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Study of status and comparison website content of football premier league clubs in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The internet has become a significant marketing tool for many of sport companies such as sports teams. This study to aimed the online marketing professional football teams of the website has been developed. The method of this research is descriptive and content analysis. The statistical sample is consisted of premier league football teams in Iran the year 2014. 36 indicators on the website this teams were assessed. That 32 indicators of Ioakimidis, Marilou article(2010) was adapted and 4 index (ticket sales, tours of the stadium, club tours and sponsors) after reviewing football teams in Europe added to it. According to the teams website content analysis, teams reviewed except from Persepolis, offered less than half of the services identified in this study and from among the clubs, Perspolis provided most services on its website, after this team, respectively were football teams of gostareh foolad tabriz and malavan bandar anzali. Teams mentioned for online sports marketing, attracting and interact more the fans with their clubs, used of less service on its website.

Keywords: website, professional teams, football, Premier League

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays information and communication technologies have opened new vistas for people in communication. They removed the restrictions of traditional media such as radio and television and transcended the geographical boundaries which resulted in faster and more efficient way of transferring information. These technologies, and the Internet, in particular, play a major role in our everyday life (1).

With ever increasing role of the Internet in the world, the number of Internet users has grown exponentially in the last few years (2). According to a report by Royal Pingdom in January 2010, there are 234 million websites on the Web and 1.8 billion Internet users around the world (3). This trend had a similar movement, as reported by Iranian Cyber police, with over 45 million users in November 2013 that 23 million of them were adolescents (4). The significant growth in the number of Internet users had led businesspeople and corporations to consider the Internet as an important marketing opportunity (5) and a wide range of business companies use it to promote their products and services and communicate with consumers (6).

Sport marketers in different levels of sport industry followed suit and took the advantage of this technology in their marketing strategies world over (7) and with global interest in sport increasing, online based services enables sport marketers to provide better services. Therefore some sport organizations and teams, which send their messages to the public through their websites, use the Internet as a marketing tool and a part of their marketing strategy. Websites are a less costly means of communication for sport organizations around the world to interact with fans (8). So it comes as no surprise that the Internet has become a significant marketing tool for many sport teams (9).

They can interact with fans, the public and potential consumers of sport products and services via their websites. Sport properties can also create fan bases and interact with sponsors in order to grow and attract sponsorship. Professional teams websites can be accessed by individual users almost everywhere (11). Initially, online sport marketing was not popular with sport organizations and websites were merely used for news and general information about teams (12). However, the exponential growth Internet popularity created an opportunity for marketers in every type of business including sport businesses (11) and soon professional sport teams realized that not only the number of fans but also the interest for the sport they were involved in raised dramatically over the world. (13) For example, in the United States alone the sport organizations annual income reached \$ 416 billion. (14) With global interest in sport increasing, online based services enables sport marketers to provide better services (15). Considering the amount of potential income which online marketing can have, it is essential for sport organizations to understand and identify the opportunities, limitations and consumer needs on the Web and take necessary steps to reduce the limitations and enhance online services. (16) Using more appealing websites sport teams transferring their extensive experience to the online world sport teams can increase consumer loyalty as well as brand value of the sport property. (17) This online world can consist of virtual and physical areas including online forums and weblog for fans so that they can share their ideas with each other about the team and matches and talk with each other in chat rooms. (10) Providing such tools for fans to exchange their viewpoints with each other and the team via team's website helps sport marketers identify fans' wants and needs and devise a suitable marketing plan (18).

Hoffman et al (1995) were the first researchers to suggest a framework for examining the development of Internet-based commercial activities. They considered the Internet as a path for distributing products and a medium for marketing communication. They divided the bases into the following categories: in terms of direction (such as online shops and other bases) and in terms of traffic control bases (such as search engines and prize pools). Hoffman et al stated that this new medium has altered the traditional role of customers in marketing interaction and communication since they have access to an enormous amount of interactive data to make their decision and to support it (19). Colimer et al (2005) , in their research about analyzing online consumer purchase behavior, found out that there is a positive correlation between customer's experience and level of use of the Internet and possibility of making online purchases. Understanding the risk of making an online purchase has a negative influence on likelihood of actual online purchase. In general, result of research carried out in three countries showed that frequent Internet use and understanding the risk of online shopping are the major factors in online purchase behavior (20). Another research by Zampano et al (2003) on the effects of the Internet as a link in marketing filed indicated that use of Internet, indeed, reduces costs of searching and locating the product and allows consumers to find their desired product easily and more efficiently and receive them faster. Internet creates a competitive atmosphere among consumers and producers which can bring mutual benefits (21). O'Reilly (2009) states that marketers considers new websites 2.0 since they are less concentrated in terms of their activities or they are user-oriented and finally most of them end up having media related activities (22). Some researchers also pointed out that communication with costumers leads to strong market relationship and the profit sport teams desire to achieve. Designing attractive websites for their teams can help sport organizations meet the needs of desires of their fans and cause users to visit the website more frequently (23, 24,25).

Sports such as soccer have global fans that spread around the world so a soccer team may have fans in others countries or even other continents. Internet as a type of media can act as a good source of information about games which overseas fans cannot attend. Not only soccer teams can broadcast games and inform fans about the time of the games they can also use the virtual world to create a brand identity through their websites. Such websites continues to enhance and increase their direct profitability and their marketing potential by collecting data about costumers (26).

Therefore improving sport team's website and providing appealing options for Internet users helps to create a strong relationship between the user and the team and certainly increase the frequency of visit to the website. Increasing rate of Internet use and public interest in sports and absence or lack of a convenient and efficient source of information in Iran underlines the need for designing Internet-based information and management system which can reduce the cost and time, enhance the accuracy and reliability of the information and means of obtain information. Absence or lack of such comprehensive systems in the past and present has greatly complicated planning process for managers. It is an unique and invaluable opportunity for managers to have twenty-four-hour access to reliable and technical information via the Internet. Such level of accessibility to information is useful to public and especially to fans for choosing their desired venue, time of the game, quality of the venue and product and provides a suitable tool to monitor and analyze sport teams. Therefore this research aims to answer the following questions: Do websites of soccer teams in major league provide valuable services for fans? And Are these websites attractive enough to increase online interaction between users and soccer teams which may lead to increased brand loyalty and brand value?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Method of this research is descriptive and content analysis. The study population of this study were the teams in the football premier league in 2014. Website this 16 teams were evaluated on 36 indicators. That 32 of these indicators was adapted of article Ioakimidis, Marilou(2010) to subject: Online marketing of professional sports clubs; engaging fans on a new playing field and 4 index (ticket sales, tours of the stadium, club tours and sponsors) after reviewing football teams in Europe added to it.

Main indicators in this study as follows: Media services such as video, games / matches, feeds RSS, email, social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), mobile services and photo albums and the services provide opportunities for users interaction Such as buying tickets and merchandise. These services are web sites interesting items because media and user interaction are the two main aspects of web 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. website content the Premier League football teams

Teaktor	Sepahan	Esteghlal tehran	Perpolis	Mes	Footlad	Saba	Malavan	Esteghal khuzestan	Zob Ahan	Damash_	Sayepa	Naft	Gostareh foolad	Fajr sepasi	Rah ahan	
																PODCASTS
*		*	*	*			*						*			RSS FEEDS
*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	GAMES/CONTESTS
*	*	*	*	*	*		*				*	*	*		*	VIDEO OR AUDIO CLIPS
			*		*		*	*				*	*			MOBILE SERVICES
*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	PHOTO ALBUMS
*			*		*	*		*	*	*	*		*		*	EMAIL
		*	*							*						LIVE BROADCASTS
																LIVE AUDIO
																NEWSLETTER
*	*	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	NEWS/HEADLINES
			*	*			*						*		*	SOCIAL MEDIA
*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*						*	*	LIVE SCORES
*		*	*		*		*	*								MERCHANDISE SALES
			*							*						sponsors
*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*					*	*		*	FORUM/MESSAGE BOARD
																FEEDBACK FORUM
																FAQS
*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*		*			*	*	*	MEMBER/LOG-IN
		*												*		BLOG
																IPHONE APPS
			*	*		*						*	*	*	*	CHAT
*		*	*			*										POLLS
																800 NUMBER
					*		*						*			SITE INDEX/MAP
	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	SEARCH FUNCTION
			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	FANS NETWORK
																DATABASES
																WEB STREAMING
	*		*		*	*							*			MUSIC
*													*			ticket sales
																tours of the stadium
							*								*	club tours
			*	*			*								*	FACEBOOK
			*	*			*								*	TWITTER
							*								*	YOUTUBE

Table 1 shows of services that teams offered through its website, That some indicators such as FAQS & FEEDBACK FORUM by None of the teams was not provided. but the index GAMES/CONTESTS are offered in website all teams.

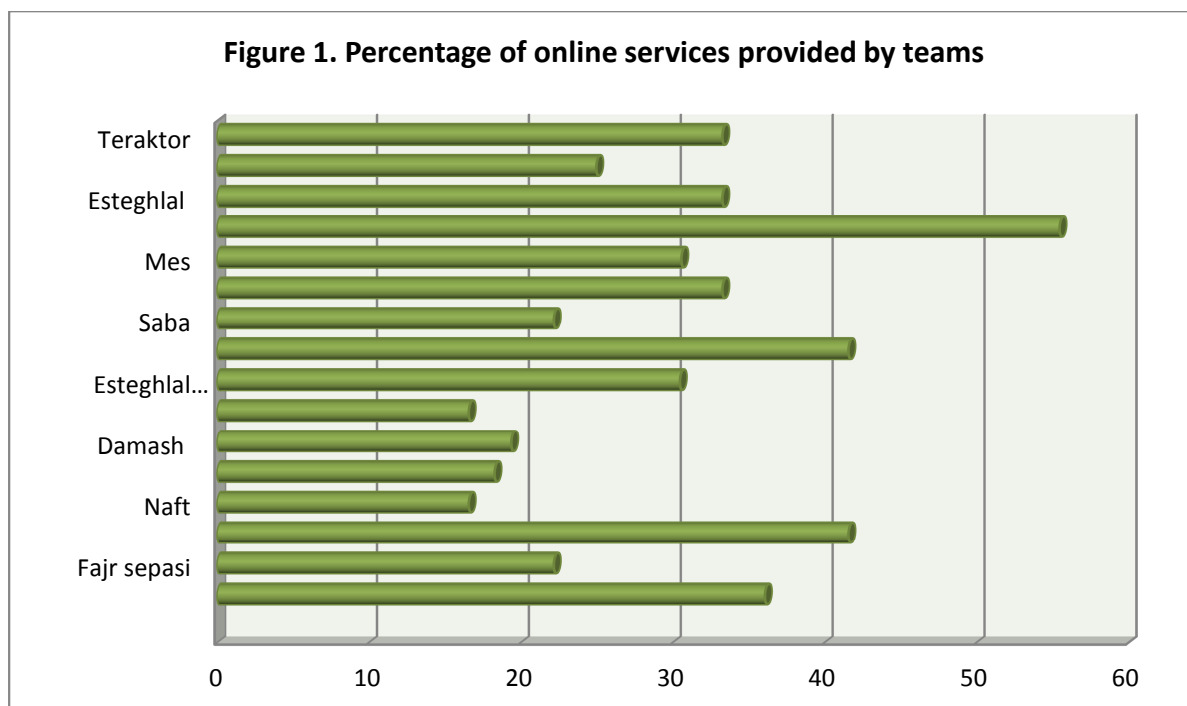
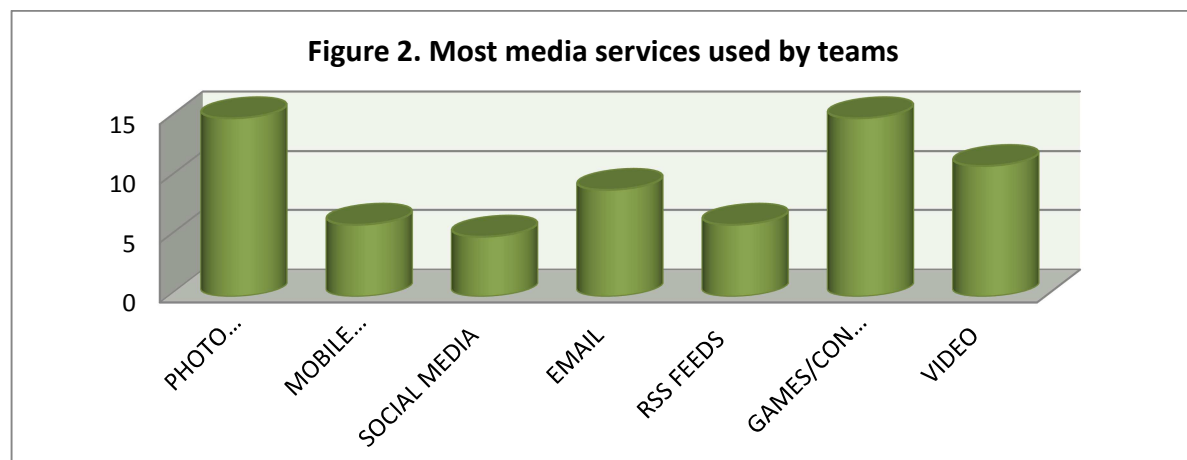
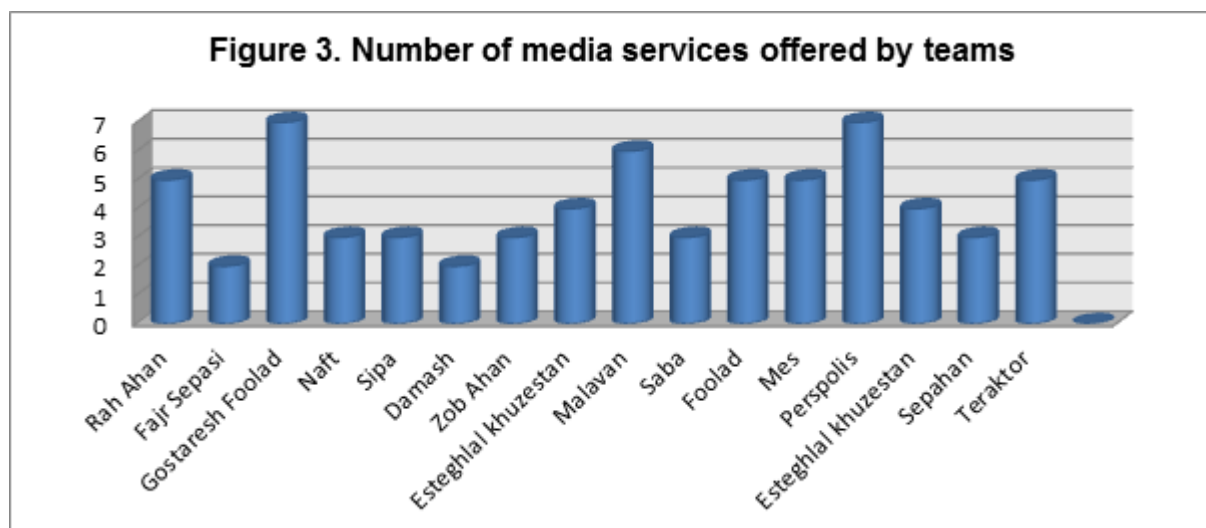


Figure 1 shows that Perspolis, 55 percent of the services identified in this study provide on its website and after that were respectively teams of Gostaresh foolad tabriz, Malavan Bandar Anzali(0/042), Rah Ahan(0/036), Teraktor sazi tabriz, Esteghlal Tehran, Foolad(0/033) and Naft Tehran , Zob Ahan(0/014) have least services on their Website.



As in figure 2 be considerate , most of the media services provided by teams on their website is related to PHOTO ALBUMS, GAMES/CONTESTS and the least they related to SOCIAL MEDIA, that offered by 5 teams : perspolis, gostaresh foolad tabriz, rah ahan, malavan and mes kerman.

Figure 3 shows the media services offered by teams, that perspolis and gostaresh foolad tabriz teams of 7 number of media services mentioned in the study, all items offered on your website and fajr sepasi, damash the least (2) the media services offered on your website.



CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current research is to examine online marketing done by professional soccer team in Iran which is done through their websites. Perspolis with an index of 20 out of 36 standards mentioned in table 1 had the highest rate of services on its website. Foulade Tabriz (15) and Malavane Bandar Anzali (14) rank second and third respectively and Zoab Aahane Esfahan and Naft Tehran both ranked last with an index of 5. Overall, soccer teams analyzed in this research provided few services on their websites for their online sport marketing and the websites had little contribution to their income, increasing brand loyalty and fan participation and brand awareness.

Today, popular soccer teams around the world not only cover their annual cost through broadcasting right (around 50%), ticket sales (around 20%) sponsors (around 15%) and player's transfer fee and other sports merchandize and products (around 10%), they also generate a significant income. Sport teams can cover a portion of their expenses by creating interesting website that can help generate income.

Analysis of media related services such as videos, games/matches, RSS feed data, emails, social networks (e.g. Facebook, twitter, YouTube), cellphone services and photo albums indicated that only Perspolis, Gostresh Foulad Tabriz, Malavan and Mese Kerman had webpages on social networks whereas soccer players of famous European teams use social networks to interact with their fans. Only five teams in the major soccer league provide cellphone services on the websites three of which (e.g. Perspolis, Foulade Tabriz and Malavan) used social media content more frequently than others. Such services can make websites more appealing to visitors. Richlo (2005) also states that sport teams can use such interesting online atmosphere to increase fan loyalty and brand value of their sport properties. Low funds can be one reason for lack of media services of teams on their websites. Generally major soccer teams do not have the necessary budget for providing such services on their websites. However, this cannot justify not even having a less expensive services such as having a webpage or email address. Low rate of online media services on websites may result in lack of local support and reduce the efficacy of the Internet as a potential sport marketing tool. There are few interesting services on websites of teams for Internet users and consequently fewer fans may choose to use the website to interact with team staff or other fans.

One of the services which can attract more users to the website is live streaming of the games which was only available on Damashe Gilan's website. Currently the most important part of this issue is Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Organization (IRIB) which pays the media right fee in a very long period time while this is an essential part of source of income in sport industry in our country. Only Perspolis and Esteghlal have radio broadcasting contracts and the news about most of the teams (11 teams) is covered in Sport news headlines.

Most of the teams (11 teams) analyzed in the research did have "Contact us" service on their website but no response was given to the messages sent to the websites by the researcher. There was only a code receive from website of Perspolis which was not useful for getting feedback from their website. There were no services through which visitors could receive answers to their questions. The findings of this research are consistent with Simons' (2007) in which he pointed out that providing tools necessary for fans to interact with each other and team staff will help sport marketers to find out about fans' wants and desires and design marketing strategy.

Online ticket sale, tours of stadium and club and selling sports merchandize of the team not only can make websites more appealing and encourage more users to visit the website but it can become a source of income for the sport property. Examining website of soccer teams, however, indicated that only two Tabrizi teams (e.g. Tractor Sazi and Gostaresh Foulad) sell tickets online which among many other advantages facilitates purchase for fans and it is safe and organized. However, it should be noted that selling ticket via the Internet depends on the teams condition and it is much easier for private teams to adopt this method. Zampano et al (2003) also stated that using the Internet reduces costs of searching and locating the product and allows consumers to find their desired product easily and more efficiently and receive them faster. It is also easier for privately owned sport properties to have tours of their soccer clubs but considering the current condition of stadiums in our country it is highly unlikely that fans and spectators would pay for taking such tours. None of teams advertise tours on the website which otherwise can encourage fan participation and finally lead to fan loyalty. Most teams did not sell sports merchandize of their team on their websites either. Goudarzi et al (2013) also in a research found stated that Iranian soccer teams seldom use their website to sell their sport products which may stem from the absence of copyright in Iran or simply because it is not customary for fans and spectators to buy sport products of the team they support.

The analysis of websites of soccer teams also revealed that only Perspolis and Damash mentioned their sponsors on their websites. This indicates that major league soccer teams do not observe their rules and regulations of sponsorship even on their websites. This may discourage sponsors and they may come to the conclusion that sponsorship plan is not as efficient as they expected. Hence sport properties should design the websites in a way that sponsors can achieve their sponsorship goals. Mentioning sponsors on teams' website, for example, can both help sponsors reach their goals and also shows that sport property is thankful for their support.

In general, major league soccer teams may not have adequate knowledge about the efficacy of various services provided on websites. As a result, they may lose several marketing opportunities via the Internet and "blindly" manage their websites. Therefore, online marketers should understand the significance of special online services in marketing strategy. The quality of services provided on websites depends on the number of web designers, maintenance and their skills in uploading videos, answering emails, uploading the latest news about games the team. Sport organization should assess their employees carefully to ensure that marketing strategies are carried out efficiently. Considering a wide range of uses for websites, professional sport teams can examine their competitors' website and use this information to enhance their own online presence. Sport teams which have more online services compared to their competitors will have more interactions with their fans and consequently increase fan loyalty.

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