



Exploring the Influence of a Competitive Environment and Marketing Trends on Sports Coaches' Attitudes Towards Advertising

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- A) conception and design of the study
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Abstract

This study examines how commercialization and a competitive environment (CE) in sports have reshaped the role of coaches, positioning them as both athletic leaders and key influencers in marketing trends (MT) and strategies. By exploring coaches' attitudes toward advertising (ATA), it highlights the significance of communication theory in understanding the evolving dynamics of sports marketing. Employing a quantitative survey methodology and structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, the study investigates the complex interplay among these variables. The findings reveal significant associations between the competitive environment and coaches' attitudes toward advertising, underscoring the importance of strategic marketing initiatives in response to competitive dynamics. Moreover, a substantial correlation is observed between marketing trends and coaches' attitudes toward advertising, emphasizing the need for sports organizations to adapt their marketing strategies to align with current market dynamics. Additionally, the research highlights the multifaceted nature of factors influencing coaches' attitudes toward advertising, including ethical beliefs, adherence to rules, and personal utility. These findings offer valuable insights for developing more effective advertising and marketing strategies tailored to the unique context of sports coaching, contributing to the advancement of marketing practices within the sports industry.

Keywords: Brand Influence of Coaches, Commercialization of Sports, Competitive Sports Environment, Sports Coaches as Marketers, Sports Marketing Trends.

Introduction

In the contemporary sports industry, advertising has become indispensable for promoting teams, engaging fans, and securing sponsorship (Khodadadi et al., 2019). Traditionally perceived as figures solely focused on athletic performance, sports coaches are now integral to marketing strategies (Yuosefi et al., 2014). The ubiquity of advertising

in daily life underscores its profound impact on individual and collective behavior (Yurtsızoglu & Golmohammadi, 2023). The concept of attitude toward advertising (ATA) is pivotal in marketing research (Chittithaworn et al., 2011). Coaches' attitudes toward advertising are critical as they affect not only team visibility but also broader organizational strategies. Given the substantial investments in advertising by companies, its role as a tool for enhancing

communication and influencing consumer behavior is well-established (Boudreau & Watson, 2006; Gardasevic et al., 2018). ATA, reflecting personal sentiments and behavioral tendencies shaped by exposure to advertisements, is a key predictor of advertising outcomes (PV et al., 2022). Additionally, consumer perceptions of the economic impact of advertising influence their attitudes (Bauer et al., 1968). Despite the growing commercialization of sports (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021), there is still limited understanding of how external factors such as competitive environments (CE) and emerging marketing trends (MT) shape coaches' perspectives on advertising.

Sport, serving as a universal medium for communication, plays a significant role in advertising goods and services (Kordlu et al., 2020). The multifaceted nature of sports advertising includes enhancing team visibility, attracting sponsorship, engaging fans, and generating revenue (Karg & Funk, 2020; Smith, 2020). Coaches, as key decision-makers, navigate these objectives within a competitive and evolving market. Their attitudes towards advertising are influenced by strategic goals, awareness of market trends, and socio-economic beliefs (Yurtsizoglu & Golmohammadi, 2023). Despite being pivotal human resources in sports, coaches face challenges in their roles (Khosravizadeh et al., 2013). Advertising in sports, through various channels such as in-stadium ads and broadcast commercials, has numerous applications (Burns, 2003). Understanding these factors is essential for developing marketing strategies that align with both coaches' professional goals and broader sports organizational objectives (Kordlu et al., 2020).

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and market adaptation for sports organizations to maintain competitiveness (Shank & Lyberger, 2014). The advent of digital marketing and personalized advertising has revolutionized engagement strategies (Dees et al., 2022). Identifying the drivers of coaches' attitudes towards advertising allows stakeholders to tailor their strategies to the sports community (Cheong et al., 2019). This alignment is crucial not only for the success of advertising campaigns but also for enhancing coaches' professional status and career development (Irwin et al., 2008). However, gaps remain in understanding how external factors influence sports coaches' advertising attitudes.

The evolution of sports coaches' roles, driven by the commercialization and professionalization of sports, has transformed them into key figures in marketing their teams and organizations (Cornwell, 2022; O'Neill et al., 2020). Coaches who embrace marketing enhance team visibility and fan loyalty, playing a critical role in brand strategy. Conversely, some coaches resist this shift, focusing exclusively on coaching and delegating marketing responsibilities (Cooper et al., 2017; Lyle, 2010; O'Neill et al., 2020; Witkemper et al., 2012).

Research on attitudes toward advertising reveals that personal beliefs, strategic goals, and socio-economic factors shape marketing effectiveness (Mehta, 2000; Zhao et al., 2022). In sports, these factors are compounded by coaches' dual roles as athletic leaders and brand influencers. Understanding how competitive pressures and marketing trends impact coaches' attitudes is essential for sports marketers aiming to develop impactful campaigns. This study addresses the gap by examining the relationships between CE, MT, and various dimensions of coaches' attitudes, including economic, social, moral, and personal beliefs. By exploring these relationships, the research provides valuable insights for sports organizations to align marketing strategies with coaches' perspectives, contributing to the evolving field of sports marketing. To guide this exploration, the following research question (RQ) has been formulated:

RQ: *How do competitive environments (CE) and emerging marketing trends (MT) influence sports coaches' attitudes towards advertising (ATA)?*

Theoretical Background

Communications Theory as the Umbrella Framework

The commercialization and professionalization of sports have strengthened the role of communication theory in sports marketing, as the development, transmission, and reception of messages have become critical to organizational success. In this process, communication plays a key role in shaping the success of advertising strategies, especially in sports, where coaches interpret and mediate messages for their teams (Pedersen et al., 2020). According to Schramm (2001), the effectiveness of an advertisement depends on how well it aligns with the audience's beliefs and values. For coaches, whose decisions affect both team performance and brand choices, it is crucial that advertising is aligned with their strategic and ethical considerations.

Once viewed only as athletic leaders, coaches now play a central role in how sports organizations communicate their marketing and branding messages. Coaches' ATA are especially important in this context, as these attitudes directly influence the effectiveness of marketing strategies in engaging target audiences (Di Pietro et al., 2012). In highly commercialized environments, the CE intensifies as sports organizations compete for revenue streams such as ticket sales, sponsorship, and merchandise (Rezaei et al., 2015). This drives the SI of sports organizations, making communication strategies central to sustaining a competitive advantage (Ramezanlo et al., 2022).

Coaches act as brand influencers and mediators, conveying both team values and commercial messages to

athletes and fans (Ghamat Afzar & Saljoghi, 2019). Understanding how commercialization redefines their role and impacts their attitude toward advertising is vital for developing effective sports marketing strategies (Farzi et al., 2019). The Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) two-step flow model further highlights coaches as opinion leaders who filter advertising messages and pass them on to athletes and team members. Therefore, brands need to design marketing messages that address the unique role of coaches as intermediaries, crafting strategies that resonate with their goals to increase the likelihood of adoption by the team (Pashaie et al., 2022).

Commercialization and Professionalization of Sport

The commercialization of sports has fundamentally transformed sports organizations by creating the need for greater professionalism and expanding their revenue-generating capabilities (Sadeghi Dezaj et al., 2023). Sports commercialization means turning sports activities into a profitable industry that includes ticket sales, television rights, advertising, and sponsorship (Slack, 2004). Professional sports are actually a type of business with a private nature and include non-governmental clubs in many developed countries. The main elements of professional sports include professional athletes, professional coaches and clubs (Arabnarmi et al., 2018). The sports industry has the characteristics of increasing domestic demand, increasing employment, and creating new points of economic and business growth (Xu & Yang, 2019). Hence, the scale and importance of the lucrative sports industry requires quality professional business (Beech & Chadwick, 2004). Additionally, professionalization has necessitated the creation of more sophisticated marketing strategies that align with the evolving demands of the competitive sports environment, as marketing has become a strategic tool to boost organizational performance (Mohammadiyan Mogadam et al., 2023). This trend has caused sports organizations to move towards becoming more professional and looking for new ways to increase income (Rezaei et al., 2015). This transformation is driven by the increasing financial importance of marketing in creating sustainable competitive advantages (Shafeiha et al., 2019). The research results indicate that various factors – cultural, organizational, social, legal, and structural – have an effect on the commercialization of sports (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021; Ghasemi et al., 2022; Hussein et al., 2023; Smith & Taylor, 2004).

Therefore, the commercialization and professionalization of sports has transformed sports organizations considerably and led to an increase in the importance of investment and marketing strategies. This process has not only affected the income and structure of organizations, but also brought fans experience and new challenges.

Coaches as Brand Influencers and Mediators

Coaches are more than just tactical decision-makers; they serve as influential figures who mediate between athletes, brands, and advertising messages across various levels of competition, from amateur to professional sports (Klatt et al., 2019). Their recommendations often extend beyond sports techniques to include lifestyle choices such as brand preferences (Lauder & Piltz, 2013). Coaches play a vital role in influencing athletes and the broader sports community through their endorsements of sports equipment, apparel, and related services (Kassing et al., 2004). Their opinions carry significant weight because they are seen as credible authorities within their field. This impact extends beyond athletes to fans, often helping brands align with values of performance and trust. Sponsorship deals that involve coaches can therefore enhance brand visibility and market reach, creating mutual benefits for both the coaches and the companies they endorse (Karimi et al., 2023).

Coaches are uniquely positioned to act as brand influencers, shaping athletes' and teams' choices through their endorsements, either explicit or implicit (Mortezaee et al., 2022). For instance, athletes often look up to their coaches as role models, which leads to the adoption of brands that coaches prefer or recommend. This is particularly relevant in contexts where athletes are selecting products based on performance, comfort, or personal utility (Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Moreover, the role of the coach as a mediator is evident in how they facilitate interactions between athletes and brands (Fahim Devin & Asadollahi, 2021). Coaches play a crucial role in the negotiation of sponsorship deals (Irwin et al., 2008), often determining which brands align with the values of their teams and athletes (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Their influence extends to ensuring that the brands they choose align with their ethical beliefs and the image they wish to project to their teams.

In this regard, marketing strategies should prioritize the role of coaches as key influencers rather than solely focusing on athletes (Martens & Vealey, 2024). Coaches can amplify brand messages by influencing their teams, making them valuable partners for advertisers. Aligning campaigns with the goals and values of coaches allows brands to form more authentic relationships within sports organizations (Pashaie et al., 2022). Furthermore, coaches act as gatekeepers, shaping how advertisements are perceived based on personal, ethical, and market-driven factors. By recognizing this, brands can tailor their advertising strategies to resonate with coaches, leading to more effective marketing outcomes.

Attitude Towards Advertising (ATA)

Attitudinal constructs are valuable for understanding consumer behavior in the marketplace (Di Pietro et al.,

2012). The influence of advertising on consumers largely depends on their attitudes towards it (Khodadad Huosseini et al., 2015). Consequently, marketers today seek to deeply understand customer attitudes and emotions. Consumer attitudes are crucial in shaping purchase intentions, making them essential for marketing management (Can & Kaya, 2016). Since attitudes are closely tied to consumer behavior, general beliefs about advertisements significantly impact overall attitudes toward advertising (Mir, 2015). Therefore, consumers' attitudes toward advertising are vital for effective ad campaigns, as these attitudes shape their cognitive responses to ads, rooted in emotions and thoughts (Gardasevic et al., 2018). Research indicates that attitudes toward advertising (ATA) significantly affect advertising effectiveness, purchase intentions, and brand perceptions (Lutz, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Zipporah and Mberia (2014) argue that highly credible advertising endorsers can quickly attract genuine consumers and boost purchase intentions. Yoosefy et al. (2020) found that sports fandom directly influences fans' attitudes toward sports-related advertisements. Dianoux et al. (2014) describe ATAs as positive or negative reactions to advertisements, reflecting consumers' thoughts and feelings about them.

In the realm of sports marketing, the positive outlook of sports coaches is significant. This attitude is an important factor for marketers and ad designers to consider when creating effective sports-related advertisements. We will examine coaches' ATAs using the following constructs:

- *Economic Beliefs in Advertising (EBA)*: This refers to the view that advertising drives economic growth by increasing consumer demand and improving market efficiency (Dunn & Barban, 1974). For professional sports coaches, advertising is crucial for securing sponsorship and enhancing their teams' financial stability (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005). Coaches who see advertising as economically beneficial are likely to have positive attitudes toward marketing activities (Schwarz & Hunter, 2017). This is particularly true for coaches in competitive environments where sponsorship is essential (Demir & Söderman, 2015).
- *Social Benefits in Advertising (SBA)*: This focuses on the role of advertising in promoting community engagement, social awareness, and healthy lifestyles (Pashaie et al., 2019). In sports, ads often convey messages about teamwork, resilience, and community involvement (Smith et al., 2017). Coaches, as key influencers, impact both their teams and broader communities (Phillips & Schlenkorf, 2016). Coaches who value the social benefits of advertising are likely to view it positively, seeing it as a means to promote social cohesion and sportsmanship (Cheong et al., 2019; Kotler & Lee, 2009).
- *Moral Beliefs in Advertising (MBA)*: This concerns the ethics of advertising, including truthfulness and fairness (Kia & Sapi, 2019). For coaches, aligning with the moral values of endorsed brands is crucial, as it affects their credibility and reputation (Ohanian, 1991). Coaches who prioritize ethical standards in advertising are more likely to support campaigns that align with these values (Schlegelmilch & Robertson, 1995). A strong moral belief in advertising can enhance coaches' engagement in marketing activities that reflect honesty and integrity (Murphy & Lacznia, 1981).
- *Legal Beliefs in Advertising (LBA)*: This involves adhering to legal standards and regulations in advertising (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ryu, 2023)1997; Ryu, 2023. For professional sports coaches, understanding the legal aspects of sponsorship and advertising is crucial for maintaining a reputable image (Bruhn & Rohlmann, 2024). Coaches who value legal compliance are likely to have positive attitudes toward transparent and lawful advertising initiatives (Esmaeilpour et al., 2017; Mick, 1992). Ensuring legal adherence in marketing efforts can influence their overall attitude toward advertising participation (Esmaeili & Amani, 2018; Lacznia & Murphy, 2006).
- *Personal Usefulness in Advertising (PUA)*: This pertains to the personal benefits coaches gain from advertising, such as increased visibility or financial gain (Ashcroft, 2010; Naeiji & Abolghasemian, 2017). In professional sports, endorsements and sponsorship can enhance a coach's personal brand and career opportunities (Mortezaee et al., 2022). Coaches who perceive personal benefits in advertising are likely to have a favorable attitude toward it (Belch & Belch, 2018), as financial or reputational gains from advertising can motivate their participation in marketing activities.

Competitive Environment (CE)

From a sports management standpoint, sports facilities ought to utilize the insights gained from customer relationship management capabilities to formulate impactful sports marketing strategies, thereby improving customer relationship performance (Pashaie et al., 2023). An external dynamic system in which a market operates can be described as a CE (Sarlab et al., 2020). Having a business mindset can serve as a launching pad for starting entrepreneurial endeavors (Gül et al., 2024). Furthermore, in today's business environment, human resources are widely recognized as an organization's most crucial asset and a source of competitive advantage (Golmohammadi-Zangabad & Barghi Moghaddam, 2020). The contemporary business landscape presents challenges

stemming from inadequate attention to the CE and the absence of well-defined, organized strategies to address these dynamics. Organizations that can promptly respond to market and customer demands are best poised to secure a sustainable competitive advantage (Rahimnia et al., 2013). Because of the incredibly dynamic nature of today's business environment, it is extremely challenging for businesses to confidently forecast their future (Obonyo, 2020). Businesses must understand their customers' desires and insights in order to refine their commercial and advertising objectives, ultimately enhancing their competitiveness, visibility, and overall performance (Yurtsizoglu & Golmohammadi, 2023). According to Rose et al. (2009), a business that offers something unique and challenging to replicate is likely to outperform its competitors in terms of profitability. In a study conducted by Sarlab et al. (2020), it was found that there exists a positive and significant relationship between customer experience (CE) and marketing strategy. Additionally, Ling et al. (2010) demonstrated in their study that factors influencing customers' attitudes towards advertising, such as credibility, information, enjoyment, and economy, positively influence customers' attitudes toward advertisements.

Strategic Intent (SI)

In the strategic management literature, the concept of Strategic Intention is of great importance for understanding the overall strategy toward which organizations are oriented (Sneddon & Mazzarol, 2002). Strategic planning involves examining both the internal and external environments of organizations. This process identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the organization while also considering environmental threats and opportunities for businesses. Aligned with these assessments, strategic planning selects efficient and innovative strategies that align with the vision and mission of the organization (Keyes, 2016). Strategic intent encompasses a declaration of intention and direction. Mission, vision, and objective statements serve as the primary means through which organizations communicate their intentions. To verify the presence of strategic intention, it is typically necessary to scrutinize these statements. Mission, vision, and objectives are commonly referenced in the literature as means of articulating strategic intent (SI) (Brand, 2011). Organizational vision, organizational mission, and organization objectives are all dimensions of SI (Obonyo, 2020). Achieving SI necessitates a level of strategic action and behavior (Odita & Bello, 2015). Through such activities, management focuses its attention on the essence of profit generation, motivating individuals and employees to pursue these goals and create room for individual development and team contribution. New operational definitions are provided as environmental conditions change. This involves the consistent

use of intentionality to guide resource allocation (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989). In a study by Odita and Bello (2015), they found that SI and its components, including mission, vision, and goals, exhibit a significant and positive correlation with organizational performance. McBryde (2000) noted that sustainable competitive advantage can be archived through SI. Pyun and James (2011) concluded in their study that advertising will be more successful when advertisers have a better understanding of what influences consumer attitudes. Despite numerous studies conducted in the field of sports coaching, encompassing both theoretical and practical perspectives, there is a prevailing notion that coaching in sports still lacks a solid conceptual foundation. Perhaps this is not surprising, as there is still no clear consensus on the nature of coaching itself (Santos et al., 2013). The findings of Gauthier et al. (2005) indicated that attracting and recruiting athletes represents one of the most significant challenges for coaches.

The Role of the Decision-Making Unit (DMU)

In marketing, the Decision-Making Unit (DMU) refers to the group responsible for making purchasing decisions within an organization (Webster, 1972). In sports, the DMU typically includes key figures like coaches, team managers, and athletes, each playing distinct roles. Coaches, due to their technical expertise and first-hand experience, hold significant sway in evaluating products, especially when assessing the utility, reliability, and performance of equipment (Nazarian Madavani & Mokhtari Dinani, 2018). Coaches often serve as gatekeepers in the DMU, filtering information and determining which brands or advertising messages are communicated to athletes (Smith & Taylor, 2004). Their influence in this capacity helps shape athletes' perceptions and purchasing decisions. For this reason, marketers need to engage coaches directly, addressing their needs and preferences to craft effective advertising messages. By understanding the dynamics of the DMU and applying communication theories, sports marketers can create campaigns that resonate with coaches, increasing the likelihood of brand adoption across teams (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Zaremba, 2022). Engaging coaches as both influencers and decision-makers ensures that marketing strategies are more targeted and effective in driving product adoption within sports organizations (Rein et al., 2015).

The Proposed Model for the Current Research

According to Fig. 1 (below), the proposed research model relies on theoretical correlations between Strategic Intent (SI) and Marketing Trends (MT) and At-

titude towards Advertising (ATA) (Economic Beliefs in Advertising (EBA), Social Benefits in Advertising (SBA), Moral Beliefs in Advertising (MBA), Legal Beliefs in Advertising (LBA), and Personal Usefulness in Advertising (PUA)) of sports coaches (SC) to support the

hypotheses. In this research, the conceptual model was designed by exploring the background of the subject and establishing relationships between the main variables. Subsequently, the model was tested and measured by collecting primary data.

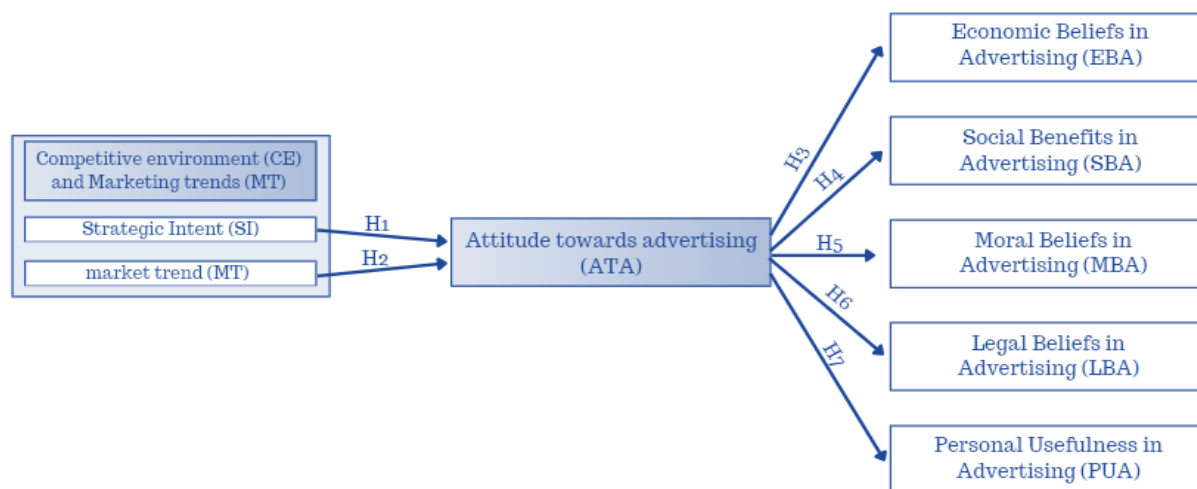


Figure 1. Hypothesized framework

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Participants

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how the competitive environment (CE) and marketing trends (MT) impact the attitudes of sports coaches towards advertising. To achieve this goal, the study proposed and tested a detailed theoretical framework. Utilizing a quantitative and descriptive survey approach, the study employed structural equation modeling (SEM). Participant selection was carried out through convenience sampling among sports coaches in Tabriz, Iran. Convenience sampling, a non-probability technique, was chosen due to its practicality and accessibility within the targeted geographical area. The selection process involved identifying potential participants from various sports teams and organizations in Tabriz, including coaches from different competitive levels such as amateur, semi-professional, and professional sports. Coaches were then contacted through direct outreach, emails, phone calls, and WhatsApp messages, where they were briefed about the study's objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances. Inclusion criteria were set to ensure representation of the target population, requiring coaches to be actively engaged in coaching a sports team in Tabriz and with at least one year of experience. Inclusion criteria were initially set to require coaches to have at least one year of active coaching experience. However, during recruitment, we also included participants who had

completed formal coaching certification and were either undergoing internships or awaiting placement as active coaches. These individuals, while classified as 'without coaching experience' in terms of practical application, were involved in the broader coaching framework through training programs, providing valuable perspectives on the evolving role of advertising in sports. As future coaches, their views offered insight into emerging trends within the sports industry, making their inclusion relevant to the study's exploratory nature. A total of 106 coaches agreed to participate and completed standardized questionnaires assessing their attitudes towards advertising, perceptions of the competitive environment, and awareness of current marketing trends. Data collection spanned from 2023 to 2024 to accommodate coaches' schedules and ensure a comprehensive dataset. When employing SEM, there exist several recommendations regarding sample size. According to Mundfrom et al. (2005), it is generally advised to have a sample size of at least 100 to 400 samples (Ahmad & Halim, 2017) for SEM analysis. Consequently, 106 sports coaches' from Tabriz city were selected for this study. It is important to highlight that in a sample size of 106 participants, factor loadings of 0.50 or higher are generally deemed appropriate (Hair et al., 2006).

Measures

Two standard questionnaires were employed to accomplish the research objectives of this study. The first questionnaire pertained to the questionnaire of CE and marketing

tendencies, encompassing two dimensions (SI and MT) (Bennett, 2005) to investigate the organization's tendency toward CE and marketing activities, which includes 15 questions. Also, the second questionnaire used in this research is a standard questionnaire from Liu (2002). It includes 30 items from categories such as *EBA*, *SBA*, *MBA*, *LBA* and also *PUA* has been used to evaluate the ATAs. The questions in the questionnaires were designed using a five-point Likert scale, where respondents indicated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) for each topic. Five sports management professors checked the validity of the questionnaire and made suggestions to clarify the questions to determine the validity. After consolidating the feedback and comments, the final questionnaire was developed. The study evaluated internal consistency and reliability by computing Cronbach's alpha and analyzing the overall correlation among all components. The findings revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The collected data were screened for completeness and accuracy. Initial descriptive statistics were calculated

to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and provide a basic understanding of the data distribution. SEM-SMART PLS³ software was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among the competitive environment, marketing trends, and attitudes towards advertising. Then a comprehensive theoretical model was developed based on existing literature and the hypotheses of the study. Based on the obtained values, the measuring instrument can be deemed reliable for this study. Citations and references were also managed using EndNote_{TM 20} software.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The survey included demographic questions, and the socio-demographic profile is outlined as follows (Table 1):

According to the results of the demographic table, it can be observed that 70.75% of the participants in this evaluation are men, while 29.25% are women. All participants were over 20 years old, with 24.52% falling in the age range of 20–25 years, 16.04% in the age range

Table 1. Participants

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Participants (n = 106)	
	n	(%)
Gender		
Men	75	70.75
Women	31	29.25
Age		
20-25	26	24.52
25-30	17	16.04
30-35	38	35.85
35-40	17	16.04
≥40	8	7.55
Education		
High school diploma	5	4.72
Associate degree	12	11.32
Bachelor's degree	45	42.45
Master's degree	32	30.19
Doctorate degree	12	11.32
Coaching experience		
Without coaching experience	18	16.98
≤ 5	34	32.07
5-10	25	23.59
10-15	14	13.21
≥15	15	14.15

of 25–30 years, 35.85% in the age range of 30–35 years, 16.04% between 35 and 40 years old, and 7.55% over 40 years old. The majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree, with 4.72% holding a high school diploma, 11.32% an associate's degree, 42.45% a bachelor's degree, 30.19% a master's degree, and 11.32% a doctorate. Regarding coaching experience, 16.98% held coaching degrees without practical experience, 32.07% had less than 5 years of experience, 23.59% had between 10 and 15 years of experience, and 14.15% had more than 15 years of coaching experience.

Investigating the Combined Validity of Each Structure

The amount of variance explained can be assessed by understanding the percentage of predicted change for the variables used, where the average variance extracted (AVE) should ideally exceed 0.5. AVE indicates how well a structure correlates with its indicators; a stronger correlation signifies a better fit. In this research, the AVE values for all

structures surpass 0.50. Composite reliability or Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.60 and 0.70 are considered suitable for exploratory research, whereas a value exceeding 0.70 is required for advanced studies (Hair et al., 2019). In this research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, and the obtained values for the questionnaire constructs exceeded 0.70. The structural model test evaluates research hypotheses by utilizing the explained variance (R Square). Higher R Square values associated with the endogenous constructs of the model indicate a better fit. According to the obtained results for R Square, it is evident that the endogenous structures of the model exceed the value of CR, indicating a favorable fit of the model. The evaluation of model quality structure is measured by Communality. Additionally, the Redundancy item index assesses the quality of the structural model for endogenous structures, taking into account the type of measurement model. Positive numbers signify the quality of the structural model.

Table 2. The combined validity of each construct

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha	Communality	Redundancy
ATA	0.684	0.866	0.914	0.769	0.360	0.588
PUA	0.754	0.939	0.732	0.918	0.596	0.444
MBA	0.848	0.904	0.746	0.941	0.675	0.422
EBA	0.644	0.935	0.844	0.920	0.519	0.315
SBA	0.651	0.937	0.840	0.922	0.523	0.322
LBA	0.669	0.910	0.771	0.877	0.491	0.222
SI	0.654	0.914		0.894	0.495	
MT	0.624	0.936		0.922	0.510	

The results from Table 2 indicate that all constructs of the model exhibit acceptable composite validity, signifying the fulfillment of the reliability condition of the model. Additionally, Cronbach's reliability coefficient for all variables in this study surpasses the minimum threshold of 0.80.

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

The standardized root mean residual (SRMR), normalized fit index (NFI), squared Euclidean distance (d_{ULS}), and geodesic distance (d_G) are all included in the indicator statistics that SmartPLS of model fit provides. The difference between the model's actual and expected corre-

lations is known as the SRMR and is used as an absolute measure of the matching criteria. If the SRMR value is less than 0.10 or 0.08, it is considered that the model has a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). To prevent model specification errors, SRMR is employed as a goodness-of-fit measure (Henseler et al., 2014). The normed Fit Index (NFI) clears the complexity between the observed model and the estimated model (Sahoo, 2019). A good model fit is indicated by NFI values near 1.0 and SRMR values near 0 (Birkie & Trucco, 2020). Moreover, the d_{ULS} and d_G values show that a strong research framework should have a significance higher than 0.05 (since it uses a 95% significance level) (AM et al., 2022).

Table 3. Overall model fitting results

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.042	0.066
d_ULS	3.032	7.367
d_G	1.593	2.005
NFI	0.819	0.803

Table 3 presents the structural model that meets the specified fit criteria. These indicators, namely SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, and NFI, are deemed appropriate for all structural aspects.

Analysis of Structural Model

After examining the measurement models, it is time to evaluate the structural model. At this stage, the investigator should verify the algebraic sign, size, and significance level of the coefficients. The size of the path coefficient indicates the strength of the association between two latent variables (Fig 2). The results obtained for the path coefficients and their significance levels (t-statistics) are displayed in Figures 2 and 3. As observed, both the path coefficients and t-statistics are significant.

In SEM analysis, if the beta coefficient (β) exceeds 0.60, it suggests a strong relationship between the two variables. If it falls between 0.30 and 0.60, there is a moderate

correlation, and if it is less than 0.30, there is a weak correlation. Hence, the β values in the research model range between 0.50 and 0.79. As evident, the path coefficients in this research exceed both 0.30 and 0.60, indicating moderate to strong relationships between the research constructs (Fig 2).

In PLS software, the “t” values indicate the significance of the effects of variables on one another. A “t-value” signifies the significance of the effects of structures. If the “t” value exceeds 1.96, it indicates a positive and significant effect. If it is less than -1.96, there is a negative effect, and if it falls between +1.96 and -1.96, there is no significant effect. In structural equations using “PLS” software, the “t” value serves as the primary criterion for confirming or rejecting hypotheses. Additionally, based on a significance level of 0.001, the “t” value must exceed 2.58, as parameters below this value are not considered statistically significant.

According to the results obtained from Fig. 3 and Table 4, the statistical value exceeds 2.58. Therefore, all hypotheses are deemed significant at the 95% confidence level.

Taking into account the significance of the relationships between the variables in the research hypotheses, we can discuss the final model of the research. Table 4 and Fig. 4 present the test results from the SEM study, including causal pathways regression coefficients and indices, along with additional details.

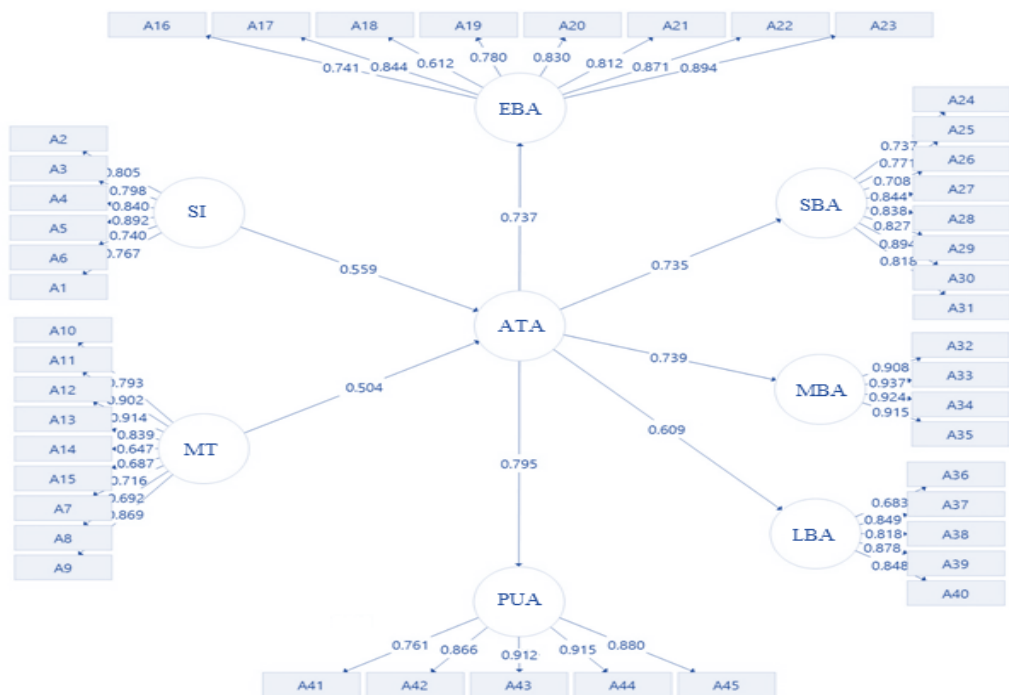


Figure 2. Results of model path coefficients

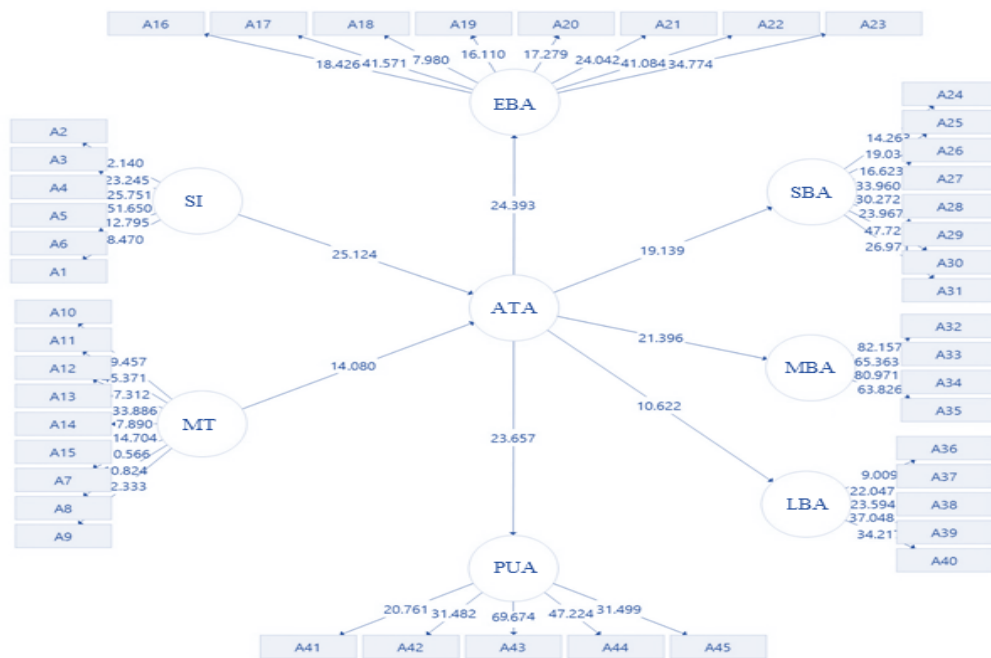


Figure 3. Results modified t-test

Table 4. Direct path coefficient values (β) and t-statistic of the main hypotheses with the paths of the research model

	Path	B	t-value	Sig	Result
1	SI ----> ATA	0.55	25.12	0.001	Confirmed
2	MT ----> ATA	0.50	14.07	0.001	Confirmed
3	ATA ----> EBA	0.73	24.39	0.001	Confirmed
4	ATA ----> SBA	0.73	19.13	0.001	Confirmed
5	ATA ----> MBA	0.73	9.70	0.001	Confirmed
6	ATA ----> LBA	0.60	19.62	0.001	Confirmed
7	ATA ----> PUA	0.79	23.65	0.001	Confirmed

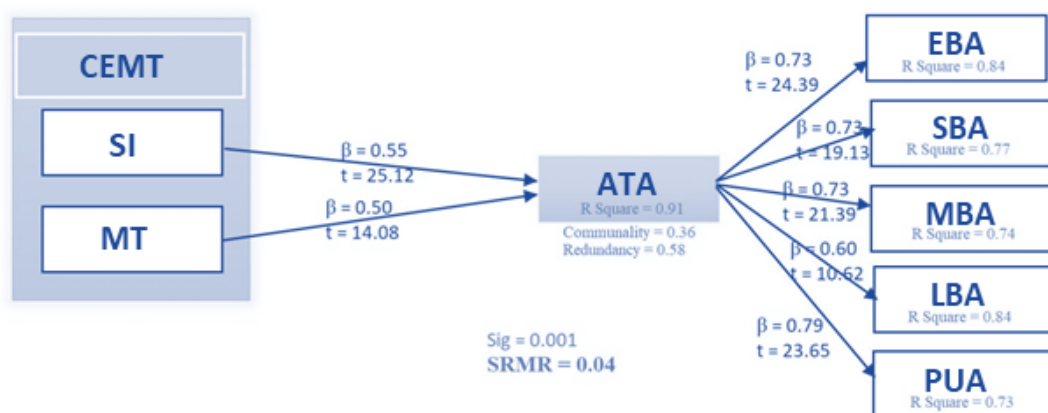


Figure 4. The final model of the research

The analysis of the survey results shows that all five constructs—EBA, SBA, MBA, LBA, and PUA—are significant indicators of coaches' ATA. Coaches who hold strong economic and social beliefs about the positive role of advertising were more likely to view marketing efforts favorably. Similarly, those who perceived personal usefulness or had strong moral and legal beliefs regarding advertising also demonstrated positive attitudes. This suggests that coaches' involvement in advertising activities is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, ethical, and legal considerations, alongside the personal benefits they derive.

Discussion

This study provides critical insights into the relationship between the competitive environments (CE), marketing trends (MT), and sports coaches' (SC) attitudes toward advertising (ATA). By employing quantitative survey methodology and structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, the research highlights key factors influencing coaches' perceptions of advertising within the sports industry.

The results reveal a significant association between the competitive environment (CE) and coaches' attitudes, emphasizing the role of external market forces in shaping these perceptions. This finding aligns with existing literature on the influence of competitive pressures on organizational behavior and decision-making (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Sarlab et al., 2020). As competition intensifies, coaches increasingly recognize advertising as a crucial tool for enhancing team visibility, securing sponsorship, and ensuring financial stability. The study broadens the conventional understanding of coaches' roles, positioning them not only as athletic leaders but also as brand influencers, thus underscoring the commercialization of sports. Coaches in competitive markets are adopting more marketing-oriented roles, engaging in strategies that align with broader commercial goals, a trend supported by strategic management theories (Odita & Bello, 2015). Coaches in more competitive environments may adopt a more positive attitude toward advertising because they recognize its potential to provide a competitive edge in securing sponsorship, engaging fans, and enhancing their team's public image. This aligns with findings from previous studies that show the influence of competitive forces on organizational strategies, particularly in high-stakes industries like sports (Shank & Lyberger, 2014).

In line with previous research, this study confirms that coaches' attitudes are shaped by exposure to competitive pressures and evolving marketing trends (Kordlu et al., 2020; Yoosefy et al., 2020). The strong link between CE and ATA suggests that, in competitive markets, coaches view advertising as essential for gaining a competitive edge, attracting sponsorship, and achieving financial stability. Additionally, coaches who stay up-to-date with marketing trends, especially digital platforms and person-

alized advertising, are better positioned to engage fans and connect with broader audiences. This reflects a positive correlation between MT and ATA, highlighting the responsiveness of coaches to both competitive pressures and current marketing strategies. This aligns with strategic management theories emphasizing the need for organizations to adapt to external pressures (Shank & Lyberger, 2014).

Moreover, the study provides evidence that economic, social, moral, legal, and personal utility beliefs (EBA, SBA, MBA, LBA, and PUA) significantly influence coaches' ATA, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of advertising perception in the sports industry. From an economic perspective, the financial considerations underpinning sponsorship and advertising are vital for sports commercialization. Effective advertising attracts sponsorship, which is key to team viability and competitive advantage (Ferrier et al., 2013; Mokhlesi Hoz Sorkhi et al., 2024). Social beliefs reinforce the role of advertising in fostering community engagement and enhancing team visibility. This aligns with the growing emphasis in sports on fan engagement and community-building as essential for long-term success (Khodadad Huosseini et al., 2015). Moral beliefs add complexity, as ethical concerns can temper coaches' views on advertising (Pfleegor, 2015; Wagner, 2013). Legal beliefs also play a crucial role, as regulations on advertising and sponsorship, particularly in competitive markets, impact coaches' attitudes. Adherence to legal frameworks, such as those governing ambush marketing (e.g. the 2010 FIFA World Cup), ensures the alignment of advertising with organizational goals and compliance with regulations, shaping coaches' overall perceptions (Dhurup, 2010; Szesny, 2021). Unexpectedly, personal utility attitudes (PUA) emerged as a stronger influence on coaches' ATA than anticipated. Coaches who perceive personal or professional benefits, such as career advancement or increased recognition, are more likely to embrace advertising. This highlights the potential for personal considerations to outweigh organizational priorities, suggesting an area for further research (Mortezaee et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping coaches' ATA. Advertising in sports is not merely a promotional tool but is intertwined with the economic, social, moral, legal, and personal dimensions that coaches navigate. Future research should further explore the relative weight of these factors in different sports contexts and examine how shifts in the commercial landscape may continue to influence coaches' attitudes.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged that may affect the generalizability and scope of the findings. First, the

sample size of 106 sports coaches, while sufficient for exploratory analysis, restricts the study's ability to make broad generalizations across diverse sports contexts. Future research should consider expanding the sample size and incorporating coaches from a wider range of sports, competitive levels, and geographic regions to increase the representativeness and external validity of the findings.

Second, the study is geographically confined to Tabriz, Iran, which limits the cross-cultural applicability of the results. Coaches in different regions may be influenced by varying competitive environments, cultural norms, and economic conditions that shape their attitudes toward advertising. Future research should adopt a cross-cultural or comparative approach to explore how these variables differ in other countries or sports ecosystems, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the global sports industry.

Third, the reliance on a quantitative, survey-based methodology, while effective for statistical analysis, does not capture the nuanced, subjective perspectives of coaches. Attitudes toward advertising are shaped by complex factors that may not be fully expressed through structured surveys. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide richer insights into the decision-making processes and personal beliefs driving coaches' advertising engagement. A mixed-methods approach would offer a more holistic view of coaches' attitudes, complementing quantitative findings with qualitative depth.

Furthermore, this study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to observe how coaches' attitudes toward advertising evolve over time, particularly as marketing trends and competitive dynamics shift in the rapidly evolving sports landscape. Longitudinal research that tracks these attitudes over time would provide more dynamic insights into how external factors, such as digitalization or economic fluctuations, influence coaches' advertising perceptions and behaviors.

Finally, while this study focused on competitive environments (CE) and marketing trends (MT) as predictors of attitudes toward advertising (ATA), future research could explore additional variables, such as technological innovations, fan engagement metrics, and athlete-coach dynamics, to provide a more comprehensive model of how sports marketing influences decision-makers. Exploring the impact of emerging platforms, like social media and e-sports, on coaches' advertising attitudes could offer new directions for sports marketing research.

Conclusion

This study makes significant contributions to the field of sports marketing by unveiling the intricate dynamics

between competitive environments (CE), marketing trends (MT), and sports coaches' attitudes towards advertising (ATA). Our findings reveal that CE has a profound impact on coaches' strategic engagement with advertising, highlighting the importance of marketing as a competitive tool in increasingly commercialized sports sectors. Coaches are not only athletic leaders but also key influencers who mediate between brands and athletes, enhancing brand visibility and market reach.

Moreover, the results emphasize the relevance of adapting to contemporary marketing trends such as personalized and digital advertising. As marketing practices evolve, coaches' ability to integrate these trends into their team strategies becomes paramount, both for personal brand development and organizational growth. These insights underscore the dual role of coaches as both brand influencers and strategic marketers, furthering the discourse on their evolving responsibilities within the sports industry.

This study provides a novel perspective on how external pressures and internal beliefs (economic, social, moral, legal, and personal utility), and emerging trends shape coaches' attitudes, offering valuable guidelines for sports marketers aiming to optimize their advertising strategies. By providing these new insights, the study advances both theoretical and practical understanding, paving the way for more targeted and effective marketing strategies in the sports industry.

Competing Interests

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT and Grammarly in order to improve language and readability of certain parts of the article. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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