



Ethical Marketing Dimensions in Sport Equipment Selling (Case Study: Yazd Province, Iran)

Amirhesam Rahimi¹ | Kourosh Ghahraman Tabrizi²

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Sport Sciences, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran.

Email: Rahimi.amirhesam@uk.ac.ir

2. Correspond Author, Associate Professor, Department of Sport Sciences, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran.

Email: Kourosh3795@uk.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of identifying and prioritizing the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment in Yazd province, Iran. The research was a mixed exploratory study conducted in the field. The research population in the qualitative and quantitative sections included all individuals who made sports purchases in 2023. In the qualitative section, 16 individuals were interviewed using the snowball method until theoretical saturation was reached. For the quantitative section, according to Krejcie and Morgan table, 384 individuals were randomly selected from 6 counties (Yazd, Meybod, Ardakan, Mehriz, Khatam, and Bafq) as the sample. The research tools in the qualitative section were interviews, and in the quantitative section, questionnaires derived from the interviews, which were examined for validity and reliability. For data analysis, descriptive statistical methods (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistical methods (exploratory factor analysis and second-order confirmatory factor analysis) were used. The research results showed that the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment were identified in four components (product, price, distribution, and promotion). In general, it can be said that by identifying the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment, on one hand, it helps develop ethics in the field of sports marketing, and on the other hand, it enables officials to prevent unethical practices through increased attention and oversight of sellers' work in the identified areas, leading to greater customer satisfaction.

Introduction

Marketing can be viewed as a social and managerial process whereby individuals and groups satisfy their needs and desires by producing, offering, and exchanging valuable goods with others. Conversely, ethics encompasses principles and norms concerning the assessment and adjudication of intentionally and voluntarily conducted human actions, discerning their virtue or vice, and stipulating obligations (dos and don'ts), responsibilities, and duties for individuals (Inalç et al., 2015).

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Hence, it can be argued that marketing ethics pertains to the principles and standards delineating acceptable conduct within the marketplace (Kutler & Armstrong, 2023). The ethical principles of marketing have been one of the challenging topics of the twenty-first century, garnering significant attention. This subject also encompasses a broad spectrum of marketing-related issues. In fact, it can be argued that any aspect of marketing with ethical dimensions falls within the framework of the literature on the ethical principles of marketing (Rahimi Kalor et al., 2018). When people discuss marketing ethics, they generally refer to the principles, values, and ideals that they expect marketers and marketing institutions to adhere to (Esmail pour & Dezhgahipour, 2012). In today's marketing era, a company that does not adhere to ethical marketing principles (or even engages in unethical sales practices by its sales representatives) can erode customer trust in the seller and their organization, consequently impacting their loyalty significantly (Hosseini et al., 2022). Marketing has often been accused in society of employing deceit, fraud, invasion of individuals' privacy, environmental pollution, promoting consumerism, and disregarding the marginalized and low-income segments of society, while marketing has originated with the aim of aiding the economies of countries and fulfilling consumer demands (Scott, 2016).

Based on this premise, researchers have categorized ethical principles of marketing into thematic areas, normative domains, and the 4Ps of marketing. Subsequently, through a preliminary review of relevant literature, they expanded a list of specific ethical issues related to marketing (Park & Stoel, 2005). Integrated marketing, or the 4Ps, comprises a toolkit of controllable marketing elements that, when combined, facilitate responsiveness to the target market and audience groups. Marketing managers must employ the most ethical approaches in product presentation, packaging, pricing, place, promotion, and publicity to achieve their objectives in terms of profitability and market share (Kutler & Armstrong, 2023).

A better understanding of this issue can be achieved by recognizing that each culture possesses its own set of values, beliefs, and customs. Consequently, ethical business behaviors vary across different sectors of the world (Eskandarpur et al., 2021). Many managers believe that ethical values learned through family, religion, and education are significant motivators in ethical decision-making and business practices (Esmail pour & Dezhgahipour, 2012). Business ethics encompasses fundamental values that guide a company's behavior. These values influence decisions made by managers regarding products, advertising, and sales strategies. The development of ethical business practices is the first step towards creating social benefit (Ebrahimi & Roodani, 2009). Essentially, business ethics refers to the principles and standards that define acceptable behavior in the marketplace, constituting a branch of applied ethics (Inalzal et al., 2015). However, researchers argue that marketing, especially the buyer-seller relationship, poses numerous ethical challenges. Indeed, marketing is considered one of the most contentious areas in professional business ethics discussions (Williams & Murphy, 1990). According to researchers, marketing is accused of being associated with deceit, fraud, injustice, invasion of individuals' privacy, exploitation of children and vulnerable populations, and disregard for social welfare (Marino et al., 2020). The general distrust towards marketing activities and a series of ethical scandals consistently keeps marketers engaged with ethical aspects of their activities (Laczniak & Murphy, 2019). In his study titled "Barriers to Ethical Marketing," (Dilmi, 2022) stated that the evaluation of the seller's orientation towards ethical marketing barriers reaches the highest level. However, no effect was found from variables such as gender, age, education level, and the quality of the seller (seller for an institution). A similar assessment of ethical review in business had previously been conducted by some neoclassicists who claimed that marketers should not be burdened with questioning ethical norms (Kushwaha et al., 2020). On the other hand, Lee and Jin (2019), in their study titled "The Role of Ethical Marketing Issues in Consumer-Brand Relationship," refute this kind of thinking and assert that compliance with the law is often necessary but not sufficient, and ethical behavior is required. While marketers may find themselves in situations where the law and personal interests are at odds.

The results of the research by Tanveer et al. (2021), titled "The Role of Ethical Marketing in Building Consumer-Brand Relationships and Brand Loyalty" indicate that ethical marketing methods have a significant impact on the sustainability of value-added products and the sustainability of the brand-customer value relationship. In fact, the study's findings suggest that employing ethical and value-based patterns in companies helps better understand consumer needs

and leads to examining and meeting those needs. Consequently, by influencing consumer purchasing behavior, it encourages them to purchase products from these companies and increases the profitability of these companies. This finding is also confirmed in the research by Ebrahimi and Roodani (2009), titled "The Role of Ethical Marketing in Consumer Purchasing Behavior of Food Products." The Gallup poll, which publishes observed ethical principles across various professions, ranks marketers at the lower end in terms of honesty and ethical standards (Park & Stoel, 2005). Esmail pour and Dezhgahipour (2012), in their research titled "Examining Ethical Functions in Marketing Management," stated that unethical pricing strategies have significant potential. Therefore, companies should avoid implementing unfair pricing tactics as executing these strategies can evoke negative sentiments among consumers and buyers towards the companies and their products.

It is noteworthy that these issues are also evident in the sports industry. In this regard, (Laczniak & Murphy, 2019), in their research titled "Ethics in Sports Marketing in Today's Market," argue that unethical behavior by organizations can damage brand reputation and reduce consumer trust, increasing the likelihood of increased government oversight of sports marketing if ethical standards are not met. They recommend that sports marketers create formal codes of ethics and mechanisms to ensure accountability. As a result, despite the existing ethical challenges in sports marketing, preventive measures can create a more responsible and trustworthy environment in the industry. By prioritizing ethics, sports organizations can strengthen their long-term reputation and success in the market. Similarly, Bjelica et al. (2016), in their research titled "Ethical Dilemmas in Sports Advertising," state that sports advertising is currently facing many ethical challenges, especially in competitive market conditions. These challenges involve choosing between good and bad advertising behaviors that should not create a sense of deception or manipulation in consumers, and despite strict regulations, there are still situations that cannot be predicted. Marketers must make decisions based on their own ethical principles, even when there are no specific rules. They believe that advertising sometimes represents a connection to hidden interests and can lead to unethical behavior. This is particularly true for specific groups such as sports fans and sports equipment consumers. Saeidi et al. (2021), in their research titled "The Role of Ethics in Social Marketing in Encouraging Sports Elites to Purchase Domestic Brands," state that adherence to ethical principles in social marketing, including: desirable social and ethical behavior, adherence to ethical principles and values in sales, customer focus, and responsibility and commitment, by the executive agents of sports brand businesses can shape behavior and encourage the purchase of consumers and sports elites. In the same vein, Mubarak and El-Hosiny (2022), also stated in their research that the mental image of the brand of football clubs is influenced by the level of commitment of these clubs to ethical practices in sports marketing. The most effective ethical methods in improving the mental image of the brand of football clubs are methods related to the product. After that, advertising, pricing, distribution, and market targeting methods are located.

The main reason for these accusations is the negligence of most companies towards the social dimensions of marketing, which has led to major violations and deviations from marketing ideals in pursuit of profitability. Companies have often thought that adhering to ethical principles in marketing hinders their access to economic goals, leading to past misconduct, which has created a negative perception of marketing (Soleimani et al., 2016).

This issue is so important that it must be emphasized that ethical decision-making in marketing is essential for advancing marketing objectives and ensuring the long-term survival of a company. Unethical actions in the short term may lead to company profits, but they do not guarantee long-term sustainability. The ethical performance of a company's marketing activities must be evident in each component of integrated marketing Esmail pour and Dezhgahipour (2012), to rebuild trust and confidence between the two parties and guide organizations towards capital accumulation and profitability. It also creates a business environment rich in trust (Scott, 2016). Studies highlighting the importance of this issue indicate that embedding ethical values into organizational strategies sets companies apart in the long term from other competitors in the industry and becomes a competitive advantage that distinguishes them from their rivals (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, in order to operationalize ethical principles and prevent the detrimental effects of non-compliance in company operations, measures in the form of tools, methods, and resources must also be considered for them

(Krishnamurthy et al., 2022). This not only ensures the satisfaction of current customers but also provides potential customer satisfaction, thereby reducing customer concerns and achieving market share and profitability increases (Saha et al., 2020).

Yazd Province is one of the largest provinces in Iran in terms of area and is expected to have 75,000 registered active athletes by 2023. The province is home to numerous industrial centers and factories, leading to the establishment of multiple sports clubs and teams. This has created a suitable environment for public participation in sports activities. Since individuals require sports equipment and supplies to engage in sports activities, numerous stores operate in this field. To promote their activities and improve their brand image, these stores employ various marketing strategies. These strategies, including quality, pricing, and distribution, must align with ethical principles to have a profound impact on brand image, customer trust, and purchasing behaviors. In this regard, sports equipment marketing in this province faces numerous challenges in various dimensions, particularly ethical ones. Many sellers and manufacturers may be under competitive pressure that drives them towards unethical behaviors. This can lead to customer distrust and decreased loyalty. Moreover, the existence of current advertising and marketing laws has enabled many advertising methods that do not align with ethical principles. Therefore, the sports equipment market in Yazd Province requires a comprehensive approach committed to ethical practices to achieve sustainable growth and increased customer satisfaction. Paying attention to the ethical dimensions of marketing not only strengthens brand image but can also lead to a healthier and more sustainable market.

Given the discussions conducted and considering the increasing prevalence of sports in society, the community's need for sports equipment and facilities is also growing. It is recognized that adherence to ethical marketing principles in the field of sports equipment and supplies can be one of the reasons for the public's interest in sports and can provide them with the necessary facilities. Therefore, it is imperative that, alongside large-scale marketing strategies in this area, complementary and medium-term solutions be employed to promote and expand ethical practices in marketing. Despite numerous studies conducted in the field of sports marketing, research on the status of ethical marketing, particularly in the area of sports equipment, is relatively limited. Given that the development of ethics in the marketing of sports equipment requires a prior examination of its dimensions, this research was designed and conducted with the aim of identifying and prioritizing the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment in Yazd Province. The objective is to foster the development of ethics in the marketplace for sellers of sports equipment and enable better oversight by relevant organizations.

Methodology

The present research method was a mixed exploratory type conducted in two sections, qualitative and quantitative, using a field method. The statistical population of the qualitative section of the research and the understanding of the ethical dimensions of marketing in sports equipment sales consisted of individuals who had purchased from sports equipment stores in the year 2023. The participants in this section were 16 individuals who were selected through snowball sampling until reaching the point of theoretical saturation. In order to collect data, semi-structured interviews have been used. Semi-structured interviews have an exploratory nature and are used for topics that lack complex structure, such as personal values and motivations. In these interviews, while explaining and clarifying the concept of ethical marketing to the interviewees, they were asked about the dimensions of ethical marketing in the sale of sports equipment. For data analysis in the qualitative section, the coding method was used, such that during the interviews, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed into text in a Word environment. Then, the interview texts were reviewed several times by the researcher, and the research codes were extracted from them. The next step in the data analysis process was to use the most significant or frequent initial codes to reduce a large amount of data. In fact, the goal of this coding section is to achieve a higher level of abstraction in the form of categories. Therefore, at this stage of coding, by identifying and organizing the initial codes, similar and common codes were grouped into a single category. Finally, at this stage of the research, after extensive back-and-forth with the data, a total of 30 final open codes were identified. To ensure the validity of the interview, careful attention was paid to the selection of the topic, the design of the questions, the manner of presenting the questions, the

recording and transcription of the interviews, and the analysis of the interviews. The test-retest reliability method was used to calculate the reliability of the interview (0.84).

In the quantitative section, model design and testing, the statistical population of the research consisted of individuals who had purchased from sports equipment and supply stores in the year 2023. Considering the population size ($N = 40000$), 384 individuals were selected as the research sample using stratified random sampling according to the Krejcie and Morgan table. The number of necessary subjects for sample selection in modeling research was also taken into account.

Table 1. Population and Sample of the Study

Row	Statistical community	Number of communities	Number of samples
1	Yazd	251	26,400
2	Meybod	41	4,280
3	Ardakan	38	4,000
4	Mehriz	19	2,000
5	Khaatam	18	1,920
6	Bafgh	13	1,400
7	Total	380	40,000

The measurement tool for the quantitative section of the research was a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the qualitative section, which was scored based on a 5-point Likert scale. In designing this questionnaire, 30 questions derived from open codes in the qualitative section were formulated as the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment. After formulating the questions, the initial draft of the questionnaire was prepared and provided to professors and specialists in sports sciences (5 people) to review the relevance, clarity, and simplicity of each question. After reviewing the opinions of professors and specialists and based on the Walts and Basel index, the questions that achieved a high coefficient (0.79) remained in the questionnaire (23 questions). After this stage, the questionnaire was provided to 30 respondents, and the reliability of the questions and the entire questionnaire (0.73) was examined, and at this stage, all the questions had high reliability. In this research, based on the P4 theory, four factors were considered as underlying factors, and exploratory factor analysis was used to validate the questions related to each factor, the results of which are presented below.

Table 2. Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test

Bartlett Test	Sampling Adequacy (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin)
Approx. Chi-Square	1296.148
df	351
Sig. .000	0.000
KMO Value	0.74

The results of the KMO test in Table 2 indicate that the sample size is adequate for conducting factor analysis. Additionally, conducting factor analysis on the research data is possible, and the data can be reduced to a set of underlying factors. The results of the Bartlett test also indicate that

there is a significant correlation between the variables and that it is possible to discover a new structure in the data.

Table 3. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Factor Loadings for Items of the Questionnaire on Factors Affecting Ethical Marketing by Sports Equipment Sellers

Items	Price Factor	Product Factor	Place Factor	Promotion Factor
Pricing commensurate with product quality	0.481			
Adhering to regulations in pricing	0.685			
Considering social responsibilities in pricing	0.646			
Supporting domestic products in pricing	0.647			
Using ethical approaches for price increases	0.489			
Appropriate product quality		0.572		
Sufficient product variety		0.443		
Offering products with suitable packaging		0.532		
Supporting domestic products		0.759		
Ensuring products are not harmful to users		0.796		
Ensuring products are not harmful to nature and the environment		0.792		
Sellers using diverse Place methods			0.481	
Making products available for customer inspection			0.757	
Providing continuous services			0.769	
Employing experienced and trained sellers			0.607	
Employing fair and ethical sellers			0.628	
Using an appropriate response system to address issues			0.560	
Avoiding negative advertising against competitors				0.767
Avoiding exaggerated catalogs and brochures				0.698
Avoiding unrealistic discounts				0.594
Avoiding promotional methods (advertising) inconsistent with cultural values				0.650
Avoiding deceptive and misleading advertising				0.481
Avoiding unreal festivals and prizes				0.548

Table 3 illustrates the factor loadings of each variable after varimax rotation. In total, the eigenvalues of 4 factors were greater than 1 (1.785, 1.317, 1.288, and 1.872). These 4 factors accounted for 54.50% of the total variance.

Table 4. displays the mean, standard deviation, reliability coefficients, and correlations among the subscales of the questionnaire

Factors	Number of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability Coefficient	Price Factor	Product Factor	Place Factor	Promotion Factor
Price Factor	5	3.06	0.746	0.74	1	0.53	0.52	0.53
Product Factor	6	3.71	0.823	0.78	-	1	0.67	0.42
Place Factor	6	2.56	0.786	0.75	-	-	1	0.51
Promotion Factor	6	4.10	0.744	0.73	-	-	-	1
Ethical Marketing Dimensions	23	3.35	0.593	0.86	-	-	-	-

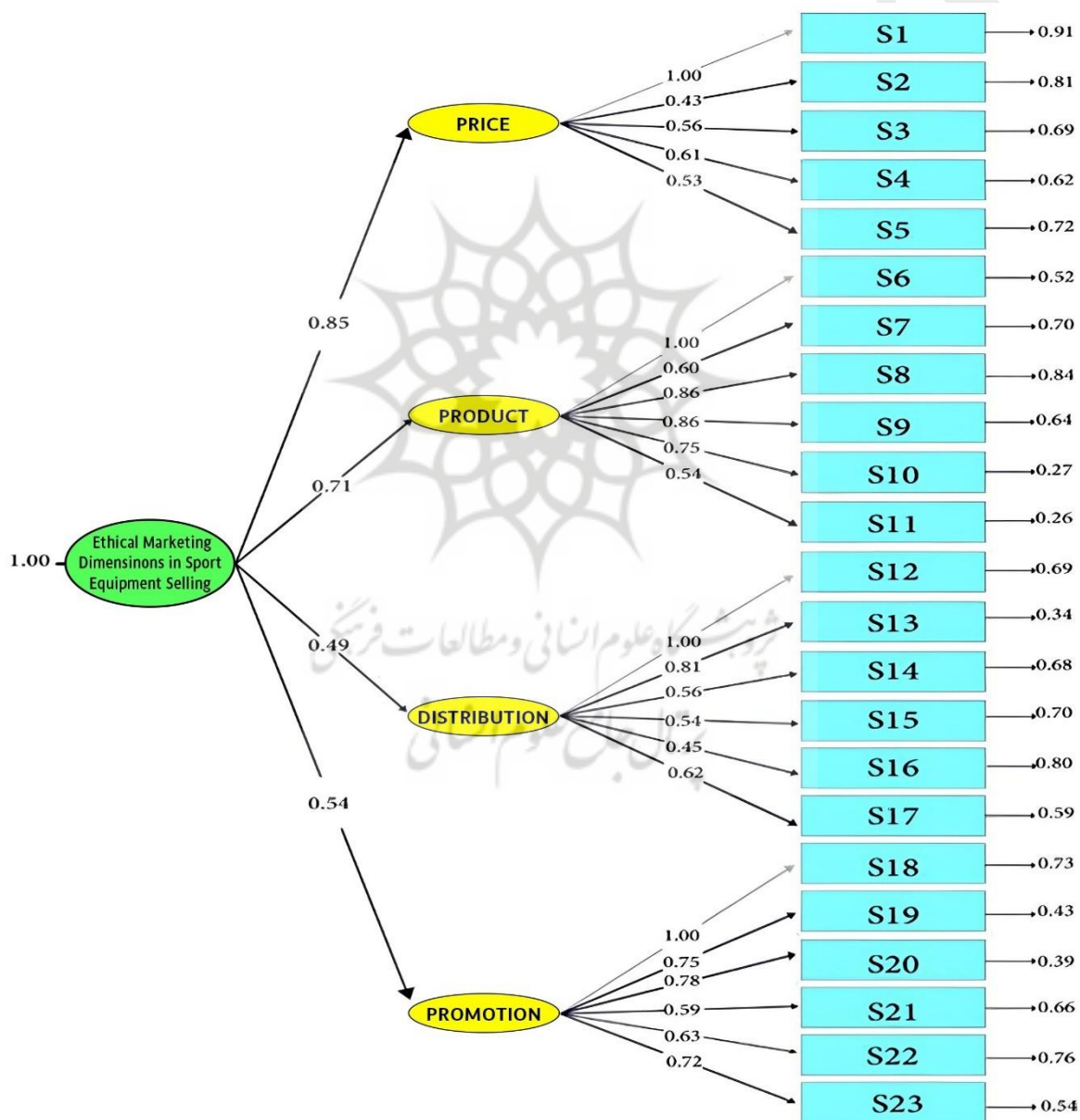
The results in Table 4 indicate that the factors influencing the ethical marketing of sports equipment vendors are significantly correlated with each other. Data collection for the research was conducted in two parts. In the library section, relevant data from literature and research background were reviewed by examining articles, books, theses, and conducting online searches. In the field section, the Place and collection of research questionnaires were carried out. Statistical analysis of

the research data involved descriptive statistics (tables, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (exploratory factor analysis and second-order factor model). All analyses in this study were performed using SPSS version 22 and LISREL software.

Results

Examination of the sociodemographic characteristics of the research sample showed that 63.2% were male and 36.8% were female. The average age of the participants in the study was 25.4 years, with the oldest being 60 and the youngest being 16 years old. The average purchase of sports equipment and gear by the participants in the study was 830,000 tomans, with the highest purchase being 7,000,000 tomans and the lowest purchase being 600,000 tomans. And finally, the most purchased sports equipment and gear by the participants in the study included 65.7% shoes and clothing, 26.9% sports equipment, and 7.1% sports gear.

In the inferential findings section, the results of the second-order factor analysis are presented to determine the priority of factors affecting the ethical marketing of sports equipment vendors. Additionally, the model below confirms the construct validity of the research instrument.



Chi-Square=384.00, df=185, p-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.094

Figure 1. Model of standardized coefficients of the four-dimensional ethical marketing scale in sports equipment sales

Table 6 .Model Fit Indices of the Research Instrument

Index	Value	Desired Value	Status
χ^2	380.47	-	-
RMR	0.045	Less than 0.05	Desirable
CFI	0.94	Equal to or greater than 0.90	Desirable
IFI	0.94	Equal to or greater than 0.90	Desirable
PGFI	0.78	Greater than 0.50	Desirable
RMSEA	0.094	Less than 0.10	Desirable
CMIN/DF	2.087	Between 1 and 3	Desirable

The results in Table 6 indicate that the indices show the following values: the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) is 2.087, the absolute fit index (RMR) is less than 0.05, the comparative fit indices (CFI and IFI) are greater than 0.90, the parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) is 0.78, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.094. These values are within acceptable ranges, indicating that the research model has a good fit and the proposed factorial structure is acceptable.

Table 7. Standardized Factor Loadings and Significance Levels of Model Variables

Row	Hidden Variable	Indicator in the Model	Causes	Standardized Factor Loading	Standard Deviation	t	Value
1	Pricing dimension	S1	Pricing commensurate with product quality	1	-	-	-
		S2	Adhering to regulations in pricing	0.43	1.16	2.59	0.001*
		S3	Considering social responsibilities in pricing	0.56	1.49	2.79	0.001*
		S4	Supporting domestic products in pricing	0.61	1.91	2.86	0.001*
		S5	Using ethical approaches for price increases	0.53	1.37	2.75	0.001*
2	Product dimension	S6	Appropriate product quality	1	-	-	0.001*
		S7	Sufficient product variety	0.60	1.38	3.88	0.001*
		S8	Offering products with suitable packaging	0.86	1.47	4.27	0.001*
		S9	Supporting domestic products	0.86	1.12	4.27	0.001*
		S10	Ensuring products are not harmful to users	0.75	1.25	3.23	0.001*
		S11	Ensuring products are not harmful to nature and the environment	0.54	1.32	4.04	0.001*
3	Place dimension	S12	Sellers using diverse Place methods	1	-	-	0.001*
		S13	Making products available for customer inspection	0.81	1.42	5.27	0.001*
		S14	Providing continuous services	0.56	1.23	4.69	0.001*
		S15	Employing experienced and trained sellers	0.54	1.01	4.56	0.001*
		S16	Employing fair and ethical	0.45	1.04	3.97	0.001*

		sellers					
		S17	Using an appropriate response system to address issues	0.62	1.13	5.11	0.001*
Promotion dimension		S18	Avoiding negative advertising against competitors	1	-	-	0.001*
		S19	Avoiding exaggerated catalogs and brochures	0.75	1.18	5.04	0.001*
		S20	Avoiding unrealistic discounts	0.78	2.54	5.07	0.001*
4		S21	Avoiding promotional methods (advertising) inconsistent with cultural values	0.59	0.97	4.49	0.001*
		S22	Avoiding deceptive and misleading advertising	0.63	1.16	3.18	0.001*
		S23	Avoiding unreal festivals and prizes	0.72	2.30	4.17	0.001*

*** In order of significance at the 0.05 and 0.01 error levels

Ranking the ethical dimensions of marketing in sports equipment sales

The gamma (γ) and lambda (λ) parameters, also known as factor loadings, indicate the relationships between constructs or factors. The gamma parameter represents the relationship between the external and internal latent variables, while the lambda parameter represents the relationship between the internal latent variable and the observed internal variable. Based on these coefficients and their significance values, determined using the t-value, it is possible to rank each of the factors influencing the ethical marketing of sports equipment vendors.

Table 8. Ranking of Ethical Dimensions of Marketing in Sports Equipment Sales

Row	Factor	Standardized Factor Loading	Standard Deviation	t-value	P-value	Rank
1	Pricing	0.85	0.22	77.2	<0.001	1
2	Place	0.49	0.21	8.2	<0.001	4
3	Product	0.71	0.25	25.4	<0.001	2
4	Promotion	0.54	0.46	25.3	<0.001	3

*** In order of significance at the 0.05 and 0.01 error levels

The results of Table 8 indicate that the most influential factors affecting the ethical marketing of sports equipment vendors (based on factor loadings) are as follows: The Pricing factor, with a factor loading of 0.85, is the most significant. Following that, in descending order, are the Product factor with a factor loading of 0.71, the Promotion factor with a factor loading of 0.44, and the Place factor with a factor loading of 0.49.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the current world, where progress, technology, and the rapid dissemination of news and information are prevalent, individuals, or customers from the perspective of organizations, have easy access to various services of organizations through the internet and other information sources. These services include information about sales prices or service offerings, types of products or services, after-sales services, and similar matters. However, what holds paramount importance in this scenario is the level of honesty and adherence to ethical principles in sales interactions and behaviors towards customers. Consequently, to identify the principles of ethical marketing among sports equipment vendors and using principle p4, the following results were obtained.

Based on the research findings, in the pricing factor, five components were identified, including: (Pricing commensurate with product quality, adhering to regulations in pricing, considering social

responsibilities in pricing, supporting domestic products in pricing, using ethical approaches for price increases).

In this context, Esmaeil pour and Dezhgahipour (2012), asserted in their research that unethical pricing strategies hold significant potential. Therefore, companies should refrain from implementing unfair pricing tactics, as their execution can lead to negative sentiments among consumers and buyers towards companies and their products. One of these sales strategies is pricing according to product quality, which is recognized as an ethical principle that customers expect sellers to adhere to in the pricing domain. In fact, the price of the products should match their quality. Ebrahimi and Roodani (2009), emphasized that adhering to this principle can strengthen customer trust. The next component is adherence to regulations in pricing. Adhering to pricing laws and regulations is one of the ethical requirements that can help maintain fairness and transparency in the market. Mensah et al. (2021), state that adherence to regulations not only helps maintain fairness in the market but also increases customer trust. From another perspective, Ebrahim and Almorshed (2014), have pointed out that companies should consider social and environmental impacts in the pricing process. This approach not only helps the brand's credibility but also attracts conscious customers. Support for domestic products in pricing, as another component, indicates a commitment to the national economy and support for local producers, which can lead to a sense of belonging and loyalty among customers (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). Accordingly, from the perspective of sports equipment buyers, the aforementioned five components are considered the most important ethical factors in the pricing domain. Neglecting these components can have negative consequences for the market, such as increased use of low-quality products and insufficient price regulation. Therefore, adhering to ethical principles in pricing not only benefits consumers but also strengthens brand credibility and increases customer satisfaction.

Another finding of the research indicated that six factors, including appropriate product quality, appropriate product variety, offering products with suitable packaging, supporting domestic products, non-harmfulness of products for the user, and non-harmfulness of products for nature and the environment, influence the formation of the ethical dimension of the product.

The appropriate quality of the product, as one of the components shaping the product aspect, is one of the most important factors in attracting customers. Research has shown that customers are increasingly paying attention to product quality and expect the purchased products to meet high standards. In this context, Abdolmaleki et al. (2018) and Yazdani et al. (2021), have mentioned the provision and production of high-quality products to customers as one of the ethical components in their research. The next component is appropriate product diversity, which allows customers to have more options to choose from and meets their various needs. Research has shown that product diversity can lead to increased customer satisfaction. When customers feel that they have more options to choose from, there is a higher likelihood that they will have a more positive shopping experience (Najafi-Ghobadi et al., 2021). Ultimately, appropriate product diversity is not only an effective strategy for attracting and retaining customers, but it also holds ethical significance in marketing. Companies should pay special attention to providing diverse options to meet the various needs of customers while adhering to ethical principles. On the other hand, Hosseini et al. (2022), introduced the non-harmfulness of products to users as one of the ethical components in the field of products in their research. They express. Ensuring product safety for consumers is one of the ethical requirements. Failure to adhere to this principle can lead to legal consequences for sellers. In this context, the non-harmfulness of products to nature and the environment is another identified component. With the increasing public awareness of environmental issues, producers and sellers must pay special attention to the environmental impacts of their products. The production and supply of products that cause less harm to the environment is not only ethically correct but can also help attract socially conscious customers (Kowalska, 2017). The results of the Williams and Murphy (1990), study is also in line with the results of the conducted research. In their research titled "The Virtue of Ethics: A Theory for Ethical Marketing," they stated that Ford Motor Company

was found guilty in courts in 1978 for failing to adhere to safety guidelines in the presentation and packaging of its products due to unethical marketing and was forced to pay a fine of 7 million dollars. In fact, the court has considered adherence to ethical marketing principles, including providing products with appropriate packaging, as part of ethical marketing and customer rights and has deemed violations of these principles a crime. The last component in the product dimension was the support for domestic products by sports equipment sellers. (Azizi & Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, 2021), state in their research that supporting domestic products is not only an effective marketing strategy but also holds significance as an ethical component in the sale of sports equipment. Companies should focus on raising awareness among consumers about the benefits of buying domestic products so that they can both contribute to the country's economic growth and increase customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, the research results indicate that the lack of oversight by officials on the adherence to ethical components in the product domain by sports equipment sellers increases the likelihood of using low-quality products, the lack of support for domestic products, the provision of harmful products to consumers, and the use of environmentally damaging products by sports equipment sellers, which in turn will lead to buyer dissatisfaction.

The research findings indicate that the components of ethical marketing in the context of sports equipment sales in the distribution aspect include six items: the use of diverse distribution methods by sellers, providing products for customer review, offering continuous services, employing experienced and skilled sellers, using fair and ethical sellers, and implementing an appropriate response system to address issues.

In this context, Ebrahimi and Roodani (2009), state in their research that the use of an appropriate response system to address customer issues is one of the ethical components of marketing in the distribution sector. In fact, the existence of an efficient response system can give customers the assurance that their needs are being addressed. According to a study conducted by Mahmoudi et al. (2015), the relationship between the professional ethics of salespeople and the formation of sustainable relationships (trust, commitment, and loyalty) indicates the importance of these systems in creating positive relationships with customers. Also, Hosseini et al. (2022), state that providing products for customer review is another ethical component of marketing in the distribution sector. Allowing customers to review and test products enables them to make their purchasing decisions with greater confidence. This can lead to a reduction in return rates and an increase in customer satisfaction. According to research conducted in the field of sports marketing, direct interaction with the product and its evaluation by the customer can have a positive impact on the brand image. In today's world, where competition in the market is very intense, sellers who adhere to ethical principles usually perform better (Veisi & Izadi, 2021). The next component was providing continuous services to customers. This ethical practice can strengthen customers' sense of belonging and encourage them to continuously use the products. Research has shown that brands with strong after-sales services and adherence to ethical sales principles typically experience higher loyalty rates (Ghezelsefloo & Chori, 2021). Abdolmaleki et al. (2018), also stated in their research that the existence of appropriate distribution channels and the use of experienced and skilled, fair, and ethical sellers are other components of ethical marketing in the distribution sector. Appropriate distribution channels allow customers to easily access the products. This can include physical stores, online sales, and even local dealerships. Proper distribution allows customers to test the products and receive the necessary information before making a purchase. This helps reduce disappointment and product returns (Asbaghi Asal, 2019). Experienced salespeople with sufficient product knowledge can better understand customer needs and provide appropriate guidance. This effective communication not only helps increase sales but also creates a lasting relationship with customers. Ultimately, sellers must adhere to ethical principles, including honesty in providing information and not deceiving customers. According to a study, adhering to ethics in marketing preserves a positive brand image and increases customer loyalty Daryadel and Mokhtari (2022), Ultimately, the presence of the mentioned components not only affects commercial success but also

helps in creating an ethical culture in the marketing of sports equipment. Stores that focus on these factors will be able to establish stronger relationships with their customers and perform more successfully in today's competitive market. These approaches will not only increase customer satisfaction but also maintain the store's reputation.

The last element of the marketing mix is the promotion factor, and research findings indicate that six ethical components have been identified in this area, including the non-use of negative advertising against competitors, the non-use of exaggerated catalogs and brochures, the non-use of unrealistic discounts, the non-use of promotional methods (advertising) inconsistent with cultural values, the non-use of deceptive and misleading advertising, and the non-use of unrealistic festivals and awards.

In this regard, Asbaghi Asal (2019), states in a study conducted on ethics in marketing that the use of exaggerated catalogs and brochures is an unethical practice in the promotion of sports equipment sales. Although this action may attract customers' attention in the short term, it can ultimately lead to a loss of customer trust. He states that using accurate and real information in advertisements helps maintain a positive brand image and increases customer loyalty. In another study, Ebrahimi and Roodani (2009), stated that the non-use of festivals and unrealistic awards is one of the components of ethical marketing in the field of promotion. Festivals and fake awards can quickly undermine a brand's credibility. Today's customers seek transparency and honesty, and any deception or false advertising is considered unethical and may lead to their dissatisfaction. One of the other components is negative advertising against business competitors, which can not only damage the brand image but also create unnecessary tensions in the market. Negative advertising can also reduce customer trust and deter them from purchasing a brand's products. Research shows that brands that emphasize ethics and honesty can establish sustainable and positive relationships with their customers (Asbaghi Asal, 2019). Another component was the use of promotional methods that were inconsistent with the cultural values of the community, which could lead to negative reactions from customers. For example, advertisements that conflict with the religious or social beliefs and values of the community may not only fail to have a positive impact but also cause public dissatisfaction. Advertisements should be designed in a way that strengthens the cultural identity of the community (Abdolahian & Hasani, 2012). Therefore, brands should pay attention to this point when designing their advertising campaigns. Deceptive and misleading advertising is another factor that not only reduces customer trust but can also have legal repercussions for brands (Hosseini et al., 2022). Román and Luis Munuera (2005), also concluded in their research that 49% of sales managers resorted to lying in their phone sales, and 34% made unrealistic promises to customers in their phone sales, thus not adhering to ethical principles in the field of promotion. It should be noted that the reason for the alignment of the above research results with the present study is the importance of promotion in shaping the company's image in the minds of customers.

Ultimately, the latest research findings indicate that prioritizing the importance of ethical marketing principles according to the P4 model is as follows: pricing is the first factor, followed by product, promotion, and Place. In this regard, Ebrahimi and Roodani (2009), stated in their research that adhering to ethical principles in the advertising sector is one of the most important ethical factors in consumer purchasing behavior. This shows that contrary to existing perceptions, attention to ethical virtues in this area not only does not impose additional costs in the organizational life cycle but also provides opportunities for long-term profitability. Furthermore, Lee and Jin (2019), state in their research that ethical components related to pricing and then product are of great importance to consumers.

Based on all the above explanations, it should be emphasized that marketers today must adhere to ethical standards such as not harming others (competitors, consumers, and society as a whole), being truthful with customers, and upholding ethical values such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency, and civic behavior in all marketing decisions. This means establishing relationships with customers and increasing consumer trust by adhering to these ethical values.

Marketers should be committed to their implicit and explicit commitments and strive to always be truthful in all situations, showing responsibility towards vulnerable market segments such as children, the elderly, the impoverished, and illiterate adults. Additionally, marketers should act as responsible citizens towards society and the environment. They should avoid product manipulation and the use of sales techniques that undermine consumer trust, value individual differences among customers, and refrain from stereotyping and clinging to stereotypes such as gender, race, age, or sexual themes in advertising and other marketing activities.

It should be noted that this research has multiple implications. Among the identified dimensions in the research, it can help in the development of ethics in the field of sports marketing. Considering that adhering to ethical principles can lead to increased customer trust and loyalty, greater attention to these aspects is essential. With increased supervision and attention to the activities of vendors in identified areas, unethical behaviors can be prevented. This not only helps increase customer satisfaction but can also strengthen brand credibility. Additionally, there is a need to educate and raise awareness among salespeople about the importance of adhering to ethical principles in marketing. These trainings can include proper pricing methods, fair distribution, and product promotion. On the one hand, adhering to ethical principles in marketing is beneficial not only for customers but also for society. With the reduction of fraud and the increase in transparency, public trust in the sports equipment market will grow, which in turn will lead to sustainable development in this field. And considering that sports and sports equipment play an important role in the health of society, adhering to ethical principles in the sale of this equipment can help promote a culture of sports and increase the overall level of public health.

It is worth mentioning that we also faced some limitations in this research. In such a way that, due to sampling limitations, the results may only pertain to a specific group of consumers or sellers of sports equipment in Yazd province and cannot be generalized to other regions or communities. Limited research time may lead to overlooking significant social or economic changes that could impact consumer behavior. This issue can lead to inaccuracies in predicting future trends in the sports equipment market. And finally, reliance on self-reporting can lead to data bias and result in outcomes that reflect respondents' opinions or feelings more than the objective realities of the market. As a result, these limitations require further attention and examination in future research to accurately analyze the ethical dimensions of marketing in the sale of sports equipment and to provide more effective solutions for improving the current situation.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines: Ethical points have been observed.

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