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ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

The Relationship Between Brand Perception Dimension with Branding's Top Clubs of Basketball and Handball Iran to Considering the Role of Mediator Fans Commitment

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Abstract

This research was conducted with the aim of relationship between brand perception dimension with branding's top clubs of basketball and handball Iran to considering the role of mediator fans commitment. This is an applied research study and the nature of the research is descriptive-correlation which data was collected through fieldwork. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by the professors and experts and the reliability of the questionnaire was obtained by using Cronbach's alpha (0.81), CR coefficient (0.81) and AVE (0.54). Sample size was determined based on the logical volume of the sample needed in the structural equation modeling method and at least 305 people. Finally, 400 questionnaires were distributed randomly among teams fans of Petroshimi Bandar Imam (basketball) and Bitá sabzevar& sephan esfahan(handball) and 310 questionnaires were evaluated and analyzed. Kolmogorov Smirnov tests and structural equation analysis were used to analyze the data. The results of data analysis of this research indicated positive effects of integrated marketing communications (IMC) on brand identity and brand personality, brand identity and brand personality on fan commitment, and fan commitment on branding Iranian basketball&handball teams.

Key words: Integrated marketing communication, brand identity, brand personality, fan commitment, branding, top clubs, Basketball, Handball

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La relación entre la dimensión de la percepción de la marca y los mejores clubes de baloncesto y balonmano de Irán para considerar el papel del compromiso de los fanáticos de mediadores

Resumen

Esta investigación se realizó con el objetivo de relacionar la dimensión de la percepción de la marca con los principales clubes de baloncesto y balonmano de branding con la consideración del rol del compromiso de los fanáticos del mediador. Este es un estudio de investigación aplicada y la naturaleza de la investigación es la correlación descriptiva, que datos se recopilaron a través del trabajo de campo. Se utilizó un cuestionario elaborado por un investigador para recopilar datos. La validez del cuestionario fue determinada por los profesores y expertos y la fiabilidad del cuestionario se obtuvo mediante el uso de alfa de Cronbach (0,81), coeficiente de RC (0,81) y AVE (0,54). El tamaño de la muestra se determinó con base en el volumen lógico de la muestra necesaria en el método de modelado de ecuaciones estructurales y al menos 305 personas. Finalmente, se distribuyeron 400 cuestionarios aleatoriamente entre los fanáticos de Petroshimi Bandar Imam (baloncesto) y Bitá sabzevar y sepahan esfahan (balonmano) y se evaluaron y analizaron 310 cuestionarios. Las pruebas de Kolmogorov Smirnov y el análisis de ecuaciones estructurales se usaron para analizar los datos. Los resultados del análisis de datos de esta investigación indicaron los efectos positivos de las comunicaciones de marketing integradas (IMC) en la identidad de marca y la personalidad de la marca, identidad de marca y personalidad de la marca en el compromiso de los fanáticos y el compromiso de los fanáticos de calificar los equipos iraníes de baloncesto y balonmano.

Palabras clave: comunicación de marketing integrada, identidad de marca, personalidad de la marca, compromiso de los fanáticos, branding, mejores clubes, baloncesto, balonmano

Introduction

In recent years, world of business has undergone significant changes, one of which is the change of approach from tangible asset to intangible asset. Intangible assets are of crucial importance to companies. Paying attention to intangible assets helps achieve a better assessment of organizational performance in short-term and long-term periods. A company's brand is one its intangible assets that should generate significant value for the company (Kapferer, 2008). Nowadays, brand is similar to capital in that it creates value for company and its product and it is considered a competitive advantage around the world; therefore, in most cases, brand turns into an organizational strategy. It is clear that a brand is not just a name, but it also includes a symbol or graphic logo which is unique. Therefore, we can define the concept of brand or identity as a name which directly helps selling products and services. Buckingham defines branding as the process of creating a logical-emotional relationship among all the people who are interacting with a brand that due to influence of factors such as behavior, tendencies, perceptions and beliefs of people who are involved in the brand, it requires a comprehensive view of branding (Buckingham, 2008). Similarly, in sport industry, sport organizations consider themselves as brands, especially in international market, and due to ethnic, regional and identity development, professional sport teams in a country are not willing to consider themselves as real brands in domestic market. It is evident that intangible assets play an important role in enhancing efficiency of organizational operations and value of financial performance of businesses in various industries and successful brands not only dominate markets around the world and strengthen customers' sense of trust and loyalty, create value for shareholders, but they also encourage a sense of purposefulness and commitment in society and through their news ideas and innovations in international market enhance the image of the country and people throughout the world (khodadadi, 2013).

In other words, market is not a place for products to compete one another but rather a place where brands challenge each other. Today, a company's brand identity is similar to capital in that it creates value for the company and its product and therefore in most cases has turned into organizational strategy (Kapferer, 2008). One of the components of branding sports teams is integrated marketing communications (IMC); IMC a combination of elements such as impersonal advertising, sales promotion factors, public relations, and personal selling is a good method for reaching advertising and marketing goals of an organization (Kotler, 2003). According to Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA), IMC is a concept of marketing communications planning which works as a comprehensive framework for evaluating strategic roles of various communications tools such as advertising, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion and combines these tools to maximize effects of marketing communications (Keller, 2001). Social media is an essential factor for marketing communications and increase consumer engagement with their brand (Gretry et al., 2017) Of course Communication tools are most effective when they are coordinate and consistent with other components of branding such as identity, personality and Image and brand equity. Identity and subsequently brand identity of a team is the key to creating strong relationship between fans and team and can be deployed through social identity theory in which a fan identifies themselves with the team because one or several of their self-identification needs are met by the team (Wann, 2006) Popp (2017) also states that fans who have a strong sense of identity with their team tend to maintain their loyalty to their team more(Popp, 2017). Based on this phenomenon and through cognitive categorization a fan introduces himself as a member of a team emphasizing common characteristics with team members and differences with non-members (Hildebrand, 2010). Therefore, the important thing is that since fans perceive some similarities between themselves and team members they dedicated time and money for supporting the team with which they have no formal relationship. Such relationships leads to annual growth of sports and this is why sports industry is responsible for a significant percentage of growth income of every country and this cannot be achieved unless a firm foundation of brand identity is designed (Gladden et al, 2002). Sports teams that have strong brands and positive brand personality can reap numerous benefits. A desirable brand personality brings many advantages: enhancing customer preferences, increasing levels of trust and loyalty and creating a base to distinguish company's products form others(Moshabaki Esfahani, 2013). Anna German (2016) concluded that brand personality is a modern strategy to improve images of sports organizations(German, 2016) On the one hand, brand image is customer perception and describes brand identity. In order for a brand to be strong, it must remain loyal to its identity. Fans who have strongly identify themselves with their favorite team are very inclined to maintain their loyalty to their team and customer satisfaction has a direct influence on customer loyalty (Pop, 2017). When there is congruence between brand identity and brand personality along with brand image and customer, a stable buying behavior can be expected. This congruence has a significant impact on brand equity and customers' sense of belonging to company's brand (Usakli, 2011). Brand equity refers to the added value that is given to a brand because of the name of that brand and each brand maintains a certain amount of value which is defined as its asset (Keller, 2008). Fans may support a team for a number of reasons including the number of wins, superstar athletes, and famous coach or having an attractive stadium. However, it is not clear why fans continue to support their favorite teams even when these factors are nonexistent(khodadi et al, 2013). Biscaia (2015) also showed that the brand equity has a positive and significant effect on fan loyalty and loyalty to sport teams is similar to that of customer loyalty to non-sport brands. If sports managers fail to determine the level of fan loyalty, they will not be able to perform their job properly. Indeed, customer loyalty facilitates sports

managers' job since this loyalty increase the level of attracting fans to a certain team without managers' help and providing better services. In sports, a fan is a person who is dedicated to a type of sport, team or athlete and follows the news and events related to them and based on Pareto Principle (80/20) this relationship can be seen among soccer fans; 80 per cent of revenue is generated from 20 per cent of fans. This is how long-term and sustainable revenue for sports organization is guaranteed (Ehsani, 2012). Studies also indicated one of key factors for sport teams and organization is to attract and maintain customers and fans and that sport leagues and teams do not have much relationship with customers and fans' perceptions (Kunkel, 2014). However, there are some mutual benefits in attracting customers and fans for leagues and sport teams and as interaction between fans and sport teams increases, it brings numerous benefits for both leagues and sports teams (Kunkel, 2014).

Fans' commitment to a certain sports team brings desirable advantages for that sports organization or team. Loyal fans are a source of revenue and they are often considered a suitable tool for advertisement. Therefore, sports organizations today try to identify, manage and use effective tools and models to create fan loyalty. Another point is that sports fans mostly spend money symbolic aspects of sports and brand is one of these aspects in sports industry. It can be concluded from the above discussion that brand is the main process of revenue generation and foundations for current economy. Consequently, powerful brands experience the least amount of revenue loss during economic recession since they gained consumers' trust. Therefore, fans' loyalty to sports brands is the key to success in sports marketing plans (Soltan hoseini et al, 2011). It is clear that if sport teams have successful branding strategy, they will attract more fans and consequently enjoy variety financial resources (attracting financial sponsors, player sales, ticket and sport products etc.) (Moshabaki Esfahani, 2013). These factors generate considerable revenue for sports teams. It is clear that team brand plays an important role in increasing this revenue and prominent sports organizations generate millions of dollars through brand management. Although these powerful brands may be different in brand management, they all emphasize on brand as the base for economic marketing (Coleman, 2011). Unfamiliarity of people with brands of sports teams and professional leagues in Iran is the main obstacle to investment and financial support of sports industry in our country in both national and international scale (Khodadadi, 2013) and this indicates the undesirable situation of sports especially in sports teams in Iran. This is why most sports teams in Iran do not have sustainable revenue and are on the brink of bankruptcy. Finally it should be noted that Iranian sports teams have several problems regarding brand familiarity and branding both domestically and abroad which due to improper brand management and planning gained almost no advantage or benefit from their brands. It is obvious that if this trend continues, sports management and ownership will not help improve sports industry in our country. Poor management, lack of up-to-date knowledge of management and unfamiliarity with international economic regulations has led to insufficient financial resources for Iranian sports teams and made them heavily dependent on the government. Their financial condition of sports teams is in so dire straits that even with direct and indirect government financial aids and other sources of revenue, none of the sports organizations in all sports fields have positive financial statements and if they do, they have had it made. This is contrast to sports teams around the world where sports teams not only cover their own expense, they also pays taxes to governments. These facts show the crucial role of brands in sports industry. Therefore, managers, stakeholders and owners of professional sports teams should focus on creating a strong logo, strong relationship with customers and meeting their needs and wants related to their team. In addition to aforementioned issues, a large proportion of investment in sports industry in our country, economic importance of sports industry and its role in macroeconomics of the country, various problems in this industry (for example, having consumer sports team instead of revenue generating ones) and above all lack of appro

appropriate approach to marketing and entering the global market and considering insufficient amount of research, lack of comprehensive knowledge in this area and the need for developing an integrated and inclusive branding concept to tackle the problems associated with globalization clearly shows the need for conducting research in this area.

Research method

As the researcher of this study attempts to investigate the effects of various factors on branding of basketball and handball top teams in Iran, This research in terms of purpose is applied and in terms of how to collect of information is descriptive-correlative that was done fieldwork. Data collection was done through fieldwork and questionnaires. To do this, the researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire, which was tested for its validity and reliability, and attended in stadiums of selected teams in order to collect data and questionnaires.

population of the study included all the fans of teams in Iranian basketball&handball Premier League during year 2016-17. Three teams (Petroshimi bandar emam in basketball, and bita sabzevar& sepehgan esfahan in handball) were selected based on the history and history of the club (at least 20 years), Number of championships (at least 2 league titles in the country), attendance in Asian championship competition (annual performance) and number of fans; based on the standards of Brand Finance they were selected as the statistical population. Since there was no precise and reliable information on the number of fans for these teams, sample population was determine based on the reasonable size of population used in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In general in SEM methodology sample population can be determined from 5 to 15 observations for each item ($5q - n - 15q$) where q represents the number of observed variables or number of items (questions) of research questionnaire and n represents the size of sample. Therefore, based on the number of items (61 items) in the research questionnaire used in this research, sample should include at least 305 people. Considering that some questionnaires may be incomplete or not returned, the researcher provided 400 questionnaires and randomly distributed them among fans who attended their favorite teams' games, Of that number, 310 questionnaires were collected and analyzed. It should be noted that the questionnaires were distributed among fans attending stadiums during first half-season of 2016-2017 in the following games: foolad mobarake- Niroue Zamini(Isfahan, 17/11/2016); Bita Sabzevar- Novin ghatre mehr parse marvdasht(Sabzevar, 18/11/2016); Petroshimi bandar emam- Shahr-dari kashan(Bandar emam, 31/10/2016). Questionnaires were used to collect data. The questionnaire was a researcher-made questionnaire based on the existing questionnaires and theoretical foundations and is reliable and valid for this research. This questionnaire consists of 7 sections: section 1 consists of 5 questions about integrated marketing strategy, section 2 consists of 6 questions about brand identity, section 3 is composed of 9 questions on brand personality, section 4 has 9 questions about brand image, Section 5 has 20 questions about brand equity, questions about section 6 has 8 questions about fan commitment and the final section consists of 4 questions about branding. The questions were made using Likert Scale (with 1 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree). Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by 15 professors and experts in field of sports management and marketing and branding. AVE (Average Variance Extracted) coefficient was also used to measure convergent validity, Cronbach's alpha to measure equivalence reliability and Composite reliability (CR) was used to measure construct reliability which is shown in table 1. Additionally, the questionnaire consisted of 9 questions about demographic characteristics. In order to analyze the data collected in this research, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. To analyze the data in descriptive statistics, various indices such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were employed. In inferential statistics, structural equation modeling (SEM) (including confirmatory factor analysis) was used. Statistical analyses were done with SPSS 20 and AMOS 23.

Table 1 – Level of validity and reliability of the questionnaire used in the research

Index	No. of questions	Cronbach's alpha	CR reliability	AVE validity
Integrated Marketing Communications	5	0/87	0/8	0/58
Brand identity	6	0/84	0/75	0/5
Brand personality	9	0/86	0/86	0/54
Brand image	9	0/87	0/83	0/56
Brand equity	20	0/76	0/79	0/59
Fan commitment	8	0/83	0/84	0/5
Branding	4	0/72	0/74	0/56

Findings

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used for this research in order to have normal distribution of data and based on the values related to level of significance for all the variables of the research, values for level of significance were lower than 0.05. This means that observed distribution of variables was different from expected distribution. In other words, distribution of variables of the research was not normal. Therefore, considering that the research used SEM and knowing that normal distribution of dependent variable is one of major assumptions in these statistical methods, in order to be able to use these statistical methods to test the hypotheses of the research, to perform the tests, we used the natural logarithm of the data.

Table 2. statistics Kolmogorov-Smirnov

Research variables	Test Statistic	P	Distribution
IMC	0/114	0/001	Abnormal
Brand Identity	0/129	0/001	Abnormal
Brand personality	0/12	0/001	Abnormal
Brand image	0/126	0/001	Abnormal
Brand equity	0/091	0/001	Abnormal
Fans commitment	0/132	0/001	Abnormal
branding	0/158	0/001	Abnormal

Due to the significant level about all Research variables in Table 2 shown That these variables is a significance level of less than 05/0. This means that the distribution of these variables is different with distribution researcher's expectations, The distribution of Research variables is not a normal distribution, Considering that in this study used structural equation modeling and with an awareness of that the normal distribution of the dependent variable is the main presuppositions of the statistical methods, For the researchers were able to use these methods to test hypotheses, for a tests run of the data natural logarithm was used.

Table 3. Standardized regression weights and t-value of the research model

			Factor loadings	t	level of significance
IMC	⇒	Brand Identity	0/43	13/552	0/001
IMC	⇒	Brand personality	0/318	9/542	0/001
Brand Identity	⇒	Brand image	0/114	3/295	0/001
Brand personality	⇒	Brand image	0/118	5/456	0/001
Brand image	⇒	Brand equity	0/292	8/679	0/001
Brand equity	⇒	Fans commitment	0/176	5/164	0/001
Fans commitment	⇒	Branding	0/13	3/73	0/001

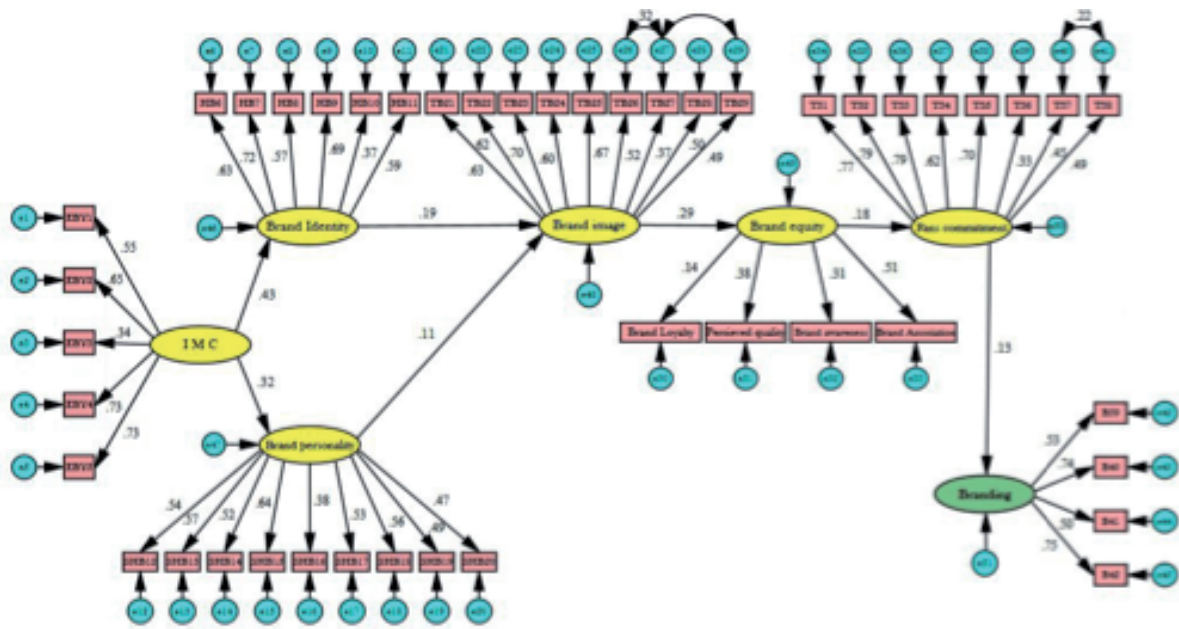


Figure1. Regression coefficients of the research model

Based on the findings of SEM and results reported in figure 1 and table 3, it can be seen that all factor loadings (standardized regression coefficients) are within acceptable range and these indices show that measured observational variables perfectly reflect latent variables (i.e. integrated marketing communications, brand identity, brand personality, Brand image, Brand equity, fan commitment and branding). Based on the findings of the research (table 3) it can be said that integrated marketing communications have a positive and significant effect on brand identity (factor loading = 0.43, T=13.552) and brand personality (factor loading = 0.318, T= 9.542). Findings also indicate that brand identity (factor loading=0.114, T= 3.295), brand personality (factor loading=0.118, T=5.456) have a positive effect on Brand image and Brand image a positive and significant effect on Brand equity(factor loading= 0.292, T=8.697). The results also showed that Brand equity has a positive and significant effect on Fans commitment (factor loading=0.176, T=5.164), Finally, Fans commitment has a positive and significant effect on branding(factor loading= 0.13, T=3. 73).

Table 4. Fit indices for model research

Fit indices	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	RMR	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI
acceptable value	-	-	1-3	more than 0/9	more than 0/9	less than 0/05	less than 0/08	more than 0/9	more than 0/9	more than 0/9
observed value	2293/515	809	2/853	0/916	0/909	0/039	0/061	0/93	0/913	0/93

As can be seen in table 2, fit indices of model indicate a very suitable fit of model since all the fit indices in this model are within the acceptable values. Based on the results of analysis, it can be seen that goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) as the main indices of fit of the model, are more than 0.9 which confirms the model. Ratio of chi square to degree of freedom (2.853) is less than 3 which is within acceptable range to confirm the mode. In addition, the closer root mean square residual (RMR) is to zero, the better fit for model of research can be achieved. Here, RMR is 0.039 which is statistically acceptable. Finally, it was observed that other fit indices (IFI, NFI, and CFI) are all at a good and high level of 0.9. Based on these explanations, it can be said that the observed data, to a great extent, confirmed that model is reasonable. Therefore, fit of the model and the model of research are confirmed.

Discussion and conclusion

This study aims to find the relationship between perceptive aspects of brand and international branding of Iranian basketball and handball top teams which is done through mediator variable of fan commitment. Findings of this study, which is done using structural equation modeling and AMOS, shows that structural model of the current research has a good fit. This means that this model is quantitatively and statistically acceptable. The findings also showed that the following factors have some effects on one another respectively: integrated marketing communications on brand identity and brand personality, brand identity and personality on brand image, brand image on brand equity, brand equity on fan commitment and finally fan commitment on branding major league sports teams. In other words, the perceptive aspects of brand create a clearer and more stable image of brand in fans' minds that finally results in having more committed fans and better branding of sports teams and generation revenue.

Findings of current research showed links between integrated marketing communications (IMC) and brand personality. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Saketi (2013), OCas (2010), Amirshahi et al (2014). IMC and especially of advertising used extensively in the process of personality creating for brand. This indicates that activities such as press conferences and communicating with mass media, magazines, catalogs and advertising among fans and society strata it has a great role in showing the brand identity of the clubs among the fans.

In this regard, sport organization can use efficient managers and staff, sponsorships and financial aids to ceremonies and local events, extensive coverage of desirable information that is consist with plans, providing short ,interesting and effective advertisements titles for the club to increase the effectiveness of this variable. Therefore, a proper and effective use of components of IMC such as advertisements, public relations, sales promotion and direct marketing to promote the brand strength of the club in the minds of fans and the general public and also proper use of these components can help to promote brand personality for football clubs and have a positive impact on the attitude of fans and target audiences towards it.

Research findings also showed that there is relationship between IMC and brand identity. In order to create a brand two key elements are required: product performance and integrated marketing communication. IMC plays a pivotal role in conveying the brand message to people. The significance of IMC is that of all marketing tools are integrated together using to deliver an integrated message to current and potential audience. The goal is to combine these tools- advertisement, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion and etc- to achieve higher level of effectiveness in brand introduction and components of brand identity. In other words, football teams can use the components of integrated marketing; Clubs can highlight the identity elements of the clubs, such as the style of play, team players, head coach, history of the team, and other elements of the team's identity. Therefore, IMC plays a considerable role in consolidating brand identity in the minds of audience. Sports teams that employ IMC are successful in attracting fans and audience. If people become properly familiar with features and benefits of a brand, they will never go to other brands.

The findings showed that brand identity affects brand image of sports teams. In other words, brand image is significantly affected by brand identity and a suitable brand identity is positively affected by brand image of sports teams of the Iran. A brand that has a strong identity can meet more of fans' symbolic needs than their functional ones. The results also show that a brand with a stronger identity can enhance brand image better and characteristics such a reputation of a brand and its international popularity (which are a part of its identity) have a positive relationship with brand image and improve brand image. SoltanHosseini et al (2014) also emphasized the advantages of team identity of Iranian soccer teams; Ebrahimipour et al (2016) stated that brand identity affects fan loyalty and increases validity of brand. The results of related studies done in countries that have developed their sports and reveal the fact that large sport teams in these countries keep their history and customs alive by reminding audience of their proud track records and use these customs as a tool to strengthen their fan base. Sports stars and managers of sports teams in many well-known sports organizations around the world have turned into symbols and heroes of their sports teams. Based on these findings and facts, it seems that emphasizing on symbols, customs, stories and history of sports teams and revive its values and customs and involving fans in the process of appointing managers and owners of sports teams (such as Barcelona) can help create positive sensitivity toward the identity of teams among fans and consequently increase loyalty and optimize branding process.

Results of the study showed that there is a relationship between brand personality and brand image of major sports teams which is consistent with the findings of Anna German (2016) and Amari (2012). In terms of general influence, brand identity is a key construct in creating a brand image. One of management applications of this finding is that managers who want to develop brand image should focus on brand personality. In order to assure that a brand personality is acceptable by fans, sports teams should question and challenge their rivals constantly to show their willingness to dominate the market and distinguish themselves from the rest in their fans' minds. Brand personality is created through variety of ways including integrated marketing strategies and social responsibility. Therefore, necessity to develop and obtain communication tools and effective and efficient public relations in order to create and consolidate a suitable brand personality for sport teams is of paramount importance. Sport teams should create a individual, sustainable and strong personality for their brand. Developing an individual personality for a brand may lead to customer loyalty to that brand. Thus when a company designs its marketing activities, it should particularly make its brand distinct. Fans should also perceive willingness of the favorite sport team to attract the feelings and being disciplined in every aspect of its operations so that brand personality of the team becomes acceptable and finally brand image of the team strengthens, which is an intangible asset and a determining factor of the value of the sport organization.

Findings of this study indicated a relationship between brand image and brand equity. Rahimnia (2012) and Amari (2012) also reported findings which showed a relationship between brand equity and brand image. Hu (2015) also emphasized that Chinese companies should enhance their brand image in order to gain competitive advantages. It can be said that a suitable brand image can increase fan loyalty and consequently fan loyalty provides significant resources for sports teams that reduces the expense related to attracting new customers and fans. A desirable brand image can also increase brand awareness and higher levels of brand awareness can increase the chance of brand being selected by consumers and affect consumers' purchase decisions. A desirable brand image can also increase customers' familiarity with brand and enhance the chance of remembering and distinguish a certain brand from others. A suitable brand image creates positive associations and better perceived brand which ultimately cause fans of a sport team to reach a better conclusion about the advantages, domination, validity and success of their favorite team while comparing it with its rivals. In other words, when a brand has a distinctive advantage over other brands, it is association with certain perceptions in customers' minds. This creates a certain type of value in fans' minds so that they consider the advantages of being a fan outweigh its related expenses and this is consistent with the findings of ebrahimi et al (2013). Therefore, the better and more appropriately a brand image is perceived by fans, the higher brand equity it will have. Strong brand equity has a direct impact on fan commitment. According to Nasr Esfahani (2014), there is a direct relationship between brand equity and fan loyalty. Ross (2006) also confirms that brand equity results in loyalty to a team, media exposure, product sales, ticket sales and revenue generation and when consumers have positive associations about a certain sports brand, this can result in higher consumption, advertisement, brand growth, receiving license and financial support. Branding a sports team and successful brand management requires public awareness in order to gain brand equity because positive brand equity can lead to higher revenue, lower expenses, customers' tendency to seek new ways for distribution, better efficiency of marketing communications and success in brand development. Additionally, since brand awareness plays an important role in consumers' decision-making, a product with higher brand awareness will have a higher portion of market and better quality assessment from consumers. This means that a higher level of awareness for a brand can increase brand loyalty, brand confidence, brand preference, and consumer purchase decision. In general, it can be said that for better branding Iranian sports teams, especial attention should be paid to brand equity (brand image, Rahimnia). One way to create brand equity is to guard brands and assure that their brand equity does not lose its value. To achieve this, brand awareness, perception and positive associations related to brand should be maintained and strengthened which requires conducting research and providing especial service to fans. For instance, Iranian soccer teams can try to achieve regional and national media coverage. Sport managers can devise a comprehensive promotional plan for advertisement, personal sale, enhancing sales in order to enhance organizational awareness. Sports managers and marketers in our country should also create innovative promotional and marketing plans to strengthen positive associations and better communication with fans. They should pay close attention to fan bases and use innovative social communication tools such as meetings between fans and coaches and star athletes to improve communication between fans and sports teams. Sports managers and marketers should provide suitable services during sporting events and matches such as better products, modern stadiums and sport venues etc. to increase brand equity of their sport organization and investing in these variables can ultimately create a positive change in brand image, fan loyalty, branding and a successful brand.

Results of this research also showed that there is a direct link between fan commitment and global branding of basketball&handball teams in Iran and this is consistent with findings of studies done by Veloutsou (2015), Leong et al (2012), and Akbari et al (2013). Kunkel et al (2014) also concluded that customer's satisfaction from and loyalty to brand considerable helps brand develop. He et al (2017) also say Loyal customers have a large impact on brand recognition. This relationship is mutual which means that fan commitment can help brand to be recognized and brand helps attract more fans. Fan loyalty to a sport team or team brings several desirable advantages for team or team. Loyal fan is the source of revenue and is usually considered a valuable tool for advertisement. Therefore our soccer teams should make an attempt to use identify, manage and use effective tools and models to create loyalty. On the one hand, fans mostly spend money of the symbolic aspect of their favorite sport and brand is one of the symbolic aspects of sport industry. Brand is the primary process of revenue generation and is the basis for current economy. This is why powerful brands experience the least amount of loss and problems during economic recessions due to their ability to gain customers' trust. In this regard, fan loyalty to brands of sports teams is the essential factor for success in marketing plans of sports industry. It can be concluded that soccer teams should concentrated their efforts of fans that have the high levels of loyalty and allocate some resources to create and maintain branding which aims to increase fan commitment. Team brands also increase fans' commitment to the team and to some extent strengthen fan loyalty. Thus, establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with fans in order to increase their level of commitment is essential. It is, therefore, recommended that management official of sport teams collect precise information about their fans in order to maintain them and gain their commitment. It this way, each sport organization can inform their fans about their teams' event in various occasions. Sport teams can encourage their fans to attend games more often and increase their commitment to the team and buy tickets by building modern stadiums, providing discounts on special days, providing special services for dedicated fans, providing official fans cards and special services for holders of such cards and founding unions and holding special festivals.

Overall suggestion: Now, as mentioned in the introduction, iran sports clubs in terms of competitive advantages acquired properties, especially having a clear and distinctive brand at the international level has been weak and the results show that managers of sport clubs in Iran must more than ever and on practical basis try in order to improve domestic and foreign fans commitment and commitment of club staff. necessitate revising the planned sports clubs Iran and most importantly, the shift to a central commitment fans and even club staff and managers not only necessary but critical factor seems. also according to the the research literature should be the ultimate goal of policy makers in sector industry, in management consulting branding, create a favorable mentality in domestic and foreign fans clubs to achieve the distinction in international competition the ultimate goals of 1) prevailing in the domestic market 2) increased internal and external customer loyalty 3) increase the ability to penetrate the global challenges and gain competitive advantage.

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