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FROM EWOM TO BRAND LOYALTY: EXPLORING DIGITAL BEHAVIORS OF SPORTS CONSUMERS THROUGH THE S-O-R FRAMEWORK

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media usage on consumer loyalty and repurchase intention in the context of sports consumption, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. In the proposed model, brand awareness and brand trust are positioned as mediating variables that explain the psychological mechanisms through which digital stimuli influence behavioral outcomes. Data were collected from 436 sports consumers who have previously purchased sports-related products or services online. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that both eWOM and social media usage positively affect brand awareness and brand trust, which in turn significantly increase consumer loyalty and repurchase intention. Additionally, brand awareness and brand trust were found to mediate the relationships between digital interactions and behavioral responses. The study contributes to the literature by empirically validating the S-O-R model in a digital sports marketing context and offers practical implications for brand managers seeking to foster long-term consumer relationships through online engagement strategies.

Keywords: eWOM, Social Media, Brand, Repurchase Intention, Loyalty

EWOM'DAN MARKA BAĞLILIĞINA: S-O-R ÇERÇEVESİ ARACILIĞIYLA SPOR TÜKETİCİLERİNİN DİJİTAL DAVRANIŞLARININ ARAŞTIRILMASI

Bilgi

#Bu çalışma Deniz Erdoğan'ın yüksek lisans tezinin bir parçasıdır.

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, spor tüketimi bağlamında elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişim (eWOM) ve sosyal medya kullanımının tüketici sadakati ve yeniden satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkilerini Uyarıcı-Organizma-Tepki (S-O-R) modeli çerçevesinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Önerilen modelde, marka farkındalığı ve marka güveni, dijital uyarıların davranışsal sonuçlara nasıl dönüştüğünü açıklayan aracılık değişkenleri olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Veriler, daha önce çevrim içi spor ürünü veya hizmeti satın almış 436 spor tüketicisinden toplanmıştır. Hipotezler, yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (SEM) ile test edilmiştir. Bulgular hem eWOM'un hem de sosyal medya kullanımının marka farkındalığı ve marka güveni üzerinde olumlu etkiler yarattığını, bu psikolojik değişkenlerin ise tüketici sadakati ve yeniden satın alma niyeti üzerinde anlamlı biçimde etkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, marka farkındalığı ve güveninin dijital etkileşimler ile davranışsal sonuçlar arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü oynadığı doğrulanmıştır. Bu çalışma, S-O-R modelinin dijital spor pazarlaması bağlamında ampirik olarak test edilmesiyle literatüre katkı sağlamak ve marka yöneticilerine çevrim içi etkileşim stratejileri yoluyla uzun vadeli tüketici ilişkileri geliştirmeleri konusunda pratik öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eWOM, Sosyal Medya, Marka, Yeniden Satın Alma Niyeti, Sadakat

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Introduction

In today's digital environment, consumer-brand interactions have undergone a radical transformation, especially in sports consumption. With the decline of traditional media and the rise of user-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media platforms have emerged as central mechanisms shaping consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Sports consumers are no longer passive recipients of brand messages; instead, they actively participate in online communities, read reviews, and share their experiences, thereby co-creating brand meanings and influencing each other's decision-making processes (Yoon et al., 2021; Akoglu & Özbek, 2024).

Although the effects of social media usage and electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) on consumer behavior are often discussed together, these two concepts refer to qualitatively different forms of interaction. eWOM refers to the experiences, evaluations, and recommendations that users share about a product, service, or brand on digital platforms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). These contents are often based on users' personal satisfaction or complaints and serve as important sources of information that influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

In contrast, social media usage encompasses multidimensional interactions with the brand. These interactions are not limited to following eWOM content; they also include more comprehensive user behaviors such as viewing, liking, sharing, commenting on, or directly communicating with the brand (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Therefore, while eWOM can be seen as a subcomponent of the social media experience, social media usage represents a broader digital participation domain.

Although previous studies have comprehensively documented the role of eWOM and social media in influencing brand value components such as awareness and trust (Bruhn et al., 2012; Barger et al., 2016), fewer studies have examined how these digital stimuli shape behavioral outcomes such as consumer loyalty and repurchase intention, particularly in the context of sports consumption, through mediating psychological structures. This gap is particularly evident in emerging markets where digital platforms have rapidly become dominant channels for engaging with sports products and services, yet consumer behavior models have not been sufficiently adapted to reflect this paradigm shift (Islam & Rahman, 2017; Sun & Moon, 2024).

To address this gap, this study uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to investigate the psychological mechanisms underlying the effects of eWOM and social media usage on consumer loyalty and repurchase intention. Specifically, brand awareness (as a cognitive construct) and brand trust (as an emotional construct) are proposed as mediators that facilitate the transformation

of digital stimuli into behavioral responses. The S-O-R model, widely used in consumer psychology and retail research (Chang et al., 2011; Han et al., 2022), provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how external cues (stimuli) in the digital environment influence internal evaluations (organism) and subsequent actions (response).

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to develop and empirically test a comprehensive structural model that explains how eWOM and social media usage influence brand awareness and trust, and how these mediators subsequently affect consumer loyalty and repurchase intention. Thus, this study offers both theoretical and practical insights into the mechanisms by which digital stimuli shape consumer behavior in the sports domain.

This research contributes three important insights to the existing literature. First, it provides empirical validation of the S-O-R model in the context of sports consumers using advanced structural equation modeling. Second, it highlights the mediating roles of brand awareness and trust, thereby revealing the underlying psychological pathways linking digital interactions to consumer loyalty. Third, it uncovers the effect of stimuli (eWOM, social media usage) and organismic factors (brand awareness, brand trust) on sports consumers' repurchase intention.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Stimulus-organism-response (SOR)

The framework of the model developed in this study is based on Mehrabian and Russell (1974) SOR model. This model is frequently preferred in consumer behavior studies (Chang et al., 2011; Hameed et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022; Mladenović et al., 2023; Sultan et al., 2021). In this model, the stimulus (S) includes external environmental variables that affect an organism. The organism (O) reflects a psychological change mechanism in which the consumer adopts the stimulus and converts it into information. The response (R) reflects the consumer's behavior in reacting to the information contained in the external stimulus (Cuong, 2024). In previous studies, electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) (Haq et al., 2024) and social media activities (Safeer, 2024) have been identified as stimuli. Brand awareness (Malanda, 2020) and brand trust (Yadav et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2020) have been used as responses by researchers. Consumer brand loyalty (Islam & Rahman, 2017; Yu et al., 2021) and repurchase intention (Prodanova et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020) were also considered as response precursors. In this context, eWOM and social media usage were used as stimuli, brand awareness and brand trust as mediators, and consumer loyalty and repurchase intention as responses in this study. These concepts, placed within the S-O-R model,

provide a good conceptual framework for measuring the direct effect of the stimulus on the response and identifying the mediating effect of the mediator in this relationship. Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual framework.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) is a social flow of information created when consumers share their experiences about products or services on digital platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM is an important source of information for potential consumers in both the information gathering and brand discovery processes. Especially for individuals who have not yet had an experience with the brand, other users' reviews and ratings serve as cues that enhance the brand's visibility and mental accessibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). This allows eWOM to be considered an external stimulus that increases brand awareness (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Positive eWOM enhances the accessibility and credibility of brand-related information, which, in turn, increases the salience and recognition of a brand (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

Previous studies have shown that the number, recency, and credibility of eWOM content positively influence consumers' ability to recognize and remember a brand (Krasila, 2021; Tariq et al., 2017). Additionally, eWOM messages enriched with visual, textual, and experiential elements facilitate the brand's establishment in the consumer's mind (Rosário et al., 2020). Positive eWOM messages disseminated on social media platforms and online review sites influence attitude (Chih et al., 2020), brand value (Sijoria et al., 2018), brand trust (Le et al., 2024), and purchase intention (Akoglu & Özbek, 2024) have been demonstrated in previous literature. We argue that eWOM messages on social media contribute to increased awareness by enhancing cognitive access to the brand, and we hypothesize that eWOM is an effective digital marketing tool for increasing brand awareness, as follows:

H1a. eWOM has a positive effect on brand awareness.

In addition, high-quality eWOM, characterized by detailed and informative comments, increases trust among consumers (Le et al., 2024). A higher number of comments increases consumers' perceived brand trustworthiness, while authentic and reliable eWOM builds consumers' trust in the brand. Electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) positively influences consumers' trust in a brand by increasing expectations and reliability, reduces perceived risks associated with the brand, and ultimately leads to an increase in purchase intent among consumers (Ali & Javed, 2023). Based on this information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b. eWOM has a positive effect on brand trust.

Social media usage

Social media platforms offer interactive and participatory environments where users generate, share, and engage with brand-related content (Kaplan &

Haenlein, 2010). Users' exposure to brand-related content through social media increases brand salience and makes the brand more memorable (Keller et al., 2008). In the context of sports consumption, social media enables users not only to consume information but also to interact with other fans, teams, and athletes in real time, strengthening their attachment to the brand (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Brands on social media, especially through visual content, influencer posts, and user comments, are able to attract consumers' attention more easily and increase their recognition (Bilgin, 2018). Additionally, sponsored ads, story content, and interactive campaigns on social media platforms cause consumers to encounter the brand repeatedly, leading them to develop familiarity with the brand at both the sensory and cognitive levels (Bruhn et al., 2012). This situation increases both the recall and recognition of brand awareness (Zeqiri et al., 2025). Therefore, it is expected that consumers who actively use social media will have a higher level of recognition and differentiation of specific brands. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a. Social media usage has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Social media platforms are critical in strengthening this relationship of trust, as they provide a space where brands can communicate transparently, accessibly, and quickly (Hafez, 2021). Consumers can assess a brand's reliability by observing its attitude on social media, its responses to customer complaints, and its stance on social issues (Pentina et al., 2013). Additionally, positive comments, reviews, and user experiences shared by other users on social media help consumers build trust in the brand (Barreda et al., 2015). This plays a decisive role in building trust, especially for consumers who are encountering the brand for the first time or seeking information before making a purchase (Chari et al., 2016). In conclusion, as the intensity of social media use increases, the amount of information consumers obtain about the brand increases, which in turn enhances perceived transparency and reliability, thereby strengthening brand trust (Leite et al., 2024). Based on this information, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2b. Social media usage has a positive effect on brand trust.

Brand awareness

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which a brand is recognized by potential consumers and correctly associated with a particular product category (Keller, 1993). It shows how the customer feels about the product or service and reflects the true source of the brand's value (Chen et al., 2019). Awareness serves as the foundation of brand knowledge and acts as a heuristic cue that facilitates consumer decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Consumers acquire brand awareness through effective marketing communication channels such as television, mobile phones, and online advertising, which helps reduce risk in product evaluation and selection, as it provides a

guarantee of product quality and reliability (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Brand awareness improves consumers' loyalty towards the brand (Firend & Alvandi, 2015; Zhao et al., 2022) and significantly influences the decision-making process (Hutter et al., 2013; Shahid et al., 2017). According to this information, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3a. Brand awareness has a positive effect on consumer loyalty.

Brand awareness has been stated to be the antecedent for consumers to make the best purchase decision, especially in situations where there is competition between brands (Li et al., 2021). Brand awareness influences potential and existing customers and ensures a positive outcome of customers' behavioral intentions (Seo & Park, 2018). Previous research has shown that consumers' brand awareness affects their repurchase intentions (Ali, 2019; Du et al., 2022; Izzudin & Novandari, 2018; Pranata & Permana, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H3b. Brand awareness has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

Brand trust

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In a highly competitive and risk-sensitive domain like sports product consumption, trust becomes a key determinant of sustained consumer-brand relationships (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Consumers tend to exhibit more tolerant, patient and loyal behavior towards brands they trust (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Trust is built when consumers consistently receive value and reliability from the brand, often shaped by the brand's online and peer reputation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Mabkhot et al. (2017) argue that consumers who trust a brand remain loyal to that brand. Previous research has proven the influence of trust in building brand loyalty (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Sohaib & Han, 2023). Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4a. Brand trust has a positive effect on consumer loyalty.

In addition, consumers who develop a sense of trust will intend to repurchase the brand (Mabkhot et al., 2017). Previous research has also revealed that brand trust affects consumers' repurchase intention (Hidayati et al., 2021; Leung & Seah, 2022; Sun & Moon, 2024). Chung (2018) presented research results showing that brand trust affects repurchase intention in the sportswear category in his study on golf apparel. According to this information, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H4b. Brand trust has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

Consumer loyalty and repurchase intention

Consumer loyalty is defined as consumers' behavioral intentions and evaluations of the likelihood of purchasing a brand (Busser & Shulga, 2019). Aaker (1992) stated that

consumer loyalty is an important key to the marketing strategy of businesses. Brand loyal consumers are willing to pay high prices because of the social and functional value the brand offers them (Rauyruen et al., 2009). In the sport context, where emotional attachment and brand communities play an important role, loyal consumers tend to make repeat purchases, defend the brand against criticism and recommend it to others (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). As supported by previous research (Mehdi et al., 2013; Pranata & Permana, 2021; Rafiq et al., 2020; Shalehah et al., 2019), the following hypothesis was developed:

H5. Consumer loyalty has a positive effect on repurchase intention.

The mediating role of brand awareness and brand trust

This study has shown that digital stimuli (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media use) It adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to explain how consumers influence behavioral outcomes (such as brand loyalty and repurchase intention) through internal psychological mechanisms. Within this framework, brand awareness (a cognitive construct) and brand trust (an affective construct) are positioned as key "organism" elements that mediate the relationship between digital exposure and behavioral responses.

Brand awareness as a cognitive mediator

In a digital context, repeated exposure to eWOM and brand-related content on social media increases the cognitive accessibility of the brand, making it more salient in the consumer's memory (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Empirical studies have shown that the volume of brand-related conversations and content significantly increases brand recognition and recall (Chari et al., 2016; Leite et al., 2024) thereby shaping brand-related decision processes (Shahid et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2022). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H6a. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between eWOM and consumer loyalty.

H6b. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between eWOM and repurchase intention.

H7a. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media usage and consumer loyalty.

H7b. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media usage and repurchase intention.

Brand trust as an affective mediator

In digital environments, trust is developed through social signals such as user reviews, peer recommendations, and responsive brand behavior on social media (Lau & Lee, 1999; Erkan & Evans, 2016). When eWOM messages are perceived as trustworthy and authentic, consumers develop positive emotional evaluations of the brand (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Trust functions as an emotional reassurance mechanism that reduces perceived risk and strengthens relational

commitment, especially in uncertain consumption contexts (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). High trust increases the consumer's willingness to remain loyal to the brand and repeat purchase behavior without extensive evaluation (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Previous empirical studies have shown that brand-related comments and content on social media increase brand trust (Ali & Javed, 2023; Le et al., 2024), which in turn affects consumer loyalty (Chung, 2018; Sun & Moon, 2024) and repurchase intentions (Pranata & Permana, 2021; Rafiq et al., 2020). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed:

H8a. Brand trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and consumer loyalty.

H8b. Brand trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and repurchase intention.

H9a. Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media usage and consumer loyalty.

H9b. Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media usage and repurchase intention.

product or service online via the web or social media. Data were collected online through Google Forms shared on social media platforms (whatsapp, instagram, e-mail, etc.). Participants were asked whether they had purchased sports products or services using social media channels or previous customer reviews; individuals who met these criteria were included in the study, while those who did not meet the conditions were excluded. Convenience sampling method was preferred because it is advantageous in terms of time, cost and accessibility. This method allows researchers to collect data from easily accessible individuals such as student groups, local communities or online users. In addition, convenience sampling also supports the purposive sampling approach in line with the purpose of this study (Saunders et al., 2019). Cohen et al. (2017) define convenience sampling as a practical method that enables researchers to collect data from accessible participants economically and quickly. Data collection started in December 2024 and ended in February 2025. A total of 451 online data were collected. 15 participants were not

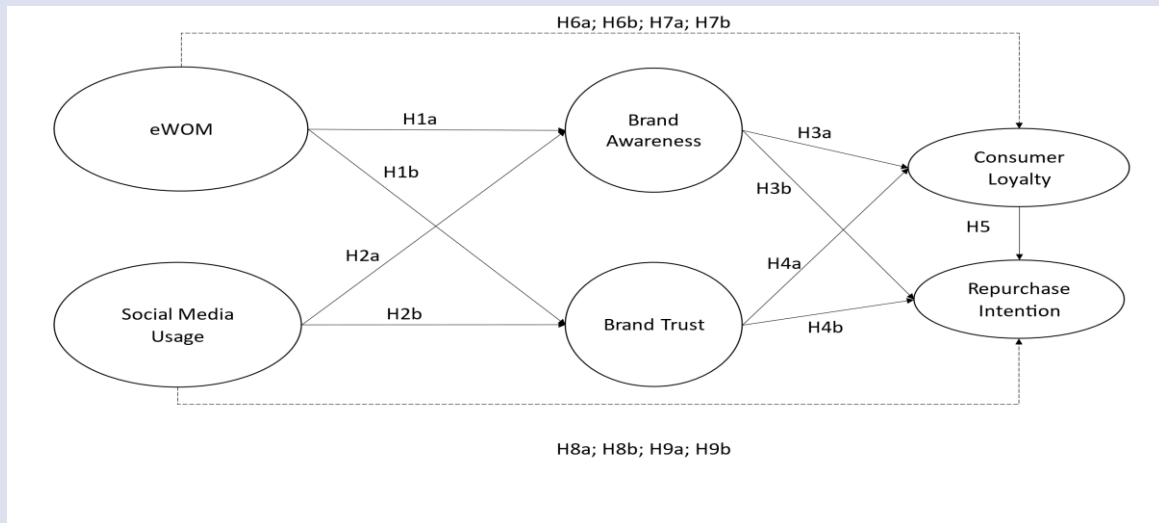


Figure 1. Research model

Method

This study uses a quantitative research design based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to investigate the impact of AI-generated information on consumers' psychological mechanisms and behavioral intentions in the context of consumers purchasing sports products and services. The research was conducted with the decision of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee dated 06.05.2025 and numbered 07.

Sample design and data collection

The research group of this study consists of sports consumers aged 18 and over who have purchased a sports

product or service online via the web or social media. Data were collected online through Google Forms shared on social media platforms (whatsapp, instagram, e-mail, etc.).

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are examined, 290 (66.5%) are female and 146 (33.5%) are male sports consumers. When the educational status of these consumers was examined, it was seen that 72.7% (n=317) were undergraduate graduates, 15.8% (n=69) were postgraduate graduates, 10.1% (n=44) were high school graduates and 1.4% (n=6) were primary school graduates. The average age of the participants was 33.84 years (± 8.97) and their average monthly income was 51,317 TL ($\pm 41,467$).

Measures

Electronic Word of Mouth Scale, Social Media Usage Scale, Brand Awareness Scale, Brand Trust Scale, Consumer

Loyalty Scale and Repurchase Intention Scale were used in the study.

Electronic Word of Mouth Scale: The scale was developed by Prasad et al. (2017). The scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Erdoğan (2025). The scale consists of 5 items (e.g. *"I recommend a particular product/brand to others online to buy it; I say positive things about the product/brand online"*). It is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale for this study was 0.870.

Social Media Use Scale: The scale was developed by Prasad et al. (2017). The scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Erdoğan (2025). The 8-item scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree). Sample items related to the scale are as follows: *"My relationship with the brand has improved thanks to social media."* and *"3-I use social media to follow sales and promotions."* The internal consistency coefficient of the scale for this study is 0.890.

Brand Awareness Scale: The Brand Awareness Scale, developed by Dabbous and Barakat (2020), consists of four items and is measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Erdoğan (2025). Example items include: *"I can quickly recognize the brands I see on social media among other competing brands"* and *"I am more familiar with the brands I encounter on social media than those I see in other settings (e.g., stores or advertisements)."* The scale demonstrated high internal consistency in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.918.

Brand Trust Scale: The original version of the scale was developed by Pappas et al. (2014) and adapted into Turkish by Çavuşoğlu and Demirağ (2021). The scale consists of four items and is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient for the scale is 0.920.

Consumer Loyalty Scale: The scale was developed by Prasad et al. (2017). The scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Erdoğan (2025). It consists of four items and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree). Sample items related to the scale are as follows: *"I am likely to continue purchasing a particular product/brand"*, *"I will consider the same company/brand as my first choice for my next purchase"*. The internal consistency coefficient for the scale is 0.886.

Repurchase Intention Scale: The original version of the scale was developed by Pappas et al. (2014) and adapted into Turkish by Çavuşoğlu and Demirağ (2021). The scale consists of 3 items and is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient for the scale is 0.944.

Data analysis

To assess the predicted relationships, analyses were conducted using a partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach supported by Smart-PLS® 3.2.8 software. PLS-SEM is a method that uses weighted composites of indicator variables to minimize unexplained variance and facilitate accountability for measurement errors (Hair Jr et al., 2021; Ringle et al., 2015). This software also identifies constructs of the dependent variable and measures the effects of each independent variable on the dependent variable (Henseler et al., 2009).

Normality Test: Mardia's (1970) multivariate normality test was conducted through the online application developed by Cain et al. (2017). Ensuring multivariate normality is an important condition for more accurate estimation of the model. The results of the analysis show that Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 11.340$, $p < 0.01$) and kurtosis ($\beta = 36.576$, $p < 0.01$) values reveal that multivariate normality is not achieved. This finding supports the preference for the PLS-SEM method because this method can produce reliable results even in cases where the normality assumption is violated (Hair et al., 2019).

Common method bias: In this study, since all data were obtained from the same source, the risk of common method bias (CMB) was assessed (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's single factor test was applied in order to determine the possible CMV and exploratory factor analysis without rotation was performed on 28 items. As a result of the analysis, it was observed that the first factor explained 33.2% of the total variance explained and since this ratio was below 50%, it was concluded that common method bias did not pose a significant problem (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Findings

In this section, the hypotheses related to the model created within the scope of the research are tested and reported below.

Measurement model

The factor loadings of the items belonging to the scale sub-dimensions in Table 1 vary between 0.634 and 0.867. Hair Jr et al. (2017), stated that factor loadings should be ≥ 0.708 . However, the authors suggest that statements with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be excluded from the model if their AVE or CR values are below the threshold (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Since the calculated AVE and CR values were above the threshold, the statements with factor loadings below 0.708 were not excluded from the measurement model (Table 1).

Table 1. Convergent validity of model variables

Constructs	Items	Outer loading (>0.6)	Cronbach's alpha (>0.7)	Rho-A (> 0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (> 0.5)
eWOM	eWOM1	0,848	0,870	0,872	0,905	0,656
	eWOM2	0,866				
	eWOM3	0,809				
	eWOM4	0,747				
	eWOM5	0,784				
Social Media Usage	SMU1	0,738	0,890	0,901	0,911	0,564
	SMU2	0,849				
	SMU3	0,818				
	SMU4	0,747				
	SMU5	0,660				
	SMU6	0,716				
	SMU7	0,762				
	SMU8	0,740				
Brand Awareness	BA1	0,893	0,918	0,919	0,942	0,804
	BA2	0,917				
	BA3	0,921				
	BA4	0,854				
Repurchase Intention	RI1	0,950	0,944	0,944	0,964	0,899
	RI2	0,960				
	RI3	0,935				
Brand Trust	BT1	0,889	0,920	0,923	0,943	0,807
	BT2	0,872				
	BT3	0,914				
	BT4	0,916				
Consumer Loyalty	CL1	0,862	0,886	0,890	0,921	0,745
	CL2	0,907				
	CL3	0,811				
	CL4	0,871				

In addition, Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.60 (George & Mallery, 2019) CR coefficient ≥ 0.70 (Hair Jr et al., 2021) and AVE coefficient ≥ 0.50 (Chin, 1998). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the constructs are between 0.834 and 0.965. Since the CR coefficients are between 0.886 and 0.967 and the AVE coefficients are between 0.552 and 0.867, it is seen that internal consistency reliability is ensured. According to these findings, convergent validity of the constructs was achieved (Table 1).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity of Model Variables (Fornell-Larcker criterion) and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	eWOM	SMU	BA	PI	BT	CL
eWOM	0,810					
Social Media Usage	0,624	0,751				
Brand Awareness	0,598	0,692	0,897			
Repurchase Intention	0,556	0,577	0,619	0,948		
Brand Trust	0,518	0,549	0,527	0,628	0,898	
Consumer Loyalty	0,595	0,614	0,712	0,729	0,607	0,863
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio	eWOM	SMU	BA	PI	BT	CL
eWOM						
Social Media Usage	0,695					
Brand Awareness	0,665	0,750				
Repurchase Intention	0,604	0,612	0,664			
Brand Trust	0,579	0,609	0,572	0,671		
Consumer Loyalty	0,674	0,686	0,788	0,793	0,673	

* Root square of AVE- HTMT<0.85 (Kline,2015)

Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were used to assess discriminant validity. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE (Average Variance Extracted) of each construct (shown

diagonally in the table) should be higher than the correlations of that construct with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). According to the table findings, this condition is met for all constructs, indicating that there is a satisfactory level of discriminant validity between the constructs.

The HTMT ratio is an alternative method that tests discrimination between constructs more precisely (Henseler et al., 2015). HTMT values below the threshold value of 0.85 suggested by Kline (2015) indicate that there is sufficient discriminant validity between the relevant constructs. According to the table, all HTMT ratios are below the threshold value of 0.85 and this finding supports that the measurement model is appropriate in terms of discriminant validity.

In conclusion, the analyses based on both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio show that the scales used in the study provide discriminant validity.

Table 3. Results of Path Diagrams Analysis for the Model (direct effects)

Hypothesis	Path	(β)	S.D	t-value	p	Confidence interval		Result
						(%2,)	(%97,5)	
	Direct effects							
H1a	eWOM→Brand awareness	0,214	0,053	4,016	0,000	0,109	0,317	Supported
H1b	eWOM→Brand trust	0,291	0,051	5,705	0,000	0,189	0,391	Supported
H2a	Social media use→Brand awareness	0,476	0,048	10,011	0,000	0,378	0,566	Supported
H2b	Social media use →Brand trust	0,362	0,056	6,477	0,000	0,253	0,472	Supported
H3a	Brand awareness →Repurchase intention	0,149	0,058	2,560	0,010	0,038	0,266	Supported
H3b	Brand awareness →Consumer loyalty	0,543	0,048	11,304	0,000	0,446	0,634	Supported
H4a	Brand trust →Consumer loyalty	0,270	0,050	5,412	0,000	0,172	0,369	Supported
H4b	Brand trust →Repurchase intention	0,320	0,050	6,412	0,000	0,224	0,418	Supported
H5	Consumer loyalty →Repurchase intention	0,459	0,059	7,845	0,000	0,345	0,572	Supported

Table 3 reports the path coefficients, t-values, significance levels and confidence intervals for the hypotheses proposed in the model. This structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis comprehensively examined the direct and indirect effects of electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM) and social media use on brand awareness, brand trust, consumer loyalty and repurchase intention. The findings revealed that eWOM directly and significantly increased brand awareness ($\beta=0.214$, $t=4.016$, $p<0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta=0.291$, $t=5.705$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, social media use had strong and positive effects on brand awareness ($\beta=0.476$, $t=10.011$, $p<0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta=0.362$, $t=6.477$, $p<0.001$). Brand awareness ($\beta=0.149$, $t=2.560$, $p=0.010$; $\beta=0.543$, $t=11.304$, $p<0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta=0.270$, $t=5.412$, $p<0.001$) directly affect consumer loyalty, while brand trust also significantly increases repurchase intention ($\beta=0.320$, $t=6.412$, $p<0.001$). Consumer loyalty was determined as the variable with the strongest direct effect on repurchase intention ($\beta=0.459$, $t=7.845$, $p<0.001$).

Table 4. Results of Path Diagrams Analysis for The Model (Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	(β)	S.D	t-value	p	Confidence interval		Result
						(%2,5)	(%97,5)	
						Indirect effects		
H6a	eWOM→Brand awareness→Repurchase intention	0,032	0,017	1,924	0,054	0,006	0,070	Not supported
H6b	eWOM→Brand trust→Repurchase intention	0,079	0,021	3,826	0,000	0,042	0,122	Supported
H7a	eWOM→Brand awareness→Consumer loyalty→Repurchase intention	0,053	0,016	3,257	0,001	0,031	0,080	Supported
H7b	eWOM→Brand trust→Consumer loyalty→Repurchase intention	0,043	0,013	3,246	0,001	0,021	0,073	Supported
H8a	Social media use→Brand awareness→Repurchase intention	0,071	0,029	2,484	0,013	0,018	0,130	Supported
H8b	Social media use →Brand trust→Repurchase intention	0,098	0,024	4,076	0,000	0,055	0,148	Supported
H9a	Social media use→Brand awareness→Consumer loyalty→Repurchase intention	0,119	0,020	5,907	0,000	0,082	0,161	Supported

H9b	Social media use → Brand trust → Consumer loyalty → Repurchase intention	0,053	0,012	4,303	0,000	0,025	0,089	Supported
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When the indirect effects are analyzed (Table 4), the effect of eWOM on repurchase intention through brand trust is significant ($\beta=0.079$, $t=3.826$, $p<0.001$). Likewise, social media use was found to have significant indirect effects on repurchase intention through both brand awareness ($\beta=0.071$, $t=2.484$, $p=0.013$) and brand trust ($\beta=0.098$, $t=4.076$, $p<0.001$). In more complex indirect pathways, eWOM and social media use positively influence repurchase intention through brand awareness/brand trust and consumer loyalty (i.e., eWOM → Brand awareness → Consumer loyalty → Repurchase: $\beta=0.053$, $t=3.257$, $p=0.001$; Social Media Use → Brand awareness → Consumer loyalty → Repurchase: $\beta=0.119$, $t=5.907$, $p<0.001$). However, the direct effect of eWOM on repurchase intention through brand awareness ($\beta=0.032$, $t=1.924$, $p=0.054$) was not statistically significant. These findings emphasize that the use of eWOM and social media in digital marketing strategies are important mechanisms that trigger consumer loyalty and ultimately repurchase intention by increasing brand awareness and trust. In particular, it can be concluded that brand trust and consumer loyalty play critical mediating roles in the outcome of these digital interactions.

Table 5. Structural model results for the model

Constructs		VIF	R ²	f ²	Q ²
eWOM	Brand Awareness	1,784	0,541	0,056	0,431
Social Media Usage		1,854		0,267 0,035	
Brand Trust		1,535			
eWOM	Brand Trust	1,653	0,348	0,079	0,276
Social Media Usage		1,653		0,121	
Brand Awareness	Repurchase Intention	2,091	0,596	0,027	0,529
Brand Trust		1,632		0,111 0,217	
Consumer Loyalty		2,391			
Brand Awareness	Consumer Loyalty	1,385	0,582	0,509 0,178	0,429
Brand Trust		1,385			

As a result of the analysis of the model in Table 5, VIF values for all variables are below 2.5, indicating that there is no serious multicollinearity problem in the model. This supports the structural accuracy of the model (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

When the R^2 values obtained for the model are examined, $R^2 = 0.524$ was found for brand awareness. This value shows that eWOM and social media use together explain 52.4% of the change in brand awareness. This confirms the impact of social media interactions and online word-of-mouth on brand visibility. For repurchase intention, $R^2 = 0.531$, indicating that eWOM, social media use and brand awareness together explain 53.1% of repurchase intention. This shows that the model explains this behavior quite well. $R^2 = 0.570$ was found for consumer loyalty. This result shows that repurchase intention explains 57% of consumer loyalty, indicating a high level of explanatory power.

According to Cohen (1988), f^2 values represent 0.02 small, 0.15 medium and 0.35 large effects (Cohen et al., 2017). According to Sarstedt et al. (2022), it is not possible to talk about an effect when the coefficients are below 0.02. The effect of eWOM on brand awareness showed a small effect ($f^2 = 0.095$). In contrast, the effect of social media use on brand awareness was found to be large ($f^2 = 0.350$), suggesting that social media interactions play a significant role in brand awareness. On the other hand, the effect of eWOM on repurchase intention is very low ($f^2 = 0.024$), while the effect of social media use on this variable is negligible ($f^2 = 0.010$). Brand awareness had a small effect on repurchase intention ($f^2 = 0.074$). The effect of repurchase intention on consumer loyalty was reported at both small ($f^2 = 0.095$) and large ($f^2 = 0.350$) effect levels, and this difference may reflect the effects of multiple paths in the model. In general, it is seen that the effect of social media use on brand awareness has the strongest effect compared to other variables in the model.

The Q^2 values obtained as a result of the blindfolding analysis show that the predictive power of the model is high. The Q^2 values above 0.25 for brand awareness ($Q^2 = 0.431$), brand trust ($Q^2 = 0.276$), consumer loyalty ($Q^2 = 0.429$) and repurchase intention ($Q^2 = 0.529$) variables reveal that the model has a strong structural validity in predicting the relevant constructs. These results support that the research model is valid and predictive in both academic and applied contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that eWOM and social media use have significant effects on consumer loyalty and repurchase intention through brand awareness and brand trust among sports consumers. The model created in the research was tested with structural equation modeling and indirect effects were examined in addition to direct effects.

According to the research results, eWOM has a significant and positive effect on brand awareness and hypothesis 1a is confirmed. User reviews and recommendations disseminated electronically strengthen consumers' brand recognition and recall processes. This finding is in line with the results of (Dülek & Aydın, 2020) regarding the role of eWOM in strengthening brand awareness. In addition, Vietrandita et al. (2024) show that positive eWOM leads to higher brand awareness. For example, a study on TikTok found a strong correlation (0.800) between positive eWOM and brand awareness, explaining 64.1% of its variability. Conversely, negative eWOM can negatively impact brand awareness. Research shows that negative perceptions resulting from eWOM can lower brand evaluations, especially when the consumer-brand relationship is weak (Yuan & Peluso, 2020). In addition, eWOM makes the brand more visible in the digital environment, which helps it to gain more space in consumers' brand memory.

The analysis shows that eWOM also has a significant and positive effect on brand trust; hypothesis 1b is confirmed. Consumers develop a more trusting perception of the brand by being influenced by other users' experiences and opinions. This result confirms the trust-building power of eWOM as stated in Choi et al. (2018) and Pourkabirian et al. (2021). Trust stands out as a critical element in establishing and maintaining the emotional bond between the brand and the consumer. Seifert and Kwon (2020) also stated that electronic word-of-mouth builds brand trust in consumers in their research on 237 students. Similar to our research findings, Marziqah and Albari (2023) reported that eWOM has a positive and significant effect on brand trust in their study on ice cream and tea consumers. According to this result, positive electronic word-of-mouth increases consumers' trust in the brand and facilitates interactions between consumers that contribute to the development of brand trust.

In Hypothesis 2a, a strong and significant effect of social media use on brand awareness was identified and this hypothesis was confirmed. Social media platforms increase awareness by providing consumers with the opportunity to interact with the brand and get to know the brand through different content. This is in line with Muntinga et al. (2011) COBRAS model, as social media allows brands to communicate more interactively and dynamically with consumers. Alkhasoneh et al. (2025) also stated in their research that the use of social media increases brand awareness and these results are in line with our research results. Borah et al. (2022) argue that

social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram play an important role in increasing sustainable brand awareness. In addition, the effect size ($f^2=0.350$) shows that this relationship has an important place in the model.

In our study, social media use also had a significant and positive effect on brand trust ($\beta=0.362$; $p<0.001$). Consumers trust the brand more by following the transparency, user experiences and up-to-date content of the brand through social media. This result is in line with the literature emphasizing the role of social media in building brand trust, such as (Habibi et al., 2014) and (Tatar & Eren-Erdogmus, 2016). Ebrahim (2020) also emphasized that social media marketing activities positively affect brand trust in his research on Egyptian consumers. Hafez (2021) also confirmed the positive impact of social media marketing activities on consumers' brand trust in his research on consumers who utilize private bank services and are active social media users.

According to the research findings, brand awareness has a significant and strong effect on consumer loyalty and repurchase intention and hypothesis h3a and hypothesis 3b are confirmed. Consumers' recognition and recall of a brand supports the loyalty development process. Firend and Alvandi (2015) and Abbas et al. (2021) revealed the positive effect of brand awareness on consumer loyalty in parallel with our research results. Zhao et al. (2022) also concluded that brand awareness positively affects brand loyalty in their research on consumers of cosmetic brands.

The direct effect of brand awareness on repurchase intention was also confirmed in these research findings. Astawa and Rahanatha (2021) concluded that brand awareness positively affects repurchase intention in their research on consumers of Nivea cosmetics brand in Denpasar. Srivastava (2024) stated that brand awareness positively affects customer satisfaction, which in turn affects repurchase intention. Contrary to our research findings, Astari et al. (2025) showed that brand awareness does not directly affect repurchase intention and concluded that this effect is realized through the mediating effect of brand satisfaction.

Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty and hypothesis 4a is confirmed. Akoglu and Özbek (2021), in their research on sports consumers, showed that brand trust positively affects consumers' brand loyalty. In addition, Atulkar (2020); Huang (2017) also obtained results parallel to our research results. Mabkhot et al. (2017) confirmed the strong effect of brand trust on brand loyalty in their research on 330 consumers in Malaysia.

In addition, it was confirmed by the research results that brand trust, one of the research hypotheses, has a significant effect on repurchase intention. These results are in line with the findings of Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Dick and Basu (1994) that trust is a fundamental element in shaping consumer behavior. Sun and Moon (2024) found that brand trust positively affects repurchase intention in their study on Dasani consumers, a bottled water brand in the United States. Leung and

Seah (2022) also obtained parallel results with our research results.

According to the research findings, consumer loyalty has a strong and positive effect on repurchase intention and hypothesis 5 is confirmed. There are many studies in the literature that support our research findings (Aquinia et al., 2021; Ding et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2017; Pranata & Permana, 2021). Tsai et al. (2025) revealed that consumer loyalty positively affects repurchase intention in a study conducted with online travel agency customers. Customers with high brand loyalty, who purchase a brand repeatedly and show a strong commitment are thought to have higher repurchase intentions (Shin et al., 2017). The $R^2=0.531$ value obtained in the model shows that the variables explaining repurchase intention have a high explanatory power.

The research findings reveal that both electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media use have significant indirect effects on repurchase intention. eWOM does not affect repurchase behaviors directly, but through mediators such as brand awareness, brand trust and consumer loyalty. This can be explained by the fact that awareness, when limited to a cognitive level of recognizing or remembering a brand, may not trigger deeper, more emotional behaviors such as loyalty (Keller, 2003). Consumer awareness of a brand does not guarantee that they will become loyal customers. When other variables such as perceived value, brand image, or satisfaction do not come into play, awareness has only a limited effect on loyalty (Aaker, 1996). Although hypothesis H6a was not supported, hypothesis H6b showed that eWOM significantly influences repurchase behavior through brand trust. This finding suggests that eWOM not only conveys information but also builds trust in perceptions about the brand (Akoglu & Özbek, 2024; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ismagilova et al., 2017).

Similarly, in line with hypotheses H7a and H7b, eWOM has a significant effect on repurchase intention through consumer loyalty. This suggests that the effects of eWOM play a role not only in the initial purchase decision but also in long-term loyalty behaviors (Hajli, 2014). It is seen that loyal consumers are more sensitive to positive eWOM and this sensitivity combined with brand loyalty increases repurchase intention (Akoglu & Özbek, 2024; Sweeney et al., 2014).

When the effects of social media use are analyzed, within the scope of hypotheses H8a and H8b, it is determined that social media use makes significant contributions to repurchase intention through both brand awareness and brand trust. Social media allows consumers to experience brands more frequently and interactively, reinforcing brand awareness and trust (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Voorveld et al., 2018). Moreover, as shown in hypotheses H9a and H9b, social media use has strong effects on repurchase intention through consumer loyalty. This shows that social media has the function of not only acquiring information but also building emotional and social attachment (Habibi et al., 2014).

Overall, it is seen that the indirect effects of eWOM and social media use on repurchase behaviors gain meaning through variables such as brand awareness, brand trust and consumer loyalty.

Theoretical implications

This study makes three important theoretical contributions to the sport marketing and consumer behavior literature. First, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) used in the research has been validated as an effective framework for explaining consumer behavior in the digital environment. The process by which external stimuli, such as eWOM and social media use, are transformed into behavioral outcomes (loyalty and repurchase intention) through consumers' internal evaluations (brand awareness and trust) has been clearly demonstrated. This supports the validity of the S-O-R model in the context of digital sports consumption. Second, the study revealed how digital stimuli shape consumer behavior through cognitive (brand awareness) and affective (brand trust) constructs. This finding extends previous research (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016) by showing that social media and eWOM effects in particular create not only direct but also indirect effects through psychological constructs. Third, the structural model developed in this study empirically tested and confirmed the mediating role of brand awareness and trust on both loyalty and repurchase intention. This indicates that cognitive and affective components should be evaluated together in the formation process of consumer loyalty and contributes to the limited studies in the literature on the relationships between these constructs.

Practical implications

This study offers several practical recommendations for brand managers and digital marketing specialists in the sports industry. First, given the powerful impact of eWOM and social media usage on consumer behavior, brands need to strengthen their digital engagement strategies. In particular, encouraging positive user reviews, managing digital communities, and maintaining constant interaction on social media are key practices that can increase brand loyalty. Sports brands can encourage users who purchase products to leave reviews via email or app notifications. For example, a small discount coupon or loyalty points can be offered after each review. Additionally, social media contests can be organized where users can share their experiences in video or photo format. Second, the process of building brand awareness should be prioritized. By increasing the visibility of sports brands in the digital environment, conducting awareness campaigns targeting the target audience, and producing consistent content, brand awareness can be increased and loyalty behaviors can be encouraged. Instead of product promotion on social media, storytelling content related to the context of product use (e.g., "How sports changed my life") can be shared. By preparing original experience videos with influencer collaborations, visibility can be increased on

platforms frequently used by the target audience (e.g., Reels, TikTok). Third, building brand trust plays a critical role in purchase intent. Accordingly, elements that build trust, such as transparent communication, quality service delivery, attention to customer experience, and responsiveness to user feedback, will contribute to establishing long-term relationships with consumers. FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) and user review sections should be detailed and included on digital sales platforms. Automatic systems and live support applications that provide consumers with real-time information during post-sales service processes (returns, exchanges, shipping tracking, etc.) should be integrated. Additionally, timely, empathetic, and solution-oriented responses should be provided to criticisms received via social media. Finally, brands should focus not only on product and service quality but also on their perceived reliability and reputation management in the digital environment. These findings demonstrate that brand management in the digital age requires a multi-layered strategy. Social media listening tools (e.g., Mention, Brandwatch) should be used to monitor posts about the brand and intervene before negative perceptions arise. Additionally, satisfaction surveys should be sent regularly to calculate digital reputation scores, and strategies should be updated based on this data.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study contributes valuable insights into the digital consumer behavior of sports consumers, certain limitations should be acknowledged that may affect the generalizability and scope of the findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to make causal inferences. Although structural equation modeling allowed the testing of complex

relationships among variables, future research should consider longitudinal designs to observe how eWOM and social media usage influence brand trust, awareness, and loyalty over time. Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through online surveys, which may be subject to common method bias, despite the applied control procedures (e.g., Harman's single-factor test). Future studies may enhance the robustness of results by integrating behavioral data, such as social media engagement metrics or purchase histories. Third, the sample consisted of sports consumers in Turkey who had previously made online purchases. While this context is relevant, the findings may not fully reflect behaviors in different cultural or economic settings. Future research should aim for cross-cultural comparisons to determine whether the observed relationships hold across diverse markets. Fourth, the model focused on brand awareness and brand trust as mediating mechanisms within the S-O-R framework. Although these are central psychological variables, future studies could explore additional mediators or moderators, such as brand engagement, perceived value, or individual differences (e.g., sports involvement, digital literacy) to better explain consumer responses. Finally, this research concentrated on generic social media usage and eWOM, without differentiating between platform types (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, X) or content characteristics (e.g., user-generated vs. brand-generated). Future research could segment digital channels and analyze content typologies to provide more nuanced strategies for sports brand managers. In sum, addressing these limitations in future studies will not only enhance the generalizability of the findings but also deepen our theoretical understanding of how digital stimuli shape consumer behavior in the evolving landscape of sports marketing.

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Research Ethics Commitment Statement

The research was conducted with the decision of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee dated 06.05.2025 and numbered 07.