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Brand Identity Transfer and Consumers' Sport Commitment in the Iranian Football Premier League: Mediating Role of Promotional and Advertising Tools

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ABSTRACT

Sports advertising is one of the methods used by most companies to introduce their brands and products and expand their market. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment with the mediating role of promotional and advertising tools from the perspective of sports consumers in Iran. 500 sports consumers participated in this study and completed the research questionnaire. The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) indicate that there is a significant relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and their dimensions, with the mediating role of promotional and advertising tools. Further, TV, mobile and social networks should have a priority over other promotional tools when transferring brand identity and sports commitment of consumers. Besides, contributing to the advancement of theory, this study has important practical implications for sport marketers and managers who are searching effective promotional and advertising tools to re-engage existing consumers or to acquire new ones.

Introduction

Brand identity is a complex concept, and sometimes obscure. However, its importance is indisputable. The purpose of brand identity is to provide a path for the organization, employees, and those who are in contact with the organization (Patrick, Dieter and Gollum, 2013). Brand success certainly depends on the structure of a strong identity, which must be firmly linked to the strategy of the company and

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the organization. Identity is often associated with history, traditions, and victories in case of leagues and sports clubs, and it is stronger as they are older and more successful (Asadollahi, Mahian Jaghargh, & Saeedi Mehr, 2020; Limbach et al., 2018). In fact, identity is based on institutional values, dynamism, skills and expertise, perspectives, beliefs, commitments, and the personal history of founders and individuals who make up companies and organizations (Patrick et al., 2013). Brand identity is based on a set of constructive factors that determine the true face of the mother organization, the reasons for commitment, and major ideological and strategic orientations (Wear et al., 2018). According to Kapferer (2008), brand identity includes six degrees, which are collectively referred to as the brand identity prism, including body, character, culture, self-image, reflectivity (reflection), and relation. Therefore, promotional tools (advertising, public relations, support, individual sales, direct marketing, etc.) are probably the most important leverage to improve brand identity and image (Asadollahi, 2018).

In the economic and business environment, sports advertising is one of the methods used by most companies to introduce their brands and products and expand their market. Companies need to carefully manage their brands to encourage their purchases, partnerships, and consumer commitment and loyalty (Asadollahi, Fahim Devin, Shahidi, & Saeid Zarak, 2018; Ercis, Ünal, Candan, & Yildirim, 2014; Haig, 2009). To guide consumers towards loyalty and commitment to sport, the brand position and identity need to be first constantly reminded and remembered by the consumer. The leading brands' marketers often spend huge amounts of money on advertising, brand awareness, or brand recognition. Then, they create the senses of preference for, loyalty towards, and commitment to the brand. However, organizations and companies often find it difficult to choose the medium for promotion and advertising, or they conclude that the media and tools have not produced the desired effects to meet their goals and demands after allocating costs and choosing the type of tools and media (Chadwick, Ellis, and Doherty, 2012). For instance, companies often adopt a variety of promotional tools such as television advertising, testimonials, memos, publications, websites, posters, and so on to achieve their advertising goals and markets (Fallah, 2003). In this regard, the traditional marketing mix model mostly known as 4 Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion) is a powerful tool that can help marketers define marketing strategies. Marketers use this tool to determine the appropriate responses to their desired market segments. It should be noted that the marketing mix includes the factors controlled by the management (Asadollahi, Tojari & Zarei, 2017b). Most marketing plans and decisions are based on one or on the combination of several elements of marketing mix. Marketers contribute to developing brand recognition, brand awareness, and even brand preferences to achieve their goals using advertising strategies (product introduction and promotion) (Ahmadi, 2015). Advertising aims to change the personal behavior and avoid people from making personal decisions, so that they would be trapped in a strong psychological impact (Asadi & Soufi, 2015).

The goals and effects of promoting and advertising are: awareness, persuasiveness, and reminder (Kutler & Armstrong, 2012). Awareness advertising informs customers about the brand value and identity. Companies and marketers use various promotional and advertising tools to achieve such goals and effects. Persuasive advertising is an attempt to change the perception of the customer about the value of the product and services. Such advertising is used greatly to create an initial demand when introducing a series of products or brand identity. Reminder advertising is in the area of maintaining customer relationships that helps someone to remember that a product is needed or where to buy. Reminder advertising helps the customer to think of the product to be psychologically guided in the first need towards a brand (Cutler & Armstrong, 2012). Consequently, the ultimate aim is to increase consumers' commitment and/or loyalty. Commitment is attitude and psychological state that describes people's desire for specific behaviors and reflects the level of their perseverance and persistence to continue to engage in behavior (Mir-Hosseini, Hadavi and Mozafari, 2011). Additionally, Commitment is one of the most important concepts used today to understand the determinants of sports participation behavior (Scanlan et al., 2003). Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons and Keeler (1993) achieved great success in combining commitment with sport by presenting a sports commitment model. According to their definition, sports commitment is a psychological state

that shows a person's willingness and decision to continue participating in sports (see also Jenson et al., 2004). Many studies have shown that if people participate in sports with a positive experience, they will continue to exercise and their commitment to participate in sports activities will increase (Casper & Andrew, 2008). The sports commitment model is a psychological model that examines the commitment and factors affecting the sports commitment of individuals participating in sports (Casper & Andrew, 2008). This model is rooted in the theories of social exchange theory, the general interpersonal relationship model and the Rasbalt (1980) investment model. Sports enjoyment, alternatives to participation, personal, social constraints, and participation opportunities are the five most influential factors in sports commitment (Scanlan et al., 2003; Wilson et al., 2004). Enjoying exercise is a positive emotional response to the exercise experience that reflects general emotions such as pleasure, interest, and happiness, and increasing it increases commitment (Casper & Andrew, 2008; Scanlan et al., 2003). Participation alternatives are activities that are more attractive as sports alternatives and people prefer to attend them regularly and put more effort into doing them; Increasing the number and attractiveness of alternative activities will reduce sporting commitment. Personal investments are activity-based personal interests that are non-refundable if you do not participate in sports. As the level of personal investment increases, so does the sporting commitment. Social constraints are social expectations and norms by which a person commits himself to continue playing sports. Participation opportunities are the benefits that come from continuous participation including friendships, social interaction, mastery of skills, and fitness (Casper & Andrew, 2008). These five components that determine sports commitment can be interrelated, but each component can also be measured separately and its effect on sports commitment independently (Scanlan et al., 2003).

The common findings indicate a relationship between brand identity and increased sport commitment in customers. Chadwick and Ellis (2012) conducted a study titled "Website Promotion: The Role of Email Marketing in UK Retailers. Content analysis revealed that this tactic, which is different from the format, address, and topic lines, attracts more customers to brand identity. In an article entitled "Impact of Brand Image and Advertising Mix on Consumer Purchasing Decision in Nigeria", Oladepo and Abimbola (2015) found that honest advertising for the product brand encouraged consumers to buy and re-purchase. Qurat and Mahira (2015) examined the effect of celebrity endorsement on customers' brand perception and repurchase intention, and found that the more credible the advertising, i.e. the use of more fashionable colors, music, images in advertising, the greater the effects on purchase intention and brand perception. Sarmad Saeedi et al. (2015), in a research study "Effect of Television Advertising on Brand Identity, found that television advertising affects the brand identity and all the components of the brand of Pasargad Bank. In a study on tennis players, Matthew (2012) stated that the more the personal awareness of tennis, the greater the motivation for further participation, commitment, and effort to reach goals. The use of various promotion tools raised the awareness of sport consumers towards commitment to greater participation in sport.

Given the importance of choosing the type of media, promotional, and advertising tools and their effect on the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment in consumers to identify the best tactics and promotional tools, avoid ineffective advertising, and effectively guiding the consumers towards commitment to sport, the Present study focused on the effect of more comprehensive tools on brand identity transfer and sport commitment among sport consumers. Based on the previous elaboration and study's objectives, we propose the following theoretical and conceptual model (Figure 1) and hypotheses:

H1: Brand identity transfer significantly influences sport commitment.

H2: There is significant (and positive) mediating effect of promotional and advertising tools on the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment.

Additionally, this paper also sought to answer what promotional tools has the greatest impact on the transfer of brand identity and sports commitment of sports consumers.

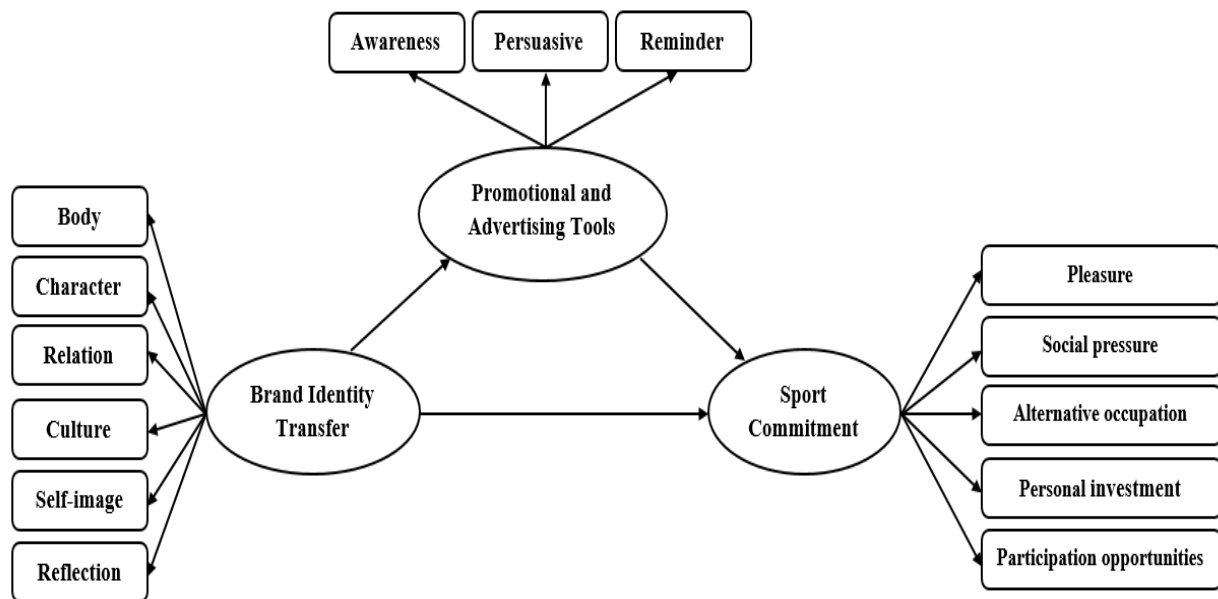


Figure 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Model of the Study Variables and their Relationship

Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of nature and objective, and descriptive-correlational in terms of methodology, and quantitative in terms of data collection. There was a field survey in this regard, and the required data was collected using a questionnaire. The statistical population of the study consisted of all sport consumers in the Iran Premier League (spectators at stadiums with a high level of participation). According to the methodology and in order to achieve the maximum characteristics of consumers, the sample size was 500. The samples were selected through random sampling approach.

Data were collected using a questionnaire about promotional and advertising tools (Television advertising, Endorsing athletes, Magazines and newspapers, Ads for websites and emails & Mobile phones and social networks) consisting of 17 items within three dimensions (awareness effect, persuasive effect, and reminder effect; based on Kutler and Armstrong's (2012) model), a brand identity transfer questionnaire consisting of 14 items within six dimensions (body, character, relation, culture, self-image, and reflection; based on Kapferer's model (2008)), and the standard questionnaire on sport commitment consisting of 26 items within 5 dimensions (pleasure, social pressure, alternative occupation, personal investment, and participation opportunities) based on Scanlan et al., (1993) which was used for spectators with minor modifications. For instance, respondents are asked: How committed they are to sports participation? To what extent has the club been able to convey its brand identity and its components? To what extent have promotional tools affected them? All items are operationalized in a five-point Likert scale. It should be noted that questionnaire based on theoretical foundations and research models of experts can correctly measure the desired variable (Asadollahi, Gholami Bidkhani, Jaghargh Mahian, & Yazdanian, 2020). The questionnaire was first submitted to the 7 people experts (professors) in the field of sport management and marketing to determine the face and content validity of the questionnaires. In order to evaluate the construct validity of the research instrument, confirmatory factor analysis test was used among the samples. The results showed that all structural markers under study had a t-statistic greater than 1.96 and also factor loadings higher than 0.4, That this value indicates that the structure of the researcher-made tool has been correctly identified. After that, the reliability of the tools was determined by Cronbach's alpha test in a preliminary sample of 30, including 0.89 for the promotional and advertising tools questionnaire, 0.86 for the brand identity questionnaire, and 0.92 for the sport commitment

questionnaire. After obtaining the necessary permissions from the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation, going to the sports stadiums (the place where sport consumers typically attend), and providing the necessary explanations, the questionnaires were distributed one to three hours before the teams' match among the spectators before the start of the football match in all league matches in the home stadium, and then collected. Descriptive statistics (tables including frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for determining the normality of variables) were used for data analysis, and structural equation tests were used to test the study of H1, H2 & H3 hypotheses. In addition, SPSS 21 and LISREL 8.8 were used for computation and data processing.

Findings

Sample Profile

Descriptive findings showed that the highest share of respondents was aged 26-35 (34%; 170 respondents) with only 4% (20 respondents) over 56 years. The marital status was 32.8% (164) single and 64% (320) married. The highest frequency of educational status was 33.2% (166), and the lowest frequency 5.4% (27) with a PhD degree.

Inferential Findings

Regarding the non-normal distribution of the variables of the effectiveness of promotional and advertising tools, brand identity transfer, and sport commitment from the viewpoint of consumers in the sample, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to determine the correlation. But before that, the data were normalized using the logarithmic method. Figure 2 illustrates the SEM results on the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and their dimensions with the mediating role of the effect of promotional and advertising tools from the perspective of sport consumers in the Iran Premier League.

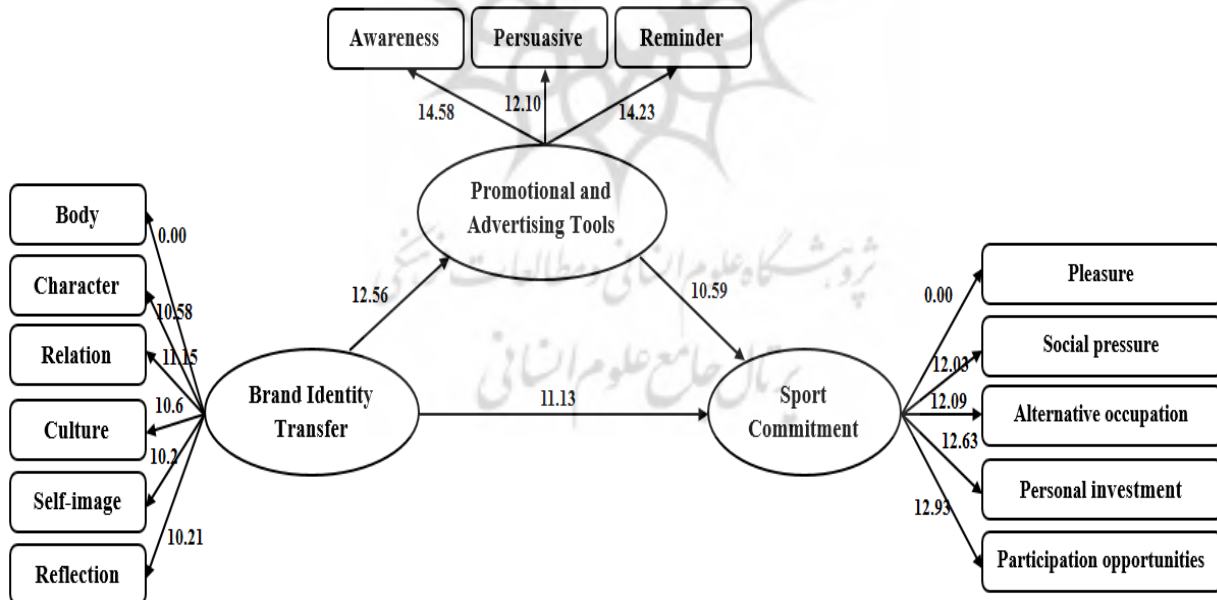


Figure 2. SEM results

According to the SEM results, and significant numbers, the results of path analysis of fitness indices of the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and their dimensions with the mediating role of the effect of promotional and advertising tools from the perspective of sport consumers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Path analysis results

Indicators	Allowed amount	Numbers obtained	result
χ^2/df	$< 3 \chi^2/df$	2.08	
P – Value	P – Value < 0.05	0.0001	
RMSEA	$0.03 < RMSEA < 0.08$	0.035	
H: Relationship between Brand Identity Transfer and Sport Commitment	more than 0.3	0.47	
H: Relationship between Brand Identity Transfer and Promotional and Advertising Tools	more than 0.3	0.43	Accepted
H: Relationship between the Promotional and Advertising Tools and Sport Commitment	more than 0.3	0.45	
GFI	Higher than 0.9	0.94	
AGFI	Higher than 0.85	0.9	
CFI	Higher than 0.9	0.91	
NFI	Higher than 0.9	0.92	

According to the results of Table 1, there is a significant relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and their dimensions with the mediating role of the effect of promotional and advertising tools from the perspective of sport consumers, in addition to establishing the structural equation conditions. Direct relationship between BIT and SC is slightly higher than mediating one (PAT – SC), it is good, because it mediates the role of promotional tools in this regard.

Brand identity variable has a direct effect on sports commitment variables and promotional tools and its impact is 0.43 and 0.48, respectively, and also the promotional tools variable has an impact on sports commitment variable and the impact rate is equal to 0.69 (Table 2).

Table 2. Standard factor loads and their significance test for model factors

Indicators	Standard factor value	load	Estimation error	T Value	P - Value
Brand Identity --> Sports commitment	0.431		0.043	811.5	< 0.001
Brand Identity --> Promotional tools	0.483		0.063	274.6	< 0.001
Promotional tools --> Sports commitment	0.690		0.043	565.11	< 0.001

According to Table 3, since the Z-value value is greater than 1.96, it can be said that with a 5% error level, this test is significant, meaning that the brand identity variable is effective on the sports commitment variable mediated by the promotional tools variable. The indirect effect is equal to 0.2967.

Table 3. Significant coefficients of Sobel test

Direct root	Indirect path coefficient	Z value	Result
Brand Identity → promotional tools → sports commitment	0.2967	3.216	Significant

There is a significant priority between the impact of each of the promotional and advertising tools on the transfer of brand identity and sports commitment (Tables 4 and 5). As can be seen from Table 4, since the significance level of my Friedman test is equal to 0.0001, so we reject the null hypothesis and accept the opposite hypothesis. That is, there is priority. The results of Table 5 showed that in general, the use of TV advertising tools has the greatest impact on the transfer of brand identity and sports commitment of sports consumers, and mobile and social networking tools, magazine and newspaper tools, website and email advertising tools, and athletes' validation tools were prioritized after television commercials in order of impact.

Table 4. Friedman test Priority of the effect of each of the promotional and advertising tools on the transfer of brand identity and sports commitment

Row	The statistics	the amount
1	Friedman	49.53
2	df	4
3	P Value	0.0001

Table 5. Average rankings for prioritizing the impact of each promotional and advertising tools on brand identity transfer and sports commitment

Factors	Mean of rating	priority	Impact rate
Television advertising	6.13	1	33.83 %
Endorsing athletes	1.31	5	11.11 %
Magazines and newspapers	2.43	3	14.32 %
Ads for websites and emails	1.38	4	12.41 %
Mobile phones and social networks	4.76	2	27.46 %

Discussion and Conclusion

Promotion and advertising, brand identity, and sport commitment, are proved to be effective in the success of marketing activities. According to the results of the present study, there is a positive and significant relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and their dimensions with the mediating role of promotional and advertising tools. Moreover, previous studies have found that sponsors and clubs always seek to attract customers and sportsmen to participation and re-engage (commitment) in order to successfully achieve their marketing goals through an effective combination of marketing mix elements, among which the element of promotion plays a significant role in transferring the various marketing objectives to consumers. Furthermore, the clubs and companies seek to use a combination of promotion and advertising in order to maintain effective relationships with their customers and consumers with a variety of tools. As argued by Asadollahi, Tojari and Zarei (2017a, 2017b), football clubs as a well-known, active, successful brands in competitive markets, can transfer their brand identity and what they are to their target audiences with the awareness of the significant, positive effect of various promotional and advertising tools on consumers. This should result with providing the conditions for guiding consumers towards re-engagement, commitment, and loyalty.

Regarding the fact that we currently witness the era of marketing, and that most companies and sports clubs engage in the delivery of their products and services over their product/service life cycle, and also that a club would be considered successful if it could effectively transfer the identity of its products and services to the target consumer, the increased awareness of the sports clubs about the goals of promotion and advertising (awareness, reminder, and persuasive) can help them to achieve this and attract consumers to repeat the purchase. The results of the present study confirmed the effects with respect to the goals of the club and companies in effectively transferring the identity of a brand as the true face of their club or company, and also its intangible effects on consumer behavior

and brand success. Consequently, the companies and sports clubs can also advertise the pleasurable experiences when involving in sports and create incentives for re-engaging in sport in order to lead the consumers towards biased, emotional attachment, or to put in better, sport commitment that is the main aim of any marketing activity.

This study results are consistent with Matt (2009), suggesting that the brand leads to the recognition of the seller or manufacturer. Kapferer (2008) argued that brand identity is the essence of the brand, and the most important and unique attributes appear in the brand identity. A brand is, indeed, the seller's permanent commitment to provide a set of features, benefits, and services to consumer that should be correctly transferred to the consumer. The managers and marketers of the sports clubs providing sports services can transfer their brand identity and benefits over competitors to the target consumers using the best method, i.e. promotion and advertising (Matt, 2009). The marketing two-way goal is to attract new customers by promising more value, and to maintain and grow current customers by providing satisfaction. According to the study results, football clubs will be thus able to re-engage their customers with the proper planning for using promotional tools to inform consumers of the sport enjoyment and remind them that they will more enjoy with more engagement in the club's activities and the use of services. They would be consequently able to create the basis for creating sport commitment and achieve their main goal of maintaining current customers through commitment and loyalty. According to the results of the research and according to Matt (2009), the brand leads to the identification of the seller or manufacturer. A brand is in fact the seller's constant commitment to provide a set of specific features, benefits and services to its consumers that must be properly communicated to the consumer, and the managers and marketers of sports clubs providing sports services can do the best. Which is the same as advertising and promotion to convey the identity of their brand or brand as well as its advantages over competitors to target consumers. Kapferer (2008) believes that brand identity is the essence of the brand and the most important and unique characteristics of the brand are reflected in the brand identity. Act and plan for themselves and what they are through advertising and promotion to the consumer.

According to Scanlan et al. (2003), sport enjoyment is an effective variable for the re-participation of individuals in sports activities. According to the present study results, the sports club officials need to identify the sources of enjoyment (commitment components) and inform the consumers or remind them so that they will ultimately be able to engage them in sport consumption through appropriate advertising.

Given the study results with regard to the mediating role of the effect of promotional tools on the relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment and also the existing theoretical bases indicating that one of the stages of designing an advertising plan by planners and marketers is the choice of media type, the football club planners and marketers can identify and select the most effective advertising tools to maximize the effectiveness of their advertising to transfer brand identity and create sport commitment among their consumers.

In addition to the information collected in the present study, the theoretical bases and literature indicate a relationship between brand identity, sport commitment, and promotional tools. The results of this study were proved to be consistent with of Matthew (2012), Azadi, Yousefi, and Eidi (2014), Asadollahi et al. (2017a), Sarmad Saeidi et al. (2015), Saktay (2013), Hesami (2015), Heydari and Sharifian (2014), and Khanlari and Zamanian (2014), Fernandez et al. (2013), and inconsistent with of Nasyryen (2005). In the consistent studies mentioned, the effect and the relationship of each tool and advertising medium was separately examined on consumer behavior such as loyalty, purchase, return, commitment, and so on. The results are thus consistent with the results of the present study, since the purpose of advertising and promotion is to create consumer behavior, and that the reminder, persuasive, and awareness effects were proved. A reason why this study results were found inconsistent with of Nasyryen (2005), was that the former examined the attitudes of Tehran residents toward television advertising and that the latter was conducted with the participation of both sexes. The present study was carried out only among males due to restriction on the women's presence in the stadiums. There are also other reasons for the inconsistency, including the fact that the level and type of attention are different depending on sex, and the negative attitude of the Tehran residents

towards the advertisements and the interruption in the programs they are interested in. Given that we are now in the age of similarity marketing, most companies and sports clubs throughout their life cycles are involved in providing similar products and services. Also, considering that a successful club will be able to effectively convey the identity of its product, service and brand to the target consumer, so the awareness of sports clubs about the goals of advertising (promotion, reminder, persuasive) can help them achieve this important objective and also attract consumers to help repeat consumption. According to this study, companies and sports clubs can promote the enjoyable experiences of a sport and sports activities to motivate re-participation in sports consumption in order to lead the consumer to emotional dependence and prejudice. In other words, they provide the same sports commitment that is the main goal of any marketing activity.

The results of the present research indicate that TV advertisements, compared to other promotional tools, have more effect on brand identity can remove these concerns, and designers can prepare the most effective advertisements to convey the company or club's brand identity using the extent that these tools have influence and using TV advertisements and other ones ordered by their level of impact. Moreover, it can be stated that TV is ideal for those who need to have extensive announcement or those who want to create a sense of motivation. Some people consider TV stronger than other advertising media since when the consumer observes that the product or service that he/she is using is the same as the one shown on TV, he/she feels more confident (Rusta, 2001). Therefore, advertisement designers of sport clubs should be careful about promoting what they really are in the media. Other advertising media (mobile apps, social networks, journals and newspapers, website and email advertising, and validation by athletes) are in the next ranks; this may be due to different reasons such as newness of tools, their interdependency (mobile phone and social networks or email and website and computer), requiring connectivity to Internet, being costly, having various work applications (websites and emails), and mass information and advertisement presentation in one tool (journals and newspapers).

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that with the effective use and combination of promotional tools, advertising planners and marketers of sports teams can achieve their goals, as well as the rankings obtained among the effectiveness of each tool, use to create sports commitment and convey the brand identity to consumers.

Figure 3 shows an integrated application model of the use of promotional and advertising tools to effectively convey brand identity and sports commitment to consumers (based on research findings) and the impact of each tool:

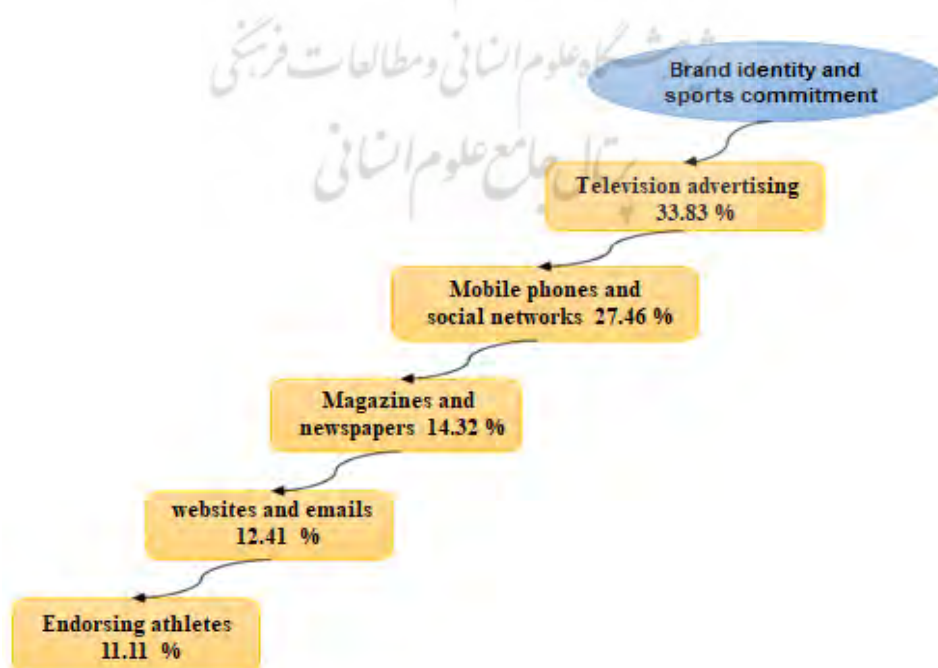


Figure 3. A mixed model of the use of promotional and advertising tools based on the priority of the effectiveness of each tool

According to Figure 3 and the impact of TV advertising tools and the higher priority of these tools over other tools on the transfer of brand identity and sports commitment of consumers, managers and advertising planners of sports clubs should first make their decisions and advertising budget on this tool. It covers a larger level of consumers with different demographic characteristics and should be used as the main tool in conveying the identity of their brand in order to attract consumers to participate and repeat this participation (commitment). The next priority is to use mobile tools and social networks as promotional tool. Club marketers and managers need to understand that consumers' attention, focus and attitudes towards tools are different, and they should not ignore new technology and the emergence of new media. The next priority is the impact of the tools based on the amount of consumer coverage related to the tools of magazines and newspapers. The use of these media to promote a brand identity in order to increase and replicate consumer participation should not be overlooked in terms of the extent of publication and the level of coverage. The fourth and fifth priorities are related to advertising using websites and emails and validation of athletes, each of which can be used by sports clubs in the final stages and priorities, depending on the degree of impact. Finally, managers, marketers, and advertising planners need to remember that instead of relying too much on the use of an advertising tool, an integrative model is needed to not lose any segment of the consumer market and the effectiveness of their advertising program and goals.

Conclusion

The confirmed relationship between brand identity transfer and sport commitment with the mediating role of promotional tool provides us with some recommendations. Initially, it is suggested that the marketing managers of the country's football clubs use promotion and advertising, which is one of the components of the marketing mix. Also try to transfer the brand identity as one of the components of the club brand management. It is also suggested that the authorities and planners of the football clubs will clearly and effectively transfer the awareness through promotion to their consumers, in order to motivate them to reuse with the awareness of sport enjoyment and create the incentives among consumers that are the components of commitment.

According to the present study findings, it is recommended to focus also on the relationship between brand identity and sport commitment in other sports leagues and fields to maximize the effects of any promotional and advertising tool with an emphasis on consumer attraction. Future studies should also take into consideration the effect of different techniques and tactics for advertising tools. Given the positive significant effect of TV advertising, compared to other media, in order to convey brand identity to consumers, managers and planners of Iranian Football Clubs are suggested to obtain knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of TV advertising tool and influential methods used in this media and the effective tactics of TV advertisements, and exploit these tactics in their advertisements to maximize the effectiveness of their promotional goals.

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