Brand Logo Benefit: Is There any Evidence of its Impact in the Higher Education Sector?

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Abstract
Few studies have examined the impact of brand logo in higher education sector. Particularly, the literature has neglected the benefits that a brand logo can have in this context. Thus, this paper outlines a framework that contributes to a greater understanding of brand logo benefits in higher education sector and extends the framework of previous studies by accounting for continuance commitment and word of mouth. We analyzed our model based on the data obtained from a sample of 340 undergraduate students from public universities in Tehran, Iran. The results indicated that the ideal self-image congruence and the brand logo benefit have a positive significant impact on commitment and word of mouth. In addition, the self-image congruence directly influences the brand logo benefit and word of mouth, and indirectly influences commitment.

Keywords: brand logo benefit, self-image congruence, word of mouth, commitment, higher education.

1. Introduction

Branding has recently become one of the most important factors in the higher education context. Recent branding approaches have been introduced to help the growth and survival of organizations operating in this sector (Ghobehei et al., 2019). It is suggested, "With increased competition and complexity of offerings in higher education, it is important for universities to apply effective branding strategies to differentiate themselves from competitors to better capitalize on the opportunities" (Mirzaei et al., 2016).

Branding strategies in higher education context have basically had an outside-in approach, such as advertisement and logo, to target students (Sujchaphong et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be stated that the brand and its characteristics in an academic context can be presented to students with a well-designed logo.

Logo is a well-studied concept in marketing literature and many studies have focused on the tangible aspects of the logo. For example, Van Grinsven and Das (2016) noted that the complexity of the brand logo design impacts brand recognition and attitude. Labrecque and Milne (2012) indicated that the color of the logo influences brand perception. However, we believed that these measures are viewed as the tip of the iceberg of logo, and the important aspects of the below-sea part of this iceberg are ignored. Particularly, we believed that some other functions of logo such as brand logo benefit have been neglected in literature.

Logos are known to contribute to recognizability and are an answer to the problem of

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indistinguishability (Erjansola et al., 2021). In addition to the functional benefits of logos, Park et al. (2013) presented another two main benefits for them as self-expressiveness and aesthetic benefits.

Japutra et al. (2015) defined brand logo benefit as a collection of benefits (including self-expressive, aesthetic, and functional ones) that are perceived by the audiences based on a logo of a brand. This concept has a great impact on anticipating some of the important behaviors such as commitment. Despite the importance of brand logo benefit, very few studies focused on this topic. To the best of our knowledge, there are currently only two studies (Japutra et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013) which have addressed this topic. However, even these studies suffer from a number of limitations. Therefore, this paper aims to gain a more complete understanding of brand logo benefit in the higher education context.

In general, this paper expands on previous studies by investigating the relationship between brand logo benefit and continuance commitment. It is notable that previous studies (Japutra et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013) concentrated only on normative and affective commitment in their conceptual model; however, Allen and Meyer (1990) identified another type of commitment, called "continuance commitment," which has not been considered in these two related articles. Another contribution of this study is the investigation of word of mouth (WOM) concept that was suggested by Japutra et al. (2016). Therefore, in this study we extend the literature by considering the WOM and continuance commitment in our conceptual model.

As there is a scarcity of research that investigates the issue from a country-of-origin perspective, Iran was chosen as the context of this study. Japutra et al. (2016) and Rauschnabel et al. (2016) argued that universities need to increasingly focus on applying branding and marketing techniques to overcome the challenges posed by today's competitive environment such as declining university budgets and student enrollment rates. In addition, evidence from different lines of research suggests that university education is one of the main factors that influences various aspects of a country's economy. Iran – due to the sanctions – needs to consider any activity that improves its economy. An example is the development of a qualified workforce (Endo et al., 2019), which is considered to be of great importance for promoting a country's economy. In addition, it seems that the differences in cultural backgrounds are an important matter, because people respond differently to branding activities based on cultural differences. Thus, it would be worthwhile to examine the influence of academic branding from Iranian perspective.

Specifically, this study contributes to the knowledge in five ways. Firstly, according to Japutra et al. (2015), research on brand logo benefit is currently at its initial stage. Therefore, this study provides a better understanding of the role of brand logo benefit by investigating some of its important antecedents and consequences. The second contribution of this study is adding conceptually to the current body of knowledge through investigating continuance commitment and WOM concepts. Another knowledge gap is related to extending the branding literature by developing a more comprehensive model for the analysis of brand logo benefit. The fourth contribution of this study is the empirical contribution to the current body of knowledge through new evidence from Iran. Finally, this study is one of the few studies that have been done in the topic of brand logo benefit in higher education context. Thus, the findings of this study have implications for both researchers and practitioners. At the theory level, the study provides a greater understanding of brand logo benefit role within the higher education context. On the other hand, it gives practitioners insight into the importance of a brand logo benefit. In addition, investigating Iranians' perceptions extends current research on branding to a distinctly different cultural context and may provide useful implications about expanding business across cultures.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Self-Image Congruence

Self-concept and self-image have been introduced under the concept of self-image congruence to the consumer behavior. Self-image congruence can be conceptualized as compatibility between the audience and the brand image. In a more explicit sense, this concept is defined as the match between the audience's self-concept, which consists of two ideal and actual aspects, and the image of a product, brand, store, etc. (Sung & Huddleston, 2018).

This concept is related to the symbolic and social characteristics of the brand image, and its purpose is to satisfy the personal and social motivations of audiences, such as self-esteem and social approval (Klabi, 2020). It must be noted that the concept of self-image congruence is based on the self-congruity theory, which states that "audiences compare their self-image with different brand images and thereafter use those brands that reinforce their self-image" (Shu & Strombeck, 2017;539). Therefore, based on this theory, higher levels of self-brand congruity lead to positive attitudes about the brand (Shu & Strombeck, 2017). In an academic context, when students match the image of the university with their image and evaluate it as appropriate to their image, a high congruency will be experienced. Self-image congruence is an important part of the analysis in consumer behavior because it provides strategic insights into positioning and advertisement analysis, and can also serve as a basis for market segmentation (Sudhana et al., 2020).

2.2. The Brand Logo Benefit

Recently, there has been intense competition among institutions to promote their brands, and they intend to use different strategies to overtake their competitors in this competition. One of the brand factors that has received a lot of attention in the strategies of institutions is brand logo (Kaur & Kaur, 2019). Brand logo is a type of stimulus that is complex and consists of several visual features that convey the meaning of the brand to the audience (Chen & Bei, 2019). Brand logos are known as the identifying factor of brands, and the importance of them is such that some famous brand logos have been unjustly cheated and copied because the brand logo can have many benefits (Pathak et al. 2019; Walsh et al. 2019). For example, one of the benefits that can be considered for the brand logo is the consolidation and explanation of the brand identity and consumer identity, whose globally successful examples include Coca-Cola and Apple. These two brands have been able to develop and explain both brand identity and consumer identity from two dimensions of brand differentiation and lifestyle differentiation (Walsh et al. 2019).

The brand logo has been given a lot of attention both practically and theoretically and is known as one of the important components in building a visual identity (Foroudi et al., 2019). However, it should be noted that investigating the importance of the benefits of the brand logo is just as important as its development and explanation. In addition, according to Bettels et al. (2019), little information is available on the impacts and benefits that a brand logo can have on audience perception. Therefore, one of the objectives of the present study is to address this gap.

2.3. Commitment

Commitment is an implicit or explicit bond made to maintain the relationship between the parties to an exchange (Khan et al., 2020). One of the principles of a long-term relationship is commitment and in the area of organizations, it is considered as a psychological attachment

with the organization. In the context of brand management, this concept is defined by the audience as the desire for a stable relationship with a brand (Nadeem et al., 2020). This concept is increasingly used in marketing to investigate the comparisons of brands by the customers. In other definitions, commitment is described as the customer's desire to maintain a valuable relationship that ensures maximum effort to maintain it (Khan et al., 2020). In previous literature, it has been stated that commitment is the most important dependent variable that has been used in the relationship between the two parties of the exchange, and so far, three components have been proposed for this concept, namely affective, normative and continuance (Rather, 2018). All three types of commitment can be used in different situations and can have different meanings. Affective commitment focuses on creating a positive emotional relationship with a subject, normative commitment is based on applying moral obligation to a subject, and continuance commitment is a logical and task-oriented concept (Chae et al., 2020). In this paper we adopt the continuance dimension of commitment to measure student commitment to a university brand because most previous research has investigated the other two dimensions (Shi et al., 2019) and there is a gap in this area.

2.4. Word of Mouth

The importance of WOM has long been considered both theoretically and practically. The history of this subject indicated that it has been applied in many disciplines, journals, and research centers since 1950s. Undoubtedly, WOM is one of the main research areas in the field of marketing and has been identified as an important topic (Iyer & Griffin, 2020). It must be noted that a large part of the studies in this area of science has focused on consumer markets and products. In the last two decades, there has been a significant change in the field of WOM studies, the approach of which has shifted from being part of customer interactions to WOM strengthening programs (Dost et al., 2019).

Previous studies state that WOM is a key factor in decision-making. This impact is referred to as more powerful than advertising and mass communication tools. Therefore, with the advent of new technologies and social media, WOM has become more widely applied (Strandberg et al., 2020). WOM can be understood as a discussion-like phenomenon that involves casual conversations and deep sharing of information. It should be noted that since WOM usually has a receiver, it could be active and passive. In a simpler sense, consumers who seek WOM information will be more likely to be affected, and this is more likely to happen in higher risk situations and decisions (Sipilä et al., 2017).

2.5. The Self-Image Congruency and Brand Logo Benefit

Today, institutions in the higher education sector should apply corporate and consumer branding approaches regardless of the context differences, because it is an important issue for them to survive in a competitive market. In addition, from a theoretical perspective, university branding is an important area in future for theory and practice of brand management science (Chapleo et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2020). Thus, investigating this topic in the context of higher education has great importance for both practitioners and scholars.

Brand logo is one of the effective factors of the brand because today's environment is more based on visual tendencies and brand logo plays a pivotal role in this regard (Foroudi et al., 2019). Despite the importance of the logo, the literature on this subject has been scattered. For example, Kim and Lim (2019) have reviewed the literature on the brand logo and argued that this area of science needs further investigations.

Self-congruence theory is one of the theories that provides useful and important bases for further study of the brand logo, especially its benefit. Self-congruency is defined as the perceived similarity between an individual's personality and the organization's personality. Therefore, this concept is based on perceptions of the brand as a general concept. It should be noted that most organizations have used self-congruency for decades to influence the audiences. In addition, this concept – unlike the functional congruence – is a symbolic concept and can communicate a lot with other symbolic elements of the organization such as brand (Zogaj et al., 2021).

Done in an academic context, Japutra et al. (2016) study found that self-image congruency has a positive impact on brand logo benefit. According to Rauschnabel et al. (2016), developing and communicating a brand is of great importance and value for universities. Therefore, we argue that there is a positive and significant relationship between self-image congruency (actual and ideal) and brand logo benefit.

> **Hypothesis 1:** Actual self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts brand logo benefit.
> **Hypothesis 2:** Ideal self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts brand logo benefit.

2.6. Brand Logo Benefit and Commitment

The brand benefit is based on the perception of the brand created by the marketer's management (Jeon, 2017). On the other hand, brands have various components, all of which are involved in this perception. For example, the logo, which is known as one of the components of the brand, has given the brand a unique advantage. Logos are visual cues that help identify and differentiate institutions from each other. In general, logos can help institutions better communicate with their audiences (Kim & Lim, 2019). It is stated that logos have different impacts on the audience's commitment. This is important because the logo as a visual cue creates a different basis for communication with the consumer and brand-related thoughts in the consumer's memory (Walsh et al., 2019).

Park et al. (2013) reported a positive relationship between brand logo benefit and commitment. In other words, the better the performance of the institution in providing brand logo benefit, the higher the increase of brand commitment (Park et al., 2013). In addition, based on our knowledge, the commitment to the university brand plays an important role in determining students' decision-making and WOM. In another study, Japutra et al. (2016) extended the model created by Park et al. (2013) and achieved the same results. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **Hypothesis 3:** Brand logo benefit positively and significantly impacts commitment.

2.7. Self-Image Congruency and Commitment

The reflection of the self through brand is a topic that has been widely investigated in the marketing literature. Self-congruence has a significant impact on deepening people's attitudes and behaviors towards the brand (Kara et al., 2020), because it plays a pivotal role in the consumer's/ student's processing of information (Kressmann et al., 2006). In simple terms, self-image congruency helps explain and predict different aspects of consumers' behaviors (Hosany & Martin, 2012). One of these behaviors is commitment to the brand.

In the higher education sector, high self-congruence with brand will bring the satisfaction of students, and satisfaction will certainly lead to commitment (Jamshidi & Rousta, 2021; Suh et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be said that commitment is one of the behavioral consequences

of self-congruence. Therefore, audiences who show a high level of commitment and establish a strong relationship with the brand will most likely perceive strong relationships between themselves and the brand (Rather, 2018). This commitment is especially important in the continuance commitment because "individuals with a high degree of continuance commitment extend their energy on behalf of the organization for contemplating because it is to be in their interest to try and do, therefore" (Valaei & Rezaei, 2016).

Zhang and Bloemer (2008) proposed a positive relationship between self-image congruency and commitment. Based on that, we posit that self-image congruency will positively impact commitment. Thus:

Hypothesis 4: Actual self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts commitment.

Hypothesis 5: Ideal self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts commitment.

2.8. Self-image Congruency and Word of Mouth

Studies on self-congruity show that self-congruity with an organization/ brand has favorable outcomes with regard to a range of behavioral intentions such as WOM (Strandberg et al., 2020). Moreover, it is a strong tool for non-profit organizations, including universities (Lang & Lawson, 2013; Moise et al., 2019). In the academic context, the students' WOM refers to the degree to which the students are talking about their university with their friends after their enrollment (Casidy, 2014).

Despite the importance of WOM in interpersonal communication, studies on this topic in the field of marketing for higher education sector are still scarce (Le et al., 2020). Therefore, this paper attempts to address this issue.

Audience can promote brands and show loyal behaviors (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010). Athiyaman (1997) reported that the students' opinions about the university are affected by the students' WOM. Moreover, the results of the studies that have investigated MBA students show that WOM is an important factor that influences students' decisions about selecting courses and universities (Casidy, 2014).

Some studies show that when consumers identify themselves with a brand, they tend to buy more and like to recommend that brand to others (Ahearne et al., 2005). Based on the results of the study conducted on the university students, those who introduce themselves with university brands show some supportive behaviors and present the positive WOM to others (Arnett et al., 2003). In general, our research puts forward self-congruence as the driver of WOM. Self-congruence was chosen because universities have been using the actual and ideal self-concept to communicate and attract top students to their brands.

In light of the limited works of WOM in the higher education context, this study investigates the impact of actual self-image congruency on WOM behavior of students. The following hypotheses investigate this relationship:

Hypothesis 6: Actual self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts WOM.

Hypothesis 7: Ideal self-image congruency positively and significantly impacts WOM.

### 2.9. The Brand Logo Benefit and Word of Mouth

The main value of logos is the identification and differentiation of a brand from other brands (Maclnnis et al., 1999). However, some studies in the literature focused on customers' emotional reactions. For example, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) discussed the effects of logos on the affective and cognitive reactions, and that logos have a positive impact on loyalty.

Bossel et al. (2019) suggest that the brand logo may have several important consequences, such as buying intention. Since the brand attitude has a significant relationship with both buying intention and WOM (Chu & Chen, 2019), it seems that there is a positive relationship between the brand logo benefit and WOM. In addition, previous studies have emphasized the necessity to adapt and evaluate every construct that leads to satisfaction, loyalty, and WOM in the higher education sector. This necessity is because of the high competition in this sector that has led to changes in the rate of enrollment, retention, and graduation of students (Rehman et al., 2020). Thus, the last hypothesis strives to address this issue.

Hypothesis 8: Brand logo benefit positively and significantly impacts WOM.

2.10. Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents our conceptual framework. We argue that brand logo benefit is impacted by actual self-image congruence and ideal self-image congruence. Japutra (2016) states that if brand benefits help the audiences, especially in the part of functional benefits (such as finding a job by a college student), the audiences seem to be more committed. In addition to this commitment, there may be other positive consequences, such as WOM. Therefore, we argue that the brand logo benefit strengthens commitment and WOM. In addition, if the brand effectively represents the self-image, we will have more commitment and WOM from the audience.
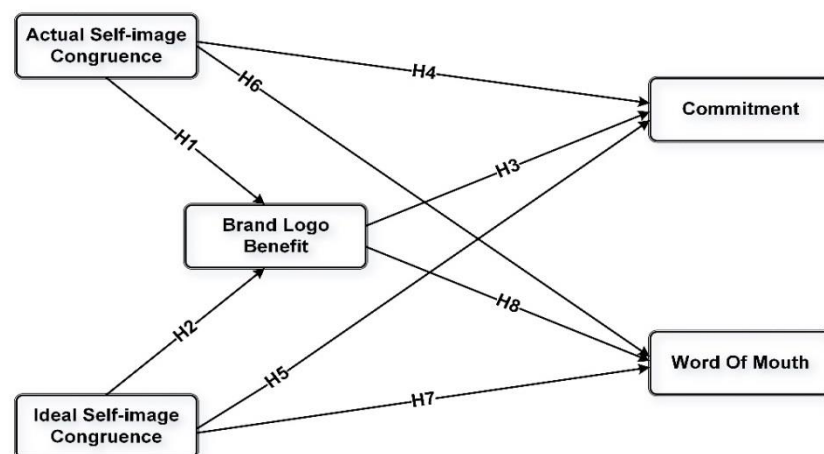
Figure 1. Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

Data were collected through a questionnaire survey. The population included 2,963 undergraduate students studying management in public universities in Tehran, including Universities of Alzahra, Tehran, Kharazmi, Shahid Beheshti, Shahed, and Allameh Tabataba'i. We believed that the incorporation of these universities jointly in the analysis would not interfere because they are the most well-known universities established in Tehran, the capital city of Iran, and are all administered under the supervision of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology of Iran. Therefore, they all represent the major part of the public higher education sector brand in Iran.

A total of 420 paper-and-pen questionnaires were distributed among the undergraduate students of the aforementioned public universities in Tehran who studied in the management field. Based on the stratified random sampling method, we divided statistical population of this study into six major subpopulations (strata) and then applied random sampling in each

stratum (Jing et al., 2015). Approximately 81% percent response rate was achieved and 340 usable questionnaires were gathered for analysis. According to Cochran formula, this is an acceptable sample size.

The profile of the respondents is contained in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

University	Population size	Percentage	Sample size
Allameh Tabataba'i	1111	37.5	128
Tehran	742	25	85
Shahid Beheshti	480	16.2	55
Shahed	220	7.5	25
Kharazmi	208	7	24
Alzahra	202	6.8	23
Sum	2963	100	340

To collect the data, a questionnaire that contained 25 items was used. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with statements based on a five-point Likert scale (1= completely disagree to 5= completely agree). The measures used to assess the constructs in this study came from previous research. For actual and ideal self-congruency, we adopted Ahn et al. (2013) and Nam et al. (2011) scales. To measure this construct, many studies traditionally employ the multi-attribute attitude models. Common multi-attribute models include a wide range of models. However, the belief-only model appears most frequently in literature and seems most appropriate for this study. In addition, we used the Meyer and Herscovitch, (2001) and Fullerton (2003) scales to measure commitment construct, because it is asserted that this scale was more appropriate than other existing instruments. In order to measure brand logo benefit, we adopted nine items from the scale by Park et al. (2013), which according to our knowledge, it is the only scale to measure this construct. Finally, word of mouth was tested through four items that were extracted from the study of Brüggen et al. (2011).

SmartPLS (2.0. M3.) was used in this study for data analysis and hypothesis testing purposes, as it made confirmatory factor analysis possible. Hair et al. (2012) analyzed the use of PLS in 30 top marketing journals over a 30-year period and found that its use has increased. Compared to covariance-based structural equation modelling, PLS allows for the use of non-normal data, small sample sizes, and the formative measurements of latent variables (Hair et al., 2012, Hair et al., 2016). In this study, we also used PLS-SEM because the variables did not follow the normal distribution.

After collecting the data, a convergent and discriminant validity test was used to check for validity. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were also used to investigate the reliability because the questionnaire was translated from English to Persian, and so reliability needed to be rechecked. As shown in Table 2, the results indicated the appropriate reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Reliability Results

Construct	Dimension	N	α	CR
Actual self-image congruency	-	3	0.82	0.89
Ideal self-image congruency	-	3	0.73	0.84
Brand logo benefit	Operational	2		
	Visual	2	0.84	0.88
	Self-expressiveness	2		
Word of mouth	-	4	0.91	0.93
Commitment	Affective	3		
	Continuous	3	0.87	0.90
	Normative	3		

The final stage in measurement model evaluation was the examination of convergent and discriminant validity. In this study, we used the average variance extracted (AVE) and Fornell-Larcker criterion to this end. As shown in Table 3, the measurement model had satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity, since all AVE values were higher than 0.5 and all square roots of the AVE were higher than the highest correlation with any other construct in the model (Hair et al., 2016). In short, the reflective model constructs were appropriate for PLS analysis.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Test Report

	AVE	ASC	ISC	BLB	C	WOM
ASC	0.73	*0.85*				
ISC	0.65	0.43	*0.81*			
BLB	0.55	0.01	0.61	*0.74*		
C	0.79	0.66	0.15	0.49	*0.71*	
WOM	0.51	0.26	0.36	0.65	0.35	*0.89*

Note: Square root of AVE in *italic*

4. Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 indicates the demographic details of the respondents.

Table 4. Respondents' Demographic Information

Variable	Item	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	53.5
	Female	158	46.5
Age	<20	133	39.2
	21-23	187	55
	>24	20	5.8
Admission Type	State-sponsored	275	80.9
	Tuition-paying	65	19.1
University	Allameh Tabataba'i	128	37.6
	Tehran	85	25
	Shahid Beheshti	55	16.2
	Shahed	25	7.4
	Kharazmi	24	7
	Alzahra	23	6.8

4.1. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model represents the relationship between the latent variables and investigates the hypotheses. For the path coefficient to be significant, the t-value of each path must be greater than 1.96 at the significance level of %95 (Hair et al., 2011). Hence, Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 are accepted, and Hypotheses 1 and 5 are rejected.

A complete overview of the hypotheses with respect to the path coefficients and their associated factor loadings is presented in Table 5. In addition, the path coefficients and t-values of the hypotheses are presented in Figure 2.

Table 5. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Path	Relationship	B	t-value	Result	R^2
H1	Actual self-image congruency→ brand logo benefit	0.075	0.64	Rejected	0.538
H2	Ideal self-image congruency→ brand logo benefit	0.448	4.68[**]	Accepted	
H3	Brand logo benefit→ commitment	0.476	5.60[**]	Accepted	
H4	Actual self-image congruency→ commitment	0.355	2.79[**]	Accepted	0.407
H5	Ideal self-image congruency→ commitment	0.152	1.38	Rejected	
H6	Actual self-image congruency→ word of mouth	0.199	1.96[*]	Accepted	0.491
H7	Ideal self-image congruency→ word of mouth	0.186	2.39[*]	Accepted	
H8	Brand logo benefit→ word of mouth	0.332	3.36[**]	Accepted	

*P**<0.01   P*<0.05*

As shown in Table 4, the impact of actual self-image congruency on brand logo benefit was rejected. However, the ideal self-image congruency significantly impacted the brand logo benefit (β=0.448, t=4.68). Thus, the second research hypothesis is accepted. The H3, H4, and H5 paths are related to the impact of the brand logo benefit, actual self-image congruency, and ideal self-image congruency on the commitment, among which only the impact of ideal self-image congruency on the commitment was rejected, while H3 and H4 were accepted. Further, H6, H7, and H8, which investigated the impact of the variables of actual self-image congruency, the ideal self-image congruency, and the brand logo benefit on the word of mouth, were accepted (H6 and H7 at a 95% significance level and H8 at a 99% significance level were significant, with impact values of 0.199, 0.186, and 0.332, respectively).

Furthermore, R^2 values for brand logo benefit, commitment, and word of mouth were 0.538, 0.407, and 0.491, respectively, which indicate the appropriateness of these indices (Hair et al., 2011).
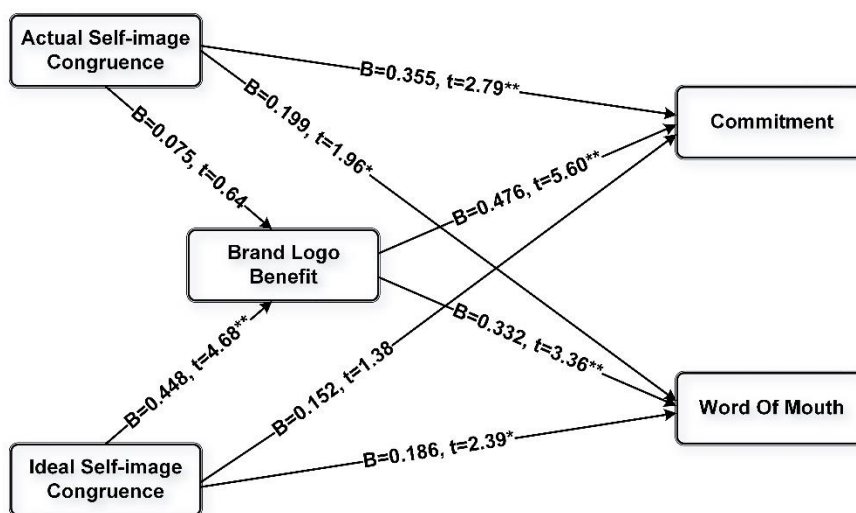

Figure 2. Path Coefficients and T-Statistic

4.1.1. Model Fit

The GOF index represents the compromise of the structural model's quality and the measured model. This index was calculated by the following formula:

$$GOF = \sqrt{R^2 \times AVE}$$

The cut-off value for the GOF was 0.4. In this study, GOF was equal to 0.665, which is greater than 0.4, indicating a strong model fit. Thus, the data has had appropriate fitness with the factor structure and the theoretical basis of the research, which indicates the consistency of the questions with the theoretical constructs.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

There is a growing consensus that public organizations should also benefit from marketing practices, and this has led to the widespread presence of concepts such as brand management in the public sector in recent years (Sataøen, 2019). Thus, the rationale for this paper was that the higher education sector especially in Iran should behave increasingly as businesses because of challenges posed by today's competitive environment. Based on this rationale, this

study developed a model and empirically tested the role of brand logo benefit in facilitating commitment and WOM. In addition, we explored actual and ideal self-image congruence as antecedents of brand logo benefit, commitment, and WOM (Japutra et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013). This study added to the body of knowledge through investigating the impact of brand logo benefit on continuance commitment and WOM, which was not considered by previous literature (Japutra et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013). In addition, though the majority of university brand studies have been conducted in developed countries, our explanation of the concept in a growing economy adds further insight to the body of university brand knowledge.

Our results reveal that the ideal self-image congruence is a more important factor (in comparison with the actual self-image congruence) in increasing the brand logo benefit, while the actual self-image congruence is a more important factor (in comparison with ideal self-image congruence) in increasing the commitment and word of mouth, thus inconsistent with prior findings (Japutra et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013). Japutra et al. (2016) reported a positive and significant relationship between the actual self-image congruence and brand logo benefit. However, we did not reach the same result in the present study. We believe that this difference might be related to the cultural differences between the contexts of these studies. In addition, the study of Japutra et al. (2016) revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the ideal self-congruence and commitment; however, the results of the present study are not consistent with this outcome. Japutra et al. (2016) concluded that the ideal self-image congruence is more limited than its actual type for commitment. Therefore, it does not mean that there is no relationship between the ideal self-image congruence and the commitment. While it can be interpreted that making the effective factors on students' commitment to their academic brand is more complex, there are other factors that influence commitment.

In general, according to the results, it can be said that the actual self-image of students has more influence on their commitment to their universities. Therefore, educational administers should pay more attention to the actual self of students and communicate their ability to help students reach their actual self-image. For example, if most of the students were socially responsible, the managers could engage them by offering social programs and activities.

Based on the results, brand logo benefit has a positive and significant impact on commitment and word of mouth. This is consistent with the studies of Japutra et al. (2016) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Since today's markets are more cluttered than ever, companies need to have brands that clearly convey definitive messages and images that they want consumers to perceive about them (Park et al., 2013). Therefore, based on the above-mentioned results, it is recommended that the university administrators consider the brand logo as an effective and powerful tool for managing brand relationships. The reason is that the university brand logo is a quick tool to differentiate the university brand in the competitive market of the higher education sector. To be more exact, according to the impact of brand logo benefit on commitment and word of mouth, it is recommended to focus more on its indicators such as self-expressive, functional, and visual aspects. For example, university administrators can stimulate students to create emotional bonds with the brand by designing attractive logos, because when individuals consider the visual effect of the logo at a high-quality level, they assume that the product is of high quality (Lee et al., 2012).

5.1. Practical Implications

The findings of this study suggest some implications for educational institutions. Firstly, brand logo offers opportunities that have not been given much attention in the higher education sector so far, and most of the professional measures in the development of the

brand logo have been limited to businesses and other sectors. Therefore, this factor of the brand in the higher education sector is unexplored, and using strategies to improve it can bring many benefits to this sector, including favorable students' behaviors such as commitment and WOM. For example, a meaningful and favorable visual identity (logo) can bring some new business partners and others to universities by presenting a unique attribute such as confidence. Thus, university administrators should manage the brand logos more systematically in order to communicate the benefits. According to our result, self-congruity can be very helpful in this regard.

Secondly, in university brand the term "student" can be replaced with "consumer" or "customer." Just as an effective consumer brand helps attract the best customers, a strong university brand may influence its ability to compete for the best students, to increase alumni association membership and contributions, and to attain monetary donations" (Judson et al., 2008). According to the noisy higher education sector of Iran, we see lots of competition between universities of Iran to attract the best candidates (Pezeshki, 2020). Therefore, it seems that an outstanding logo could be helpful to specify how universities want to be remembered in the thoughts of applicants. In this way, it is recommended that university administrators distinguish the benefits of their brand logos. Universities with meaningful and attractive logo benefits can be more successful than other competitors in attracting top candidates. The findings show that ideal self-image congruence plays an important role in determining brand logo benefit. Therefore, universities should develop distinctive brand measures to reinforce the perceived image/personality of the candidates. In addition, university administrators should develop an image closely matching the self-perception of potential candidates. To this end, they can adapt their communications to target students' self-concept.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

Finally, it should be noted that the present study was conducted in the context of higher education, and the results may not be completely generalizable to other contexts. In this regard, further studies should consider other contexts such as the finance and goods industries. Moreover, in order to have a better understanding of factors related to brand logo benefit, it is recommended to future researchers to conduct qualitative and mixed studies. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate other antecedents (such as brand identification) and consequences (such as brand trust) of brand logo benefit.

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