

Effects Of Brand Orientation on Customer Orientation and Employee Behavior (Case of Study: Sports Clothing Stores)

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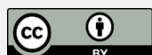
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Abstract: Today's organizations are not superior in terms of technology and product differentiation due to rapid changes and intense competition. Meanwhile, the main factor of their success is their human resources. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effects of brand orientation on customer orientation and employee behavior. The statistical population of this research is all employees of sportswear stores in Mazandaran province. According to Morgan's table, the sample size was equal to 67 people. The sampling method of the present study was a simple random sampling. Then, data has been collected using a questionnaire tool. Using convergent validity, the validity of the research was confirmed. Its reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha test. In this research, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the data distribution. The path analysis method was used to test the hypotheses. Data analysis has been done using Excel software and SPSS and PLS software. The results of this research showed that brand orientation has a significant effect on employees' customer orientation and brand-oriented behavior of employees. Employee customer orientation has a significant effect on employee customer orientation behavior. Finally, the customer-oriented behavior of employees has a significant effect on the brand-oriented behavior of employees. It is suggested to the managers and officials of the country that by raising the needs and problems of the customers from the employees in their organization and answering the customers' questions correctly and trying to influence the customers by providing them with the desired information in order to help the customers to achieve their goals. have the necessary.

Keywords: brand orientation, brand orientation behavior, customer orientation, customer orientation behavior.

1. Introduction

The sports industry serves as a marketplace wherein the services catered to customers pertain to sports in diverse forms (Tarighi and Shirdel, 2022). A brand functions as a strategic tool that companies employ to facilitate swift identification of their products and organizations, providing customers with compelling reasons to select their offerings over those of competitors (Tarighi, Sheikh, and Salehi, 2022). The primary objective of club management involves cultivating brand relationships, bolstering fan loyalty, and managing fan behaviors to forge an emotional connection between the club brand and its supporters, thereby securing a competitive edge (Tarighi, Ahmadi, and Salehi, 1401). The performance analysis of several international sports organizations, including international sports federations and national organizations from various countries, demonstrates their utilization of diverse sports marketing techniques to achieve their objectives. These organizations have attained notable success through various marketing strategies (Tarighi, Hamidi, and Rajabi, 2017). A critical competency for competitive success is possessing knowledge and marketing skills within economic institutions. Sports institutions, in particular, are integral components of a country's economic framework. They strive to meet economic objectives while promoting the development of general, specialized, and championship sports at both domestic and international levels (Tarighi, Hamidi, and Rajabi, 2014). Managers of professional sports organizations must adeptly navigate challenges such as high costs, intensely competitive markets, widespread fan dissatisfaction, potential collapses, and the rapid advancement of new technologies to ensure survival in the commercial sports sector (Tarighi et al., 2017). Brands within the sports industry should be crafted around concepts that resonate with and are familiar to the target market (Malki, Hosseini, and Tarighi, 2020). Each brand embodies its own unique personality.

Brand names that clearly define and distinguish their identity and goals, while presenting a tangible and approachable image, can establish a deep and beneficial relationship with their customers (Sajadi et al., 2016). Indeed, branding is a key profit-generating process and the cornerstone of the modern economy. During periods of recession and crisis, robust brands tend to experience fewer declines and challenges, thanks to the trust they have

built with consumers (Sajadi et al., 2016). Professional sports have evolved into a significant business sector, with sports managers increasingly utilizing marketing concepts and responding to customer demand (Sajadi et al., 2016). Like non-sports organizations, sports organizations face environmental and global changes and contend with unique challenges (Sajadi et al., 2014). The sports industry is bifurcated into two primary branches: the sports service industry and the sports goods production industry. This sector encompasses entertainment, sports fitness, the organization of sports competitions, and the integration of sports with other industries, all of which can effectively reflect the development level of the sports industry (Tarighi et al., 1400).

In the sports industry, each team can be viewed as a brand and its fans as customers (Tarighi et al., 2021). Sports fans exhibit various behaviors to support their favorite clubs. Commercial brands that officially sponsor these sports clubs aim to attract and build relationships with the club's fans (Tarighi, Kerami, and Salehi, 1400). The role of sports marketing—which includes the specialized application of marketing principles and processes to sports and non-sports products through financial sponsorship, brand value, and loyalty—is crucial (Tarighi, Talebi, and Salehi, 2022).

Brand value is enhanced through loyalty, positive perceptions, the ability to attract new customers, the capacity to demand higher prices, ease of market entry, and the prevention of new competitors (Tarighi and Sajjadi, 2021). The need to increase managerial efficiency, alongside the aesthetic and ideological performance of "branding," has compelled marketing researchers to continuously revise and reassess the theories and conceptual complexities of this multifaceted structure (Tarighi et al., 1400).

Strong and successful brands embody two human characteristics: heart and intellect. These brands effectively influence both the emotions and rational thoughts of consumers (Sajadi et al., 2014). Research has shown that real value does not reside within goods or services themselves, but rather in the perceptions held by actual and potential customers. It is the brand that cultivates this perceived value in customers' minds, which is why companies place significant emphasis on brand management. Possessing strong brands enhances a company's



competitiveness and profitability (Sheikhalizadeh and Bashiri, 2018).

Branding is an approach wherein organizational processes are centered on crafting, evolving, and upholding brand identity through interaction with target customers, with the aim of attaining a competitive edge (Spuleri et al., 2020). In this context, emphasis is placed on fostering employees' awareness of brand identity through their work behaviors (Prathari and Azma, 2018). Research underscores the significant impact of service employees' actions on shaping customers' experiences and sentiments toward the company's brand. Brand orientation within an organization aims to train and motivate employees to engage in behaviors aligned with the organization's objectives. Securing customer loyalty and gaining a competitive edge necessitates employees' consistent fulfillment of customer expectations associated with the brand. Without a deep understanding of the brand, employees' behaviors may not resonate positively (Erkman, 2018). Customer orientation stands as a pivotal concept within relational marketing (Lukanova et al., 2021).

According to Sacks and Weitz (1982), customer orientation refers to the extent of engagement between service providers and customers aimed at meeting customer needs and enhancing their satisfaction (Sheikhalizadeh and Bashiri, 2018). Brand orientation fosters a culture that encourages employee actions and the delivery of high-quality services (Garas et al., 2018). Undoubtedly, a key requirement for gaining a competitive advantage is the organization's or its employees' capacity to satisfy customer needs more effectively than competitors. Hence, customer-oriented behavior stands out as a favored outcome for organizations.

Customer-oriented behavior entails employees assisting customers to meet their needs through activities such as identification, understanding, analysis, and response (Mohammed, 2017). Employee behavior should actively reflect brand values and serve as a brand advocate, leading to the manifestation of employee branding behavior (Kim et al., 2019). Brand-oriented behavior emerges as an outcome of employees' performance, aligning with organizational citizenship behavior and impacting the creation of exceptional service quality. Unlike customer-oriented behavior, which may be limited to certain individuals, brand-oriented behavior is an organizational behavior influenced by customer-

oriented behavior. Employees striving to satisfy customer needs often exceed their designated responsibilities (Pahler, 2018). While influencing employee attitudes is not straightforward, employees can act in accordance with organizational expectations when they understand what is required of them and possess adequate skills.

Research indicates that internal branding, coordinated training, and internal communication significantly influence employee behavior in fulfilling brand promises. Moreover, organizational climate, including service orientation, plays a crucial role in shaping employees' service delivery behavior (Sarako et al., 2019). Performance management represents a key factor in the successful execution of future endeavors aimed at attaining both organizational and individual objectives. Organizational performance encompasses the manner in which the organization's missions, tasks, and activities are carried out, as well as the outcomes derived from such performance. In an alternate definition, organizational performance entails the attainment or surpassing of organizational and social objectives, as well as fulfilling the responsibilities incumbent upon the organization (Bastag et al., 2016). Obhan and Sinagh (2019) conducted a study titled "Brand Orientation and Consumer Behavior: A Case Study of the Indian Sportswear Market." Their findings reveal that branding exerts a positive and significant influence on consumer behavior. Factors such as influence demand, loyalty, and brand awareness also exhibit a positive impact on consumer behavior.

Azizan and Yuser (2019) explored the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction within the Malaysian hotel industry. Their research revealed that the brand image held by customers significantly and positively influences their satisfaction. On the other hand, Dehghani Soltani and Tavakoli Yazdi (2018) conducted a study titled "Explaining the Role of Customer Relationship Quality in the Impact of Customer Orientation and Service Orientation on Customer Loyalty: A Case Study of Bagh Bahrami Hall, Kerman."

The findings indicated that the quality of customer relationships exerts a positive and significant influence on the correlation between customer orientation and service orientation. Hence, it is imperative to scrutinize this invaluable concept in businesses and commercial enterprises that prioritize customer-centric operations. Additionally, with the



impending entry of the country into the World Trade Organization and the escalating competition among companies, there is a pressing need to establish a customer relationship management system aimed at fostering customer satisfaction and subsequently nurturing customer loyalty (Haji Amini and Esfahani Nia, 2015).

Indeed, conducting such research is deemed necessary for several reasons:

1. Theoretically, it has the potential to generate new insights in the field. To date, there have been limited studies examining the impact of brand orientation on customer orientation and employee behavior. Thus, this research can contribute to filling the gap in existing literature and advancing knowledge in this area.
2. From a practical standpoint, this research can offer an operational framework for managers and employees within relevant organizations and companies. By shedding light on the interplay between brand orientation, customer orientation, and employee behavior, it can guide decision-making processes and streamline organizational procedures. This clarity can empower stakeholders to identify necessary steps and implement effective processes within the organization.

2. Materials and Methods

The objective of this study is to assess the impacts of brand orientation on both customer orientation and employee behavior. The statistical population for

this research comprised all employees working in sportswear stores across Mazandaran province. Utilizing Morgan's table, the sample size was determined to be 67 individuals. Simple random sampling was employed as the sampling method. Subsequently, data was collected through a questionnaire tool. The validity of the research was confirmed using convergent validity, while reliability was established through the Cronbach's alpha test. The normality of the data distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Path analysis was adopted to test the hypotheses. Data analysis was conducted using Excel software, as well as SPSS and PLS software packages.

3. Results

The research findings revealed that out of the total 67 respondents, 23 were male, accounting for 34.3% of the sample, while 44 were female, constituting 65.7%. Regarding age distribution, the highest frequency (25.55%) was observed in the age group below 30 years, whereas the lowest frequency was recorded in the age group above 50 years. In terms of educational background, 6.0% of respondents held a diploma or lower qualification, 65.7% possessed an associate or bachelor's degree, and nearly 28% held a master's degree or higher. The income distribution among respondents indicated the highest frequency in the income range above one million two hundred thousand tomans, with the lowest frequency observed in the income range of 600 thousand tomans and below.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics, gender, age, education, income

	Description	frequency	percentage
Gender	Female	44	34.3
	Man	23	65.7
Age	Below 30 years	37	55.2
	30-40 years	30	44.4
	Above 50 years	0	0
education	Diploma or lower	4	6.0
	Associate or Bachelor's	44	65.7
	Master's or higher	19	28.3
Income	Below 600,000 tomans	0	0
	600,000 - 1,200,000 tomans	43	35.8
	Above 1,200,000 tomans	24	64.2



Note: Frequencies are provided as raw numbers. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR)

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	composite reliability (CR)
branding	0.902	0.908
Employee customer orientation	0.824	0.865
Brand orientation behavior of employees	0.776	0.740
Customer-oriented behavior of employees	0.799	0.862

Table 3. path coefficients and test statistics

Direction	Path coefficient	t statistic	Result
Brand orientation → customer orientation of employees	0.411	140.2	confirm
Brand orientation → brand orientation behavior of employees	0.375	212.2	confirm
Brand orientation → customer-oriented behavior of employees	-0.102	715.0	rejection
Customer orientation of employees → brand orientation behavior of employees	0.085	518.0	rejection
Customer orientation of employees → Customer orientation behavior of employees	0.589	282.5	confirm
Customer-oriented behavior of employees → brand-oriented behavior of employees	0.375	020.2	confirm



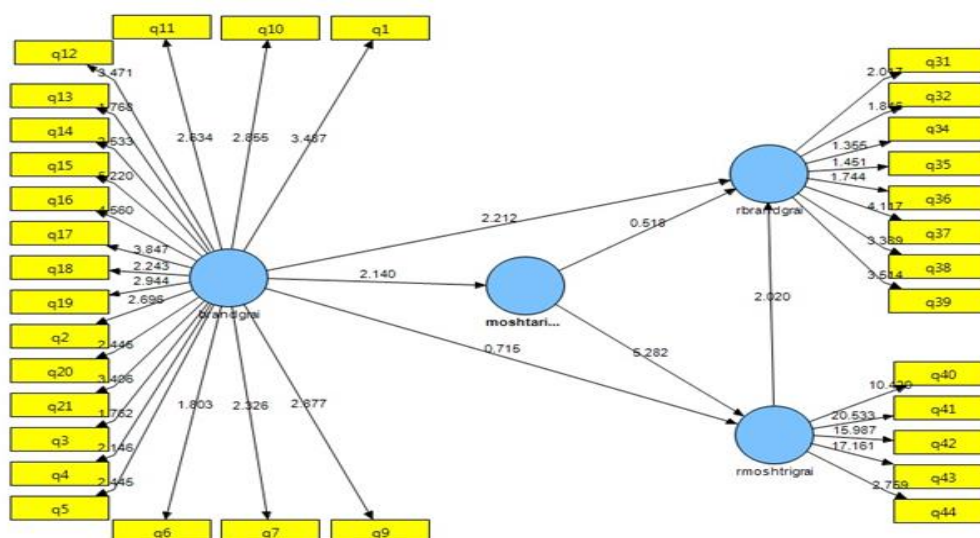


Figure 1. The general tested model of the research (t-measure).

5. Conclusion

In this study, the impact of brand orientation on both customer orientation and employee behavior was explored. The results indicated that brand orientation exerts a positive and significant influence on employee customer orientation, employee brand-oriented behavior, and employee customer-oriented behavior. Specifically, brand orientation was found to positively affect employees' customer orientation. This finding aligns with previous research by King et al. (2013) and Dehghani Soltani and Tavakoli Yazdi (2018).

Branding necessitates an integrated, consistent, and holistic approach to service brand management. It hinges on the synergy between organizational culture and brand identity, much like its dependence on prioritizing exceptional and personalized customer service. Brand orientation fosters a culture that motivates employee actions and facilitates the delivery of high-quality, competitively differentiated services (Hasni et al., 2018).

Similarly, the results indicated that brand orientation significantly impacts employees' branding behavior, aligning with findings from King et al.'s (2013) research. Although influencing employees' attitudes may not be straightforward compared to influencing their behavior, providing employees with clear expectations and necessary skills enables them to perform in line with organizational goals. Empirical evidence highlights that internal branding, coordinated training, and internal communication play pivotal roles in shaping employee behaviors to deliver on the brand promise. Furthermore,

organizational factors, such as a service-oriented culture, influence employees' service behaviors.

The fifth hypothesis of this study demonstrated that employee customer orientation significantly influences employee customer orientation behavior, a result consistent with prior research findings such as those of King et al. (2013) and Hasni et al. (2018). Arguably, sustaining a competitive advantage relies on the organizations, or more specifically its employees', ability to better fulfill customer needs compared to competitors. Therefore, customer-oriented behavior emerges as a desirable outcome for many organizations. Customer-oriented behavior encompasses employees' capability to assist customers in meeting their needs through recognition, understanding, analysis, and responsiveness. Additionally, the findings indicated that employee customer orientation significantly impacts employee customer orientation behavior.

Undoubtedly, a commitment to achieving sustainable competitive advantage hinges on the organization's, particularly its employees', capacity to outperform competitors in meeting customer needs. Hence, customer-oriented behavior emerges as a coveted outcome for many organizations. Customer-oriented behavior encompasses employees' adeptness in assisting customers to fulfill their needs through recognition, comprehension, analysis, and responsiveness. This finding resonates with prior research, including the studies conducted by King et al. (2013) and Hasni et al. (2018).

Moreover, the results revealed that employees' customer-oriented behavior significantly influences their brand-oriented behavior. This implies that when employees prioritize meeting customer needs



effectively, it positively impacts their alignment with and embodiment of the organization's brand values and objectives.

Brand-oriented behavior represents a proactive outcome whereby employees, akin to organizational citizenship behavior, contribute to the delivery of exceptional service quality. It is a behavior driven by organizational motivation and influenced by customer-oriented behavior. Employees who are motivated to fulfill customer needs tend to exceed task requirements, thereby demonstrating brand-oriented behavior. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Obhan and Sinagh (2019) and Dehghani Soltani and Tawakoli Yazdi (1398).

Compared to employee customer behavior, which may be limited to certain individuals, the success of businesses in today's landscape, characterized by heightened competition and rapid technological advancements, hinges on their ability to adapt to evolving consumer expectations and preferences. As such, companies that prioritize brand-oriented behavior among their employees are more likely to thrive in this dynamic environment.

Understanding and effectively addressing the expectations and values of customers is crucial for success. Branding plays a significant role in this process, as a strong brand creation is a key factor in attaining competitive advantage and ensuring long-term survival in the market. Therefore, it is imperative for companies to prioritize branding initiatives and encourage employee and customer orientation towards the brand.

To thrive and maintain a presence in the market, companies and organizations must pay close attention to all aspects of branding, as well as the behaviors of both employees and customers. By fostering a brand-centric culture and aligning employee and customer behaviors with the brand values, companies can enhance their competitive position and ensure sustained success in the marketplace.

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تأثیر برندگرایی بر مشتری‌گرایی و رفتار کارکنان (مطالعه فروشگاه های پوشاک ورزشی)

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چکیده: سازمان‌های امروزی به‌خاطر تحولات سریع و رقابت فشرده، از لحاظ فناوری و تمایز محصول چندان برهم برتری ندارند. در این میان عامل اصلی موفقیت آنها منابع انسانی‌شان است. هدف این پژوهش ارزیابی اثرات برندگرایی بر مشتری‌گرایی و رفتار کارکنان هست. جامعه آماری این تحقیق کلیه کارکنان فروشگاه پوشاک ورزشی در استان مازندران می‌باشد. طبق جدول مورگان حجم نمونه برابر با ۶۷ نفر بوده است. روش نمونه‌گیری پژوهش حاضر به‌صورت نمونه‌گیری تصادفی ساده بود. سپس با استفاده از ابزار پرسش‌نامه داده‌ها جمع‌آوری شده است. با استفاده از روایی همگرا، روایی تحقیق تأیید شد. پایایی آن از طریق آزمون آلفای کرونباخ تأیید شد. در این پژوهش برای تعیین نرمال بودن توزیع داده‌ها از آزمون کولموگوروف اسمیرنوف استفاده شد. برای آزمون فرضیه‌ها از روش تحلیل مسیر استفاده شد. تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها با استفاده از نرم‌افزار اکسل و نرم‌افزار SPSS و PLS انجام گرفته است. نتایج این تحقیق نشان داد که برندگرایی تأثیر معنی‌داری بر مشتری‌گرایی کارکنان و رفتار برندگرایی کارکنان دارد. مشتری‌گرایی کارکنان تأثیر معنی‌داری بر رفتار مشتری‌گرایی کارکنان دارد. در نهایت رفتار مشتری‌گرایی کارکنان تأثیر معنی‌داری بر رفتار برندگرایی کارکنان دارد. پیشنهاد می‌شود به مدیران و مسئولان کشور که با مطرح کردن نیازها و مشکلات مشتریان از سوی کارکنان در سازمانشان و پاسخگویی درست به سؤالات مشتریان و تلاش بر تأثیرگذاری بر مشتریان از طریق ارائه اطلاعات مطلوب به آنان در جهت کمک به مشتریان برای رسیدن به اهدافشان اهتمام لازم را داشته باشند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: برندگرایی، رفتار برندگرایی، مشتری‌گرایی، رفتار مشتری‌گرایی.

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استناد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.