Using Appropriate Brand Strategy to Enhance Brand Trust in Fitness Exercise Product Among Women

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Abstract

Consumer behavior is often influenced by the brand of a specific product. In order for sports brands to appeal to the female consumer market, they must optimize suitable brand strategies and strengthen their brand trust among the targeted consumers. Brand trust is the willingness to rely on a brand and is based on consumer expectations of the brand's ability and reliability (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001); hence, it is critical in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. The present study investigates if brand concept is an effective brand strategy that substantially influences brand trust in female fitness exercise products. A questionnaire-survey was administered to 400 female participants who visited sport and physical activity centers in Taipei City. Of the 400 questionnaires, 376 were considered valid (response rate 94%). Brand concept was found to positively influence brand trust through brand identification. Furthermore, the results provide a conceptual framework for understanding how brand concepts influence brand trust. Therefore, developing a suitable brand concept would be an effective brand strategy to influence consumer behavior.

**Keywords: brand strategy, brand concept, women's fitness exercise product, brand trust**

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運用適宜的品牌策略強化女性對於健身產品品牌之品牌信任

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摘要

　　現代的消費者會基於品牌來決定產品的選擇。為了吸引女性市場，運動品牌運用適當的品牌策略去強化女性消費族群的品牌信任變得格外重要。品牌信任是消費者願意信賴並且信任其品牌之產品。因此，品牌信任會影響消費者的購買決定。本研究目的探討以品牌概念為女性健身產品品牌之品牌策略，是否會對女性健身產品消費者的品牌信任產生影響。本研究以問卷方式對女性健身運動參與者收集研究資料，研究樣本以台北地區的運動中心與健身俱樂部做抽樣。在 400 份回收問卷中,有效問卷 376 份,有效問卷回收率約 94%。研究結果發現，品牌概念經由品牌認同會對品牌信任有正面之影響。本研究對於品牌概念如何影響品牌信任提出了概念性的架構。根據研究發現，本研究建議發展適當的品牌概念是有效的品牌策略。

關鍵詞: 品牌策略、品牌概念、女性健身產品、品牌信任
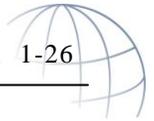
Introduction

Female participation in physical exercise has dramatically increased, which has in turn driven the development of female- related product markets. In the global sporting product market, renowned brands such as Nike, Adidas, Under Armour, and Puma have continued to develop their product categories such as apparel, footwear, accessory by focusing on the female exercise sector to satisfy consumer needs. For example, Nike, the world's leading innovator of sportswear, footwear and sporting goods, has extend its various product divisions to Nike Women, which produces apparel, footwear, and other sporting goods designed specifically to appeal to women on functional and aesthetic levels. Gender is one of the most common segmentation criteria used by marketers. This makes sense, marketing professions divide male and female segmentations that give marketers easy to identify and access the target consumers, resulting in large enough profit.

More and more consumers choose products on the basis of brands. To appeal to the female market, it is critical for sports brands to optimize suitable brand strategies to strengthen brand power and form a connection with targeted consumers. However, in the field of sports management, there are not many studies that investigate female fitness exercise product brand from the point of view of brand strategy. Without a good brand strategy for products, it is difficult to establish connections with the brand's targeted consumer. Brand strategy is a set of integrated strategies used by a brand owner to achieve the brand owners' objectives (Alamro & Rowley, 2010). The objective of brand strategy is to develop distinctive features of various services or products provided by an organization (Keller, 1998) to differentiate it from its competitors. This study examined brand concept as a significant tactical aspect of brand strategy. The branding literature proposes that brands can be organized by means of brand concept (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). Brand concept is a firm-selected brand meaning derived from consumer needs (i.e., functional needs, symbolic needs, experiential needs) that maintains consistency of meaning throughout the life of the brand (Frank & Krake, 2005; Park et al., 1986). The firm-selected brand meaning specifies a brand relative to competing brands, and it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customers' minds.

Although previous studies have paid great attention to explore the relevant issues of brand concept, brand identification, band image, and brand trust, none explored them about female fitness exercise products. Therefore, this study wanted to fill the research gap. Brand identification refers to consumers' sense of sameness with a brand (Elbedweihy & Jayawardhena, 2014). The previous studies have argued that people who behave identification with a particular brand are more likely to show activities that benefit the brand (Homburg, Wieseke & Hoyer, 2009). Brand image is a set of perceptions about a brand reflected by brand associations for consumers (Keller, 2003) which includes symbolic meanings associated with the specific attributes of the brand (Chen, 2010). Therefore, brand image is considered as an important aspect of marketing when it is difficult to distinguish a brand from its competitors based on tangible quality features (Chen, 2010). Brand trust is a willingness to rely on a brand based on expectation of its ability and reliability (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Therefore, brand trust can influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

The study was to report on the findings of a conceptual model for the brands of female fitness exercise apparel by empirically testing the effect of brand strategies (i.e., brand concept) on mediating variables (i.e., brand identification and brand image) as well as the influence on brand trust as dependent variable. Theoretically, this study proposes a model and assesses the effects of brand strategy on brand trust. From a practical perspective, this research can help sports marketing managers to identify appropriate brand strategies for promoting female fitness exercise product brands that can enhance consumers' brand trust, as well as establish brand status as perceived by the target market. Figure 1 shows the research framework.
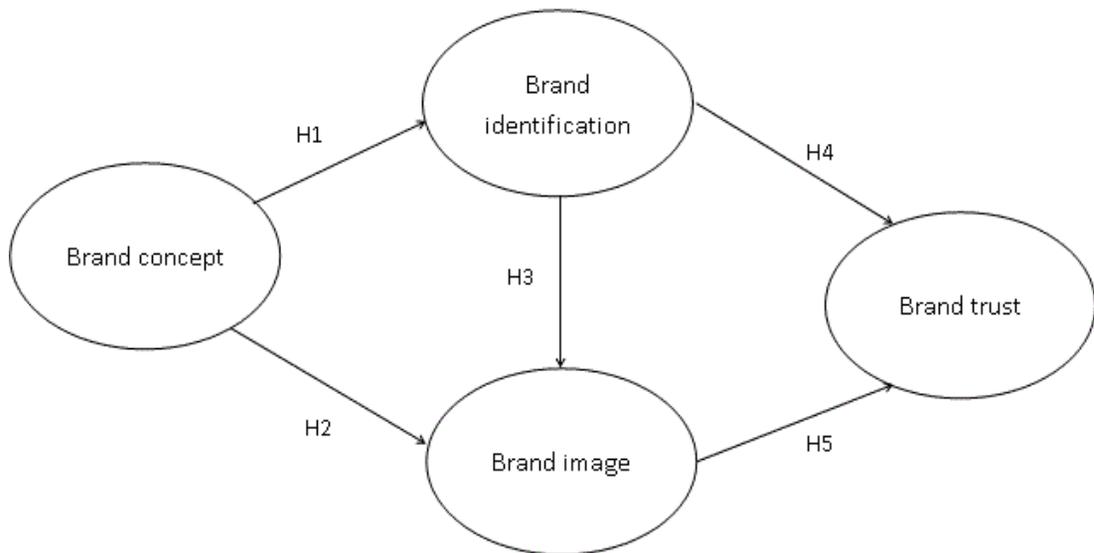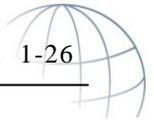
Figure1   Proposed model to analyses the effect of brand concept on brand trust

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

## Brand concept, brand identification, and brand image

Brand concept has been defined as a firm-selected brand meaning derived from three basic consumer needs (i.e., functional needs, symbolic needs, experiential needs) that maintain consistency of meaning throughout the life of the brand (Frank & Krake, 2005; Park et al., 1986). A brand with functional concept primarily serves as solving externally generated consumer problem. Symbolic brand concept pertains to products that fulfill internally generated consumer needs for self-enhancement, group membership or ego-identification. Lastly, experiential concept is defined as one designed to provide sensory pleasure, variety or cognitive stimulation. Therefore, brands can be organized by means of brand concepts (Lanseng & Olsen, 2012). As such brand concepts can be used to refer to the image created in a brand, and product theoretically can be positioned with a functional, symbolic, or experiential image. Therefore, brand concepts are category structures in consumers' minds and differentiate brands from other competitors in the same product category (Lanseng & Olsen, 2012).

The concept of brand identification is based on social identity theory, which has been applied widely in other disciplines. Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his or her knowledge of their membership in a social group or group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). Social identity theory can be used to frame consumer-brand identification concepts where consumers identify with an organization without formally interacting with the organization (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010). Brand identification is based on the sum of brand meanings conveyed as a product, organization, symbol and person (Aaker, 1991). True identification with a brand, however, can be achieved only when the forces, values and vision of the brand are clearly specified through internal and external communication (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Brand identification prompts individual's personal commitment to an emotional involvement with a brand, which inherently incorporates psychological and behavioral dimensions. As a result, consumers may categorize themselves in terms of their favorite brands.

Keller (2003) defined brand image as the "perceptions of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (p.66). Therefore, brand associations may be understood types of dimensions, such as attributes, benefits, and attitudes based on the experience in using a brand (Bosch, Venter, Han, & Boshoff, 2006). According to Bosch et al. (2006), brand image is a synthesis of various brand messages, such as brand name, visual symbols, attributes, products, or services, and the benefits of advertisements, sponsoring, and promotional articles. Consumer perceptions of brand image vary based on how brand messages are decoded to extract meaning and interpret symbols (Nandan, 2005).

Brand concept is directly linked to consumers' needs that can be used to categorize consumers and differentiate brands from other competitors in the same product category (Lanseng & Olsen, 2012). Based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), a suitable brand concept fits consumers' needs then drives consumers to categorize themselves in terms of their favorite brands which establishes the sense of affiliation with brands; consequently, may contributes a heightened sense of group belonging and enhances brand identification. Brand concept is a firm-selected brand meaning derived from basic consumer needs (Frank & Krake, 2005; Park et al.,
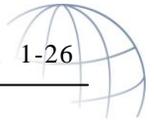
1986), which convey a brand purpose to establish brand association in the minds of consumers; consequently, create brand image (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Brand concept endues a brand with a meaning, and managers operationalize the meaning in the form of an image (Park et al., 1986). Based on this discussion, we present the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Brand concept has a positive impact on brand identification.

Hypothesis 2: Brand concept has a positive impact on brand image.

Brand identification and brand image

Brand identification steams from the company or organization (Nandan, 2005). A company produces a particular product with unique features to differentiate itself from competitors. It is how a company seeks to identify itself (Marguiles, 1997). A company often dedicates its effort to communicate its identification and value to consumers. However, brand image originates from the consumer's perception of the brand (Nandan, 2005). Brand image is the total impressions of the information that consumers receive from many sources and accumulates in the memory of consumers in relation to a brand (Herzog, 1963). According to Nandan (2005), a brand message is "packaged" in terms of brand identification, and it is "unpackaged" by the consumer in form of brand image.

In practice, distribution channel plays a vital role in consumers' perceptions of the brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Consumers do not just consider their relationship with the brand; they also perceive the relationship with the intermediaries who transmit planned brand identification to consumers (Alexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). In other words, the marketing agents and institutions that own and manage the brand have a critical role to transmit planned brand identification to consumers. As a result, the perception of brand identification at the time of decoding its identification facets shapes the image of the brand in the mind of consumers (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Previous researches also have proposed that brand identification influence brand image (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004; Bosch et al., 2006). Therefore, we present the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis3: Brand identification has a positive impact on brand image.

Brand identification and brand trust

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) defined brand trust as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (p. 82). Sung and Kim (2010) asserted that the following two components are essential to brand trust: (a) trustworthiness, which refers to consumer confidence in a brand's intentions to provide quality performance in a sincere and honest manner, and (b) expertise, which refers to the extent that a brand is perceived to be skillful and knowledgeable, based on the company's experience or training in the product or service category. Applying social identity theory in consumer brand identification (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), during the brand identification process, consumers define themselves in relation to the brand, resulting in personal and emotional investment in the brand. Therefore, consumers tend to believe that the brand is reliable, consistent, competent, responsible, helpful, and honest, and these beliefs thereby enhance trust in the brand. Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Brand identification has a positive impact on brand trust.

Brand image and brand trust

Previous research indicated that brand image has a positive impact on consumer trust because it potentially reduces the risks perceived by consumers (Flavian, Guinaliu, & Torres, 2005). Brand trust is a feeling of security held by a consumer from which, they anticipate that a brand meets their expectations. Therefore, a brand would be perceived as having an effective brand image if consumers perceive positive brand associations that strengthen their sense of security and believe that the brand performs as expected. Accordingly, previous studies have proposed that a positive relationship exists between brand image and brand trust (Flavian et al., 2005). Based on this discussion, we assert that brand image is positively associated with brand trust.

Hypothesis 5: Brand image has a positive impact on brand trust.
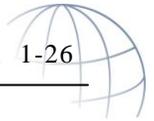
Brand concept and brand trust

A suitable brand concept fits consumers' needs that can be used to categorize consumers in terms of their favorite brands which build the sense of affiliation with brands (Lanseng & Olsen, 2012). Accordingly, based on the prediction of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), consumers' affiliation with brands leads to a heightened sense of group belonging and enhances brand identification. Consumers with stronger identification tend to show more affective attachment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), resulting in personal and emotional investment in the brand. Consequently, consumers are inclined to believe that the brand is reliable, consistent, competent, responsible, helpful, and honest, and these beliefs thereby enhance trust in the brand. Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6: Brand concept has a positive indirect impact on brand trust via brand identification.

Brand concept is derived from basic consumer needs, which transmit a brand purpose to build brand association in the minds of consumers; consequently, result in brand image (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Consumers perceive positive brand image that enhance their sense of security and believe that the brand performs as expected. Scholars previously have proposed that brand image has a positive impact on brand trust because it potentially reduces the risks perceived by consumers (Flavian et al., 2005). Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7: Brand concept has a positive indirect impact on brand trust via brand image.

The foregoing discussion has established that brand concept has a positive indirect impact on brand trust. Moreover, discussion in the preceding paragraphs has presented that brand identification has a positive impact on brand image. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 8: Brand concept has a positive indirect impact on brand trust via brand identification/brand image.

Methods

Survey method and data collection

This study applied the questionnaire survey to verify the hypotheses and research framework. This study requested that every respondent identify which physical exercises such as swimming, aerobic dance, weight training, jogging, bicycling that she regularly participates in. The three leading brands, Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour were listed in the questionnaire. Consequently, every respondent was requested to regard one of these brands as the focal brand when answering the questionnaire. The data for the current study were drawn from 400 females who are regular physical exercise participants in Taipei City. Questionnaires were distributed in sports centers and fitness clubs in Taipei City from February 2013 to May 2013.

Measures

The questionnaires adopted in this study refer to research studies, and these four variables are measured using a seven-point Likert scale with items in questionnaires. Several measures are modified from existing validated scales and some measures were developed for use in this study based upon related literature. Prior to data collection, a content validity test was performed to determine whether the initial survey questionnaire was valid. The content validity assessment was conducted by six experts and scholars. Subsequently, eight female college students who have been regularly engaged in physical exercise were asked to fill in the questionnaire and to identify the ambiguities in terms, meanings and issues. The initial items measuring twelve dimensions believed to comprise four primary factors. The list of items is shown in Appendix. The following sections comprise the variable constructs.

Brand Concept. This work is modified from the conceptual structures of brand concept proposed by Park et al. (1986). Three constructs are proposed: (1) functional (2) symbolic (3) experiential. However, Park et al. did not provide items for measuring the respective factors. The nine items obtained from literature review and the author's self-development were carefully reviewed and edited by the researcher.

Brand Identification. Three constructs and their items were adopted and
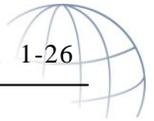
modified from the works of O'ReillyIII and Chatman (1986), Tildesley and Coote (2009), Vandenberg, Self , and Seo (1994) and Bosch et al. (2006). The study proposed three factors: (1) honor connection (2) success sensitivity (3) active presentation. The nine items are developed for measuring the constructs.

Brand Image. The current research utilized the structures of brand image suggested by Aaker (1996). According to Aaker's conceptual works, the researcher generated 12 items for measuring four factors of brand image: (1) value (2) personality (3) organizational association (4) differentiation.

Brand Trust. The current study adopted the structures and scales of attitudinal trust proposed by Delgado-Ballester, E. and Munuera-Aleman, L. (2001), using six items for measuring two constructs: (1) creditable (2) benevolence.

Data analyses

The data were analyzed using the statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 14.0). An analysis of structural equation model (SEM), available in LISREL VII, was used to test the hypothesized model. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggested that the measurement model was first confirmed and then the structural model was tested.

Results

We send 400 questionnaires and 400 were returned from 2013 spring. The ratio of questionnaires return was 100%. In the 400 returned questionnaires, there were 376 valid and 24 invalid questionnaires missing values or incomplete answers. The effective rate of response was 94%. The majority of the participants were 33% between 35 and 44 years of age (n = 125) and 24% between 18 and 24 (n = 92). In addition, the participants were generally highly educated with 73% (n = 274) having college degree or graduate degree. The descriptive results are shown in Table 1.The mean scores for individual factors ranged from 2.42 to 3.58. The standard deviation scores ranged from 0.60 to 1.01. The results indicate that intercorrelations between factors ranging from 0.25 to 0.74. The results of reliability test are shown in Table 1. We conduct the reliability analysis through using Cronbach's α coefficient to measure the consistency reliability of the constructs. In our empirical study, Cronbach's α coefficient of three dimensions are larger than 0.70.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, correlations, reliability and validity analysis of variables

Constructs/ Variables	*M*	*SD*	α	λ	CR	AVE
Brand Concept			.76		.77	.53
1. BC1	2.64	0.75		.60		
2. BC2	2.97	0.96		.80		
3. BC3	2.64	0.80		.76		
Brand Identification			.86		.87	.69
4. BID1	2.98	0.85		.77		
5. BID2	3.58	0.92		.85		
6. BID3	3.67	1.01		.86		
Brand Image			.86		.87	.62
7. BI1	2.67	0.72		.77		
8. BI2	2.67	0.77		.82		
9. BI3	2.79	0.74		.82		
10. BI4	2.91	0.60		.73		
Brand Trust			.60		.61	.44
11. BT1	2.42	0.69		.63		
12. BT2	3.22	0.87		.70		

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1											
2	.47										
3	.48	.59									
4	.34	.55	.43								
5	.32	.45	.39	.65							
6	.25	.45	.40	.63	.74						
7	.28	.46	.40	.56	.42	.54					
8	.31	.49	.51	.49	.42	.51	.62				
9	.29	.48	.37	.51	.40	.51	.63	.67			
10	.33	.42	.39	.36	.41	.50	.54	.59	.61		
11	.33	.34	.43	.40	.36	.37	.34	.40	.36	.27	
12	.38	.44	.36	.42	.48	.41	.34	.32	.26	.27	.44

α: Charnbach's α; λ: Factor Loading; CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance

Extracted   all correlation were significant (*p* < .05)
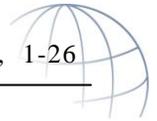
Measurement model

The hypothesized four-factor model was examined to assess overall model fit, composite reliability, and discriminant validity.

First, we assess the reliability jointly for all items of a construct by computing the composite reliability (CR). The results are shown in Table 1. We find that CR values of three dimensions ((brand concept, brand identification, and brand image) are larger than .70 which represents acceptable level of reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, we compute the average variance extracted (AVE) to confirm the discriminate validity. The results show that AVE values of three dimensions (brand concept, brand identification, and brand image) are not smaller than 0.5 which supported for the discriminate validity of the hypothesized model (Batra & Sinha, 2000).

The only one dimension of brand trust does not achieve the recommended thresholds of reliability and validity tests (α=0.60, CR=0.61, AVE=0.44). The reason of why the reliability and validity tests are less than the recommended threshold values may be interpreted as the only two factors of brand trust construct.

Second, we employ various fitness indices to examine the validity of the model and fit indices of the proposed measurement model are shown in Table 2. Three types of fit indices, absolute, comparative, and parsimonious fit index, were recommended to assess overall model fit (Kelloway, 1998). The RMSEA was used to measure absolute fit; the CFI was used to measure comparative fit; and the PNFI was used to measure parsimonious fit. In our study, the results of model fit for the hypothesized model indicated acceptable model fit to the data (χ^2= 135.70, p<.001; χ^2/df = 2.82, RMSEA=.070; CFI=.98; PNFI=.70).

Table 2

Results of measurement model fit

Index	Values
χ^2/df (normed chi-square)	2.82
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.98
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index(PNFI)	0.70
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.070

*p<.05

Structural model

The structural model fit values are shown in Table 3. The results of model fit indicated acceptable model fit to the data (χ^2= 161.73, *p*<.001; χ^2/df = 3.30, RMSEA=.078; CFI=.97; PNFI=.71).

The Table 4 and Figure2 displays the structural model with the coefficient and almost significant relationship between variables and variables are followed the hypothesized direction. In direct effect, brand concept has significant effect on brand identification (H1: β_1 = 0.7, *t* = 8.26, p<.05) and brand image (H2: β_2= 0.43, *t* = 4.23, p<.05). Brand identification has significant effect on brand image (H3: β_3 = 0.41, *t* = 4.52, p<.05). Brand identification significantly influences brand trust (H4: β_4 = 0.63, *t* = 5.72, p<.05). However, brand image does not significantly affect brand trust (H5: β_5 = 0.19, *t* =1.19, p<.05). As to indirect effect, brand concept has significant effect on brand trust through brand identification (H6: β_6 = 0.44, *t* =5.20, p<.05). However, brand concept does not significantly affect brand trust via brand image (H7: β_7 = 0.08, *t* =1.81, p<.05) and does not significantly influence brand trust via brand identification/brand image (H8: β_8 = 0.05, *t* =1.90, p<.05).

Table 3

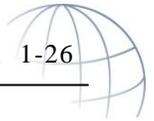**Results of structural model fit**

Index	Values
χ^2/df (normed chi-square)	3.30
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.97
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index(PNFI)	0.71
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA）	0.078

*p<.05

Table 4

Path effect of structural model

	β	t
Direct Effect		
H1 BC→BID	.70	8.26*
H2 BC→BIM	.43	4.23*
H3 BID→BIM	.41	4.52*
H4 BID→BT	.63	5.72*
H5BIM→BT	.19	1.91
Indirect Effect		
H6 BC→BID→BT	.44	5.20*
H7 BC→BIM→BT	.08	1.81
H8 BC→BID→BIM→BT	.05	1.90
Unexplained Variance		
BID	.51	6.71*
BIM	.40	6.77*
BT	.41	4.04*

*p<.05

BC: Brand Concept, BID: Brand Identification, BIM: Brand Image, BT: Brand Trust
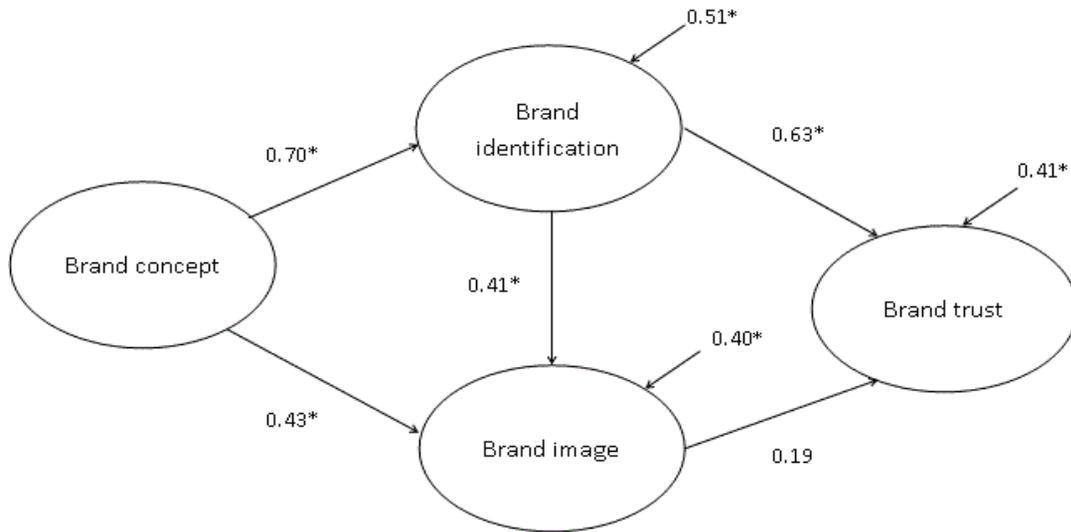
Figure2. The results of the proposed model

Discussion and Implication

The topic of brand concept as a brand strategy has not been extensively studied in the sports management literature, but scholars have previously suggested the importance of studying this construct (Frank & Krake, 2005; Park et al., 1986). The current study intended to fill this gap in the literature by examining the female physical exercise product market in Taiwan. In order to fill this research gap, this study proposed four novel constructs－brand concept, brand identification, brand image, and brand trust－and developed a research framework to further discuss their relationships. The empirical evidence found from this study identified brand concept that has positive impact on consumer brand trust through brand identification. Therefore, this study suggests that women sport brands should invest more resources in the developing of brand concept, brand identification, and brand trust, because these constructs are positively associated with brand trust.

With respect to lifestyle trends, consumers currently hold an increasingly positive attitude regarding the participation of women in fitness exercise. This change in attitude has driven women to increase their consumption of related products. Findings in the area of brand literature indicate that gender influences the attitudes and behavior of consumers toward brands. Regarding choice of brands,
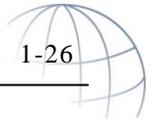
males tends to emphasize functionality and the immediate benefits of using a branded product (Zayer & Neier, 2011). Female, in the contrast, engages in more elaborative processing of personal, real-life emotional experiences and are more concerned about their social appearance and acceptance (Sahay, Sharma & Mehta, 2012). Thus, how society views women and their participation in fitness exercise affects how women perceive their own relationship to fitness exercise, which in turn influences the sports brands that women choose.

Based on the empirical evidence of the study, brand concept is considered to be an effective brand strategy, and managers should focus on developing core brand concepts to develop meaningful consumer-brand trust. Scholars have proposed that three distinct consumer needs, functional needs, symbolic needs and experiential needs, be addressed to develop a brand concept (Park et al., 1986). To develop the female market, female characteristics are crucial for integration into brand concept development. For example, the concept of experiential needs should provide sensory pleasure, variety, and cognitive stimulation which are integrated into female characteristics. Women tend to show more concern than men for social appearance and acceptance. Therefore, a connection between society and self-connection is more important to women who build toward the products. Sports brands have realized the importance of social appearance and acceptance for women, and are thus striving to improve their designs and styles. To differentiate brands in the women's market, designing products that are stylish and adjusted to specific fitness exercise is critical. In addition, developing a deep brand trust with consumers requires designing and implementing a distinctive brand concept that matches targeted consumers' values.

The results of path analysis in this study represent that the path1 (brand concept →brand identification→brand trust) is stronger than the other two paths and is only one significant path in the path analysis. Previous study has proposed that female is more concerned about their social appearance and acceptance (Sahay et al., 2012). Therefore, how women perceive a brand is strongly based on a connection between society and self-connection. In other words, female consumers more tend to categorize themselves in terms of their favorite brands. Females regularly invest resources in participatory in fitness exercise which require a significant level of

psychological and physical involvement. Thus, when female fitness exercise enthusiasts are satisfied by a well-suited brand concept, they have a tendency to build a strong connection between a status of fitness exercise enthusiast and a brand. Consequently, female fitness exercise participants categorize themselves in terms of their favorite brands in resulting brand identification. This may explain the reason of why brand identification mediates the impact of brand concept on brand trust is stronger than the other two paths.

The importance of regular participation in fitness exercise has been widely recognized by the female population. The trend of living a healthy lifestyle has consistently driven the development of female related product markets. To satisfy the needs of this market, sports brands consistently provide female consumers with variety and innovation. In this competitive market, employing suitable brand strategies is vital for competing in the market and achieving specific goals. This study suggested that developing a suitable brand concept is an effective brand strategy. A suitable brand concept provides a brand meaning to a specific brand and satisfies target consumers' needs which results in occupation of a distinct and valued place in the target market.

Academic Implications and Future Research

Based on the idea proposed by Keller (1993) that brand knowledge is based on the associations a person makes with brand, the current study provides a conceptual framework for understanding how brand concepts affect brand trust. The current study verifies the crucial status of brand concept and extends the theoretical understanding of the impacts of brand strategies (i.e., brand concept) for the dependent variables (brand trust), through brand identification and brand image in the context of female physical exercise products. Although this research adds to the knowledge about brand concept, the findings are specific to female physical exercise products. To test generalizability, future research is recommended to extend this research to various related markets, such as outdoor activity product or various sports equipment. The generalizability of the results in the current study is limited to participants merely from the Taipei city. Although female fitness exercise
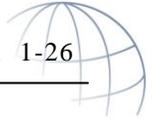
participants in Taipei city are a large segment of market, they may not be representative of all female fitness product consumers in Taiwan.
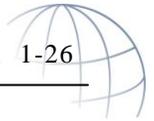
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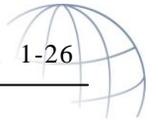
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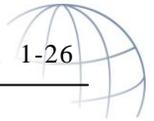
Appendix

The items of brand concept

Construct	Items
Functional	1. The brand emphasizes functional performance in solving consumption-related problems. 2. The brand provides functional performance in solving special consumption-needed problems. 3. The brand reinforces its image by associating to its other performance-related products.
Symbolic	1. The brand is related to my group membership or self-identification. 2. The brand maintains my group-image or self-image based associations. 3. The brand generalizes its image to referent-based products.
Experiential	1. The brand provides sensory satisfaction or cognitive stimulation. 2. The brand emphasizes on sensory or cognitive stimulation. 3. The brand links to its image to that of other experiential products.

The items of brand identification

Construct	Items
Honor Connection	1. This honor brand really inspires the very best in my life. 2. I am extremely glad that I chose this brand over others. 3. For me this is the best of all possible brands for which to work.
Success Sensitivity	1. I really care about the success and fate of this brand. 2. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that expected in order to help this brand be successful. 3. I feel that this brand's success is my personal success.
Active presentation	1. I feel a sense of "ownership" for this brand rather than being just a consumer. 2. I actively talk up the brand to my friends as a great brand. 3. I am proud to present and tell others that I am a loyal user of this brand.

The items of brand image

Construct	Items
Value	1. The brand provides good value for the social prestige. 2. The brand has a core value. 3. There are reasons to buy the brand over competitors.
Brand personality	1. The brand has herown personality. 2. The brand is interesting. 3. I have a clear image of the type of person who would use the brand.
Organizational association	1. The brand is made by an organization I would trust. 2. I admire the organization which creates the brand. 3. The organization associated with the brand has credibility.
Differentiation	1. The brand is different from competing brands. 2. The brand is basically the same as competing brands. 3. The brand has particular feature and style.

The items of brand trust

Construct	Items
Creditable	1. The brand offers a product with a constant quality level. 2. The brand helps consumers to solve any problem with the product. 3. The brand provides products I'm looking for.
Benevolence	1. The brand provides special benefit for me. 2. The brand intends to favor to me. 3. The brand is friendly to me.