



Customer decision-making and brand identity in sports brand

Behshad Panjehzadeh¹, Bahador Panjehzadeh²

¹PhD Student in Sport Biomechanics, Department of Sports Biomechanics, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

²Bachelor of Science in Biology, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran.

*Corresponding Author: Behshad Panjehzadeh.

"PhD Student in Sport Biomechanics, Department of Sports Biomechanics, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran"

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Abstract: This research prioritized decision-making factors of customers and brand identity in choosing a sports brand. The research substantiates a descriptive survey and a comparative model. The sample included 384 customers of sports product stores in Kermanshah, who were selected by available sampling. Data, which were collected by questionnaires sent via email and social media, were analyzed by SPSS. The questionnaire was reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) and demonstrated content validity via expert opinions and revisions. Due to non-normal distribution of the data (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), regression and Spearman's correlation tests were utilized to examine hypotheses. Friedman's test provided a ranking for the factors of influence. Results indicated that brand name, service, appropriateness, quality, variety, atmosphere, and brand identity all have significant impacts on purchase decision-making ($p=0.00$). Pearson's correlation confirmed a significant relationship between research factors and customer decision-making ($p<0.05$). Brand identity contributed the most, followed by brand, while service had the least contribution.

Keywords: Sports brand, decision-making, brand identity, and customers.

Introduction

Scientific principles have also played a major role in developing professional sports, making it a successful industry. As sports management becomes a key aspect, coaches and researchers look for new ways to improve athlete performance (Mankarsi, Safania, & Ghasemi, 2015). With profit and market share determining competition in today's world, public as well as private firms are now using scientific and marketing methods more (Tomaj & Karami, 2019). Advertising, which is aimed at successful satisfaction of consumers' requirements, is very competitive in the advertisement market. Although economic crises like the 2007 crisis (Dehghanpouri, Abdavi, & Eskandergad, 2016) have existed, advertisement markets have made every effort to stay stable. Having a strong brand reputation is necessary to obtain brand loyalty and competitiveness. A brand is a valuable asset, which enhances business capital (Williams, 2010). Competitiveness is extremely significant during periods of globalization. Organizations strive to construct their brands, as value assets, by continuously meeting commitments, exhibiting a shared willingness to learn about drivers of brand success.

Research Methodology

Brand identity within today's marketplace is also a major driver of consumer purchases, sometimes overshadowing the product itself. The sport business, one of the leaders of Europe's and the United States' major economic sectors, is a good example, with Adidas and Nike becoming rich by developing and distributing sports products (Fong Yi, 2008). Increased participation in sports by the public has fueled demand for sports products and services, including gear, apparel, and coaching (Ko et al., 2012). Meanwhile, sports marketing means the promotion of products related to sports, like the promotion of football club tickets.

Defining consumers of sports often relies on their interaction with various sports products or services. In order to recognize the importance of consumer satisfaction, organizations implement modern marketing tactics increasingly (Nazarpour et al., 2020). Awareness of consumer needs, behavior, and drivers is critical to marketers in an era of many brands and abundant product choices (Akbari et al., 2015). Consumers nowadays prefer to associate themselves with brand affiliations, prompting the producers to shift from production-based approaches to brand-based approaches (Ahmadinejad et al., 2020).

Positive brand image quickly evokes emotion and differentiates products (Kotler & Keller, 2006). A brand essentially promises value to the customer (Laquin, 1993), and has a tendency to stimulate purchase frequency via market share. Brands infuse modern life (Kapferer, 2008), aiming to form emotional connections with consumers (Parhizgar et al., 2013) and build a positive image (Ahmed & Thiagaraj, 2015). Understanding consumer behavior, and more importantly the buyer's journey, is essential for brands that want to capture market share. This study aims to determine and prioritize the determinants of customer decision-making and brand identity in the particular context of purchasing sports equipment, an area not yet studied. This research gap makes it challenging to determine these determinants, and therefore empirical research is necessary. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine what affects customer purchasing decisions and the brand identity in the sports equipment market.

This descriptive-survey applied research had a comparative impact assessment model. Clients of Kermanshah sporting goods stores constituted the population of this study. Since the population had no limit, 384 members were randomly sampled using convenience sampling and the Morgan table. Findings are provided in two parts: descriptive statistics presenting the data and variables and inferential statistics used to make generalizations on the findings in

the population. SPSS was used to analyze the data. Brand image questionnaire was found to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 (Table 1). Expert review ensured content validity. Questionnaire, developed based on research objectives and

sources, was validated by professors and professionals before being sent to the available sample via email and social media (Telegram and WhatsApp) to ensure anonymity of respondents.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for calculating the reliability of questionnaire indicators.

Index Name	Cronbach's α -Rate	Number of Items
Brand	0.76	6
Service	77.0	3
Convenience	83.0	3
Quality	71.0	3
Variety/Choice	73.0	4
Atmosphere	87.0	4
Brand Identity	87.0	15

Research findings

Descriptive findings from the statistical sample are presented first, followed by interview data. Tables 2-5 are tabulations of the sample's demographics by level of education, age range, and marital status, respectively. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

indicated that distribution of data was not normal. Thus, regression analysis and Spearman correlation were used to test the research hypotheses. The Friedman test ranked effective factors. Results indicated that brand identity was the most important factor in customer decision-making, and service was the least important factor (Table 8).

Table 2. Gender of the subjects of the present study.

Frequency	variable	percentage
Man	257	66.92
Woman	127	33.08

Table 3. Education level of the subjects of the present study.

variable	Frequency	percentage
Doctorate	62	16.14
Master's	93	24.21
Bachelor's	120	31.25
Postgraduate Diploma	67	17.44
Diploma or lower	109	28.38

Table 4. Age range of the subjects in the present study.

variable	Frequency	percentage
40 years and above	62	16.14
30-40 years	97	25.26
20-30 years	38	9.89

20 years and under	187	48.69
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Table 5. Marital status of the subjects in the present study.

variable	Frequency	percentage
Married	188	48.95
Single	196	51.04

Table 6. Results of the regression test to examine the research variables on purchasing decision-making.

variable	Beta	B	SE	R	t	p-Value
Constant	---	61.48	19.63	0.64	15.75	0.00
Brand name	0.64	3.21			16.48	0.00
Constant	---	84.54	21.11	0.57	27.45	0.00
Service	0.57	5.95			13.55	0.00
Constant	---	76.75	19.71	0.64	25.21	0.00
Convenience	0.64	4.81			16.32	0.00
Constant	---	75.19	20.24	0.61	22.52	0.00
Quality	0.61	5.14			15.26	0.00
Constant	---	68.94	18.96	0.67	21.46	0.00
Variety/selection	0.67	4.30			17.86	0.00
Constant	---	74.02	18.13	0.70	27.47	0.00
Atmosphere	0.70	3.74			19.61	0.00
Constant	---	38.09	14.29	0.83	11.24	0.00
Brand identity	0.83	1.82			29.18	0.00

Table 7: Spearman correlations between study components and customer decision-making.

Customer decision making		Brand Identity	Atmosp here	Variety/Choic e	Quality	Suitability	Service	Brand
	r	**0.77	**0.73	**0.66	**0.59	**0.63	**0.54	**0.61
	P-Value	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table 8. Results of the Friedman test to prioritize factors affecting customer decision-making.

	Average Rank	SD	Average
Brand	5.80	5.16	19.41
Service	1.44	2.45	6.56
Suitability	2.88	3.41	9.74
Quality	2.57	3.07	9.42
Variety/Choice	4.12	4.01	12.70
Atmosphere	4.23	4.85	13.26
Brand Identity	6.97s	11.69	48.59

Discussion and Conclusion

The prime intent of the study is to formulate executable solutions and steer follow-up research. This current research makes considerable implications to buyers, organizations, and sellers to tailor winning marketing strategies to different segments of consumers and calibrate their marketing mix to choose brands. Finding the variables affecting decision-making, brand preference, and identity of paramount concern are most important to success for business and a brand. Through the ranking and analysis of these factors, business firms can achieve maximum brand success in competitive markets. Ranking of factors that affect customer buying decisions and branding in making selections on sports brands is the aim of this research. The profile of respondents reveals a male (70%) sample with varying educational backgrounds (20% PhD, 25% Master's, 30% Bachelor's, 15% Postgraduate Diploma, 10% Diploma). Age split is skewed in favor of the young (49% under the age of 20, 10% between 20-30, 25% between 30-40, and 16% over 40), with nearly equal splits when it comes to marital status (48% unmarried, 51% married). Findings show there is a big chunk of customers (49%) who are young, educated individuals who are extremely sports participatory and sport brand purchasing.

The study indicated that brand name, service, suitability, quality, variety/selection, atmosphere, and brand identity all significantly influenced ($P=0.00$) the purchasing of sporting equipment. Pearson correlation indicated the presence of a significant relationship between these factors and customer decision-making ($p<0.05$). The most influential factor was brand identity, followed by the brand itself, while the least influencing factor was service. This corroborates previous literature (Movahed Yasin et al., 2007; Tsuji, 2000 & 2004; Kimbozal & Mutenda, 2007; Sami Nasr et al., 2011; Wey, 2003; Gazquez et al., 2009; Shoki Ibrahim, 2013) that emphasizes the importance of quality in buying decisions. Quality ranks high with buyers as it increases business expansion, good ratings, and greater confidence. When buyers perceive a high linkage of a brand with its quality, quality perception becomes a significant factor in their choice. Brand distinctiveness, uniqueness, and sustainable competitive advantage are significant drivers for brand selection. Brand differentiation is crucial for identification in a competitive marketplace. Innovative and creative brands, even beyond their functional attributes, leave a lasting impact on buyers, leading to brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

Sport brands have salient characteristics due to inherent heterogeneity in sports and competitions, where success and popularity are compounded. A social power sport brand with role model image and high desirability creates an image of uniqueness

among buyers that compels them to opt for it rather than alternatives. Brand identity provides assurance, especially when difficult to equate brand qualities, lowering perceived risk when opting for recognized brands. Experiments confirm that brand identity is a key determinant of brand choice, evoking a preference for highly identified brands. While it is a key role, brand identity has not been adequately researched. There is consensus among researchers and practitioners on the fundamental role of brand identity in brand differentiation and management. Defined internally by the firm's expectations, brand identity must be periodically maintained and is the brand's introduction and market differentiator.

This study examines the intricate relationship between customer decision-making processes and brand identity within the sports branding sector. By analyzing how brand identity elements—such as logo, athlete endorsements, and emotional connections—impact consumer choices, this research contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior tailored specifically to sports brands. It highlights the significance of brand loyalty and identity in influencing purchasing decisions, presenting valuable insights for marketers and brand managers aiming to enhance customer engagement and loyalty in an increasingly competitive market.

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