

The structural equation model of brand identity and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football League's fans

Modelul ecuației structurale privind relația dintre identitatea de brand și loialitatea atitudinală și comportamentală a fanilor Ligii Iraniene de Fotbal

Mohammadrasoul Khodadadi¹, Mohammad Pourranjbar², Abolfazl Bejani³, Roghayeh Sarlab⁴

¹ *University of Tabriz, Iran*

² *Physical Education Department and Physiology Research Center Kerman, Iran*

³ *Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran*

⁴ *Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran*

Abstract

Background. Identity is a key element in branding and the core element of a successful brand is to perceive how the brand identity is created and developed.

Aims. This research tackles the modeling of structural equation of brand identity dimensions and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in Iranian Super League's fans.

Methods. The present study is descriptive-analytical and completed as a survey. The statistical population included the 13 Iranian league clubs and 690 people were chosen using the Q-Cochran formula and stratified random and cluster sampling methods. The author developed a Fan Based Brand Equity (FBBE) instrument based on Kapffer's model in brand identity and Meller and Hansan's model of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. The first section included demographic characteristics and the second section consisted of items covering all variables by Likert's seven item scale. Content reliability was CVI=0.87 and internal validity was investigated in a pilot study by two methods of test-retest and Cronbach's Alpha (0.75) SPSS 20 used for descriptive statistics of variables and data normality and AMOS20 used for structural equation modeling.

Results. The results showed that brand identity had a significant positive effect on the loyalty to the brand. Tangible identity had a significant positive effect on behavioral loyalty but no significant effect on the attitudinal loyalty of Iranian Super League fans.

Conclusions. Reinforcement of the football brands' intangible identity has an impressing effect on the brand. Brand identity could duplicate the power of attracting fans.

Keywords: brand identity, brand loyalty, fans, football.

Rezumat

Premize. Identitatea este un element cheie în branding. Elementul central al unui brand de succes este de a percepe modul în care a fost creată și dezvoltată identitatea brandului.

Obiective. Această cercetare are ca obiective abordarea modelării ecuației structurale a indentității de brand. Din acest motiv a fost luată în considerare atitudinea și comportamentul fanilor Super Ligii Iraniene.

Metode. Studiul de față este o anchetă și se bazează pe metoda descriptiv-analitică. Populația folosită în cercetare pentru analiză statistică a cuprins 13 cluburi din liga iraniană și 690 de persoane, care au fost alese folosind formula Q-Cochran și metodele de prelevare de probe aleatorii și grupuri stratificate. Autorul a construit un instrument de măsurare Fan Based Brand Equity (FBBE) pe baza modelului Kapffer, pentru realizarea identității de brand și modelului Meller și Hansan pentru măsurarea loialității atitudinale și comportamentale. Prima secțiune a inclus caracteristicile demografice și a doua secțiune a constat din elemente care să acopere toate variabilele de șapte elemente pe scara Likert.

Fiabilitatea testului a fost CVI = 0,87 și validitatea internă a fost investigată într-un studiu pilot, prin două metode de testare-retestare și Alpha Cronbach (0,75) SPSS 20, utilizând pentru statisticile descriptive ale variabilelor și date de normalitate. De asemenea a mai fost utilizat programul AMOS20 pentru modelarea ecuației structurale.

Rezultate. Rezultatele au arătat că identitatea de brand a avut un efect pozitiv semnificativ în loialitatea de brand. Identiti-

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Address for correspondence: Physical Education and Sport Sciences Department, University of Tabriz, 29 Bahman Sq., Tabriz, Iran,
Postal Cod: 5166616471

E-mail: rm_kh85@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: Mohammadrasoul Khodadadi

tatea corporală a avut un efect pozitiv semnificativ în loialitatea comportamentală, dar nici un efect semnificativ în loialitatea atitudinală a fanilor iranieni ai Super Ligii.

Concluzii. Consolidarea în fotbal a brandurilor de identitate necorporale a imprimat efectul asupra brandului. Identitatea de brand ar putea fi dublată ca putere de atragere a fanilor.

Cuvinte cheie: identitate de brand, loialitate de brand, fani, fotbal.

Introduction

Marketers argue that brands are important on a number of levels. First, brands make a financial contribution to firms. Up to 70 percent of a firm's earnings can be attributed to brands (Perrier, 1997). Brands did not use to be mentioned in financial statements, but their value is increasingly recognized among the "intangible assets" of firms. Second, customers build loyalty to strong brands. Finally, brands now provide the guiding principles for market oriented organizations. Over time, research attention has shifted from a focus on brand image to the creation of brand identity (Kapferer, 1997; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

The sporting world has long recognized the fervent loyalty of fans to particular sporting stars and teams. Sport is a significant sector in economic, social, and management terms. Globally, the market alone is estimated to be worth around \$12 billion per annum (Ozanian, 2005). Football is one of the most globally significant sports. While many sports have appeal and commercial success within particular regions, such as baseball, few appeal to fans in all regions of the world. Even the mention of brand in conjunction with football is likely to raise the hackles of many football fans (Bridgewater, 2010). For these reasons, considering football clubs and other football organizations as brands - and seeing what insights can be gained from doing so - may be a useful exercise even for those who deplore the commercialization of football. Sports marketing theory argues strongly that football and other sports clubs should be considered as brands. These arguments focus on a number of attributes of sports clubs that make this appropriate. First, the media interest in sports clubs means that they have an increasing awareness of image. Certainly, sports attract loyal, even fanatical support. Within sports marketing literature there is a growing volume of work in the areas of "fan identification," or the relationships that fans have with clubs and with loyalty to particular teams or sports personalities (Sutton et al, 1997). The growing commercial importance of sport means that clubs are increasingly concerned with raising revenue in order to successfully meet their sporting aims. For a football club, this may be how it might attract greater numbers of fans in attendance at matches or events. For a football body, this might be to provide a better service to members of the association, or otherwise help the football body to meet the needs of its members. Sports theory also explores why fans support a specific club or sports star, what influences the choices they make, and what would prompt them to participate more in particular sports (Bridgewater, 2010).

On the other hand, in traditional economic literature, labor, capital, and land are three fundamental production elements and are regarded as the main sources of wealth and value creation; however, it cannot explain how a product

with the same efficiency, quality, and features is sold at the price three times the competitors products. New marketing approaches explain this phenomenon by the identity that different brands provide for their customers. In numerous markets, brand creates a unique identity for a product and connects it to a specific group of target population. In psychological perspective, this type of products, in addition to their apparent applications, positively affects customer self-esteem and dignity. For this reason, a customer would prefer to pay higher prices (Shirazi et al., 2013). Thus, brand loyalty plays a critical role in creating long-term benefits for the organization. Sen & Bhattacharya (2001) argue that customers reflect and reinforce their identities through brand identification and the relationships that are built along with it. Therefore, when customers highly value the quality of a brand and competitors can easily imitate and copy the firm products, the necessity of creating a strong brand identity to gain brand equity seems highly important and desirable (Geuens et al., 2009). According to De Chernatony & McDonald (1994), the purpose of branding is to facilitate the circumstances for gaining loyal consumers and retaining them with acceptable cost with the goal of accelerating return on investment. Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as customer attachment to the brand. In research on brand loyalty, the main challenge is to define the brand loyalty concept and to measure it, because repurchasing is not only a voluntary reaction, but it is due to mental, emotional, and normative factors (Meller & Hansan, 2006).

Identity is a key element in branding and the core element of a successful brand is to perceive how the brand identity is created and developed (Laforet, 2010). Geuens et al. (2009) define brand identity as a concept of a brand designed and presented by an organization. The identity of each brand is its quintessence and originality. So, if an organization wants to create a sustainable image in its customers' minds, it needs to create its brand identity first. A brand provides an attractive and strong identity when its identity is more distinctive and prestigious in comparison with other brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994). Therefore, when the role of brands is distinguishing products by creating value for the brand owners, brand distinction is regarded as an underlying and critical concept in contemporary competitive markets (Lu et al., 2008; Vignoles et al., 2000). A distinctive brand identity enables the consumers to fulfill their self-definition needs for being unique (Berger & Heath, 2007; Ruvio, 2008). Hansen et al. (2008) suggest that corporate reputation has a positive relationship with perceived value. In addition, there is a positive relationship between brand identity and customer satisfaction, because brand identity gives specific prestige to consumers and it is able to fulfil the customers' needs for uniqueness and self-enhancement. Geçti & Zengin (2013) indicate that there is a positive relation between

brand trust and brand affect. Brand trust is also positively related to both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Despite expectations, brand affect showed no significant impact on behavioral loyalty. According to the research of Moshabaki et al. (2013) on the brand identity of sports design industry in Iran, dimensions of brand identity in Iranian Football League include football success (0.97), delivery (0.92), local area teams (0.89), star players (0.88), logo, fans, history, traditional rivals (0.87), tradition (0.85), team performance (0.82), stadium (0.72) and non-player personnel (0.51). Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate football brand identity based on real fans. Finally, the question is raised: What are the effects of fan based tangible and intangible brand identity on attitudinal and behavioral loyalty?

Hypothesis

Tangible identity has a significant effect on attitudinal loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans

Tangible identity has a significant effect on behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans

Intangible identity has a significant effect on attitudinal loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans

Intangible identity has a significant effect on behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans

Material and methods

Research protocol

a) Period and place of the research

This study is a descriptive survey study, examining the structural equation model of brand identity and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans in 2013.

b) Subjects and groups

The statistical population was represented by football club (Esteghlal, Persepolis, Sepahan, Foolad and Mes) fans of 13 Football Super League clubs and the sample population consisted of 690 people chosen from seven clubs using the Q-Cochran formula and random category and clustering methods.

c) Tests applied

The instrument was the author-made FBBE questionnaire based on Kapferr’s model (2008) for brand

identification and Meller & Hansan’s model (2006) on attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. The questionnaire had two segments of demographic characteristics and 54 questions of Likert 7 switched spectrum covering all related variables. Whole reliability was (CVI=0.87) and validity was surveyed by 2 pilot methods of test-retest and Chronbach that showed a score higher than 0.75 for 47 questions and lower than 0.75 for 2 questions, which were finally eliminated from the questionnaire.

d) Statistical processing

A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed among fans in five stadiums and 690 were returned and used in the final analysis. First, data were analyzed for descriptive of mean, standard frequencies, percentiles and charts, then descriptive statistics was evaluated for all variables. Using KS showed that distribution was normal, and SPSS 20 was used for exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. SPSS 20 software was used for descriptive statistics of all variables and determination of normality of distribution, and AMOS 20 was used for structural equation modeling.

Results

Table I reports demographic characteristics such as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum, and Table II shows the descriptive index of brand identity and loyalty on brand variables

To test the impact of brand identity on attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty in Iranian Super League fans, the structural equation model was used. The calculations were performed with the AMOS software. First, the overall fit of the model was evaluated and then, the hypotheses were tested. For the overall fit of the model, two indicators of absolute, comparative and parsimonious fit were investigated. The statistical value of chi-square was 576.53 and the significance level was 0.059 due to the significant level of chi-square, being higher than 0.05; it results that the collected data stand in line with the theoretical model of research. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.975, which is considered as a desired amount for GF. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.04, less than 0.07, which is desired and confirms the research model. Also, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was 0.932; the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.907 and PNFI was

Table I

Descriptive index of demographic variables.

Index Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	32.45	7.305	20	63
Fandom history	9.18	4.413	3	22
Number of attendances in desired team’s matches	7.41	3.024	1	18

Table II

Descriptive index of brand identity and loyalty on brand variables.

Variable \ Index	N	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Brand Identity	690	4.9954	1.14709	-.425	-.183	2.35	7.00
Tangible identity	690	5.1940	1.05432	-.295	-.234	2.67	7.00
Intangible Identity	690	4.7417	1.39075	-.505	-.247	1.83	7.00
Brand Loyalty	690	5.2390	1.06105	-.160	-.403	2.75	7.00
Attitudinal loyalty	690	5.1830	.90405	-.451	.111	3.50	7.00
Behavioral loyalty	690	4.7912	1.31984	-.381	-.234	2.00	7.00

0.637, all of which indicate a desired level and confirm the research model. Therefore, generally, the model is valid for arguing the relation between the variables (Table III).

The modeling results are shown in Table IV. The results show that tangible identity had a significant positive effect on the attitudinal loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans - with an estimated coefficient 0.672, a standard estimated coefficient 0.642, critical ratio 13.45, and significance 0.001. Tangible identity had a significant positive effect on the behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans - with an estimated coefficient 0.703, a standard estimated coefficient 0.613, critical ratio 13.20, and significance 0.001.

Intangible identity had a significant positive effect on the behavioral loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans - with an estimated coefficient 0.207, a standard estimated coefficient 0.241; critical ratio 6.67, and significance 0.001. Intangible identity did not have a significant effect on the attitudinal loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans - with an estimated coefficient 0.051, a standard estimated coefficient 0.065, critical ratio 1.80, and significance 0.072.

A structural equation model was developed for the effect of brand identity on loyalty to brand in Iranian Super League fans. The statistical value of chi-square was 3.65 and the significance level was 0.061, due to the significant

level of chi-square, being more than 0.05; it results that the collected data stand in line with the theoretical model of research. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.986, which is considered as a desired amount for GF. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.051, less than 0.07, which is desired and confirms the research model. Also, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was 0.91; the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.985 and PNFI was 0.564, all of which indicate a desired level and confirm the research model. Therefore, generally, the model is valid for arguing the relation between variables (Table V).

Table VI shows the results of model analysis. The results show that brand identity had a significant positive effect on loyalty to brand - with an estimated coefficient 0.571, a standard estimated coefficient 0.748, critical ratio 14.17, and significance 0.001. Also, based on the significant positive effect of brand identity on the behavioral loyalty of Iranian Super League fans - estimated coefficient 0.672 and standard estimated coefficient of identity factors and loyalty factors higher than 0.4 - it can be concluded that the aforementioned factors can explain the total score of identity and loyalty.

Discussions

The results showed that brand identity had a significant

Table III
Structural equation model fit indexes.

Model fit index		Rate	Criterion	Interpretation
x ²		165 with 576.53 df		
Absolute	p value	0.059	Higher than 0.05	Good fit
	Goodness-of-fit index	0.975	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
Comparative	Tucker-Lewis index	0.932	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
	Comparative fit index	0.907	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
Parsimonious	Root mean square error of approximation	0.04	Lower than 0.07	Good fit
	Parsimonious normal fit index	0.637	Higher than 0.50	Good fit

Table IV
Regression estimation and significance tests.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standard estimate
Tangible identity	---> Attitudinal loyalty	.672	.050	13.450	.001	.642
Tangible identity	---> Behavioral loyalty	.703	.053	13.201	.001	.613
Intangible identity	---> Behavioral loyalty	.207	.031	6.667	.001	.241
Intangible identity	---> Attitudinal loyalty	.051	.028	1.799	.072	.065

Table V
Structural equation model fit indexes for all scores.

Model fit index		Rate	Criterion	Interpretation
x ²		3.65 with 1 df		
Absolute	p value	0.061	Higher than 0.05	Good fit
	Goodness-of-fit index	0.986	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
Comparative	Tucker-Lewis index	0.910	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
	Comparative fit index	0.985	Higher than 0.90	Good fit
Parsimonious	Root mean square error of approximation	0.051	Lower than 0.07	Good fit
	Parsimonious normal fit index	0.564	Higher than 0.50	Good fit

Table VI
Regression estimation and significant tests for total scores

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standard estimate
Identity	---> Loyalty	.571	.040	14.170	.001	.748
	---> Identity	1.000				.844
Tangible identity	---> Identity	.690	.042	16.282	.001	.648
	---> Loyalty	1.000				.784
Behavioral loyalty	---> Loyalty	1.450	.061	23.698	.001	.980

positive effect on the loyalty of Iranian Football Super League fans. These results suggest that with enforcement of brand identity, brand loyalty will increase significantly. The amount of the total standardized effect of the brand identity factor on brand loyalty was 0.748. In other words, for one unit change in the standard deviation of the brand identity factor, the loyalty amount changes into 0.748. This is in line with the results of Javaheri Kamel & Kosarneshan (2011); Dehdashti Shahrokh et al. (2012); Gladden & Funk (2002); Bauer et al. (2005); Alexandris et al. (2008); Koo (2009), and Schade & Burmann (2010). Moshabbaki et al. (2013) in the research "Planning brand identity pattern of Iran's sport industry; case study of football super league" state that football is an industry for which branding and brand identity have an extraordinary importance, in which developed football countries have special brand patterns. In this research, the author presents a pattern of brand identity factors of Iranian Football Super League teams in relation to new brand identity theories and patterns of some developed football countries; Germany, Spain, France and South Korea, along with comments and viewpoints of experts and fans, and finally, ten dimensions determined for Iranian Football Super League. All these dimensions were expressed more widely by Gladden & Funk (2002). The result of this study is not in line with that of Moshabbaki et al. (2013), who neglected Kapferer's (2008) comprehensive brand identity model that considered identity in two dimensions of being tangible and intangible.

The results showed that tangible identity had a significant positive effect on the fans' attitudinal loyalty (estimated coefficient 0.672, standardized estimated coefficient 13.45 and significance level 0.001) and behavioral loyalty (estimated coefficient 0.703, standardized estimated coefficient 0.613, critical ratio 13.20, and significance level 0.001). Tangible identity involves subscales of appearance, relation and reflection. According to the results, if apparent traits, gestures and objective schemes are reinforced in a way that leads to a continuous and positive attitude toward the football brand and have a positive distinction in relation to the brand, so that the brand is used again by the person who finally transforms into an active and loyal fan, successful brand management takes place. These results are in line with the following studies: Jamali Nejad (2007); Gylaninia & Mousavian (2010); Dehdashti Shahrokh et al. (2012); Javaheri Kamel & Kosarneshan (2011); Shah Hoseyni et al. (2011); Ebrahimi et al. (2012), and Moshabbaki et al. (2012) in Iran, and Gladden & Funk (2001); Gwinner & Swanson (2003); Gwinner & Bennett (2008); Anonymous (2009); Koo (2009); Broadbent et al. (2010); Schade & Burmann (2010); Cui (2011).

The evaluated intangible identity effect on the Iranian Football Super League fans' behavioral loyalty was positively significant (estimated coefficient 0.207, standardized estimated coefficient 0.241, critical ratio 6.67, and significance level 0.001), but the effect of intangible identity on attitudinal loyalty was not significant (estimated coefficient 0.051, standardized estimated coefficient 0.065, critical ratio 1.80, and significance level 0.072). Intangible identity includes subscales of personality, culture and self-image. Acquainted personality by football brand, brand culture between public and football brand self-expression

could create an intangible identity between fans in this research and it would lead to continuous participation and real loyalty of fans. This result is not in line with the results of Moshabbaki et al. (2013), but favors the results of Jamali Nejad (2007); Gylaninia & Mousavian (2010); Dehdashti Shahrokh et al. (2012); Javaheri Kamel & Kosarneshan (2011); Shah Hoseyni et al. (2011) and Moshabbaki et al. (2013) in Iran, and Gladden & Funk (2002); Gwinner & Swanson (2003); Gwinner & Bennett (2008); Anonymous (2009); Koo (2009); Broadbent et al. (2010); Schade & Burmann (2010); Cui (2011).

Dehdashti Shahrokh et al. (2013) consider brands with a strong identity as a formula for long term relations between customer and corporation, resulting in loyalty. Unlike other brand management approaches, the conceptualization and transformation of the identity approach takes place with managers and executive agents, which means that the development of this approach increasingly depends on functional experiences gained from using the brand concept as a management instrument (Khodadad Hosseini & Rezvani, 2012).

Ross (2006) considers that all concepts of the branding area are based on tangible and handmade goods, while sport services are intangible and decaying. Berry (2000) believes that sport services are intangible, not packaged and have no label, so that brand relies on organization instead of a relation with the product. Most of the authors believe that consumers who strongly relate to a brand need less advertisement (Khodadad Hosseini & Rezvani, 2012).

Conclusions

1. Brand identity is the explanation and description of brand and consists of a name, brand visual traits – logo, color, font, etc. In brand identity, it is determined that clients should have a certain feeling toward the brand. Due to this, brand identity is an instrument to identify clients and demonstrate the brand differentiation aspect. Brand identity is an indicator of brand association and company tendencies to formulate this identity in the mind of clients.

2. Brand identity is formulated by corporate managers, while brand image is an indicator of the customer's brand perception. The aim of management is to equalize brand identity and brand image. In this respect, a high level of brand awareness and a positive brand image have a special role in price setting and developing advertisement activities so that a positive image enables the brand to gain more intangible profit and enhance flexibility and resistance against price increase. Fans with a strong attitude toward sport brand tend to pay more for the brand. On the other hand, brand loyalty is the ultimate purpose of corporations which possess a product with a special brand. The fans' priority of participating in sport events of their desired club is named sport brand loyalty. Fans must perceive that their desired football club's brand offers them a plan and combination of safe service containing levels of qualities with appropriate price. This perception is the basis of repeated attendance by fans. At the beginning, fans may show themselves as the club's fans and then the satisfaction with being fans makes them repeat attendance and tend to continue loyalty.

3. Brand identity refers to the quality and properties

of a brand; neglecting its subscales in football may bear damage to the club, although it may not affect financial balance or the loyalty of fans. Brand identity structure becomes more relevant day by day in brand management, because it potentially has the ability to enforce competitive strength. Nowadays, many corporations create and manage identity in order to make sure that brand identity presents a precise set of values, abilities and exclusive suggestions. Brand identity can be tangible and intangible. Tangible identity includes appearance, relation, reflection subscales, and intangible identity includes personality, culture and self-image subscales.

4. Tangible identity has internal approaches to surveying identity. From the internal aspect, identity derives all its dimensions of strategic decision such as relations, brand development, brand architecture, association. Thus, football club management must spend considerable time developing tangible brand identity. With this explanation, the reinforcement and evolution of Iranian football clubs with the support of loyal fans is ascending and at least leads to the improvement of Iranian sport industry management marketing activities. It means that in the sport area, the club's name and reputation has an effect on the consumer and the consumer's perception, and from the customer's viewpoint, the club's reputation indicates the quality of its services.

5. Reinforcement of the football brand intangible identity has an impressing effect on the brand. A famous and familiar football brand could submit its brand right to another corporation for use on their products. Brand identity could duplicate the power of attracting fans.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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