The Effect of Brand Social Identity and Narrative Branding on Consumer Behavioral Intentions: The Mediating Role of Brand Image in Selected Luxury Sports Clubs in Tehran

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of brand social identity and narrative branding on consumer behavioral intentions, considering the mediating role of brand image in selected luxury sports clubs in Tehran. This applied research employed a descriptive-correlation method and a quantitative approach. The target population comprised customers of luxury sports clubs, from which two clubs Samfit and Oxygen were selected due to their special services for VIP and CIP clients. Using the 10-times rule, the minimum sample size was determined, and to enhance reliability, 200 respondents were selected online. Data were collected using a questionnaire with two sections (demographic information and main variables). For brand social identity and narrative branding, 5 items each were adapted from Rachbini et al. (2023); for brand image, 4 items from Arminen (2017); and for behavioral intentions, 5 items from Whang et al. (2021). Data analysis was performed using SPSS 27, and hypothesis testing was conducted with Smart PLS 3.2.8. The results showed that narrative branding significantly impacts brand image (β=0.169) and behavioral intentions (β=0.215), and brand image positively affects behavioral intentions (β=0.442). It can be concluded that enhancing brand social identity and narrative branding is crucial for creating a strong brand image and positively influencing the behavior of customers at luxury sports clubs.

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1. Introduction

Luxury goods play a role in a kind of social system where people's sense of who they are and their self-worth come from the brands they show off (Cho et al., 2022). Luxury means the top level of real brands that offer both physical and mental benefits. People buy luxury brands mainly for reasons tied to how others see them and for the pleasure they get (Akoğlu et al., 2024). In fact, luxury consumption represents a prominent portion of the iceberg of happiness and well-being and serves as an indicator of success in many countries (Dekhil et al., 2017). Consequently, the consumption of luxury products extends beyond the level of physiological needs (Arminen, 2017). Luxury brands can be characterized by various attributes such as symbols of wealth and status, high price and superior quality, sensory pleasure, prestige, and a sense of closeness to the values of the country of origin (Bartikowski et al., 2019).

A luxury brand, in its general sense, is defined as brands that produce goods and services possessing higher levels of quality compared to comparable products in their category while remaining financially accessible (Fuentes et al., 2023). Competition among luxury brands is intensifying in today's market. In this competitive landscape, luxury brands must understand their customers' attitudes and values to survive, because consumers of luxury goods seek values that transcend those of ordinary products (Lou et al., 2023). With the expansion of luxury goods and services consumption in developed countries such as the United States and several European nations, and the spread of this consumption approach in Asia, the Middle East is currently regarded as one of the most important target markets for luxury companies and service providers, accounting for a substantial share of global demand (Masoodipoor & Mohammadi, 2023). Emerging markets such as the United Arab Emirates, China, and Russia exhibit 70% growth in inclination toward purchasing luxury goods and services, whereas the corresponding figure in mature markets of North

America and Europe stands at 53%. Furthermore, luxury brands represent only a small volume of consumer purchases yet generate significant financial value. For instance, the global luxury market was estimated at 170 billion USD in 2009, 320 billion USD in 2012, and 400 billion USD in 2016 (Haghighinasab et al., 2016). The luxury products industry constitutes a vital segment of the global economy with a high growth rate. In 2021, this market grew by approximately 13–15% and reached 1.4 trillion euros worldwide (Zhu et al., 2022). Luxury brands have also attracted attention in Iran, although the majority of the population does not consist of luxury brand consumers. According to a survey conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in 1401 (2022–2023), 15.3% of the Iranian population are customers of luxury brands (Yeganeh, 2022).

Research indicates that the propensity to consume luxury brands is not limited to high-income segments of society; even individuals with moderate incomes exhibit willingness to purchase these brands (Tynan et al., 2010). The effects and outcomes of luxury product and service consumption are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and cultural aspects. This inclination toward luxury consumption can be influenced by economic and cultural components. One influential factor is the adoption of social identity through the use of luxury brands (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Ziaei et al., 2022). Such usage serves to display wealth, success, and social status, given that luxury products and services are generally defined as those positioned at the pinnacle of the market in terms of quality and price (Farid Fathi et al., 2023). Luxury services, regardless of their functional purpose, are regarded as symbols of personal and social identity (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). In the contemporary world, the use of luxury brands not only fulfills self-esteem needs but also highlights personal aspirations. Consumers select products not solely based on tangible value but also on the desire to experience and express the brand image and derive self-satisfaction. The fundamental motives of

consumers for purchasing luxury brands vary according to culture and individual personality (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). Luxury brand consumption differs from ordinary consumption patterns and creates a form of dependency that is not influenced by pricing systems. Purchasing luxury brands, unlike regular consumption, is affected by external and non-monetary factors. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing individuals' behavioral tendencies toward luxury brands can be valuable for marketers. Given the distinct consumption behavior toward luxury brands (where the reasons for using luxury brands are not uniform across individuals and significant gender differences exist in the inclination toward luxury brands) and the varying expected values among customers, identifying and aligning with consumers' behavioral tendencies is essential for luxury brand marketing (Yoo & Park, 2016).

Currently, luxury consumption and luxury values among sports consumers have increased incredibly over the past two decades, distancing the field of sport—particularly leisure and recreational sport—from its original essence. According to the latest statistics in Iran, 4.5% of the population allocates part of their annual income to cosmetics and membership in luxury fitness clubs (Ilvari & Edrisi, 2019). In this regard, Farid Fathi et al. (2023) ran a qualitative study on how luxury values seep into choices for sports gear like shoes and clothing. They outlined causes (personal, interpersonal, and luxury-related), context (economic, cultural, social settings), intervening elements (sports settings, demographics, social media, venues, and media), strategies (fake consumerism, changed priorities in sports, too much online time), and outcomes (cultural, personal, social, economic effects in sports) using grounded theory.

In the sports sector, luxury brands face stiff competition and work to build distinct identities that connect with buyers (Rachbini et al., 2023). Two ideas stand out: brand social identity and narrative branding, both shaping how people view

luxury brand image. Brand social identity builds belonging, shared values, and emotional ties. For luxury, it relies on exclusivity, aspiration, and connection. It gives buyers a special social spot that boosts perceived value and sways behavior (Zare, 2025). Past work has looked at how brand identity and communities affect loyalty, support, and involvement (Rachbini et al., 2023; Nazarian et al., 2025).

Narrative branding uses stories to share a brand's identity, values, and history. Luxury brands tell tales of tradition, skill, and genuineness to stir emotions and the wish for something unique. Studies find it improves differentiation, recall, and equity, which then shapes views and buying intent (Burgess & Jones, 2023).

Various studies have demonstrated that brand social identity and narrative branding in luxury brands have a significant impact on brand image and consumer behavioral tendencies. Cho et al. (2022) emphasized that brand social identity and the sense of belonging and exclusivity among luxury fashion consumers help create a favorable brand image and shape consumer perceptions. Zhu et al. (2022) showed that narrative branding strategies can strengthen brand image by creating emotional connections, authenticity, and enhanced consumer engagement. Lou et al. (2023) found that a positive brand image significantly affects purchase intention, with brand social identity and narrative branding acting as mediating factors. Kim and Manoli (2022) highlighted the importance of brand social identity and the mediating role of brand identification in shaping individual consumption patterns. These studies indicate that creating an immersive brand experience and fostering a sense of community play a crucial role in influencing consumer purchase behavior. Yeganeh (2022) concluded that brand image has a direct and significant effect on customer purchase intention and trust. Soltani Tajabadi (2024), in a study titled "The Impact of Brand Identity and Brand Image on Brand Equity with the Mediating Role of Brand Attachment, Attitude, Trust, and

Commitment" (case study: household appliance consumers), found that brand identity and brand image have a direct and significant relationship with brand attachment; brand attachment is directly related to attitude, trust, and commitment to the brand; attitude toward the brand is linked to trust; trust is linked to commitment; and attitude, trust, and commitment all have a direct and significant relationship with brand equity.

Existing research has primarily examined the relationship between narrative branding, brand social identity, consumer behavioral tendencies, and brand image in luxury products across industries such as fashion, perfume, automobiles, and household appliances. No study has yet addressed this relationship gap within the sports industry. Some prior findings suggest that the appropriate selection of symbols, designs, colors, characters, sounds, and any element associated with consumer perceptions can increase attachment to the brand. However, two major gaps addressed in the present study are: (1) focusing on the sports industry, and (2) examining narrative branding in

the context of luxury sports services. If the relationships among the research variables prove significant, luxury sports brands can enhance brand image, nurture brand social identity, and leverage narrative branding to implement integrated marketing strategies and maintain consistency. This approach would strengthen competitive advantage, attract customers, and guide purchase behavior in the luxury sports and fitness club sector, ultimately improving the sustainability of sports-related businesses (Fatahimilasi et al., 2024).

Therefore, given the growing tendency among Tehran residents to use luxury brands in the sports sector and the absence of prior research addressing this gap, the researchers of the present study aim to investigate the effect of brand social identity and narrative branding on the behavioral tendencies of consumers at various branches of the luxury fitness clubs SamFit and Oxygen, with brand image acting as a mediating variable.
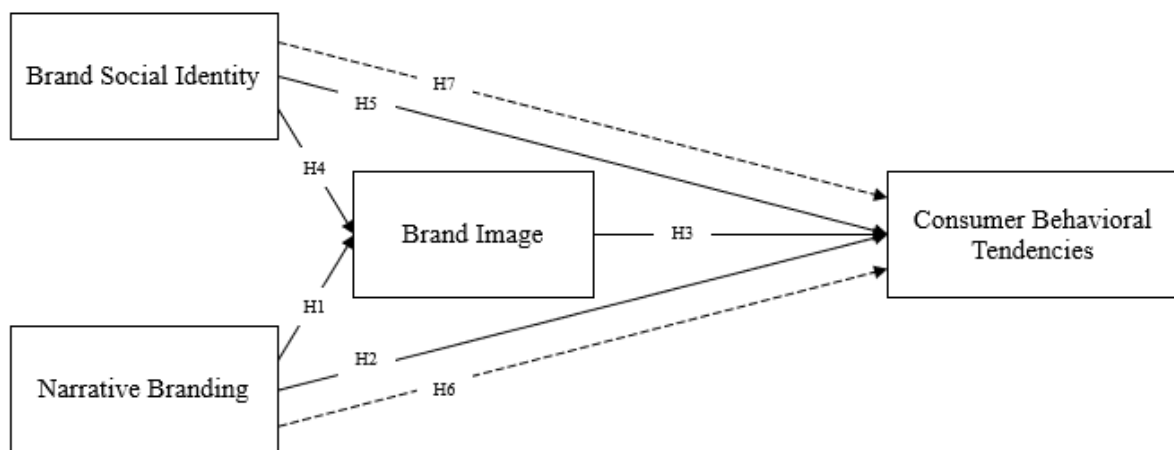

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model

2. Methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of method and strategy, employing a quantitative approach to test the structural model. The statistical population consisted of customers of the luxury fitness clubs

SamFit and Oxygen, selected specifically because both brands offer premium-priced VIP, CIP, and exclusive luxury services. To determine the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM analysis, the 10-times rule was applied (Sarstedt et al., 2014;

Schreiber et al., 2006), which requires the sample to be at least ten times the number of latent variables. However, to increase reliability and statistical power, convenience sampling was utilized through an online questionnaire, ultimately yielding valid responses from 200 customers. The questionnaire was designed and administered via the Porsline platform and distributed through relevant social media groups and channels associated with bodybuilding, TRX, and CrossFit communities. Although online distribution provided advantages such as high accessibility and reduced costs, it also presented limitations, including the absence of direct respondent interaction.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: the first captured demographic characteristics of participants, while the second assessed the four core research constructs—brand social identity (5 items adapted from Rachbini et al., 2023), narrative branding (5 items adapted from Rachbini et al., 2023), brand image (4 items adapted from

Arminen, 2017), and behavioral tendencies (5 items adapted from Whang et al., 2021)—all measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Face and content validity were established by consulting 11 sport management professors specializing in marketing and branding; their feedback was incorporated to enhance item relevance to the target population. Construct reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients (Table 2).

Descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS version 27 to profile the respondents demographically. Hypothesis testing and evaluation of the structural model were conducted via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.2.8, selected for its robustness to non-normal data distributions and suitability for small-to-medium sample sizes. Key evaluative criteria included t-statistics, path coefficients, significance levels of path coefficients, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) to assess explained variance in endogenous constructs.

3. Research Findings

The presentation of the research findings is divided into two sections: descriptive and inferential. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Education		Age		Gender	
Primary Education	24.20	20–30 years	47.30	Male	58.60
Bachelor's Degree	60.50	31–40 years	33.20		
Higher Education	15.30	20–30 years	19.50	Female	42.40

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the construct validity of the measurement instrument. This method is used to examine the degree of fit between the hypothesized model and the actual data. In other words, confirmatory factor analysis evaluates whether the factors specified by the researcher can adequately explain the variance of the observed variables according to the predetermined pattern. The results obtained from SmartPLS 3.2.8 software indicated that all questionnaire items exhibited appropriate factor loadings, and no item was removed (Table 2). Factor loading represents the strength of the relationship between the latent variable and its corresponding observed indicator. The higher the factor loading of an item, the greater its contribution to explaining the construct. Standard factor loading criteria typically range from 0.5 to 0.7, although the minimum acceptable value is 0.4 (Stevens, 2002). The factor loadings derived from testing the conceptual model, as shown in Figure 2,

confirmed that all items possessed suitable factor loadings.

Table 2. Evaluation of reliability, convergent validity and factor loading of the research instrument

Variable	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Homogeneous Reliability	AVE
Brand Social Identity	Luxury sports brands create a sense of community among their consumers.	0.821	0.916	0.919	0.937	0.749
	Luxury sports brands represent exclusivity and prestige.	0.893				
	Interacting with other consumers of my club makes me feel part of a special group.	0.865				
	Using luxury fitness clubs creates shared experiences and values between me and other consumers.	0.864				
	The social identity of my sports club brand influences my perception of its desirability.	0.883				
Brand Image	Luxury fitness clubs are perceived as higher quality and more prestigious than other clubs.	0.936	0.935	0.937	0.954	0.838
	The brand image of luxury fitness clubs is elegant and sophisticated.	0.931				
	Luxury sports brands possess exclusivity and superior status.	0.901				
	The brand image of luxury fitness clubs influences the decision to use that brand.	0.893				
Narrative Branding	The storytelling approach used by luxury sports fashion brands enhances their brand image.	0.842	0.892	0.899	0.92	0.698
	Narrative branding of luxury fashion brands creates an emotional connection with consumers.	0.843				
	Stories about the presence of sports champions and the club's role in the lives of sports legends affect consumers' perception of the club's authenticity.	0.786				
	Storytelling can leave a lasting heritage and value for luxury sports brands.	0.853				
	Storytelling techniques used by luxury sports fashion brands attract consumer interest and attention.	0.853				
Behavioural Tendencies	When choosing a fitness club, I consider luxury brands.	0.827	0.834	0.841	0.883	0.603
	The brand image of the fitness club affects my satisfaction with my choice.	0.839				
	Luxury sports club brands influence my willingness to pay a premium.	0.729				
	I usually choose luxury brands in most of my sports-related decisions.	0.712				
	The social identity of luxury fashion brands makes me not consider other brands.	0.768				

In the present study, acceptable thresholds for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were set above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.834 to 0.935 and composite reliability values ranged from 0.841 to 0.937, confirming the adequate reliability of the measurement instrument.

Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to

Henseler et al. (2009), AVE values greater than 0.50 are considered acceptable. The results indicated that convergent validity criteria were satisfactorily met for all constructs.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (see Table 3). Discriminant validity is established when a construct shares more variance

with its own indicators than with other constructs. This is confirmed when the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with all other constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity of Research Constructs Using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Dimensions	Narrative Branding	Brand Image	Behavioural Tendencies	Brand Social Identity
Narrative Branding	**0.836**			
Brand Image	0.658	**0.915**		
Behavioural Tendencies	0.741	0.814	**0.776**	
Brand Social Identity	0.777	0.761	0.806	**0.865**

In the Fornell-Larcker matrix, the square root of the AVE for each construct (values on the main diagonal shown in bold) must be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (values below and to the right). As shown in Table 3, this condition is fully satisfied, confirming that discriminant validity has been established and that the structural model exhibits adequate divergent validity.

The structural model was further evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and significance of path

coefficients (t-values) (Hair et al., 2017) (see Table 4). The R^2 value ranges from 0 to 1 and is interpreted as weak (0.25), moderate (0.50), or strong (0.75). In the present study, R^2 values for all endogenous constructs exceeded 0.50, indicating strong explanatory power and good fit of the structural model.

Additionally, the Stone-Geisser Q^2 criterion was employed to assess the model's predictive relevance. The results revealed that Q^2 values for all constructs were greater than zero, thereby confirming that the research model possesses satisfactory predictive power (Table 4).

Table 4. Structural Model Evaluation

Dimensions	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q² (Predictive Relevance)
Narrative Branding	Exogenous	Exogenous	Exogenous
Brand Social Identity	Exogenous	Exogenous	Exogenous
Brand Image	0.591	0.587	0.463
Behavioural Tendencies	0.763	0.759	0.420

According to Henseler et al. (2009), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was used to evaluate the overall fit of both the measurement and structural models. The recommended threshold for SRMR is less than 0.08. In the present study, the obtained SRMR

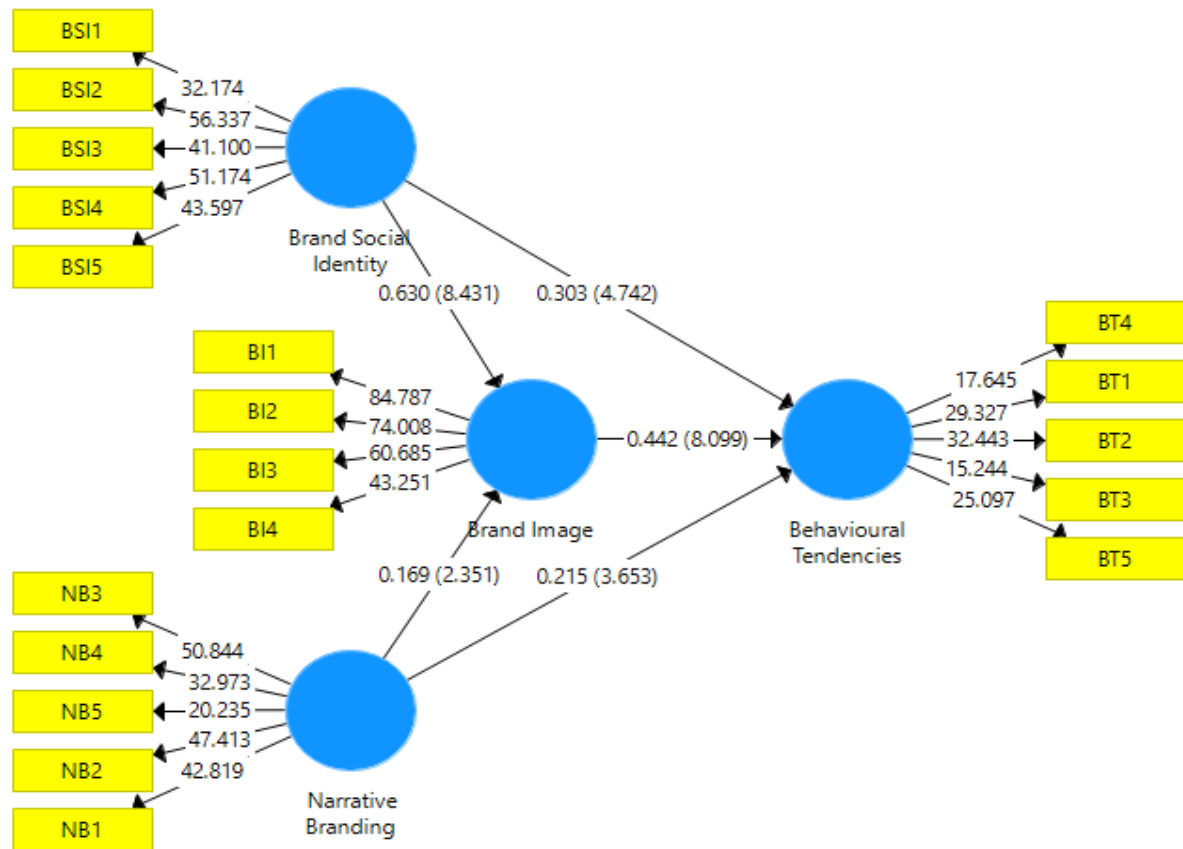value was 0.0682, which is below the acceptable limit and indicates excellent model fit.

Figure 2. Structural model of research

Table 5. Examination of the Direct Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	P-Value
H1	Narrative Branding → Brand Image	0.169	0.074	2.274	0.023
H2	Narrative Branding → Behavioral Tendencies	0.215	0.064	3.355	0.001
H3	Brand Image → Behavioral Tendencies	0.442	0.056	7.962	0.001
H4	Brand Social Identity → Brand Image	0.630	0.074	8.456	0.001
H5	Brand Social Identity → Behavioral Tendencies	0.303	0.064	4.692	0.001

Table 6. Examination of the Indirect (Mediating) Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	P-Value
H6	Narrative Branding → Brand Image → Behavioral Tendencies	0.075	0.034	2.229	0.026
H7	Brand Social Identity → Brand Image → Behavioral Tendencies	0.278	0.049	5.625	0.001

The primary criterion for assessing the statistical significance of relationships is the t-statistic (t-value). A relationship is significant at the 0.05 level if the t-value exceeds 1.96, and at the 0.01 level if it exceeds 2.58. This statistic confirms only the existence of a significant relationship and does not indicate its strength.

As shown in Table 5, the t-values for all direct paths are greater than 1.96, confirming that all five direct hypotheses (H1–H5) are supported at least at the 0.05 significance level (in fact, four of them are significant at p < 0.001). Similarly, both mediating hypotheses (H6 and H7) in Table 6 are statistically significant (p < 0.05 and p < 0.001, respectively).

To evaluate the strength of the relationships and the explanatory power of the model, the coefficient of determination (R²) is used. This index indicates the percentage of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent (and mediating) variables, with values ranging from 0 to 1. An R² greater than 0.60 is generally considered substantial. In the present study, the R² for the ultimate endogenous variable (Behavioral Tendencies) was 0.763. This means that the independent variables and the mediating variable (Brand Image) together explain approximately 76% of the variance in consumers' behavioral tendencies toward luxury fitness clubs, demonstrating strong predictive and explanatory power of the proposed model.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted on luxury fitness clubs in Tehran and examined the relationships between brand social identity and narrative branding on customers' behavioral tendencies in selected luxury sports clubs (SamFit and Oxygen), with brand image serving as a mediating variable.

The results revealed that narrative branding has a positive and significant effect on the brand image of luxury fitness clubs in Tehran. This finding is consistent with portions of previous studies by Cho et al. (2022), Youn & Kim (2019), and Rachbini (2023). In particular, Rachbini (2023) dug into social aspects and storytelling in luxury cosmetics and fashion, offering tips for managers to build engaging experiences, tighten consumer ties, and boost buying in a tough market. Since narrative branding keeps showing strong positive effects on brand image in different settings, storytelling clearly helps shape how consumers see and judge brands—it builds emotional links and shares values and history well. The result stresses why fitness clubs need a solid brand image and good storytelling. Managers aiming to improve image should try narrative techniques, like bringing in champion athletes for stories; that could really strengthen the club's image. Additionally, Ryu et al. (2019) studied luxury hotels in Malaysia and found structured brand stories lift image, which lines up here. Prior work and these results suggest narrative branding works to boost image in many sectors.

Narrative branding also directly and positively affects customer behavioral tendencies in Tehran luxury fitness clubs—and significantly so. It means using stories on purpose to share identity, values, heritage (Rachbini, 2023). Luxury brands use narratives for history, skill, realness; they tap into emotions and the want for something special. Studies point out it helps stand out, stick in memory, build equity, then shape views and intent to buy. Current results align with Rachbini et al. (2023) and Huang et al. (2018). Huang et al. (2018) saw storytelling impact positive emotions and visit plans in luxury hotels. Thus, the similarity of findings across different industries (luxury fitness clubs and hospitality) can be attributed to the universal nature of human consumer behavior, cultural influences, and the paramount importance of customer experience. Psychological and behavioral principles remain largely consistent across sectors, and storytelling serves as a powerful tool for creating deeper emotional connections and richer experiential value for customers. Narrative branding can improve customers' behavioral tendencies because brand stories foster stronger emotional bonds, aid brand differentiation, and build greater consumer trust—factors that collectively increase loyalty and repurchase intention.

Additionally, this research identified a positive and significant relationship between the brand image of luxury fitness clubs and customers' behavioral tendencies. This positive association highlights the critical importance of cultivating a strong and favorable brand image. The findings of this hypothesis are supported by studies conducted by Yeganeh (2022) and Miwa et al. (2023). In support of these results, Moghanlou (2016) investigated the mediating role of customer experience management in the relationship between brand image/performance and fans' behavioral tendencies in football clubs. The results revealed that customer experience management acts as a partial mediator, meaning brand image and performance influence fans' behavioral tendencies through customer experience rather than directly. The study also showed that creating a desirable brand image and performance in fans' minds can lead to long-term attendance, with positive and engaging experiences playing a key role. Miwa et al. (2023) demonstrated that behavioral intention forms when luxury fashion product management focuses on uncovering brand advantages—such as fashion innovation—while considering brand image and customers' emotional feelings. These studies collectively indicate that brand image can enhance overall customer experience. Brands with a positive image typically deliver superior services, which in turn reinforces positive behavioral tendencies. Brand image reflects customers' current perceptions of a brand. Key elements of a positive brand image may include a unique logo that reflects the organization's identity, a slogan that concisely describes the business, and a brand mark that embodies core values. The more distinctive and positive the brand image characteristics, the more customers a company attracts. Based on the third hypothesis, brand image has a direct and significant effect on customers' behavioral tendencies, further confirming that a stronger and more positive brand image fosters greater customer trust in the company and its products/services. The findings provide valuable insights into the interrelationships among the variables and their implications for consumer behavior in the context of luxury sports brands. First, the analysis shows that brand image significantly influences consumer purchase behavior. When luxury fashion/sports brands are perceived as authentic, high-quality, stylish, and innovative, they exert a positive impact on consumers' purchase decisions and overall purchase satisfaction. As Noori et al. (2023) noted, physical quality has a positive effect on behavioral tendencies—this finding underscores the importance of nurturing a strong and desirable brand image to drive consumer behavior. In this regard, a favorable brand image in luxury sports businesses reduces environmental risks, increases opportunities, attracts more customers, and encourages greater utilization of the store's products and services.

Additionally, this study found positive and significant relationships between brand social identity and brand image, as well as between brand social identity of luxury sports clubs and customers' behavioral tendencies. Brand social identity refers to cultivating a sense of belonging, shared values, and emotional connection among consumers. In luxury brands, social identity formation is often based on principles of exclusivity, aspiration, and affiliation. Researchers argue that brand social identity provides consumers with a unique social position, thereby enhancing perceived brand value and influencing their behavioral tendencies. Specifically, Xu et al. (2022) found significant positive effects of social identity on brand equity and brand image both directly and indirectly, although notable differences existed depending on context (sports vs. governmental or non-governmental institutions); however, these results partially contrast with Kim & Manoli (2022). Sports businesses operate in highly dynamic markets with intense competition and therefore rely heavily on brand image for survival and growth. Social identity reflected in brand image is a critical factor that can help sports businesses stand out from competitors. Enhancing performance and

leveraging a positive brand image enable sports businesses to thrive in a dynamic and competitive environment. Beyrami Igder et al. (2016) showed a positive and significant relationship between brand social identity and its dimensions (perceived brand value, customer satisfaction, brand identity, and brand trust) and the reputation of sports clubs' brand image. Sahin et al. (2011) demonstrated that people desire distinctiveness, and the more distinctive a brand identity, the greater the emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral support it receives from customers. Thus, in line with these studies, the present research further examines the mediating role of brand image in the relationships between brand social identity and behavioral tendencies, and between narrative branding and behavioral tendencies among customers of luxury sports clubs in Tehran. Moreover, the strong positive relationship between brand social identity and the reputation of luxury sports clubs highlights a crucial implication: clubs seeking to retain customers amid competition must pay greater attention to the concept of brand social identity and accord it higher priority. Overall, marketers and managers of sports service centers are advised to employ techniques that stimulate consumer awareness and foster positive attitudes or feelings toward the club's brand when building social identity, thereby creating a positive brand image that enhances future purchase intention, loyalty, commitment, and customer acquisition. Finally, it is recommended that future researchers continue to prioritize brand social identity and its reinforcing factors to identify additional ways to develop a positive social identity for sports club brands.

Luxury sports businesses operate in highly specialized markets with intense competition; thus, they pursue brand image enhancement and positive shifts in customer behavioral tendencies for survival and growth. Brand social identity and narrative branding are two pivotal factors that can help luxury sports businesses differentiate themselves from competitors. Improving performance and adopting brand-image enhancement methods—particularly narrative branding—enable these businesses to achieve superior outcomes in dynamic and competitive environments. Like any study, the present research has certain limitations. First, only brand image was examined as a mediator of the effects of brand social identity and narrative branding on behavioral tendencies. Future researchers may explore additional mediating variables such as brand equity. Second, the study was conducted within a specific time frame, and results may change over time. Therefore, the findings may be valid only within the examined period. It is thus recommended that the research model be tested at different time intervals to assess its ability to evaluate consumer behavioral tendencies under varying temporal conditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationships among brand social identity, narrative branding, and consumer behavioral tendencies in the context of luxury fitness clubs. The results enrich existing theoretical models in branding and consumer behavior and specifically clarify the mediating role of brand image in this process. From a practical standpoint, the research provides useful tools for luxury fitness clubs and their managers. Strengthening brand social identity and implementing narrative branding strategies can help build a stronger brand image, ultimately leading to more positive customer behavioral tendencies. Organizations are encouraged to enhance their branding strategies by focusing on social identity and storytelling while continuously improving brand image. Such actions can increase customer loyalty, attract new customers, and ultimately create greater competitive advantage for luxury sports clubs.

5. Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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