

BRAND PERCEPTION DYNAMICS: A STUDY OF ADIDAS AND NIKE IN CZECH AND SWEDISH CONTEXTS

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to examine and compare the perception of Adidas and Nike brands among Czech and Swedish consumers. A quantitative methodology was employed, utilizing two electronic questionnaires distributed in Czech and Swedish. The study provides insights into consumer preferences, brand awareness, and brand equity perceptions in the two countries. The findings reveal that while both brands enjoy a positive reputation in both nations, Czech consumers demonstrate a slightly stronger preference for these brands compared to their Swedish counterparts, who exhibit a more neutral stance. The results contribute to understanding consumer behavior in different cultural settings and offer practical implications for brand management in the sportswear industry. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how Adidas and Nike are perceived in different cultural contexts and offers valuable recommendations for brand management and marketing practices. The findings underscore the importance of considering cultural differences in global marketing strategies to achieve better brand positioning and consumer loyalty.*

Keywords: *Sports brand, customer perception, comparison, brand equity, brand positioning*

JEL Classification: *M31, M37*

INTRODUCTION

Sports marketing plays a crucial role in the success of companies that focus on selling sports equipment and apparel. Brands like Adidas and Nike are dominant players in this market, and their perception by consumers has a significant impact on their market position. In today's era of abundance and luxury, branded clothing is a status symbol for many. People develop relationships with brands, whether positive or negative, and these feelings influence business transactions. Therefore, it is important

for companies to understand how consumers perceive their brand and what factors influence their purchasing decisions.

This study focuses on comparing the perception of Adidas and Nike brands among Czech and Swedish consumers, aiming to identify differences and similarities in their preferences and values. The research question is: “What are the differences in the perception of Adidas and Nike brands between Czech and Swedish consumers?” The objective of this work is to identify and characterize the differences in the perception of Adidas and Nike brands between Czech and Swedish consumers and to evaluate the results for each country separately. To achieve this goal, a quantitative methodology will be used, specifically electronic surveying, and the data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparison.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

A brand is a tool for differentiating from competitors and identifying a product or service. Yadin (2002) in his International Dictionary of Marketing provides a simplified definition of a brand as a protected product name along with a personality name and visual identity. Kotler (2005) adds that a brand is an important part of a product, adding value and, in the eyes of the consumer, quality and trust. A brand guarantees the consumer the same expected quality for every purchased product.

Legal protection of a brand is crucial to ensure its uniqueness and prevent copying by competitors. Kapferer (2008) and Bastos & Levy (2012) mentions that historically, brands were created mainly to defend against theft and identify the origin of a raw material. Today, the definition has been adjusted to include all legal consequences, such as the date of trademark registration, conditions of termination, or extension of protection against copies.

Measuring brand strength can be done from various perspectives, both from the customer's point of view and from a financial perspective. Kapferer (2008) distinguishes two areas from which a brand should be viewed: the brand from the customer's perspective and their relationship to the product and company, and the creation of certain metrics that compare the brand according to its financial strength.

Factors Influencing the Probability of Purchasing Sports Brands

The likelihood of consumers buying sports products is influenced by a complex interplay of various factors. Brand perception is paramount in consumer decision-making (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Hassan, 2019; Ahmadi et al., 2021). Studies indicate that a positive brand perception significantly affects consumers' intention to repurchase (Zboja & Voorhees, 2006; Aslam et al., 2018; Astawa & Rahanatha, 2021). Several key constructs contribute to the formation of brand perception, including brand trust, emotional brand association, and brand image (Merrilees & Miller, 2005; Kervyn et al., 2012; Aslam et al., 2018). Aslam et al. (2018) states, that according to studies perceived similarity is essential in building trust, and congruence between brand image and self-image establishes trust. Also state that image-congruence positively impacts customer trust in apparel brands.

Brand equity is another significant determinant of purchasing behavior (Ogunnaike et al., 2017; Tsordia et al., 2018; Thanaiudompat, 2023). Brand equity can be measured in various ways, with brand value growth being one of the most visible indi-

cators of success (Washburn & Plank, 2002; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller & Brexendorf, 2019; Jaworek et al., 2021). Consumers with a higher degree of brand identification tend to exhibit greater loyalty and preference toward a given brand (Loureiro et al., 2024). In the online environment, cognitive online brand identification (COBI), influenced by online brand prestige and lifestyle congruency, can lead to brand advocacy, indirectly mediated through brand love (Batra et al., 2012; Palusuk et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2024). Brand personality also significantly impacts consumer decisions (Ghorbani, 2014; Su & Tong, 2015; Attor et al., 2022). Su & Tong (2015) states that research in the sportswear industry has identified several dimensions of brand personality of which competence, attractiveness, sincerity, and innovation have been shown to be positive and significant contributors to building and strengthening the brand equity of sportswear.

Social factors also play a role in purchase decisions (Auger et al., 2010; Daga & Indriakati, 2022; Maqula & Katrodia, 2023). Subjective norms, reflecting perceived social pressure, have a significant positive influence on purchase intention (Nam et al., 2017; Maqula & Katrodia, 2023). In the online sphere, customer brand value co-creation, based on perceived risk, represents an important aspect of the interaction between brands and consumers (Mustafa et al., 2022; Asgari, 2023). Building a strong brand should be a priority for every professional sports team, which can be achieved by evaluating criteria influencing brand support (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). This involves adopting a partnership mindset, seeking alignment of values, and recognizing the plurality of stakeholders in a sponsorship (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023).

A study on sportswear brands in the Slovak market revealed that Adidas was perceived as the most significant brand (Janoskova & Kral, 2020). Factors influencing brand selection in the sports product market include gender, age group, education level, sports brand preference, level of sports participation, and preferred shopping method (online or in-store) (Hassan, 2019). Research in Pakistan on online apparel shopping indicated a significant positive impact of all proposed constructs (brand experience, brand trust, emotional brand association, brand image) on repurchase intention, except for prior brand experience (Aslam et al., 2018).

Product Attributes Relevant in Purchasing Sports Brands

When purchasing sports products, consumers consider various product attributes. Perceived product quality is a crucial factor influencing purchase intention (Asshidin et al., 2016; Laluyan et al., 2017; Quoquab et al., 2017; Harsono et al., 2018). Studies (Laluyan et al., 2017; Maqula & Katrodia, 2023) suggest that perceived quality has a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. A study on Adidas sport shoes in Manado (Laluyan et al., 2017) found that perceived quality significantly influences consumer purchase intention, alongside advertising and brand awareness. Consumers also seek products that align with their expected benefits and features (Lüthje, 2004; Nam et al., 2017). Expectations regarding sustainability attributes of green sportswear, such as eco-labels, environmental impact, and recycling ratio, significantly influence attitude towards the brand and purchase intention in some cases (MacIntosh et al., 2013; Nam et al., 2017; Wang & Shen, 2017; Wall-Tweedie & Nguyen, 2018; Huang & Chiu, 2024).

In the context of cross-border strategic brand alliances (SBAs), country-of-origin (COO) fit can affect consumers' overall brand evaluation (Lee et al., 2016). Subjects in a congruent COO image condition showed significantly greater positive post-alliance evaluation changes toward the host brand compared to those in an incongruent COO image condition (Lee et al., 2016). Conversely, subjects in the incongruent COO image condition exhibited significantly greater positive post-alliance evaluation changes toward the partner brand (Lee et al., 2016). This implies that COO images and consumer team identification jointly affect product evaluation in a cross-border strategic brand alliance context (Lee et al., 2016). For lowly identified consumers, a host brand should collaborate with a partner brand with a favorable country image, while for highly identified consumers, the partner brand should ally with a well-known host brand with a favorable COO image to leverage that image (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2016).

Collaboration of Sports Brands with Athletes

Sponsorship of sports teams and endorsements by individual athletes are common marketing strategies for sports brands (Biscaia et al., 2013; Hassan, 2019; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2023). These collaborations can significantly influence brand perception, brand image, and purchase intention of the sponsor's products (Chanavat et al., 2009; Jung & Kim, 2015; Hassan, 2019). The selection of a suitable athlete for endorsement is crucial and should consider factors such as the athlete's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Hassan, 2019). Effective use of athletes in advertising can lead to increased sales (Laluyan et al., 2017). For example, endorsement by celebrities, pro athletes, and influential people is considered a marketing factor that can drive co-branding in the Persian Gulf Pro League (PGPL) (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023).

Brand Collaboration (Co-branding) in Sports

Beyond athlete collaborations, sports brands are increasingly engaging in strategic partnerships with other brands (co-branding) (Frederick & Patil, 2010; Lee et al., 2016; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). This can involve the fusion of luxury brands with high-tech sports brands (Yu et al., 2019; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023; Zheng & Lu, 2024). The objectives of co-branding can include boosting sales, enhancing brand image, and reducing marketing costs (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). A study in the Persian Gulf Pro League (PGPL) (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023) identified four main drivers of co-branding between professional sports organizations and on-field apparel sponsors: brand management, partner relationships, marketing factors, and supporting factors. Brand management includes enhancing brand value, utilizing partner knowledge, brand position, identity, equity, and image (Borkovsky et al., 2017; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). Partner relationships encompass satisfaction, mutual trust, commitment, common interest, product reliability, and innovative strategies (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). Marketing factors involve the marketing mix, market position, competitive advantage, and entry into new domestic markets (Akgün et al., 2014; Al Badi, 2018; Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). Supporting factors include copyright, contracts, and social media law (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) identified marketing, partner relationships, brand management, and support as the most influential factors (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). When selecting a co-branding partner, it is important to consider

the fit between the brands and products (Lee et al., 2016). Cross-border strategic brand alliances (SBAs) enable host and partner brands to create synergistic effects, leading to enhanced brand image and positive brand evaluations (Lee et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was chosen to assess consumer perceptions of Adidas and Nike in the Czech Republic and Sweden. Data collection was conducted using two online questionnaires—one in Czech and one in Swedish—distributed among relevant consumer groups. A modified direct translation method was employed for the development of a bilingual questionnaire in Czech and Swedish. The survey included questions about brand perception - consumer preferences, and brand awareness (via operationalization, Figure 1).

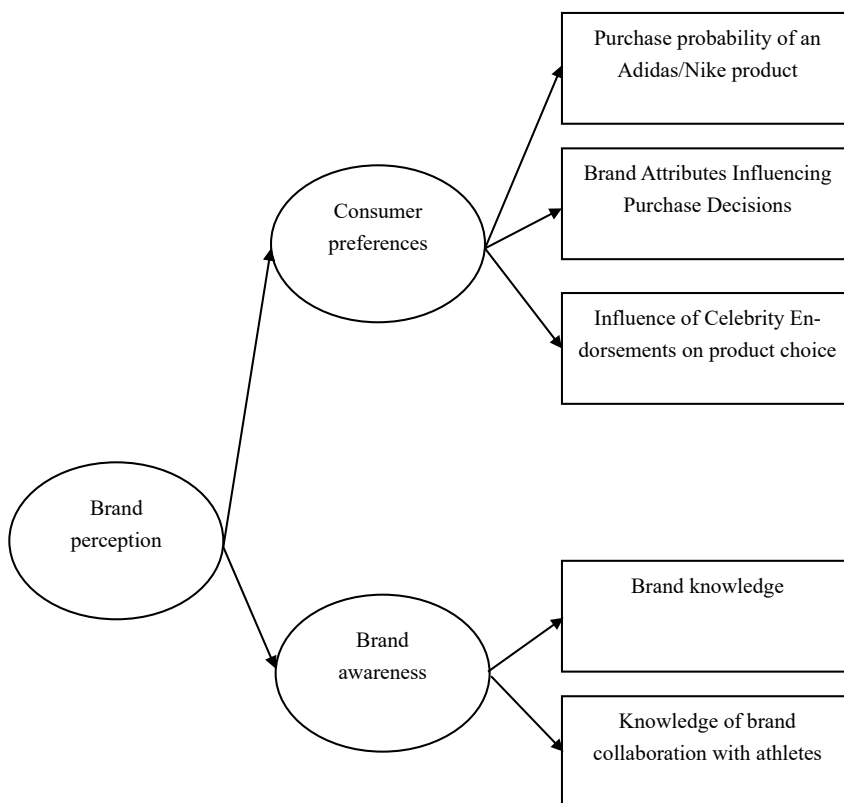


Figure 1. Operationalization

Source: own data

The research sample consisted of athletes from the Czech Republic and Sweden aged 18-40 years. The age range was chosen considering the adulthood of the respondents and divided into two generations, Z and Y. A quota sampling method was used to ensure a representative sample. The goal was to obtain 100 responses from each country to allow for an objective comparison of the questionnaires. The research sample consists

of 200 respondents and the final structure of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Structure of the research sample*

Criterion	Variants	Relative size (%) Czech	Relative size (%) Sweden
Gender	Male	35	40
	Female	65	60
Age	18-27	84	69
	28-40	16	31
Sports performance categories	Amateur/recreational athlete	36	45
	High Performance Athlete	38	12
	Elite athlete	22	34
	Professional athlete	4	9

Source: own data

Data collection was conducted through online distribution channels, ensuring accessibility and anonymity for participants. The survey included Likert scale items (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree) measuring attitudes toward Adidas and Nike in terms of brand awareness, and consumer preferences. The obtained data were compared, focusing on the most significant differences and similarities. The final dataset was analyzed using comparative statistical methods, including frequency analysis and cross-tabulation. These methods allowed for identifying key differences between Czech and Swedish consumers in their perception of Adidas and Nike.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the key findings of the empirical investigation into the perception of Adidas and Nike brands among Swedish and Czech consumers. The results are analyzed, compared within and between the two countries, and contrasted with existing literature where applicable. Limitations of the study and potential implications of the findings are also addressed.

Overall Brand Perception and Purchase Probability

The research revealed an overall positive perception of both Adidas and Nike brands in both Sweden and the Czech Republic. A significant majority of respondents in both countries indicated a likelihood of purchasing products from either brand. However, Czech respondents demonstrated a slightly more positive inclination towards both brands compared to their Swedish counterparts, who exhibited a more neutral stance. Specifically, 84% of Czech respondents indicated they would “always buy” or “rather buy” Adidas, compared to 52% of Swedish respondents. Similarly, 83% of Czech respondents expressed positive purchase intent for Nike, while this figure was 60% in Sweden. This suggests a potentially stronger brand engagement or familiarity (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Ahmadi et al., 2021) within the Czech consumer base for these dominant sports brands. Notably, Nike appeared to have a slightly higher number of potentially loyal customers in the Czech Republic, with 23% stating they would “always buy” Nike com-

pared to 10% for adidas. In Sweden, the number of respondents indicating they would “always buy” Nike (21%) was also higher than for adidas (14%).

Key Brand Attributes Influencing Purchase Decisions

The study investigated the importance of six brand attributes for both adidas and Nike: product quality, advertising/logo/slogan, product design, past personal experience, impulsive appeal, and brand prestige.

For adidas, Czech respondents identified product design (mean = 4.03, median = 4) as the most important attribute influencing their purchase decisions, followed by product quality (mean = 4.00, median = 4) and past personal experience (mean = 3.89, median = 4). In contrast, Swedish respondents prioritized product quality (mean = 3.73, median = 4) for adidas, with product design (mean = 3.64, median = 4) ranking second. The least influential attribute for adidas among Czech respondents was advertising/logo/slogan (mean = 2.52, median = 2), while for Swedes, it was impulsive appeal (mean = 2.04, median = 1).

For Nike, product quality emerged as the most crucial attribute for both Czech (mean = 4.14, median = 4) and Swedish (mean = 3.82, median = 4) respondents. Product design (Czech mean = 4.07, median = 4; Swedish mean = 3.78, median = 4) and past personal experience (Czech mean = 3.97, median = 4; Swedish mean = 3.53, median = 4) also held significant importance in both countries. Similar to adidas, advertising/logo/slogan was the least important factor for Czech consumers (mean = 2.80, median = 3) when considering Nike, whereas impulsive appeal ranked lowest for Swedish consumers (mean = 2.17, median = 2).

These findings suggest that while core product attributes like quality and design are paramount for both brands across both countries (Aslam et al., 2018), subtle differences exist in the relative importance assigned to these and other factors. Czech consumers appear to place a slightly higher emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of adidas products, while Swedes prioritize the fundamental quality. For Nike, the emphasis on quality is consistent across both demographics. The lower importance attributed to advertising and impulsive appeal suggests that purchase decisions are likely driven by more intrinsic brand values and product characteristics (Ogunnaike et al., 2017; Thanaiudompat, 2023).

Influence of Celebrity Endorsements

The study explored the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer brand choices. Overall, respondents in both countries reported a relatively low level of influence from celebrity endorsements. In the Czech Republic, the modal response was “almost not influenced,” with 65% selecting a negative influence option. In Sweden, the responses were more divided, with “occasionally influenced” and “almost not influenced” being the most frequent answers. Interestingly, the correct identification of sponsored athletes varied (Laluyan et al., 2017). For instance, LeBron James (Nike) was correctly associated with the brand by a high percentage in both countries, suggesting a strong link between certain high-profile athletes and their sponsoring brands (Biscaia et al., 2013). However, other endorsements were less accurately recognized. This suggests that while brands invest in celebrity marketing, its direct influence on purchase decisions, at least as self-reported, may be limited, or its impact might be more nuanced, contributing to overall brand image rather than immediate purchase

triggers for all consumers (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023).

Perceived Similarity of Brand Perception Across Countries

Interestingly, a similar proportion of respondents in both the Czech Republic (55%) and Sweden (55%) believed that the research findings between the two countries would be similar. However, the subsequent analysis revealed notable differences in purchase probability and the relative importance of brand attributes, indicating a potential disconnect between consumers' intuitive expectations and the empirical reality.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations warrant consideration. The sample size of 100 respondents per country limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Swedish and Czech populations. The unequal gender distribution within the samples could have introduced bias, although sub-group analysis based on gender was not performed due to this imbalance. The reliance on self-reported data via electronic questionnaires is susceptible to response bias and potential inaccuracies. The noted translation error in the response options for a purchase probability question in the Swedish version might have introduced confusion. Furthermore, the researcher's lack of fluency in Swedish necessitated reliance on translators, potentially overlooking subtle linguistic nuances. Finally, the study focused solely on adidas and Nike, neglecting the broader competitive landscape within the sports apparel and equipment market.

Significance and Potential Implications

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the cross-cultural perception of two leading sports brands. The findings highlight both universal and country-specific factors influencing consumer preferences. The consistent importance of product quality underscores the fundamental expectations of consumers in this market segment. The differing emphasis on design for adidas between the two countries suggests potential avenues for tailored marketing strategies. The relatively low reported influence of celebrity endorsements raises questions about the effectiveness and optimal utilization of this marketing tactic.

The observed differences in overall brand inclination and attribute importance suggest that while both adidas and Nike enjoy strong global brand equity, local market nuances stemming from cultural or economic factors play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences. This implies that a standardized global marketing approach might benefit from adaptation to resonate more effectively with specific national consumer segments. Future research could explore these cultural and economic influences in greater depth, employing larger and more diverse samples, and incorporating qualitative methodologies to gain a richer understanding of the underlying drivers of brand perception.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of Swedish and Czech consumers' perceptions of adidas and Nike provides empirical evidence of both shared values and distinct preferences, contributing to the broader understanding of cross-cultural brand perception in the sports industry. The findings offer practical implications for brand management and marketing strategies seeking to optimize their impact in these specific European markets.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and characterize specific differences in the perception of adidas and Nike brands between Czech and Swedish consumers. The research findings confirmed a generally positive perception of both brands in both countries, with Czech respondents exhibiting a slightly more positive attitude. Brand preferences varied, with Nike being more preferred in Sweden, while in the Czech Republic both brands were perceived similarly. The key attribute influencing purchasing decisions was product quality in both countries and for both brands, although Czech respondents attributed greater importance to the design of adidas products. Conversely, the influence of celebrity endorsement proved to be relatively low in both surveyed populations. While the research yielded valuable insights into the nuances of brand perception across cultures, limitations related to sample size, uneven gender representation, and potential biases arising from self-report questionnaires and translation inaccuracies should be considered. Future research could focus on a deeper exploration of cultural and economic factors influencing brand perception, utilizing larger and more diversified samples and combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The identified differences suggest that targeted marketing strategies that consider the specificities of national consumer segments could be more effective than a universal global approach.

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