Identifying effective strategies on the branding of Iran's premier football league with a combined research approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and validate strategies affecting the branding of the Iranian Football Premier League. The research method was mixed in terms of data collection which was qualitative-quantitative. The statistical population in the qualitative section included professors in the field of sports marketing, club officials and the league organization. Sampling method was used as non-probability sampling, with purposeful selection and with maximum variability or heterogeneity. The sample size in this study was 16 based on the theoretical saturation index. Also in the small part of the managers and staff of the sports club, PhD students in the field of sports marketing and finally the customers who are provided with sports services, which were equal to 360 people. The research tools included semi-structured interviews and a researcher-made questionnaire that was designed according to the extracted codes in the qualitative part. Qualitative part analysis was performed with Maxqda software and quantitative part analysis was performed with AMOS structural equation modeling software. The results related to the effective strategies on branding of the Iranian Football Premier League have been shown, which include 6 concepts and 44 codes have been identified and approved. Finally, the results of the model were confirmed in terms of validation. The results showed that legal solutions, appropriate management strategies, establishing proper communication and interactions, holding matches according to current world standards, strengthening the facilitators, brand fit and logo with the league formed the branding strategies of the Iranian Football Premier League.

Keywords Accreditation, Branding, Solutions, Premier League

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's business world, brand management is considered a crucial factor that contributes to improving marketing and economic conditions (Carlson et al., 2019). Sports brands must be formed based on concepts that are meaningful and recognized by the target market. Managing a sports league's brand can attract media attention and lead to financial sponsors, powerful media supporters, and improved communications (Balouli et al., 2015). Sports leagues are increasingly focused on rebranding and strategic planning to increase brand equity and reach more customers through brand development projects and branding campaigns (Kunkel & Doddard, 2020).

The Persian Gulf Pro League in Iran needs to have a proper branding model to professionally develop its brand, given the professionalization of football in Asia and Iran's international success in the sport (Abdollahzadeh & Tekeli, 2017). However, studies show a lack of comprehensive research on branding

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the Iranian football league. Designing a branding model can lead to recognizing the league, attracting more investment, better teams participating, stronger foreign players joining, higher media interest, more loyal fans, and ultimately higher revenue for the league and football federation (Rezaei et al., 2020; Rajabzadeh et al., 2017).

As a developing country where football is professionalizing with international successes, Iran needs to understand how to manage and elevate the brand of its top football league. This research aims to propose a comprehensive qualitative model for branding the Persian Gulf Pro League by examining existing data from interviews, documents, observations, etc. to address the research gap.

2. Methodology

This was an applied field research that used a mixed qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative data came from interviews with experts in sports marketing, club officials, and league officials using a purposive non-probability sampling with maximum variation. The sample size was 16 based on theoretical saturation. For quantitative data, a researcher-made questionnaire containing 44 strategies affecting the branding model of the Iranian Premier League was distributed to 360 sports club managers, staff, and sports marketing PhD students using an available sampling method.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study used Guba and Lincoln's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, transferability through peer debriefing, dependability through inquiry auditing, and confirmability through recoding 3 interviews for inter-coder reliability of 85%.

The qualitative data analysis used a systematic grounded theory approach by Strauss and Corbin (1998) involving open, axial and selective coding. The quantitative data was analyzed using structural equation modeling in AMOS 26 software to validate the proposed model based on the qualitative findings. An integrated mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analyses was employed.

3. Results

In the qualitative section, the extracted codes and related components were identified for the effective strategies on strategic innovation in sports businesses. After analysis, this allowed answering the main and sub-research questions. The first step was open coding where all data was coded. Initial codes were generated which form the basis for major categories and key components of the emerging grounded theory. Table 4 shows the first level (initial) and second level (focused) coding related to understanding the meaning of identifying effective strategies for branding the Iranian Premier Football League. Six concepts and 44 approved codes were identified.

In the quantitative section, confirmatory factor analysis examined the relationship between the latent factors (concepts) and the observed variables (codes). First-order CFA was conducted using AMOS software to validate the factors and codes extracted from the questionnaires. Factor loadings above 0.4 with t-values above 2.567 (p<0.01) indicated good construct validity. The overall fit indices like CFI, GFI, etc. were within the acceptable ranges, confirming that the proposed model of effective branding strategies for the Iranian Premier Football League had a good fit and was validated by the data.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

It suggests several management strategies such as comprehensive planning, meritocracy in responsibilities, gaining government and public support, delegating some responsibilities to clubs, having

the clubs' union organize the league matches under the league organization's supervision, privatizing football clubs, and employing football managers in clubs.

Communication strategies mentioned include using mascots aligned with the brand identity, interacting effectively with mass media, activating social media, designing an informative website, utilizing scientific research, and collaborating with global service companies.

For organizing matches properly, it recommends equal treatment of teams, designing special championship cups and slogans, appropriate scheduling, pre-match cultural programs, improving broadcasting quality, allowing women's entrance to stadiums, and aligning the brand logo with the league's identity.

The current logo is described as simple yet representative of Iran's national symbols, comprehensible to the audience, and having become recognizable through match broadcasts over the years.

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