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**Building Viable Fitness Brands: Importance of Brand Communication Strategies in  
Attracting Potential Health Club Members**

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## **Building Viable Fitness Brands: Importance of Brand Communication Strategies in Attracting Potential Health Club Members**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to empirically examine antecedents of sport consumer-based brand equity in the fitness segment of the sport industry (i.e., participatory sport). The proposed framework consisted of market-induced (e.g. word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth) and organization-induced antecedents (e.g. price, place) that have been theoretically proposed, but not tested. An 18-item paper-based survey was administered to a convenience sample of health club prospects (N= 213). The questionnaire consisted of items measuring price (three items), brand awareness (two items), brand association (three items), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (three items), word-of-mouth (WOM) (three items), and place (four items). The relationship between independent (i.e., price, place, WOM, eWOM) and dependent variables (i.e., brand awareness, brand association) within the proposed model were tested using a multiple linear regression analysis (MLR). The results of the proposed model indicated that the four proposed antecedents accounted for a total of 30% of the variance in brand awareness and 14% of the variance in brand association. Specifically, price and WOM were significant predictors of brand awareness as well as brand association. The findings suggest that organization controlled brand strategies such as price, and organic brand communications such as WOM, help shape the perceptions potential health club members have with the health club brand.

**Keywords:** brand equity; brand image; health clubs; participatory sport; fitness industry

## **Building Viable Fitness Brands: Importance of Brand Communication Strategies in Attracting Potential Health Club Members**

### **Introduction**

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, about 35% of U.S. adults are obese (Ogden et al., 2012). This percentage is alarming considering the obesity rates of other nations. The prevalence of obesity is staggering as it has been linked to several non-communicable diseases (i.e., heart disease, type I diabetes, some cancers) (Ogden et al.). As public health practitioners begin to develop ideologies on preventative medicine, it is imperative that sport and fitness marketers realize the seriousness of public health issues and emphasize how, through the use of effective marketing strategies, sport participation can serve a crucial role in America's battle against obesity.

Research has indicated that people understand the significance of adhering to a healthy lifestyle, one that includes proper nutrition, strength, and cardiovascular training (Tharrett & Peterson, 2006; Williams, 2010). However, a disproportionate amount of Americans are not consuming fitness-related services and/or products that promote a healthy lifestyle. For instance, health clubs in the United States are only attracting 17% of the population (Scudder, 2003). However, 97% of Americans indicate that they need the services offered by health clubs in order to maintain and enhance their quality of life (Tharrett & Peterson, 2006). These findings provide sustenance to the notion that inefficiencies in brand communications may be the catalyst behind the health club industry's inability to attract a larger segment of the population, despite the population's inherent need for the services they provide.

In relation to sport management, Williams and Pedersen (2012) defined the fitness sector of the sport industry as the business of sport and exercise participation that includes persons and organizations that manufacture, sell, instruct, and/or operate exercise and sport-related goods and services. Like the products and services of their spectator sport counterparts, the services provided by the fitness sector (e.g., health clubs) are intangible and inconsistent in nature (Gladden & Funk, 2001). However, unlike the spectator sport sector, the fitness sector suffers from a lack of academic literature. As a consequence, emerging literature supports the notion that there needs to be more

research examining the marketing strategies utilized by fitness enterprises to attract consumers (Li & Jin, 2011).

In recent years, the fitness sector of the sport industry has begun to garner some attention amongst sport marketing scholars (e.g., Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2004; Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos, & Kaltsatou, 2008; Williams, 2010; Williams & Pedersen, 2012). However, to date, no research has examined the use of brand communications strategies geared at the 83% of Americans who are not health club members. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide insight into the effects marketing messages have on the formation of brand equity in the mind's aware non-consumers, otherwise known as prospects in the health club industry. To this end, we investigated role of organization-induced and market-induced brand communications on the creation of brand awareness and brand association.

## **Literature Review**

### *Consumer-based brand equity*

Keller (1993) stated that, "consumer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory" (p.1). Keller's (1993) seminal work on the conceptualization of consumer-based brand equity highlights the overarching concept of brand knowledge. Brand knowledge is composed of brand awareness and brand image. According to Keller, brand awareness is the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind when other brands in that product category are mentioned. For instance, an individual looking for a convenient place to exercise at various times of the day may recall 24 Hour Fitness as a health club, or may recognize the brand as a leader in the health club category for future purchase (Keller, 1993; Williams, 2010). Ultimately, brand awareness is reached if a consumer is able to recognize the brand in the marketplace (i.e., brand recognition) and/or recall the brand name when the product category is mentioned (i.e., brand recall). In terms of health clubs, consumers must be aware of the brand before associations can be formed, and a purchase can be made. It is imperative that potential club members think of the brand (e.g., 24 Hour Fitness) when they think of the product category (e.g., health clubs). Previous research has suggested that there are three primary reasons brand awareness is a component of brand equity: (1) increases consumer consideration; (2) creates effective decision-making (3) influences brand association formation (Keller, 1993). Given the importance of brand awareness to an organizations viability and

financial stability, we aimed to uncover how market and organization related brand communications foster brand awareness.

The other key dimension of brand knowledge (i.e., brand equity) is brand associations. Brand associations are the impression, links, and nodes a consumer or non-consumer holds in his/her mind about a brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Brand associations consist of the things we relate to a brand when we see, feel, or think about it. Establishing strong brand associations may help health club managers enhance their brands, and determine the components of brand equity to direct them (Alexandris et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). Absolutely anything that comes to mind when a certain brand is thought of is considered an association. Additionally, brand associations can vary according to their favorability, strength, and uniqueness (Keller, 1993). Building consumer-based brand equity requires creating distinct brand marks that serve as points of differentiation brands. Regarding the health club industry, establishing brand associations that are favorable in the minds of prospects can aid in creating strong brand equity, and add to the likelihood of product consumption (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

#### *Sport brand equity*

To date, there has been substantially more branding research devoted to the spectator segment of the sport industry (e.g., Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006), than the fitness sector. In investigating spectator-based brand equity, sport management scholars have appropriately adjusted Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) models of brand equity to fit the spectator sport sector (e.g., Gladden & Milne; Gladden et al.; Ross, 2006). Nevertheless, we consider the apparent differences between the services provided by health clubs and those provided by spectator sport organizations (e.g., leagues, franchises). However, scholars have suggested that the way in which sport consumers generate brand perceptions may be similar to that of fitness consumers (i.e., Alexandris et al., 2008; Williams & Pedersen, 2012). In particular, these studies have employed spectator-based brand equity (SBBE) model (Ross, 2006) in a health club context.

***The spectator sport-based brand equity model.*** Specifically, Ross' (2006) SBBE model proposed several antecedents and consequences of brand equity. He proposed that brand awareness and brand association (i.e., brand equity) were preceded and influenced by organization-induced (e.g., marketing mix), market induced (e.g., publicity), and experience induced (e.g., evaluation of the quality of service

provided) encounters with the brand. Furthermore, he postulated that the creation of brand equity may result in the following consequences: team loyalty, media exposure, merchandise sales, ticket sales, and revenue solicitations. The underlying premise was that brand equity is the result of marketing communications controlled by the organization (e.g., place), uncontrolled by the organization (e.g., word-of-mouth), and/or a consumer's personal encounter with the brand.

**Organization-induced Antecedents.** Organization-induced antecedents can be categorized as components of the marketing mix that are produced by the health club and controlled by management. Price and place are included in the proposed model as they have a direct impact on consumers (Mullin et al., 2007; Williams, 2010) and can be easily applied in a health club context. Ross (2006) proposed the traditional marketing mix in addition to variables cited in previous literature as they relate to service marketing. More recent studies examine price and place as brand associations of health club members (Williams, 2010; Williams & Pedersen, 2012). The present study examined price from a promotional perspective within the health club industry as scholars have examined this marketing tactic in terms of how it impacts pretrial brand evaluations (Raghubir & Corfman, 1999). Furthermore, the current study will be the first to test place as an antecedent of brand equity. Previous studies also alluded that location is rather valuable to consumers in terms of proximity, as they have less sacrifices to make when acquiring the health club's services and/or products (Williams, Pedersen, & Walsh, 2012; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000).

**Market-induced Antecedents.** Market-induced antecedents are sources of brand-related information gathered by consumers that are uncontrolled and unpaid for by the organization (Ross, 2006). Based on the recommendation made by Ross, this study examined Word-of-mouth communication (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as market-induced antecedents. In general, WOM is the means by which buyers of services exchange information about those services, thus diffusing information about a product throughout a market (File, Cermak, & Prince, 1994). According to previous literature, WOM is considered to have a significant impact on consumer preference (Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969; Arndt, 1967; Richins, 1983).

Similarly, according to Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004), eWOM is defined as positive or negative statements made about a product, company, or media personality that are made widely available via the Internet. eWOM's prevalence coincides with the emergence of internet usage. In the context of health clubs,

prospective customers visit web sites and read reviews from other customers (i.e., eWOM) to learn more about a product before making a purchase (Doh & Hwang, 2009). The aforementioned factors should be observed by health club managers as literature has suggested that these exchanges are common in service industries (Berry, 2002).

#### *Measuring fitness brand equity.*

In the context of health clubs, Alexandris et al. (2008) empirically tested the relationship between Ross' (2006) proposed experience-induced antecedent — operationalized as service quality — brand associations and brand loyalty in a European health club setting. Their findings suggested a significant relationship between experience-induced antecedents (i.e., service quality) and brand associations. Similarly, Williams and Pedersen (2012) assessed experience-induced antecedents (i.e., exercise commitment & service quality) among club members in a U.S. health club setting. Moreover, the researchers' findings supported Alexandris et al.'s (2008) and the inclusion of exercise commitment as an experience-induced antecedent of brand equity. However, the previous research provides a superficial view on how antecedents of brand equity — referred to in this study as brand communications — affect brand equity. Moreover, it was beyond the scope of the previous research to examine how brand communications that originated from the fitness organization or external sources (e.g., general public, media) affect brand equity. Therefore, the present study fills this gap in the literature by examining a) market-induced antecedents (i.e., price and place) and b) organization-induced antecedents (i.e., WOM and eWOM).

#### **Conceptual framework**

In an attempt to empirically investigate the effects marketing messages have on the formation of brand equity in the mind's aware non-consumers — using Ross' (2006) SBBE model as the theoretical framework — we tested the relationship between market and organization-induced antecedents and brand equity (i.e., brand awareness & brand associations) constructs among health club prospects. In order to test the applicability of organization-induced and market-induced antecedents in a health club context, constructs were applied to the proposed model that the researchers deem appropriate for health club prospects. For instance, Ross (2006) stated that elements of the marketing mix were considered organizational-induced antecedents that contribute to the formation of brand awareness and brand associations. For that reason, the present

study measured price and place as organization-induced marketing strategies for health clubs. Similarly, market-induced antecedents (e.g., publicity) were assessed using word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth communications, as proposed in the SBBE model.

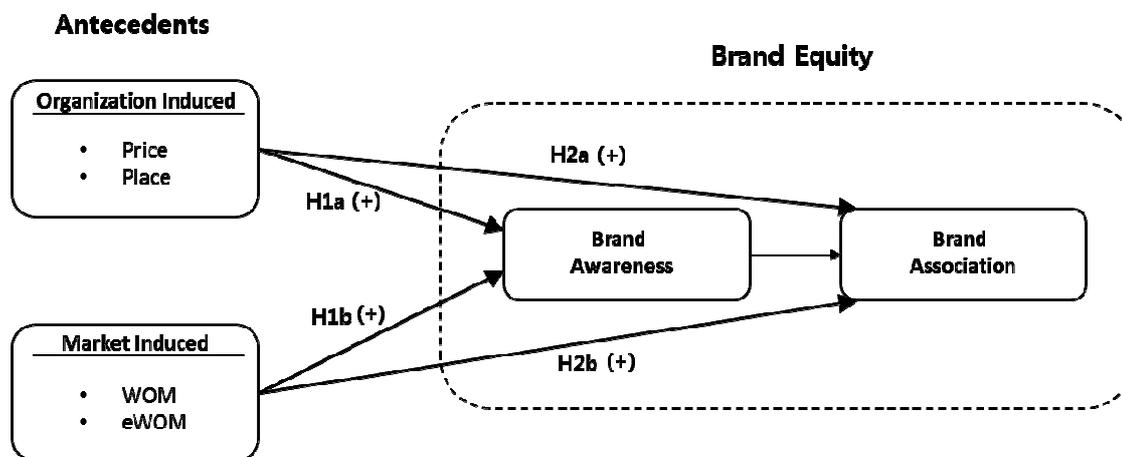
The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) outlined above provides valuable insights into how prospects gauge brand equity in a health club context. The present study utilized the SBBE model as a theoretical framework to examine the brand perception of prospects in the health club industry. After a thorough review of the literature and analysis of various conceptualizations of brand equity, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1a: There is a positive and significant relationship between market-induced antecedents (e.g. WOM, eWOM) and brand awareness among prospects in the health club industry.

H1b: There is a positive and significant relationship between organization-induced antecedents (e.g. price, place) and brand awareness among prospects in the health club industry.

H2a: There is a positive and significant relationship between market-induced antecedents (e.g. WOM, eWOM) and brand associations among prospects in the fitness industry.

H2b: There is a positive and significant relationship between organization-induced antecedents (i.e., price, place) and brand associations among prospects in the health club industry.



**Figure 1.** Prospects' brand equity model being tested [on the basis of Ross's (2006) spectator-based brand equity (SBBE) model]

## Methodology

### Sampling and procedure

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university in which the researchers are based, the data were collected from collegiate students in the Midwestern United States. A convenience sampling method was employed for this study, because such a method allowed the researchers an opportunity to choose the appropriate sample considered representative of the population. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher selects a requisite number from cases that are conveniently available (Singleton & Straits, 2005). For the purposes of this study, a sample of health club prospects were utilized to measure the organizational and market induced antecedent components of brand equity. Previous research has suggested that these antecedents become insignificant once a consumer has had a direct experience with the brand, thus using current and past members of the health club would not appropriate to answer the proposed hypotheses (Berry, 2002).

A self-administered paper-and-pencil survey was completed by respondents (N=213) currently enrolled in a fitness-related course at the university. The questionnaires were completed during class. The demographic characteristics of the total sample revealed that 43.6% of the respondents were male and 56.4% were female.

The average ages of the respondents were between 19-25 (97.6%). Regarding ethnicity, 87.7% were Caucasian, Asian and African American was 4.7% and 4.2%, respectively.

### Instrument

The participants were given a questionnaire that consisted of 18 items, measured on a 7-point Likert scale, to measure the four antecedents and two brand equity factors. The four antecedents were word-of-mouth (three items), electronic word-of-mouth (three items), price (three items) and place (four items). The following statement is an example of a word-of-mouth item: "People say positive things about this health club to me." Additionally, the two brand equity factors were brand awareness (two items) and brand association (three items). The following statement is an example of a brand association item: "I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of this health club." The aforementioned items have been tested in previous research (e.g., Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Park et al., 2011; Williams, 2010; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Zeithaml et al., 1996) and have shown to be valid, in regard to construct and predictive validity.

A reliability analysis was conducted to examine the consistency of the items within the questionnaire. The reliability estimates for the proposed constructs were measured using the Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient that tests the homogeneity of all items in the instrument subscale. According to Nunnally (1978), in order to have an acceptable level to verify internal consistency, the alpha value should be greater than ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). All of the brand association factors and service quality dimensions yielded acceptable Cronbach's alpha levels ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ) as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Internal consistency of antecedents and brand equity variables

Factors	Number of items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Antecedents		
Place	4	.922
Price	3	.907
eWOM	3	.858
Word-of-mouth	3	.815
Brand equity		
Brand Awareness	2	.868
Brand Association	3	.633

### Data Analysis

In order to test whether the proposed antecedents predicted the brand equity (i.e., brand awareness and brand association), a multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis was conducted with IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 19.0 to test the proposed hypotheses. Four antecedents were set as the independent variables and the brand association was set as the dependent variable. The aforementioned procedure was replicated with the omission of brand association and the inclusion of brand awareness as the dependent variable.

### Results

Prior to conducting multiple linear regression analyses (MLR), a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the correlations between the antecedents (i.e., price, place, word of mouth, and electronic word of mouth) and brand equity components (i.e., brand awareness and brand association). Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviation), and the correlations between variables. The mean scores of the variables ranged from 3.85 to 6.09. In regard to the antecedent variables, WOM had the highest score ( $M = 5.211$ ,  $SD = 1.413$ ), followed by Place ( $M = 4.768$ ,  $SD = 1.663$ ), Price ( $M = 4.197$ ,  $SD = 1.417$ ), and eWOM ( $M = 3.851$ ,  $SD = 1.627$ ). Regarding the correlations among variables, eWOM had the low correlation with other factors.

**Table 2.** Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Correlations of Variables (N=213)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Brand Awareness	6.091	1.081	—					
2 Brand Association	4.449	0.861	.391**	—				
3 Price	4.197	1.417	.370**	.266**	—			
4 Place	4.768	1.663	.273**	.061	.348**	—		
5 Word of Mouth	5.211	1.413	.518**	.344**	.425**	.318**	—	
6 Electronic Word of Mouth	3.851	1.627	.144*	.169*	.167*	-.064	.104	—

*Note.* One-tailed; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 1a and 1b proposed that there would be a positive and significant relationship between market-induced antecedents (e.g., WOM, eWOM) and brand

awareness (H1a), and organization-induced antecedents (e.g., price, place) and brand awareness (H1b) among non-consumers in the fitness industry, respectively.

The results in Table 3 reveal that this model shows overall good fit ( $F = 23.097$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicating that the four antecedents accounted for a total of 30% (adjusted  $R^2 = .308$ ) of the variance in brand awareness. By examining each of the standardized betas for antecedents, we conclude that all of the four antecedents were positively linked to the creation of brand awareness as hypothesized. Brand awareness, however, price ( $\beta = .146$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and WOM ( $\beta = .417$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were the only significant predictors. These results, therefore, partly support our Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Additionally, none of the antecedents (e.g., independent variables) showed multicollinearity problems.

**Table 3.** Regression Results of Organization-induced and Market-induced antecedents on the Brand awareness

Dependent variable	Antecedents	Adjusted - $R^2$	F	B ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig
Brand Awareness		.308	23.097			.000*
	(Constant)			3.457	11.736	.000*
	Organization Induced					
	Price			0.112 (0.146)	2.192	.030*
	Place			0.062 (0.095)	1.496	.136
	Market Induced					
	WOM			0.319 (0.417)	6.390	.000*
eWOM			0.054 (0.082)	1.382	.168	

*Note.*  $\beta$  indicates the standardized beta which means the degree of influence on brand awareness from standardized 1 unit change of antecedents. It also indicates the direction of the relationship.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$

Hypotheses 2a and 2b proposed that there would be a positive and significant relationship between market-induced antecedents (e.g., WOM, eWOM) and brand association (H2a), and organization-induced antecedents (e.g., price, place) and brand association (H2b) among non-consumers in the fitness industry. A multiple linear regression analysis (MLR) was conducted to examine the linkage between the antecedents and brand association to test these hypotheses. Also, in order to verify which, if any, of antecedents had more influence on the creation of brand association, the standardized beta values for each antecedent was analyzed.

As presented in Table 4, the analysis revealed the model had a significant *F*-value ( $F = 9.552, p < .001$ ) which indicated good model fit. In this model the four antecedents accounted for a total of 14% (adjusted  $R^2 = .139$ ) of the variance in the creation of brand association. Similar to the results of MLR on brand awareness, brand association was significantly predicted by Price ( $\beta = .150, p < .05$ ) and WOM ( $\beta = .294, p < .001$ ). In contrast, the result of the MLR conducted on brand association revealed that only three antecedents (i.e., Price, WOM, eWOM) have a positive relationship with brand association. Although it was not significantly accounted for in the variance of brand association, the result showed that Place had negative relationship ( $\beta -.078, p = .136$ ). Again, these results moderately support our Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

**Table 4.** Regression Results of Organization-induced and Market-induced antecedents on the Brand association.

Dependent variable	Antecedents	Adjusted- <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>B</i> ( $\beta$ )	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Brand Association		.139	9.552			.000**
	(Constant)			3.103	11.736	.000**
	Organization Induced					
	Price			.091 (.150)	2.035	.043*
	Place			-.040 (-.078)	-1.108	.136

## Market Induced

WOM	.179 (.294)	4.081	.000**
eWOM	.057 (.108)	1.657	.168

*Note.*  $\beta$  indicates the standardized beta which means the degree of influence on brand awareness from standardized 1 unit change of antecedents. It also indicates the direction of the relationship.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$

### Discussion

The present study examined the role of organization and market induced antecedents on brand awareness and brand associations. The findings of this study support the previous literature by providing support for the proposition that brand communications disseminated by an organization and/or its consumers will affect the brand perceptions of current and potential consumers (e.g., Berry, 2002; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross, 2006). The following sections will discuss the findings in detail.

To examine hypotheses 1a and 1b a multivariate regression analysis (MLR) was employed. The market-induced antecedents (i.e., WOM and eWOM) and the organization-induced antecedents (i.e., price and place) were set as the independent variables, while brand awareness served as the dependent variable. The findings support the previous literature by empirically supporting the relationship between antecedents and brand awareness (Ross, 2006). Moreover, these findings suggest that the brand communication strategies employed by health clubs are reaching potential consumers in the marketplace, and are effective at creating top of mind awareness (TOMA) when the health club product category is mentioned (Mullin et al., 2007). With the vast array of health club brands in the marketplace an unknown or generic health club brand has a very small chance for success (Aaker, 1991). Put another way, if a prospect is not aware that a health club exists five miles from his or her home, the likelihood of the prospect becoming a member will decrease. The creation of brand awareness may not be a problem for national health club brands, but smaller regional clubs may find it difficult to acquire TOMA in the minds of potential consumers.

Specifically, this study found that price and word-of-mouth significantly contributed to the creation of brand awareness. Creating marketing strategies around these concepts may aid national, regional, and local health club brands in creating brand

awareness. In regard to price, previous research has found that price is a unique brand association for health club members (Williams & Pedersen, 2012). In respect to its role as an antecedent, price is defined as a marketing strategy that delineates perceived brand utility related to cost (Lassar et al., 1995). Moreover, this study provided additional evidence to support that price is an organization-induced antecedent for prospects. In contrast, Aaker (1991) noted that the development of brands has reduced the dependence on price to making purchase decisions. While we agree with the aforementioned author's statement, the results of this study show that while strong brands have reduced consumer dependence on price, it has a critical impact on shaping consumers' perceptions of the brand (i.e., brand equity). Dissimilarly, word-of-mouth is an external brand communication absorbed by prospects and consumers, which is not disseminated by the health club. Previous research has suggested that word-of-mouth is only superseded by direct experiences with respect to the influence it has over a consumer's purchase decisions (Berry, 2002). Due to the fact that word-of-mouth is uncontrolled, it would be difficult for practitioners to develop marketing strategies around word-of-mouth. However, marketing strategies that employ the use of current consumers, such as bring a friend promotions, may prove to be effective creating brand awareness via word-of-mouth.

In order to examine hypotheses 2a and 2b a second MLR was conducted. The researchers followed the same procedures as in hypotheses 1a and 1b by setting the market-induced and organization-induced antecedents as the independent variables, while brand association was set as the dependent variable. These findings suggest that three of the four antecedents (i.e. price, WOM, eWOM) had a positive relationship with brand association and two (i.e. price, WOM) of the four significant predictors of brand association. In regard to place, the findings indicate that place is not an important factor for developing distinct associations with the brand. The findings suggest that due to prospect's lack of direct experiences with the place of distribution, the construct may not help them form opinions of the health club. Additionally, further research should be conducted on the items employed to measure place to ensure they fully capture the unique role of place as a marketing strategy employed by health club practitioners.

Price and WOM demonstrated a strong prediction on brand association. This outcome seems fitting as price and word-of-mouth are common marketing strategies utilized by practitioners to sale health club memberships to prospects. Price allows the potential consumer to gauge the value of the health club brand, while WOM provides

preliminary consumer-based perceptions of the health club. Market-induced and organization-induced antecedents are essential in creating a strong a brand image in a segment of the market that lacks experience with the brand to guide their perceptions and decisions.

### ***Future Research***

Future studies should consider further examining eWOM as a market-induced antecedent in health club members as opposed to prospects. Results of this study suggest that prospects do not rely on online mediums to shape their opinions on health club brands. However, this may be due to the lack health club brand visibility on social networking sites. Health club brands should consider extending their marketing outlets to include social media. Moreover, the results of this study found that traditional WOM is effective in creating brand awareness and brand association, thus an eWOM strategy that focuses on consumer-to-consumer interaction as opposed brand-to-consumer interaction may prove to be beneficial. Marketing tactics such as these may aid practitioners in the creating brand awareness, and health club-related brand associations such as socialization (Alexandris et al., 2008). Additionally, this may provide more insight into how much online interaction actually occurs among health club members. Lastly, future studies should also consider comparing the brand perceptions of and antecedents between health club consumers and prospects.

### **Limitations**

The aim of the current study was to test the relationships between market-induced antecedents, organization-induced antecedents, brand awareness, and brand association. A limitation of the study was the use of a convenience sample, as this technique impedes generalization. While the sample used in the study was appropriate to conduct the statistical analysis, a larger sample size should be targeted in future studies in order to utilize statistical techniques such as structural equation modeling. Structural equation modeling (SEM) would aid in determining causation among all of the constructs proposed in the SBBE model (Ross, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Although previous literature has indicated that health and fitness stakeholders understand the advantages that are provided by health clubs, managers are still

challenged with retaining members as well as attracting new members. The present study provides essential findings that fitness practitioners can apply when developing their marketing strategies. Specifically, several antecedents (i.e., price, WOM, and eWOM) related to brand communication and brand image were found to have an impact on brand awareness and brand association (i.e., consumer-based brand equity) in the health club industry. By fostering the appropriate antecedents, health clubs managers can differentiate their brand from competitors in the marketplace. Moreover, the findings support previous research which has indicated that brand equity contributes to consumer brand loyalty, repeat purchase, and a more active society (Gladden & Funk, 2001; Ross, 2006; Williams & Pedersen, 2012).

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