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# The Effect of Using Word-of-Mouth Marketing on the Identity of Sports Brands

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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Today, the birth of sports brands and businesses is increasing, and each of them is trying to increase the popularity of their brand. In this regard, the aim of this research was to examine the effect of using word-of-mouth marketing on the identity of sports brands. This research was (semi-experimental in terms of practical purpose and in terms of data collection method). The subjects were divided into two experimental and control groups, each with a population of 20 people. Data analysis was done by covariance analysis. Also, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normal distribution of the data, and the Ljung-Box test was used to check the homogeneity of variance. The tool for data collection was the brand identity questionnaire of Coleman et al. (2011), whose Cronbach's alpha was 0.76. The statistical population of the research included customers of sports brands, three of which were selected through available sampling. The results showed that the use of word-of-mouth marketing had significant effect on the brand identity of sports businesses. Also, the hypothesis of brand identity provided positive results (Also, all of the hypothesis of brand identity presented positive results). As a result, customers of sports goods buy more based on the recommendations of others due to the different quality, average price, and high variety. Therefore, word-of-mouth marketing is very important in this matter, and this makes customers use the experiences of buyers.

#### Keywords:

Brand, Brand Identity, Sports Business, Word-of-Mouth Advertising

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## Introduction

In recent years, researchers have come to the conclusion that the real value of products and services for companies is not inside the products and services, but this value exists in the minds of real and potential customers, and it is the brand that creates the real value in the minds of customers (Keller, 2012). Therefore, a reliable and well-known brand leads to the loyalty of consumers in a competitive market, and one of the distinctive features of these customers is being loyal to the brand, always favoring the brand, and turning away from other brands. Therefore, one of the ways to create customer loyalty to the brand is to develop a suitable identity for the brand. Brands introduce themselves to consumers and differentiate themselves from other competitors by identity (Buile et al., 2013).

Brand identity is an effective strategic tool and an important source of competitive advantage for the company (Melewar, 2003). Therefore, in the definitions, brand identity is the name or symbol of a brand that is related to the assets or liabilities of the brand and adds or subtracts from the value of goods or services (Aaker, 1997). Also, brand identity is a unique set of brand names that planners want to create, as well as promises to loyal buyers of products and services (Keller & Kotler, 2005). Brand identity in general refers to the essence and authenticity of the brand (Waters & Jones, 2011).

Word-of-mouth marketing is a type of written and oral communication with consumers about a brand or product that occurs as an intermediary and the source of the message and is considered a message from the point of view of the receiver. It is an activity in which the consumer transmits information about products and services to another consumer or the organization's efforts to encourage, facilitate, and expand marketing communications among consumers. In advertising, marketers use an attractive and effective message to stimulate consumers to start word-of-mouth advertising. Word-of-mouth communication can be positive (praising the brand name and product) or negative (slandering the brand name and product), both of which spread quickly and play a major role in the customer's attitude. About the new product entering the market or products that their purchase is risky, they perform frequently (Maheri & Hosseini, 2013).

Marketing literature has confirmed the existence of a relationship between word-of-mouth marketing in a sustainable and long-term manner and brand identity to identify itself to others that customers consume. Among these researches, Kurniawan et al. (2023) under the title "Influence Of Brand Image On The Word Of Mouth Which Implicates To Brand Equity Sport Event Srivijaya Ranau Gran Fondo 2022" showed that there was a significant effect of brand congruence on brand trust, there was a positive relationship between brand congruence and brand commitment, a positive direct effect of brand trust on brand commitment, there was no significant relationship between brand trust and word of mouth, there was an influence between brand commitment on word of mouth, and there is a significant strong relationship between word of mouth and brand equity. The results showed that brand trust has a direct positive effect on brand commitment, there is no significant relationship between brand trust and word of mouth. There was a strong and significant relationship between brand commitment on word of mouth and word of mouth and brand equity. (Thus, it has implications for sport event organizers to continue to increase the satisfaction and comfort of consumers or attendees, as well as correct deficiencies in values that do not meet the needs of consumers or participants, in order to develop a very good sports event brand image. Faridnia et al. (In-Press), during research "The Effect of Applying Guerrilla Marketing Techniques on Emerging Sports Brand Equity," concluded that the use of various design techniques, including partisan brands, can have a positive effect on the special value of sports brands. Gholamnejad et al. (2021), showed that the brand name in sports product manufacturing companies has a strong and positive effect on dimensions, trust in the brand, word-of-mouth advertising, and also identity of the brand. Taheri and Hamdi (2021), under the title "Investigating the Effect of Brand Identity on Brand Evaluation and Creating Customer Loyalty," concluded that when a customer identifies with a particular brand, this has a positive effect on his judgment of the target brand, and finally, it causes loyalty. So it can be said that brand identity leads to customer loyalty through product quality, perceived value, and trust in the brand. Also, Qolipour et al. (2020), with their research on "Effect of brand identity, loyalty, and satisfaction on brand evangelism in sports goods," came to the conclusion that the managers of the sports goods industry should focus their marketing activities more on the factors influencing brand evangelism to develop a focus on customer loyalty, identification, and satisfaction. In this regard, it is necessary to use marketing tools to create a unique identity. Sadrnia et al. (2018), with the title "The Role of Social Media Marketing in Causal Relationships of Brand Love and Viral Marketing among Customers of Selected Sportswear Brands," concluded that by increasing the amount of participation with clients, they self-reinforce viral behaviors. Because creating challenging content and polling posts are factors that can boost viral behavior, Chaudhary (2018) research titled "Brand Love: Fiction or Reality?" The findings

of this research showed that satisfied consumers show more willingness to word-of-mouth advertising about brands. Also, a positive and significant relationship was observed between brand love, loyalty, and word-of-mouth advertising. In another study, Solja et al. (2018) examined consumer reactions using the impact of stories that appeared in the packaging of goods and the interestingness of stories and their impact on consumers in particular was approved in the field of word-of-mouth propaganda. The research findings showed that even a short story of the brand on the packaging of the product has a positive effect on the emotional value, attitude, value of the product, and the tendency to purchase behavior. Also, Behnam et al. (2015) investigated "The influence of word of mouth on consumer-based brand equity creation in sports services" and showed that the study shows the importance and role of word-of-mouth advertising in creating a strong brand name value. In order to increase the power of a brand, managers should invest in word-of-mouth advertising. Park et al. (2010) investigated brand attachment and brand attitude strength: conceptual and empirical differentiation of two important drivers of brand equity and believe that there is a positive relationship between customer brand identification (CBI) and the feeling of belonging to the brand and behavior among consumers. Hamberg et al. (2009), with their research on "social identity and service-profit chains," state that there is a very strong effect between customer identification by brand and people's loyalty.

In fact, word-of-mouth advertising is the result and basis of customer retention, and loyal customers are more inclined to do so and act as brand representatives for the company. The reasons that show the power of word-of-mouth communication are: first, word-of-mouth communication is more valid than business and information sources under the company's control; second, word-of-mouth communication is real communication and it can be two-way, like the process of message flow; third, people share their experiences about goods, services, and brands with others, and this can lead to a reduction of risk for potential customers (Khabiri et al., 2013).

Also, brands should be managed as valuable assets for companies. In marketing, brands are the difference between competitive offers and are critical factors for the success of companies. A new perspective on a brand is the best way to think of a psychological phenomenon that identifies goods and services and differentiates them from others through commercial messages and communications. It is the relationship between a person and a customer that finds meaning (Keller & Kotler, 2005) A number of recent studies have gathered evidence on the effects of brand identity on brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, and brand evangelism (Hai and Lee, 2011; Oliver, 1999; Porral & Long, 2015). But few studies have investigated the effect of word-of-mouth marketing, especially in the goods industry and sports businesses, which makes it necessary to conduct research in this field. For this reason, using the opinions of customers of sports brands who have knowledge of marketing, are in communication, and are considered the main consumers of sports goods can be useful information to evaluate and further strengthen the brand identity for manufacturers and sellers of sports goods. Therefore, this research aims to answer these questions: Can word-of-mouth marketing have an effect on promoting and developing the identity of sports brands?

## Research Methods

The current research is an applied research in the classification of research based on the objective, and it was carried out as a semi-experimental method. The statistical population includes customers of sports brands, 40 of whom were selected by random sampling. The number of selected sports brands is 3, whose customers were available to the members of the research team and could have access to them.

In order to achieve the goals of the research, three sports brands named Daei, Dae do, and Majid were selected as available samples. It should be noted that Daei and Majid sports brands are active in the field of sports equipment production, including t-shirts, sports clothes, shorts, shoes, etc., and the Dae Do brand is also active in the field of Taekwondo martial arts sports equipment production. The number of samples in both the control and experimental groups includes 40 people from sports brands who were selected by the accessible sampling method due to the difficulty of accessing all sample members, 20 of whom were divided into the experimental group and 20 into the control group. The measurement tool includes the brand identity questionnaire of Coleman et al. (2011), which was validated by Agassi (2012), and after choosing this questionnaire, it was approved by university professors. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of different sections, and this coefficient was 0.76 for all variables; then the said questionnaire was given to the two control and experimental groups before the start of the word-of-mouth marketing technique application process so that the information about the brand identity was recorded before the start of the word-of-mouth marketing technique process, then after collecting the relevant information from the two control and in the experiment, it was the turn of the word-of-mouth marketing technique that was designed, and this part of the

research was only used for the experimental group, and the relevant process regarding the use of the word-of-mouth marketing technique was not given to the control group, so that the results of the use of the experimental group could be compared. with the results of not using the control group to be measured with each other. (Then, two control and experimental groups were given mouth-to-mouth before starting the process of applying the techniques. Then, after collecting information from the two control and experimental groups, it was the turn of the word-of-mouth marketing technique that was designed, and this part of the research was used only for the experimental group, and the relevant process related to using the word-of-mouth marketing technique. The control group was not studied so that the results of the use of the experimental group could be compared with the results of the non-use of the control group.)

The questionnaire used has a total of 17 questions, 5 of which are related to the collection of demographic information and other qualitative information, and 12 of which are related to brand identity. It should be noted that brand identity, according to Coleman et al. (2011), has four items under the title of brand visual dimensions, brand personality, brand trust building, and brand consistent communication, of which visual dimensions include three questions, brand personality includes three questions, and trust building includes four. The compatible question and communication include two questions, on the basis of which the sub-hypotheses of the research are designed based on five items related to brand identity. Then the collected data were analyzed by the covariance method, and SPSS version 16 software was used.

**Findings**

Table number 1 provides information regarding the age, gender, and purchasing history of customers.

**Table 1- Demographic information of the participants**

Number of interviewees	Gender		Purchase history			Age			
	woman	man	Every 6 months	Every 6 months to a year	one more year	Under 25 years	26 to 35 years	36 to 45 years	Over 45 years old
40	16	24	5	11	24	13	15	6	6
100%	%40	%60	12.5%	27.5%	60%	%32.5	%37.5	%15	%15

In this research, in order to analyze the findings, first the research data (which were collected in field operations through questionnaires) have been extracted. In the descriptive review of the data, the statistical indices related to each of the research variables were calculated. In the inferential statistics section, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were used to check the normality of the variables, and the covariance analysis test was used to check the research hypotheses. As can be seen in Table 2, all research variables have a normal distribution based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test because the obtained values show ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it can be claimed with 95% confidence that all research variables follow a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests are used to analyze research hypotheses.

**Table 2- Kolmogorov- Kolmogorov-Smirnov test**

Group	Control		Experiment	
	Test statistics	significance level	Test statistics	significance level
Pretest - brand identity	0.538	0.935	0.675	0.752
Pre-test - visual dimensions	0.979	0.293	1.007	0.263
Pretest - brand personality	0.909	0.380	0.816	0.518
Pre-test - building brand trust	1.104	0.175	0.970	0.303
Pre-test - consistent brand communication	1.142	0.147	1.352	0.052
Post-test - brand	0.891	0.406	1.043	0.227

identity				
Post-test - visual dimensions	0.813	0.523	0.935	0.346
Post-test - brand personality	0.710	0.695	0.768	0.598
Post-test - building brand trust	0.978	0.294	1.184	0.121
Post-test - consistent brand communication	1.35	0.052	1.18	0.12

### Homogeneity of variances

The use of ambush marketing has an effect on the brand personality of emerging sports businesses. To check this hypothesis, Leven test was used, the results of which are listed in Table 3. Also, four other assumptions are displayed separately in this table to ensure the equality of their variances. As can be seen, the assumption of equality of variances is valid for all research variables ( $P < 0.05$ ). According to the set of presuppositions, it can be seen that the data from this research can be entered into the covariance analysis, and the differences between the two groups in the dependent variables can be examined.

**Table 3- Lune's test to check the homogeneity of variances for two research groups**

Variable	Theories	Significance level	Degree of freedom group $\gamma$	Degree of freedom group $\delta$	F
Brand Identity	The main hypothesis	0.360	37	1	19.302
	The first hypothesis	0.350	37	1	28.806
	The second hypothesis	0.610	37	1	14.358
	The third hypothesis	0.801	37	1	11.005
	The fourth hypothesis	0.450	37	1	15.288

According to the results of Table 4, by removing the effect of the pre-test variable and according to the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of the brand identity scores according to the group membership of "proof and test" in the post-test stage ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the identity of sports brands. The amount of this practical significance effect was 0.25; that is, 25% of the total variance of sports brand identity has changed by using word-of-mouth marketing.

**Table 4- Covariance analysis results table for brand identity**

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
pre-exam group	0.107	1	0.107	12.803	0.001	0.361
error	5.860	1	5.860	23.702	0.001	0.251
Total	1.801	37	0.031	12.244	0.001	0.509

According to the results of Table 5, by removing the influence of the pre-test variable and according to the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of the scores of the visual dimensions of the brand according to the membership of the "proof and test" group in the post-test stage ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the visual dimensions of sports brands. The amount of this practical



significance effect was 0.18; that is, 18% of the total variance of the visual dimensions of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing.

**Table 5- Table of the results of the covariance analysis of the component of the visual dimensions of the brand**

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
pre-exam	2.231	1	2.231	13.410	0.001	0.630
group	1.702	1	1.702	10.440	0.001	0.180
error	5.470	1	5.470	32.420	0.001	0.520
Total	5.569	37	0.240			

According to the results of Table 6, by removing the influence of the pre-test variable and according to the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of the brand personality scores according to the membership of the "proof and test" group in the post-test stage ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the personality of sports brands. The degree of this practical significance effect was 0.29; that is, 29% of the total variance of the personality of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing.

**Table 6. Table of the results of covariance analysis of the brand personality component**

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
pre-exam	1.374	1	1.374	22.960	0.001	0.408
group	2.456	1	2.456	41.470	0.001	0.290
error	3.430	1	3.430	54.150	0.001	0.756
Total	2.398	37	0.104			

According to the results of Table 7, by removing the effect of the pre-test variable and according to the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of the brand trust scores according to the group membership of "proof and test" in the post-test stage ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on building trust in sports brands. The practical significance of this effect was 0.36; that is, 36% of the total variance of sports brand trust was changed by applying word-of-mouth marketing.

**Table 7- Table of the results of covariance analysis of brand trust building component**

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
pre-exam	0.389	1	0.389	10.520	0.001	0.690
group	1.539	1	1.539	25.410	0.001	0.360
error	5.369	1	5.369	89.530	0.001	0.750
Total	2.422	37	0.102			

According to the results of Table 8, by removing the influence of the pre-test variable and according to the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of brand compatible communication scores according to the membership of the "proof and test" group in the post-test stage ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the consistent communication of sports brands. The level of this practical significance effect was 0.33; that is, 33% of the total variance of the consistent communication of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing.

**Table 8- Table of results of covariance analysis of brand compatible communication component**

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
pre-exam	0.123	1	0.123	0.250	0.001	0.110
group	4.258	1	4.258	21.690	0.001	0.330
error	7.092	1	7.092	33.704	0.001	0.252
Total	7.785	37	0.296			

## Discussion

A concept brand is more than a product brand. It is the brand name that creates distinctions for many of these products. Many market managers see this difference as a competitive advantage for their brand. According to these businesses, they have ways to develop their brand (Ahmadi, 2013). A brand is very important for every company, and creating and maintaining its proper place in the minds of customers is one of the important goals of marketers. In this regard, identity is a key part of branding, and the most important issue in creating a successful brand is understanding how to create and develop brand identity. Brand identity provides a framework for the overall integrity of the brand. Therefore, the concept of identity reminds us that a brand cannot have the capacity to accept everything, but the time and symbols that it accepts give a meaning, a territory, and therefore boundaries for that territory (Ross, 2001). Word-of-mouth marketing is the most powerful method of human communication, and the positive advertising message of companies or organizations is transferred from one person to another without any cost. This action is done by using people's conversations face-to-face or through web and internet pages. As mentioned, this variable, as a powerful tool, should be considered part of effective strategies in marketing and advertising. In some cases, this method is a neutral tool because the message can be conveyed both negatively and positively. Therefore, the more positive word-of-mouth advertising among consumers, the more profits companies get, and for this reason, brands have recently allocated a special place in their business.

In this regard, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of word-of-mouth marketing on brand identity. In the research methodology, research has been categorized in terms of practical purpose and in terms of the nature and method of semi-experimental work. The results showed that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the identity of sports brands, and the practical significance of this effect was 0.25; that is, 25% of the total variance of the identity of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing. Also, in order to ensure the assumption of equality of variance, the four assumptions mentioned in the above text were used, and the results showed that the first component, the use of word-of-mouth marketing, has an effect on the visual dimensions of sports brands. The amount of this practical significance effect was 0.18; that is, 18% of the total variance of the visual dimensions of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing. The second component is that the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the personality of sports brands. The degree of this practical significance effect was 0.29; that is, 29% of the total variance of the personality of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing. In the third component, the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the trust of sports brands. The practical significance of this effect was 0.36; that is, 36% of the total variance of sports brand trust was changed by using word-of-mouth marketing. Also in the fourth component, the use of word-of-mouth marketing has an effect on the consistent communication of sports brands. The amount of this practical significance effect was 0.33; that is, 33% of the total variance of the consistent communication of sports brands has changed with the use of word-of-mouth marketing. The results of these assumptions are consistent with the results of the study by Gholamnejad et al. (2021), Chaudhary (2018), Behnam et al. (2014), Farah Abadi et al (2019) and Faridniya et al (2023). Hence, word-of-mouth advertising has a great impact on brand awareness. The most influential marketers in consumers' lives are those whom the consumer knows and trusts, such as family members, friends, and colleagues. Hence, brands have realized that investing in word-of-mouth marketing and word-of-mouth communication plays an important role in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes. In low-involvement decisions, a minimal level of awareness can be sufficient for product selection. Brand recall requires that the consumer correctly recall the product from his memory. It is very important that there are people whom the consumer knows and trusts to tell him positive things about that product or service and recommend that product or service to him. A good start for the brand is to think about who, when, where, and how they will buy or use

the brand (Behnam, 2014 & Faridniya et al 2023). Brand identity is also a very important issue in brand management, and the more the brand expands and diversifies, the more the customer feels that he is facing different brands, not a single brand unit. Brand identity causes the brand to be targeted and meaningful, and as a result, it is a key factor in the brand's strategic vision.

### Conclusion

As a result, it can be said that customers of sports goods, especially Dai, Dai Do, and Majid, buy more based on the recommendations of others because of the different quality, average price, and high variety. For this reason, word-of-mouth marketing is very important in this matter, and this is so that customers can use the experiences of buyers. As a result, customers will pay a lot of attention to word-of-mouth communication to reduce the risks associated with the purchase, which promotes and develops the sports identity of these brands.

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### Conflicts of Interest

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