601	0.677						
Brand loyalty	0.588	0.403	0.547	0.629	0.696	0.669	0.662	0.601	0.604	0.558	0.617	0.762	0.762	0.669	0.662					
Social Stimuli	0.890	0.474	0.479	0.909	0.729	0.604	0.724	0.762	0.666	0.639	0.653	0.588	0.588	0.558	0.617					
Previous Experience	0.526	0.898	0.696	0.547	0.475	0.666	0.606	0.588	0.517	0.473	0.489	0.550	0.550	0.699	0.677	0.610	0.724			
Customer Brand Engagement	0.508	0.604	0.909	0.696	0.479	0.593	0.601	0.572	0.475	0.479	0.517	0.669	0.662	0.629	0.669	0.662	0.691	0.687		
Attitude towards the Brand	0.475	0.469	0.696	0.437	0.570	0.555	0.934	0.403	0.547	0.629	0.696	0.629	0.558	0.617	0.699	0.677	0.610	0.645	0.662	
Brand Health																				

According to the results of the tables, it can be concluded that the convergent and divergent validity of the model is favorable.

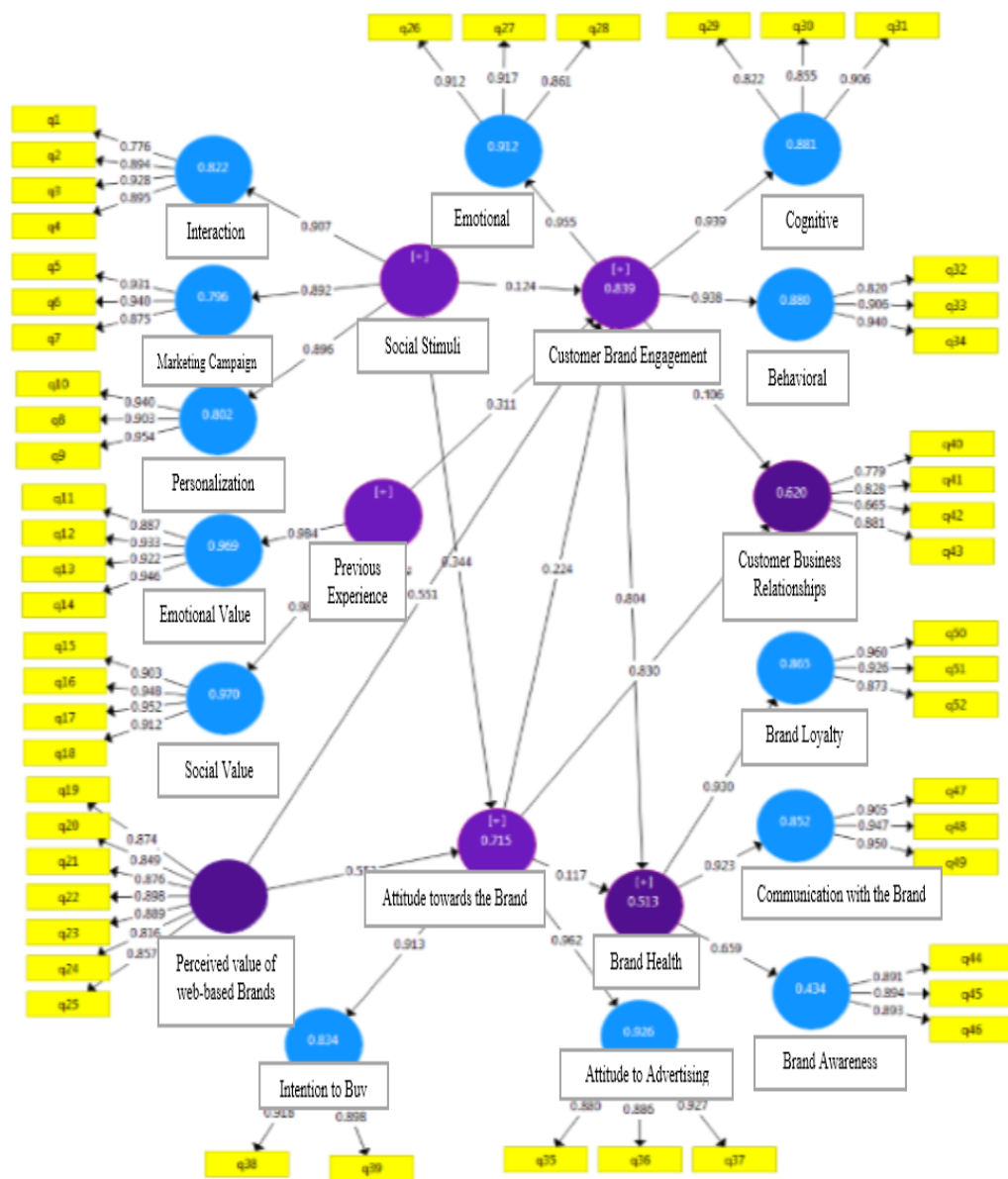


Figure 1. Path coefficients of the research model.

Figures 1 and 2. The coefficients in these charts are divided into two categories. The first category is the relationships between hidden variables (ellipses) and obvious variables (rectangles), called factor loadings.

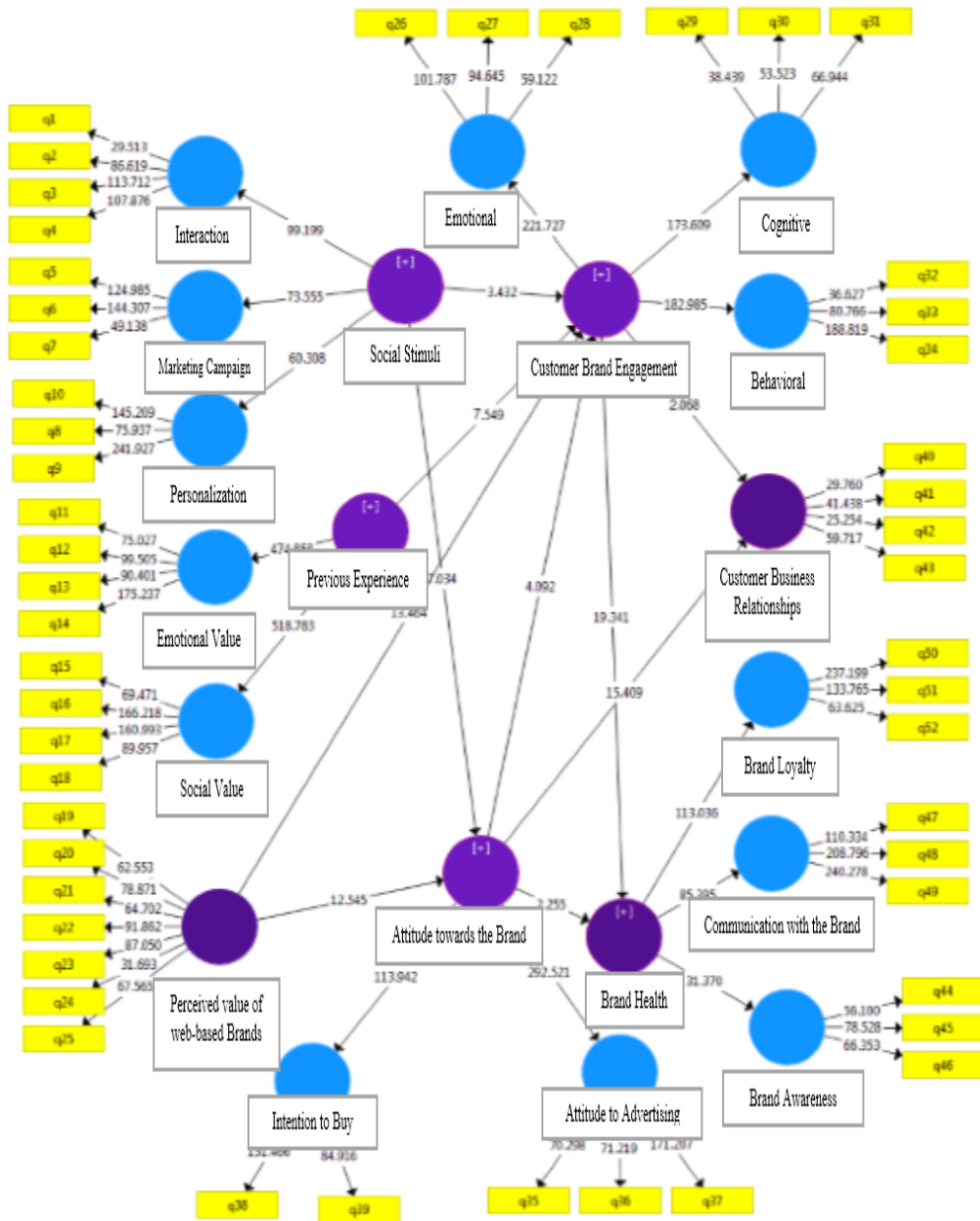


Figure 2. T Sobel model.

4.1. Determination coefficient and fit index of the first research model

Determination coefficient and fit index of the first research model by using the data explanation variance value (R²) for the dependent variables, the predictive power of the designed model is analyzed. In Table 6, the determination coefficient of the model is reported.

Table 5. Coefficient of determining the research model.

Variables	The coefficient of determination	Variables	The coefficient of determination
Interaction	0.822	Intention to Buy	0.834
Marketing Campaign	0.796	Customer Business Relationships	0.620
Personalization	0.802	Brand Awareness	0.434
Emotional Value	0.969	Communication with the Brand	0.852
Social Value	0.970	Brand loyalty	0.865
Emotional	0.912	Customer Brand Engagement	0.839
Cognitive	0.881	Attitude towards the Brand	0.815
Behavioral	0.880	Brand Health	0.513
Attitude to Advertising	0.926	-	-

The general criterion considered for the partial least squares method is called (Gof). The goodness of fit value is obtained from the following formula:

$$GOF = \sqrt{AVE * R^2}$$

$$GOF = \sqrt{0.785 * 0.802} = 0.793$$

The Q² criterion is used to check the model's prediction power. Suppose the value of Q² in the case of an endogenous construct (dependent variable) obtains three values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35. In that case, it indicates the weak, medium, and strong predictive power of the construct or related exogenous constructs, respectively (Table 6).

Table 6. Review of Q² criteria of the research model.

Variables	Q2 Coefficient	Variables	Q2 Coefficient
Interaction	0.593	Intention to Buy	0.659
Marketing Campaign	0.632	Customer Business Relationships	0.351
Personalization	0.659	Brand Awareness	0.320
Emotional Value	0.774	Communication with the Brand	0.702
Social Value	0.779	Brand loyalty	0.693
Emotional	0.696	Customer Brand Engagement	0.544
Cognitive	0.62	Attitude towards the Brand	0.485
Behavioral	0.660	Brand Health	0.351
Attitude to Advertising	0.708	-	-

In the effect of social and commercial stimuli on customer brand engagement, the path coefficient equals 0.124, a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic equals 3.432. As a result, social and commercial stimuli positively and significantly affect customer brand involvement. In the effect of social and commercial stimuli on the attitude towards the position (position) of the brand, the path coefficient is equal to 0.344, which is a positive value. The value of the t statistic equals 7.034, so social and commercial stimuli positively and significantly affect the attitude toward the brand's position. In the study of the impact of previous experience on brand involvement, the path coefficient is equal to 0.311, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 7.549, so previous experience has a positive and significant effect on brand involvement.

The path coefficient of the perceived value of branded websites on customer brand involvement is 0.551, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 13.464, so the perceived value of branded websites has a positive and significant effect on customer brand involvement. In the impact of the perceived value of branded websites on the attitude towards the brand, the path coefficient is equal to 0.552, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 12.545, so the perceived value of branded websites has a positive and significant effect on the attitude towards the brand.

The path coefficient impact of attitude towards position (brand position) on brand engagement is 0.224, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 4.092, so the attitude towards the position (brand position) has a positive and significant effect on brand involvement. In the impact of the attitude towards the situation (brand position) on the health of the brand, the path coefficient is equal to 0.117, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 2.255, so the attitude towards the position (brand position) has a positive and significant effect on the health of the brand. In the impact of attitude towards the situation (brand position) on business relationships, the path coefficient is equal to 0.830, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 15.409, so the attitude towards status (brand position) has a positive and significant effect on business relations. In investigating the impact of customer brand involvement on customer business relationships, the path coefficient is equal to 0.106, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is equal to 2.068, so customer brand involvement has a positive and significant effect on customer business relationships. In examining the impact of customer brand engagement on brand health, the path coefficient is 0.804, which is a positive value, and the absolute value of the t statistic is 19.341, so customer brand involvement has a positive and significant effect on brand health.

4.2. Determining the intensity of the effect of hidden variables

Defining the power of the impact of hidden variables states what contribution each variable has in predicting the dependent variable. In addition, F2 with three values of 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 represents strong, medium, and weak effect sizes, respectively.

Table 7. The results of the effect intensity test.

Variables	The dependent variables				
	Customer Brand Involvement	Attitude towards Brand Authority	Business Relationships Customer	Brand Health	
Independent variables	Social stimuli	0.023	0.168	-	-
	Previous experience	0.153	-	-	-
	Perceived value of web-based brands	0.299	0.433	-	-
	Attitude towards the brand	0.77	-	0.700	0.011
	Customer brand engagement	-	-	0.10	0.513

The findings showed that the intensity of the variable effect of social stimuli on customer brand participation is weak, and the attitude towards the brand is average.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This research has been conducted with the aim of Customer Behavior and Brand Promotion in Professional Sports Clubs: Developing a Model of Social Networks Marketing in Sports Cultural Club in Sepahan. Based on the results, the path coefficient of social business drivers and customer brand engagement is a positive value. As a result, it can be said that social business drivers positively and significantly affect customer brand engagement. This result is in line with the findings of [Ul Islam and Rahman \(2017\)](#) and [Verhagen et al. \(2015\)](#). The coefficient of the path between social and commercial stimuli on the attitude towards the position (position) of the brand is a positive value. It can be said that social, commercial incentives positively and significantly affect the attitude towards the brand's position. This result is in line with the findings of [Kujur and Singh \(2017\)](#).

As a result, it can be said that previous experience has a positive and significant effect on brand involvement. This result is in line with the findings obtained from the research of [Simon and Tossan \(2018\)](#). The coefficient of the path between the perceived value of branded websites and customer brand involvement is positive. It can be said that the perceived value of branded websites has a positive and significant effect on customer brand engagement. This finding is consistent with the research results of [Chen \(2017\)](#).

The coefficient of the path between the perceived value of branded websites and the attitude towards the brand is positive. It can be said that the perceived value of branded websites has a positive and significant effect on the attitude towards brand status. This finding is consistent with the research results of [Peng et al. \(2019\)](#). The coefficient of the path between attitude towards the position (brand position) and brand involvement is a positive value. It can be said that the attitude towards the position (brand position) has a positive and significant effect on brand engagement. This finding is consistent with the research results of [Kujur and Singh \(2017\)](#). The coefficient of the path between attitude towards the position (brand position) and brand health is a positive value. This finding is consistent with the results of [Ahmad et al. \(2016\)](#).

The coefficient of the path between attitude towards position (brand position) and business relations is a positive value. It can be said that attitude towards status (brand position) positively and significantly affects business relationships. This finding is consistent with the results of [Ahmad et al. \(2016\)](#). The positive value is the path coefficient between customer brand involvement and customer business relationships. It can be said that customer brand involvement has a positive and significant effect on customer business relationships. This finding is consistent with the results of [Ismail \(2017\)](#). The path coefficient between customer brand involvement and brand health is positive. It can be said that customer brand involvement has a positive and significant effect on brand health. This finding is consistent with the results of [Lim et al. \(2015\)](#).

Analytical findings showed that social business drivers influence attitudes toward brand status (position) more than customers' brand involvement. The most important factor affecting social networks is their entertainment. People use social networks in their free time. In these networks, people follow their interests by forming groups. Also, consumers' taste is revealed based on people's interest in different entertainment. In the meantime, considering the enjoyment of social networks and attracting the attention of users, it is possible to create diverse and attractive entertainment to create awareness and particular value of the brand in the minds of consumers.

A well-known, trusted, famous, and well-accepted sports club or organization that can provide an excellent service experience for its customers by properly informing and advertising its page or channel in the natural and virtual space, such as employee word-of-mouth advertising, environmental advertising, advertising on the Internet, etc., can increase its number of followers and maintain its audience by creating desirable content and updating it. Also, the perceived value of branded webs has a positive effect on customer brand involvement and attitude towards brand authority, which is consistent with the findings of [Peng et al. \(2019\)](#).

According to the results, the higher the intensity of the attitude towards the position, the higher the level of conflict. Conflict can appear in the form of "cognitive," "emotional," and "behavioral," which, while increasing the user's attention and learning about the brand of the club or organization, also stimulate and change his feelings and accompany him with more activities. With the increase in the intensity of the attitude towards the brand, the level of brand health and customer business relations increases, which is in line with the research of [Ahmad et al. \(2016\)](#).

The more intense the customer's brand involvement is, the more the customer's business relationship and brand health will increase positively. This finding is consistent with the results of [Ismail \(2017\)](#). Therefore, perhaps the reason for this finding can be related to the fact that the intensive competition between companies, stores, and organizations has provided conditions that continuously seek to find a new way to communicate with customers and introduce their products, and in the meantime, the indescribable speed of technology growth has come to the aid of marketers. Every day provides new opportunities for them to communicate more and more directly with customers. On the other hand, social networks are an opportunity to create a mutual dependence with contacts and engage them on an almost personal level; social networks create an opportunity to introduce the club and its services. Therefore, clubs must make the right decision regarding social networks. Social

networks cause the message to reach a group of contacts and improve the attitude of customers towards the club and its services, raise the level of awareness of the club and improve its mental image, increase customer loyalty, and finally, the value of the customer.

Internet marketing capabilities only had a mediating role in the relationship between company characteristics and company performance. In explaining these results, it can be stated that for companies, factors such as the efficiency of the website and its design to create a long-term relationship with the fans and stimulate them to buy more are essential. Companies can bridge the gap between themselves and their fans through their websites, and these companies have also increased revenue in their companies by selling their products online. E-commerce improves overall performance and increases overall competition. Sports managers need to use interactive marketing media to communicate with customers in the present time. In addition, by integrating various elements of social media such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, top professional teams enhance their presence in communities and create virtual forums that are effective in brand selection and engaging and interacting with fans.

Sports club managers should pay more attention to their company's effectiveness, considering the research results show that the company's characteristics are not related to the marketing ability. In marketing activities, they created visual appeals to increase the durability and effectiveness of the correct transmission of messages in cyberspace. Pay attention to the interests and tastes of customers in the Internet space. A suitable network should provide advertisements with the largest audience and sufficient societal influence. Internet marketing should be in line with the strategic planning of sports companies. The conditions for increasing the amount of internet audience should be considered. Finally, a suitable and happy environment for sports internet marketing should be considered. Professional club managers should create contests and incentive schemes on brand and service types and keep up with customers' changing needs by offering survey questions on WhatsApp and Instagram channels to improve.

Managers of social networks of professional clubs should pay more attention to the influence of attitudes in these networks to attract more customers. For example, they can pay valuable rewards for more cooperation and participation with the club by placing communication pages and practical and online offers for customers. Professional clubs can try to strengthen positive attitudes as much as possible by monitoring virtual spaces. If negative attitudes are observed, they can take action to find the root of this attitude and neutralize and change it.

6. Limitations and future research

Although this study provides meaningful findings for sport clubs, the study still has some limitations. There are other influential factors, such as Hidden behavior in social sports marketing. These variables should be included in future studies.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

The authors are grateful to the anonymous referees of the journal for their beneficial suggestions to improve the quality of the article. Usual disclaimers apply.

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رفتار مشتری و ارتقای برند در باشگاه‌های ورزشی حرفه‌ای: توسعه مدل بازاریابی شبکه‌های اجتماعی

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چکیده

هدف: این پژوهش با هدف ارائه مدل بازاریابی شبکه‌های اجتماعی در باشگاه فرهنگی ورزشی سپاهان مبتنی بر رفتار مشتری و ارتقای برند انجام شد.

روش: پژوهش حاضر توصیفی و به صورت پیمایشی انجام شد. جامعه آماری این تحقیق شامل کاربران و اعضای فعال باشگاه فرهنگی ورزشی سپاهان در شبکه‌های اجتماعی بودند که از بین آنها ۳۸۴ نفر به روش نمونه‌گیری تصادفی انتخاب شدند. جمع‌آوری داده‌ها با استفاده از پرسشنامه استاندارد و تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها با استفاده از مدل‌سازی معادلات ساختاری و نرم افزار Smart PLS و SPSS انجام شد. **یافته‌ها:** یافته‌های پژوهش نشان داد پیشایندهای بازاریابی شبکه‌های اجتماعی شامل محرک‌های کسب و کار اجتماعی، تجربه برند و ارزش‌های درک‌شده از تبلیغات اینترنتی برند است که تأثیر مثبت و معناداری بر روابط تجاری مشتری و سلامت برند از طریق برند مشتری دارد. تعامل و نگرش برند همچنین این تحقیق نشان داد که تعامل و نگرش مشتری به برند منجر به ارتقای برند می‌شود. همچنین، تصمیم‌گیری درست برای باشگاه‌ها در مورد شبکه‌های اجتماعی بسیار مهم است.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: ما نشان دادیم شبکه‌های اجتماعی باعث ارسال پیام‌های گروهی به مخاطبین شده و نگرش مشتریان را نسبت به باشگاه و خدمات آن بهبود می‌بخشد، سطح آگاهی مشتریان را نسبت به باشگاه بالا برده و تصویر ذهنی از آن را بهبود می‌بخشد، وفاداری مشتریان و در نهایت ارزش مشتری افزایش می‌یابد.

کلیدواژه

باشگاه ورزشی حرفه‌ای

صنعت ورزش

درگیری مشتری

نگرش به برند

نگرش مشتری

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۵/۰۴

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۸/۱۸



The Effect of Athletes' Experience Quality on the Loyalty to Sports Clubs

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Today, an essential part of sports' duties towards society is the responsibility of the clubs of various sports disciplines. Sports clubs play an indispensable role in developing the health of people in the community and healthily spending their free time. This study investigates the relationship between predictors of experience quality and athlete loyalty. It also evaluates the mediating effect of the quality of athlete experience on the relationship between predictor variables and athlete loyalty.

Methodology: The research method was descriptive-correlation. The statistical population of the research was the athletes of Iran's private clubs, using non-probability sampling and convenience sampling. Data was collected online from 391 athletes in combat sports, bodybuilding, and fitness through Google Forms. 6 hypotheses were proposed and tested using structural equation modeling.

Findings: A significant relationship existed between predictor variables and the athlete experience quality ($P < 0.05$). Also, the experience quality mediates the relationship between predictor variables and athletes' loyalty positively and significantly ($P < 0.05$). The results can help to develop and improve marketing strategies to increase the athletes' experience quality in service centers and sports clubs and create customer experience and management processes. It also has implications for managers of service centers and sports clubs or marketing managers who aim to increase customer loyalty and club effectiveness.

Originality: This study empirically justifies the relationship between predictor variables for the quality of experience and loyalty of athletes in private clubs. This study also provides insight into the relationships between predictor variables, experience quality, and athlete loyalty in an integrated model.

Keywords

Customer Experience
Experience Quality
Loyalty
Private Sports Clubs
Service Outcome Quality

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/07/30

Accepted: 2023/11/09

How to cite this article:

Allahveisi, A., Izadi, B., & Mansouri, H. (2023). The Effect of Athletes' Experience Quality on the Loyalty to Sports Clubs. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(4), 71-84. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.44547.1115>



1. Introduction

The service industry has become a driving force of economic development in recent years. In the highly competitive environment, competing businesses have consistently provided superior service quality for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Dam & Dam, 2021). With the increase in the number of sports clubs in recent years and the fierce competition between them, as well as creating various problems in the business environment of sports clubs, such as the outbreak of Coronavirus, the concerns of the managers of these clubs have been increasing (McLean et al., 2021). In today's highly competitive environment, customers are one of the most important assets of businesses (Rajabi Asli et al., 2023). In this situation, adopting different and new strategies to attract and retain customers has attracted the attention of many managers in sports clubs because customers are an essential element in the success of sports clubs (Poor Soltani Zarandi et al., 2020). Clubs should not be satisfied with customer satisfaction. They need to make sure that their customers are loyal (Rabbani Nik et al., 2021). Loyalty of sports customers is considered the key to success and the basis of profitability of clubs (Moemeni et al., 2022). Also, sports clubs need to retain customers because if they can reduce their lost customers by 5%, their profitability will increase by 25% to 85% (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). In this regard, Customer Experience Quality (CEQ) will likely determine the service's perceived value (Kim & Choi, 2013). Some studies show that providing a superior customer experience is a means to achieve results in successful marketing and a competitive (Gao et al., 2020); CEQ is an essential and relatively new concept for service companies to gain a competitive advantage (Eskiler & Safak, 2022). Although the CEQ literature is expanding, there is a gap in the history and implications of the customer (athlete) experience in the sports services sector. Creating a superior customer experience and ensuring its sustainability seems to be one of the main goals of service companies (e.g., sports clubs) (Eskiler & Safak, 2022). Business leaders believe that customer experience is crucial to a company's competitiveness, and marketing researchers call it the fundamental foundation of marketing management (Homburg et al., 2017). Customer experience has also become a topic of interest among academics. It has led to many calls for research, resulting in the growth of customer experience in academic journals related to this concept across different contexts and advances in understanding (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). The strategic goal of measuring customer experience is to use this knowledge to support positive and desirable customer experiences to achieve higher long-term loyalty (De Keyser et al., 2015). Based on the research model of Skyler and Eskiler and Safak (2022), four variables of service result quality, athlete-athlete relationship quality, coach-athlete interaction quality, and club environment quality predict the athlete experience quality, which is examined in this research. This model can be valuable and helpful for future researchers in customer experience quality, customer experience management, and sports club managers. Also, all organizations and individuals who deal with customers in any way can benefit from this research and use it to increase customer loyalty (Eskiler & Safak, 2022).

2. Theoretical background

Customer loyalty is constantly selecting a company's products and services over competitors (Khattiyasuwan, 2021). Athlete Loyalty is a desire to stay in a service company for a long time. Athletes buy and use goods or services frequently and voluntarily recommend these products/services to others (Shamsudin, 2020). Customers loyal to a company are not easily influenced by price or availability. They prefer to pay more and ensure the same quality services and products they know and like (Khattiyasuwan, 2021). Loyal athletes feel a sense of belonging to the sports club, which creates a greater desire to create word-of-mouth communication and makes them act as fans (Chiti et al., 2023). Customer experience is remembered positively or negatively depending on customer satisfaction, and customers who evaluate their experience feel satisfied (Kim, 2022). Experience quality is the cognitive and emotional aspects perceived when visiting and making purchasing decisions (Roy, 2018). Experiences create unique customer value and strongly influence their satisfaction, loyalty, and recommendation behavior (Funk, 2017).

Service quality refers to comparing a customer's assessment of the perceived performance of specific features with their previous expectations (Nainggolan & Amidiola, 2021). A prior study by Hsieh and Hiang (2004) suggests that customer perception of service quality, crucial in the formation of service delivery evaluation, leads to customer satisfaction. Eskiler and Safak (2022) concluded that improving the quality of service results in loyal customers who experience high-quality customer-employee and customer-customer interactions. Additionally, Liu et al. (2017) confirmed that the quality of service has a significant effect on customer satisfaction. Sports environments may include negative interactions that reduce motivation and harm program members (Eys et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential to study the positive and negative effects of social interactions across the path of athletes in sports (Orr et al., 2021). The customer-customer relationship can be used to find similar customers for common recommendations (Tuteja & Kumar, 2021). Peers may include any social influences in the sport (other than the coach) in which the individual engages (Orr et al., 2020). Peer-to-peer quality refers to the perceived judgment of the superiority of customer interaction with each other (Lemke et al., 2011). The customer experience affects not only the elements under the control of the service providers (e.g., service interface, price, collection, retail space) but also the elements beyond the control of the service providers, such as the influence of other customers (Verhoef et al., 2009). Helpful or annoying customer behavior may have a positive or negative effect on other customers' service experiences, and the beneficial behavior of other customers may also increase customer evaluation of the service experience (McGrath & Otnes, 1995). According to the results of Pandey and Kumar (2020), by facilitating the creation of customer value, service companies will be able to gain more participatory support among customers. Also, indirectly enabling their customers by providing superior customer experience to others is the ultimate goal of a company. According to the research of Pino et al. (2022), exceptional cases of peer-to-peer hospitality services may create a feeling of "home," strengthening the psychological ownership of the place of

service and encouraging customers to re-use the same services. Orr et al. (2021) also showed that club-mates play a passive yet essential role in providing a space for athletes with disabilities to feel welcome and to achieve their sport-related goals.

The relationship between the athlete and the coach is dynamic and sometimes complex. The quality of interaction is related to the perception of customers' interaction with service providers (e.g., employees, staff, trainers, etc.) during service delivery (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Jowett and Lavallee (2007) defined the coach-athlete relationship as all situations in which the coach-athlete's feelings are internal thoughts or behaviors (Jowett & Lavallee, 2007). The coach-athlete relationship is crucial in improving athletic performance and increasing outputs such as athlete well-being (Davis et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that the quality and improvement of the coach-athlete relationship reflects the efficiency and success of coaching in sports (Jowett, 2015). The coach-athlete relationship may affect the player's athletic performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). In general, the development of the interpersonal relationship between the coach and the athlete results from a long-term and continuous relationship based on cooperation, trust, and sacrifice, which creates a favorable atmosphere for athletic performance (Cynarski, 2020). According to Zarei et al. (2021) coaches' perfectionism predicts the quality of relationships with their athletes, and coaches' forgiveness positively predicts quality relationships, while coaches' control behaviors negatively predict quality relationships with their athletes (Zarei et al., 2021). Sports environments are informal learning contexts that depend on educators' practical educational communication strategies. Locker rooms and other spaces should not be disorderly (Geidne & Quennerstedt, 2021). The most crucial necessity and duty of sports club managers is to provide a basis for expanding customer (athlete) interaction with the service environment (Shirahmad et al., 2021). Environmental variables like light and music increase sales and can affect customers' subconscious minds. Design factors also include visual items such as decoration and color stimuli that the customer is aware of (Kokabi et al., 2019). The social aspects of sports clubs - such as positive and pleasant environments - are the most essential factors in determining participation (Casey et al., 2021).

Clubs must maintain a quality center for their members, coaches, staff, and athletes. Challenges arise from the need to keep up with advanced technologies and equipment, strengthen training techniques, improve support services, and maintain a healthy internal environment (Ibrahim & Hassanain, 2022). In the research of Geidne and Quennerstedt (2021) many young people emphasized that the facilities should be fresh and clean to identify a sports club they feel good about and, therefore, can be a source of good health. Athletes may have different experiences attending sports clubs. Their experiences may cause them to leave the gym, get bored of their workouts, or increase their loyalty. Research is needed to help generalize the findings of previous studies. In this regard, we aim to test a model developed from earlier models, which explains the antecedents and concepts of the quality of the athlete experience in sports clubs. We aim to explore ways to improve the quality of athletes' experience and provide a good experience for sports club athletes to increase their loyalty to sports clubs ultimately. Accordingly, the research aims to investigate the Effect of Athletes' Experience Quality on the Loyalty of Athletes in Sports Clubs.

3. Methodology

The present research method was descriptive-correlation in terms of practical purpose, cross-sectional in periods, and its data collection procedure was field-based. The statistical population of the research was the athletes of Iran's private clubs, and detailed studies regarding the number of people in this statistical population are not available. The primary tool used was a valid online questionnaire. In this research, descriptive and inferential statistics SPSS statistical software and partial least squares technique with the help of SmartPLS version 3 software were used to describe the data. The data was collected using a cross-sectional survey among 450 athletes from private clubs in Iran. To select a suitable sample for the research, using non-probability sampling and convenience sampling, samples were collected from 450 athletes from private clubs in Iran (combat sports, bodybuilding, and fitness). The data was distributed and organized using a cross-sectional survey and through social networks. Statistical power has been used to determine the sample size. According to the variables involved in the model, the researcher considered the statistical power of 0.9; Effect size of 0.05 and alpha of 0.05 were estimated in the sample power software of the minimum sample size. With a response rate of 87%, we were able to collect 391 questionnaires.

The questionnaire comprised 19 items within six constructs. Moreover, ethical approval was sought from the University of Kurdistan before administering the questionnaire to the study participants. A Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was allocated to all items. Service outcome quality was measured by a 3-item scale ($\alpha = 0.85$) (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim & Choi, 2013). The Coach-Athlete Interaction was measured by a 3-item scale ($\alpha = 0.83$) (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim & Choi, 2013). The Athlete-athlete relationship quality was measured with an items scale ($\alpha = 0.82$) (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim & Choi, 2013; Lemke et al., 2011). The Sports Club Environment was measured with an items scale ($\alpha = 0.81$) by Hosseini Yarandi (2019). The Athlete experience quality was measured with the scale of an item ($\alpha = 0.85$) by (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim & Choi, 2013; Lemke et al., 2011). Finally, Athlete Loyalty was measured with the 3-item scale ($\alpha = 0.78$) (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

All the measurements in this study were reflective, and internal consistency, reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity index were assessed. Internal consistency was tested using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha, and index reliability was examined using external indicator loads. Both values must surpass the threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was tested using the average variance extracted, which should go beyond the point of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was examined according to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and HTMT criteria; in this part, the AVE square root of each structure must be higher than the correlation between the corresponding constructs. For the power of predicting the model, Stone-Geisser's index was used. This index specifies three amounts of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as weak, medium, and strong, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). We used a criterion called statistical correlation VIF, introduced by Hair et al. (2019). At last, for the adequacy of the conceptual framework of the model, we utilized two NFI and SRMR indexes, which

Lohmöller (1989) introduced. These indexes are used in PLS-SEM to examine the fit of the model.

4. Results

In this study, 323 men and 68 women participated. One hundred seventy-one participants were under 20; 108 were in the age range of 21-30 years; 90 were in the age range of 31-40 years; and 22 were over 40 years old. Two hundred fifty participants had Diploma and Sub-Diploma degrees; 41 had associate degrees; 67 had a Bachelor's degree; 32 had a Master's degree; and only 1 had a PhD degree. Three hundred twenty participants did combat sports, and 71 worked in bodybuilding and fitness. Two hundred seventeen participants reported less than five years of sports experience; 107 said a history of 6-10 years; 20 reported a record of 11-15 years; and 47 reported a history of more than 15 years. Reliability and validity are the two main criteria widely used to evaluate the external model (Hair et al., 2019). The reliability of an external model was assessed by examining the reliability of the marker and the reliability of the internal compatibility through composite reliability (CR). In the second step, the convergent validity of each structure criterion was assessed using the extracted mean-variance. Finally, the distinction's validity and the index's external loads were evaluated. According to the values in Table 1, All values exceeded the recommended threshold level of 0.70. CR values in this study were between 0.87 and 0.91, which means achieving the reliability of the measurement model. In addition, to identify convergence elements in the measurements of all structures, AVE was evaluated with a threshold value equal to and more significant than 0.50 (Henseler et al., 2015). The results show that the value of AVE for all structures is between 0.63 and 0.78. Hence, convergent validity is created. Later, the validity of the differentiation was assessed using the HTMT and Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion Hair et al. (2019) by comparing the second root of AVE for each structure with the correlation matrix correlations. Table 2 below shows the results of the HTMT and Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which indicates the validity of the separation (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Measurement models and measures.

ITEM	FL	Alpha	CR	AVE
<i>Service outcome quality</i>		.859	.914	.780
My sports club brings athletes to their sporting goals.	.89			
My sports club provides the best results for my athletes.	.91			
I feel good about what my gym offers to its athletes.	.85			
<i>Coach-Athlete Interaction</i>		.835	.900	.751
I believe that the coach of my sports club takes care of the athletes.	.87			
I say that my sports club coach is interested in athletes.	.87			
I think my relationship with my sports club coach is excellent.	.86			
<i>Athlete-athlete relationship quality</i>		.827	.897	.743
I think it is great to deal with other athletes in my gym.	.84			
I believe we interact well with other athletes in our sports club.	.89			
I think my communication with other athletes in my gym is excellent.	.86			
<i>Sports Club Environment</i>		.809	.874	.635
The appearance of the club is visually appealing.	.81			

ITEM	FL	Alpha	CR	AVE
The physical conditions of the club environment (lighting, ventilation, temperature, and facilities) are suitable.	.84			
The location of the club is in a convenient location.	.77			
The club has a healthy environment.	.77			
<i>Athlete experience quality</i>		.850	.909	.769
I think the method of gaining experience in my gym is great.	.88			
I believe that we have good experiences in our sports club.	.89			
I say what we experience at my gym is great.	.86			
<i>Athlete Loyalty</i>		.783	.873	.697
My gym is my first choice for working out.	.82			
I will continue to be a sports club member in the coming years.	.85			
I would recommend joining my gym to others.	.83			

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

Latent Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Athlete Loyalty	.835	.794	.810	.758	.786	.740
Athlete experience quality	.649	.877	.717	.708	.809	.733
Athlete-athlete relationship quality	.652	.603	.862	.688	.664	.699
Coach-Athlete Interaction	.617	.604	.569	.867	.725	.595
Service outcome quality	.647	.693	.561	.620	.883	.753
Sports Club Environment	.599	.616	.582	.502	.631	.797

Note: The upper matrix of the HTMT and the lower index of the Fornell and Larcker criterion matrix.

The results of the structural model are presented in Table 3. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable. This model has explained the 42% variance in the Athlete Loyalty and 59% variance in the Athlete experience quality. The redundancy index (Q2) indicates the relation power for the prediction of the conceptual framework of the research (Hair et al., 2019). The Q2 amounts should be more than zero, which existed in the variables of this study. SRMR has been defined as the difference between the observed correlation and the implicit correlation matrix. Thus, it assesses the average size of the observed differences and the expected correlations possible as an absolute measurement of model fit (model). An amount of less than 0.08 is considered adequate to introduce SRMR as a suitable criterion for PLS-SEM, preventing an error in model specifications. The calculated amount for this study was 0.06, which confirmed the model's fitness. According to the results of Table (3), all the research hypotheses were established according to the cut-off value of 1.96.

Table 3. The results of the research hypotheses.

Path model	β	SD	t Value	F2	Result
Service outcome quality -> Athlete experience quality	.354	.076	4.652	.14	support
Athlete-athlete relationship quality -> Athlete experience quality	.190	.055	3.434	.05	support
Coach-Athlete Interaction -> Athlete experience quality	.180	.076	2.380	.04	support

Path model	β	SD	t Value	F2	Result
Sports Club Environment -> Athlete experience quality	.193	.059	3.293	.05	support
Athlete experience quality -> Athlete Loyalty	.649	.039	16.661	.26	support
R2 Athlete Loyalty	.42	Q2	Athlete Loyalty	.27	
Athlete experience quality	.59		Athlete experience quality	.42	
SUMMER	.06				
NFI	.80				

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the Effect of Athletes' Experience Quality on Athletes' Loyalty in Sport Clubs. For this purpose, inspired by the research model of [Eskiler and Safak \(2022\)](#) the model with six variables (i.e., athletes' loyalty, service outcome quality, athlete-athlete relationship quality, coach-athlete interaction quality, club environment quality, and Athlete experience quality) was investigated. The first finding of the present study shows that the quality of an athlete's experience is positively associated with the quality of service outcome perceived by the athletes in private clubs. This finding is consistent with ([Brady & Cronin, 2001](#); [Hsieh & Hiang, 2004](#); [Liu et al., 2017](#)). Hence, when clubs provide quality service to athletes, athletes get good results, followed by athletes' satisfaction with the quality of service, which leads to a positive experience in the athlete's mind. Therefore, paying attention to the quality of services of private sports clubs is very effective in the quality of athletes' experience. The study's second finding shows a positive effect of the quality of the athlete-athlete relationship on the quality of the athlete experience in private clubs. These results are consistent with the claims of ([Orr et al., 2021](#); [Pandey & Kumar, 2020](#); [Verhoef et al., 2009](#)). [Garg et al. \(2014\)](#) introduced the presence of other customers and customer interactions as dimensions of customer experience. The quality of relationships between athletes also improves social relationships between athletes and creates a positive and quality experience. The higher the quality, the higher the quality of the athletes' experience in private clubs ([Garg et al., 2014](#)). Another study finding reveals the positive effect of coach-athlete interaction on the quality of athletes' experience in private clubs. This finding agrees with the research of ([Davis et al., 2018](#); [Jowett & Cockerill, 2003](#); [Zarei et al., 2021](#)). Developing the interpersonal relationship between the coach and the athlete generally results from a long-term and continuous relationship based on cooperation, trust, and sacrifice. This creates a favorable atmosphere and improves athletic performance ([Cynarski, 2020](#)). The Athletes who interact more and better with the club coach are more motivated and enjoy training better. Another finding of the present study was the positive effect of the quality of the club environment on the quality of the athlete's experience perceived by athletes in private clubs. This finding is consistent with the results of [Shirahmad et al. \(2021\)](#) reported environmental aesthetics as an important factor in customer interaction. Many private club athletes relate the quality of the sports experience solely to the environment of a sports club; in other words, the healthier the environment of a sports club, the more facilities, the better equipped, the healthier it is, the better the visual design, and the better the quality of the athletes experience. Another important finding from the present study was that athlete loyalty is positively affected by the quality of the athlete's experience in private clubs. This finding is consistent with the findings of ([Patma et al., 2020](#); [Salim & Rodhiah,](#)

2022). Pleasant experience increases the customer's intention to return to the same place (Mohammadi et al., 2021). When an athlete has negative feelings or experiences about a sports club, they will rarely use it and will have negative feelings about it and will want to try other clubs (Akil & Ungan, 2022). The positive and quality experiences that athletes have received from a private club will increase their loyalty and make them willing to re-use the services of that club. In this study, we generalized the findings of previous research. We tested a more robust model than previous models, explaining predictors and concepts of athlete quality in sports clubs and exploring ways to improve the quality of the athletes' experience. We tried to provide a good experience for sports club athletes and ultimately increase their loyalty to sports clubs. Based on the findings of this study, all the hypotheses presented were supported, and we came to a clearer understanding of the positive and significant effect of the athletes' experience quality on athlete loyalty. We also found that athlete's experience quality is affected by service outcome quality, athlete-athlete relationship quality, coach-athlete interaction quality, and the club environment quality. Emphasis on the components of the present study does not mean that other components outside the research are not important. As a rule, other factors are involved in the loyalty of customers of sports clubs, and paying attention to them effectively increases customer loyalty. We examined many key factors and found that to improve the quality of the athletes' experience, the clubs should provide various services to athletes so that they can enjoy sports and club activities. The findings of this study were consistent with the results of similar research. However, this study added the effect of the quality of the club environment on the quality of experience directly and on athlete loyalty indirectly compared to previous research. Also, this study used a larger sample size than previous studies, and athletes in combat sports, bodybuilding, and fitness were examined.

This research has several important management implications. To improve the quality of the athletes' experience, club managers must ensure that athletes achieve what they expect and get good results from exercising in the club. Based on the results of (Orr et al., 2021), sports activities and peer interactions should be examined. Club officials and managers can encourage cooperation and relationships between athletes by planning group sports activities and bringing athletes together in the club environment. The club coach must interact well with the athlete and give the athlete time to get a positive and quality experience. In this regard, it is recommended that sports club managers design enjoyable and athlete-centric interactions in which experiences are created together. The customer experience can be developed gradually through improvements in the quality of service results and frequent interactions with the service provider and other customers (Verhoef et al., 2009). Also, the equipment and physical environment of the club, the location of the club, and its health should be standard and appropriate to improve the quality of the athletes' experience effectively. Managers must enhance the quality of modern equipment, the appearance of the club, the interior decoration of sports clubs, and other services that will be attractive to customers (Khattiyaswan, 2021). The results can help develop and improve marketing strategies to increase the quality of the athlete experience in service centers and sports clubs and build customer experience and management processes. In addition, the findings have implications for service center and sports club managers or marketing managers who aim to increase customer loyalty and club effectiveness. In general, the

results of this study provide valuable insights into the field of sports club services, which need to be given special attention.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نقش کیفیت تجربه ورزشکاران بر وفاداری به باشگاه‌های ورزشی

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چکیده

هدف: امروزه بخش مهمی از وظایف ورزش در قبال جامعه بر عهده باشگاه‌های رشته‌های مختلف ورزشی است. باشگاه‌های ورزشی نقش مهمی در ارتقای سلامت افراد جامعه و گذراندن اوقات فراغت به روشی سالم دارند. این مطالعه به بررسی رابطه بین پیش‌بینی کننده‌های کیفیت تجربه و وفاداری ورزشکار می‌پردازد. همچنین اثر واسطه‌ای کیفیت تجربه ورزشکار را بر رابطه بین متغیرهای پیش‌بینی کننده و وفاداری ورزشکار ارزیابی می‌کند.

روش: روش تحقیق توصیفی - همبستگی بود. جامعه آماری پژوهش ورزشکاران باشگاه‌های خصوصی ایران بودند که با استفاده از روش نمونه‌گیری غیراحتمالی و در دسترس، داده‌ها از ۳۹۱ ورزشکار در رشته‌های رزمی، بدنسازی و آمادگی جسمانی به صورت آنلاین از طریق فرم‌های گوگل جمع‌آوری شد. ۶ فرضیه با استفاده از مدل سازی معادلات ساختاری مطرح و مورد آزمون قرار گرفت.

یافته‌ها: بین متغیرهای پیش‌بینی کننده و کیفیت تجربه ورزشکار رابطه معناداری وجود داشت ($P < 0.05$). همچنین کیفیت تجربه رابطه بین متغیرهای پیش‌بینی کننده و وفاداری ورزشکاران را به صورت مثبت و معنادار میانجی‌گری می‌کند ($P < 0.05$). نتایج می‌تواند به توسعه و بهبود استراتژی‌های بازاریابی برای افزایش کیفیت تجربه ورزشکاران در مراکز خدماتی و باشگاه‌های ورزشی، ایجاد تجربه مشتری و فرآیند مدیریت کمک کند. همچنین برای مدیران مراکز خدماتی و باشگاه‌های ورزشی یا مدیران بازاریابی که هدفشان افزایش وفاداری مشتری و اثربخشی باشگاه است، پیامدهایی دارد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این مطالعه به‌طور تجربی رابطه بین متغیرهای پیش‌بینی کننده کیفیت تجربه و وفاداری ورزشکاران در باشگاه‌های خصوصی را توجیه می‌کند. این مطالعه همچنین بینشی از روابط بین متغیرهای پیش‌بینی کننده، کیفیت تجربه و وفاداری ورزشکار در یک مدل یکپارچه ارائه می‌کند.

کلیدواژه

تجربه مشتری

کیفیت تجربه

وفاداری

باشگاه‌های ورزشی خصوصی

کیفیت نتیجه خدمات

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۵/۰۸

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۸/۱۸



Designing an Electronic Marketing Model Based on Social Networks –Case Study on Sports Equipment Manufacturing Companies

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Today, due to the potential of networks and social media, marketing has experienced significant growth in them. However, the mechanism by which a sports equipment manufacturing company can engage in this field is uncertain. Therefore, this study aimed to present an electronic marketing model based on social networks in sports equipment manufacturing companies.

Methodology: This research was conducted qualitatively using a structural-functional analysis approach at the strategic level. The participants consisted of experts in sports marketing, media, and sports equipment production, and a snowball sampling method based on theoretical saturation was used to select 18 of them. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, and its validity, transferability, reliability, and conformability were examined. The data was analyzed using the coding method.

Findings: We showed the company's marketing model production of sports equipment in the network social functions subject to five main aspects (opportunity, targeting, setting up, monitoring and optimization, and threats), and there are 19 major categories. This result showed electronic marketing based on social networks in the company production of sports equipment is a systemic process. Based on this, it is suggested that the company producing sports equipment is made for optimal use of the opportunity. The existing part of their marketing actions is the fluency of the media in social activities while keeping pace with statistics and content steps that are based on the opinion of experts, monitoring the threats in this area, and as much as possible based on the reasons for the political conditions of the country from the all-round presence on the platform foreigners should be avoided and if possible, in the network internal social activities to operated.

Originality: This study helps to understand how companies producing sports equipment can effectively use social networks for marketing purposes.

Keywords

Digital Era
Digital Marketing
Production Company
Social Network

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/06/01

Accepted: 2023/11/17

How to cite this article:

Mohammad Rezaee, Z., Veisi, K., Fatemi, A., Aliabadi, S., & Smaeili, M. (2023). Designing an Electronic Marketing Model Based on Social Networks –Case Study on Sports Equipment Manufacturing Companies. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(4), 85-102. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43981.1101>



1. Introduction

At the global level, three significant trends in technological development, socio-economic changes, and geopolitical transformations have led to increased attention to marketing processes in all areas (Fesanghari et al., 2021). The sports industry is not exempt from these trends, and marketing activities in this industry have become challenging (Rust, 2020). Therefore, to remain resilient, it is necessary to review marketing strategies and employ innovative mechanisms to achieve marketing goals (D'Attoma & Ieva, 2020). One of the innovative mechanisms in marketing that has experienced the most growth in the past decades with the advancement of information and communication technology is electronic marketing. It involves utilizing electronic communication channels with customers to disseminate marketing messages (Kamandi & NiyakanLahiji, 2019). At the same time, it is defined as creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with customers through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products, and services in a way that achieves the goals of both parties (Mohammed, 2004). The history of electronic marketing dates back to the first commercial transaction over computer networks in 1989, and gradually, websites, Netscape, Microsoft browsers, and the internet introduced digital commerce environments (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Electronic marketing encompasses a diverse and extensive range of methods, including content, video, influencer, affiliate, email, social media, SMS, and viral marketing (Bokhare & Metkewar, 2014). Among these, one of the new tools in electronic marketing is social media marketing, which allows organizations and companies to adapt their marketing activities and influence their customers, thereby engaging in online commerce (Nejadfarahani, 2015). Social networks are computer-based technologies that enable the exchange of ideas and opinions, content sharing, and collaboration through digital platforms (Fernández et al., 2022). Furthermore, social media marketing is a type of internet marketing that helps companies achieve their marketing goals by generating and sharing content on social media platforms, and its formation can be traced back to 2003 and 2004 (Trattner & Kappe, 2013).

Based on conducted surveys, it is predicted that worldwide investments in social media marketing platforms will increase to \$563.153 billion. Correspondingly, it has been identified that 90% of marketers worldwide use social media platforms for their marketing activities. In this regard, the United States of America is the largest investor in this field, with over \$14.8 billion in investment (Ali Abbasi et al., 2022). These statistics indicate that social media platforms are currently one of the most common marketing strategies for various businesses (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Duff & Segijn, 2019).

In sports, the use of social media has become an essential strategy for coverage and promotion of sports (Piché & Naraine, 2022). The results of a survey indicate that the majority of winners and sports producers either utilize or intend to use social media to increase their revenue, as these media platforms provide them with the best marketing platform and millions of users spend their time on social networks, which represents a potential marketing opportunity (Kapnia, 2022). Nike is a prominent example of these companies, as it has achieved its marketing goals to a great extent by creating various pages on these social networks (Kapnia, 2022).

Since the presence of various businesses, particularly sports-related businesses, on social networks is of great importance in this research, sports equipment manufacturing companies, in particular, need a specialized model for social media marketing. However, the issue is that every business, whether sports-related or non-sports-related, has its unique nature, audience, mission, structure, and specific goals that set it apart. Therefore, it is impossible to use a unified and homogeneous model for their media marketing activities. Another issue is that in previous research, a specific mechanism for social media marketing has not been presented, and it is unclear what specific actions a sports equipment manufacturing company should take for its marketing on its media. What actions should they take? Under what conditions are these actions influenced? And in general, the marketing process on social media is not clear and straightforward.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, social media marketing is not one type of electronic marketing that differs from other electronic marketing methods, so it is impossible to apply a uniform interpretation and understanding to them, nor can a unified guideline be used for their formation or excellence. These issues, along with the fact that some previous research has viewed social media marketing as a direct sales channel, while these media are only tools for advancing marketing goals and not a direct sales channel, have made it difficult for sports equipment manufacturing companies to take advantage of a cohesive and native model for marketing on social media. It has also led to confusion for these companies, as understanding the factors influencing this phenomenon alone cannot guarantee its successful implementation. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive model specific to electronic marketing based on social media in sports equipment manufacturing companies to fill these gaps and enable effective and efficient marketing activities on social networks.

2. Theoretical background

Past research indicates that achieving marketing goals on social networks and achieving the desired marketing strategy based on technology is not a simple task and requires specific requirements and needs. In this regard, [Javani and Nayyeri \(2022\)](#) have shown that sports service brands can influence the value of their brand and consumer response through social media marketing activities, thereby increasing their market share and sales. [Sohrabi et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrated in a research study titled "strategic business development model of Iran's professional sports" that professional sports in Iran lacks sustainable performance in terms of both financial and sporting aspects due to severe profitability and commercialization weaknesses. [Saberi et al. \(2023\)](#) also reported on a study titled "The sport-for-all development strategies based on social marketing approach" in which they proposed two solutions: employing appropriate reward and punishment systems of the employees and dividing the society into heterogeneous groups". In another study, [Nazari et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that the antecedents of social network marketing include social business drivers, brand experience, and perceived values from branded web advertisements, which have a positive and significant effect on customer business relationships and brand health through customer brand engagement and brand attitude. Also, we showed that the customer's brand engagement and attitude lead

to brand promotion. Making the right decision for clubs regarding social networks is very important. [Fesanghari et al. \(2021\)](#) have demonstrated that market-oriented marketing activities of recreational sports based on a 9-stage technology-oriented approach include market targeting, market research, market analysis, market development, market exploration, market retention, market warming, market expansion, and market guidance. Completing these stages can lead to the benefits of technology-oriented recreational sports development in terms of market exploration and growth, enabling entry into international markets. [Abdoli et al. \(2022\)](#) have also shown that knowledge management customer needs assessment. Customer engagement is a foundational component of an effective social media marketing model that influences strategic marketing and the competitive advantage of a company. They contribute to media effectiveness and customer loyalty. Previously, [Amanati et al. \(2020\)](#) conducted a study on the social media sports marketing model and found that human resources, skilled workforce, training, and volunteers are the most critical factors in the success of sports marketing in social media. The elements of social media power, differences between traditional and new media, inclination towards digital systems, easy access, audience categorization, price, search, print media, and inefficiency of conventional media are essential enabling and limiting factors, and infrastructure and managers' unawareness are the most critical intervening factors. Based on this, the present research proposes strategies for promotion, communication, loyalty, content production, branding, trust building, and public relations.

In this regard, [Alam et al. \(2018\)](#) demonstrated, through their study on the marketing model of social media in premier league football clubs, that the mentioned marketing is influenced by internal conditions (structural factors, nature of football, managerial characteristics, professional factors related to the sports industry, and factors related to social media) and contextual conditions (communication and information technology, cultural and social factors, legal and regulatory factors, economic factors, and factors related to government and policies). Accordingly, it is necessary to utilize strategies of technological actions, structural actions, cultural and social actions, legal actions, economic actions, marketing-related actions, human resources-related actions, actions related to fans, and social media. Additionally, [Pereira et al. \(2022\)](#) discovered through their study on social media marketing in Portuguese football clubs that the structure and content of the posts were based on interaction, user-generated content, online communities, and content marketing. The mentioned research also showed the effectiveness of content-based marketing actions and the selection of the most suitable social network. [Körkkö \(2022\)](#) demonstrated the increasing impact of social media on sports marketing and revealed that social media significantly affects the promotion of sports brands. The mentioned research also indicated that traditional marketing has more integration and credibility than social media marketing, meaning that sports consumers trust traditional marketing more than social media marketing. However, consumers expressed that social media marketing is more interactive than conventional marketing.

Furthermore, [Atker et al. \(2022\)](#) concluded, through analyzing the impact of social media on sports businesses, that sustainable economic value depends on sports companies studying their consumers' habits, researching their competitors, and determining when and where growth in daily activities should occur. In another study, [Kowalski \(2022\)](#)

demonstrated, through a survey of viral marketing in social media, that sports clubs in Poland do not fully utilize the viral marketing potential on social networks, and most communication activities are based on official messages. Additionally, the mentioned study showed that in these clubs, communication management is based on peer criteria and repeating actions that others perform. Finally, [Ong and Leng \(2022\)](#) showed that social media marketing had limited influence on the behavior of sports consumers, especially football spectators, while previous studies have shown that social media marketing has a practical impact on consumer behavior.

In the conclusion drawn from the analysis of the presented literature, it can be said that social media marketing is a crucial determinant in promoting sports and achieving sports marketing objectives. However, there is no consensus on this matter because the study by [Ong and Leng \(2022\)](#) demonstrated contrary findings to previous studies, indicating that social media marketing has a limited influence on sports consumers' behavior. It is also evident that sports marketing on social media requires a model, leading to the proposal of various models for sports marketing on social media. However, it is worth noting that most of the models presented have been developed for non-production sectors of the sports industry, and a model depicting how marketing is conducted on social media for sports production companies has not been designed before. Notably, researchers have primarily focused on influential factors in the described models, and a model illustrating the process of social media-based sports marketing has not been presented.

Furthermore, in the presented models, the use of paradigmatic models of data-based theory has been more prominent, and no structural-functional analysis has been provided for them. Moreover, paradigmatic models themselves come with limitations. Additionally, previous research on sports marketing on social media has mainly been concentrated on a specific platform, with less emphasis on other social platforms. Finally, the current studies have primarily focused on the reactions of sports consumers, with less attention given to marketing methods through sports networks.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted qualitatively using a structural-functional analysis approach at the strategic level. The described method takes a holistic, systemic, and long-term view of phenomena ([Nasiri & Dastoom, 2020](#)). It is based on the Marxist theoretical worldview and utilizes it to study social phenomena that have their functional structure ([Peters, 1954](#)). Structural-functional analysis, also known as functional-structural analysis, is a sociological framework that examines how social networks and systems function to maintain social order and stability. It focuses on understanding the functions and interrelationships of different societal components. This approach was popularized by sociologist Robert K. Merton, who emphasized the importance of functional analysis in understanding social phenomena. The available analysis explains why specific actions occur, continue, or are sustained over time. Concerning social structures, Merton argued that they serve specific functions that contribute to a society's overall stability and functioning. These functions can be manifest (intended and recognized) or latent (unintended or unrecognized) ([Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017](#)).

The target population of this study consisted of experts in sports marketing, media, and sports equipment production. They were selected through snowball sampling, and initially, 15 of them were interviewed based on theoretical saturation. However, to increase the reliability, the number of interviews was increased to 18 cases. A semi-structured interview approach to collecting the data was utilized. The interview questions were divided into demographic questions and questions related to the research topic (such as: "How can sports manufacturing companies market themselves on social media? "What actions should these companies take for marketing on social media? What factors influence the marketing of sports equipment manufacturing companies on social media? Why should sports equipment manufacturing companies use social media for marketing?). Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria were employed to ensure the research's validity. It was including credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Each of these criteria was examined, and the actions taken in this research to achieve them are discussed. In this study, to establish credibility, the interview transcripts and the extracted codes were sent to the participants for feedback, and their perspectives were incorporated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, to achieve transferability, all stages of the research were thoroughly documented for potential use by other researchers while providing detailed demographic information about the interviewees. Moreover, assistance was sought from an expert in sports management during the coding process to ensure dependability. Three interviews were randomly selected, and the expert performed the coding after necessary training. Codes that were similar according to both coders were labeled as agreement codes. In contrast, dissimilar codes were labeled as disagreement codes, and the percentage of agreement between the two coders was calculated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability calculation.

Reliability	Codes of disagreement	Codes of agreement	the total number of codes	Interview no	Row
.888	1	4	9	P3	1
.750	4	6	16	P7	2
.909	1	5	11	P11	3
.803	6	15	36	Total	

To ensure the conformability of the research stages, including data collection, analysis, and formation of themes, the steps taken to facilitate the suitability of the research for the audience and readers were described. Finally, three processes were used for data analysis: open, axial, and theoretical coding.

4. Results

The demographic information of these individuals is reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants in the research.

Work experience	Age	Education	Activity	Row
7	35	Master's degree	Director of Datak Company	1
16	47	Bachelor's degree	Media manager of Iran Legionnaire	2
10	39	PhD	University faculty	3
6	41	PhD	University faculty	4
15	46	PhD	University faculty	5
5	44	PhD	Sports shop Store Manager	6
6	39	Master's degree	Manager of the sports news page Sports news page manager	7
17	41	Master's degree	Marketing Director of Pishtazan Zendgi Asan company	8
6	28	PhD	Owner of the Capital Sports Cooperative store	9
13	39	Master's degree	Makan, two-wheeler sales manager	10
19	47	PhD	University faculty	11
7	38	Bachelor's degree	Shahsavand Market manager	12
3	29	Master's degree	Director of the Karo Vision Trading Company	13
14	41	PhD	University faculty	14
5	27	Master's degree	The owner of the Geisha sports online store	15
6	38	Master's degree	The owner of Rad Sport	16
9	33	Bachelor's degree	Sales Manager of Tolo Sports Iranian Company	17
21	51	PhD	University faculty	18

Based on the results of open coding through the review of conducted interviews, 98 final concepts were identified. After the open coding and concept determination, in the axial coding stage, 19 dimensions were determined under the titles of consumer behavior change, value creation, effective interactions, platform determination, marketing effectiveness, customer understanding, marketing outcomes determination, competitor analysis, tactic and policy determination, financial provision, content production strategy determination, legislation, short term, medium term, long term, severe threat, soft threat, digital environment growth, and social media penetration expansion. Finally, based on the combination of five main perspectives, the dimensions were named goal setting, implementation, monitoring and optimization, threat, and opportunity.

Table 3. Concepts, dimensions, and perspectives of electronic marketing based on social networks in production companies.

landscape	Dimensions	Concepts	Interview code
Targeting	Change in consumer behavior	Increase consumer loyalty	P6, P7, P18
		Provide word-of-mouth advertising	P13, P17
		Gaining consumer trust	P3, 10, P8, P9, P17
		Increasing consumer satisfaction	P5, P16, P2
	Value creation	Get more value	P8
		Improve brand credibility	P15, P12, P13
		Increase brand awareness	P9, P11, P16
		Creating a personality for the brand	P7, P9
		Market leadership and thought leadership	P9
		Effective interactions	Approaching the customer

landscape	Dimensions	Concepts	Interview code
	Effectiveness of marketing actions	Establishing deep, long-term, and two-way relationships with audiences	P9
		Keeping customers	P1
		Get audience and follower's information	P1, P2
		Analyzing competitors and learning from them	P1, P9, P14, P13
		Generating quality leads	P1, P0
		More sales	P1, P9, P16, P18
		Brand audience growth	P7, P11, P12, P14
		Reduce marketing costs	P3, P4, P9, P11
		Increasing the effectiveness of content	P7, P11, P12, P15
	Platform determination	Increasing the effectiveness of marketing processes	P9, P14
		Facebook	P6, P9, P17
		Instagram	P4, P6, P9, P16
	Determination of marketing achievements	Twitter	P4, P5, P16
		LinkedIn	P10, P12, P13
		Special and unique measurable	P1, P4, P12, P16
		realistic	P4, P3, P7, P9
	Customer Recognition	On-Time	P1, P11, P14, P12
		accessible	P10, P15
Age		P10, P17	
Job		P1, P2, P5	
Analysis of competitors	Income	P14	
	Habits and motivations	P1, P8, P11, P13	
	issues and problems	P10, P15, P17, P18	
	Favorites	P10	
	Preparing a list of competitors	P2, P5, P6, P10, P13, P14, P16	
Setting up launch	Identifying close competitors	P2, P3, P8, P11	
	Modeling successful competitors	P10, P14, P15	
	Analysis of competitors' production content strategy	P10	
	Analysis of competitors' service type	P10, P15, P17	
	Evaluating all types of social media	P10, P15	
	Choosing the suitable social media	P10	
	Determining primary and secondary social media	P2, P5, P6	
	Adopting the best practice for each platform	P2, P3, P8, P11	
	Consider video content	P10, P14, P15	
	Continuity in producing and publishing content, especially video content	P10	
Determination of content production strategy	Determine the type of content	P10, P15, P17	
	Show attractive aspects of business	P3, P11, P15	
	Use of statistics, figures, and infographics	P1, P3, P7, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16	
	Coverage of business news	P10	
Financing	Attention to the time of posting content	P10, P11	
	Content Monitoring	P10	
	Provide appropriate content	P3, P9	
	Add the annual cost of the project	P4	
	Fit between the adjusted budget and tactics and strategy	P1, P2, P5	
	Cost concentration for the most productive sectors	P2, P6, P9	

landscape	Dimensions	Concepts	Interview code
Monitoring and optimization	Legislation	Determination of roles	P2, P4, P9, P11, P12, P13
		Determine the timetable	P1, P2
		Division of tasks, orderly and purposeful	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P11, P15
		Set a daily and weekly schedule	P3, P5, P6, P9, P11
	Short term	Responding to comments and questions	P5
		Asking questions to followers	P1, P8, P10, P11, P15, P18
		Observing brand behaviors online and reacting to them	P9, P11
		Discover and check keywords	P1, P5, P9
		Check posts and content produced by competitors	P9
		Following news and topics related to work	P9, P10
		Checking trending hashtags	P5, P9, P11, P13, P14
		Preparation of calendar and posting schedule for the coming week	P14, P15, P17
		Coordination with other team goals and future activities	P3, P4, P9, P16, P18
		Identifying the best posts of competitors	P9
		Follow the results of advertising campaigns in execution	P9, P13
		Medium-term	Collecting monthly statistics
	Strategy analysis Competitors' social networks		P1, P5, P9, P14
	Compare your performance with competitors		P2, P4
	Identifying the successes of the past month and integrating them into the social media strategy		P2, P4, P8, P9, P11, P14, P15
	Research upcoming events and news		P1, P4, P6, P9, P11, P17
Ensuring brand proof in various social networks	P1, P2		
Reviewing and evaluating key performance indicators in the last three months	P9, P11, P13, P14, P15		
Set goals for the next three months	P13, P14, P16, P17		
Long term	Definition of key performance indicators for the next three months	P8, P9, P13, P14, P16	
	Target audience analysis	P5, P15, P17, P18	
	Blocking access to the social network by the owner of the network	P4, P6, P9	
	Blocking access to social networks by governments	P4, P14, P12	
Threat	Hard threat	Hacking social networks	P13, P14, P16
		Setting up fake and similar pages	P11, P13, P15
		Time-consuming activities in social networks	P2, P3, P4
	Soft threat	Extensive changes in the possibility of using social networks	P4, P9, P11, P13, P16, P17
		Ethical considerations	P1, P2, P3
		Attracting different strata of society, even negative and destructive people	P3, P4

landscape	Dimensions	Concepts	Interview code
Opportunity	Growth of the digital environment	Disorder and crowding	P4, P9, P11, P13, P15, P17
		It is difficult to measure the rate of return on investment accurately	P3
		The spread of smartphones	P3
		The growth of advertising demand in social networks	P1, P2, P4
		Growing demand for digital services	P1, P10
	Expansion of influence of social networks	Increasing social networks	P3
		Influence of social media on society	P5, P6, P7, P9, P13, P16
		The membership of many people in social networks	P12, P15, P16
		Epidemic use of social networks around the world	P9, 13, P14, P17

The following conceptual model for social media-based electronic marketing in sports equipment manufacturing companies was developed based on expert interviews.

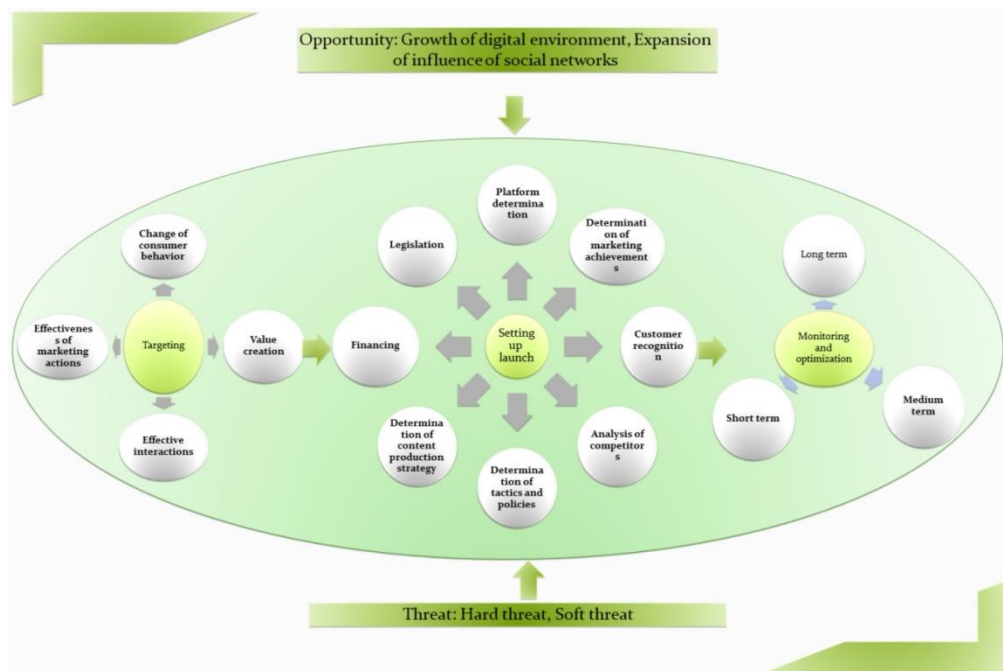


Figure 1. The conceptual model of social media-based electronic marketing in sports equipment manufacturing companies.

According to the mentioned model, social media marketing in sports equipment manufacturing companies comprises five main perspectives. The first perspective, called the "Opportunity Perspective," is created by combining the dimensions of digital environment growth and expanding social networks' penetration. In this perspective, sports equipment manufacturing companies adapt and transition from traditional

marketing to electronic marketing, explicitly marketing through social media, to align with the appropriate conditions and achieve their marketing goals. In this situation, the companies need first to establish "targeting." Targeting in this context refers to why and for what reasons they choose to market on social media. Based on experts' opinions, these companies pursue marketing through social media for four main objectives: behavior change of consumers, value creation, effectiveness of actions, and effective interactions on social media. It is worth noting that there is no specific priority or sequence among these objectives, and a company can simultaneously pursue all four goals or focus on one or multiple purposes at a given time.

After the targeting phase, sports equipment manufacturing companies must take "Launch Perspective" actions. The actions in this perspective involve determining the platform, identifying marketing achievements, understanding customers, analyzing competitors, setting tactics and strategies, determining content production strategy, securing financial resources, and legislating. The notable characteristic of launch perspective actions is that, unlike the targeting phase, there is a policy of precedence and sequence. This is because until these companies determine their platform, meaning which social network (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter) they intend to market on, they cannot define their achievements or gain the necessary understanding of their customers and competitors. Additionally, tactics and strategies for content production may vary across different platforms, and financial resourcing and legislation may differ. However, it is essential to consider all these actions simultaneously.

By the fourth perspective, the mentioned companies need to monitor and optimize their performance and actions after launching. To do so, they should regularly monitor daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly. Notably, the "Monitoring and Optimization Perspective" is one of the essential perspectives of the social media marketing model. Without proper monitoring, ensuring goal achievement or addressing deficiencies and weaknesses is impossible.

Finally, in this framework, sports equipment manufacturing companies must be aware that conducting marketing activities on social media, particularly in Iran, faces challenges and threats. Neglecting these challenges can lead to the failure of marketing initiatives and pose risks to the company's survival if all its marketing activities rely on social networks. These threats can be examined at two levels: soft and complicated. Complicated hazards include government-imposed access restrictions to social networks, while soft threats refer to extensive changes in the usability of social networks and disorder and congestion.

5. Managerial implications

The study aimed to design an electronic marketing model based on social networks in sports equipment manufacturing companies. The data analysis showed that manufacturing companies tend towards marketing in social media according to the leading and, at the same time, relevant opportunities. Marketing in social media is an innovative mechanism; at the same time, they can influence consumers through it. Consumers who want to receive digital services due to the expansion of smartphones and the increase of social networks are, at the same time, more exposed to advertisements on social networks.

On the other hand, by increasing its penetration rate in society, expanding the number of its users, and spreading it worldwide, social media emit this signal that the influence of social networks has increased and the way to marketing success goes through their channel. This finding is consistent with the interpretation of [Chatterjee and Kar \(2020\)](#); [Duff and Segijn \(2019\)](#). They stated that social media is currently one of the most common marketing strategies, and on the other hand, the study's findings also confirm ([Ali Abbasi et al., 2022](#)).

The data analysis also showed that targeting is the first step of electronic marketing based on social networks in sports equipment manufacturing companies. Targeting can be followed from the four dimensions of consumer behavior change, value creation, effectiveness of actions, and effective interactions. This finding is consistent with the results of studies by [Abdoli et al. \(2022\)](#), who envisioned gaining a competitive advantage for social media marketing, and [Körkkö \(2022\)](#) because they mentioned promoting sports brands. On the other hand, this finding is inconsistent with the results of the study of [Ong and Leng \(2022\)](#) because the realization above showed that it is impossible to change the behavior of sports consumers. There can be several reasons for this inconsistency. The first thing is that in the mentioned study, the marketing measures in social media were not evaluated independently. The viral marketing policy was emphasized, while no specific marketing strategy was considered in the current research. The other thing is that in the mentioned research, the effect was evaluated based on the football spectators.

In contrast, in the current research, the unit of study is sports equipment manufacturing companies, and at the same time, what has been proposed is at the level of theory and whether it has an effect. Or not because the model has not been tested. It is unrecognizable. Also, the data analysis showed that after the completion of targeting, it is necessary for sports equipment manufacturing companies to enter the "launch scene." The actions of this perspective are a combination of determining the platform, defining the marketing achievements, knowing the customer, analyzing the competitors, choosing the tactics and policy, determining the content production strategy, financing, and legislation. This finding is in line with [Abdoli et al. \(2022\)](#); [Alam et al. \(2018\)](#); [Amanati et al. \(2020\)](#); [Fesanghari et al. \(2021\)](#) because they had previously proposed some measures of the launch landscape. As mentioned, the first step in the launch scenario is to determine the platform. This action was recognized as one of the first actions because the sports equipment manufacturing companies need to determine which of the social networking platforms is more suitable for their business in the first place. It is worth mentioning that Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn platforms currently have the most users. Still, the nature of their performance is not equal, so they cannot be used with a single strategy for a specific purpose. For example, Facebook is the largest social network in the world, and its users see various content published by businesses active on the Internet every day.

However, due to the filtering of this platform, the role of this media is weak in Iran, but we can still have some expectations from it. In contrast to Instagram, which mainly focuses on visual content, it is considered an essential and critical platform for introducing more and better internet businesses. Especially since several tens of millions of Iranians are on this social network. However, this social network is now also accompanied by a filter. The second major category of the launch perspective categories is the determination

of marketing achievements by manufacturing companies. What achievement means is the specific goals that must be completed to reach the main goals. It is worth noting that the mentioned achievements specify how sports equipment manufacturing companies get from point A (unfavorable conditions, un-estimated goals) to point B (successfully met goals). Therefore, the described achievements should be specific, unique, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. The third major category of the launching landscape category was called customer recognition. This action was recognized as critical in social media marketing because knowing customers' personalities and characteristics helps sports equipment manufacturing companies reach their desired goals at the right time and place. If the companies mentioned above know their target community's age, occupation, income, interests, issues and problems, obstacles, habits, and motivation, it will be elementary to target them in social media.

Moreover, if the mentioned companies know their customers well, they can advertise according to their wishes and needs. As a result, more efficiency will be expected with less spending, and competitor analysis is another step in the start-up landscape. Competitor analysis was recognized as a start-up action, and it was determined that sports equipment manufacturing companies should implement it because the mentioned companies should be aware of the activities of their competitors by marketing on social media. This helps them to understand what strategy has worked better in the market, and at the same time, they identify successful methods and tactics. For this purpose, the production mentioned above companies must prepare a list of their competitors and monitor and analyze their production content strategy by checking which social media they use. It is worth noting that this calculation helps sports equipment manufacturing companies get a general picture of their competitors' behavior. Based on these criteria, they can monitor and measure the status of their actions in the market.

The fifth action of the launch landscape was called determining tactics and policies. From this point of view, the mentioned category is essential, and many companies in social media marketing are active on all social media, regardless of choosing the best and most appropriate option. As a result, the companies mentioned above must determine which media is more suitable for them by using the information they get from their customers. In this way, they do not waste their time and capital in the wrong place. It is worth noting that the chosen tactic for each social media, in addition to the most appropriate method for each platform, depends on the goals and achievements of the company. For example, if the company's goal is to remove competitors and the primary social media of the company in its social media marketing strategy is Instagram, one of the effective tactics that the said companies can use is investing in Instagram marketing or influencer marketing, which draws attention attracts a lot to them, it was also found that determining the strategy of content production in social media marketing of sports equipment manufacturing companies is an essential step because social media and content have a close relationship with each other. So, without appropriate content, social media marketing will be impossible and meaningless; without social media, no one will know the company's range.

As a result, the mentioned companies must use both to achieve their goals and visions. It is worth noting that the type of content, the time of posting content, and the number of

published content are three fundamental components for any successful marketing strategy in social media. Based on the analysis, funding is also one of the actions of the start-up landscape, and the manufacturing companies above need to pay attention to the tactics chosen to achieve their goals and achievements to finance their social media marketing. For this purpose, they need to think of a comprehensive list of the tools they need and the costs of the advertising work they need to do. It is worth noting that the last step was called the launching of legislation. This measure was considered the final step because a platform for legislation is not provided until the pre-legislative measures are taken. In the legislation of sports equipment manufacturing companies, it is necessary to divide the duties and establish rules to avoid confusion and disruption. In addition, the legislation provides the possibility of monitoring marketing actions. However, the monitoring and surveying of activities is not under it but should be considered as a separate perspective.

Adapting from what has been said, the fourth perspective of social media marketing of sports equipment manufacturing companies is called "monitoring and optimization," which is both the last operational step of marketing and the step in which the previous measures of monitoring and evaluation are carried out. It is worth mentioning that the actions of this perspective are summarized in four dimensions or significant categories of daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly monitoring and optimization. This finding is somewhat consistent with the results of [Atker et al. \(2022\)](#) previously, by analyzing the impact of social media on sports businesses, they concluded that sustainable economic value depends on the fact that specific sports companies. It is consistent with when and where growth should occur in daily activities. The important point in connection with the significant categories of monitoring and optimization is that in carrying out the operations of this perspective, the mentioned manufacturing companies should move from part to whole. It means that first, they should do daily monitoring and optimization, and by putting daily information together, they should do weekly monitoring. In this way, the process of actions, both in the short and long term, is better defined, and it is easier to see whether the operation was negative or positive over time.

It is worth mentioning that monitoring and optimization is the end of the marketing process of sports equipment manufacturing companies in social networks. However, as mentioned earlier, it is essential to note that the companies do not operate in a vacuum. At the same time, social media marketing comes with its challenges and problems. As a result, you cannot invest in social media marketing, allocate time, and consider appropriate tactics but ignore possible threats. An issue that, if not paid attention to and a reasoned and consistent policy is not considered, will lead to the collapse of marketing measures. At the same time, it will also endanger the company's life.

Moreover, with the filtering of Instagram and WhatsApp social networks in Iran, this problem has happened to many companies and caused many losses. It is worth mentioning that two major categories of threats are considered in this research. The first threat is called the challenging threat, through which the network owner or government blocks access to the social network. The most common issue in Iran is that companies do their marketing actions in such a situation. The second and last type of threat is called soft threat, whose characteristic feature is that marketing activity in social networks is superior to marketing

in the time environment. At the same time, extensive changes in the possibility of using social networks make these networks complex.

6. Conclusion

Adapting from what was stated, it was found that electronic marketing based on social networks in sports equipment manufacturing companies is a systemic process. On this basis, it is suggested that the sports equipment manufacturing companies use the available opportunities to use social media as part of their marketing activities. While observing the calculated steps, which are based on the opinion of experts, the threats facing this field monitor and, as much as possible, due to the country's political conditions, avoid all-round presence on foreign platforms and, if possible, work on domestic social networks. It is worth mentioning that this research was accompanied by limitations that must be considered in interpreting the findings. The first limitation is that in this research, the role of stakeholders, policies, and strategic plans of the country that can be effective in marketing in social media was not discussed because examples for them were not raised in the interviews. Another limitation is that in this research, a conceptual model created on how to market in social media for sports equipment manufacturing companies was presented, and the accelerators and inhibitors of marketing in the mentioned media were not addressed. Based on this, future researchers are suggested to study the role of stakeholders and macro and micro policies in social media marketing and to investigate the accelerators and inhibitors of sports equipment manufacturing companies' marketing in the media. What are the social issues, and how can excellence be achieved in this field?

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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طراحی مدل بازاریابی الکترونیکی مبتنی بر شبکه‌های اجتماعی - مورد مطالعه شرکت‌های تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی

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چکیده

هدف: امروزه به دلیل ظرفیت بالقوه شبکه‌ها و رسانه‌های اجتماعی بازاریابی در آن‌ها رشد روزافزونی را سپری می‌کند با این حال سازوکار اینکه یک شرکت تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی چگونه می‌تواند در این زمینه به فعالیت بپردازد نامشخص است. از این رو هدف مطالعه حاضر ارائه مدل بازاریابی الکترونیکی مبتنی بر شبکه‌های اجتماعی در شرکت‌های تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی بود.

روش: این پژوهش به صورت کیفی با رویکرد تحلیل ساختاری- کارکردی در سطح راهبردی انجام شده است. مشارکت‌کنندگان آن را صاحب‌نظران حوزه بازاریابی ورزش، رسانه و تولیدات تجهیزات ورزشی تشکیل دادند که به روش گلوله‌برفی و مبتنی بر اشباع نظری ۱۸ نفر از آن‌ها انتخاب شدند. ابزار گردآوری اطلاعات مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختاریافته بود و ممیزی آن برحسب اعتبار، انتقال، قابلیت اعتماد و تأییدپذیری بررسی شد. جهت تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از روش کدگذاری استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌های این تحقیق نشان داد مدل بازاریابی شرکت‌های تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی در شبکه‌های اجتماعی تابع پنج منظر اصلی (فرصت، هدف‌گذاری، راه‌اندازی، پایش و بهینه‌سازی و تهدید) و ۲۰ مقوله عمده است. این نتیجه نشان داد بازاریابی الکترونیکی مبتنی بر شبکه‌های اجتماعی در شرکت‌های تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی تابع یک فرایند سیستمی است. بر این اساس پیشنهاد می‌شود شرکت تولیدکننده تجهیزات ورزشی جهت استفاده بهینه از فرصت ایجاد شود. بخش موجود از اقدامات بازاریابی آنها، روانی رسانه‌ها در فعالیت‌های اجتماعی ضمن همگامی با آمار و گام‌های محتوایی مبتنی بر نظر کارشناسان، رصد تهدیدات موجود در این حوزه و تا حد امکان بر اساس دلایل باید از شرایط سیاسی کشور از حضور همه جانبه بر سکوی خارجی‌ها پرهیز کرد و در صورت امکان در شبکه فعالیت‌های اجتماعی داخلی را به انجام رساند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این مطالعه به درک این موضوع کمک می‌کند که چگونه شرکت‌های تولیدکننده تجهیزات ورزشی می‌توانند به طور موثر از شبکه‌های اجتماعی برای اهداف بازاریابی استفاده کنند.

کلیدواژه

بازاریابی الکترونیکی
بازاریابی دیجیتال
شرکت‌های تولیدی
عصر دیجیتال
شبکه‌های اجتماعی
ورزش

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۳/۱۱

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۸/۲۶



Development the Strategies of Sports Products Online Sales

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Online customers' purchase experience has become significant because of the emergence of the Internet as the primary network for the supply of products and services. The study aimed to introduce critical and influential factors in the progress of online sales of sports products through qualitative and quantitative processes.

Methodology: The participants in the qualitative section include 17 managers of sports production companies and sport management experts and sport product consumers. The questionnaire was made through open questionnaires and interviews and weighting of Delphi. And 564 online customers participated in the quantitative section and were analyzed by confirmatory factor analysis.

Findings: The findings showed that the components of online retail development include digital strategy, predicting the subsequent purchase of customers, creating value through the marketing mix, providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment, tracking customer-level data, Financial, and information security, website content quality, product and service information evaluation, service tools, and customer value dynamics. As a result, for the development of online retail sales, it is necessary to plan separately for these variables to provide the grounds for the formation of development. Respecting the law of the "chain of businesses" creates an environment rich in interaction and economic synergy, benefiting all aspects of a healthy and dynamic economic puzzle. The dimensions of the development of online retail sales includes digital strategy, predicting the subsequent purchase of customers, creating values through marketing mixes, and evaluating product and service information, service tools, and customer value dynamics.

Originality: The study's creativity is to use quantitative and qualitative methods to show the online retail development dimensions of sports goods and equipment.

Keywords

Customer
Digital Strategy
Economy
Marketing Mix
Purchase
Sales Promotion

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/02/25

Accepted: 2023/06/24

How to cite this article:

Kiani, M. S., Nazari, L., & Shahbazzpour, L. (2023). Development Strategies of Online Sales Sports Products in Iran. *Sports Business Journal*, 103-120. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43037.1076>

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Print ISSN: 2783-543X

Online ISSN: 2783-4174



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1. Introduction

The growth of information technology and the ever-increasing use of the Internet has led to the creation of a new form of retail transactions, in the form of Internet retail, and has turned online shopping into a daily activity for people all over the world (Yu et al., 2019; Zhu, 2018). When the Internet started, no one imagined that everyday life and the way of doing business would change like this. The number of online retail stores is increasing daily; some even believe that traditional retail stores will disappear someday (Jimenez et al., 2019). Online shopping is constantly growing due to the increasing acceptance and penetration of Internet technology (Riaz & Raman, 2015). Online retail stores have advantages for sellers and buyers compared to traditional retail stores, including that establishing online stores is relatively easy and requires less money (Yu et al., 2019). Its main advantage for buyers is that wherever they are, they can buy all their necessities just by typing a few words without leaving home. In addition, people worldwide are looking for the fastest, simplest, and cheapest way to do things and buy because of their busy schedules. Therefore, online retail could replace traditional retail (Jimenez et al., 2019). The occurrence of some crises may increase the desire to buy online. The situation that the coronavirus has created since 2019 caused more people to shop online. The restrictions that the coronavirus created for people all over the world made even those who had never shopped online before feel the need to shop online for the first time to gain the experience of online shopping; on the other hand, the businesses that had face-to-face sales before this, due to the closure of their companies, have to bring their business to the Internet and sell online (Dannenberg et al., 2020). Therefore, these explanations clarify the importance of online retail sales in global electronic commerce. Electronic commerce in Iran is beginning its journey, and the online retail market is attractive to enter and compete. Internet usage (55%) and smartphone usage (126%) in Iran have created the expectation of creating many opportunities for online companies. On the other hand, international sanctions have prohibited international e-commerce companies, the most well-known of which are Amazon, Walmart, eBay, etc. It has been handed over to local companies such as Digi-Kala, Tasifan, Shipur, and Zarin-Pal (Norouzi Seyed Hossini et al., 2022). The capacity of this market for new companies is exciting. Considering Iran's young population, which constitutes more than 70% of the people, it is clear that Iran's online market can provide an ocean of new opportunities for e-commerce companies (Pahlavanyali & Momeni, 2016). Meanwhile, Iranian people are less willing to buy from online retailers. Therefore, companies should identify factors affecting the demand for online shopping and increasing sales (Bahrainizad et al., 2022). Online customer experience is considered an essential factor for the success of online retailers. Consumers seek an attractive, memorable, and interactive online experience (Mostafavi et al., 2016; Sarlab & Farid Fathi, 2021). Because the customer experience in online and offline space is very different (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 2000). However, the problem is that sports retail stores do not have enough financial capacity to provide hundreds of online order processing centers, and we rarely see that sports retail stores have such a wide range of activities that cover all parts of the world. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions. But in general, it can be

pointed out that the level of development of sports retail stores has been lower than other retail stores (Hwang et al., 2018). This issue in online retail Sports of the country is more evident because they suffer from quantitative and qualitative problems. A clear example of this problem can be related to the fact that less than five online sports retailers operate in a specialized way in Iran. Most retail stores offering sports goods and equipment are non-sports. Since online retail sales in sports is one of the emerging businesses in the distribution of sports goods and equipment, its launch not only helps to sell sports products better and more accessible but also expands the range of activities. Going beyond the borders, it is necessary to identify the components of the development of these retail stores in the form of scientific research. But despite the importance of this issue, the research related to the development of online sports retail sales is low. However, the nature of these factors is the same in many ways for most retail stores. Patroni et al. (2015) showed that expanding retail sales depends on innovation. In this research, it is also mentioned that online retail stores need to have a digital strategy. Motamarri et al. (2017) also referred to the dynamic and real-time personalization of services aimed at brand loyalty, discovering opportunities for service innovation, creating new services, and having a strategy. Shibata and Kurachi (2015) support real-time decision-making using updated online information such as online feedback, customization according to needs, predictive modeling of customer behavior in the future, Dynamic pricing based on the customer's purchase history and competitive choices, and determining the right price, segmentation of customers through the analytical model of combined behavior, advertising management based on location, media, and timing features. Also, Rapp et al. (2015) pointed out that the development of online retail sales depends on the marketing mix. In addition, Kopalle et al. (2012) concluded that financial and informational security is a determining factor. Although there are other factors, the importance of this factor is more significant than other factors. Wilder et al. (2014) also believed that the value of online retail customers should reach a dynamic level. Also, Lee and Turban (2001) identified the content quality of Tie (2003)'s website as having product and service information.

A review of the studies conducted on online retail development shows that the development phenomenon is affected by various factors. On the other hand, the identified factors are not the same from the perspective of the conducted research and are different. This is while all the researchers have tried to plan a plan for the development of online retail sales. Therefore, it is concluded that the research results are not in the same direction. In addition, the identified factors for retail sales are almost different with each spectrum. Therefore, it is impossible to follow a single prescription for the development of all online retail stores because there are not many online sports retail stores in the country, and their lack of action has led to non-specialized retail sales of products. Offer a sport in which they do not have enough expertise. It is necessary to examine the components of the development of these retail stores purposefully in the form of online sports retail sales. To determine which components are decisive and if these components are identified, constructive suggestions can be made accordingly for retail stores that operate in this field and people who intend to They are entering this field.

2. Methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and analytical and exploratory, which was done by combining qualitative and quantitative models. The study's statistical population in the qualitative part included managers of sports production companies, professors, and university experts. In the quantitative part, the statistical population included sports goods and equipment consumers. The sampling method in the qualitative section was purposeful, and the sample size was equal to the theoretical saturation of 17 people. Also, the sampling method was available in the quantitative area. Finally, 700 questionnaires were returned, of which 564 questionnaires were used. Data were obtained through open questionnaires and interviews, Delphi questionnaire weighting, and confirmatory factor analysis. The collected data were analyzed using SPS and SmartPLS software.

3. Results

3.1. Content analysis

According to the content of the interviews and the frequency of the identified concepts, the following categories were identified as the most critical factors affecting the development of online retail sales. As in [Table 1](#), various interview concepts have been extracted concerning developing online retail sales of sports goods and equipment. In this step, 97 codes were identified, of which 55 were similar, and 44 were unique. Next, special codes will be the basis of coding for the second coding stage, which is used for secondary coding or creating the main category because similar codes are repetitions of unique codes and do not provide new information about factors affecting the development of online retail sales of sports goods and equipment.

Table 1. Initial coding of the development indicators of online retail sales of sports goods and equipment.

Interview code	Initial code
C1	1. Supporting open communication, 2. Recognizing each customer's consumption pattern, 3. Knowing the customer's buying and consumption habits, 4. Offering products considering the potential talents of the geographical area, 5. The price in online shopping should be lower than in other stores, 6. Customer transaction data
C2	1. Customization according to needs, 2. Customer segmentation through a hybrid behavior analysis model, 3. Access to telephone support, 4. Information up-to-date, 5. Privacy protection, 6. Advertising management based on location characteristics, 7. Investment In the national infrastructure necessary for the online format
C3	1. Optimizing resources and efficient operations; 2. Entrepreneurial-opportunistic management style, 3. Supporting open communication, 4. Investing in internet infrastructure, 5. Preservation of people's privacy, 6. Knowing customer interests, 7. Analysis Data from integrated channels, 8. Dynamic pricing based on customer purchase history, 9. Authenticity
C4	1. Entrepreneurial management, 2. Preservation of personal privacy of site customers, 3. Preservation of ethical issues, 4. Completeness of information, 5. Pleasantness, 6. Relevance, 7. Comprehensibility, 8. Compatibility, 9. Adequacy, 10. Form of information
C5	1. Prioritizing the customer, 2. Paying attention to customer needs, 3. Advertising management, 4. Knowing customer buying habits, 5. Improving customer experience and relationships, 6.

Interview code	Initial code
	Facilitating product referral and exchange, 7. Knowing customer preferences, 8. Digital leadership
C6	1. Obtaining customer insights, 2. Prioritizing the customer, 3. Maintaining privacy, 4. Knowing the customer's interests, 5. Knowing the customer's wishes, 6. The accuracy of the information given by the customer, 7. Validating and verifying the seller. 8. The completeness of the information, 9. The information is up-to-date, 10. The correctness of the information
C7	1. Adopt digital learning as a strategy; 2. Prioritize the customer, 3. Short lead time, 4. Group structures, 5. Demographic data, 6. Survey data, 7. Vendor verification, 8. Resource optimization. And efficient operations, 9. Privacy protection, 10. Understanding customer buying habits, 11. Prioritizing the customer, 12. Customer orientation, 13. Improving customer relations
C8	1. Entrepreneurial management style, 2. Preservation of privacy, 3. Knowing the customer's wishes, 4. Up-to-date information, 5. Low price of products or services offered in online shopping, 6. Prioritizing the customer, 7. Having demographic data of customers, 8. Advertising management, 9. Knowing the demographics of sports customers
C9	1. Recognizing product similarities, 2. Recognizing customer interests, 3. Investing in internet infrastructure, 4. Supporting open communication, 5. Customization according to needs, 6. Customer orientation, 7. Improving customer relations.
C10	1. Privacy protection, 2. Creating a chat room for customers, 3. Advertising management, 4. Understanding customer interests, 5. Customer segmentation, 6. Comprehensibility of the information provided on the site, 7. Understanding customer buying habits, 8. 9. Supporting open communication, 10. Vendor verification 11. Efficient operations and functions
C11	1. Subsector boundaries to provide dynamic information; 2. Privacy protection, 3. Prioritize the customer, 4. Dynamic pricing, 5. Entrepreneurial and innovative management, 6. Compatibility of the information supplied according to sports products.

Now that all the data is coded and several codes or initial concepts are created, the second coding stage in content analysis begins. At this stage, the researcher does not work with raw texts but with the concepts he has produced. This coding stage, or "secondary or core" coding, is to create and extract major categories or indicators. Categories are concepts of higher abstraction and allow the analyst to reduce and integrate data (Mohamadpour, 2014). In Table 2, the coding method of the first level (primary) and the second level (secondary) is presented under the title of understanding the meaning of dimensions practical on the development of online retail sales of goods and sports equipment.

Table 2. Secondary coding (identification of adequate dimensions on the development of online retail sales of goods and sports equipment).

Related Identified Concepts (Primary Codes)	Main categories	Interview code
Support for open communication, digital learning, optimization of resources and efficient operations, entrepreneurial-opportunistic management style, investment in national infrastructure necessary for the online format, digital leadership	Digital strategy	C1, C3, C9, C10, C8, C7, C4, C11, C2
Recognizing each customer's consumption pattern, knowing customer interests, gaining customer insight, knowing customer wishes, knowing customer buying and consumption habits	Predicting the subsequent purchase of customers	C3, C5, C6, C9, C10, C1, C8, C7

Related Identified Concepts (Primary Codes)	Main categories	Interview code
Product similarities, group of structures, sub-branch boundaries	Providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment	C9, C7, C11
Customer transaction data, demographic data, survey data	Customer-level data tracking	C1, C7, C8
Analyzing the data of integrated channels, offering products considering the potential talent of the geographical area, the time of arrival of the goods should be short, management of advertising based on location characteristics, dynamic pricing based on the customer's purchase history, the price in online shopping should be lower than the prices in other stores.	Creating value through the marketing mix	C3, C1, C2, C5, C8, C10, C7, C11
Authenticity, privacy, ethical issues, authentication, and seller approval	Financial and information security	C3, C6, C2, C4, C6, C7, C10, C11
Up-to-date information, the form of communication, the correctness of the information, completeness of the information	Website content quality	C2, C6, C8, C4
Sufficient, agreeable, compatible, relevant, understandable	Evaluation of product and service information	C4, C11, C10
Access to telephone support, product referral facility, and exchange, creating a chat room for customers	Service tools	C2, C5, C10
Improving customer experience and relationships, customer orientation, segmentation of customers through the combined behavior analytical model, prioritizing the customer, customization according to needs	Dynamics of customer value	C5, C7, C9, C2, C10, C6, C8, C11

In this research, a schematic model presents the dimensions of developing online retail sales of goods and sports equipment to show the theoretical codes and their comprehensibility. It should be noted that based on secondary coding (main categories), digital strategy categories include predicting the subsequent purchase of customers, creating values through marketing mixes, providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment, tracking customer-level data, and financial security. And information, website content quality, product and service information evaluation, service tools, and customer value dynamics.

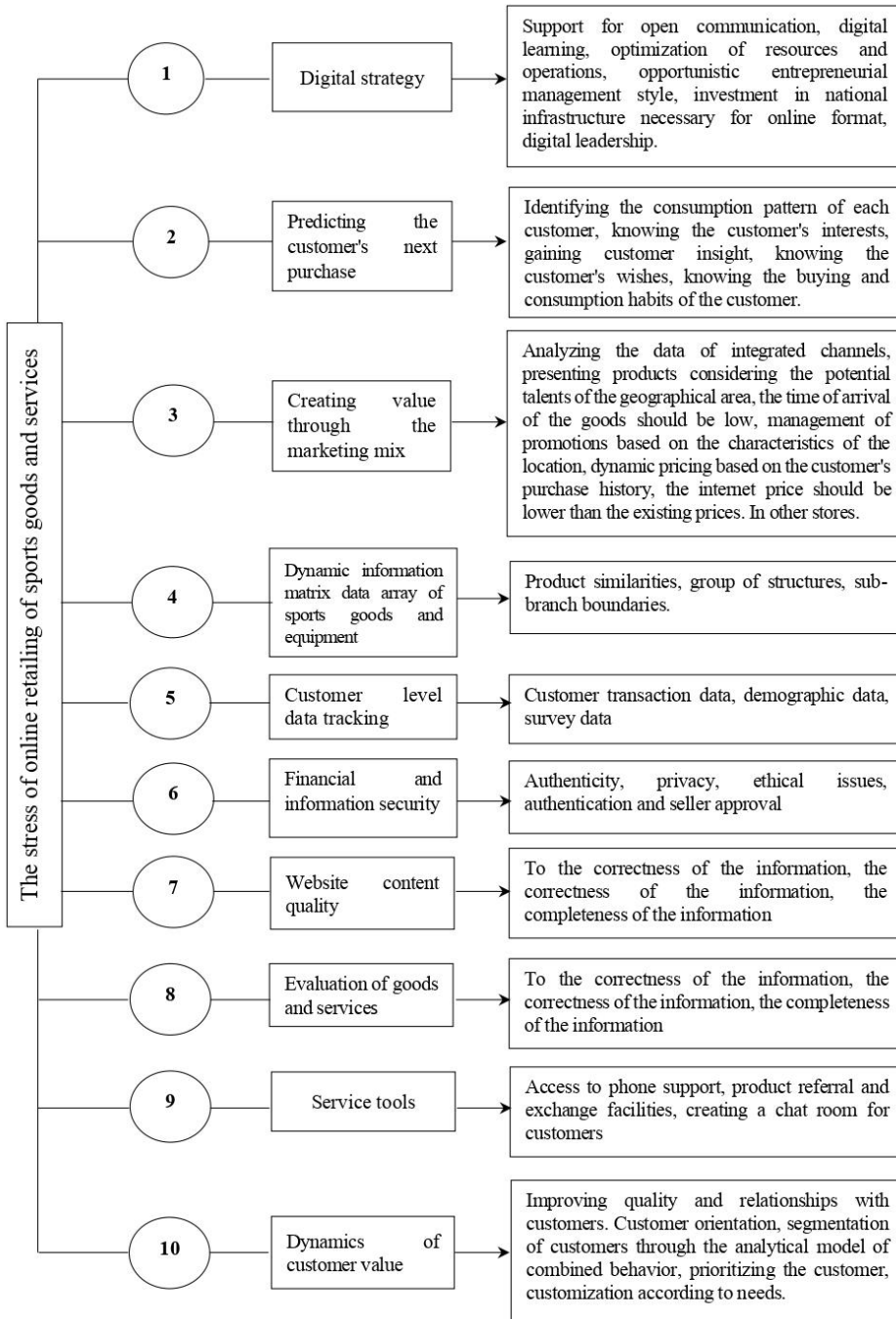


Figure 1. Schematic model of the development dimensions of online retail sales of sports goods and equipment.

3.2. Fuzzy Delphi

Delphi technique with a fuzzy approach was used to determine the importance of indicators and screen the most critical identified indicators. Based on the results of the de-fuzzification of the aggregated values of the experts, the tolerance threshold for the criteria of "dynamic pricing based on the customer's purchase history" and "the price in online shopping must be lower than the existing prices" is lower than the considered value of 0.6. These criteria are excluded from the set of practical standards for developing online retail sales of sports goods and equipment because, from the point of view of experts in this field, the said criteria do not have a decisive role. The critical issue in this regard is that in applying the Delphi technique for screening, the result can be achieved by de-fuzzifying the values and selecting the threshold intensity in the first step. But for the use of Delphi in predicting the views of each expert, the average views are calculated, and the Delphi cycle is repeated. This process stops when two consecutive averages are close to each other (Habibi et al., 2015). Adapting from this point of view, it can be said that in the current research, consecutive averages are close, and the desired result has been achieved in this first stage. The proof of this claim can also be considered the low number of excluded criteria.

Table 3. De-fuzzification results of aggregated values of experts.

Criterion	Average view	Definite value	Result
Support open communication	(1 ·0/977 ·0/727)	0/901	Acceptance
Digital learning	(1 ·0/954 ·0/704)	0/886	Acceptance
Resource optimization and efficient operations	(0/975 ·0/954 ·0/704)	0/877	Acceptance
Entrepreneurial-opportunistic management style	(1 ·0/886 ·0/634)	0/840	Acceptance
Investment in national infrastructure	(1 ·0/863 ·0/613)	0/825	Acceptance
Digital leadership	(1 ·0/931 ·0/681)	0/870	Acceptance
Identifying the consumption pattern of each customer	(0/977 ·0/886 ·0/590)	0/817	Acceptance
Understanding customer interests	(1 ·0/863 ·0/613)	0/825	Acceptance
Gaining customer insights	(1 ·0/886 ·0/636)	0/840	Acceptance
Understanding customer needs	(1 ·0/795 ·0/658)	0/817	Acceptance
Knowing the buying and consumption habits of customers	(0/9 ·0/750 ·0/522)	0/724	Acceptance
Integrated channels data analysis	(0/954 ·0/750 ·0/500)	0/734	Acceptance
Providing products considering the talents of...	(0/954 ·0/704 ·0/451)	0/704	Acceptance
The arrival time of the goods is low	(0/977 ·0/818 ·0/568)	0/787	Acceptance
Advertising management based on location features	(0/954 ·0/795 ·0/545)	0/764	Acceptance
Dynamic pricing based on purchase history...	(0/750 ·0/545 ·0/340)	0/545	Rejection
The price in online shopping should be lower than the price	(0/659 ·0/477 ·0/318)	0/484	Rejection
Product similarities	(0/818 ·0/704 ·0/386)	0/636	Acceptance
Group of structures	(0/909 ·0/727 ·0/477)	0/704	Acceptance

Criterion	Average view	Definite value	Result
Subbranch boundaries	(0/954 ·0/886 ·0/545)	0/795	Acceptance
Customer transaction data	(1 ·0/886 ·0/636)	0/840	Acceptance
Demographic data	(0/977 ·0/795 ·0/545)	0/772	Acceptance
Survey data	(1 ·0/931 ·0/659)	0/863	Acceptance
accuracy	(0/931 ·0/795 ·0/522)	0/749	Acceptance
Privacy protection	(0/954 ·0/795 ·0/545)	0/764	Acceptance
Maintaining ethical issues	(0/931 ·0/681 ·0/431)	0/681	Acceptance
Signing and verifying the seller	(1 ·0/977 ·0/704)	0/893	Acceptance
Up-to-date information	(0/886 ·0/704 ·0/454)	0/681	Acceptance
Information format	(0/909 ·0/750 ·0/500)	0/719	Acceptance
The correctness of the information	(0/909 ·0/727 ·0/472)	0/702	Acceptance
Completeness of information	(1 ·0/977 ·0/727)	0/901	Acceptance
Suffice	(1 ·0/931 ·0/659)	0/863	Acceptance
to be pleasant	(0/931 ·0/863 ·0/636)	0/810	Acceptance
Compatible	(0/977 ·0/863 ·0/613)	0/817	Acceptance
related	(0/977 ·0/840 ·0/590)	0/802	Acceptance
understandable	(0/931 ·0/727 ·0/477)	0/711	Acceptance
Access to phone support	(0/954 ·0/772 ·0/477)	0/734	Acceptance
The facility for product referral and replacement	(0/886 ·0/727 ·0/477)	0/696	Acceptance
Creating a chat room for customers	(1 ·0/931 ·0/681)	0/870	Acceptance
Improve customer experience and relationships	(0/977 ·0/863 ·0/613)	0/817	Acceptance
Customer Orientation	(1 ·0/977 ·0/727)	0/901	Acceptance
Customer segmentation through analytical model...	(1 ·0/909 ·0/659)	0/856	Acceptance
Prioritizing the customer	(1 ·0/909 ·0/659)	0/856	Acceptance
Customization according to needs	(0/909 ·0/750 ·0/500)	0/719	Acceptance

In the following, the factorial validity of the structure of online retail development was checked using the second-order confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether the structures of this variable have the necessary validity. For this purpose, the maximum likelihood estimation method was used to evaluate the model fit.

Table 4. Evaluation of online retail development structure measurement models.

Variables	Λ	α	CR	AVE
Online retail development		0/951	0/955	0/338
Digital strategy	0/621	0/886	0/913	0/636
Strategy-1	0/810			
Strategy-2	0/755			
Strategy-3	0/830			
Strategy-4	0/781			
Strategy-5	0/791			
Strategy-6	0/798			
Predicting the next purchase	0/748	0/908	0/932	0/731
Prediction-1	0/844			

Variables	Λ	α	CR	AVE
Prediction-2	0/890			
Prediction-3	0/863			
Prediction-4	0/841			
Prediction-5	0/838			
Creating value through the marketing mix	0/599	0/878	0/918	0/741
creation-1	0/857			
creation-2	0/937			
creation-3	0/668			
creation-4	0/952			
Providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment	0/514	0/941	0/962	0/849
Presentation-1	0/955			
Presentation-2	0/963			
Presentation-3	0/919			
Customer-level data tracking	0/769	0/881	0/926	0/807
Trace-1	0/878			
Trace-2	0/912			
Trace-3	0/904			
Financial and information security	0/755	0/916	0/941	0/798
Security-1	0/910			
Security-2	0/920			
Security-3	0/888			
Security-4	0/855			
Website content quality	0/571	0/916	0/940	0/798
Quality-1	0/891			
Quality-2	0/910			
Quality-3	0/892			
Quality-4	0/880			
Evaluation of product and service information	0/778	0/862	0/900	0/643
Evaluation-1	0/753			
Evaluation-2	0/832			
Evaluation-3	0/835			
Evaluation-4	0/775			
Evaluation-5	0/811			
Service tools	0/587	0/793	0/879	0/707
Tool-1	0/823			
Tool-2	0/842			
Tool-3	0/858			
Dynamics of customer value	0/706	0/938	0/953	0/802
Dynamics-1	0/888			
Dynamics-2	0/922			
Dynamics-3	0/926			
Dynamics-4	0/871			
Dynamics-5	0/868			

Based on the evaluation results of online retail development measurement models, it was determined that the values of Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) of all indicators are higher than the threshold of 0.7 (<0.7 for composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha; (Hair, 1995). In addition, all the values of average variance extracted

(AVE) for the variable of online retail development are above the recommended standard and exceeded the value of 0.5 (Hair, 1995).

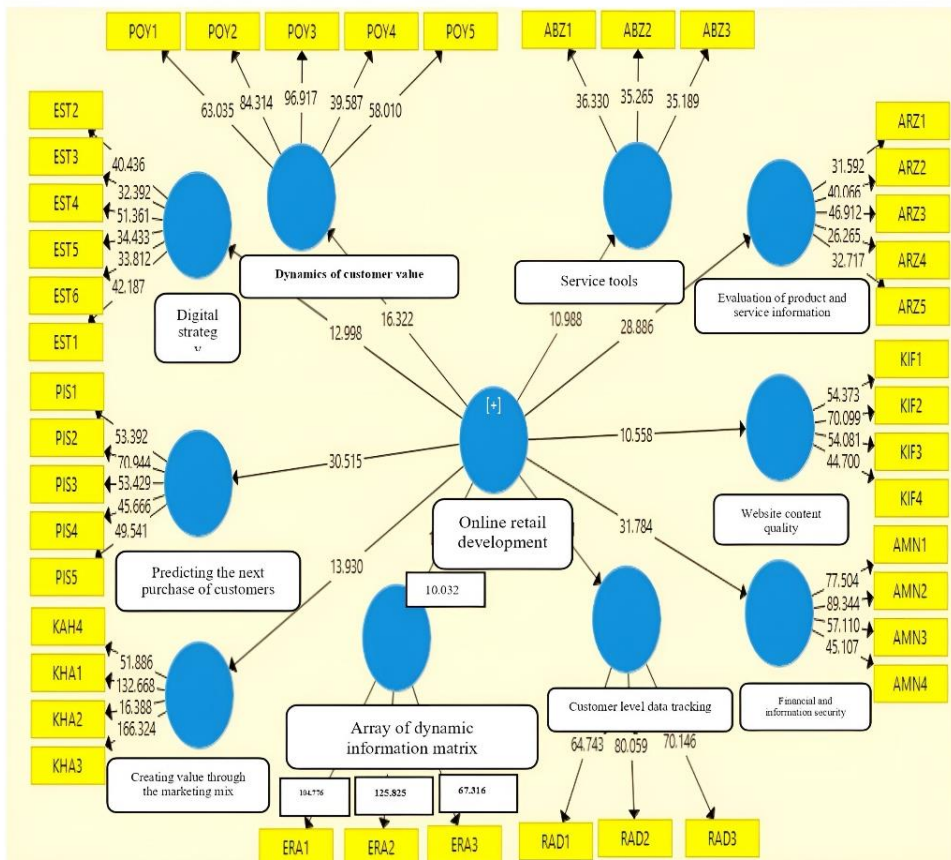


Figure 2. Online retail development measurement models in meaningful mode.

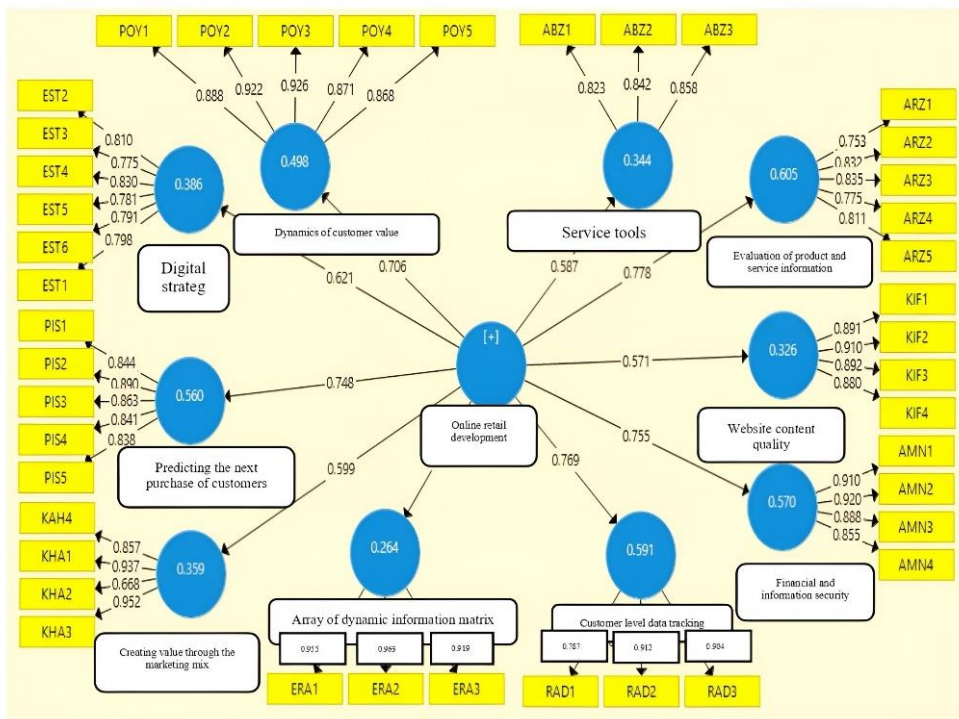


Figure 3. Online retail development measurement models in standard mode.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In general, what we need today in the country's retail industry is a strategic and organizational look at store activities that prevent market failure and its elimination. The term store strategy includes all the store activities of the organization, which is formulated and explained to create and develop markets, determine the organization's general framework and policies, and set the store's basic plans. Retailers must focus on long-term planning to effectively cope with the intensity of retail competition and the urgency of creating new distribution networks, technologies, and globalization. It can be said that the retail strategy shows how this industry should interact with the environment, customers, and competitors. According to Kwak and IBS, most companies consider supporting practices and tools useful for project management processes as they allow them to Adapt to changing business environments. At the same time, they need a reference model to efficiently implement such tools (Kiani et al., 2021).

Based on the results of content analysis, it was determined that the dimensions of online retail development of sports goods and equipment include digital strategy, predicting the subsequent purchase of customers, creating values through marketing mixes, providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment, tracking customer-level data, security. Financial and informational, website content quality, product, and service information evaluation, service tools, and customer value dynamics. This finding refers to the digital strategy with the results of studies by (Motamarri et al.,

2017; Patroni et al., 2015) referring to the creation of value by marketing mix with the results of studies by (Fong et al., 2015; Rapp et al., 2015; Shibata & Kurachi, 2015), referring to the provision of dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment with the results of the study (Shapiro & Varian, 1999), From the dimension of customer level data tracking with the results of Kopalle et al. (2012)'s study, from the dimension of financial and information security with the results of Lee and Turban (2001) et al.'s studies, from the dimension of website content quality with the results of (Lee & Turban, 2001), referring to the evaluation of goods and services information with the results of Tie (2003)'s study, and finally, referring to the dynamics of customer value with the results of the studies of (Shibata & Kurachi, 2015; Wilder et al., 2014). Considering that the mentioned studies have pointed out that the development and expansion of online retail sales deals with the mentioned dimensions. Suppose these components are used in online retail sales with any spectrum, whether sports or non-sports. There is a possibility that development will occur in different dimensions.

It is inferred that various factors can affect online retail sales development. These factors make it possible for online retailers to develop. However, the direction of movement of these factors and the fields of their influence in the order of the development of the mentioned retails are separate, requiring that they be addressed separately. In other words, the dimensions that exist for the development of online retail sales, while they are interdependent, are not the same in terms of meaning and concept. One of the components of online retail development based on the analysis done in this research was digital strategy. The definition of digital strategy is that retailers are required to have an appropriate strategy in the field of online business to develop their businesses. Based on the analysis, this goal will be realized through the support of open communication, digital learning, optimization of resources and efficient operations, entrepreneurial-opportunistic management style, and investment in the national infrastructure necessary for the online format and digital leadership. Slow in this regard, (Patroni et al., 2015), in examining how a retailer uses user-generated social media for innovative content, concluded that digital strategy should be designed to support open communication, digital learning, and digital leadership. To implement this, online retailers can improve their innovative content through social networks. According to (Motamarri et al., 2017), this importance can create shared value between the company and the customer using big data.

It was also found that predicting the subsequent purchase of customers is a determining factor in the development of online retail sales. Adapting from the interviews conducted in the discussion of predicting the next purchase of customers, it is necessary to recognize the consumption pattern of each customer, to know the customer's interests, to get the customer's insight, to know the customer's wishes, to know the buying and consumption habits of the customer. In this regard, (Grewal et al., 2017), in their research, which aimed to draw the future of retail sales, determined that retailers can use data to design more attractive plans, better target their customers, and Create tools that encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions. According to Bradlow et al. (2017), in forecasting methods, the goal of forecasting is to know unknown variables from future data, and it is mentioned as one of the critical techniques of big data for the development of online retail sales. Another

component of online retail development was value creation through a marketing mix. The analysis of the interviews showed that creating value through the marketing mix is realized through the study of data of integrated channels, offering products by considering the potential talents of the geographical area, low product arrival time, and advertising management based on locational characteristics. According to Yu et al. (2019), who presented a comprehensive model of retailers' strategies at the four levels of market, company, store, and customer, one of the strategies of retailers at the store level is to pay attention to the marketing mix. In this research, product classification, price, and promotion of sales and distribution were among the things that should be paid attention to.

Providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment was another component of online retail development. This matrix aims for retailers to offer the products consumers desire with the information they have (Shapiro & Varian, 1999). Since most information and levels can be collected about each product, retailers can better understand products they have never considered (before marketing) (Bradlow et al., 2017). Based on the opinion of the experts participating in the research, providing a dynamic information matrix of goods and equipment can be obtained by recognizing product similarities, group structures, and sub-branch boundaries.

It was also found that customer-level data tracking is one of the components of online retail development. This tracking is done through customer transactions, demographic, and survey data. Kopalle et al. (2012) believe that customer tracking in online retail is done through credit card, IP address, and user registration. Typically, in retail, the link between customer transaction data from a customer relationship management system, demographic data from credit card or loyalty card information, survey data through mailing address linkage, and store visit information can be tracked in various ways.

In addition, the analysis of the interviews showed that financial and informational security is another component of online retail development that should be considered. According to the opinion of experts, this importance is expressed through authenticity, personal privacy, ethical issues, authentication, and verification of the seller by the relevant authorities. Lee and Turban (2001) concluded that a consumer's purchase intention is formed after he has a realistic belief and attitude toward the information and services provided. It seems that providing financial and informational security to customers is one of the ways that lead to the formation of trust in them. Through this, it is possible to increase the level of confidence and belief of customers in retail sales. To improve online services.

The quality of website content was also a decisive factor in developing online retail sales. According to the experts participating in this research, the said quality depends on the information up-to-date, the form of the report, the correctness of the information, and the completeness. If these features are considered in online retail sales and planned with a predetermined plan, we can expect that said retail sales will continue to develop. Of course, as mentioned earlier, other indicators play a decisive role in developing online retail sales apart from these factors. Among other components of online retail growth, we can evaluate product and service information in which sufficiency, pleasantness, compatibility, relevance, and comprehensibility are indicators, service tools that refer to access to telephone support, Facilitation of product referral and replacement, creation of

a chat room for customers and finally the dynamics of customer value, which is necessary for its realization to improve the experience and relations with customers, customer orientation, segmentation of customers through the analytical model of combined behavior, prioritizing the customer, customization according to needs, he pointed out.

The results of the screening of the information of the qualitative section using fuzzy Delphi analysis determined that out of all the indicators identified for the development of online retail that were discussed in the previous discussions, only the hands of "dynamic pricing based on history" "Customer purchase" and "the price in online shopping should be lower than the existing prices" were excluded from the analysis process because their role in the development of online retail sales was not recognized. Further, it was found that other indicators of the methods used in the discussion of online retail development are adequate. In addition, examining the factorial validity of the research constructs using the maximum likelihood method showed that the constructs of online retail development have the necessary validity. Based on this information, it seems that the indicators used in the measurement models of this variable are reliable

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۱۰۳-۱۲۰

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.43037.1076



توسعه استراتژی‌های فروش آنلاین محصولات ورزشی

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خرید

مشتری

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: با توجه به ظهور اینترنت به عنوان شبکه‌ی اصلی عرضه‌ی محصولات و خدمات در سال‌های اخیر، تجربه‌ی خرید آنلاین مشتریان اهمیت زیادی یافته است. هدف این پژوهش معرفی فاکتورهای مهم و تاثیرگذار در پیشرفت فروش آنلاین محصولات ورزشی بود که به روش کیفی و کمی و با رویکرد اکتشافی انجام گرفته است.

روش: در بخش کیفی ۱۷ نفر از مدیران شرکت‌های تولیدی ورزشی، اساتید مدیریت ورزشی در این پژوهش مشارکت نمودند و در این مرحله پرسشنامه از طریق پرسشنامه باز و مصاحبه و وزن دهی دلفی ساخته شد. در بخش کمی نیز مصرف‌کنندگان محصولات ورزشی ۵۶۴ پرسشنامه را تکمیل و تحلیل داده‌ها بر مبنای آزمون و تحلیل عاملی تأییدی بدست آمد.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌های پژوهش نشان داد که مؤلفه‌های توسعه خرده‌فروشی آنلاین شامل استراتژی دیجیتال، پیش‌بینی خرید بعدی مشتریان، خلق ارزش به وسیله آمیخته بازاریابی، ارائه ماتریس اطلاعاتی بویا از کالا و تجهیزات، ردیابی داده‌های سطح مشتری، امنیت مالی و اطلاعاتی، کیفیت محتوای وب سایت، ارزیابی اطلاعات کالا و خدمات، ابزارهای خدماتی و بویایی ارزش مشتری هستند. در نتیجه براین اساس لازم است جهت توسعه خرده‌فروشی‌های آنلاین برای این متغیرها طرح‌ریزی جداگانه‌ای انجام شود تا از این طریق زمینه‌های شکل‌گیری توسعه فراهم آید. در واقع احترام گذاشتن به قانون «زنجیره کسب و کارها» باعث ایجاد فضایی سرشار از تعامل و هم‌افزایی اقتصادی می‌شود که سود ناشی از آن متوجه همه وجوه یک پازل اقتصادی سالم و بویا خواهد شد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: نوآوری این مطالعه استفاده از روش‌های کمی و کیفی برای نشان دادن ابعاد توسعه خرده‌فروشی آنلاین کالاها و تجهیزات ورزشی است.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۱/۱۲/۰۶

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۴/۰۳

تماس با نویسنده مسئول: محمد سعید کیانی mohammadsaeidkianii@vatanmail.ir

- ۲۸ توسعه ارزش ویژه برند باشگاه‌های فوتبال: نقش نسبی تمایز هویت، جذابیت هویت، و هم‌هویتی هوادار-تیم (مطالعه موردی: لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران)
اکبر جابری
- ۴۸ اثر رنگ بر تعهد به برند در خریداران کالاهای ورزشی: نقش میانجی ارزش ویژه برند
سودابه رحمتی؛ حمیدرضا صفری جعفرلو؛ محمدصادق افروزه
- ۶۹ رفتار مشتری و ارتقای برند در باشگاه‌های ورزشی حرفه‌ای: توسعه مدل بازاریابی شبکه‌های اجتماعی
رسول نظری؛ الهام مشکل‌گشا؛ محسن لقمانی
- ۸۴ نقش کیفیت تجربه ورزشکاران بر وفاداری به باشگاه‌های ورزشی
آرمان اله‌ویسی؛ بهزاد ایزدی؛ حسین منصوری
- ۱۰۲ طراحی مدل بازاریابی الکترونیکی مبتنی بر شبکه‌های اجتماعی - مورد مطالعه شرکت‌های تولیدی تجهیزات ورزشی
زیبا محمد رضایی؛ کوروش ویسی؛ عادل فاطمی؛ سمیرا علی آبادی؛ محسن اسماعیلی
- ۱۲۰ توسعه استراتژی‌های فروش آنلاین محصولات ورزشی
محمد سعید کیانی؛ لیلا نظری؛ لیلا شهبازیور

شماره ۵ نشریه در حالی منتشر شد که امروز مخاطبان بیشتری نشریه را می‌شناسند. تعداد مقالات رد شده کمتر شده‌اند چرا که اسکوپ نشریه در میان مخاطبان جایگاه خود را پیدا کرده و خوشحالییم که محققان حوزه کسب‌وکار در ورزش، امروز می‌توانند نتایج تحقیقات خود را در یک نشریه تخصصی و با بالاترین زیرساخت‌های کیفی و شکلی موجود در میان سایر نشریات این رشته، منتشر نمایند.

در این نشریه نه تنها سعی شده ویرایش ادبی و گرامری مقالات با دقت بالایی انجام شود، بلکه منابع با نرم‌افزار اندنوت با صرف وقت زیاد و دقت بالا، کنترل و خودکار شده و همچون سایر نشریات معتبر جهان، در متن مقاله و نیز به منابع اصلی در اینترنت لینک باشند. این تلاش موجب می‌شود منابع و ارجاعات با کمترین خطا در هر مقاله استفاده شده و ارجاعات نادرست به دقت اصلاح شوند. همچنین تمامی ارجاعات به مقالات محققانی که آثارشان در این نشریه منتشر می‌گردد در صفحات پابلون، ریسرچ‌گیت و گوگل اسکالر آنها به دقت بارگزاری شده و به نویسندگان اطلاع‌رسانی شود. ضمناً، داوران محترم نشریه می‌توانند با تمهیدات اندیشیده شده، و ثبت داوری‌های خود در صفحه پابلون شخصی‌شان، سایر سردبیران و محققان دنیا را از فعالیت‌های خود آگاه سازند و بدینوسیله امکان دریافت پیشنهاداتی برای داوری‌های بیشتر را از سردبیران نشریات بین‌المللی میسر نمایند.

علاوه بر این‌ها، به اشتراک‌گذاری مقالات و شماره‌های نشریه در صفحات اجتماعی موجب افزایش رویت‌پذیری آن‌ها شده که خود باعث افزایش h -index نشریه به عدد ۸ شده است. این رشد برای مدت کوتاه دو ساله‌ای که از فعالیت آن می‌گذرد، نتیجه مناسبی است. در این مسیر، سعی شده تا با ثبت نام نشریه در نمایه‌های معتبر علمی، نه تنها در داخل کشور موفق به دریافت بالاترین رتبه علمی شویم، بلکه انشالله در سال سوم فعالیت نشریه، شرایطی را فراهم نماییم تا نویسندگان و محققان ایرانی هر چه بیشتر و بهتر با محققان خارج از کشور در انجام کارهای پژوهشی و نیز نگارش مقالات علمی مشترک همکاری نمایند.

در این مسیر از حمایت‌های حوزه معاونت پژوهشی و اداره نشریات دانشگاه الزهراء^(س) بی‌اندازه سپاسگزاریم که هر آنچه در توان داشته و مورد نیاز تیم اجرایی نشریه بوده دریغ ننموده‌اند. همچنین از داوران گرامی برای داوری‌های دقیق و دلسوزانه مقالات، محققان و نویسندگان این شماره به دلیل ارسال مقالات ارزشمندشان و پاسخ‌های دقیق به اصلاحات درخواستی داوران که موجب ارتقای سطح مقالات شده، سپاسگزاریم. امیدواریم بتوانیم شرایط را به گونه‌ای فراهم آوریم که نه تنها موجب دسترسی سایر محققان به نتایج آخرین و جدیدترین مطالعات صورت گرفته در این حوزه گردیم، بلکه مقالات همکاران در انتظار طولانی یک تا سه ساله انتشار، معطل نمانند. در راستای مأموریت خود در توسعه کسب‌وکارهای ورزشی، و در پاسخ به درخواست محققان جوان، امیدواریم بتوانیم در سال جاری با برنامه‌ریزی و برگزاری ۲ کارگاه آموزشی، در کمک به محققان جوان برای انجام پژوهش‌های با کیفیت بالا و نگارش مقالات به زبان انگلیسی انجام وظیفه کنیم.

نشریه

نشریه فصلنامه علمی

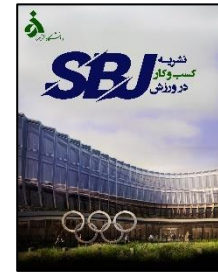
دانشگاه الزهراء (س)

کسب و کار

دوره سه، شماره چهار، شماره پیاپی ۸

پاییز ۱۴۰۲

در ورزش



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-	دکترای مدیریت ورزشی	دکتر مریم رهبر

نشریه

کسب و کار

در ورزش

نشریه فصلنامه علمی دانشگاه الزهرا (س)

دوره سه، شماره چهار، شماره پیاپی ۸

پاییز ۱۴۰۲

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