

**Research Article**

## **EXAMINING LOYALTY OF WUSHU PREMIER LEAGUE TEAM ATHLETES TO SPORT BRANDS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sports industry includes sectors such as sporting goods, marketing and financial support. Changes in marketing concept over the past decade lead all businesses and organizations to customer Orientation and customer loyalty. This aim of this study is to examine loyalty of Wushu premier league team athletes to sport brands and identify its underlying factors. The method of this study was descriptive, correlation, longitudinal and applied and data was collected in field method. The statistical population of study included all athletes participating in Wushu premier league (150) and was held in Tehran and sample was selected as (n = 150). The tool was new version of brand loyalty evaluation questionnaire of Lau et al (2006) including eleven factors of product quality brand name, price, product style, shop environment, advertisement, quality of services, affected by others, social class, lifestyle and advertisement size. Reliability of questionnaire was obtained 0.86 in a preliminary study of 40 subjects by Cronbach's method. The collected data was analyzed after diagnosing its normality by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and using Spearman correlation test at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  and statistical Software of SPSS19. The data revealed a significant positive relationship between all factors of Wushu premier league team athletes' loyalty to sport brands. Finally Friedman test showed that advertisement size, social class and influence of others have the highest rate in loyalty of Wushu premier league team athletes to sport brands. Given the importance of gender effect on loyalty, three factors of advertisement size, social class and influence of others are recommended to merchants, store authorities, agencies and production companies so that they emphasize on combination of these three factors on their marketing policies.

**Keywords:** *Loyalty, Wushu Athletes, Sport Brands*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Physical Education and Sport Sciences like other sciences have succeeded unimaginable boundaries of progress and technology and have affected all basic sport infrastructures including business, economics, politics, etc. Internationally, the sport ranks eleventh among the major industries of country. Sport industry includes sectors such as sporting goods, marketing, implementation supervision and financial support, professional sports, sport clothing, sport media and entertainment sports (Georgia, 2011). Changes in the concept of marketing in the last decade have led all organizations and businesses to customer orientation. Also, one of the main challenges is keeping customers or in other words, is their desire. Increased competition to acquire more customers has led companies to attach more value to services offered to clients so that they show themselves different compared to their competitors (Hizi, 2002). On the other hand, brand name or symbol is used to identify a product or services and to distinguish it from competitors (Aaker, 1991).

Brand loyalty is defined as the ability to attract and retain customers; also, it shows feel, behavior and attitude towards brand (1,991 acres). Studies by Peterson and Tarth (2009) showed that people engagement in marketing activities in sport clubs is related to service quality and brand loyalty. If this relationship does not have any benefits, it will not last long. Being aware of negative and positive relationship with brand allows sport centers to gain brand loyalty (Williams, 2010). Also Annecy (2007) considers lack of brand loyalty as the most important factor involved in health industry. In sport centers, the central core is activity and exercise. Sport complexes satisfy their customers through meet the needs of customers in terms of complexes, facilities, sports facilities and services (Annecy, 2007). Tejari and

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colleagues (2011) reached the following conclusions in a study entitled the role of trust in and loyalty to merchandise brand logo among professional volleyball players of Gonbad:

There is direct and significant relationship between believe in logo and dependence on logo among elite volleyball players, also, there is direct and significant relationship between believe in logo and pride and lateral success in life of elite volleyball players. According to statistical analysis, there is no significant relationship among believe in logo, logo popularity, merchandise logo management and escaping from daily problems of loyalty to mark. Broadbent *et al.*, (2010) in their research entitled desire to brand, brand image and loyalty in Australian elite sport concluded that sport teams are looking for increasing productivity through marketing strategies.

These strategies are targeted to move towards a loyal supporter. Leong *et al.*, (2012) in their article entitled effect of customer loyalty on buyer behavior in Malaysia concluded that there is significant relationship between brand equity, customer satisfaction and did customer loyalty and suggest that customer satisfaction is an introduction on customer loyalty. Also, they showed, although brand capital has less relationship with customer loyalty compared to satisfaction, however, brand capital and relationship are considered a positive rating for brand. In addition, Chen and Lin (2013) in a study that examines internal marketing and loyalty of employees, emphasized on the strong effect and role of internal marketing on employee loyalty.

Considering the above topics, researches related to branding are valuable assessments for organizations so that they can create effective strategies for brand loyalty. Brand understanding may help managers and planners to promote marks and commercial brands, especially in the realm of sports brands directly. Organizations realize the importance of creating and maintaining a relationship with brand and brand name both in sports and other industries.

Due to increased understanding of customer needs and Wushu sport lead to increased brand loyalty. The present research regarding the lack of studies in the field of brand and customer loyalty of Wushu athletes, tries to answer this question: how is the loyalty of Wushu premier league team athletes to sport brands?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of this study was descriptive, correlation, longitudinal and applied and data was collected in field method. The statistical population of study included all athletes participating in Wushu premier league (150) and was held in Tehran and sample was selected as ( $n = 150$ ). The tool was new version of brand loyalty evaluation questionnaire of Lau *et al.*, (2006) including eleven factors of product quality brand name, price, product style, shop environment, advertisement, quality of services, affected by others, social class, lifestyle and advertisement size. The collected data was analyzed after diagnosing its normality by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and using Spearman correlation test at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  and statistical Software of SPSS19.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of descriptive statistics showed that participants had a mean age of 21.32 years and all participants were male, 72.7% single, 23.7% in Tehran, 30.0% had a BA degree, 56% of physical education, 56% unemployed and 54% of them had a moderate economic status. Based on the reported brands, the first priority of participants was three brands of Vising, TopTan and Namdaran; Vising with 39.3% share won the largest share.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data was not in normal situation. Therefore, the Spearman test was used in these hypotheses. The test results indicated a significant direct relationship between factors and loyalty of Wushu Premier League team of athletes to sport brands.

This means that there is significant positive relationship between factors of brand name, product quality, price, product style, shop environment, advertisement, affected by others, social class, lifestyle and advertisement size and loyalty of Wushu Premier League team athletes to sport brands. The results are shown in Table 1.

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**Table 1: Correlation coefficients between factors and loyalty of Wushu premier league team athletes to sport brands**

	Significance level	Number	R	Variables
0/987	150	0/00	Athletes loyalty	Brand name
0/001	150	0/771**	Athletes loyalty	Productquality
0/001	150	0/507**	Athletes loyalty	Product price
0/001	150	0/662**	Athletes loyalty	Appearance
0/001	150	0/534**	Athletes loyalty	Shop Environment
0/001	150	0/37**	Athletes loyalty	Advertisement
0/001	150	0/302**	Athletes loyalty	Provided quality
0/001	150	0/774**	Athletes loyalty	Affected by others
0/001	150	0/795**	Athletes loyalty	Social class
0/001	150	0/799**	Athletes loyalty	Lifestyle
0/001	150	0/764**	Athletes loyalty	Advertisementvolume

\*:  $p < 0/05$     \*\*:  $p < 0/01$

And finally, there was significant difference between factors of customer loyalty to sport brands. In this regard, researcher used Friedman test to test study hypothesis. Thus, there is difference between customer loyalty factors to sport brands in terms of study community. The factor of advertisement size has devoted the highest priority to itself. The hypothesis test results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Friedman test results for prioritizing customer loyalty to sport brands**

Mean rate	IT dimensions	Priority of criteria
6/45	Advertisementvolume	1
6/36	Social class	2
6/25	Affected by others	3
6/22	Productquality	4
6/18	Brand name	5
6/16	Appearance	6
6/16	Shop Environment	7
6/05	Advertisement	8
5/94	Lifestyle	9
5/74	Provided quality	10
4/49	Product price	11

### Conclusion

The aim of all marketing activities in organizations is recruitment, retain and promotion of customer loyalty. The main aim of this research is to investigate the loyalty of Wushu premier league team athletes to sport brands and to determine major factors. There is direct and positive relationship among factors of

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brand name, product quality, price, product style, shop environment, advertisement, quality of services, influence of others, social classes, advertisement size and amount of Wushu premier league team athletes' loyalty to sport brands. According to the results, the advertisement size and social class have the most importance for male athletes. These results suggest that, People are led to use and buy branded sports clothes who seeking access to sale services such as seasonal sales, warranty, providing gifts for people in special occasions and quality of sport clothing. As a result, it seems that consumers of branded sport clothing, regardless of gender and athletic status, with different motivations try to buy and this can be derived from knowledge and experience of customers. This study is in line with surveys of "Annecy (2007), Broadbent *et al.*, (2010), Leong *et al.*, (2012) and Chen and Lin (2013)" and is not in line with Tejari *et al.*, (2011) study.

Since the research has been conducted on men, with particular attention to the effect of gender on loyalty, three factors of advertisement size, social class and affected merchants, shop authorities, agencies and production companies are recommended to emphasize on combination of three factors on marketing policies.

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