The Impact of Sports Apparel Brand Image on the Repurchasing Behavior of Student Athletes: A Case Study of Iran

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Abstract— the current study aimed to evaluate the impact of sports apparel brand image on the repurchasing behavior of students participating in the 13th Sports-Cultural Olympiad (SCO) which was held in 2016 in Mashhad, Iran. The study is an applied research which adopts a causal methodology. The sample population consisted of about 2,900 student athletes. Overall, 610 individuals were included in the sample through Morgan Table. The study has used a self-made 26-item questionnaire, the validity of which was confirmed by the faculty members at the Department of Sport Sciences at Tehran University and Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and its reliability was calculated to be 0.892. To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The descriptive statistics have employed central tendency. As for the inferential statistics, statistical methods such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, multiple regression, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient were taken into account. The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient with regard to the impact of the sports apparel brands image and its components including attributes, benefits, and brand attitudes on the students' intention to repurchase a product was 0.514, 0.608, 0.143 and 0.292, respectively, and the regression coefficient of the variables were 0.514, 0.260 and 0.366, respectively. Hence, the impact of the variables is positive and direct. Level of significance of the test, in all cases (Sig= 0.0<0001.05). As a result, characteristics of sports apparel brand had the highest impact on the repurchasing behavior of students participating in the 13th Sports Cultural Olympiad in Iran.

Keywords— brand image, repurchasing intention, sports apparel, Sports-Cultural Olympiad, student athletes

I. INTRODUCTION

Sports industry is one of the most important and attractive industries in the world, the products of which are faced with fierce competition. A type of sports products that have a major role in the implementation and development of sport fields and are faced with global appeal, are sports apparel. The results of numerous studies show that early in the 21st Century, sports apparel accounted for 22% of the total share of the world's apparel market, which gradually increased in the following years. Since the sports apparel market accounts for a high percentage of the total apparel market, studying the purchasing and repurchasing behavior of its consumers will be highly beneficial for the producers and

researchers focusing on sports apparel (1). Consumers tend to use products which are similar to their mental image and in order to judge the quality of the product, they utilize internal sources such as the unique attributes of the product, as well as external sources such as price, quality, and the existing mental image of the brand. The role of the mental image of the brand is of particular importance for both experienced and inexperienced customers, because they try to strengthen their own mental image through buying the product which they believe is in high consistency with their own mindset (2). According to Fishbein model of behavioral intentions (1967), the intention of an individual to perform a behavior is a function of his/her attitude toward performing that behavior in a given setting (3). Numerous studies show that the image of a company can possibly affect the judgments and behavioral intentions of its consumers. Therefore, the image of the company's identity would influence the intentions of consumers for buying the products of the company, which is considered as one of the significant behavioral intentions of the consumers. In addition, by improving the image of the brand and highlighting it, consumers can easily recall the information that they already know about the brand during the purchasing process, including pre-purchase which may cause an increase in the purchasing intention of consumers. Brand is the feeling and image which people have about certain products, services, or companies. The success of a brand is the direct result of the knowledge of the method and quality of offering the brand to the market in the simplest way possible. The image of a brand represents a set of promises to the buyer, indicating trust, implementation, and a defined set of expectations. The purpose of marketing is to create an image of the brand or embellish it in order to attract potential customers. Consumers should have a clear image of the attributes of the brand in their minds. These attributes can include quality, speed, low price, high price, and variety. The overall picture is in fact a combination of all the perceptions of the consumers about a company, product and/or brand (4). Among the tangible aspects of a product, the image of the brand is the most

important one. In fact, most marketing strategies are focused on highlighting the image of the brand (5). The more the brand image has roots in the mindset of the customers, the more the companies can take benefit from the customers (6). The image of the brand is defined as the mental image of the consumer of the received service and includes the symbolic concepts which the consumer associates with a special feature of a product or service (7).

The reputation or image of a brand includes the realization and perception of the target market of the attributes, benefits, usage conditions of users, manufacturers, and even marketers of a product. In other words, this concept refers to the thoughts and feelings of people when they see or hear the name of a brand. The customers' image of a brand is a set of sincere beliefs about a brand which represent the past experiences of encountering with the brand (4). This concept is made of a combination of the physical reality of the product and the beliefs and feelings surrounding it (8).

The image of the brand consists of different attributes. These attributes include a wide range of real/virtual, conscious/unconscious, and direct/indirect attributes. The image of a brand consists of three components, namely attributes, advantages, and attitudes. Attributes refer to what the customers think about the brand. Attributes are divided into two groups, namely related and unrelated attributes, based on their relevance to the product. Related attributes consist of the attributes which affect the performance of a product or service from the customer's perspective. These attributes have a significant impact on the selection of the products and services and facilitate the purchasing decision-making process. Unrelated attributes are the ones which have no direct impact on the product performance; however, in terms of purchasing decision-making, they are indeed important. These attributes include the price, perception of the consumers, perception of the consumption, identity of the brand, and the perception of the experiences.

As for advantages, they consist of what the customers think the brand will offer them. In fact, the advantage analyzes the method of

solving problems or satisfying the needs of the customers. In general, the advantages of a brand could be divided into three categories, namely functional, empirical and symbolic advantages. Functional advantages refer to the internal advantages achieved from the consumption of the products and services which mostly are associated with the attributes of the product or service. These advantages satisfy the lower-level needs of the customers. Experimental advantages include emotional pleasure, variety seeking, and cognitive motivations that the brand creates. In fact, these advantages are associated with the customers' feelings when consuming the goods and services. Symbolic advantages refer to people's needs of showing off, stabilizing the roles, belonging to a group, and/or understanding one's self which are satisfied by consuming a certain brand (9). Mindset or attitude is related to the customers' beliefs about the rate of offering the attributes and advantages by the brand and the judgements associated with these beliefs. In fact, the attitude toward the brand can could be considered as one of the main responses of the customers to the brand. The image of the brand includes the symbolic associations (brand personality) and the functional associations (beliefs about the brand) (9). Several studies have been conducted on the impacts of the image of a section and its components on the purchase intention of the consumers, some of which are going to be mentioned shortly. It is worth mentioning that purchase intention refers to the tendency of an individual for doing or directing a behavior (10).

A study conducted by Jalali et al. (2011) investigate the comprehensive fidelity/loyalty model regarding the brand and the desire to repurchase, which reflects the influence of the perceived value and quality, and brand equity (as independent variables), and brand satisfaction, continuous and emotional commitment (as intervening variables) on the loyalty of the customer and his/her willingness to repurchase a brand (11). In another study, Azadi et al. (2014) explore the role of sports sponsorship in promoting brand equity in the sports apparel industry from the perspective of

Physical Education students in Iran. The study concludes that sports sponsorship increases the probability of a brand to exist in a mentioned set, which will make it easier for the consumers to choose a certain brand, and consequently, increases the volume and frequency of customers' purchase (12). In a recent study, Al-Husseini et al. (2015) argue that whatever the higher the impact of these factors in the minds of the consumers, the more they are inclined to buy the company's products. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of prestige, reputation and brand image on the repurchasing intention of customers (13).

The results show that brand credibility, brand prestige, and brand image have a significant positive impact on the perceived quality and cost-saving information. It was also concluded that brand reputation and image have a significant negative impact on the perceived risk. In addition, perceived quality and cost saving information have a significant positive impact on the repurchasing intention of customers. However, perceived risk has a significant negative impact on the repurchasing intention. Also, according to research findings, brand prestige did not have a significant impact on the perceived risk. This was also the case for the impact of perceived risk on the cost-savings information.

In the same realm, Gilaninia et al. (2012) focused on 200 consumers of dairy products. The findings of this study indicated a significant positive relationship between perceived quality and brand reputation, reputation and loyalty, as well as perceived quality of the brand and purchasing intention (14). The results of the study conducted by Chung et al. (2009) on the effects of local production and brand image on the purchasing intention of consumers in South Korea indicated that brand reputation has an indirect correlation with brand loyalty (15). In a similar vein, Curra´s-Pe´rez et al. (2009) study the role of self-definition in identifying the customers of companies with social responsibility. They found that brand reputation, through attitude toward the brand, has a significant correlation with purchase intention, which is an example of

brand loyalty (16). Weisheng and Doyeon (2016) conducted a study on a sample of 247 participants. The questionnaire data were probed using structural equation modeling techniques. The results indicated that commitment to the brand had a positive impact on the repurchasing intention of consumers. Using investment model of commitment processes, the research provides useful information about the correlation between brand consumers and repurchasing intention (17).

Despite the previously mentioned studies, little research has been done with regard to sports apparel brand image and repurchasing intention. During the past two decades, our findings regarding the judgment of the consumer about the brand and relevant processes such as brand development, global brand, brand image, etc., have significantly increased. On this ground, the current study aims to see how brand image leads to wider understanding of the purchasing process as well as consumer satisfaction.

II.   Methodology

The present study was applied in purpose and regarding the research method, it was causal. The study was conducted through a survey. The sample population consisted of all the male and female students participating in the 13th Sports-Cultural Olympiad in 2016. Overall, the population included 2,900 students, of which 1,700 were male and 1,200 were female. According to Morgan's Table, the sample of male participants was 313 and the sample of female participants was 297. Cluster sampling and simple random sampling methods were employed. The study has used a self-made 26-item questionnaire, the validity of which was confirmed by the faculty members at the Department of Sport Sciences at Tehran University and Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and its reliability was found to be 0.892. To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. The descriptive statistics has taken advantage of

central tendency. As for inferential statistics statistical methods such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, multiple regression, and Pearson's correlation coefficient were analyzed. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS software version 21.

III.   Results

The results of descriptive data analysis demonstrated that the average age of respondents was 24.86. As for their marital status, 15.2 percent of the participants were married and 84.8 percent were single. Table 1 shows the educational level of the participants, while their income is presented in Table 2.

Table1. Educational Level of the Participants

Program Type	Frequency	Percent
Associate Degree	11	1.8
Bachelor	444	72.8
Masters	142	23.3
Doctorate	13	2.1
Total	610	100.0

Table2. The Income of Participants

Income Status	Frequency	Percent
No Income	375	61.5
Less than 70$	53	8.7
70-140$	32	5.2
140-210$	67	11.0
More than 210$	83	13.6
Total	610	100.0

Deductive analysis of the data is presented below.

Table3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic Z	Significance Level (Sig)	Test Result
Brand Image	1.213	0.105	Normal
Brand Attributes	1.166	0.111	Normal
Brand Advantages	1.185	0.102	Normal

Brand Attitudes	1.361	0.098	Normal
Purchase Intention	1.02	0.303	Normal

Table4. Pearson Correlation Test Results between Sports Apparel Brand Attributes and Students Repurchase Intention

Variable	Repurchase Intention	Significance Level
Brand Attributes	0.608	(0.0001*)
Brand Advantages	0.143	(0.000*)
Brand Attitudes	0.292	(0.000*)

According to Table 4, Pearson correlation coefficients between brand attributes, brand advantages, and brand attitudes with the repurchase intention of students were 0.608, 0.143 and 0.292, respectively. The level of significance of the test was 0.000, which is less than 0.05 (Sig = 0.0< 000.05). Thus, by 95 percent certainty, it can be argued that there is a significant positive relationship between brand attributes, brand advantages, and sports apparel brand attitudes with the repurchase intention of student athletes in Iran.

Table5. Multiple regression test results (the dependent variable intention to repurchase)

Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)		T Statistic	Significance Level	Collinearity Statistics	
	Non-standard	Standard			Tolerance	VIF
Constant Coefficient	0.692	------	2.994	0.0001*	-------	----
Brand Attributes	0.514	0.623	3.665	0.0001*	0.899	1.112
Brand Advantages	0.260	0.376	2.136	0.0001*	0.823	1.214
Brand Attitudes	0.366	0.584	2.543	0.0001*	0.838	1.194

F statistic	119.162	Model Significance Level	0.0001*
Coefficient of Determination	0.374	Adjusted Coefficient of Determination (adj) R ^ 2	0.371
Significance Level (K-S)	0.112	Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.845

According to Table 5, F statistic value is equal to 119.162 and the model's significance level is 0.0001 which is less than 0.05 (Sig <0.05). This indicates the adequacy of the model at the certainty level of 95 percent. Accordingly, the model is capable of explaining some of the changes of the dependent variable by the independent variables. Also, the adjusted determination coefficient (R^2=0.371) shows that the total model variables are able to explain 37.1 percent of the changes in the dependent variable. The regression model is as follows.

(Brand attitudes) 0.366 + (brand advantages) 0.260 + (Brand Attributes) 0.514 + 0.692 = repurchase intention

According to Table 5, it becomes clear that among all the components of brand image, i.e., brand attributes, brand advantages and attitudes of sports apparel, "brand attributes" have the greatest impact on the repurchase intention of student athletes (standard beta coefficient= 0.623), followed by brand attitudes and brand advantages.

IV. Discussion

According to the Pearson correlation coefficient results with regard to the relationship between sports apparel brand attributes and repurchase intention (0.608), there is a significant positive correlation between sports apparel brand attributes and the repurchase intention of student athletes in Iran. Since the correlation is less than 0.7, it is assessed as average. Based on the questionnaire

results, factors such as high quality, appropriate behavior of sellers, reasonable price, quick access, attractive promotions, pleasant purchase-consumption experience and customer satisfaction have a positive impact on the repurchase intention of student athletes.

The researchers assume that the correlation was assessed to be average because the quality of the offered products not satisfactory. Also, in the Iranian context, the prices of products offered by sports brands are very high compared to the quality of the products. Moreover, the products which are claimed to be produced by well-known foreign companies are not imported legally and they are mostly fake products; therefore, consumer satisfaction is low. Unfortunately, in Iran, advertising does not still have its real status and the current advertisements seem to have failed to attract the consumers. For instance, "Dayi" products, although deemed appropriate by many consumers, are not known to many Iranian student athletes.

In addition to ineffective advertising, sales agents, particularly those who are in direct contact with the customer, have not yet fully understood the appropriate code to handle the customers and are not aware of its direct impact on sales. Despite the increasing emphasis on customer retention, these salespeople are merely concerned with selling their products under any circumstances. However, some features which were mentioned at the beginning of the paper invite the customers to buy the products of a certain brand.

Brand attributes include uniqueness, durability, non-compliance and inimitability. Unrelated attributes in terms of purchase decisions are of high importance. These attributes include the price, perception of the consumer, perception of the consumption, brand personality, and perception of experiences (9). A decrease in prices would lead some families towards choosing a brand, even though they might not currently need the product (18). Functional attributes of sports apparel include fast-drying, breathability, waterproofness, odor resistance, light weight, antimicrobial nature, and durability (18). The more consistency that

product attributes (quality, price, design and beauty) have with the needs and demands of consumers and the more familiar the brand name, the more the tendency and consent of the customers. Also, more satisfaction with the product would result in the loyalty of consumers (19) which would in turn increase the possibility of repurchase. The results of this research are consistent with the findings of al-Hosseini et al (2015) (13) and Gilaninia et al. (2012) (14). These studies have similarly emphasized the impact of brand reputation and quality on the purchasing intention of customers.

Since the Pearson coefficient for the advantages of sports apparel brand and purchase intention was calculated to be 0.143, there is a significant positive correlation between the advantages of sports apparel brand and the repurchase intention of Iranian student athletes. According to the factors questionnaire, the primary role of being an sports apparel (sporting usage), feeling charm and beauty, being distinctive, youngness and energy, establishment of friendly ties, sense of being associated with a sport hero, sense of belonging to a group or sports team, the validity of the producing country, and the manufacturer, have a low positive impact on the repurchase intention of student athletes. This impact is higher on male student athletes compared to female student athletes. The reason for the low impact could be that most student athletes (61.5%) have no fixed income. Hence, they avoid buying products which are not of urgent necessity.

Another factor which may cause the pre-mentioned low impact is that today's Iranian youth are not willing to participate in groups and team work, and consider the sense of belonging to the group among the factors that hinder progress. This prevents the athlete from having a sense of belonging to sports teams.

Advantages include what customers think that brand will offer them. Different needs of the people including showing off, stabilizing their role, belonging to a group, and self-recognition are the ones which are satisfied by purchasing the products of a brand (9). These are the advantages or benefits of the brand that will be

the basis for deciding whether or not to purchase it. The advantages of sporting apparel can be the underlying motivation of purchase as well as useful information for businessmen and means to provide customer satisfaction (20). The results of this part of the research are in line with the study conducted by Divandari et al. (2009) (9) and Weisheng and Doyeon (2016) (17). Most researchers agree that by approaching sports audience and differentiating themselves from other clubs, organizations and brands can improve the sense of belonging among their fans which would in turn attract potential customers and motivate them to repurchase. The study by Fournier (1998) (21) has shown that consumers often tend to use brands which possess a strong personality so that they can establish a relationship and demonstrate their character.

Pearson coefficient for the relationship between brand attitudes of sports apparel and repurchase intention was 0.608. Hence, there is a significant positive correlation between the two variables. Since the correlation is less than 0.7, it is assessed as average. Based on the results obtained from the sports apparel brand questionnaire, if sport apparel brands practically show that in addition to their profits, they care about the interests of society (public interest), they will positively affect the repurchase intention of student athletes. The impact on female athlete students will be more than male athlete students; and the reason for the average correlation can be due to the level of educational level (98%) of students in undergraduate and above. Given that most people in the Iranian society are educated, this feature can be emphasized and through this, brands can successfully attract and retain their customers as well as observe the customers' rights in all affairs. In fact, by conceiving customer attitudes to the brand, consumer behavior could be easily anticipated. Image and positive attitude to favorable brand is a very important factor for loyalty to the product. Customers should like the brand and the respective product in order to be more loyal.

In fact, attitude toward the brand can be seen as an influential response of customers (9). Also,

the attitude has a mediating role between the attitudes of social performance toward luxury brands and purchase intention (20). Customer's attitude is considered as the best predictor of their intention and potential behavior (2). The findings are consistent with the results of Hanzaee and Taqipourian (2012) (22), Chung et al. (2009) (15) and Curra´s-Pe´rez et al. (2009) (16). Brand image, through the mediation of brand attitude, has a significant relationship with brand loyalty. Also, attitude toward brand, based on what it evokes in the customer, creates value for the brand and then the customer's perception of a brand is desirable and their attitude becomes positive, which would ultimately have a positive impact on repurchase intention.

Pearson correlation coefficient of sport apparel brand image was 0.514 (p=0<0.5). The value of F statistic was equal to 119.162 (p0<0.5), which indicates the adequacy of the model at the certainty level of 95 percent. Accordingly, the model as a whole is able to explain a part of the dependent variable by independent variables. The adjusted determination coefficient R^2 (0.371) showed that the variables in the model explained 37.1 % of the variance in the dependent variable.

The significance level of the independent variable related to brand attributes, brand advantages, and brand attitudes of sports apparel was less than 0.05. Therefore, by 95% certainty, it can be said that these three elements have impact on the repurchase intention of Iranian student athletes, and since the variables' regression coefficient value was positive, their effect is direct and positive.

It should be noted that by comparing the standardized beta coefficient, among the components of brand image (i.e., brand attributes, brand advantages and brand attitudes of the sports apparel), "brand attitudes", by the largest standard beta coefficient (0.623), has the greatest effect on the repurchase intention of student athletes, which may be due to the age of the athletes (24.86 years).

Marketing goal is creating a desirable image of a brand in order to attract people. Consumers

should have a clear picture about the brand attributes (4). Consciously or unconsciously an attempt has been made to create this image. Packaging, distribution places, propriety or politeness of those responding the phone calls, and all that a consumer sees or hears about a company build an image in their mind, and this would in turn affect their decisions to buy a product or not.

A good image of a brand can affect the customers' repetitive support. Through honesty, the brand image influences loyalty to the brand (19). Curra´s-Pe´rez et al. (2009) have considered repurchase intention, one of the examples of brand loyalty (16). Therefore, customers should like the brand and product in order for their loyalty to be increased. In some studies, factors causing the loyalty to sports products include price, quality, fashion (design and aesthetics), shop environment, promotion and brand name. Also, by improving brand image and highlighting it, consumers can easily recall the information about the brand during the purchase process that also includes pre-purchase stage and ultimately this will increase purchase intention of consumers from the respective brand (19).

The results of this section are consistent with the results of Al-Hosseini et al. (2015) (13), Chung et al. (2009) (15), Wu, et al (2011) (23), Hanzaee and Taghipourian (2012) (22), Gilannia et al. (2012) (14), and Wiesheng and Doyeon (2016) (17) who also argue that brand image affects purchase intention and a brand that has formed a good image in the mind of the customers can expect the customer loyalty. However, the results of the study in this regard are not in line with the findings of Chung et al. (2009) (15) and Curra´s-Pe´rez et al. (2009) (16), since they expressed that brand image indirectly influences repurchase intention.

V. Conclusions

All in all, the results of the current study indicate that brand attributes, with the highest standard beta coefficient, have the greatest effect on the repurchase intention of customers, followed by attitudes and advantages,

respectively. Also, the lack of proper advertising position, lack of understanding of the customer's status by salespeople, emphasis on sales rather than customer retention, avoiding the sense of belonging to group, having beliefs that the group hinders the progress, high unemployment rate, and low income were the issues that should be resolved by careful planning. Approaching the sports audience and differentiating among them is one of the major steps that should be taken. Finally, using specific marketing strategies for sports apparel, an all-inclusive approach to customer's needs and values, and fulfilling the expectations of customers would probably lead to more satisfaction and loyalty, and thereupon, customer's positive feedback and profitability.

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