INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF TEAM TRUST AND TEAM ATTACHMENT ON TEAM LOYALTY OF FOOTBALL TEAMS IN IRAN AZADEGAN LEAGUE

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ABSTRACT
This study is applied and descriptive – correlational research studying the impact of team trust and team attachment on team loyalty of football team of Azadegan League in Iran. The study consisted of all Iran's Azadegan League Football fans which 472 of them were selected as sample of study. To examine the validity of the questionnaire, content validity was used and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate reliability of test. SPSS.22 and LISREL software were used in two descriptive and inferential statistics in order to analyse data. In addition, normality test, SEM (structural equations model), a T-Test and T-Value tests, test load factoe, and goodness of fit were used in this regard. Finally, it was revealed that there is significant relationship between sport team attachment and team loyalty in the Azadegan Football League of Iran. Hence, the first hypothesis was confirmed. It was also found that there is a significant relationship team trust and team among sport teams in the Azadegan Football League of Iran. Hence, second hypothesis was also confirmed.

Keywords: Trust, Loyalty, Attachment, Sport Teams

INTRODUCTION
Team loyalty plays an important role in predicting the behavior of sport fans such as attending in team's next competitions (Wakefield and Sloan, 1995; Sumino and Harada, 2004). Managers of sport teams should apply incentives to increase the fans involvements and their interests in their teams. It means that fans and members of team should be together (like players and fans). This can be done through public service activities and public manifestation. Enhancing loyalty of fans to team can increase their presence in competitions and financial performance as result. If we want talk strategically, we should say that say managers must use strategic approaches in improving long relationship and loyalty of fans, including relationship branding and marketing. Branding and branding strategies were proposed as a concept for financial and non-financial objectives before (Cuvelaere and Richelieu, 2005). Therefore, it is suggested that branding can help sport teams to achieve financial stability and reliability, especially for smaller teams (Cuvelaere and Richelieu, 2005).

Branding can be used as in development of sport teams by applying attractive image and social personalities. The reason for great importance of team loyalty in sports services is due to their heterogeneity, their dependence on team performance, and lack of control over the outcome of the game (Funk and Pastore, 2000, Mahony et al., 2000). Since loyal sport are tempted to change their interested teams to a more successful team during the season, understanding of factors that are related to loyalty is so essential and important in sport brand management. Given the importance of this issue in the brand management, we investigated the impact of team trust and team attachment on team loyalty in football teams of Azadegan League of Iran.

The objectives of this study are as follows:
- Assessing the relationship between team attachment and team loyalty in football teams of Azadegan League of Iran.
- Assessing the relationship between team trust and team loyalty in football teams of Azadegan League of Iran.

Based on research objectives, a conceptual model is used as follows:
Review of Literature

In previous studies, loyalty was created due to meetings of teams and fans (Funk and James, 2006) rather than the essential quality of a long relationship. This study accepts communicative aspect in investigating the loyalty history of sport team aspect, and it determines the relationship between sport fans and sport teams regarding relationship marketing aspects in terms of their cognitive and emotional perception link. The main idea of relationship marketing (RM) starts by creating a shared mutual relationship through communication and interaction between business and customers (Gronroos, 1994). Identifying the needs of customers by RM leads into reduction in the cost of serving them over time and increase in profits (Janda, 2011). RM implementation is more than a strategy and we cannot assign it solely to one part such as marketing or sales. Although its importance has been recognized across different industries, relationship transactions are considerably different across different customers and different contexts (Williams and Chinn, 2010). As a result, the findings of RM may not be generalized from one branch of study to another branch (Stavros and Westberg, 2009). Therefore, more research will be needed to understand the applications and performance approach of RM in certain industries. Regarding sport area, limited research has been done. However, existing studies provide useful information, and these studies are for sports organizations that can meet the conditions to use RM. In most cases, marketing sport transactions include certain types of RM (Williams and Chinn, 2010). The team attachment: brand communication theory states that during interaction with a brand, consumers can develop positive emotional feelings such as love, passion, joy and love for a brand and attachment for a brand (Fournier, 1998; Thomson et al., 2005). This reasoning leads to definition of brands as an emotional bond between consumer and brand (Thomson et al., 2005). In addition, the emotional attachment for a brand depends on macro investment of a brand. This shows that consumers are eager to "ignore personal interests immediately to promote communication" with brand and stay with it (keep the relationship with it) (Thomson et al., 2005). One of the key features of attachment for a brand is excitement and enthusiasm of brand.

Team trust: trust resulting from social psychology is inherent characteristic of any social valuable relationship. Brand trust creates important structure in marketing because it affects positive and interested attitudes of consumer and leads into brand trust (Ballester and Aleman, 2001) that is manifestation of successful relationships between consumers and brand. Brand trust refers average consumer tendency to rely on brand ability to carry out mentioned functions mentioned above and it remains since one has trust in credibility and integrity of exchange (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is estimated based on ability of a brand to continue to fulfill its promises and rewards and staying with the costs involved with counted process (Doney and cannon, 1997). It is known as a process that is carefully taken into consideration (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Based on the theory of trust and commitment, (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), trust has been considered as an important factor in developing and maintaining of very valuable and lasting brand.

Loyalty: Customer loyalty is a concept that is widely used in the field of consumers’ behavior for many years. For example, Dick and Basu (1994) have considered customer loyalty as the power of establishment of relationship with attitude of an individual regarding the entity (brand, service,
warehouse, vendor, etc.) and of repurchase. Parasuraman et al., (1991) defined customer loyalty in two dimensions of behavioral attitudinal. Attitudinal dimension includes the perception of repurchase, refrain from purchasing from other companies, introducing to others and persuading them to use particular products or services of the company, while behavioral dimension (Dick & Basu, 1994) refers to behavior of customers about purchase and expressing preferences about products and services.

In sport, loyal fans are those people who have prejudice to particular sport, team or athlete and follow the affairs related them (preacher Mousavi, 2007), in a way the Pareto principle (80-20 rule) governs on loyal fans of football based on researchers claims. Twenty percent of loyal fans would supply 80% of sport income resources. Therefore, loyal fans would guarantee the long-term and sustainable profit of clubs (Mullin, 1993).

Loyalty in sport: In different sports, there are two research trends regarding loyalty and its literature. The first focuses on social, external factors affecting the relationship between sport consumers and sport team. Therefore, the success of a team, its place and status, support of peer group (Wann et al., 1996), the importance of family and friends, presence in competitions (Kolbe and James, 2000), and the role of social groups such as friends, parents and the media (James, 2001) have been investigated as a priority arrangements.

Table 1: Presented models for loyalty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>row</th>
<th>Research variables</th>
<th>Researcher researchers</th>
<th>title</th>
<th>year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Independent variables (interaction to create value, satisfaction, trust, reinforcing relationship) and dependent variable (loyalty)</td>
<td>Jurate Banyte and Aiste Dovaliene</td>
<td>Relations between customer engagement into value creation and customer loyalty</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Independent variables (partnership purchase program, gifts, members day, journal, insurance coverage, gift card, and particular price) and dependent variables (customer loyalty and customer satisfaction)</td>
<td>Ibrahim Zakaria et al.,</td>
<td>The Relationship between Loyalty Program, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty in Retail Industry, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent variable (attempt dimension, cognitive dimension, and emotional dimension) and dependent variable (customer loyalty)</td>
<td>Luigi Dumitrescu, Mihai Tichindeleon, Simona Vinerean Zhaohua et al.,</td>
<td>Analysis of factors used in relationship marketing</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Independent variable (trust, service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and change cost) and dependent variable (loyalty)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty</td>
<td>2010</td>
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</table>
Research Article

The second theory focuses on the internal psychological factors of consumers and it is taking a more individual approach (Funk and James, 2001, 2006; Kwon et al., 2005; Richardson and ODwyer, 2003; Sumino and Harada, 2004). In addition, incentives such as interest in team, indirect attachment, excitement, self-control, and interest in a player interest as motivating basics for behavioral loyalty of fans about their favorite team have been reported (Neale and Funk, 2005). In this case, loyalty is result of strong behaviors about sport team (Funk and James, 2006) and emotional demonstrations of fans in the stadium (Sumino and Harada, 2004).

In order to improve typologies of sport fans, loyalists were used as criteria for the classification (Harris and Ogbonna, 2008). Tapp (2004) claims that different parts of loyalty are affected by various factors. Fans who have low level of loyalty that their loyalty is resulted from satisfaction with performance of team, while high level of behavioral loyalty is resulted from family history and self-knowledge. Previous studies indicate there is one group of people among sport consumers who are not loyal. Therefore, loyalty among sport fans is a myth and one group of fans changes their loyalty to other teams or demonstrate surface loyalty (Mahony et al., 2000).

In addition, literature of sport marketing has investigated each of the current structures within service framework (Goode, 2004). They refer to diversity of customer loyalty. Therefore, research has found out that satisfaction (Kolbe and James, 2000), brand image (Bauer et al., 2008), quality of service (Shilbury, 1994), trust (Farrelly and Quester, 2003) and perceived value (Siomkos et al., 2006) are determinants of loyalty in a sport concept and theme.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology of Study

This study is applied in its objective and it is descriptive-correlational in terms of data collection method. It is applied since results of study can be used in improving the performance of sport teams, and it is descriptive since it examines the current situation and it is correlational since researcher aims to find the relationship between two variables of study.

The population of study consisted of all football fans of Azadegan League of Iran that their number is unlimited. Therefore, Cochran method was used to select sample of study. As there is no specific information of the population size, there is no information of population variance. Therefore, the sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{\left( \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 \times S^2}{d^2} \right)}{\text{population variance}}$$

The sample of study was calculated by one preliminary study with distributing questionnaire among 25 members of the population and the variance of the initial sample was estimated at 95% of reliability. Based calculations conducted, 472 people were estimated as sample of study, and 550 questionnaires were distributed randomly among sample of study and 480 questionnaires were recognized suitable for analysis. Due to the nature of the subject of study and unlimited population of study, non-probability sampling method was used.

Library and field methods were used to collect data. Library method was used to develop theoretical principles and literature of study, while field method was used to collect data from population of study using questionnaire. Questionnaire was used to measure research indicators, collecting data and information needed. Based on the objectives of the study and nature of study, five-option questions were used in this study using Likert scale in the package form. Standard questionnaire was used as a tool of study to collect data, adopted from similar studies conducted in this regard.

Team Attachment Questionnaire

Eight items were used to measure team attachment, firstly. These items were firstly proposed and tested by James and Ross (2002). Four items are measured to such extent that one has perceived commitment to teammates, and other four items are assessed to such extent that one images team in his personal interpretation and respond them. The team was given an eight-item measure these items in the first (James
and Ross, 2002) was proposed and tested in the exercise. Four items are measured to the extent that a person is perceived commitment to their team and four other items to the extent that an individual assessment team and respond visualize the concept of his own.

**Sport Team Questionnaire**

Four items were used to measure and assess team trust. These items were adopted from marketing literature (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

**Team Loyalty Questionnaire**

Nine items were used to measure loyalty to brand used in marketing literature before (Zeithami et al., 1996). The first four items assess the team loyalty and remaining five items assess the loyalty. Mean scores of two sub-scales were used as indicator of loyalty to brand. Content validity was used to examine the validity of questionnaire in this study. Questionnaire was given to a number of experts, professors, and advisors, and their opinions were about questions and evaluation of hypotheses were considered. They confirmed the validity of questionnaire. One of the methods of calculating the reliability is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. When Cronbach's alpha coefficient is calculated more than 0.7, its reliability would be considered desirable.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variable</th>
<th>Cronbach's alpha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team trust</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team attachment</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team loyalty</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total variables with descriptive statistics</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total variables without descriptive statistics</td>
<td>0.921</td>
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Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated 0.921. Hence, reliability of questionnaire is desirable.

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:
- There is significant relationship between team attachment and team loyalty.
- There is significant relationship between team trust and team loyalty.

SPSS.22 and LISREL software were used in two descriptive and inferential statistics in order to analyze data. Descriptive analysis methods include tables, graphs, distribution indicators, frequency, etc. In addition, normality test, SEM (structural equations model), aT-Test and T-Value tests, test load factore, and goodness of fit were used in inferential analysis.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

Descriptive statistics indicators were used to describe the general features of respondents. Frequency of respondents was examined based on gender, age, educational level and favorite team. All 480 samples were selected among males who are allowed to go to the sport stadiums. Among total number of respondents, 225 of them are in age range 30 years, and they include over 45% of the sample of study, while 132 of the respondents are in age range of 30 to 40 and 92 of them are in age range of 40 to 50 who include less than 20% of the sample. Only 31 of them are over 50 years old and they include slightly more than 5% of sample of study. One hundred and forty eight of them have secondary school degree or lower than it and they include 31 percent of the sample, while 173 of the respondents have associate's degree, 119 of them have bachelor degree, and 40 of them have master degree or higher than it.

Fans were selected among nine clubs, including Damash Ghilan, Nassaji Mazandaran, Siah Jameghan, Mes Rafsanjan, Parseh Tehran, Shahrdari Tabriz, Shahrdari Ardabil, Niruye Zamini Tehran, and Etka.
Gorgan. Damash Ghilan fans included 30% of sample with 144 people. Nasaji Mazandaran fans included 14/38% of sample, Siah Jameghan included 10/63 % of sample,Mes Rafsanjan included 9/17% of sample, Parseh Tehran included 11/88% of sample, Shahrdari Tabriz included 9/17% of sample, Shahrdari Ardabil included 5/21% of sample, Niruye Zamini Tehran included 5%, and Etki Gorgan included 4/58% of samples.

<table>
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<th>Table 3: Descriptive analysis of research variables</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team attachment</td>
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<td>Team loyalty</td>
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<th>Table 4: Normal distribution of data test (sub-factors)</th>
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<tr>
<td>trust</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard of deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</td>
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<tr>
<td>significance</td>
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<th>Table 5: Normal distribution of data test (main structures)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</td>
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<tr>
<td>significance</td>
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Based on results of table above, significance level was obtained higher than 0/05 in all cases. Therefore, hypothesis is confirmed. It means that distribution of data of each of dimensions is normal. Hence, we can use parametric tests and confirmatory factor analysis.

Fit indicators show desirable values. Xi-two normal amount was obtained 1/389 that is in the acceptable range of 1 to 5. Therefore, structural model has desirable fitting. In addition, as RMSEA fit index was obtained 0/032 that is lower than 0/05, model has good fit. Other indicators of goodness of fit are within the acceptable range.

Figure 2: Factorial load of impact of sport team attachment on sport team loyalty
Figure 3: T-statistic value of the impact of sport team attachment on sport team loyalty

Figure 4: Factorial load of impact of sport team trust on sport team loyalty

Figure 5: t-statistic value of the impact of sport team trust on sport team loyalty

Table 6: Hypotheses test results

<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 attachment to a sport team on team loyalty</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>Hypothesis is confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of team trust on team loyalty</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>Hypothesis is confirmed</td>
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Table 7: Path analysis

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<th>Direct</th>
<th>Paths</th>
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<tr>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>Trust-loyalty</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>attachment -loyalty</td>
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Discussion and Conclusion
Hypothesis one: there is significant relationship between team attachment and team loyalty. The value of relationship between attachment to a sport team and team loyalty was calculated 0.44 that is acceptable value.
Test statistic was also obtained 3.74 that is higher than critical value of t at the error level of 5%. Therefore, it shows that observed correlation was significant. Therefore, there is significant relationship between team attachment and team loyalty.
Hypothesis two: there is significant relationship between team trust and team loyalty.
The value of relationship between team trust and team loyalty was calculated 0.51 that is acceptable value.
Test statistic was also obtained 5.78 that is higher than critical value of t at the error level of 5%. Therefore, it shows that observed correlation was significant. Therefore, there is significant relationship between team trust and team loyalty.
The current study examines the mechanism that which of the essential structures of relationship marketing used in sport field can help to growth of team loyalty and better understanding of their roles in the customer-sport team relationships. Theoretically, this study expands our experimental knowledge regarding sport team loyalty and its relation with other key concepts such as participation, attachment, and trust. Managers must measure team trust, team attachment, and team loyalty so that they conduct sport brand analysis, since loyalty has been found as determining factor of brand performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and team attachment plays key role in the structure of team loyalty. Team must invest their resources to increase participation of brand consumers, if they want to enhance the emotional bonds between consumers and brands. This is vital to develop a sport team image that identity supports the goal section. Team loyalty plays an important role in predicting the behavior of sport fans such as their intentions to attend in following competitions (Wakefield and Solan, 1995; Sumino and Horada, 2004). Managers of sport team plan propaganda in order to develop and expand the participation and interest of fans to their teams. They also can bring the members of team together (such as players and coaches) for fans through public presence and public service activities. Enhancing team loyalty can increase the presence of fans in the competitions and financial performance. This research emphasizes on strong emotional relationship among sport teams and fans, and the significant role this relationship was revealed in the study. Results of the study show the impact emotional ties of fans with sport teams. Investing in strong emotional ties and relationships between sport consumers and managers of sport teams can increase the particular value of team brand.

Recommendations
Based on results of study, the confirmed significant relationship between team attachment and team loyalty, and the confirmed significant relationship between team trust and team loyalty in the football teams of Azadegan League of Iran, it is recommended that football teams use this capacity to increase their revenue, given their several financial problems.

REFERENCES


Research Article


Research Article


