

Emotional Branding and Consumer Loyalty:
A Study of Sportswear Preferences Among Armenian Youth

by

Anna Maria Diraohansian

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Abstract

This capstone aims to understand the role of emotional branding in the decision-making process when shopping for sports brands specifically. The paper will analyze the tie between consumers' emotional attachments to brands, how brands position themselves and create brand relationships that lead to consumer behaviors and what role brand personalities play in people's lives. Besides analyzing marketing strategies and emotional attachments, it will also focus on specific sports brand examples, such as brand analysis and how they tie with the dimensions of brand personality. It will then uncover the key factors that contribute to brand loyalty among Armenian youth, specifically people aged between 18-30 and shed light on what influences their decision, loyalty and viewpoints towards their preferred sports brands.

Keywords: Emotional branding, brand personality, brand relationships, brand loyalty, consumer behavior, emotional attachment, brand love, emotional marketing and neuromarketing

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Why is it that no matter how many choices we have for buying a pair of sneakers, we still go to the website or the local store of our favorite one, the one brand we have owned for years? It is just as if there is no cheating on some brands. This is because some brands somehow hold special places in our lives. These are the brands we trust, recommend to friends, and, most importantly, are loyal to for years running. When it comes to sportswear, the most famous brands like Nike and Adidas, and so on get the spotlight. But what drives such devotion towards them? And usually, we choose one of these brands as an archetype, making it a part of our style, an element that sets us apart from other people's styles. These can change through the span of our lives, depending on how old we are, what stage of life we are in, our interests and many other factors that influence our decisions. The reason, in most cases, has more to do with the spiritual rather than a functional rationale - emotional branding.

Emotional branding appeals to the heart, objectives, and self-image of consumers and what it does is it elevates products from mere commodities into symbols of identity and affiliation. For any other companies selling athletic apparel or gear, sports brands have particularly mastered this art. They speak to a way of living, a principle, and, in most instances, very personal empowerment or identity. For example, Nike's slogan "Just Do It" does not just sell its products; it stirs the mind into being tough and doing more. In like manner, Adidas ads mainly refer to real situations and communities, which evoke feelings in consumers on a human level.

Pivotal to emotional branding is the ability to create a bond between the brand and its consumers, a bond that bypasses rational decision-making. People do not just buy a pair of running shoes for durability or price; they do, but they also invest in values, stories, and emotional narratives that the brand has carefully cultivated. This is why many buyers, even when offered cheaper or more practical options, would prefer to stick with brands that correspond to their aspirations or reflect their identities. Indeed, research has shown that this is not a happy accident but the result of a conscious effort to create passion, affection, and connection among consumers. So, in the highly competitive sports industry, emotional branding is one of the most distinguishing elements for companies in relation to their competitors. Since there are many players in the market offering similar products, the capability of brands to connect with consumers on an emotional level has become a deciding factor that would ensure long-term loyalty. Sports brands do that through inspirational storytelling, celebrity endorsers, and cause-driven programs. The variety is endless.

For many consumers, wearing a Nike or Adidas logo is not about clothes per se; it is about broadcasting some aspect of their identity. This capstone project will discuss how emotional branding serves as one of the drivers of consumer loyalty for sports brands. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explain how brands like Nike and Adidas, while global fashion companies, were able to create effective emotional appeals for strong brand attachment. This study also provides a closer look at such emotional bonds and their effects on consumer behavior, from making purchasing decisions to remaining loyal to a certain brand in the long run, and valuable insights into one of modern marketing's most powerful tools.

Literature review

In today's over-saturated retail market, brands need to do more than supply good-quality products; they need to make people feel something special and be a part of the community. Since this research paper is concentrated on brands and people's connections with them, first, it's important to dive deep into how brands position themselves in their industries. To illustrate the first basic knowledge, Aaker defines the "Dimensions of Brand Personality" as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand." He mentions that even though brands and humans can have similar conceptualizations in their personalities, they still differ in how they are formed, and those differences are what actually shape consumer preferences. This is where emotional branding saves the day and becomes the centerpiece of our decision-making when it comes to buying something. To understand the role it plays in decision-making, it is important to understand how it functions first and have a definition of it. Thus, emotional branding is the means of creating a bond that makes a product significant in some way to the consumers' lives (Malär et al., 2011).

Emotional attachment, according to Thomson and MacInnis's "The Ties That Bind: Measuring the Strength of Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands" (2005), makes people feel emotions like affection, passion and connection." And we can conclude that Nike and Adidas embrace these parts very differently. Aaker identifies five dimensions of brand personality, which are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, calling them the "big five". She mentions that when a brand's personality matches the human one, it influences the decision of the person. From Aaker's characteristics, for instance, we can conclude that Nike has been an exciting and rugged brand by belief, as reflected in its bold and aspirational taglines (Wu, 2022). Additionally, attachment is a type of emotion that tightens the bond between a person and an object, so when the feeling of connection, affection and love is stronger, the attachment will be stronger (Thomson & MacInnis, 2005).

Another term that plays a key role in understanding the research of this paper is the concept of "Brand Love," by Batra et al. (2012), which defines brand love as a deep emotional attachment characterized by passion, commitment, and positive evaluations. Both Nike and Adidas foster brand love through their emotional branding strategies, but their approaches to doing so differ. Nike's focus on excitement and individualism appeals to consumers' aspirational desires and creates passionate loyalty. On the contrary, Adidas's emphasis on sincerity and community fosters a different kind of loyalty rooted in shared values and collective identity. Thomson and MacInnis (2005) and Malär et al. (2011) add to these views by presenting the degree of emotional attachment and how well identities align according to the reasons behind brand love. Thomson and MacInnis, for example, mention that even though people interact with multiple brands on a regular basis and have thousands of product choices, they still develop special connections with only a small number of brands. Nike's campaigns inspire many people, including their watchers, loyal customers, and people who see the ads for the first time. They show the ideal self of a person, someone who is ready to achieve personal excellence. Adidas, on the other hand, reflects an actual self with authenticity and inclusivity. The difference between the ideal and actual self, thus, is that the ideal self is the version one strives to become while the actual self is who they believe they truly are. This synthesis suggests that though both brands have achieved what Batra called "brand love," and they targeted different aspects of the consumer's psyche in doing so: Nike through aspiration and Adidas through authenticity.

To identify these personalities of brands, whether they focus on individualism or collectivism, for instance, a study called "Emotional brand attachment and brand personality: The relative importance of the actual and the ideal self" by Malär et al. explains the connections with brand attachments and the actual and ideal self. The main reason for investigating these is the strong emotional connections developed towards brands. Malär et

al. highlight how purchasing products from certain companies brings people closer to the vision they have for their ideal selves. Kammerer et al. (2021) extend the emotional attachment idea into congruence between brand personality and the consumer's actual and ideal self and explain that Adidas comes in tune with a consumer who wishes to share values and community, while Nike focuses on individualism. Additionally, Wu, in “The Brand Analysis of Nike Based on its Emotional Branding and Marketing Strategies,” highlights how Nike’s campaigns evoke resilience and ambition and appeal to consumers’ drive for personal achievement (Wu, 2022). By aligning its personality with consumers’ aspirations, Nike deepens emotional attachment. It is considered to be one of the most “socially conscious” brands because of its accessibility and innovative and fashionable designs (Wu, 2022). On the other hand, in the paper “Emotional Branding—Identifying the Difference Between Nike and Adidas,” Kammerer et al. (2021) recognize the serious attention paid by Adidas to collective experiences through campaigns that emphasize involvement in communities and the expression of authenticity.

To add to the above idea of the actual and ideal self, we should mention that all the brands create some sort of feeling, but the differences between them are the fundamental differences in brand identity. Belk's theory of the extended self, “Possessions and the Extended Self,” back in 1988, describes how consumers incorporate brands into their self-concepts (Belk, 1988). It explains how a brand can be positioned around empowerment and self-improvement and that is how it relates to people who strive to be great. Adding to this, Wu gives an example of one of the campaigns for Nike’s “Just Do It” as a symbol of ambition (Wu, 2022). These instances explain the statement that matching a brand’s personality with the consumer’s self is one way to achieve strong brand attachment and create emotional cues (Malär et al., 2011).

A final key aspect to be discussed is celebrity endorsements, which is a marketing strategy that helps create stronger emotional connections. This is usually done by personifying brand values through celebrities. In the article “ Sport Brands: brand relationships and consumer Behavior,” Kunkel and Biscaia point out that there are actually deep psychological connections between fans and sports entities like teams, leagues, and athletes (2020). Nike's interactions with famous athletes such as Michael Jordan and LeBron James typify its spirit of excellence and steadfastness. According to Thomson and MacInnis, a celebrity endorser is someone who enhances emotional attachment by manifesting brand characteristics (Thomson & MacInnis, 2005). Wu continues this idea and mentions that Nike uses an endorsement strategy, which helps them to relate to consumers who look up to athletes and share their values with them (Wu, 2022). It should also be mentioned that over the years, Nike has become more vocal in addressing social issues as well. For instance, an ad featuring Colin Kaepernick focuses on courage and social justice. While it came with some risks and was controversial for some, this move helped position Nike once again as a bold and fearless brand that is not afraid to take a stand and fight for what it believes in. So, by aligning itself with consumers who have similar values, Nike builds an even deeper sense of loyalty with its customers and viewers as well. Similarly, Adidas is also more community-oriented in choosing ambassadors for its brand. It continues to build the original idea of team players and reflects themes of authenticity and inclusivity in doing so. Kammerer brings the example of the celebrity ad by Adidas, including Lionel Messi, as an example of its emphasis on humility and hard work (Kammerer et al., 2021). Adidas strengthens its sincerity, attracts customers through such collaborations, and creates shared values over the glory of individual stars. Kammerer talks about Adidas's collaborations with influential local cultural forces and sports communities and refers to them as inclusive and authentic. The brand's storytelling reflects its commitment to collective progress and shared

values and resonates with socially oriented consumers. In another case, Adidas promotes itself as a brand that supports the idea of having collective experiences in a creative manner. These types of ideas refer to consumers who genuinely value the concept of connectedness and authenticity, and they form loyalty through shared values. So, in the end, both brands learn how to resonate with their customers or, better said, make their customers feel like they are part of the close circle of the brand and its representative athletes.

From these papers, we can conclude that these findings have wider ramifications for marketers as well: emotional branding is not a fit-for-all approach; it must be in line with the identity of the brand and its target audience. Other brands in the field can learn some lessons from the examples of Nike and Adidas, and they can change their strategies to resonate with their consumers' values, identities, and aspirations. This is why emotional branding has everything to do with making your customers feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves and closer to their ideal selves. This emotional bonding in an overcrowded marketplace separates sports brands from each other and makes them not just successful businesses but critical cultural symbols in the lives of millions.

Research questions

The main themes that I focus on in this paper are emotional branding and its role in the decision-making process, specifically for sports brands. The research question goes as follows: *“What influences people to be drawn to specific sports brands and what are some key factors that contribute to brand loyalty among Armenian youth?”*

Furthermore, the research examines the emotional connections the Armenian youth have with their favorite sports brands and what factors play a key role in their being drawn to those brands and staying loyal to them. To understand the core of the research question and explain how I came to it, this paper will help understand the reasons why people become so

emotionally connected with specific brands. I will do this first by analyzing emotional brand attachment at its core, decoding what a brand personality and brand love are and how perceptions are shaped due to them.

An essential aspect I will be looking at is the survey results to understand patterns of psychological and marketing strategies that make certain brands more appealing to the Armenian audience and how elements such as emotion, cultural identity, and social influence their consumer decisions. Examples of marketing techniques include sports brands using storytelling strategies, empowering messages, and identifying with consumers' identities.

These areas will be explored more deeply as part of the research to understand how sports brands forge emotional and practical connections with their consumers, create a strong attachment and consumer behaviors, and what are the main factors that influence the Armenian youth.

Methodology

The research consists of two parts and combines both qualitative and quantitative research to explore how emotional branding influences consumer loyalty regarding sports brands. I have also included insights from a recent conference I attended in Prague, Czech Republic, on the topic “Storytelling meets science: Transform your Marketing.”

The first main part of the research examines existing academic studies, such as secondary sources. They also include expert analyses on emotional branding and consumer loyalty and specific insights on sportswear brands like Nike and Adidas. These sources provide a foundation for understanding the theory behind emotional branding, uncovering their marketing strategies and comparing them.

The survey is constructed to help get quantitative responses from a group of consumers of sports brands in terms of their emotional attachment to sports brands. The

questions are well-thought-out to make sure the responses cover the aspects of brand attachment and emotional resonance and what effects brand storytelling or endorsements can have. The cross-section would entail all age groups, interests, and profiles for consumers to understand the impact of emotional branding on various demographics. Responses towards these will quantify the role of an emotional connection in the loyalty aspects of a brand. The main target will be the Armenian youth, specifically people aged between 18 and 30 and the survey will follow the patterns of the participants based on their favorite sports brands.

Through the quantitative data that will be gathered from the survey, I will create a statistical graph and identify patterns through which I will measure the effectiveness of emotional branding variables and consumer loyalty. These will be cross-referenced to qualitative findings as a way of very practically and comprehensively bringing out how emotional branding strategies foster brand loyalty. This approach allows the study to take into account the holistic view of emotional appeals that sports brands make and hence, their effectiveness in building lasting consumer relationships.

To ensure reliable results, the study follows key sampling principles. The estimated population for this study is 338,177 Armenian consumers (Armstat, 2025). To achieve statistically significant results, the survey uses a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 6%. The assumed population proportion is 50% to ensure a balanced representation of different consumer behaviors. These measures help ensure the sample is representative of the broader market, making the findings applicable to a larger audience.

Before distributing the survey through the different channels I had on my hands, I decided to conduct a pilot test with five participants to ensure the questions were clear, relevant, and easy to answer. I agreed with them beforehand, sent the survey for piloting, and, using both their positive and negative feedback, altered the survey accordingly. I made sure

there were no errors so that the survey was performed at its full effectiveness and for meaningful data.

As mentioned, the survey focuses on Armenian consumers of sports brands, particularly looking at their purchasing decisions, brand preferences, and emotional attachments. It was carefully designed to capture key aspects of emotional branding with questions that help understand the habits of people and how they come to be loyal to their favorite brand.

The survey begins with a demographic question, asking about the age, gender, and location of the person. I separated them into three age gaps, which will help me narrow down the results and follow patterns for smaller sections of age groups.

Even though my target is people aged between 18 to 30, I included a question option for 18-22, which will cover university undergraduate students, 22-24, which will cover mostly master's degree students and 25-30, which will cover graduated individuals already in the working market and hopefully earning their own money.

A question about where a person lives follows with the options, the capital city, Yerevan, living in another city and living in a rural area. This question will help me identify the difference between a person's living city and conditions on their purchasing habits and their viewpoints on a global level, if there are any.

The next question is about the factors that influence people's decision to purchase a product the most and here they have an option to select as many answers as are applicable. Options included brand reputation, price, discounts and promotions, celebrity endorsements, recommendations from friends/family, online reviews/product quality, emotional connection to the brand (e.g., brand story, values). This question will be the start of an important section of my research and will help me identify the most important factors among Armenian youth. Price and discounts are usually known to drive short-term purchases, whereas a strong

emotional bond can lead to long-term brand loyalty. This question will also help determine whether Armenian youth make buying decisions based on rational factors or emotional connections.

Then, the survey moves to channels through which people receive their advertisements and by which they are mostly influenced. Some of the options are TV advertisements, social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), Google/YouTube ads, billboards and influencer marketing. This question matters because, in the rising digital platforms and the marketing strategies that come with it, it is not always evident which option holds still and which one has completely lost its value in the Armenian context. Furthermore, understanding which channels are most persuasive helps identify how sports brands tailor their marketing strategies effectively.

The following two questions are specifically about a person's favorite sports brand and how often they purchase from it. This will help examine brand dominance and consumer preferences among people aged 18 to 30 in Armenia. The cultural aspect is also quite prominent in this section because people in America, especially in the case of sports brands, value word of mouth and mirroring effects and this question will understand such values as well. The follow-up question on purchase frequency will uncover the depth of brand loyalty. Whether consumers buy occasionally or frequently, this data will help differentiate between casual buyers and dedicated customers.

Another question is a statement that will help explore how psychological triggers drive purchases. People tend to have deep connections with brands based on past experiences and through this statement, "I usually buy sports products/clothing due to emotional reasons like nostalgia, excitement, or fear of missing out", we will get a percentage of the people in each category. A similar question follows about which marketing message stands out to the person more, so we can identify how emotional branding, particularly through storytelling,

creates a sense of belonging and trust, making consumers feel personally connected to a brand.

With the rising popularity of influencers and influencer marketing in Armenia, the next question is specifically about how likely a person is to purchase something when a well-known influencer promotes it. Influencers also shape media trends in Armenia, so brands started extensively investing in them. However, not all consumers are equally influenced: some may be more skeptical of paid promotions, while others rely on influencers for product recommendations. This question will help determine the level of trust Armenian youth place in influencer endorsements.

The next question is simple, “what aspect of a sports brand makes it stand out?”. Brands are unique in design and aesthetics, association with famous athletes or influencers, community engagement and sustainability efforts, performance and innovation in products and emotional connection through advertising. This is also a culture-specific question because most consumers may be drawn to brands that align with their identity and values and the ones they resonate with.

Moving to a more dramatic aspect, this question is about things that would make people switch from their favorite sports brand to another. Some of the options include a better-quality product from another brand, lower prices from competitors, loss of emotional connection with the brand and a negative experience with the brand. If a brand no longer resonates with consumers on a personal level, they may seek alternatives that provide a stronger sense of identity and belonging.

The following two questions examine brand values and alignment, asking about how important a sports brand’s alignment with their personal values is in their purchasing decisions and if their favorite brand changed their core values, would they still support it. Some consumers prioritize sustainability, inclusivity, or ethical labor practices, while others

focus on performance and affordability. Others who strongly identify with a brand's mission may feel betrayed by a shift in values, which can lead to decreased loyalty.

The point of the next question is to understand how much of a role pricing plays in emotional loyalty and rational decision-making. The statement asks if a person's favorite brand started significantly increasing prices without improving quality, would they still buy from them. This will help us understand the overall picture in Armenia and understand the scope of pricing.

Price may be one important aspect, but what a significant number of people have started valuing these days are ethics and overall ethical labor. The next question asks if a person's favorite brand was involved in a major controversy, such as discrimination or unethical labor practices, would it affect their loyalty? Globally, this is a major issue and many companies have been affected by news going viral about their brands. It is much easier to spread this type of information through social platforms, but it is as easy to forget it too. So, it is important for brands to understand consumer reactions to controversy to navigate challenges while maintaining trust.

The penultimate question examines a sudden design and concept change of companies and how they may affect people's perceptions. It will try to find out the type of role a logo or aesthetic change can play in people's perceptions of their favorite brands.

The final question is an open-ended question asking to describe a favorite spot brand in one word or phrase. This question captures the emotional essence of the brand in consumers' minds, reflecting its reputation, identity, and impact. This question will help us understand which brands have done a better job of reflecting their personalities.

In addition to the primary survey and literature review, this research also includes a comparative case study using a PESTLE analysis of Nike. This case study was selected to deepen the understanding of how external environmental factors shape branding strategies

and emotional connections on a global scale. By analyzing Nike's political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal environment, the study provides a broader context for interpreting the Armenian survey results. It helps to highlight how global brands manage external challenges while building emotional loyalty and how these strategies translate into smaller, developing markets like Armenia. Including this case study strengthens the research by linking individual consumer behavior patterns to wider strategic and market influences, offering a more complete view of how emotional branding operates both globally and locally.

Research Findings and Analysis

Consumer behavior when purchasing a sports product is influenced by various psychological and economic factors. Emotional triggers play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions, as consumers often connect with brands that address their personal aspirations, insecurities, and self-perceptions. Authenticity and relatability are key drivers of trust, with consumers gravitating toward brands that present genuine, diverse representations rather than idealized portrayals. Social proof further reinforces purchasing decisions, as peer recommendations and user testimonials validate brand credibility. Additionally, when consumers see familiar and relatable imagery, their brains mirror the emotions depicted, fostering a stronger sense of connection and belonging. This study analyzes survey responses from 189 participants to determine the key motivators and deterrents affecting their purchasing decisions. By examining purchasing motivations, advertising effectiveness, brand loyalty, and ethical considerations, this research provides an in-depth look at consumer preferences in the sportswear industry.

Demographics

The survey included participants aged 18-30, with a majority (42.2%) in the 18-22 age group, followed by (33%) in the 25-30 age group and (24.8%) in the 22-24 age group. Most respondents (87.2%) were female, and the rest (12.8%) were male. An overwhelming 89% resided in Yerevan and leaving a tiny percentage for other cities and rural areas. This demographic distribution suggests that urban-based young adults, particularly women, have answered the survey and were the dominant consumers in the sportswear market.

Understanding the preferences of this demographic is crucial for brands seeking to establish and maintain customer loyalty.

Factors Influencing Purchasing Decisions

Survey results indicate that price (77.1%) and brand reputation (69.7%) are the most significant determinants in purchasing decisions. Online reviews and product quality also play a key role, with a (67.9%) and recommendations from friends and family (57.8%) taking part as well. Surprisingly, celebrity endorsements (10.1%) had minimal influence, which suggests that traditional influencer marketing may be less effective for this demographic compared to peer recommendations and perceived quality. These findings highlight that consumers claim to prioritize practical considerations over aspirational ones. Thus, a brand's credibility, affordability, and peer endorsements shape purchasing decisions more than emotional connections. This is consistent with previous research indicating that rational decision-making plays a predominant role in consumer behavior, especially in product categories where quality and price vary significantly across brands.

Advertising Impact

Modern advertising has shaped society in many ways and it is no surprise that for the youth today, many traditional advertising channels simply do not make sense. Posters,

billboards, and social media ads all step into people's personal space and tell them what they should buy and who they should be. Since advertising plays a traditional role in helping businesses reach prospective customers, the same goes for sports brands. Moreover, with the technologically driven lives, the distance between producer and consumer has grown a lot smaller. With the numerous media platforms and channels available to us, a simple online search takes us to providers able to satisfy our wants and needs. So, the dilemma comes from not knowing which product to choose out of the many available to us and this is when advertising comes in.

The two most common forms of advertising arousal have been found to be the qualities of the product and the emotional arousal and response from the audience. The answer to the question of why people choose a product from one brand over another is that they develop an affinity with a particular brand. It could be something as small as an aesthetically pleasing logo design or something that resonates with you on a deeper level. In fact, the most successful sports ad campaigns hardly say anything about the product itself but instead create a lucid atmosphere that evokes a strong emotion from its target consumer. These are usually the types of ads that are remembered, talked about during classes and conferences and of course, influence purchasing decisions.

Regarding advertising methods, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok emerged as the most influential advertising channels (87.2%), overshadowing TV advertisements (5.5%) and Google/YouTube ads (9.2%). Influencer marketing remains a strong force (50.5%), indicating that while direct celebrity endorsements may not be compelling, micro-influencers and content creators play a crucial role in shaping purchasing behavior. This trend aligns with shifts in modern digital marketing, where peer influencers and user-generated content often have greater credibility than traditional advertising. The personal connection consumers feel with influencers contributes to trust, making their

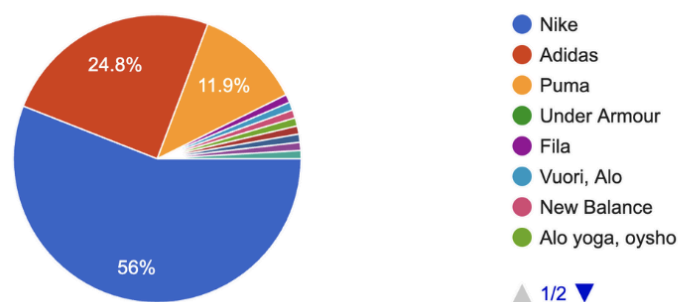
endorsements more effective than conventional ads. Brands should leverage authentic storytelling on social media, engaging with potential buyers through relatable content rather than high-budget commercials.

In Armenia, while social media is one of the most influential advertising channels, many sports brand campaigns appear to lack localization for the Armenian market. Despite widespread visibility, ads often reuse global content without adapting it to local cultural values, language nuances, or consumer habits, potentially weakening emotional resonance with Armenian youth. There are also no available social media pages that officially represent the on-site stores in the city, which is also a drawback and makes it difficult for people to follow specific discounts and campaigns online.

Brand Preferences and Loyalty

Nike (56%) and Adidas (24.8%) dominated as the most frequently purchased brands.

Which sports brand do you purchase most frequently?



However, only 5% of respondents claimed that their chosen brand is a go-to option, with 42.2% making purchases sporadically and 33% buying a few times a year. This suggests that

while brand preference exists, long-term brand loyalty is not absolute. Consumer habits suggest that while brand recognition remains strong, the commitment to a single brand is fluid. Given that a significant percentage of respondents claim to switch brands based on quality or price considerations, companies should focus on maintaining a balance between product innovation and affordability to retain customers.

Emotional and Rational Motivators

When it comes to figuring out what type of person one wants to be and what one wants from life, most people struggle to find answers. Good advertising helps us build an identity by releasing anxiety and telling us what choice to make by compelling us to buy a certain product. Once we do this, we will be able to emulate the identity and characteristics that we have learned to associate with a particular brand or product. Advertising that caters to our feelings primarily resonates with our subconscious mind and not our conscious mind; that is why people sometimes cannot rationally deduce their preference for a certain brand and the ability to pay a premium for a product that we cannot tell apart from competitors. When people are drawn to it simply because of what it evokes inside and the association that comes with it, then the brand is truly successful.

A majority (73.4%) of respondents claim to prefer logical explanations (facts, statistics) over emotional storytelling (26.6%) when evaluating marketing messages. Additionally, 40.4% were neutral toward purchasing sportswear based on emotional triggers like nostalgia or fear of missing out, while 33% outright disagreed with emotional purchasing motivations. These findings reinforce the importance of rational messaging in marketing campaigns. Sportswear brands should emphasize product quality, material innovation, and value-for-money messaging rather than relying on emotional appeals alone. However, a segmented approach

may be beneficial, as a smaller but significant proportion of consumers (26.6%) respond to emotional narratives.

Brand Switching and Ethical Considerations

Consumers demonstrated a strong inclination toward quality-driven decision-making. 54.1% stated they would switch brands for a better-quality product, while price competitiveness (12.8%) played a lesser role. Ethical considerations also impacted loyalty - 30.3% would reconsider their support for a brand involved in a major controversy, while 39.4% would assess the severity before making a decision. Furthermore, if a favorite brand increased prices without improving quality, 46.8% would likely seek alternatives. These insights indicate that consumers are highly discerning and willing to change their purchasing behavior if a brand fails to meet expectations. Sportswear companies must maintain ethical business practices and ensure product quality remains high to retain a loyal customer base. Implementing corporate social responsibility initiatives and transparently addressing controversies can help maintain trust and prevent brand abandonment.

Open-Ended Responses

The non-required question to write words and phrases associated with favorite sportswear brands highlights the emotional and functional attributes that consumers value most. The 62 respondents who answered the question revealed rich emotional insights into how Armenian youth perceive and connect with these companies. The most dominant association was the word “comfort” or “comfortable,” which appeared in various forms over twenty times. This overwhelming frequency highlights that for many consumers, comfort is not simply a physical sensation but an emotional state. It signals trust, security, familiarity, and consistency, which form the foundation of emotional loyalty. When consumers choose to

describe a brand with “comfort,” they often reflect a broader sense of emotional reliability, where the brand becomes part of their personal routines and even their identity.

Another significant recurring association was the phrase “Just Do It,” along with its variations such as “Do it,” and extended motivational slogans like “Just do it / never give up / now or never.” These reflect the effectiveness of brand slogans in becoming internalized motivational affirmations. They show that Nike, in particular, has succeeded in embedding its message into the consciousness of its audience. Respondents were not just recalling a brand, they were connecting to an idea of action, strength, and determination. This demonstrates how emotional branding becomes powerful when it taps into aspirational identity. “Just Do It” represents more than a call to purchase, it becomes a mindset, one that young consumers may use to narrate their ambitions or motivate themselves.

Beyond comfort and motivation, aesthetics emerged as a strong theme. Words such as “aesthetic,” “fashion,” “stylish,” “style,” “trendy,” “sleek,” and “special look” were used to describe favorite sportswear brands. These associations suggest that visual appeal is central to how Armenian youth perceive brand value. Sportswear, in this context, is not just performance gear but a form of self-expression. Wearing a stylish or trendy brand is a way to communicate personal taste, individuality, and social alignment. The strong presence of these aesthetic terms highlights the fashionization of sportswear, where brand choice often reflects social identity as much as athletic performance.

Practical traits like “durable,” “quality,” “performance,” “practical,” and “fast” were also frequently mentioned. These responses show that consumers still place high importance on tangible, functional product characteristics. While emotional and symbolic connections matter, people also remain deeply concerned with value. A brand’s ability to deliver quality consistently helps foster long-term trust and repeat purchase behavior. Terms like “fast” and

“performance” evoke the desire for efficiency and effectiveness, connecting sportswear to physical capability and personal excellence.

Several more unique and culturally specific responses stood out and provided interesting insights into how consumers personalize brand meaning. The word “Father,” for instance, may indicate that someone’s connection to a brand stems from early familial influence, particularly paternal figures. “Mercedes” could reflect luxury and aspiration, connecting the brand with sophistication and prestige. “FIBA” links directly to international basketball, suggesting an association between brand preference and affiliation with global sports culture. These responses reflect the complex cultural, emotional, and even spiritual factors that can shape brand perception in ways that go far beyond marketing campaigns. Words like “energy,” “confidence,” and “trust” suggest that the brand is not only worn but felt, affecting how people see themselves and how they believe others perceive them. Confidence, for example, is not just an outcome of wearing comfortable clothes; it is an identity-boosting trait. Energy and trust evoke motivation and reliability, implying that these brands play an active role in helping consumers feel prepared and secure.

Brand-specific references were also common. “Stripes,” “three lines,” and “Samba” directly evoke Adidas and its iconic visual and product elements. “Forever Faster,” Puma’s slogan, made an appearance, reflecting how slogans become emotional tags that consumers remember and repeat. These phrases demonstrate the powerful link between branding elements and mental recall. Once embedded in the consumer’s memory, they become shortcuts to emotional meaning. They also show how visual identity, like Adidas’ three stripes, can become symbolic in itself, functioning as a badge of belonging or fashion credibility.

A few participants stood apart by expressing disconnection from sports branding altogether. Responses like “I don’t like sportswear” and “honestly I do not have a favorite sportswear

brand, sorry” reflect the presence of neutral or resistant consumers. These perspectives are valuable because they reveal the limitations of emotional branding. Not all consumers are equally impacted by these tactics, and some remain disengaged or uninterested in aligning their identity with global brand narratives. These responses serve as a reminder that branding must compete with apathy, skepticism, and indifference, especially in markets with diverse economic and cultural perspectives.

In total, the open-ended responses show that Armenian youth engage with sportswear brands across a broad emotional spectrum - from comfort and motivation to aesthetic appeal, cultural pride, and personal ethics. While slogans and visuals play an essential role in brand recall, the deeper emotional connection comes from how well a brand supports the consumer’s sense of identity, community, and aspiration. Whether it is through a phrase like “Just Do It,” a value like trust, or a feeling like comfort, these associations suggest that the emotional bond between brand and buyer is not abstract—it is built through meaningful and memorable impressions.

Discussion

Emotional branding plays a key role, if not the most important one, in the marketing strategies of sports brands and that’s how it enables them to go beyond the functional benefits of their products and create deep emotional connections with consumers. Neuromarketing plays as much of important role because it is all about how a person perceives messages, such as advertising cues and how it stays in the long run. In this process, storytelling is one of the most prominent aspects of neuromarketing (REM Prague, 2025).

The true power of brands is that they can influence human behavior in ways that extend beyond the point of sale. When people make choices about different brands, they are

choosing to create an identity because someone is going to form an impression about themselves. For instance, when one chooses Nike over Under Armour, they are choosing a different way to express affiliation with the sport because Nike is more about affiliation and Under Armour is about the underdog which is how Kevin Plank, founder and CEO of Under Armour, describes the soul of the brand he built from scratch. So in a way, they have to choose which of the different conceptual pathways is more consistent with where they are in life. So once this consumer makes that choice, their relationship with a brand can deepen to the point where they identify with the brand like family, and once you identify with the brand, it can shape the way you behave. It is also quite interesting when someone talks badly about that product, most people will usually go out and defend it because an attack on the brand is an attack on themselves.

As marketers tend to say, branding is mostly about influencing people emotionally, which can be used positively and negatively. People might think they are doing things for logical reasons, but emotions are what drive them. Many people even believe that emotions are unreliable, but they are actually crucial and provide some revolutionary shortcuts that help us.

To dive deeper into neuromarketing, there are three main aspects it is concerned with. The first one is how emotions drive decisions and logical reasoning often takes on a secondary role in decision-making because many people value more their emotional connections to brands and thus, emotions shape preferences and actions more significantly. The second factor is about cognitive biases and how they shape behavior. This is examined by the influence of purchasing choices, meaning that people tend to make subconscious decisions based on shortcuts they are familiar with from previous experiences, rather than doing a new analysis. Moreover, the third aspect is about sensory triggers such as colors, sounds, words and other cues that influence consumer perceptions and responses.

Understanding these factors enables marketers to craft compelling stories that resonate deeply with their target audience. For example, warm colors may evoke feelings of excitement and energy, while softer tones can create a sense of calm and trust. Similarly, background music or certain key phrases can reinforce a message and make it more memorable.

Neuromarketing principles used by sports brands, as mentioned during the REM Prague conference marketing workshop:

1. Emotional triggers - Sports brands often tap into deep emotional connections by addressing themes like self-confidence, empowerment, and motivation. This triggers empathy and personal relatability among consumers, connecting them to the brand's message.
2. Social proof - Many sports brands use endorsements from athletes or feature everyday consumers to show that their products are used and trusted by a diverse range of people. This reinforces the idea that the brand is universally accepted and admired, encouraging social validation and group identity.
3. Authenticity bias - Raw, natural, and real imagery used in campaigns by sports brands makes their messages more believable and trustworthy compared to traditional advertisements. This authenticity resonates with consumers, who appreciate transparency and genuineness in the brands they choose.
4. Mirror neuron activation - When viewers see relatable images of athletes or people who resemble themselves, their brains mirror the emotions portrayed, fostering a sense of connection and belonging. This helps the consumer feel emotionally aligned with the brand, strengthening their overall connection and brand loyalty.

For instance, Nike has built a brand personality that focuses on persistence, empowerment, and the pushing of personal limits. As mentioned above, when viewers see the

logo, Nike's slogan, "Just Do It," says a lot about a particular type of person who finds themselves driven and determined. This is even true for people who are not professional athletes; they, too, find Nike's message somewhat inspiring as it has to do with the universal human desire to get better. On the contrary, Adidas brings its brand personality into being with authenticity and a strong sense of community. Other than stressing individual achievement, Adidas focuses on collective experiences and the magic of shared passions. It thereby creates a feeling of belonging among customers, who will then be inclined more to view the brand as an ensemble in their way of life and social identity.

An example was highlighted here during the conference about how even when one resonates with a story, it does not necessarily mean that one will need to buy the product. This is because some stories activate a part of the brain that stimulates a connection that others do not and when a new mention is activated in a certain part of the brain. Marketers understand this very well and arouse those emotions of their consumers. In other words, "the sensory language arouses the emotion" (REM Prague, 2025). Storytelling is another powerful tool utilized in neuromarketing to enhance consumer opinions. During REM Prague, 2025, storytelling was defined as "the art of sharing messages in a way that emotionally resonates, creates connection, and drives action." It usually has a hero as a central character, who represents the customer, so the consumer should resonate with that hero. The hero faces a challenge and this creates an emotional connection with the consumer. This is the conflict that the hero faces and the obstacle that they overcome. Here, the consumer should also resonate with the conflict in a relatable manner. Finally, the conflict should be resolved and the product is the highlight in this section because by engaging audiences in a meaningful way, brands can foster loyalty and differentiate themselves in competitive markets. Consumers are more likely to remember and relate to stories than to traditional advertising messages, making storytelling a valuable tool in marketing strategies. The techniques are all

calculated using the latest technology from neuroscience and the new marketing methods have specific techniques to control the outcomes.

Storytelling matters for three main reasons:

1. It builds trust,
2. It creates emotional connections,
3. It improves brand recall.

These examples illustrate that storytelling is not just an advertising technique but a fundamental element of brand identity and consumer perception. As marketing continues to evolve, companies that master the art of storytelling will be better positioned to connect with consumers on a deeper level, foster loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly saturated market.

Moreover, strong brand equity is a really important aspect of sports consumer behavior because consumers are driven by emotions, and it is no surprise that emotions play a key role in sports (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Within the context of the sportswear industry, Nike and Adidas are specifically the leading paragons of emotional branding because they each use different ways to build brand loyalty, foster identity alignment, and inspire brand love.

Thus, the brand communicates itself as a drive for success for its consumers. In comparison, Adidas focuses more on the social aspect of identity in general. As Kammerer et al. (2021) mention, it has established itself as an example of shared purpose and authenticity and encourages sustainability in its processes. To add to this point, Malär et al. (2011) explain that a brand is strong when it can connect with consumers' actual and ideal selves and create an emotional bond with them. In most instances, this alignment for Adidas happens through its promotion of community values and environmental initiatives. Belk provides some insights in his research, along with the analyses of Malär et al. and Wu, showing that

Nike and Adidas cater to different parts of the extended self: Nike to the aspirational individual and Adidas to the socially conscious collective.

True loyalty comes from sticking with the brand and the product regardless of the circumstances. So, when customers are loyal to a brand, it means that they are willing to forego the competitors in order to come back to the brand again and again. It is needless to say that establishing a sense of loyalty towards one's brands among customers is essential in the world of sports brands. So, what triggers that sense of loyalty among the Armenian youth?

The survey results reveal key insights into what drives brand loyalty among Armenian youth when it comes to sports brands. First and foremost, price and product quality are the two most significant factors influencing purchasing decisions. This aligns with the idea that customers conduct a cost-benefit analysis before committing to a brand, showing that their loyalty is not purely emotional but also rational. While brand reputation and discounts also play a role, the emotional connection to a brand ranked lower in importance, suggesting that young consumers in Armenia are primarily practical in their approach to sportswear purchases.

Another crucial takeaway is the overwhelming impact of social media as the dominant advertising medium. Nearly 90% of respondents cited platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok as their primary source of influence, far surpassing traditional methods such as TV advertisements or billboards. This highlights the necessity for sports brands to craft engaging digital marketing strategies that align with the behaviors of their target audience. Additionally, influencer marketing holds moderate sway, but direct recommendations from friends and online reviews appear to be far more persuasive, emphasizing the role of peer influence in purchasing decisions.

The data also suggests that Armenian youth do not strongly associate their sportswear purchases with emotional factors like nostalgia or excitement. The majority of respondents either disagreed or remained neutral when asked whether emotions play a role in their buying choices. Furthermore, logical reasoning, such as product features and performance, was cited as the most persuasive marketing approach, reinforcing the idea that consumers in this demographic respond better to factual, well-reasoned arguments rather than sentimental storytelling.

Brand identity and values also emerged as relevant but not decisive factors in loyalty. While a significant portion of respondents considered a brand's values somewhat important, only a small percentage claimed they would only buy from brands that align with their personal beliefs. However, if a brand were to undergo drastic changes in its aesthetic or values, many consumers would at least reconsider their loyalty. Price sensitivity was another key finding. Most respondents indicated they would seek alternatives if their preferred brand significantly raised prices without a corresponding improvement in quality.

Finally, Nike and Adidas dominate the Armenian sportswear market, with Nike leading significantly. Puma and other brands hold a much smaller share, which implies that sports brands attempting to penetrate this market need to offer something distinct, whether in design, comfort, or innovation, to compete with the industry giants.

First off, novelty, adventure, and the unknown all have the tendency to create excitement and expectation on the part of customers. It is not necessary to launch new products every six months, but it means being able to offer a compelling narrative in order to grab and keep customers' attention.

Psychologically speaking, we're eager to make associations as humans. So when we align a product with a happy memory or feeling, our bodies release dopamine, and we can associate the product or the brand with a pleasant experience. The vice versa works for this,

so when we associate a brand with an unpleasant feeling or memory, we tend to stay away from it. Thus, generating brand loyalty largely revolves around being able to put a brand image and message that generates positive emotions on the part of customers every time they come into contact with it. So, it is essential that people associate pleasant memories and experiences with a particular brand. Using certain slogans, colors, odors, and sounds at times serves companies very well.

Since humans are also tribal beings, it is no surprise that collectivism is at a high peak in Armenian culture. So, when people feel a part of a group, they create an identity within that group. This provides them with a much-needed sense of security and safety, and tapping into this psychological desire for identity and belonging is a key brand strategy for sports brands. The appeal for sports in gear often centers around identity, strength, be it inner or outer, and the status it covers. In order to achieve these, the brands need to convey the right stories. These should not only be compelling ones but the kind of stories that customers actually come to embrace as their own. Additionally, customers need to become a part of the brand so that, in a way, the brand can become their tribe. Awareness of the psychological phenomenon that drives brand loyalty should really motivate brands to increase awareness in their target markets in order to find innovative ways to cater to distinctive needs and desires. Knowing what makes potential customers tick is the most essential ingredient to any successful brand model. This goes beyond mere associations; they should also be quite intense, a unique emotional connection, so that consumers feel that they are part of the brand they are constantly purchasing and share the brand experiences. Hence, it becomes integral to their identities. This said, the brand is more than a product or an experience; it becomes a trusted companion to people, so they love being loyal and faithful to and one that they willingly come back to.

Comparative Case Study

Since this research focuses on how emotional branding affects loyalty to sportswear brands among Armenian youth, in this section, we will take the Nike brand as an example to study its PESTLE analysis and compare it with Armenia based on the survey results. To be able to analyze it within the Armenian market, it is important to look at the larger environment that shapes how brands connect with people. To fully understand how brands like Nike build strong emotional ties, we need to look at the outside factors that influence their decisions. These factors include politics, the economy, social changes, technology, laws, and environmental concerns. All of these forces play a role in how brands create their image and how consumers respond to them.

Before starting the actual analysis, let's take a look at the background of "Nike" as a company and its achievements. Formerly known as Blue Ribbon Sports, it was established in 1964 and is now the world's largest supplier of athletic footwear and sports gear (SWOT & PESTLE.com, 2023). This section will uncover a case study of PESTLE analysis of Nike in 2019. It will show how Nike responded to outside pressures while continuing to strengthen its emotional bond with customers. This case study also helps show what lessons other brands, including those trying to grow loyalty in Armenia, can learn from Nike's example.

When we compare Nike's global PESTLE analysis to the situation in Armenia, primarily based on the survey findings among Armenian youth, we can see many important insights emerge. These insights show both where emotional branding works the same way and where local realities create differences. Understanding these small details helps us see how brands like Nike can strengthen emotional loyalty among Armenian consumers, and it also gives ideas for how local brands could apply similar strategies.

Political factors

Business processes heavily depend on the type of government in a nation. Hence, an open-minded government and a stable political environment are present, promising opportunities for business and growth for brands like Nike. The considerations of political factors that positively influenced Nike's marketing strategies are

- Low interest rates in its home country (the US)
- Favorable international tax agreements
- Receiving government support for infrastructure

For example, the US's sanctions on Iran acted as an impediment for Nike, which was planning to sell its equipment there. The Nike campaign we talked about above, "Just do it," did not go very well with a segment of the population because people did not like the influencer mentioned in it.

Nike benefits globally from stable governments, favorable tax laws, and strong international agreements that make it easier to sell across borders. In Armenia, the political situation is not always stable and the market size is much smaller and not all global brands invest heavily here. This creates an interesting effect. The survey showed that Armenian youth still have strong preferences for global brands like Nike and Adidas. Even without heavy political or economic investment in Armenia, Nike's emotional messages reach Armenian youth mainly through social media and online platforms. This suggests that while global political structures help Nike internationally, in Armenia, it is mainly the brand's emotional storytelling and global cultural power that keeps it popular, rather than local political support. There is also less direct competition from domestic Armenian sports brands, meaning Nike's emotional branding faces fewer local challenges.

Economic factors

Nike's business model is influenced by the state of economies where it sells its athletic apparel, footwear and equipment. In recent years, recession has troubled most of the brands and Nike has been able to manage growth in revenue from 2005 to 2018, with minor fluctuations. Some of the economic factors that positively affected are

- The rapid growth of developing markets
- Relatively economically stable developed countries
- The low cost of labor in far Eastern countries, which has kept Nike's revenue growing
- The policy of outsourcing to Asian countries that Nike undertook from the 1990s

The markets of the developed countries, like the United States, are relatively stable, providing Nike with the opportunity to continue its stable growth in these countries. Nike has good chances to penetrate the UK, Australia and other such promising markets (Makos, 2024).

When it comes to economic factors, Nike operates globally in highly developed economies where people have more disposable income. Nike also keeps production costs low by outsourcing to cheaper labor markets. In Armenia, the economic situation is different. While the country is developing, and there is a growing middle class, many young people are still price-sensitive, as the survey clearly showed. Price and quality were ranked as the top two deciding factors in the survey, with 77.1% claiming to prioritize price and 69.7% brand reputation. This reveals that even if Armenian consumers are emotionally attached to a brand, they are willing to switch if the price rises too much or if the quality drops. Therefore, Nike's success in Armenia depends not only on emotional branding but also on offering good value for money. High prices without visible added value could easily cause Armenian consumers to shift loyalty, despite emotional attachments. This is an important difference compared to

Nike's larger markets, where consumers may continue buying a brand despite price increases because of stronger economic security.

Social factors

Social factors are the ones that influence the attractiveness of Nike products and accessories. These are the factors that directly influence Nike:

- Improving collective consciousness about fitness and sports
- Growth of individual wealth in developing countries
- Rising emphasis on product safety and better quality

In developing countries, Nike has the scope to consumers with increasing individual wealth. The brand can develop safer products and initiate marketing campaigns that highlight the safety of its sports shoes, equipment and clothing. Nike has been unable to address the working conditions of laborers, low wage rates in the industrial conditions of factories in these countries, which may lead to backlash or can cause harm to its brand image and sales.

Looking at social factors, globally, Nike benefits from rising health consciousness, sports culture, and a focus on individual achievement. In Armenia, based on the survey results, the social aspect of branding is just as strong but with a slightly different flavor. Armenian youth highly value style, aesthetics, and emotional connection. Words like "comfort," "style," "trendy," and slogans like "Just Do It" were frequently cited by survey participants. This shows that Armenian youth use brands to express their personal and social identity, just like in larger markets. However, there is also a strong collective consciousness in Armenian society. Young people often care about belonging to a group and being accepted by peers. This makes emotional branding that highlights both individuality and community belonging very powerful. Nike's campaigns that show perseverance and achievement work

well in Armenia, but additional messaging around community values, teamwork, and collective pride could make the brand even more successful here.

Technological factors

Nike's business changes as per the technologies available for business processes. It uses one of the most advanced IT infrastructures for its operations and delivery. It uses a model in which the transaction and supply chain are linked via Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) and Massively parallel processor system (MPPS), both of which can be considered the most upgraded systems. Nike has efficiently harnessed online technology to ensure contactless payment via mobile phones. Major parts of the operations have been automated over time, thereby reducing labor costs. The company has effectively integrated mobile technologies and its products to reach out to consumers. It has also made a substantial mark on other digital platforms, according to various digital metrics, and has been positioned correctly through social media.

Technological factors are another important comparison point. Nike has invested heavily in digital marketing, online shopping, social media presence, and mobile apps. In Armenia, the survey showed that young people mainly engage with brands through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Over 87% of survey participants said social media is the main way they see sports brand advertisements. This means that Nike's digital strategy is very well suited to the Armenian market. However, while global Nike customers often have access to fully developed e-commerce ecosystems, Armenia's online shopping infrastructure is still growing. Not all products are available locally, shipping costs can be high, and delivery services are not always reliable. This affects how fully Armenian consumers can engage with Nike beyond just social media exposure. Therefore, emotional branding on digital platforms must also be paired with improvements in product accessibility if Nike and

similar brands want to deepen loyalty in Armenia. Ease of purchase is a growing expectation among Armenian youth, and any technological gaps can weaken even strong emotional connections.

Environmental factors

Nike has phrased ISO-1400 as its overall product development outlook. This provides a boost in Nike's environmental image. It has kept a tab on its carbon footprint and waste management. Nike uses organic cotton in its products which is considered environmentally friendly. Moreover, Nike shoes are easier to recycle compared to other major brands.

Environmental factors were a growing focus for Nike globally in 2019. The company took major steps to reduce its carbon footprint, use organic cotton, and promote recycling. In Armenia, environmental awareness is rising, especially among younger generations, but it is still not the main factor influencing purchasing decisions. The survey showed that values like price, quality, and emotional connection are stronger drivers of brand loyalty right now. However, about 30% of participants said that a major ethical controversy could affect their loyalty. This suggests that environmental and ethical practices are emerging concerns that could become more important in the near future. Brands that show environmental responsibility can build a future-proof emotional bond with Armenian youth. Even if it is not the main priority today, it is wise for brands to start emphasizing their eco-friendly initiatives to prepare for a more value-driven consumer market.

Legal factors

Nike has already hit roadblocks many times with allegations of gender discrimination and hostile work conditions. Nike has been charged many times for dodging taxes and several

investigations have also been conducted over its shady marketing practices, specifically where it offers discounts.

Finally, legal factors impact Nike's image in complex ways. Globally, Nike has faced lawsuits related to labor practices, tax issues, and discrimination. In Armenia, such legal battles are less visible to the average consumer. However, ethical considerations still matter emotionally. The survey showed that Armenian youth value trust. If a brand is caught up in major scandals involving discrimination, unethical labor practices, or unfair business behavior, a significant percentage of Armenian youth would reconsider their loyalty. Brands must therefore manage their reputation carefully. In Armenia's smaller and more tightly connected society, word-of-mouth and peer influence are very strong. Negative news spreads quickly, and rebuilding trust can be even harder in a close-knit community. Brands operating in Armenia must remember that emotional trust is fragile and must be protected through ethical behavior at all levels.

To bring all these factors together, the Armenian youth market is one where emotional branding is very powerful but must be supported by real, practical value. Unlike in larger markets where strong emotional messages might be enough to maintain loyalty even through economic ups and downs, Armenian consumers are highly practical in their decision-making. Emotional branding must walk hand-in-hand with affordability, accessibility, quality, and ethical responsibility. Brands like Nike succeed among Armenian youth because they combine global emotional appeal with visible product quality and strong online engagement. However, there is still space for improvement, especially when it comes to localizing their message to Armenian cultural values and making their products easier and more affordable to access.

Emotional branding that highlights motivation, self-expression, and comfort resonates well. However, loyalty is not unconditional. Armenian youth are willing to shift if they feel a

brand no longer reflects their values, becomes too expensive, or stops delivering quality. Emotional trust is powerful but must be constantly renewed through positive, consistent, and ethical actions.

Future strategies in Armenia should combine the universal appeal of motivational branding with local touches that speak to shared identity, community pride, and accessible excellence. In conclusion, the lessons from Nike's PESTLE analysis, when combined with the insights from Armenian youth, show that emotional branding succeeds best when a strong understanding of the external environment supports it. Brands that wish to achieve long-term loyalty must not only create powerful emotional connections but also adapt intelligently to the specific needs, values, and conditions of the markets they operate in.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the emotional and psychological factors that influence brand loyalty among Armenian youth, several limitations should be acknowledged.

The first obvious limitation of the project lies in the demographic structure of the survey respondents. Out of the 189 participants, 87.2% identified as female, while only 12.8% were male. This significant gender imbalance means that the findings primarily reflect female perspectives and consumer behavior, which could limit the broader applicability of the results across all Armenian youth. Although young women represent a key consumer demographic in the sportswear market, this uneven representation may overlook distinct preferences, values, and motivations held by male consumers or other gender identities. In future studies, achieving a more balanced gender distribution could offer a fuller picture of how emotional branding and neuromarketing influence diverse consumer groups in Armenia.

Another limitation is that the majority of respondents live in Yerevan (89%), with far fewer from other cities or rural regions. As such, the data largely reflects an urban youth experience, who are more likely to be exposed to global marketing, social media trends, and access to international sportswear brands since they are located in the city center only. Further research could expand to include more voices from rural and regional areas, where purchasing behavior might be shaped by different economic, cultural, and social influences.

I also want to highlight that with the study being focused on the foundation and understanding of emotional branding, getting results from the Armenian segment primarily focuses on self-reporting through surveys. For future research, it could also be beneficial to consider qualitative methods, such as focus groups or separate in-depth interviews, to uncover deeper psychological narratives and more nuanced perceptions of brand identity and loyalty. It would also help understand how brand attachment evolves over time, especially as Armenian youth transition from students to professionals and how factors like income growth, shifting values, or global events influence consumer loyalty as mentioned in the PESTLE analysis.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration all the findings and analyses conducted throughout this research, it becomes clear that emotional branding is one of the strongest tools that sportswear brands use to build loyalty, influence purchasing decisions, and create lasting consumer relationships. This effect is visible not only in major global markets but also in smaller, developing markets such as Armenia. Emotional branding shapes perceptions, strengthens brand identity, and helps companies like Nike and Adidas maintain relevance even when facing economic, political, or technological challenges.

As consumers, what we can do to make informed decisions is be aware of the influence brands hold. It's important to always pause and think a little bit about our choices. What was discovered in this research about identity is that a lot of it has to do with the fundamental need for us as humans to have support systems. Now, brands have stepped in as pillars of our identity, so seeing them in a positive light is nothing but an important step that should be highlighted. Good advertising feeds off both insecurities and deficiencies as humans and makes us believe that we can mask them with a new and exciting identity. However, we should remember that among authentic decisions that align with our best interests is no easy task and takes effort.

The survey conducted among Armenian youth confirmed that emotional branding plays an important role, but it is not the only factor guiding purchasing decisions. Armenian consumers highly value comfort, style, brand reputation, and product quality. While emotional connections to slogans, brand stories, and aesthetics were strong, practical concerns such as price and product durability were equally significant. This shows that in Armenia, emotional branding must be carefully balanced with practical realities. Brands cannot rely solely on emotional appeal; they must also deliver visible and consistent value to keep customer loyalty intact.

The comparative case study of Nike's PESTLE analysis further strengthened the understanding of how emotional branding operates within a broader market environment. Globally, Nike has had the advantage of political support, stable economic conditions, and a technologically advanced infrastructure. It has built its brand image not only through emotional storytelling but also through strategic positioning in response to social changes, environmental challenges, and legal pressures. In Armenia, while many of these external factors are different in scale, the emotional branding strategies used by Nike still successfully resonate with consumers. However, for emotional loyalty to remain strong in the Armenian

context, brands must also pay attention to factors like affordability, local cultural values, ease of access, and ethical behavior.

The connection between global strategies and local realities is crucial. Nike's success shows that strong emotional messages like "Just Do It" can travel across cultures, but they must meet local expectations and needs to maintain their power. Armenian youth respond to motivation, identity, and style, but they are also critical and practical buyers. They are ready to switch loyalty if brands fail to meet their standards in quality, price, or ethics. Emotional branding creates the bond, but trust and consistent delivery are what sustain it.

Another important insight is that the emotional relationship consumers have with brands is multi-layered. It includes rational needs such as comfort and price, emotional desires such as confidence and belonging, and social influences such as community acceptance and peer recommendations. The survey results, combined with the PESTLE case study findings, clearly demonstrate that successful brands must speak to all of these levels at once. Emotional loyalty is not built overnight, and it is not maintained simply by good advertising. It is earned through a continuous process of trust-building, storytelling, community engagement, and value creation.

Moving forward, brands that want to strengthen their position in Armenia's growing sportswear market should not only continue investing in emotional branding but also adapt their strategies to local social values, economic realities, and technological access. They should work to create emotional narratives that reflect not only global success and individual empowerment but also community pride, collective progress, and cultural identity. In conclusion, emotional branding remains one of the most powerful drivers of brand loyalty, but it must be supported by a deep understanding of the target market's environment and expectations. This research shows that Armenian youth are highly receptive to emotional connections with brands but also demand honesty, quality, and respect. Brands that manage to

align emotional storytelling with real-world value will be the ones that succeed in building long-lasting loyalty in Armenia and beyond.

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