




## Investigating the Mediating Role of Customer Relationship Management in the Relationship between Customer Knowledge Management and Consumerism among Members of NPSCs

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article type:</b> Original Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 29 December 2024 Revised: 31 May 2025 Accepted: 03 Jun 2025 Published online: 01 July 2025</p> <p> © 2025 the authors. Published by University of Tehran, Faculty of Sport Sciences and Health. This is an open access article under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License.</p>	<p><b>Background:</b> Given that the threats of consumerist attitudes are felt among Nonprofit Sport Clubs/Organizations (NPSCs/ NPSOs) members in Iran, the main focus of this paper is to determine how NPSCs in Iran deal with consumerist attitudes in sports.</p> <p><b>Aim:</b> This study empirically examines whether Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) affects Consumerism (CS) by considering the mediating role of Customer relationship management (CRM) in NPSCs.</p> <p><b>Materials and Methods:</b> The statistical population of the current study included consumers of NPSC in North-West Iran. The data collection tool was a questionnaire. Structural equation modeling was used to test the research model.</p> <p><b>Results:</b> The findings indicate that CRM mediates the relationship between CKM and CS, and when CKM is high, CS and CRM are also high.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> This paper contributes to the literature on nonprofit organizations by showing the important role of CRM in the CS of NPSCs. Therefore, we recommend that sports clubs rely on CKM and CRM as much as possible</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Customer orientation, service quality, behavior, knowledge, club</p>

**Cite this article:** Dehghanpouri, H., & Darooghe Arefi, N. (2025). Investigating the mediating role of customer relationship management in the relationship between customer knowledge management and consumerism among members of NPSCs. *Sport Sciences and Health Research*, 17(2), 1-25.

## 1. Introduction

The development of consumerism represents one of the greatest changes in the human experience, literally around the world, over the past two or three centuries [1]. Consumerism is evident in various sectors of consumption, and the sports service industry is no exception. In this context, sports consumers have shown a growing impatience in their pursuit of excitement and enjoyment [2] requests a greater degree of flexibility in sporting options [3]. Furthermore, the rise of individualization and commercialization in society has raised apprehensions about the impact of these trends on sport clubs [4, 5] and in recent times, a sense of gloom has enveloped the voluntary sport club, casting a shadow over its existence [5] and a growingly diverse and unpredictable internal environment is emerging within numerous Non-Profit Sport Organizations (NPSOs) and the sports movement as a whole. The non-profit nature of these entities contributes to the challenges that modern NPSOs are encountering [4]. Hence, the exploration of CS attracts the attention of both researchers and professionals [2, 6, 7].

Generally, consumerism culture typically alters individuals' lifestyle choices [7], leading to significant repercussions in the behavior and mindset of NPSO members [5, 8]. It is predicted that this approach will ultimately result in the disbandment of social interactions within the sporting community [5], and it is thought to oppose the conventional principles of reciprocity

and solidarity that are dominant in these institutions [3, 9]. Therefore the consumerist mindset poses a significant risk to the future of NPSOs [10]. The consumerist attitude has become a pivotal aspect in the discourse surrounding the advancement of NPSOs due to these imminent dangers [5]. Empirical research has largely overlooked the concept of consumerism in sport (CS) organizations, making it a relatively new and unexplored research topic [6]. The consumerist attitude has not received significant attention in the field of sociology of sport and sport management research, to be more specific [10]. This is while the social value of sport consumption is significant as it relates to individual well-being, relatedness, and growth [11] and on the other hand sport consumerism has evolved into a relevant societal and economic activity [12] and sport consumerism implicates a positive behavior that is met with reward, which creates enduring experiences and sustainable well-being in a broaden and-build model [13]. On the other hand, the rapid ascendancy of both competitive and leisure sporting has created an avid sport consumerism culture which is a long way to be quenched. Also this is illustrated by the growth in professional sport followership as well as the incline of investment in the commercial properties of the sport industry [14] that not only does not promote consumer wellbeing but it has damaging consequences for consumers and society at large [14-16]. Packard provided a detailed explanation of the negative impact of

consumerism on society in his renowned book, "The Hidden Persuaders" [17]. Similarly, Drucker (1954) expressed concern about the misalignment between organizational behavior and societal expectations, which poses a threat to the legitimacy of organizations as social institutions [18]. Meanwhile, consumers have gained significant influence in shaping market dynamics. Accordingly, the clarity of the opportunity and necessity for research in the field of sport consumerism is evident [11]. Furthermore, it will persist as a fundamental topic of investigation within the voluntary sport sector [10].

On the other hand, NPSOs have to keep their mission in mind, which is to serve their members [19] and they need to have a better understanding of how to attract and retain consumers by gaining knowledge from customers and aligning services based on their needs and wants [20].

Because inadequate knowledge management strategies are introducing a new set of difficulties, including consumerism. Thus if organizations want to understand customers, they should not only quantify the customer information they receive, but also analyze and understand customer knowledge through organization [21]. Non-Profit Sport Clubs (NPSCs) primarily focus on consumer-oriented business models, where consumer knowledge plays a crucial role as a valuable asset. By implementing effective consumer knowledge management (CKM), NPSCs can enhance their

services and gain a competitive edge in the market. CKM is essentially a consumer-oriented approach that leverages consumer knowledge as a key strategic resource [22], and is defined as a combination of organizational tools, practices, and soft skills focused on how to create, accumulate and transfer customer-related knowledge [23].

CKM and its respective dimensions are key areas of concern for sport organizations and more specifically for NPSCs. The impact of various CKM dimensions may vary between Asian markets, where the social effect of the group is higher, and in Europe or North America, where the culture is more individualistic [24]. Moreover, the impact of industry type or organization size on CKM remains uncertain. To illustrate, the specific industry in which a company operates can significantly affect CKM and the willingness of customers to exchange their knowledge and expertise. In addition, organizations that possess a greater market share may have a stronger ability to attract and manage customer knowledge, ultimately leading to more effective utilization of such information [25]. The study on the diverse behaviors of sports consumers implies that service providers should consider tailoring their offers to meet their specific expectations [2]. Within these forums, a wide range of individuals with varying levels of knowledge can articulate their needs, concerns, and inquiries [26]. As a result, in response to new sport expectations and challenges, organizations

must adhere to their social, societal, and/or sport missions, along with the prevailing regulations in their sport and country [27]. Therefore, sports clubs that continuously search for, and use, relevant knowledge (e.g. best practice skills, information) from knowledge sources are more successful than clubs that do not engage in these activities [28]. Recent research highlighting the significance of CKM in the nonprofit sports sector as an expanding area of study [22, 29]. But, is unfortunate that the knowledge management literature [25] does not extensively address the outcomes derived from the implementation of CKM. Additionally, there has been no empirical investigation conducted thus far to examine the relationship between CKM and CS.

On the other hand, it can be stated that customer's expectations are not any longer solely restricted to induce best product and services, they also need a face-to-face business during which they need to receive exactly what they demand and in a quick time [30]. Thus, Sports organizations must establish connections with their stakeholders in order to acquire fresh insights and knowledge [20], and they should adapt their operations to cater to the perceived demands of consumers by implementing adaptable frameworks and providing a diverse array of supplementary services [5]. In order to adapt to changing needs, NPSOs should aim to increase the flexibility of their activities while preserving their traditional values of creating a secure social atmosphere. Implementing an

approach that emphasizes connection to a familiar social environment and a feeling of safety, while also allowing for flexibility, could be beneficial for NPSOs [31]. In this way, customer relationship management (CRM) is a principle that revolves around the idea of integrating customers and marketing to foster a meaningful connection [32, 33] and as a strategy aims to satisfy and build long term relationship with customers [34] and also allows managers to gather information and data about the customer and build customer knowledge from them.

Recently, NPSCs have more discovered the benefits of introducing CRM. It is mentioned that, the management of the relationships with sports club members, particularly the recruitment of new, and the retention of existing, members, is fundamentally important to nonprofit sports clubs [28]. Because sports clubs aim to gain a deeper understanding of the requirements and preferences of their members, volunteers, and prospective new members [35].

Therefore, switchover of customer to the competition has made CRM imperatives, essential, failing which consumerism takes over. It implies that the customer should be at the center stage of all activities of the organization (customer centric organization) [36]. So in this situation, it is evident that CRM is a more viable proposition, if executed professionally, than the hassles of consumerism. CRM leaves an indelible impression in the minds of customers [36] and the more regular interaction there is, the better the chance for a successful client care.

Despite its significance, very few researchers have studied CRM in sports organizations [28].

Generally, when an organization is able to fully engage with the customer's senses, including their smell, touch, sound, and breath, CRM seamlessly integrates into its operations, finding its rightful place [36]. Twenty-first century consumerism commands that managers re-think the way they manage so as to ensure that consumers enact behavior, which demonstrate an appreciation of the customer-orientated value systems achieved in part by the demands of consumer groups [37]. Therefore, the necessity of evaluating CRM as a mediator in the connection between customer knowledge management and consumerism cannot be overstated.

NPSCs as a key section has an important role in advancing goals in the sports of Iran. NPSCs offer services related to competitive and recreational sport activities across both individual (e.g. Badminton) and team (e.g. Basketball) sports in Iran, but only one sport is provided in each NPSC [38]. NPSCs are characterized by offering sports programs to participants within a community setting on a foundational level. An ideal-typical NPSO has 7 main characteristics: 1. membership is voluntary; 2. the organization is target-specific and goal oriented; 3. the organization has an obligation to serve members' interests; 4. decision-making structures are democratic; 5. the organization is independent from the state and the market; 6. activities within the

organization are primarily oriented toward members; and 7. voluntary work is the primary resource for the organization. These characteristics indicate that NPSCs are in many respects different from profit-oriented organizations and these characteristics also differentiate sport organizations from various other nonprofit organizations [39]. NPSCs in Iran aim to increase sport participation through the strategies of "Sport for All" and "Active Iran" to improve the performance of Iranian sport at the national and international levels. The Ministry of Youth and Sport in Iran is highly invested in attaining the stated objectives and functions [20, 40].

NPSO in Iran such as sports federations develop their activities in various fields, pursue multiple goals and are active with the attitude multiple stakeholders satisfaction and regard to changes and growing demands against the external environment [41]. In sum, NPSCs in Iran share similarities with other countries, such as the EU, in terms of their structure and certain processes. For example, in many countries, these clubs serve as representatives of federations in each city, focusing on the structural aspects. Additionally, in terms of processes, they diligently organize sports competitions and activities catering to members with diverse abilities and age groups [38]. Sport policy makers in Iran must comprehend the significance of recreational and sport services in order to address the concerning low levels of physical activity across various demographics.

This understanding will encourage individuals to engage more frequently with the offerings of sport clubs [42].

NPSOs in Iran strive to enhance the sporting performance and physical activity levels of their members through the utilization of sport and recreation activities at both the national and state levels [43]. In fact, the National Professional Sports Clubs play a vital role in the Iranian sport industry as the government places significant emphasis on monitoring the operations of these clubs. These clubs function under the guidance of the National Sport Federation, reflecting the government's dedicated focus on their activities. Most NPSCs in Iran follow similar policies and practices initiated by the government. However, types of sport, size, internal actors, and processes vary across the clubs [22].

Therefore, according to the information provided, it is possible to infer that NPSCs have the ability to manage CS by utilizing CKM and CRM. In order to address this research gap, the current study seeks to assess the intermediary function of CRM in the correlation between CKM and consumer behavior within NPSCs participants.

The findings of this research could significantly enhance the existing body of knowledge in sport management literature. Because nonprofit organizations are essential in developing sustainable communities providing many social, environmental, health and human services required by a vast amount of community stakeholders [40] and these organizations hold

immense social significance in the daily lives of numerous individuals, and their progress is a matter of utmost importance to these individuals [10]. Therefore, the main focus of this article is to determine how NPSCs in Iran deal with consumerist attitudes in sports. Because the threats of attitudes consumerism are felt among members of NPSCs in Iran and because members of NPSCs are an important figure in Iran's sports management, the consumerist attitude among members of NPSCs seems to have put pressure on sports managers in clubs to change their policies regarding members.

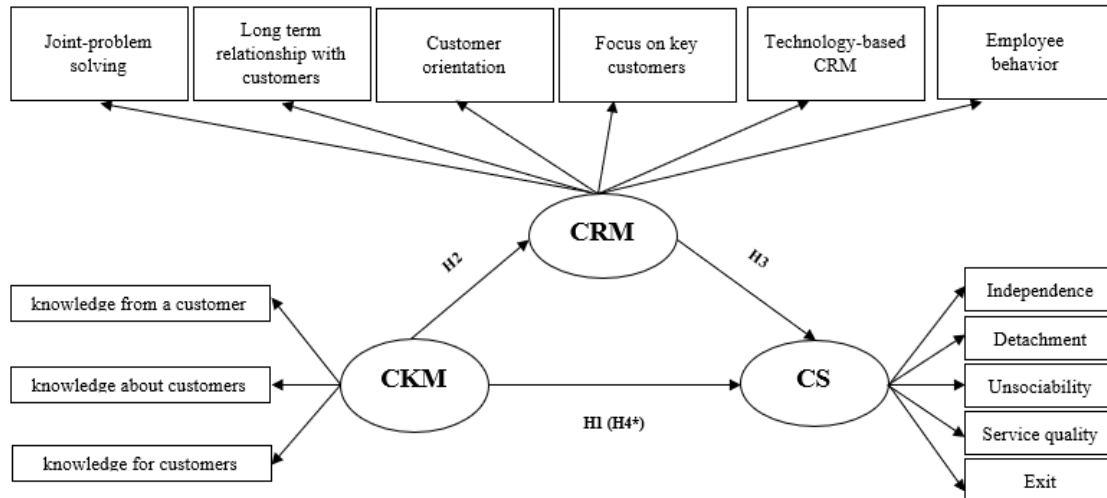
Second we follow the view of Jasimuddin et al., (2006)[44]; Sandhwalia & Dalcher (2011)[45]; and Haider (2019)[46] who have stated recently, associations have recognized the importance of customer knowledge management because of their ability to efficiently utilize their knowledge to reform and react to quick changing customer desires. In this direction, Koenigstorfer & Wemmer (2019)[28] have suggested that the success of clubs depends on the application of CKM. Generally, NPSOs are identified as knowledge intensive. NPSOs, confronted with a progressively competitive landscape, necessitate the implementation of a strategic methodology to guarantee long-term viability, a component of which involves the strategic administration of their knowledge resources [42]. while in competition with the for-profit sector, are distinct in a way that hinders them from simply adopting strategies commonly used by for-profit entities. Therefore, strategies must be

customized to align with the specific characteristics of the non-profit sector [42]. Therefore, this article generally contributes to the growing body of literature on customer knowledge management in NPSOs. Also non-profit organizations, including NPSOs, will also find this article useful in better understanding knowledge management activities to counter members' consumerist attitudes. Therefore, we hypothesize that NPSCs can control CS through CKM.

The further important aspect is that we discuss the literature background of CRM. Because it has not been well established in the domain of sport management and the impact of CRM on CS has been neglected in the existing research. The characteristics of a consumerist attitude are more visible in commercial sports organizations such as fitness and health centers, but are also recognizable in some NPSCs. In general, there are few clubs that have modernized their operations and developed towards consumer logic [5]. Generally, the extent to which members work in their sports club and the stability of their commitment could be influenced by the way the specific working conditions match these subjective expectations

and evaluations [9]. So, our comprehension of CRM in sports management is enhanced through the guidance provided by Chinnappa et al., (2021)[36]. According to Chinnappa et al., (2021), CRM serves as a response to consumerism when fully implemented [36]. It encompasses not only the acquisition and continuous updating of knowledge regarding customer needs, motivations, and behavior but also the application of this knowledge to enhance performance through experiential learning [47]. Thus, by comprehending consumer demands through methods like CKM and delivering services that surpass expectations, an organization can enhance perceptions of service quality [48]. Therefore, our hypothesis suggests that NPSCs have the ability to regulate CS via CKM and CRM. This study is among the pioneering ones to provide empirical evidence for the significance of CRM in NPSCs and its impact on CKM and consumer behavior.

The conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1. After conducting a thorough literature review, the researcher will introduce the research hypotheses, which will subsequently undergo empirical testing.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual framework

\*H4 refers to CKM's impact on Consumerism is mediated by CRM in NPSCs.

### 1.1. CKM and CS

Generally, Voluntary sport organizations are facing a growing disparity between the expectations of their members and the services they provide. Consequently, these organizations are compelled to adapt their activities to maintain appeal to individuals with a consumerist mindset, thereby necessitating greater flexibility. Additionally, the rising consumerist attitude among members also drives voluntary sport organizations to enhance the quality of their services [6]. Therefore, The integration of CKM is vital for organizations as it enables the shift of customers from passive product recipients to proactive knowledge collaborators, serving as a crucial strategic mechanism [49], because If organizations possess exceptional relevant knowledge, they are able to assist their customers in comprehending their needs and issues [39] and

NPSCs that apply their knowledge and insight into their clientele can then move forward to meet their demands and foster customer loyalty [20]. NPSCs have the ability to explore CKM in order to identify customer needs and expectations, ultimately cultivating loyalty towards the club's services [20]. NPSC managers should strive to acquire comprehensive customer data for optimal decision-making [22]. Therefore, sports clubs should prioritize the exploration of external knowledge and the incorporation of outside information [28]. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize that CKM has a positive impact on Consumerism in NPSCs:

**Hypothesis 1.** CKM has a positive significant impact on Consumerism in NPSCs.

### 1.2. CKM and CRM

Recently, organizations have recognized the significance of integrating their CRM and KM

endeavors as they acknowledge the pivotal role played by KM in achieving CRM success. Consequently, KM can be perceived as the primary sub-process within CRM, as organizations must cultivate capabilities pertaining to CKM processes in order to effectively manage CRM [50]. This infrastructure facilitates the collection of essential customer information and data, aiding in the enhancement of customer knowledge. Khosravi & Hussin (2016) argued that CKM is a CRM tool [51]. The study by Gazi et al. (2024) also showed that knowledge management affects CRM performance [52].

Organizations that can manage and analyze the Knowledge about customer efficiently will be able to maintain good relationships with their customers and ensure customer loyalty [53, 54].

On the other hand, du Plessis & Boon, (2004) also indicated that customer relationships can not take place without knowledge management [55]. Also, has been certified the importance of customer knowledge and its impact on CRM practices [50]. According to Payne (2012), CRM provides opportunities to use information, to better understand customers, to offer value through customized offers and to develop long term relationships [56]. Nejatian et al., (2011) have also stated that a significant interaction effect between CKM and CRM performance [57]. Therefore, looking at the close relationship between CRM and CKM as key factor for a successful management strategy [23]. Based on

these arguments, we hypothesize that CKM has a positive impact on CRM:

**Hypothesis 2.** CKM has a positive significant impact on CRM.

### 1.3. CRM and CS

Study of the diverse behaviors of sports consumers implies that service providers should consider developing customized offers to cater to their preferences [2]. Sports offerings must be varied, easily accessible, and quickly consumable [58]. Recent policies, such as those implemented in the Netherlands, have placed greater demands on NPSCs to conform to the perceived consumerist mindset of existing and prospective members. These policies highlight opportunities for enhancing the adaptability of NPSCs' operations [3].

On the other, as customer demands are constantly changing, it is essential to prioritize ongoing enhancements to CRM systems in order to deliver satisfactory services to customers and ensure that Organizations can retain their customer base [59]. The primary goal of CRM is to identify and cater to the unique needs of every customer, ensuring their satisfaction and fostering customer loyalty. Additionally, CRM aims to attract new customers and maintain existing ones [30, 50, 60-62]. Since organizations rely more and more on their customer connections, managers are placing significant emphasis on cultivating strong customer relationships [63]. So by implementing CRM, the organization can effectively address

the desires and requirements of its customers [64, 65].

Chinnappa et al. (2021) discovered that implementing CRM in its entirety serves as a solution to consumerism [36]. With this in mind, we propose that CRM positively influences consumerism in NPSCs:

**Hypothesis 3.** CRM has a positive significant impact on Consumerism in NPSCs.

#### *1.4. The mediating role of CRM*

Organizations need to offer appropriate services to all customers to build strong relationships and foster collaboration with them. Hence, the use of CKM appears to be crucial [66, 67]. When an organization successfully implements CKM, customers' roles evolve from being passive users to becoming equal partners with the organization, contributing value to the relationship [29].

In this regard, CRM is a strategic approach that organizations can adopt to effectively manage and foster valuable relationships with their customers, leveraging knowledge and insights. Therefore, organizations must enhance their understanding of customers and take advantage of every chance to engage with them in order to gather customer insights and enhance their customer database, enabling them to leverage this information to generate innovative value propositions [68]. Because a long-term partnership promotes constant customer contact to ensure the understanding of customer needs [50].

In the meantime, the primary obstacle faced by NPSCs is to develop a framework capable of fulfilling the diverse requirements and expectations of their stakeholders, while simultaneously ensuring satisfactory service and value for their association [4]. NPSCs have the ability to innovate their services by improving customer insight, particularly through fostering strong customer-staff connections [29]. As a result, these organizations must transition from solely performing administrative tasks to being responsible for their performance through a performance-based approach [4]. NPSCs should leverage partnerships with rival companies and harness external expertise to maximize their potential [69]. As such, according to the arguments presented, we proposed that the positive influence of CKM on Consumerism is facilitated by CRM in NPSCs.

**Hypothesis 4.** CRM mediates the association between CKM and Consumerism in NPSCs.

A summary of the hypotheses established is presented in Fig. 1.

## **2. Research methodology**

### *2.1. Sample and procedure*

The data related to the hypothesis test were collected from a sample of NPSCs in the northwest of Iran. The statistical population in the present study included consumers of NPSCs in the northwest of Iran (in 5 provinces of West Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Ardabil and Zanjan) who are active in one of the

competitive and recreational sports activities individually or as a team.

There were 420 questionnaires that were gathered, however, 14 questionnaires had to be excluded as they did not provide complete responses to important questions. A total of 420 surveys were distributed, with only 406 deemed usable, resulting in a response rate of 96.66%. We utilized a quantitative design with a convenience sample of 406 consumers located in Northwestern provinces of Iran. The sample consisted of 141 females (34.7%) and 265 males (65.3%). The age of the participants in the study varied from 21 to 70 years old, with the majority falling within the 41 to 50 age bracket (n 169, 41.6%). The participants had been members of the club for a minimum of 11 months, and the majority had been club members for more than 3 years (n 221, 54.4%). Most participants reported a monthly income exceeding 75000000 rails.

The questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. It is considered the optimal tool for gathering information due to its ability to efficiently and conveniently collect quantitative data. Questionnaires that had already been developed for each variable were utilized as the instruments for the present study. These questionnaires were designed based on a Likert scale. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a Pilot study was conducted. The five-point Likert scale used for data collection, with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree”. In order to conduct research on a broader scope, a pilot

study was carried out to confirm the validity of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a reliability score exceeding 0.7 being deemed acceptable [41, 70]. Cronbach's alpha test results are given in Table 2 (see table 2).

The comprehensive empirical analysis included several tests: factor loadings, assessment of convergent validity, examination of discriminant validity, and evaluation of the structural equations model by analyzing the explained variance (R<sup>2</sup>), predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>), t-test (5,000 bootstrapping), and effect size (f<sup>2</sup>) [71, 72]. This examination was established using structural equation model-partial least squares (Smart PLS v.3.2.8) and SPSS v.21 software [73].

## 2.2. Measures

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the impact of CKM on CS via CRM. Respondents completed a questionnaire consisting of various items. CKM, CS, and CRM were assessed using constructs with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Absolute agree) to 5 (Absolute disagree) (refer to Table 1 for specific item statements). At first, the researchers adjusted the scales employed in this investigation to reflect the current situation and the viewpoint of NPSC customers. Following this, the revised scale underwent validation by seven sports management researchers.

The evaluation of CKM was conducted using a three-dimensional scale that was derived from Behnam et al. (2020) [29]. The CKM scale consisted of 14 items: knowledge from the consumer (four items), knowledge about the consumer (six items), knowledge for consumer (four items).

Second, CS was evaluated by the five dimensional scale using 24 items which were adapted from Van der Roest (2016) [3]. This scale consisted of independence (four items), detachment (six items) unsociability (seven

items) service quality (four items) and coping and exit behavior (three items).

Lastly, CRM was measured by the twenty-four-item and six dimensional scale, adapted from previous work [74-78]. This scale consisted of joint-problem solving (four items), Long term relationship with customers (five items) customer orientation (four items) focus on key customers (four items) technology-based CRM (three items) and employee behavior (five items).

**Table 1.** Measurement instruments

Variables	Component	Adapted Items
Customer Knowledge Management	Knowledge from customers	My club asks customers about the quality of their current service.
		My club asks customers about the quality of their competitor's service.
		My club asks customers about their favorite activities (such as health and recreation or sports).
		Getting ideas from customers enables the development of new and innovative services for my club.
	Knowledge about customer	My club has a proper understanding of the background and records of its customers.
		My club has a correct understanding of the number of customer referrals.
		My club has a correct understanding of the customer's needs and prerequisites.
		My club has a correct understanding of customer demands.
		My club has a good understanding of the customer's problems.
	Knowledge for customer	My club has a good understanding of the client's occupation and income level.
		My club provides information about the current services for customers.
		My club provides information about new services for customers.
		My club provides information about the benefits of new services for customers.
		My club helps customers make better decisions by providing information.
Consumerism	Independence	It's important for me to be able to choose which moment of the week I exercise.
		It is important for me to be able to shape the nature of my sports activities.
		I want to decide for myself how long I will actively participate in sports activities.
		When I exercise, I don't want to consider other people's wishes or interests
	Detachment	I don't want to do volunteer work for my club.
		I don't want to fulfill my obligations to a club other than the sports activities itself.
		I consider it normal to perform additional tasks or activities for my club.
		I will actively try to improve the weak points of the club when necessary.
		When I do not agree with the way things are managed at this club, I will actively work to improve these issues.
		I often talk to important people (board members or managers) about how things are done in this club.
	Unsociability	I enjoy participating in social activities that are organized by this club.
		When I'm in this club, I'm looking to connect with people who aren't part of my team or group.
		After I finish my sport or physical activity, I often stay on campus to talk with others.
		I do not find it necessary to maintain contact with other people in this club.
		I meet people in other places that I know exclusively through this club.
	Service quality	I only come to this club for exercise or physical activity.
		I often talk to other members about the current issues of this club.
		It is important to me that my sports activities are guided by qualified coaches and instructors.
		The quality of the coaches and lecturers largely determines my continued presence in sports with this club.

		It is important for me that the activities offered to me by this club are of high quality.	
		The quality of the sport provided largely determines my continued activity with this club.	
	Coping and exit behavior	If I am not satisfied with the situation of this club, I will leave it.	
		If this club does not meet my expectations, I will find another club where I can exercise.	
		Even if I am unhappy, I will continue to be a member of this club.	
Customer relationship management	Joint-problem solving	In this club, the problems and complaints of customers are addressed one by one.	
		In this club, the opinions of customers are answered respectfully.	
		This club manages the problems related to its customer's payments (such as tuition, membership, etc.).	
			In this club, information is provided about issues such as billing, services or any other customer questions
	Long term relationship with customers		This club provides facilities (for example, membership discounts, periodic raffles, etc.) to interact with customers.
			This club has appropriate interactive communication channels (such as telephone, website, social networks, catalogs, brochures, SMS, email, etc.) with customers.
			In this club, feedback is received from customers on a regular basis (weekly or monthly) to improve the service.
			In this club, customers are free to express their opinions.
			The club always maintains close interaction with its customers to build long-term relationships.
	Customer orientation		The staff of this club treats the customers with respect.
			This club has a culture where the customer is given first priority.
			This club provides services that meet the needs of customers.
			This club feels responsible for meeting the needs of its customers
	Focus on key customers		This club takes into account their suggestions through continuous dialogue with regular customers and surveying them.
			This club strengthens its emotional bonds with regular customers on important occasions.
		This club charges a relatively small fee for its regular customers compared to the services it provides.	
		This club treats me, who is a regular customer, as an important customer.	
		This club has a database that stores customer information in it.	
Technology-based CRM		This club has good facilities (both physical in the case of the club and virtual in the case of the website and social networks).	
		In this club, computer systems are used to provide services to customers (such as reception, providing training programs, etc.).	
Employee behavior		The friendly behavior of this club's staff makes me happy.	
		The help of the club's personnel makes me loyal to the club.	
		The kindness of the staff of the club towards me makes me satisfied.	
		The services provided by the staff of this club are of high quality.	

### 2.3. Data analysis

To test our hypotheses, we used structural equation modeling with using PLS Version 3.2 which is robust to non-normal data and has been popularly used in previous sport marketing and management research. To evaluate the second-order measurements, we conducted a second-order confirmatory factor analysis. Indicator reliability, internal consistency, discriminant validity and convergent validity were assessed [79]. Reliability was examined by composite reliability (CR), while indicator reliability was examined using factor loadings. Reliability is

deemed suitable when a CR value is higher than the threshold of 0.70 [80]. Convergent validity is examined using average variance extracted (AVE). An indicator is deemed valid when its AVE value is higher than the threshold of 0.50 [81]. Discriminant validity is supported when square root of the AVE of each construct is higher than correlation coefficients with the other constructs in a model [81].

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Testing the measurement model

In modeling structural equations, the validity of the construct must first be examined to

determine whether the selected indicators are accurate enough to measure the construct. Confirmatory Factor Analysis is used for this purpose. In this method, the relationship between a latent variable (construct) and its observed variable(s) (indicator) is determined by a number called factor loading. The higher the factor loading of an indicator with a specific construct, the more that indicator explains that construct. Gefen and Straub (2005)[82] suggest that the factor loading of each observed variable should be more than 0.4, and its t-statistic should be more than  $\pm 1.96$ . Otherwise, that variable should be excluded from the set of indicators. As shown in Table 2, the factor load of all items is more than 0.5. So no questions will be removed from the analysis. The reliability of research items is evaluated using two criteria of Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability

(CR). According to Cronbach (1951) [83], the appropriate amount of Cronbach's alpha is above 0.7. PLS offers another criterion for reliability called composite reliability, introduced by Werts, Linn, and Joreskog (1974) [84]. The advantage of this criterion over Cronbach's alpha is that the reliability of constructs is not absolute but is calculated concerning the correlation of constructs with each other. Fornell and Larcker (1981) set standards above 0.7 for composite reliability [81]. According to Table 2, Cronbach's alpha for all constructs is over 0.7, indicating appropriate research item reliability. Also, the composite reliability values for all constructs are above 0.7, indicating that constructs have good composite reliability (see Table 2). In addition, the variance inflation factor (VIF) scores were between 1.09 and 2.21, so multicollinearity was not an issue [72].

**Table 2.** Measurement model

Construct	Item	Factory loading	T statistic	CA	CR	AVE
CKM				0.952	0.957	0.651
	Knowledge about customers	0.921	91.29	0.901	0.924	0.670
	Knowledge for customers	0.959	150.51	0.875	0.911	0.720
	Knowledge from a customers	0.946	126.02	0.848	0.898	0.687
CRM				0.979	0.981	0.679
	Joint-problem solving	0.948	141.30	0.883	0.920	0.741
	Long term relationship with customer	0.960	165.48	0.900	0.926	0.714
	Focus on key customers	0.949	171.74	0.897	0.929	0.765
	Employee behavior	0.948	140.08	0.916	0.941	0.798
	Technology-based CRM	0.897	52.69	0.874	0.923	0.799
	Customer orientation	0.949	171.74	0.902	0.932	0.773
CS				0.952	0.957	0.557
	Detachment	0.924	88.96	0.887	0.914	0.640
	Service quality	0.885	56.84	0.883	0.916	0.741
	Exit	0.901	68.05	0.772	0.868	0.688
	Unsociability	0.939	123.00	0.899	0.921	0.625
	Independence	0.888	62.07	0.868	0.910	0.717

The research model's validity is examined using convergent validity and divergent (discriminative) validity. Convergent validity examines the correlation of each construct with its items or indicators. The Averages Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to scrutinize the convergent validity of the research. Fornell and Larcker (1981) set a standard above 0.5 for AVE [81]. As Table 2 Shows, the AVE for each research construct is greater than 0.5, so the convergent validity of the research model is perfect. The Fornell-Larcker Test (1981) was used to examine divergent validity [81]. According to this test, divergent validity is

acceptable when the root AVE for one construct is greater than the correlation coefficients of that construct with other constructs. Table 3 shows the root AVE for each construct and correlation coefficients between the research constructs. In this table, the values of the original diameter of the matrix present the root AVE and the values below the original diameter present coefficients between research constructs. According to this table, the root AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation coefficient of that construct with other structures. Therefore, the divergent validity of the research model with the mentioned criteria is excellent.

**Table 3.** Root AVE for research Construct and Correlation Coefficients between Construct

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Detachment	0.80													
Unsociability	0.70	0.79												
Service quality	0.70	0.73	0.86											
Exit	0.77	0.79	0.72	0.82										
Independence	0.73	0.73	0.82	0.78	0.84									
Joint-problem solving	0.40	0.42	0.53	0.49	0.50	0.86								
Long term relationship with customer	0.42	0.41	0.52	0.48	0.49	0.80	0.84							
Employee behavior	0.42	0.42	0.52	0.47	0.52	0.87	0.88	0.89						
Focus on key customers	0.44	0.43	0.52	0.48	0.49	0.87	0.85	0.80	0.87					
Technology-based CRM	0.41	0.39	0.49	0.40	0.46	0.81	0.84	0.81	0.84	0.89				
Customer orientation	0.40	0.42	0.52	0.47	0.48	0.88	0.89	0.89	0.87	0.80	0.90			
Knowledge about customers	0.56	0.57	0.59	0.57	0.58	0.48	0.50	0.47	0.51	0.48	0.50	0.81		
Knowledge for customers	0.53	0.55	0.61	0.60	0.59	0.53	0.56	0.51	0.54	0.50	0.54	0.82	0.84	
Knowledge from customers	0.51	0.56	0.54	0.53	0.53	0.48	0.52	0.47	0.49	0.46	0.49	0.80	0.80	0.82

### 3.2. Structural equations model and Hypothesis

Testing After testing the measurement model, the structural model of the research, which examines relationships between latent variables, is tested

If the value of T is within range of  $-1.96$  and  $+1.96$ , the connection between factors insignificant at the confidence level 95% and if  $T < -1.96$  and  $>+1.96$ , the connection between factors will be significant at the confidence level 95%. Hence the results showed that connections between all factors are significant.

**Table 4.** Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	( $\beta$ ) path coefficient	t-statistic	Test result
H1	CKM-CS	0.524	9.82	Confirmed
H2	CKM-CRM	0.568	10.26	Confirmed
H3	CRM-CS	0.236	3.93	Confirmed

The Bootstrap method was used to test the fourth hypothesis, which considers the indirect relationship between CKM and CS through the mediating role of CRM. In this method, if the value of the lower limit and the upper limit of Bootstrap are both positive and negative and the

p-value is less than 0.05, the indirect path is considered significant, and the hypothesis is confirmed. Table 4 shows the bootstrap method's results to evaluate the indirect effect's significance.

**Table 5.** The Results of the Bootstrap Method

Path						
Independent variable	Mediating variable	Dependent variable	Indirect effect	T-Statistic	Estimation Error	P-value
CKM	CRM	CS	0.13	3.53	0.038	0.001

As shown in Table 4, the significance level of the test is equal to 0.001, which is lower than 0.05, and the confidence interval of the bootstrap value does not include zero, so the research's fourth hypothesis is confirmed. This means that CKM affects CS by mediating CRM.

Upon completion of the measurement model in PLS analysis, the subsequent step involves the calculation of the structural equations model. In order to investigate the mediating effects of CRM, we followed the procedures recommended by [72, 85]. Specifically, the direct effect model was initially measured prior

to the indirect effect model, as illustrated in Table 4. Additionally, in order to analyze both the direct and indirect effects of the structural equation models, four specific criteria were utilized: assessing the (R<sup>2</sup>) for endogenous latent variables to determine the variance in each construct, estimating significance (Q<sup>2</sup>), and evaluating the path coefficients [72]. We have conducted an analysis on the impact of 5,000 bootstrapped samples derived from the initial 408 cases. This analysis aims to provide a precise measurement of the clarified change and

estimate the significance in the direct effect structural equations model [72].

The value of R2 quantifies the extent to which the independent variables can explain the variation in the dependent variables [72]. Though a satisfactory value of R2 relies upon the setting of study [71] shows the value of 0.26, 0.13 and 0.09 express high, moderate and low sequentially, but in this study, R2 value for endogenous variable, the direct effect model explained CRM is 0.323, which implies that 32.3% change of CRM is predicted by CKM. Also, the R2 for CS is 0.471, which means that 47.1% change of CS is explained by CKM and CRM. Likewise, a cross-validated redundancy measure (Q2) was applied to quantify the estimate significance of the research model [72]. Criterion Q2 refers to the ability of the structural

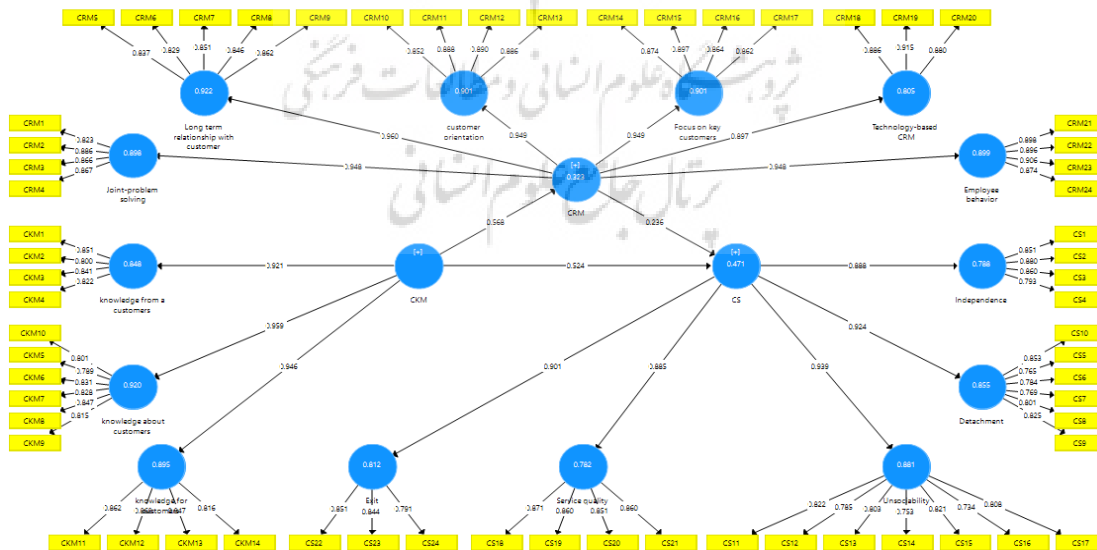
model to predict the endogenous variable. Values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered weak, moderate, and strong values for Q2. Given the results of Table 6, the Q2 for CRM and CS are 0.206 and 0.246, respectively, which are acceptable regarding criteria. Goodness of Fit (GOF) examines the overall fit of the structural model. This index which was developed by Tenenhaus, Amato and Vinzi (2004)[86], is calculated using the geometric mean of R2 and the mean commonality indicators:

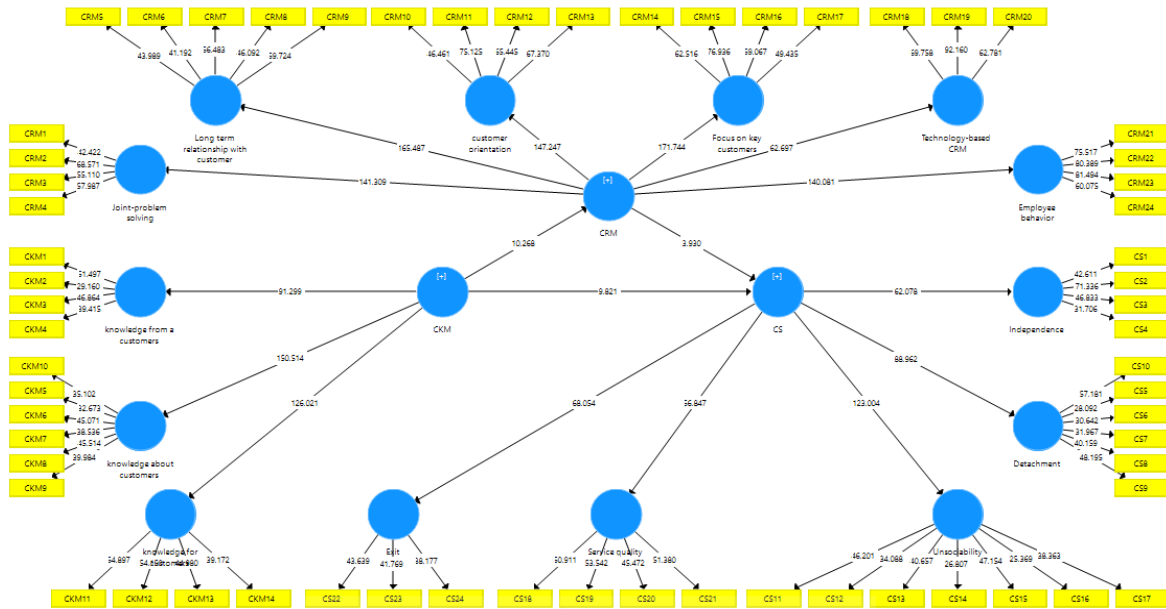
$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{commonality} * R2}$$

Values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are suggested as weak, moderate, and strong values for the overall model fit. According to the above formula, the GOF was calculated at 0.499. This value indicates a strong overall fit.

**Table 6.** Coefficient of determination in the PLS method

Construct	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
CRM	0.323	0.206
CS	0.471	0.246





#### 4. Conclusions

This study empirically examines whether CKM affects CS by considering the mediating role of CRM in NPSCs. The findings indicate that CRM mediates the relationship between CKM and CS, and when CKM is high, CS and CRM are also higher. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed

##### 4.1. Theoretical implications

In this study, we aimed to examine how CKM and CRM are related to CS. This study adds to the literature on sports management by examining CKM, CRM, and CS in the context of sports, particularly non-profit sports organizations. Although research has shown some relationships between these concepts [4, 6, 22, 28, 30, 50, 69], however, no research to date

has clearly examined the mediating effect of CRM on CKM and CS.

We did this with a specific focus on NPSCs in Iran as an emerging market. This research extends previous studies by integrating streams of research on the use of customer relationship management in NPSCs (For example, [28] and consumerism in non-profit sports organizations (For example, [10, 87].

In our study, CRM is considered as a mediating variable. While previous studies have studied this variable alone or in connection with customer knowledge management (For example, [23, 57, 88]. Also, CS is considered as a dependent variable in our study, which is affected by CKM and CRM. While there has been very limited research on CS in service organizations For example, [5]. This study is an extension of the work of Van der Roest et al., 2015 [10].

Current study shows that CKM has a positive effect on CS. In line with the study that examined this relationship in the service sector [6], our study also confirmed the importance of CKM in CS. CKM permits the swift evaluation and feedback from customers to ensure their satisfaction (23).

This study also showed that CKM has a positive effect on CRM in NPSCs. Previous studies have confirmed the importance of CKM on CRM [50, 51, 55, 57]. These studies argued that CKM is a CRM tool. The present study added to this line of research by presenting the finding that knowledge from, for, and about customers contributes to CRM in NPSCs. In other words, CKM should be managed to improve CRM. Consequently, NPSCs should apply CKM to improve customer relationship management. Finally, by confirming the positive impact of CKM on CRM in NPSCs, this study reflects the arguments in previous studies.

CKM acts as the fuel of the CRM system. Without accurate knowledge of customers, CRM becomes a superficial and integrated process. In contrast, CRM optimized with CKM enables intelligence and data-driven interactions. By monitoring customer feedback and opinions (e.g. through surveys or conversation analysis in the gym app), CKM allows CRM to design loyalty programs based on real needs. CKM strengthens the core of the CRM system by transforming raw data into actionable insights. In gyms, this combination not only personalizes interactions, but also increases customer loyalty and long-

term profitability. However, the success of this process depends on ethical execution, attention to privacy, and ongoing employee training.

Furthermore, our findings showed a significant relationship between CRM and CS, which is consistent with previous studies [2, 3, 64, 65, 89]. This finding enriched the studies that confirmed CS as an outcome of CRM use [89]. Overall, our finding and the results of previous studies suggest that CRM implementation fully serves as a solution to CS. Generally, the consumerist discourse is concerned with a change in the way sport participants experience their activities in a NPSCs [10]. In this situation, sport consumers have been confronted by a loss of landmarks, partially due to the collapse of grand ideologies, the questioning of traditional structures, and the diminishing of dominant tendencies [2]. Contemporary NPSO has developed into a bureaucratic entity that faces a multitude of performance challenges that continue to impact upon the governance and management of these organizations [4]. Indeed, this increasing commercialization of voluntary sport organizations be defined as “the process leading to the replacement of transactions based on reciprocity or entitlement by transactions involving compensation (i.e., sale in a market).” [8] (p. 357).

On the other, social obligations and expectations are key to the way NPSCs are organized, and they seem to contrast with a consumerist attitude [3]. In this situation with regard to the member role, first, a shift from active participation to the

consumerism and passive adherence can be observed. The volunteer role, next, shifts from a strong ethic of service to the community to one-to-one and highly result-oriented relations [90]. NPSOs require examining the mechanisms through which targeted interactions and customer-centric strategies control customer consumption behavior. CRM increases customer loyalty and trust by creating meaningful connections and positive experiences. This makes customers not only inclined to consume current services sustainably, but also to consume complementary services. CRM also targets customers at critical decision-making moments by using appropriate communication channels (application, email, SMS). The result is an increase in conversion rates due to emotional impact at the right time. CRM, by solving problems quickly, gains customer trust and increases their willingness to invest more in services. The result is a reduction in the risk of customer abandonment and an increase in the willingness to try new services. Our study findings add to an emerging line of research on consumerism in NPSCs [6, 15]. Hence, if the goal of sports organizations is to retain loyal consumers, CRM is a vital practice and CRM should be introduced as a process that enables NPSCs to control consumerism. Finally, another goal of the present study was to evaluate the mediating role of customer relationship management in the relationship between CKM and consumerism.

The results indicated that the relationship between CKM and CS is mediated by CRM. These findings suggest that CRM is important in NPSCs and leads to CS. It seems that NPSCs are more service-oriented and customers are highly engaged with new services, which may affect their behavioral intention. Our research shows that sports clubs can employ CKM in conjunction with CRM to make appropriate decisions in the area of CS. This finding also empirically supports previous studies [3] and shows that NPSCs are able to improve their capacity if they use customer knowledge management CKM and have CRM. Accordingly, we emphasize the need for further efforts to build the capacity of NPSCs in CKM and CRM and improve their CS.

In general, NPSCs can improve consumers' perception of the organization through CRM in the community. If consumers' perception of the club's activities is positive, this will encourage greater participation in creating shared value. In particular, this study found that NPSCs' activities are an important driver for consumer engagement. Our findings indicate that NPSCs in Iran employ CKM and CRM, which leads to CS among members and helps their organization to perform better.

#### *4.2. Managerial implications*

The findings of this study have practical implications for sports managers. The results of this study highlight the importance of CRM. Specifically, NPSCs should seek external

sources of knowledge from their sport and employ experienced managers and coaches who have the knowledge required for CRM. As O'Reilly & Knight (2007) has confirmed, the importance of knowledge management tools should be emphasized and presented in the activities and speeches of NPSCs leadership [91]. Hence, NPSCs should support CKM in order to enhance CRM. It is also recommended that sports clubs consider CKM as a critical process that helps in customer relationship management in NPSCs. This is in line with the view of Behnam et al., (2021) that managers should abandon traditional methods of managing their clubs and improve their knowledge management processes (e.g. communicating with customers, conducting online surveys), thereby meeting the changing needs and demands of their customers [92].

According to the present study, NPSOs should rely on their assets such as CKM and CRM to perform better. Therefore, it is recommended that NPSOs benefit from developing, storing, and sharing new knowledge about members, services, programs, and policies. This helps Iranian NPSCs to increase their knowledge about members' needs and expectations. It is likely that staff in NPSOs will be reluctant to share knowledge. Therefore, it is better to share existing knowledge in different ways. Sports clubs are therefore advised to work with sports federations, other sports clubs, charities, sponsors and universities to strengthen their CRM processes. Finally, it is recommended that

NPSCs offer new services and activities by holding meetings with customers.

Based on the positive impact of CKM on consumerism, it is suggested that by analyzing customer data (such as sports history, financial constraints), the services provided can be personalized. The result of this will be increased satisfaction due to the customer's sense of value. CKM also allows for the identification of hidden needs (for example, the need for group classes to increase motivation). By designing loyalty campaigns (such as rewards for customers who reach their sports goals), the customer churn rate can be reduced. By segmenting customers based on behavioral patterns, the rate of conversion of customers into active consumers can also be increased.

Based on the positive impact of CKM on CRM, it is suggested that free consultation or special offers be offered to customers whose activity has decreased. Integrating CKM with CRM systems requires advanced software infrastructure and initial investment. Changing traditional CRM processes to data-driven systems may encounter resistance from employees. However, by designing mechanisms to continuously collect customer opinions and update the customer knowledge bank, regular customers can be transformed into loyal and supportive customers. Based on the positive effect of CRM on consumerism, it is also recommended to use intelligent CRM tools that allow for personalization and analysis of customer behavior. Strengthen communication and

technical skills of employees to be trained to optimally use the CRM system.

#### *4.3. Study limitation and future research*

As with all studies, this research also has limitations.

First, data were collected only in Iran (from a single culture). This issue limits the potential generalizability of this model. For this reason, it is possible that it cannot be generalized in other cultures and societies. Hence, it is suggested that this issue be investigated in other countries to generalize the results. Second, our study is a cross-sectional design. Therefore, it is not clear how consumerism evolves over time. Hence, a longitudinal study would be useful given that it would allow comparison of results over time.

Third, CRM can have different effects on consumerism depending on the type of discipline (e.g., bodybuilding, fitness, gymnastics, etc.). For this reason, it is better to measure the effects of variables on each other according to different sports fields. Fourth, it is possible that consumerism differs according to whether the sport is individual or team. For example, in Asia, the culture is more collectivist.

Whereas in North America or Europe the culture is more individualistic [24]. For this reason, it is suggested that future studies examine consumerism in different sports and in different geographical locations. Fifth, based on past studies, it is likely that many variables influence the relationship between customer knowledge management and consumerism. Therefore,

future research should consider other variables as moderators and mediators in the relationship between consumerism and customer knowledge management.

Sixth, we selected six dimensions of CRM and five dimensions of consumerism that have been examined in studies of NPSOs. Focusing on all dimensions is very complex and often one or two aspects are neglected in sports organizations. Therefore, it is worth considering other CRM and consumerism models for future studies of NPSOs. Seventh, in addition, although participants were assured that individual responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw at any time, the results may still be biased.

#### *4.4. Conclusions*

This study provides empirical evidence that CKM positively influences CS in non-profit sports clubs through CRM. The present paper contributes to the literature on non-profit organizations by demonstrating the important role of CRM in the CS of non-profit sports clubs. Therefore, we recommend that sports clubs rely on CKM and CRM to the extent possible.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

#### **Authors' contributions**

H.D.; developed the original idea, methodology, investigation, resources, writing—original draft preparation. N.D.; methodology.

#### **Acknowledgment**

Hereby the authors of the current paper acknowledge the help of all those who have cooperated in conducting the present research.

### Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

### Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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