INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF TEAM TRUST, INVOLVEMENT AND SELF-EXPRESSION ON TEAM ATTACHMENT OF FOOTBALL SPORTS TEAMS IN IRAN AZADEGAN LEAGUE

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ABSTRACT
This research is an applied, descriptive and correlational research and deals with the impact of team trust, involvement and self-expression on the team attachment of football sport teams in Iran Azadegan League. The statistical population includes all the fans of football sport teams in Iran Azadegan League that 472 people were estimated as the studied statistical sample. Content validity method is used to examine the validity of the questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been used for calculating the reliability. LISREL and SPSS.22 software were used to analyze the data in two sections of descriptive and inferential statistics; the normality test, structural equation modeling, T-test and T-value, factor loading and goodness-of-fit test were also used. Ultimately, no significant relationship was observed between team self-expression and attachment to sport team in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League. Therefore, the first hypothesis was not confirmed. Also, a significant relationship was observed between trust to the sports team and attachment to sports team in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League. Therefore, the second hypothesis was approved. The third hypothesis was also approved which was based on the relationship between team involvement and attachment to sport team in football sport teams of Iran football Azadegan League.

Keywords: Trust, Involvement, Self-Expression, Attachment, Sports Teams

INTRODUCTION
At the moment, companies and institutions have concentrated on strategies of brand loyalty, because they noticed several benefits. Brand loyalty prevents the entry of new competitors and brings more sales and profits. In addition, faithful consumers will be less vulnerable against the performance of competitors (Dick and Basu, 1994) and their sensitivity against price will decrease. Research shows that brand loyalty is directly related to the low costs of marketing, an increase in the number of new customers (Aaker, 1991) and the verbal word of favorite and pleasant (Dick and Basu, 1994) while is the mediator between the brand’s situation and its special value.

Therefore, the creation of loyalty between companies and customers is essential for business success. While millions of dollars are at the risk of sports industry, today's marketing managers of sport teams are grappling with many challenges to gain a better understand and recognition about the relationship between teams and their fans. An important issue that sport marketers are faced with is how to develop and maintain the longitudinal relations with their fans without noticing to their team performance. So, loyalty is a basic factor for any longitudinal relation which should be at the center of the management of contemporary sport brand (Funk and James, 2001, 2006; Heere and Dickson, 2008).

Until recently, the brand managers generally spent substantial resources on measuring and evaluating the awareness of the brand and the brand’s image. The result of this research indicates that sport team managers should also use the dimensions of brand relationship and develop the strategic and tactical innovations in order to ensure that consumers understand the value of self-expression in the team and trust to it and be attached to it. Therefore, managers should assess the team trust and team attachment when the analysis of sport brand evaluation is carried out because loyalty determines the brand’s performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and attachment to the team plays an important role in loyalty. Team managers should invest their resources in raising the self-expression values of their sport teams, involvement of consumers with that and trust, in order to increase the emotional links of consumers with
their brands. Since the team self-expression can enhance the consumers’ internal social self, a thought and idea should be considered for a sport team to support the resemblance of the purpose and the destination. According to the above issues, the fundamental question raised in this research is: Are the dimensions of relationship marketing, such as team trust, involvement and self-expression effective on the team attachment of football sport teams in Iran Azadegan League?

The objectives of this research are as follows:
- Assessing the relationship between team self-expression and attachment to sport team in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League
- Assessing the relationship between team trust and attachment to sport team in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League
- Assessing the relationship between team involvement and attachment to sport team in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League
- Based on the research objectives, a conceptual model adapted from (Tsiotsou, 2013) was proposed and tested in content of professional football teams:

Research Literature
The concept of relationship marketing was first presented by Barry in 1983 in the field of service organizations and was defined as a strategy to attract, maintain and enhance the relationships with customers. Relationship marketing is the process of identifying, creating, maintaining, strengthening and if necessary, end a relationship with customers and other stakeholders in a mutual benefit (Vegholm, 2011). Successful relationship marketing is very important in creating loyal customers, good reputation by word of mouth and cost reduction to find new customers (Whyatt and Koschek, 2010). The definition provided by (Sheth et al., 2012), describes the relationship marketing as a continuous process of involving in common activities and programs to create or increase psychological, social and bilateral economic values in order to make a profit by the intermediaries and the final customers. In relationship marketing, mutual trust, cooperation and mutual commitment is necessary between the supplier and the customer, therefore, all relationships are considered as a key for competitive advantage (Hougaard and
Bjerre, 2002). Through an RM approach, sports marketers can communicate, listen, addressing the customers’ needs and demands and can maintain and increase their basic fans (Yu and Trail, 2011). Rooney et al., 2007 do believe that fans networks needs a strong bilateral involvement, also, is recognized through the broader theory of relationship marketing (Sarkar, 2011) state that: Fans have to sacrifice themselves for their favorite sport clubs and in turn, the clubs should sacrifice for their supporters, the goal, in both cases, is getting the value added for each of the parties. Scientific research carried out in recent decades, encourages sports clubs to maintain a long relationship with sponsors and other stakeholders and to strengthening their vision (Stoney, 2001).

Team involvement: involvement or the performance relationship of individuals' characteristics (i.e. needs, values and goals) the organizational factors (Like time of purchase or perceived risk related to the decision to buy and properties and features of goods or stimulants/motivations), (such as the type of media, changes in the type of goods) (Zaichkowsky, 1985). The involvement results are higher motivations which have specified the above perceptual details and stimulation (Mano and Oliver, 1993). This variable includes two dimensions of the involvement: importance and pleasure are measurable in the level of ordinal measurement.

Team trust: trust, that is due to the social psychology, is the inherent characteristic of any valuable social relationship. Trust to the brand creates an important structure in marketing because it affects the positive and favorable attitudes of consumers and leads to brand commitment (Ballester and Aleman, 2001).

Team self-expression: self-expression is defined as the consumer’s perception from a value that raises the individual’s social particular brand or reflects the inner-self. In the literature of the consumer’s behavior, it has been demonstrated that individuals do not choose specific brands just for their performance benefits, but this selection is because of the symbolic characteristics (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004; Watanasuwan, 2005). This variable includes two dimensions of the self-expression: the inner self and social self are measurable in the level of ordinal measurement.

Team attachment: the concept of the sense of attachment can be defined as the dependence on the community or a particular group. In other words, someone who has a sense of attachment and commitment is the integral member of the group (Qutaiba and Tamie, 2010). One of the key features of the brand attachment is the brand stimulation and enthusiasm. Customers will be dependent to the brand through linking the brand with attractive entity in order to achieve the individual development opportunity (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; Park et al., 2010). The brand attachment is detected vital in its impact on consumer behavior and lifetime of brand commitment. In other words, brand attachment shows an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand (Thomson et al., 2005).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research Methodology**

This research, based on the applied purpose and method of data collection, is a description of the correlation type. It’s functional, because using the results of the project is effective in improving the performance of the sports teams, is descriptive because it examines the current situation and is the correlation type because the researcher seeks a relationship between two variables.

The statistical population includes all football fans of Iran's Azadegan League which their number is unlimited. Therefore, Cochran formula is used for determining the sample size. Since there is no specific information about the population size and accordingly, no available knowledge about the population variance, therefore, the sample size was calculated through the following formula:

\[ n = \frac{Z^2 \times S^2}{d^2} \]

A preliminary study was done with distributed questionnaires among 25 members of the statistical population and the sample size was estimated by estimating the variance of the initial sample at 95% confidence. According to the conducted calculations, 472 people were estimated as the least statistical sample studied, and for ensure further, 550 questionnaires were distributed randomly among the estimated
sample size which 480 questionnaires were detected as suitable questionnaires for analysis. According to
the nature of the research topic and the studied unlimited statistical population, the available non-
probability sampling method has been used.
Library and field research methods are used to collect information. Library method is used to compile the
theoretical foundations and research background and field method is used to collect data from statistical
population by using questionnaire. The collection of data and necessary information from the
questionnaire were used for measuring the research indicators, and questions are designed in the form of a
five-option package by using Likert spectrum with regard to the objectives of the study and the nature of
the current research subject. Data gathering tool and the questionnaire information is standard which were
applied based on the similar samples that have been validated and used in previous studies.

The Team Involvement Questionnaire
The revised version of personal involvement list (Zaichkowsky, 1994) that included ten items was used to
measure the team. This scale contains two dimensions of the involvement. Importance and pleasure (mean
rank of two dimensions) were used as two markers of the team involvement.

Sports Team Self-Expression Questionnaire
A questionnaire was developed by (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) to measure the level of self-expression.
Their scales are composed of two factors: Inner self (four items), Social self (five items). The mean rank
of two factors was used as two markers of self-expression.

The Questionnaire of Attachment and Belonging to Sports Team
At first, eight-items were used to measure the team attachment. These items were initially proposed and
tested in sports by (James and Ross, 2002). Four items are measured to the extent of the perceived
commitment of an individual toward their team, and four other items are assessed to the extent that a
person visualizes the team in his own concept and response to it.

The Questionnaire of Trust to the Sports Team
Four items were used for measuring and evaluating the team trust. These items were taken from
marketing literature (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).
In this research, content validity method is used to investigate the validity of the questionnaire. So that the
questionnaire was given to a number of experts, supervisor professors and advisors and they were asked
about their opinion on questions and evaluation of hypotheses, that they unanimously confirmed the
questionnaire.
One method of calculating the reliability is the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. If the Cronbach's alpha
coefficient be calculated more than 0.7 for a scale, then the scale reliability is assessed favorably.

\[
\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum s_x^2}{s^2_x}\right)
\]

Table 1: The output of SPSS software for calculating the questionnaire Cronbach's alpha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the variable</th>
<th>Cronbach's alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team involvement</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team trust</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team self-expression</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team attachment</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the variables with descriptive statistics</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the variables without descriptive statistics</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the whole questionnaire was 0.921. Therefore, the reliability of the
questionnaire is evaluated favorably. The research hypotheses are as follows:
- There is a significant relationship between sports team’s self-expression and attachment to sports team.
- There is a significant relationship between trust to sports team and attachment to sports team.
There is a significant relationship between team involvement and attachment to sports team. LISREL and SPSS.22 software were used to analyze the data in two sections of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistical analysis methods include tables and graphs, indices of dispersion, frequency and etc., and data normalization test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) is used in inferential analysis of structural equation modeling (SEM), T-test and T-value, factor loading and goodness-of-fit test were also used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Descriptive statistical indexes were used to describe the general characteristics of the respondents. The frequency of respondents has been studied based on gender, age, level of education and favorite team. All 480 subjects of the studied samples are selected among men who are allowed to go to the sports stadiums.

225 respondents are in the age range of less than 30 years and they form more than 45% of the sample size and have the highest frequency. 132 people of the respondents are in the age range of 30 to 40 years old. 92 people are in the age range of 40 to 50 years which is less than 20% of the sample size. Only 31 individuals are over 50 years old and form slightly more than 5% of the sample size.

148 individuals have a diploma or lower that is about 31 percent of the sample size. 173 people of the respondents have an associate degree. Individuals with a bachelor include 119 people. 40 persons have a Master's degree or higher.

Fans were selected from 9 gyms, Damash Gilan, Mazandaran Textile, Siah Jamegan Mashhad, Mes Rafsanjan, Parseh Tehran, Tabriz Municipality, Ardabil Municipality, Tehran ground forces and Etka Gorgan. Team fans of Damash with 144 people, constitute 30% of the sample size. Fans of Mazandaran Textile, Siah Jamegan Mashhad, Mes Rafsanjan, Parseh Tehran, Tabriz Municipality, Ardabil Municipality, Tehran ground forces and Etka Gorgan have allocated 14.38%, 10.63%, 9.17%, 11.88%, 9.17%, 5.21%, 5% and 4.58% of the sample size to themselves respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the research variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Variation range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>4.197</td>
<td>4.330</td>
<td>4.330</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.315</td>
<td>3.330</td>
<td>1.670</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.772</td>
<td>3.860</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>3.570</td>
<td>1.430</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner-self</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.843</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-self</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.888</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.835</td>
<td>3.880</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>3.750</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team involvement</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.985</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>3.450</td>
<td>1.550</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Trust</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team self-expression</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.867</td>
<td>3.980</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team attachment</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3.835</td>
<td>3.880</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>3.750</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Data normality test (sub-factors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pleasure</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Inner-self</th>
<th>Social-self</th>
<th>Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.197</td>
<td>3.772</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>3.843</td>
<td>3.888</td>
<td>3.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>0.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Based on the table results, in all cases, the significance amount is greater than 0.05, therefore, there is no reason for rejecting the assumption which means the measurement data distribution of each dimension is normal. So, parametric tests and confirmatory factor analysis can be used.

Fit indexes show favorable values. Also, the amount of 1.389 is obtained as the Chi-square normal which is in the acceptable range of 1 to 5. Therefore, structural model has a good fit.

\[
\chi^2 = \frac{301.61}{217} = 1.389
\]

Since, the RMSEA fit index is 0.032, which is lower than 0.05, the model has a good fit. Other indicators of goodness of fit were also in the acceptable range.

Table 4: Data normality test (main structures)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team involvement</th>
<th>Team Trust</th>
<th>Team expression</th>
<th>self-</th>
<th>Team Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.985</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>3.867</td>
<td>3.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>0.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</td>
<td>2.834</td>
<td>3.725</td>
<td>2.747</td>
<td>3.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Standard load factor of the research hypotheses test
Table 5: Test results of Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>T-Value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The impact of team self-expression on attachment to sports team</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Hypothesis rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of team trust on team attachment</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>Hypothesis acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of team involvement on team attachment</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>Hypothesis acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: T-Value statistic of the research hypotheses test
Table 6: The path analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement- attachment</td>
<td>0.3256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust- attachment</td>
<td>0.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression- attachment</td>
<td>0.0792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a significant relationship between team self-expression and attachment to the sports team. The power of relation between variables of team self-expression and attachment to the sports team is 0.18 which is a very small amount. Also, the amount of 0.44 has been obtained as the test statistic which is bigger than the critical value of t at the error level of 5% (that means 1.96) and shows that the little correlation observed is not significant. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the team self-expression and attachment to the sports team.

There is a significant relationship between trust to the sports team and attachment to sports team. The power of relationship between variables of team trust and attachment to the sports team is 0.65. Also, the amount of 8.13 has been obtained as the test statistic which is bigger than the critical value of t at the error level of 5% (that means 1.96) and shows that observed correlation is significant. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between team trust and attachment to sports team.

There is a significant relationship between team involvement and attachment to sports team. The power of relationship between variables of team involvement and attachment to the sports team is 0.74. Also, the amount of 8.67 has been obtained as the test statistic which is bigger than the critical value of t in the error level of 5% (which is 1.96) and shows that observed correlation is significant. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between team involvement and attachment to sports team.

![Figure 4: The confirmation results of the final research model](image-url)

Table 7: The summary of one-sample t-test results for research variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>Amount of significance</th>
<th>Confidence interval of 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>4.197</td>
<td>46.740</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>3.772</td>
<td>27.571</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>36.225</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner-self</td>
<td>3.843</td>
<td>31.951</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-self</td>
<td>3.888</td>
<td>34.617</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>3.835</td>
<td>35.529</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team involvement</td>
<td>3.985</td>
<td>41.562</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Trust</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>36.225</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team self-expression</td>
<td>3.867</td>
<td>37.577</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team attachment</td>
<td>3.835</td>
<td>35.529</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Article

The amount of 4.197 has been obtained as the respondents’ viewpoint average in pleasure dimension which is bigger than the middle of Likert spectrum. Also, the amount of significance is 0 that is smaller than the error level of 0.05. Therefore, the observed mean is significant. The amount of 46.74 has been obtained as the t-statistic, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96. Also, both the upper and lower bounds of confidence interval are greater than zero (positive) and the test claim will be approved. According to each of these statistical findings with 95% confidence it can be said that: pleasure is in a desirable situation.

The amount of 3.772 has been obtained as the respondents’ viewpoint average in impotence dimension which is bigger than the middle of Likert spectrum. Also, the amount of significance is 0 that is smaller than the error level of 0.05. Therefore, the observed mean is significant. The amount of 27.571 has been obtained as the t-statistic, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96. Also, both the upper and lower bounds of confidence interval are greater than zero (positive) and the test claim is approved. According to each of these statistical findings with 95% confidence it can be said that: pleasure is in a desirable situation.

Similarly, it can be seen that trust, inner-self, social-self, attachment, team involvement, team trust, team self-expression and team attachment are all in desirable status.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to research findings, it was observed that the relationship between variables of attachment to sports team and team self-expression is equal to 0.18 which is a very small amount. Also, the amount of 0.44 has been obtained as the test statistic which is bigger than the critical value of t at the error level of 5% (that is 1.96), and it shows that the little correlation observed is not significant. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between team self-expression and attachment to sports team in football sports teams of Iran Azadegan League.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is not approved. Also, a significant relationship was observed between trust to the sports team and attachment to sport teams in football sport teams of Iran’s Azadegan League. Therefore, the second hypothesis is approved. Finally, a significant relationship was observed between team involvement and attachment to sports team in football sports teams of Iran Azadegan League, Therefore, the third hypothesis is confirmed.

This study provides a large share both in theoretical and practical areas to understand the structure of sports team loyalty (Funk and James, 2006). The present study investigates a mechanism that deals with each of the basic structures of relationship marketing used in the sport field to find out which of them can help the growth of loyalty in sports team and can help to better understand their role in customer-sports team relationships. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends our experimental knowledge about sports team loyalty and their relationships with other key concepts such as participation, self-expression, attachment and trust.

When the analysis of sports brand assessment is done, managers should measure the team trust, team attachment and team loyalty, because loyalty is known as the determinant of the brand performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and team attachment plays the key role in the structure of team loyalty. If team managers wish to nurture the consumers’ emotional bonds with their brand, they should invest their resources in increasing the self-expression value of their sports team, the participation of consumers with that and trust. Because the team self-expression will increase the consumers’ social-self and inner-self, this matter is vital to develop the image of a sports team which supports the identity of aim sector. Team loyalty plays an important role in predicting the behavior of sports fans such as the intention to attend in the team’s upcoming games (Wakefield and Solan, 1995; Sumino and Horada, 2004). Sports team managers should plan their advertising in order to develop and encourage the fans’ participation and interest towards their team; bringing team members together (for instance, the players and team coaches) for the fans through public appearances and public service activities. Increase loyalty to the team may increase the presence in the game and therefore increase the financial performance. This research emphasized on the strong emotional relationships with the fans, and the featured role of this relation and bond was appeared in the research.
Research Article

Research results show the high impact of fans’ emotional bonds with sports teams. Sports team managers can develop and increase the team’s brand equity with investing in strong emotional ties with sports consumers.

Suggestions

According to the research results about the Iran football Azadegan League, it is suggested that football teams use this important potential and especially with regard to the abundant financial problems of many teams in Azadegan league they can use the fans' capacity to make money. Since the study showed that loyal fans are ready to provide financial assistance to their teams, clubs can take advantage of their fans’ financial capacities by adopting financial principled mechanisms for the fans’ financial participation with methods such as offering shares in exchange.

REFERENCES


Research Article


