

Examining the Determinants of Word-of-Mouth Advertising and Their Impact on Sports Consumers, Emphasizing the Mediating Role of Homophily

Sakineh Lotfi Fard Shokurloo¹, Amir Ojagh^{2,*}

¹Department of Sports Marketing Management, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University, Tehran, Iran

²Sports Management, Mohaghegh Ardabili University, Ardabil, Iran

Email address:

lfershteh@gmail.com (Sakineh Lotfi Fard Shokurloo), Fereshteh.lotfi103@gmail.com (Sakineh Lotfi Fard Shokurloo),

seyedamirojagh@yahoo.com (Amir Ojagh)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Sakineh Lotfi Fard Shokurloo, Amir Ojagh. Examining the Determinants of Word-of-Mouth Advertising and Their Impact on Sports Consumers, Emphasizing the Mediating Role of Homophily. *International Journal of Sports Science and Physical Education*.

Vol. 8, No. 3, 2023, pp. 32-41. doi: 10.11648/j.ijsspe.20230803.12

Received: August 10, 2023; **Accepted:** August 28, 2023; **Published:** September 8, 2023

Abstract: This research explores the factors that influence word-of-mouth among sports consumers, specifically focusing on the mediating role of homophily (interpersonal factors). The current research is a descriptive-correlational study with an applied purpose conducted in the field. The statistical population consisted of all members (both staff and patients) of the Specific Patients and Transplant Sports Federation (IR. SPTF) in Tehran, Iran. A sample of 360 members was selected from the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation who had watched a documentary film about organ transplantation and special patients on television at least once based on recommendations from others. A targeted sampling method was employed, selecting 360 federation members who completed a word-of-mouth questionnaire. To ensure a test power of 80%, the sample size was determined using SPSS 24 software. Cronbach's alpha test was utilized to assess the internal consistency, resulting in a reliability value of 0.70. Data analysis was conducted using Smart PLS 3 software and the statistical structural equation modeling technique. The findings revealed a significant relationship between word-of-mouth advertising and factors such as experience, expertise, trust, and commitment. Additionally, homophily played a moderating role in this relationship. In conclusion, the characteristics of word-of-mouth advertising and the influence of homophily were found to impact the behavior of sports consumers, motivating them to engage in word-of-mouth promotion.

Keywords: Connections, Sports Consumer, Word of Mouth

1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive market, employing effective marketing strategies to capture customers' attention is crucial. One such method that has proven to be highly effective is word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising [5]. Over the past two decades, there has been a fundamental shift in the marketing landscape, recognizing WOM as an integral part of the marketing mix that requires management [52]. WOM refers to the transmission of messages through oral communication among people, leading to the spread of marketing messages about a company, its services, and its products among the general public [29, 43-46]. Our everyday conversations with

friends and acquaintances play a significant role in shaping our opinions and providing information about products, brands, and even voting choices [18, 22, 40-54].

WOM communication, which leverages person-to-person transmission, is regarded as one of the most effective marketing methods. It involves consumers describing and recommending products or services to each other, and its lack of commercial bias makes it a valuable source of information, particularly in situations where consumers have limited prior experience [20]. Extensive research has demonstrated the influence of WOM on purchase decisions, brand perception, and various other areas, leading many to consider it one of the most potent advertising methods [47].

Consumer acceptance is significantly influenced by WOM or WOM communication, playing a critical role in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes [11, 12]. Moreover, people engage in WOM to discuss products and share their experiences and opinions about various services. One of the strengths of WOM marketing lies in its independence from organizations, as it is driven by consumers rather than sports organizations or companies [30]. Another key aspect is that WOM provides indirect experiences about products or services, as people gather information from their surroundings, sports media, and interactions with others [50].

Consumers are more likely to engage in positive WOM after having a satisfactory experience [34]. In today's competitive landscape, where consumer trust in traditional advertising is declining and communication through social networks is expanding rapidly, WOM can significantly influence consumer attitudes and behaviors, leading to sustainable competitive advantages. This form of WOM involves existing customers sharing information with others, such as friends and acquaintances, in an attempt to influence their purchasing decisions [14]. It has the potential to predict consumer purchase intentions and is considered a reliable and influential source of information that can shape product acceptance [13, 55-57]. Consumers' skepticism toward traditional marketing communications has driven them to seek information from alternative sources, making them increasingly reliant on WOM communication [3].

Furthermore, the influence of WOM on customer purchase decisions stems from the inherent trust customers place in their friends' opinions and recommendations. With the advent of the Internet, WOM communication has transcended physical limitations and now encompasses online platforms, making Internet WOM a critical factor for sports organizations [51]. WOM not only has a significant impact on customer engagement but also stimulates people's desire to participate in sports, thereby fostering the growth of the sports industry [4]. Surprisingly, even in the digital age, people still prefer to engage in person-to-person conversations [9].

WOM refers to non-commercial communication among individuals regarding products, services, or brands, and it holds great importance in understanding consumer behavior. The American Communications Research Institute recognizes it as a means for customers to share information through various channels, such as product recommendations and promotions [35]. Due to the close relationship between communication science, marketing, and advertising, WOM has gained prominence within the marketing field [41]. Homophily, which pertains to the similarities and connections between consumers based on their personal evaluations and experiences with an organization or product, plays a crucial role in WOM [39]. WOM allows individuals to influence like-minded consumers' evaluation and purchase intentions by sharing information and social norms [28]. Norms also play a role in consumer WOM communication [24, 26]. Also, fostering interpersonal relationships between buyers and sellers can lead to positive customer WOM. Therefore, encouraging the establishment of interpersonal connections is

a valuable strategy to increase the likelihood of customer WOM [10]. Lo's theory classifies marketing communication based on its primary characteristics, distinguishing between communication at the structural level and communication involving active elements in marketing. When discussing active elements in marketing, the focus is on interpersonal relationships between consumers and others, highlighting the significance of individual characteristics and social connections within marketing [27].

In the following, we will examine the theoretical background: In the fifth generation of marketing, brands have encountered a technological revolution and the proliferation of various social platforms in the digital realm. Customers now have the ability to share their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on these platforms. Consequently, recognizing the significance of social participation, including eWOM, as an independent factor that directly impacts key brand indicators is crucial for the sustainable success of organizations [1]. research conducted indicates that the formulation and implementation of e-commerce ethics indicators and the provision of guarantees on websites can enhance eWOM and encourage customers to make online purchases. This, in turn, contributes to companies' profitability and overall performance [36]. in a study on WOM, several findings were revealed: 1) WOM is associated with brand awareness, 2) it correlates with product awareness, and 3) product quality influences brand awareness. These three exogenous variables, along with factors like price perception, brand image, and product design, collectively influence the endogenous variable of brand awareness [31]. Furthermore, a study conducted sheds light on WOM among student consumers. The results suggest that students tend to be more rational and less influenced by social media marketing in their purchasing decisions. These findings can be valuable for MSME management seeking to attract potential customers and effectively engage with the student segment [6].

In a comprehensive research titled "eWOM in the Field of Marketing: A state-of-the-art analysis and Suggestions for the Future," explore various important aspects of Electronic WOM and provide recommendations for young researchers [19] conducted a study on the role of WOM in customer loyalty within Mashhad fitness clubs. The research findings demonstrated that WOM advertising, alternative choices, and commercial purchases positively and significantly influenced customer loyalty [21]. Another study highlighted the impact of eWOM advertising on perceived risk. Consumers perceive this type of advertising as a means to mitigate potential risks when making product choices, making it particularly important. [49]. It was also shown in a study that expertise and identity significantly influence people's attitudes toward advertisements and their future interest in products and services [56]. A study demonstrated that besides its direct effect, customer trust, mediated through emotional commitment and the customer's understanding of quality, indirectly influences customer loyalty. Moreover, the positive empathy displayed by employees further impacts perceived

customer trust and emotional commitment. These studies contribute to our understanding of WOM's various dimensions and effects in marketing, providing valuable insights for academics and practitioners [33].

In this study, we utilized the model framework developed by Asda and Ko, (as shown in "Figure 1" Initially, we examined the impact of word-of-mouth (WOM) as the dependent variable in the model. Subsequently, the study explored the characteristics of the message sender, specifically their credibility and expertise, as well as the moderating effects of homophily, which relates to interpersonal relationships. The theoretical background of each hypothetical relationship was examined in the preceding section [7].

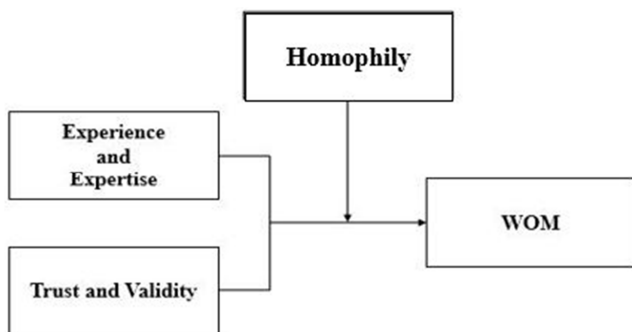


Figure 1. Conceptual model of research.

While Asda and Ko [7] focused on soccer viewers who had received advice about three months prior to soccer matches, our research aimed to measure the effect of WOM on members (staff and patients) of the Specific Patients and Transplant Sports Federation (IR. SPTF). These patients suffer from depression and experience mental and physical exhaustion due to their illness. Consequently, they require attention and support tailored to their condition, which the special patients' federation provides through suitable sporting activities such as darts, shooting, table tennis, chess, swimming, and athletics. Engaging in these daily activities helps patients distance themselves from the world of their illness and aids in their overall treatment [37]. Moreover, exercise has been shown to positively impact the quality of life and physical and psychosocial health of this population [45]. Additionally, the employees of this organization face a unique and high-pressure work environment when dealing with patients [8]. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the well-being of the employees in order to provide better services to the patients [25].

A consumer is defined as someone who utilizes the organization's goods and services [23]. The significance of word-of-mouth lies in its ability to provide consumers with crucial information about a sports organization, often helping them decide whether to support and endorse the organization. Word-of-mouth advertising also aids in attracting new consumers [48]. Hence, studying this type of sports consumer and their role in enhancing WOM within the IR is crucial. SPTF. This research presentation serves as a step toward assisting sports managers in understanding this phenomenon

comprehensively and taking appropriate measures to manage it. The researcher aims to answer the following two questions:

Does placing more emphasis on WOM advertising have an impact on sports consumers with the mediating role of homophily?

What is the effect of WOM advertising, including its components, on sports consumers?

2. Methodology

The current research is a descriptive-correlational study with an applied purpose conducted in the field. The statistical population consisted of all members (staff and patients) of the Specific Patients and Transplant Sports Federation (IR. SPTF) in Tehran. A sample of 360 members was selected from the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation who had watched a documentary film about organ transplantation and special patients on television at least once based on recommendations from others. The sample size of 360 was determined using SPSS 24 software, ensuring a test power of 80%.

The research was implemented in two stages. In the first stage, the researcher attended the sports hall of the desired federation and spoke to a group of invited members about a documentary on the World Organ Transplant Championships that would be broadcasted on TV. The participants were asked to watch and recommend the program to other patients and friends. The second stage involved the researcher's presence among the participants after the documentary was broadcasted, where questionnaires were distributed. To ensure the generalizability of the results, 450 questionnaires were distributed, and 360 complete and correctly filled questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 88.33%.

The original English version of the questionnaire was designed by Asada and Ko in 2016. The English version was translated into Persian, following the four basic dimensions Asada and Ko [7] mentioned that facilitate cross-cultural adaptation of the questionnaire. The word-of-mouth section consisted of three questions related to who suggested watching a sporting event. The sender's characteristics included dimensions of experience with four questions and trust with five questions. Additionally, the homophily section encompassed four questions related to the relationship between the respondent and the person who recommended watching the sports event.

The chosen instrument for collecting the necessary data aligned with the research objectives was the standardized questionnaire developed by [7]. The questionnaire consisted of four subscales, namely WOM, experience and expertise, trust and commitment, and homophily. It included six questions related to the desired characteristics of the respondents. The variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree."

The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by ten professors specializing in sports management and marketing.

Additionally, the validity was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis. To establish the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 50 participants from the target population. Cronbach's alpha test was utilized to assess the internal consistency, resulting in a reliability value of 0.70. Statistical assumptions regarding the correlation coefficient and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were tested using SPSS. 24 and Smart PLS. 3 software, with a significance level of 0.05.

3. Findings

The research findings were analyzed and examined through descriptive and inferential sections. The descriptive section involved analyzing the frequencies and percentages of variables such as gender, age, education, and marital status among the participants. The results of this analysis are presented in "Table 1" which displays the frequency and percentage distributions of these variables.

Table 1. Demographic variables.

Variable		F	0/0	0/0 CF
gender	Female	63	5.82	5.82
	Man	297	5.17	100
age	Less than 20 years	96	7.26	7.26
	21 to 30 years	129	8.35	5.62
	31 to 40 years	82	8.22	3.85
	41 to 50 years	37	3.10	6.95
	More than 50 years	16	4.4	100
marital status	married	228	3.63	3.63
	Single	132	7.36	100

In "Table 2" the central tendency indices of the variables were presented and discussed. This included measures such as the mean (average), standard deviation, and variance.

Table 2. Descriptive indices of research variables.

Variable	M	Sd	S ²
WOM	4.588	1.480	2.193
Experience and Expertise	4.702	1.287	1.657
Trust and Validity	4.572	1.113	1.239

Based on the obtained values, it can be observed that the central tendency indicators, particularly the mean (average), provide insights into the data. Among the variables, the highest average value was found for experience and expertise, with a value of 4.702, indicating that participants, on average, rated this construct highly. On the other hand, trust and

validity had the lowest average value of 4.572, suggesting a relatively lower rating for this construct.

In this section, Cronbach's alpha and CR composite reliability were used to measure the reliability of the research constructs. Also, AVE criterion was used to evaluate convergent validity.

Table 3. The results obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis of the research.

Independent variable	Dimension	λ	T	AVE	CR	rho
WOM	Question1	36.66	0.867	0.763	0.906	0.847
	Question2	43.03	0.872			
	Question3	31.20	0.882			
	Question4	31.19	0.665			
Validity and Trust	Question1	31.60	0.851	0.565	0.865	0.803
	Question2	27.84	0.832			
	Question3	20.14	0.778			
	Question4	9.05	0.602			
	Question5	28.11	0.813			
Experience and Expertise	Question1	57.11	0.879	0.664	0.888	0.852
	Question2	21.00	0.786			
	Question3	10.68	0.727			
	Question4	13.00	0.761			
	Question5	15.41	0.791			
Homophily	Question1	22.54	0.852	0.604	0.857	0.772
	Question2	24.58	0.834			
	Question3	7.06	0.606			
	Question4					

Composite reliability, which is a more modern measure compared to Cronbach's alpha, is commonly used in Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. Its superiority lies in the fact that it considers the correlation of the constructs with each other when calculating reliability. In the current study, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for the variables demonstrated suitable reliability, confirming the

reliability of the measurement model. Additionally, the T-values in this study were greater than 1.96, indicating significance at the 0.05 level. The AVE values indicated high convergent validity for the variables, meaning there was a strong correlation between each construct and its indicators. Consequently, the measurement model exhibited an acceptable fit.

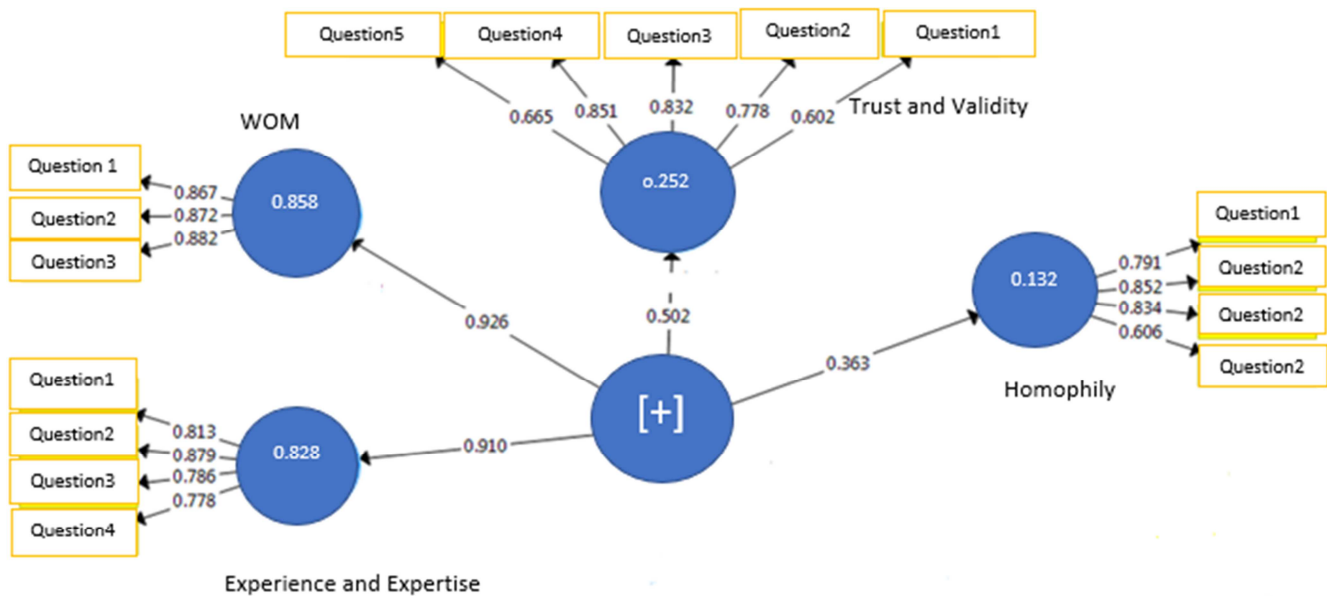


Figure 2. Factor analysis model of research confirmation in significance mode.

In "Figure 2" the structural model in its standard state illustrates the strength of the relationship between the latent variable (factor) and the observed variable through factor loadings. Factor loadings range between zero and one. If a factor loading is less than 0.4, the relationship is considered weak and may be disregarded. In factor analysis, the variables measuring a latent variable should have high factor loadings with that specific factor and low factor loadings with other factors.

The factor loadings for the research items fall within the range of 0.867 to 0.882 for WOM, 0.602 to 0.851 for trust and validity, 0.778 to 0.879 for experience and expertise, and 0.606 to 0.834 for homophily. These values are all above the threshold of 0.4, indicating that the variables have established convergent validity.

The skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess the normality of the research variables.

Table 4. Checking the normality of research variables.

Independent variable	kurtosis values		skewness	
	The standard error		statistics	
WOM	0.338	-0.697	0.170	-0.169
Validity and Trust	0.338	-0.423	0.170	-0.309
Experience and Expertise	0.338	-0.181	0.170	-0.385

Based on the table's presented results, the research variables' skewness values are within the mean of ± 3 . This suggests that the distribution of the variables is approximately symmetrical, and their skewness falls within the normal range.

The findings obtained from the statistical sample are extrapolated to the statistical population in the subsequent

statistical analysis. This is accomplished through the use of statistical tests, including Pearson's correlation coefficient and variance-based structural equation modeling. These methods serve to evaluate the relationships between variables and offer insights into the overall structural model of the research.

Table 5. Estimation of the direct effect of experience, expertise, and trust, commitment on WOM.

Independent variable	R ²	Direct impact	P. Value	Impact
Experience and Expertise → WOM	0.601	0.777	0.001	confirmation

Independent variable	R ²	Direct impact	P. Value	Impact
Trust and Validity → WOM	0.239	0.489	0.001	confirmation

Referring to the results presented in "Table 5" it is observed that the variable of experience and expertise has a statistically significant direct effect on WOM (word-of-mouth). This suggests that experience and expertise possess the ability to predict WOM. Furthermore, the results shown in the subsequent table indicate that trust and variables also have a statistically significant direct effect on WOM. Thus, it can be

concluded that trust and variables are capable of predicting WOM.

Moving on to "Table 6" the study examines the significance of the moderating effect of the homophily-type variable in the relationship between experience and expertise and WOM advertising. This investigation is carried out using overlapping confidence intervals.

Table 6. Examining the confidence intervals of the relationship of WOM experience according to homophily.

group	Direction	Coefficients	2.5%	97.5%
High homophily	Experience and Expertise→WOM	0.601	0.714	0.865
Moderate homophily	→Experience and Expertise WOM	0.239	0.705	0.836

Referring to the values in the high homophily group, the confidence interval ranges from 0.714 to 0.865, while in the medium homophily group, it ranges from 0.705 to 0.836. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that these intervals do not overlap with each other. This implies that in the domain where the high homophily group's confidence interval ends at 0.865, the value in the medium homophily group starts at 0.705. Consequently, there is no overlap between the coefficients in the high homophily and medium homophily groups. The coefficient in the high homophily group is 0.796, while in the medium homophily group, it is 0.772. Therefore, considering the non-overlapping confidence

intervals, the coefficients 0.796 and 0.772 in the high homophily and medium homophily groups, respectively, exhibit significant differences. This indicates that the homophily type variable plays a moderating role. Additionally, the impact of experience and expertise on WOM advertising is significantly higher in the high homophily group compared to the medium homophily group.

Furthermore, in "Table 7" the study investigates the significance of the moderating effect of the homophily variable in the relationship between trust and credibility with WOM advertisements. This examination is performed using overlapping confidence intervals.

Table 7. Investigating confidence intervals according to homophily.

group	Direction	Coefficients	2.5%	97.5%
High homophily	→Trust and Validity WOM	0.537	0.124	0.515
Moderate homophily	→Trust and Validity WOM	0.486	0.108	0.454

Based on the high hemophilia group values, the confidence interval ranges from 0.124 to 0.515, while in the average hemophilia group, it ranges from 0.108 to 0.454. These findings indicate that these intervals do not overlap with each other. In other words, the range where the high hemophilia group's confidence interval ends at 0.515 is where the average hemophilia group's interval starts at 0.108. Consequently, there is no overlap between the coefficients in the high homophily and average homophily groups. The coefficient in the high hemophilia group is 0.537, while in the average hemophilia group, it is 0.486. Thus, considering the non-overlapping confidence intervals, the coefficients 0.537

and 0.486 in high hemophilia and average hemophilia groups exhibit significant differences. This implies that the hemophilia-type variable plays a moderating role. Additionally, the impact of trust and validity on WOM advertising is significantly higher in the high hemophilia group compared to the average hemophilia group.

Moving on to "Table 8" it is observed that the overall evaluation indices of the structural equation model, within the optimal range of these indices, indicate that the assumed model based on the research data is supported and fits well. The data aligns with the model, and all indicators demonstrate the desirability of the structural equation model.

Table 8. Evaluation indexes of the generality of the structural equation model.

Variable	GOF ¹	CV Red ²	CV Com ³	AVE ⁴	CR ⁵
WOM	0.29	0.433	0.479	0.763	0.906
Experience and Expertise	-	-	0.429	0.666	0.888

¹ -Goodness of Fit (GOF)

² -Cross Validated Redundancy (Cv Red)

³ -Cross Validated Commuality (Cv Com)

⁴ --Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

⁵ --Composite Reliability (CR)

Variable	GOF ¹	CV Red ²	CV Com ³	AVE ⁴	CR ⁵
WOM	0.31	0.169	0.479	0.763	0.906
Trust and Validity		-	0.356	0.567	0.865

And then we will examine the final model of the research.

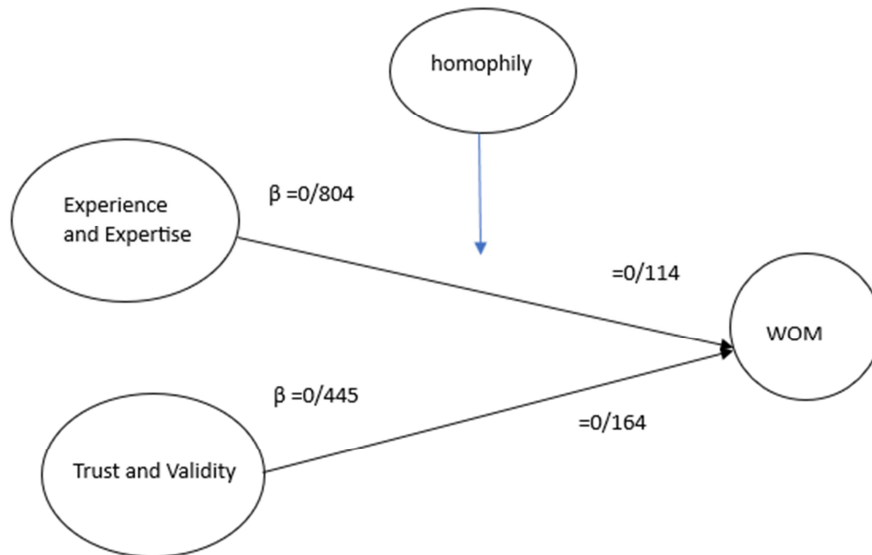


Figure 3. The final research model.

Based on the obtained results and the significance level ($p=0.001$) of the moderating variable, hemophilia, it has been determined that this variable plays a moderating role ($\beta = 0.114$) between the variables of experience and expertise and WOM. Additionally, the significance level ($p=0.001$) of the moderating variable, hemophilia, indicates that it also plays a moderating role ($\beta=0.164$) between the variables of trust and commitment and WOM.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationship between the components of WOM, including the characteristics of the sender of the message (expertise, experience, trust, commitment), and on the other hand, to investigate the mediating role of homophily (interpersonal factors) and their effect on the consumers of the (IR. SPTF). In competitive conditions, customer orientation, customer retention, acquisition, and Customer satisfaction are very important in sports organizations. Therefore, Identifying customer satisfaction plays an essential role in the of sports organizations [2]. Managers Sports complexes should try to introduce their services to customers, and their, through advertising [16]. The structural equation analysis results showed a significant and positive relationship between WOM and the variable of experience and expertise. Innew et al, concluded in their research that the value of WOM is due to the effect it has on actual and potential consumers. Positive comments from satisfied consumers can increase purchases [17]. Personal conversations and informal exchange of information among people who are familiar with each other not only affect the decisions of consumers but also shape their

expectations and attitudes before consumption and even their perception after consumption of goods or services. WOM is a process in which customers who have used a particular product or service convey their experiences through WOM to customers planning to buy [42]. Fans attending sports events commonly use WOM to share their experiences, such as Chinese fans discussing the World Cup [48]. Customers who have not had a shopping experience or do not have a thorough understanding of the specific features of the product or service typically depend on WOM for information. Therefore, compared to foreign marketing strategies, WOM has an important and significant effect on customer attitudes and behavior, and therefore WOM has been widely studied by previous researchers, [31, 32].

Sports fans commonly engage in watching sports events and frequently rely on word of mouth (WOM) to express their opinions and share their experiences. The relationship between trust and validity in WOM is found to be positive and significant, as indicated by the results of the structural equation model. trust and validity are capable of predicting WOM. Research conducted demonstrates that WOM can significantly influence consumer purchasing behaviors and their satisfaction with products and services offered by companies. This is because customers often place more trust in communication that does not come directly from marketers. They perceive opinions from friends, family, and acquaintances as more believable and trustworthy due to their perceived lack of bias or vested interests. The value of WOM becomes evident when we consider its consequences and effects on potential and actual buyers. Positive testimonials and interpretations from satisfied customers can lead to an increase in purchases, while negative feedback from

dissatisfied customers may result in a decrease in sales. Moreover, people in Iran tend to have a less favorable attitude toward media and often lack trust in its advertising messages. Many individuals believe that media advertisements do not present them with genuine information. As a result, WOM, as one of the most significant and longstanding forms of informal communication, plays a more influential role in marketing processes, such as persuading individuals to make purchases and utilize services [53]. It is worth noting that sports fans typically watch sports events and commonly employ WOM to share their opinions [48].

Homophily, which refers to interpersonal relationships, plays a moderating role in the relationship between WOM (Word-of-Mouth) penetration and its impact. This role was examined through four sub-hypotheses, and the results indicated that homophily influences the relationship between experience, expertise, and WOM. Specifically, it acts as a moderator, meaning that the relationship between experience, expertise, and WOM is stronger among individuals with higher interpersonal relationships compared to those with lower interpersonal relationships. These results suggest that factors other than experience and expertise also contribute to the effectiveness of WOM. One such factor is the presence of interpersonal relationship moderators. The quality of the relationship plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of WOM.

Furthermore, homophily also moderates the relationship between trust and validity in WOM. This means that individuals with stronger interpersonal relationships experience a greater connection between trust and commitment in WOM compared to those with weaker interpersonal relationships. In this context, it should be noted that trust and validity are fostered when there are strong relationships among individuals. In such cases, people can trust each other without any reservations, leading to commitment. This, in turn, results in better advertising and the exchange of personal conversations and informal information among acquaintances. These interactions not only influence consumer decisions but also shape their expectations and attitudes before and after consuming products or services [15].

WOM provides a competitive advantage as it serves as an important channel of communication between consumers. It represents an interpersonal relationship between the sender and receiver, capable of influencing the behavior and opinions of the receiver. WOM plays a crucial role in shaping the opinions and beliefs of individuals [41]. Similarly, in the context of sports, fans who are more knowledgeable about sporting events tend to spend more time seeking information and sharing their opinions, resulting in a more impactful WOM effect [7]. These findings align with previous research conducted [38, 44].

5. Conclusion

In general, it is undeniable that WOM is a crucial source of information for consumers. In the case of the (IR. SPTF) in Tehran, WOM proved to be effective in influencing both staff

and patients, as evidenced by their increased interest in races after watching a documentary. The characteristics of the message sender (such as expertise and credibility) and the role of homophily as a mediator play a significant role in shaping the behavior of sports consumers. Recognizing the power of WOM, sports organizations must prioritize this aspect in their marketing efforts. By doing so, they can motivate consumers to engage in WOM, ensuring the financial profitability of the federation and allowing them to provide high-quality services to their special patients.

In line with the current research, it is recommended to foster interpersonal relationships by facilitating necessary interactions. These relationships have proven to be more effective in attracting more contacts, as indicated by the results. It is also advisable to establish mutual trust between the final consumers and the officials of sports federations. This trust will encourage individuals to bring their neighbors to the venue and generate WOM. Additionally, based on the findings, it is suggested that federations and sports service providers should focus on ensuring a positive customer experience throughout various touchpoints. This includes providing excellent customer service, delivering high-quality services, offering reasonable prices, meeting customer expectations after service usage, and implementing long-term relationship management systems to retain customers. By adopting these measures, sports organizations can cultivate a positive mindset among their customers and generate positive WOM for their services.

ORCID

Sakineh Lotfi Fard Shokurloo: 0000-0001-5135-6726

Amir Ojagh: 0000-0001-8836-5140

References

- [1] Alefpour Tarakameh, M., Ansari, M., Nasiri, S., & Mohamadifam, S. (2022). The Role of Social Participation and Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising in Brand Equity. *Journal of Business Management*, 13 (4), 953-973.
- [2] Afshangi, S., Hadavi, S. F., & Allah, A. (2013). Satisfaction prediction and willingness to re-enter customers by related marketing components in sports clubs: Study of women's aerobic clubs in Mashhad. *Quarterly Journal of Applied Research in Sport Management*, 1 (4), 63-70. [In Persian]
- [3] Allsop, D. T., Bassett, B. R., & Hoskins, J. A. (2007). Word-of-mouth research: Principles and applications. *Journal of advertising research*, 47 (4), 398-411.
- [4] Abdolmaleki, H. (2020). Modelling the role of Ergonomy and Sportscape on Service Experience of Clients of E-Sport Business with mediating of E-Word of mouth. *Communication Management in Sport Media*, 8 (1), 71-82. [In Persian]
- [5] Aileen, E., Gaberamos, O., Bernarto, I., & Pasaribu, L. H. (2021). The Effect Of Social Media Marketing, Word of Mouth, And Effectiveness of Advertising on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention on Grab Application Users Domicile of Tangerang. *Enrichment: Journal of Management*, 12 (1), 426-441.

- [6] Amri, W. A. A., Putra, F., Saputera, D., Novitasari, D., & Jainuri, J. (2023). Online Shop Purchase Decision: How to Do Social Media Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), and Lifestyle Affect? *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 7 (1), 253-261.
- [7] Asada, A., & Ko, Y. J. (2016). Determinants of word-of-mouth influence in sport viewership. *Journal of Sport Management*, 30 (2), 192-206.
- [8] Asli Azad, M., Rajaei, R., Farhadi, T., Aghasi, A., & Shahidi, L. (2017). Investigating the relationship between hardiness as well as resiliency and burnout aspects in the care givers of the physically, mentally and multiple retarded patients at the welfare organization in 2015. *Community Health journal*, 10 (2), 24-32.[In Persian]
- [9] Balter, D., & Butman, J. (2005). Grapevine: The new art of word-of-mouth Marketing Portfolio. *Retrieved March*, 5, 2020.
- [10] Berger, J. (2014). Word of mouth and interpersonal communication: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 24 (4), 586-607.
- [11] Brown, J. J., & Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. *Journal of Consumer research*, 14 (3), 350-362.
- [12] Brown, T. J., Barry, T. E., Dacin, P. A., & Gunst, R. F. (2005). Spreading the word: Investigating antecedents of consumers' positive word-of-mouth intentions and behaviors in a retailing context. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 33 (2), 123-138.
- [13] Burnham, T. A., & Leary, R. B. (2018). Word of mouth opportunity: why recommendation likelihood overestimates positive word of mouth. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 26 (4), 368-389.
- [14] De Wit, J. B., Das, E., & Vet, R. (2008). What works best: objective statistics or a personal testimonial? An assessment of the persuasive effects of different types of message evidence on risk perception. *Health Psychology*, 27 (1), 110.
- [15] De Bruyn, A., & Lilien, G. L. (2008). A multi-stage model of word-of-mouth influence through viral marketing. *International journal of research in marketing*, 25 (3), 151-163.
- [16] Du, J., Chen, M. Y., & Wu, Y. F. (2020). The effects of social media on sporting event satisfaction and word of mouth communication: An empirical study of a mega sports event. *Information*, 11 (10), 482.
- [17] Ennew, C. T., Banerjee, A. K., & Li, D. (2000). Managing word of mouth communication: empirical evidence from India. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 18 (2), 75-83.
- [18] Erlangga, H. (2021). Effect of digital marketing and social media on purchase intention of Smes food products. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12 (3), 3672-3678.
- [19] Ismagilova, E., Dwivedi, Y. K., Slade, E., & Williams, M. D. (2017). *Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the marketing context: A state of the art analysis and future directions*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- [20] Fahmi, K., Sihotang, M., Hadinegoro, R. H., Sulastri, E., Cahyono, Y., & Megah, S. I. (2022). Health Care SMEs Products Marketing Strategy: How the Role of Digital Marketing Technology through Social Media? *UJoST-Universal Journal of Science and Technology*, 1 (1), 16-22.
- [21] Gholizadeh, B., Talebpour, M., Kashtidar, M., & Abdolmaleki, H. (2018). Mouth advertising, an effective tool for loyalty of sport customers, case study: women's health clubs in Mashhad. *International Journal of Leisure and Tourism Marketing*, 6 (1), 51-64. [In Persian]
- [22] Harrigan, P., Daly, T. M., Coussement, K., Lee, J. A., Soutar, G. N., & Evers, U. (2021). Identifying influencers on social media. *International Journal of Information Management*, 56, 102246.
- [23] Kotler, P. (1973). The major tasks of marketing management. *Journal of marketing*, 37 (4), 42-49.
- [24] Kim, S., Moore, S. G., & Murray, K. (2021). "Don't buy" or "Do not buy"? How negation style in online reviews influences consumer product evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 29 (3), 308-322.
- [25] Khosravizadeh, E., Latifi, J., & Shahmansoori, E. (2019). Environmental and strategic analysis of veterans and disabled sport board in Hamedan Province. *Journal of the Scientific Sports Association of Iran*, 9 (17), 163-176. [In Persian]
- [26] Kronrod, A., & Danziger, S. (2013). "Wii will rock you!" The use and effect of figurative language in consumer reviews of hedonic and utilitarian consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (4), 726-739.
- [27] Lo, S. C. (2012). Consumer Decisions: Theeffect of Word-Of-Mouth. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, 4 (3).
- [28] Lumataw, Y. V., Lapijan, S. J., & Rumokoy, F. S. (2019). The influence of interface quality, information quality, and customer service on customer satisfaction at the online shop in Manado at sam ratulangi university students. *Jurnal EMBA: Jurnal Riset Ekonomi, Manajemen, Bisnis dan Akuntansi*, 7 (1).
- [29] Mahadevan, K., & Joshi, S. (2021). Trends in electronic word of mouth research: A bibliometric review and analysis. *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 51 (4), 8-26.
- [30] Maheri, M., Hosseini, M. (2021). Studying the Electronic Word-of-Mouth Effects on Brand: Netnography of an Iranian Internet Forum. *Management Research in Iran*, 18 (4), 139-159. [In Persian]
- [31] Mahaputra, M. R., & Saputra, F. (2021). Relationship Word of Mouth, Advertising, and Product Quality to Brand Awareness. *Dinasti International Journal of Digital Business Management*, 2 (6), 1099-1108.
- [32] Martin, W. C., & Lueg, J. E. (2013). Modeling word-of-mouth usage. *Journal of Business Research*, 66 (7), 801-808.
- [33] Markovic, S., Iglesias, O., Qiu, Y., & Bagherzadeh, M. (2022). The CSR imperative: How CSR influences word-of-mouth considering the roles of authenticity and alternative attractiveness. *Business & Society*, 61 (7), 1773-1803.
- [34] Nam, H. & Kannan, P. (2020), "Digital environment in global markets: cross-cultural implications for evolving customer journeys", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 28-47.

- [35] Özdemir, A., Tozlu, E., Şen, E., & Ateşoğlu, H. (2016). Analyses of word-of-mouth communication and its effect on students' university preferences. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 235, 22-35.
- [36] Rahimi Aghdam, Sanobar, Naser, Mohin Taghizadeh, and Haq Vardizadeh. (2021). The relationship of e-commerce ethics with e-purchase intention: the mediating role of electronic word-of-mouth advertising and the moderating role of guaranteed statement. *The Quarterly Journal of Ethics in Science and Technology*, 16 (1), 92-99. [In Persian]
- [37] Rum, L., Sten, O., Vendrame, E., Belluscio, V., Camomilla, V., Vannozzi, G.,... & Bergamini, E. (2021). Wearable sensors in sports for persons with disability: a systematic review. *Sensors*, 21 (5), 1858.
- [38] Sivaram, M., Munawar, N. A., & Ali, H. (2019). Determination Of Purchase Intent Determination Of Purchase Intention Through Brand Awareness And Perceived Quality (Case Study: For Consumers Pt. Sentosa Santosa Finance Tangerang Area). *Dinasti International Journal of Management Science*, 1 (2), 232-246.
- [39] Stouthuysen, K., Teunis, I., Reusen, E., & Slabbinck, H. (2018). Initial trust and intentions to buy: The effect of vendor-specific guarantees, customer reviews and the role of online shopping experience ☆. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 27, 23-38.
- [40] Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N., & Mazzarol, T. (2012). Word of mouth: measuring the power of individual messages. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46 (1/2), 237-257.
- [41] Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N., & Mazzarol, T. (2008). Factors influencing word of mouth effectiveness: receiver perspectives. *European journal of marketing*, 42 (3/4), 344-364.
- [42] Smith, T., Coyle, J. R., Lightfoot, E., & Scott, A. (2007). Reconsidering models of influence: the relationship between consumer social networks and word-of-mouth effectiveness. *Journal of advertising research*, 47 (4), 387-397.
- [43] Şehirli, M. (2021). Transformation of WOM (Word of Mouth) From Traditional to Digital and Current Recommendations for e-WOM. In *Handbook of Research on IoT, Digital Transformation, and the Future of Global Marketing* (pp. 380-400). IGI Global.
- [44] Srivastava, M., Sivaramakrishnan, S., & Saini, G. K. (2021). The relationship between electronic word-of-mouth and consumer engagement: An exploratory study. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 10 (1), 66-81.
- [45] Te Velde, S. J., Lankhorst, K., Zwinkels, M., Verschuren, O., Takken, T., de Groot, J., & HAYS study group FJG Backx JF de Groot KM Lankhorst TCW Nijboer T. Takken DW Smits OW Verschuren JMA Visser-Meily MJ Volman HW Wittink. (2018). Associations of sport participation with self-perception, exercise self-efficacy and quality of life among children and adolescents with a physical disability or chronic disease—a cross-sectional study. *Sports medicine-open*, 4, 1-11.
- [46] Torres, J., Torres, P., & Augusto, M. (2019). The impact of trust and electronic word-of-mouth reviews on purchasing intention. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 37 (1), 136-151.
- [47] Wangengeim, F. V. & Bayon, T. (2004). Word of mouth on services switching. *European Journal of Marketing*, 38, 117-1185.57.
- [48] Wakefield, L. T., & Bennett, G. (2018). Sports fan experience: Electronic word-of-mouth in ephemeral social media. *Sport Management Review*, 21 (2), 147-159.
- [49] Wu, M. H. (2013). Relationships among source credibility of electronic word of mouth, perceived risk, and consumer behavior on consumer generated media.
- [50] Cheung, C. M., & Lee, M. K. (2012). What drives consumers to spread electronic word of mouth in online consumer-opinion platforms. *Decision support systems*, 53 (1), 218-225.
- [51] Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of marketing research*, 43 (3), 345-354.
- [52] Chen, Y., & Xie, J. (2008). Online consumer review: Word-of-mouth as a new element of marketing communication mix. *Management science*, 54 (3), 477-491.
- [53] Chen, Y., Wang, Q., & Xie, J. (2011). Online social interactions: A natural experiment on word of mouth versus observational learning. *Journal of marketing research*, 48 (2), 238-254.
- [54] Yuan, Y. H., Tsao, S. H., Chyou, J. T., & Tsai, S. B. (2020). An empirical study on effects of electronic word-of-mouth and Internet risk avoidance on purchase intention: from the perspective of big data. *Soft Computing*, 24, 5713-5728.
- [55] Yusuf, A. S., Che Hussin, A. R. & Busalim, A. H. (2018), "Influence of e-WOM engagement on consumer purchase intention in social commerce", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 493-504.
- [56] Zhao, J. (2005). An experimental comparison of celebrity spokespersons' credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and identification on attitudes toward the ads and future interest. Lethbridge, Alta.: University of Lethbridge, *Faculty of Management*, 2005.
- [57] Zulkarnain, M., & Abdul, L. (2021). Kualitas Produk, Servicescape dan Word of Mouth Serta Pengaruhnya terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Ulang. *Bus. Innov. Entrep. J*, 3 (1), 38-44.