



The Effect of Brand Association on Brand Equity of FC Persepolis Football Team with the Mediating Role of Fan-Team Identification

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to assess the effect of brand association on the brand equity of the FC Persepolis football team with the mediating role of fan-team identification.

Methodology: The present study is a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational study conducted in the field. The study's statistical population included football fans of the FC Persepolis football team in Iran. Based on Krejcie & Morgan's table, 391 fans were selected through random sampling in Azadi stadium at 98th Derbi of Tehran. Washburn and Plank's brand association questionnaire (2002), Yoo and Donthu's brand equity Questionnaire (2001), as well as Mael and Ashforth's fan-team identification Questionnaire (1992) were used to collect the research data. The validity of the research tool was calculated and confirmed based on content and structural validity, and the reliability was assessed according to Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. After distributing the questionnaires, 391 valid questionnaires were completed, and structural equation modeling via PLS was used to test the research hypotheses.

Findings: The results showed that brand association significantly affected brand equity ($\beta = 0.39$) and fan-team identification ($\beta = 0.36$). The results also confirmed the positive and significant effect of fan-team identification on the brand equity of the Persepolis football team ($\beta = 0.41$). Moreover, based on the Sobel test, brand association through fan-team identification had an indirect, positive, and significant effect on the brand equity of the Persepolis football team. The GOF index value also indicated the research model's proper fitness.

Originality: This study is one of the limited research projects investigating the relationship among brand associations, team identification, and brand equity simultaneously as a comprehensive model in the Iranian sport context.

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Sports Brands
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1. Introduction

The brand equity of sports teams is one of the critical aspects of business management in sports (Hattula, 2018). By strengthening the equity of sports brands, sports teams will be able to show more successful performance at national and international levels by generating more income. Brand equity as a competitive advantage affects the future benefits, financial gain, and effectiveness of communication marketing (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Branding in sport setting has become even more critical as sports turn into a consumer-based industry (Kalashi et al., 2021). In order to survive in the current competitive market, sport teams have to adapt to new changes and new markets (Sarlab et al., 2022). According to the limited revenue sources, besides sports organizations' intense competition for fan base revenues, football teams must consider the augmentation of team brand equity (Tarighi et al., 2021).

It is developing and strengthening sports brands and attracting fans as the main customers in the sports industry. It can be one of the central strategies at the heart of sports team management because developing and strengthening the sports teams' brand and earning money can provide a platform for football teams' national and transnational success (Jaberi et al., 2014). Therefore, paying attention to the dimensions of branding and specifically to strengthening the brand equity as one of the most important intangible assets of sports teams (Ahn & Kang, 2022), can provide the necessary grounds for creating a strong brand image of sports teams and the conditions necessary to prepare sports clubs to become income-generating brands (Yağız & Özer, 2022).

The customer-oriented brand equity is the essence of a sports organization's success, and the basis of brand equity lies behind what customers have learned, felt, seen, heard, and experienced from the brand. In other words, brand power is rooted in customers' minds (Keller, 1993). In brand management, actions such as creating, strengthening, and developing brand equity will lead to greater penetration of the brand in the market and increase the brand's share and value in the market. Brand equity can provide brands with strategic advantages which capture the increasing value to consumers (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The brand equity is critical for sport brands to be reputed (Bahrami et al., 2021). The importance and benefits of creating brand equity in teams are documented in some recent studies (Biscaia et al., 2016). Developing the brand value can play a significant role in branding of sport brands (Nazarian Madavani et al., 2022). Increased fan loyalty, global presence, differentiation of team, positive fan attitude, and increased purchase intentions can be described as consequences of high team brand equity; hence, team management needs to identify important factors affecting the teams' success (Naik & Gupta, 2012).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) have defined identification as a sense of belonging or a perception of oneness. Gladden et al. (1998) and Ross (2006) have shown a significant relationship between fan-team identification and brand equity in their model. Fan-team identification has been suggested as an essential predictor of fan attendance at college sports events (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). (Murrell & Dietz, 1992) argue that sports fan identification refers to fans' psychological connection to a team or a sport (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). Fan-team identification provides sports teams with enthusiastic fans with personal commitment and emotional involvement (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), making

sports fans display unique cognitive, psychological, and emotional reactions to their favorite teams. Generally, fan-team identification has received increasing attention in the marketing literature (Brian Greenwood et al., 2006). To create adequate income streams, sports teams should attract, develop, and maintain close relationships with many sports consumers (James et al., 2002). Formation of fan-team identification can pave the way for developing sports team brands and reinforcing the fan base and economic base of sports teams (Jaberi et al., 2014). Identifying fans with sports teams is a critical concept in sports marketing. It arises from the close relationship that fans have with their favorite teams and can have significant economic and financial consequences for sports teams (Tsordia et al., 2021).

One of the essential strategies for sports marketers to increase consumer preferences and loyalty; is creating strong, positive, and unique beliefs about sports brands in consumers. In other words, creating favorable associations about the brand in customers' minds will ultimately lead to customer loyalty (Bauer et al., 2008). Aaker (1991) defines the brand as a set of associations that differentiate offerings within the marketplace. In a sports context, such associations can be every organization-specific feature that persuades fans to choose their favorite team among alternatives. Brand associations are a set of perceptions of a brand name that are meaningfully organized in a consumer's mind and influence their judgment of whether a product is valuable (Hal Dean, 2004). The association of the brand reflects the consumer's deep attitudes toward the brand. Mental associations must have sufficient power, desirability, and distinction in the eyes of the customers to help the brand's positioning (Javani et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have been conducted in the research literature regarding the main hypotheses included in the research model. Regarding the proposed relationship between the brand association and fan-team identification, Moshabaki Esfahani et al. (2016) found that the Iranian football league's brand association influences fans' belonging to the football teams. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) discussed the strong affiliation of consumers with companies based on the concept of identification. They believed that identifying with organizations helps consumers satisfy their self-definitional needs. Ross (2006) found that a sports team's commercial success dramatically depends on brand associations and brand equity. The results of a study conducted by Wann et al. (1996) indicated that parental interest in a team, the talent of the team players, geography and the influence of friends, and the team's success were the origins of team identification. The geographical location was the prominent reason for supporting a team (Jones, 1997). A team's success was also significant in team identification (End et al., 2002). The relationship between brand association and brand equity was the following proposed hypothesis in the research model. In this regard, Ross (2006) revealed that brand associations could help sports teams in the branding process (Ross, 2006), which influences consumers' behavior, and brand differentiation and establish positive attitudes towards a brand (Aaker, 1991). Gladden et al. (1998) explain that brand association is critical in creating brand equity. Considering the essential role of brand association in the brand equity of sports teams (Gladden et al., 1998), paying particular attention to the factors affecting brand association in sports settings may help sports teams develop their brand equity. Gladden et al. (1998) state that success, reputation and tradition, conference affiliation, and product delivery contribute

to brand associations. Kerr and Gladden (2008) found star players, head coaches, conference and league cooperation, or stadium/arena as other indicators affecting brand associations. Gladden and Funk (2002) introduced team-related and organization-related features as essential dimensions of brand associations. Gladden and Funk (2002) found that success, head coach, and star player as team-related characteristics and reputation and tradition, product delivery, logo, and stadium/arena organization-related characteristics, were distinctive elements in generating sports brand associations.

The effect of fan-team identification on brand equity was the following proposed hypothesis in the research model. In this regard, Underwood et al. (2001) argue that social identification plays an essential part in brand equity development. Sports brands that are significantly able to attract high levels of consumer identification (Underwood et al., 2001) provide sports organizations with a significant chance to develop their brand value. (Carlson et al., 2002) found that the level of brand equity was positively correlated with the level of fan-team identification. According to Milne and McDonald (1999), and Sutton et al. (1997), fan behavior, loyalty, and attitudes are affected by the level of fan-team identification. It has also been suggested that the more significant social identification (Underwood et al., 2001), or team identification (Carlson et al., 2002), the more considerable brand equity. Generally, the relationship between brand equity and team identification has been emphasized by many studies (Carlson et al., 2002; Underwood et al., 2001). In the study of Kim and Manoli (2022), team identification was found as a significant determinant of both behavioral intention and WOM intention.

Considering the multidimensionality of brand equity, studying the psychological and sociological components related to this concept in sports can be considered an essential step in brand management in the professional football league of Iran. The power of the brand is rooted in the minds of customers (Keller, 1993); therefore, evaluating the psychological and emotional tendencies and attitudes of fans and the effects of these factors in strengthening the value of sports brands can provide the necessary grounds for developing brand equity. Studying the behavior and attitude of fans and explaining them from different psychological and sociological aspects can provide more practical knowledge and information to sports managers to manage the behavior of fans. Brand association, fan-team identification, and brand equity are among the indicators that can provide sports managers and marketers with comprehensive information about fans' expectations by evaluating the fans' characteristics and tendencies (Jaberi et al., 2014).

Examining the process of identifying with different organizations and identification consequences have become attractive in marketing and management research (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Because of the critical role of identification (that involves a significant attachment) in maintaining a close and long relationship between consumer and organization, they are addressing this issue in sports marketing research is of great significance. Moreover, because of depending on governmental resources and engaging in different financial problems, it is increasingly necessary for football clubs of professional leagues in Iran to reinforce their brand equity to pave the way for playing a more critical role within the marketplace. Although Participation and attendance for all levels of football in Iran have increased rapidly in recent years, the performance of football teams is relatively

weak from a marketing perspective. One of the most important strategies for coping with these challenges is developing the brand equity of football teams.

From a research perspective, while research on team identification, brand association, and brand equity has been widely conducted in the sports marketing literature, very little research has been undertaken to study these variables together as an integrated model. In other words, this study is one of the limited types of research that investigated the relationship among brand associations, team identification, and brand equity simultaneously as a comprehensive model in the sport context of developing countries, particularly for teams below the professional level.

As an emerging potential market with enthusiastic fans, the professional football league in Iran can be considered a marketing research focus. FC Persepolis is known to have a remarkable number of million supporters in Iran, and this abundant number of eager fans can bring the excellent potential for economic achievement (Miri et al., 2022). While this football team with such enthusiastic fans has remarkable potential to become an attractive brand, this club is severely engaged in financial and economic crises. The club is owned by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports as a governmental sector, which may be the main barrier to becoming a profitable brand. It should be taken for granted that there have recently been many efforts to privatize the club with no success due to the enormous debt it has accumulated. Besides these challenges and branding problems, psychologically attached fans of this team (as a significant asset) convinced us to conduct this study to find out if these concepts can help the club improve brand equity and ultimately develop brand positioning in fans' minds.

In this research, the researcher, using the existing research literature with a multi-dimensional view to examine the sociological, psychological, and marketing variables in an integrated and comprehensive conceptual model, seeks to provide a model to explain the role of brand association and fan-team identification in brand equity of the of Persepolis football teams in professional football league of Iran. This research will investigate the effect of brand association and fan-team identification on brand equity as a conceptual model. This model may demonstrate the role of psychological (brand association) and sociological concepts (fan-team identification) in strengthening the brand equity of a football brand among the fans as the main customers in a football setting. The research hypotheses and components are presented in the following model (Figure 1). The primary purpose of the current research was to test a conceptual model to illustrate how team brand association can affect the development of fan-team Identification and the brand equity of the FC Persepolis football team.

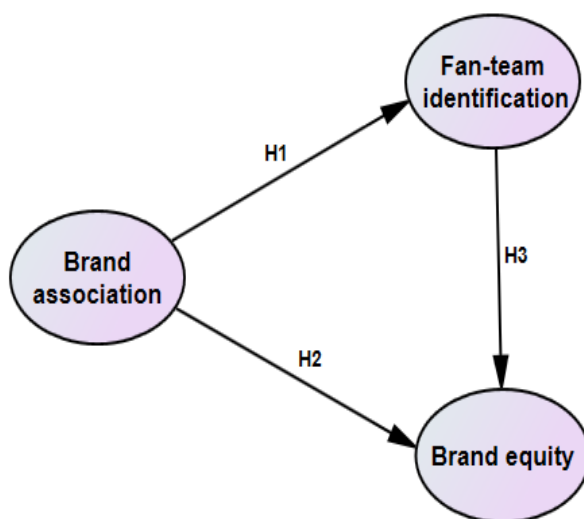


Figure 1. Research model.

2. Methodology

This research is practical in terms of objectives and descriptive and survey in terms of data collection. To collect data, library studies and a field study among the statistical population of the research (fans of the Persepolis football team) have been used. Questionnaires in similar studies in the research literature have been used to collect data in the field section. In this research, brand equity questionnaires (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) with four items, a brand association questionnaire (Washburn & Plank, 2002) with three items, and a fan-team identification questionnaire (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) with three items, were used. The rating scale of each question was prepared from agree to completely disagree based on the Likert scale of one to five. The statistical population of this research included all fans of the Persepolis football team in Iran who had at least five experiences of attending the matches of their favorite team. SPSS and PLS software were used to analyze the data. Based on Krejcie & Morgan's table, the required number of samples was estimated to be at least 384 people according to the number of fans of the Persepolis football team.

The 98th Derbi of Tehran, held in the eighth week of the 18th edition of Iran's premier football league at Azadi Stadium in March 2022, was selected for data collection. The research questionnaire had an appendix that contained the purpose of the research and a guide for completing the questionnaire for the respondents. Distribute and collect questionnaires eight research associates, who had explained in advance how to distribute and collect the questionnaires, were in eight different places in the stadium. Questionnaires were distributed and collected one hour before the start of the game. Four hundred twenty questionnaires were randomly distributed among the fans present at Azadi Stadium. At the end and after the investigations, from a total of 401 returned questionnaires, 391 questionnaires were used in data analysis. Because of the different

cultural contexts of the environments in which the questionnaires were developed and used, to further ensure the validity and reliability of these tools for use in the research process, Validity and reliability evaluation of the tools were considered.

Cronbach's alpha method and composite reliability were used to ensure the tool's reliability. A reliability study of Cronbach's alpha was conducted in a preliminary study on 30 Iranian football fans. A higher alpha value of 0.7 and a composite reliability index higher than 0.8 indicate the excellent reliability of the research tool (Chin, 2010), which is presented in Table 1. Face validity, content validity, and construct validity were conducted to check the instrument's validity. The face and content validity of the research tool was confirmed based on the opinions of nine sports marketing experts. Based on these opinions, brief changes were made in the wording and writing of the statements. Confirmatory factor analysis and convergent validity were also used to evaluate the instrument's construct validity. In the confirmatory factor analysis, factor loadings higher than 0.5 indicate the validity of the research tool in Table 1. Convergent validity was also estimated by calculating the average variance extracted. The amount of variance removed for the research tool in Table 1 was higher than the suggested value (0.5), indicating the research tool's convergent validity (Hair et al., 2020)

3. Results

More details about the demographic features of the research sample have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the research sample.

| Demographic features | | Percent % |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Employment status | Employed | 40.3% |
| | Not employed | 58.6% |
| Age | 18–22 | 23% |
| | 23–27 | 21% |
| | 28–32 | 22% |
| | 33–37 | 23% |
| | >=37 | 11% |
| Education | Under the Bachelor | 11% |
| | Bachelor | 68% |
| | Master | 20% |
| | Doctoral | 1% |
| Monthly income | <= \$100 | 37% |
| | \$ 100–300 | 36% |
| | \$ 300–500 | 19% |
| | >= \$ 500 | 8% |
| Marital state | Married | 41% |
| | Not married | 59% |

In the first step of inferential statistical analysis, the internal consistency, indicator reliability, convergent reliability, and discriminant validity were calculated to examine the measurement properties (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 2. Results of measurement properties.

| Construct | Items | OL (>0.70) | α (>0.70) | CR (>0.70) | AVE (>0.50) |
|-------------------------|-------|-------------------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| Brand association | Q1 | 0.82 ^a | 0.84 | 0.86 | 0.73 |
| | Q2 | 0.80 ^a | | | |
| | Q3 | 0.84 ^a | | | |
| Fan-team identification | Q4 | 0.79 ^a | 0.85 | 0.83 | 0.75 |
| | Q5 | 0.80 ^a | | | |
| | Q6 | 0.83 ^a | | | |
| Brand equity | Q7 | 0.78 ^a | 0.79 | 0.81 | 0.69 |
| | Q8 | 0.81 ^a | | | |
| | Q9 | 0.82 ^a | | | |
| | Q10 | 0.79 ^a | | | |

Notes: a: P< 0.05. OL= Outer Loading. α = Cronbach’s Alpha. CR= composite reliability. AVE= Average variance extracted.

As Table 2 shows, the values of indices all reach the acceptable amount and indicate a good model fit. In the next step, structural equation modeling was conducted to estimate the t-value for hypothesis testing. The findings revealed a positive and significant effect for the brand association on fan-team identification ($\beta= 0.39$; $t= 2.73$; $p<0.001$) and brand equity ($\beta= 0.36$; $t= 2.36$; $p<0.001$). Moreover, fan-team identification significantly affected brand equity ($\beta= 0.41$; $t= 2.89$; $p<0.001$).

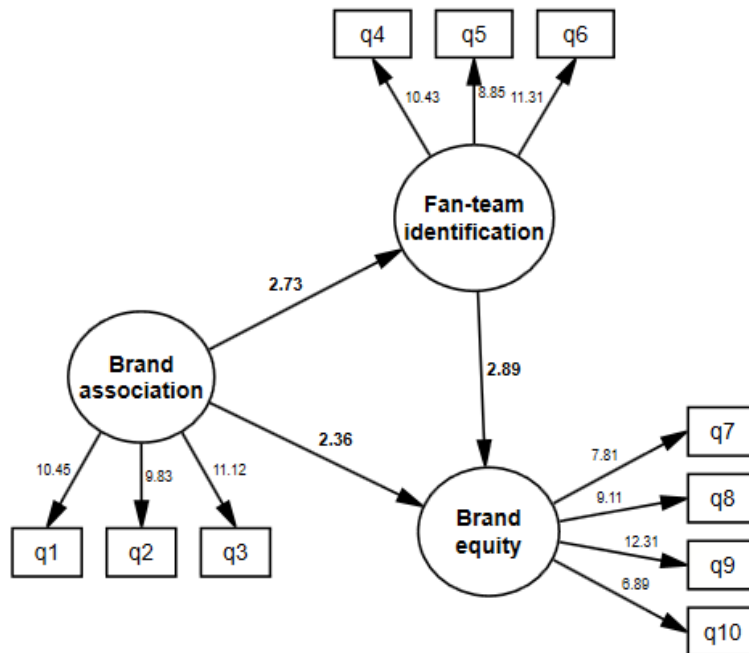


Figure 2. T value model.

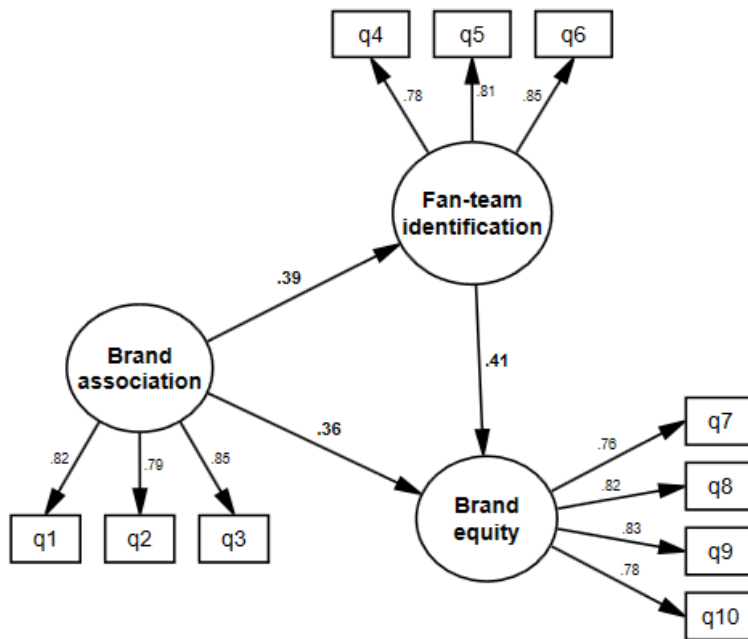


Figure 2. The research model with Beta coefficient.

The results presented in [Table 3](#) revealed that all the proposed hypotheses were empirically confirmed.

Table 3. Structural model test results for hypotheses.

| H | Path | β | T-value | P | Result |
|----|---|---------|---------|-----|-----------|
| H1 | Brand association → Fan-team identification | 0.39 | 2.73 | *** | Supported |
| H2 | Brand association → Brand equity | 0.36 | 2.36 | *** | Supported |
| H3 | Fan-team identification → Brand equity | 0.41 | 2.89 | *** | Supported |

*** $p < 0.001$.

According to the findings in [Table 3](#), all the proposed hypotheses were found to be statistically significant. All of the structural relationships, t values, and path coefficients have been presented in [Figure 2](#). As illustrated in [Figure 2](#), the data supported all proposed hypotheses.

Sobel test was used to test the significance of the mediating variable (Fan-team identification) in the relationship between the brand association and brand equity. Z-value was found to be 2.03, and since this value is higher than 1.96, it can be stated that at the 95% confidence level, the effect of the mediator variable is significant in the relationship between the brand association and brand equity. VAF index was used to determine the intensity of the indirect effect through the mediator variable. The value of VAF was 0.26, which means that more than a quarter of the impact of brand association on brand equity

is indirectly explained by the mediating role of fan-team identification. The general fit of the model is calculated through the GOF criterion provided by (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). The use of this criterion is calculated through the following relationship:

$$\text{GOF} = \sqrt{\text{communalities} \times R^2}$$

In this criterion, Communalities is the sign of the average communal values of each structure, and R^2 is the average value of the R Squares values of the endogenous structures of the model. In the GOF criterion, three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 have been introduced as a weak, medium, and strong values for GOF. The GOF value for the current model was calculated as 0.316, which shows the strong overall fit of the research model.

4. Managerial implications

The findings have implications for managers who are responsible for football marketing programs. Recognizing the associations relevant to football teams and their effect on the behavioral and emotional reactions of the fans towards the sports teams can provide the base for the identification of the fans with the sports teams. They are considering the importance of managing the relationship with sports fans (as the core customers in sport setting) in strengthening the brand equity of sports clubs that leads to revenue generation of sports teams. Also, the study of mechanisms enhancing the relationship between fans and sports teams can be one of the critical priorities in marketing studies. Without a doubt, proper management of CRM in sports will be impossible without paying attention to the sociological and psychological components governing the relationship between fans and sports teams. Therefore, studying psychological and sociological aspects as a critical prerequisite in sports marketing in Iran, which is at the beginning of professionalization, is unavoidable, and conducting quantitative and qualitative studies to explain the various psychological and sociological aspects of the relationships between fans and sports teams is recommended. Due to the importance of brand association in this research and their effect on fan-team identification and the brand equity of the football teams, sports managers should consider the identity associations of football teams such as color, team uniform, club logo, head coach, success, and star players, stadium, sponsor, website, and group experiences, history, owners, and geographic region related to the team. These features should be given special attention and taken for granted in formulating brand strategies. Sports managers can develop the team-fan connection and quality of the league in a football setting to achieve team success and fan satisfaction by focusing on brand association aspects (Tarighi et al., 2021). According to the prominent role of brand equity in creating economic potential, studying, and presenting multidimensional and comprehensive models of brand equity of sports clubs can be very helpful and strategic. Looking at the critical and influential factors in attracting fans and providing models to develop the brand equity of football clubs can be a practical step in the all-round growth of football teams in the sport setting. Defining a proper identity document based on the expectations and demands of football fans is critical for approximating the identity of football fans with the essence of football clubs. Sports managers and sports marketers can

maximize the marketing potential by establishing more identified fans. Providing an engaging experience for sports fans in events and matches is critical in creating more favorable brand associations in fans' minds, resulting in more identification with teams and increased brand equity.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Recognizing the elements persuading fans to be more engaged in football team brands make sports manager able to meet fans' needs and interests more effectively. This, in turn, helps to develop stronger relationships between teams and fans. The current study focuses on delivering a model involving brand association and fan-team identification to highlight the importance of team brand equity.

A part of the findings revealed that "brand association" had a positive and significant effect on the "brand equity" of the FC Persepolis football team in the professional football league of Iran. It has been accepted that brand associations directly affect the perceived value of brands (Burmam et al., 2009). E M Steenkamp et al. (2003) found that brand attributes lead to improved brand equity. Brand association is an internal factor that enhances brand equity (Burmam et al., 2009). The findings of Jabetri et al. (2014) also showed that the brand identity dimensions of football teams, which are rooted in brand association, have a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of football fans. Increasing the attractiveness of the brand identity of the football teams develops the unity and integration of fans with sports teams and organizations, and this phenomenon can lead to the creation of significant potential in the development of the fan base and money generation for sports teams and organizations (Jabetri et al., 2014). Consistent with this finding, Aaker (1991) argued that brand associations provide different functions, such as influencing customers' decisions, differentiating the brand, and creating positive customer emotions. Gladden et al. (1998) explained that brand association is critical in building brand equity.

Moreover, Jabetri et al. (2014) found that brand associations such as star players, coaches and managers, technical qualities, team history, social commitments and responsibility, social interactions, and fan-team close relationships have a significant effect on fan-team identification of football fans. Therefore, to create strong brands of sports teams in the field sports industry and to reach loyal fans, sports managers and marketers should investigate the perceptions of fans and determine the association-building factors of sports teams at the top of their marketing and branding strategies; at this way, they can efficiently use their fan potential, according to this fact that brand associations play a significant role in establishing brand identity (Gladden et al., 1998), getting a complete understanding of these associations and their effect on the behavioral and emotional reactions of the fans towards the sports teams. They can provide the basis for more brand equity in football teams.

The findings also demonstrated that "brand association" is significantly influential on "fan-team identification" of the FC Persepolis football team in the professional football league of Iran. The findings showed that team brand associations are potent tools in identifying fans with the FC Persepolis football team. The results of a study

conducted by Wann et al. (1996) indicated that brand association (parental interest in a team, talent of the team players, geography and the influence of friends, and the success of the team) were the origins of team identification. According to Moshabaki Esfahani et al. (2016), brand Association Assets of the Iranian Football League played a significant role in belonging fans to their favorite teams. The geographical location as a brand association was also a prominent reason for supporting a team (Jones, 1997). Another brand association, such as the sports team's success, was also found to be significant in team identification (End et al., 2002). Brand associations can help sports teams in branding (Ross, 2006), influence consumers' behavior and brand differentiation, and establish positive attitudes toward a brand (Aaker, 1991). The combination of football team features underpinned in the fans' minds provides a strong image of football teams. A proper image of football teams leads to close relationships between fans and their favorite football teams.

Another part of the research findings showed that "fan-team identification" had a positive and significant effect on the "brand equity" of the FC Persepolis football team in the professional football league of Iran. One of the key concepts in the field of strengthening team brands is the development of a fan-team identification level that ultimately makes fans eagerly involved in issues related to their favorite teams (Jaberi et al., 2014). The level of identification with sports teams has been defined as one of the important predictors in the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions of fans in past research (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In previous research, fan-team identification has been an essential predictor of fan attendance at university sports events (Wann et al., 2004), and ticket and merchandise sales (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002). In line with these findings, Gladden et al. (1998) and Ross (2006) have also demonstrated a significant relationship between fan-team identification and brand equity in their model. (Carlson et al., 2002) believed that customer-oriented brand equity is positively associated with the level of identification with the sports team. Therefore, this part of the findings is consistent with Gladden et al. (1998) and Ross (2006). The findings of Jaberi et al. (2014) have also shown that fan-team identification had a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of football fans (as one of the dimensions of brand equity). In the study of (Kim & Manoli, 2022), team identification was found to be a key determinant of behavioral intention and WOM intention. The effects of team identification on consumer purchase intention in sports marketing were also confirmed by (Lee, 2021). According to the findings of (Jaberi & Barkhordar, 2022), fan-team identification can provide critical consequences for sponsors in professional football leagues. A comprehensive understanding of the process of co-identification and development of the brand equity of sports teams provides the opportunity for marketers and sports managers to present their sports goods and services in a way that satisfies the needs and demands of target consumers. Generally, the relationship between brand equity and team identification has been emphasized by many studies (Carlson et al., 2002; Underwood et al., 2001). It has also been suggested that the more significant social identification (Underwood et al., 2001), or team identification (Carlson et al., 2002), the more substantial brand equity. In sports contexts, it would also appear that fans' primary reason for supporting sports teams depends upon their level of team identification. More identification of fans with football teams can be a critical factor

in brand equity. If sports managers and organizations pave the way for developing mutual communications of football teams with sports fans, this makes a crucial platform for improving team brand equity.

The investigation of the mediating role of fan-team identification in the relationship between the brand association and brand equity showed that the effect of fan-team identification is significant in the relationship between the brand association and brand equity. According to this finding, fan-team identification can facilitate and strengthen the impact of brand association on the brand equity of the FC Persepolis football team. In other words, increasing the level of identification of football teams with their fans can pave the way for more positive behavioral and cognitive consequences in a marketing context. Sports managers and marketers should take this for granted. Providing outstanding opportunities for approximating the identity of sports teams with the demands and expectations of sports fans can facilitate the identification of sports fans with their favorite teams. This ultimately results in brand equity and brand positioning of the teams.

The study of various psychological and sociological variables, such as brand development and strengthening the brand equity of sports teams, can provide a basis for developing the attractiveness of sports teams' brand identity. Sports managers should be aware that the development of brand equity in sports is not a one-dimensional issue, but paying attention to various marketing, social, and psychological aspects of brand equity creation is particularly important.

The research model casts Fan-Team Identification as the focal point at which one's psychological connection with a team is influenced by brand association. Strong Fan-Team Identification, in turn, is felt to result in a higher level of team brand equity. The findings showed that team brand associations are powerful in identifying fans with the FC Persepolis football team. Improving brand equity will also be achieved via reinforcement of fan-team identification. The current research results afford general support to the notion that brand association and Fan-Team Identification are critical concepts shaping brand equity among football fans. Indeed, Fan-Team Identification as a psychological commitment to football teams plays a crucial role in consumer decision-making of team-related services. Bringing the association of sports brands closer to the identity and demands of sports fans will provide the basis for more communication and identification of fans with sports teams. It will ultimately lead to strengthening the fan base and developing the brand equity of sports teams.

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تأثیر تداعی برند بر ارزش ویژه برند تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس تهران با نقش میانجی همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم

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کلیدواژه

برندسازی
برندهای ورزشی
تیم‌های فوتبال
هواداران ورزش

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف از مطالعه حاضر، بررسی تأثیر تداعی برند بر ارزش ویژه برند تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس تهران با نقش میانجی همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم بود.

روش: پژوهش حاضر یک مطالعه کمی، مقطعی و همبستگی بوده که به صورت میدانی انجام گرفته است. جامعه آماری پژوهش شامل هواداران تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس در لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران بوده است. بر اساس جدول کرجسی و مورگان، ۳۹۱ نفر از هواداران تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس تهران با استفاده از روش نمونه‌گیری تصادفی در ورزشگاه آزادی تهران در داری نود و هشتم به عنوان نمونه آماری انتخاب شدند. از پرسشنامه تداعی برند **واشورن و پلاتک (۱۹۹۵)**، پرسشنامه ارزش ویژه برند **یو و دانته (۲۰۰۱)** و پرسشنامه همذات‌پنداری **میل و اشفورث (۱۹۹۲)** جهت گردآوری داده‌های مرتبط با تحقیق استفاده شد. جهت بررسی روایی از روایی سازه و محتوا استفاده گردید و پایایی ابزار نیز با استفاده از الفای کرونباخ و پایایی ترکیبی مورد تأیید قرار گرفت. پس از توزیع پرسشنامه‌ها، تعداد ۳۹۱ پرسشنامه بصورت کامل و صحیح گردآوری گردید و جهت آزمون فرضیات تحقیق، آزمون مدلیابی معادلات ساختاری با استفاده از PLS به کار گرفته شد.

یافته‌ها: نتایج نشان داد که تداعی برند هم بر ارزش ویژه برند ($\beta=0/39$) و هم بر همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم ($\beta=0/36$) تأثیر معناداری داشته است ($\beta=0/41$). براساس نتایج، تأثیر همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم نیز بر ارزش ویژه برند تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس تهران مثبت و معنادار گزارش گردید. بر اساس آزمون سوئل نیز تداعی برند از طریق همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم دارای تأثیر غیرمستقیم، مثبت و معناداری بر ارزش ویژه برند تیم فوتبال پرسپولیس تهران بوده است. مقدار شاخص GOF نیز حاکی از برازش مطلوب مدل پژوهش بوده است.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این مطالعه از معدود تحقیقاتی محسوب می‌شود که با ترکیب مفاهیم روانشناختی و بازاریابی به بررسی رابطه بین تداعی برند، همذات‌پنداری هوادار-تیم و ارزش ویژه برند به‌طور همزمان در قالب یک مدل جامع در حوزه ورزش ایران پرداخته است.

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