



BRAND IDENTIFICATION MODEL OF SPORT INDUSTRY (CASE STUDY: IRANIAN SOCCER PRO LEAGUE)

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ABSTRACT

Team-fan identification is a new discussion included in the organizational behavior, marketing and particularly sport marketing based on the social identity theory. It is believed that identification acts beyond the loyalty to develop organizational interests. By this phenomenon, identification became a part of fan's self-image followed by successful team. The present study develops a team-fan identification model from fan's point of view. This study collects data from both qualitative and quantitative phases. Participants include 10 expert and fans of Iran pro-league. Sample size is 300 in the first phase and 720 in the second phase selected by a simple random method. Accordingly, the authors develop the team-fan identification model fitted to IPL in 2014-15 season by new ideas related to sport identification. Finally, a new team-fan identification model was developed in which dimensions of team and soccer identification are of great importance, instead of evaluative dimension. The factorial loadings are as follows: 0.93 cognitive identification, 0.87 affective identification, 0.86 team identification and 0.82 soccer identification.

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Keywords: Social identity, Identification, Organizational identification, Team-fan identification.

Contribution/ Originality

This study originates new model for identification, especially in sports, in which new dimensions of team and soccer identification are of great importance, instead of evaluative dimension.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports and healthy recreations, as the most profitable industry of the 21st century, are an important industry influencing the developed economies. The sports industry has rapidly globalized. By having advertisement opportunities, the sports interacts industry, business and sports. Meanwhile, soccer is of great importance. According to available documents, soccer is the most popular sport in international level; so that, many countries consider soccer as their national

sport. In Iran, as other eastern countries, sports rapidly became a part of the daily life; through this process, soccer became the most popular sport in Iran due to its certain attractions which recently lead to specific social effects, particularly in national level. Spontaneous national celebrations following winning a game by the national team, such as Iran-Australia or Iran-America (The World Cup, 1998, France), are social attraction of soccer. These games were so significant that victory strengthened national identity. In terms of national plays, thousands of people from different parts of Iran come annually to Azadi Sports Complex, Tehran, to support their favorite teams. Although soccer has many positive social outcomes, it cannot perform independently successful in terms of branding due to the governmental structure dominating it as well as managers unfamiliar with soccer branding rules. This means neglect of advocacy which underlies an institution including the soccer team.

In sports level, two perspectives can be analyzed; first, classic perspective which believes that sports has been doing for health; second, interdisciplinary perspective which considers the sports, particularly soccer, as a part of economy, society and culture responsible for the society [1]. According to the latter, soccer is an instrument serving the economic development. Therefore, sports followed by soccer is an industry which lead to value added to goods and services and supplies a product to the market as other industries [2, 3]. In sports industry, the customer shows loyalty to the organization as a brand and plays an important role in brand management strategies and more importantly organizational survival. Thus, all brands should put efforts to establish a consistently strong relationship between themselves and customer attitude which is able to direct and control fan behaviors [4-6]. This eventually leads to the identification phenomenon in sports, particularly soccer. Identification changes the spectator to a fan who identifies himself with his favorite team followed by stadiums crowded by fans, increased rate of ticket sales, interested media and sponsors and increased right to broadcast [1, 3, 7]. These outcomes seem considerably attractive for sport managers and marketers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Identification

According to Marketing Science Institute (MSI), the most important priority in 2012-2014 was identification of people as consumers. On the other words, why people buy and consumer goods and services? To answer, the consumers buy and consumer goods for the use or creation of value [8]. Nevertheless, buying loyalty is not enough [9]. Under abnormal economic conditions, this relationship may experience fluctuations which can be minimized by focusing identification.

Origin of social identification is a discussion interested by many social scientists. Some stemmed identification to personal needs [10, 11] and some other to socio-structural contexts [11]. Two points are important here; first, a better understanding can be achieved on concepts and principles of identity followed by identification by studying the theories relevant to identification; second, since 1950s when Foote introduced the term identification, organizational/social identity followed by identification convert the identity management to a governing paradigm on strategic management of organizations by factors such as competition, globalization, social responsibility and eliminated barriers which isolate the organization from external environment.

According to social identity theory, the key factor to establish a strong relationship between consumer and organization is identification concept in which consumers identify with the organization to meet one or more self-definitional needs by the organization. The main assumption of social identity theory is that self-image involves personal attributes and social identity of an individual [12]. In 1970s, Tajfel and Turner developed the social identity theory to understand the behaviors which people show under group conditions. Using this theory, people describe their personal identity and classify themselves in social groups [13, 14]. According to Tajfel [13] social identity is a part of self-image resulting from one's knowledge of his membership in a social group with values and emotions related membership in that group [13]. The social identity theory involves three domains: categorization, identification and comparison (CIC) [15].

Social identity theory and the concept derived from it, self-categorization [14] forms a good theoretical basis for social identification which, by definition, refers to oneness which members feel toward certain groups [16]. This theory and its basis was first used in an organizational context to analyze personal and group behaviors of formal members, because it was believed that people acquire a part of their identity from organizations and groups to which they are formal members [17]. This process undergoes through cognitive categorization by which people introduce themselves as a member of the organization focusing on common attributes and differences between the organization and other members [18]. Assumptions of social identity theory self-categorization can be generalized to situations where people are not formal members of the organization [10]. Here, collective identity [19] can be used instead of formal affiliation to show the relationship between consumer and the organization. Therefore, social identification results from linkage between two research directions: self-categorization theory (underlying cognitive identification) and social identity theory (underlying affective identification). People seem to identify with other groups in order to feel better for themselves (self-esteem) and to decrease reduce social uncertainty [20].

The team-fan identification is used in sports to examine the relationship between fans and teams by the social identity theory [21-23]. This theory explains how people use categories to evaluate the environment and their position in order to select activities which are consistent with their identity and to support organizations with which they have similar identities. Team identification refers to a mental relationship between team and fans [24], or the degree of emotional or even aggressive behavior of fans [25] it is an instrument to measure subjective well-being of fans and the degree of mental relationship between fans and teams or certain players [26]. Through identification, fans consider the success or failure of the team as their own success or failure and the team reflects inner characteristics of fans. According to definitions, there are three dimensions for brand (team)-consumer (fan) identification:

Cognitive dimension: Cognitive dimension refers to self-categorization in a social category [27] resulting in cognitive relationship between the individual and the group to which one belongs [17]. A cognitive relationship forms between consumer and brand when brand associations are used to form self-image or to communicate with others. Therefore, cognitive identification is an area in which consumers categorize and define themselves as a sample of a certain brand.

Evaluative dimension: Based on how one evaluates his social group and how one perceives evaluations of others on the group, social identities may be evaluated positive or negative. It is also believed that organizations contribute to positive or negative effects of members [28]. Therefore, people try to avoid brands with negative concepts resulting in negative self-evaluations. Thus, evaluative identification involves the extent to which consumers perceive value of the relationship with brand or others.

Affective dimension: Affective dimension refers to affective attachment to the group and evaluations related to the group [13]. Therefore, affections including concerns about brand separation and happiness at brand attachment [29] are expressed when there is a strong relationship between self and brand. It is believed that affective relationship emerges when brands enter in life and identity of consumers. Therefore, affective identification refers to one's emotions for the brand and others' evaluations on the brand.

Regarding significance of professional sports in modern societies, they often take advantage of team-fan identification. The stronger identification, the more tendency fans show to spend time and invest on supporting their favorite team. Findings show that team identification is followed by affective [23, 30] and behavioral [31] responds of fans. Studies also show that team identification positively influences on purchase of team products by fans [31]. In team identification, this question needs to be answered that why people participate or spectacle sports events. To answer, Wann [11] introduces three psychological, environmental and team-related factors:

Psychological factors: Wann [11] defines psychological factors as need to affiliation, distinctiveness and prestige which contribute to self-image of the fans by facilitating identification.

Environmental factors: According to Wann [11] environmental factors which help team identification process are related to socialization process. Environmental factors include sports factors [32] friends and peers [33] parents and family [22, 32, 33]. By helping to establishment of fan's personal relationship, these factors play an important role in socialization process and lead one become a fan by learning and initializing attitudes, values, knowledge and behaviors related to advocacy.

Team-related factors: Wann [11] defines team-related factors as team performance, players' attitudes and organizational characteristics. Authors suggest different team-related factors as constituents of team-fan identification, including previous successes, star players, geographical reasons, friends and peers become a fan, parents and family become a fan, logo, stadium and fame [34] successful season, managerial decisions, fame and tradition [24] success, style, color and players [35] symbolic relations (with players, color, logo or name of the team), socio-cultural relations, team victories, star players, sociological factors including social underdogs [36] Vicarious Achievement through relationships with team, players or coaches [37] successes, performance, tradition and stadium [6] identity attractiveness [10, 30, 38] self-definitional needs [10, 17, 18, 30].

According to literature, it seems authors have been more focused on cognitive, affective and evaluative identifications, while interests in sports, particularly soccer and team can be another considerable dimension of identification, which is discussed here. Therefore, the present study

develops a brand identification model for Iran Pro League (IPL), a discussion which seems attractive because professional soccer is a brand new phenomenon in Iran.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This descriptive analysis collected data through two qualitative and quantitative phases. The former involved three stages: 1) evaluation of team identification texts and models (using content analysis); 2) feedback of 300 soccer fans (by free thoughts); 3) integration of feedbacks and available models, utilization of expert views for conceptualization, summarization and classification of thoughts and extraction of brand identification thoughts. The quantitative phase involves development of the questionnaire, collection and analysis of data and finally extraction of fan-team identification elements according to fans. Different questionnaires [5, 6, 17, 22, 38-41]. Were used in this phase. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equations were used to develop team-fan identification model for IPL during 2012-2013 season.

Participants included two groups: 1) 10 elites and experts to develop indicators of identification dimensions and or to discover other effective variables on team identification as well as validity of the materials; 2) IPL spectators present in the stadium who were reduced to fans of Esteghlal Tehran, Perspolis Tehran, Sepahan Esfahan, Tractor Sazi Tabriz, Foolad Khozestan and Malavan Anzali because of work extension and based on history, championship, number of fans and presence in IPL. The sample size was determined by relevant statistical relationships; then, questionnaires were distributed among fans by sample random sampling with an equal ratio (300 in the first phase and 720 in the second phase). Considering regression rate (0.4), nearly 2000 questionnaires were distributed during games of the above-mentioned teams.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

At the beginning of the study, author had to answer that what are dimensions of team-fan identification in an Iranian professional soccer team. To answer this, a large amount of concepts was collected by reviewing literature and different sport identification models, feedbacks of soccer fans by free thoughts and using expert opinions. Then, similarities, repetitions, case studies and irrelevant answers were eliminated by help of experts and independently. Finally, the initial questionnaire was developed by the indicators and distributed among initial samples (300). The items with low factorial load were removed by factor analysis. Thus, the final indicators of brand identification thoughts were extracted for the questionnaire, as shown in Table 1.

Table-1. Refinement Stages of Team-Fan Identification Indicators

Sub-Criteria	The First Stage (Collecting Items from Various Sources)	The Second stage (Refining Items based on Semantic Similarities)	The Third Stage (Refining based on Factor Analysis)
Soccer Iden.	5	4	3
Team Iden.	16	12	4
Cognitive Iden.	12	7	4
Affective Iden.	7	5	3
Evaluative Iden.	7	3	--

Note: Iden = Identification

As Table 1 shows, although there is evaluative identification in literature of team-fan identification as supported by soccer exports, it is not considered as dimensions of team-fan identification by Iranian soccer fans.

In the second phase, the question was raised that whether soccer fans support indicators of team-fan identification. The indicators extracted in the third stage of the second phase were used in the final questionnaire. Figure 1 shows results from confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model to evaluate validity and reliability of the questionnaire using AMOS software.

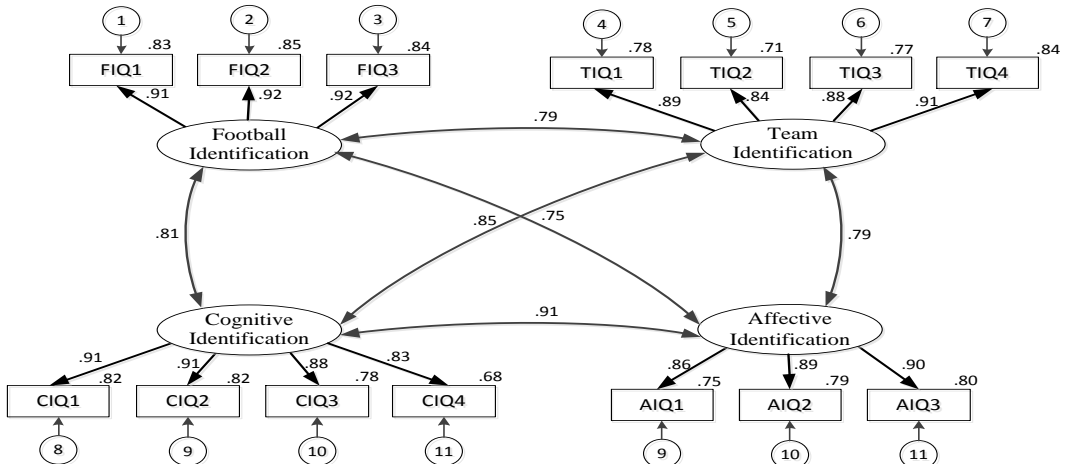


Figure-1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Measures and Correlation between Secondary Categories

Based on outputs (Figure 1 and Table 2), test indicators related to reliability and KMO test were >0.7 and average variance extracted was also >0.5; therefore, indicators are in a good level [42]. This means good validity and reliability of material and goodness of confirmatory factor analysis for data. The calculated factorial weights also show that the variables used in questionnaire well indicate the related elements. To evaluate validity, content and construct validity were used (using expert opinions, confirmatory factor analysis, and using different resources). To calculate reliability of measures, Cronbach’s α and Intra-Class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) were used in 95% confidence interval. According to calculations, reliability was 0.92 indicating a good reliability. In addition, the calculated factor loadings (Maximum Likelihood) indicate a good validity.

Table-2. Results for Validity and Reliability

Primary Category (Team-Fan Identification)	Secondary Category	Measure	Factor Loadings		C.R.		Reliability of ICC		KMO	Bartlett test	AVE
			Measure	Secondary Category	Measure	Secondary Category	Measure	Secondary Category			
Cognitive Identification		CI2	0.91	0.93	31		0.93		0.87	0.001	0.83
		CI3	0.91		31						
		CI4	0.88		29						
		CI6	0.83								
Affective Identification		AI3	0.86	0.87	33	36	0.91	0.92	0.75	0.001	0.85
		AI4	0.89		35						
		AI5	0.90								
		TI4	0.89								
Team Identification		TI5	0.84	0.86	31	35	0.93		0.86	0.001	0.83
		TI9	0.88		33						
		TI10	0.91		36						
		FI1	0.91								
Soccer Identification		FI2	0.92	0.82	40.8	31	0.94		0.77	0.001	0.89
		FI4	0.92		40.1						

The first right column is the primary category or team-fan identification. The second column involves dimensions of identification including affective, cognitive team and soccer identifications. Obviously, evaluative identification is not confirmed; instead, Iranian fans are highly affiliated to team and soccer. The third column contains final items of the questionnaire. Obviously, order of the items is not considered in the third column, because there were many items in the initial test and then they were refined in the first stage. Therefore, number of items remained unchanged, so that the confirmed items are clear. For example, 16 items were collected for cognitive identification; the items 2, 3, 4 and 6 were confirmed from threesome refinements; these four items were used in the final questionnaire. The fourth column contains weights of measures (items) and secondary categories which were all in a good level. The fifth column represents critical ratio (C.R.); the absolute value of C.R. >1.96 indicates significant weights. The sixth column shows secondary and primary categories using ICC in 95% confidence interval. Obviously, all coefficients are in a good to high level [42]. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Bartlett test and extracted mean variance were used to evaluate model goodness. In this case, values >0.7 show good factor analysis for data; in Bartlett test, p-value <0.05 shows significance. The overestimated AVE indicator >0.5 indicates that measures well explain variance of their constructs. Significant weights also indicate construct validity of categories [42]. Using Figure 1 and Table 3, construct validity can be evaluated by correlation in the form of convergent and divergent validity between dimensions of team-fan identification.

Table-3. Pearson Correlation and AVE for Secondary Categories of Team-Fan Identification

Identification Dimensions	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Correlation	R ²	AVE	P.Value
Cognitive ↔ Affective Iden.	.362	.023	15.42	.91	.83	.87	0.001
Cognitive ↔ Team Iden.	.343	.023	14.94	.85	.73	.86	0.001
Cognitive ↔ Soccer Iden.	.335	.023	14.75	.81	.66	.89	0.001
Affective ↔ Soccer Iden.	.342	.024	14.48	.75	.56	.85	0.001
Team ↔ Soccer Iden	.364	.024	14.96	.79	.62	.89	0.001
Team ↔ Affective Iden	.354	.024	14.84	.79	.63	.86	0.001

Note: Iden = Identification

As noted above, one of the best indicators to show validity is average variance extracted (AVE) and its comparison with R². According to tables 2 and 3, it should be noted that: 1) all correlation coefficients between sub-criteria of team-fan identification were significant in 0.01; 2) all explained variances per sub-criterion were >0.5 which means goodness of convergent validity between all sub-criteria; 3) all explained variances per sub-criterion were >estimated R² which means goodness of divergent validity between all sub-criteria of team-fan identification. Figure 2 shows outputs of confirmatory factor analysis to determine dimensions of team-fan identification. Obviously, weights of team-fan identification dimensions are Cognitive identification (0.93), Affective identification (0.87), Team identification (0.86) and Soccer identification (0.82).

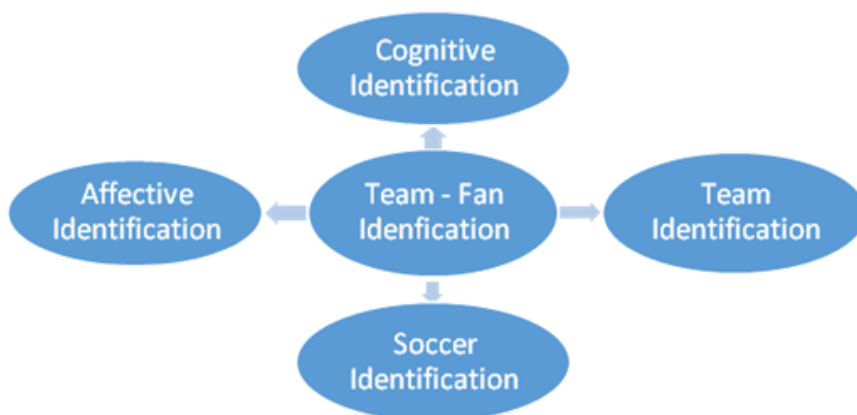


Figure-2. Team-Fan Identification Model

According to outputs, all indicators indicate model fitness [42]:

Table-4. Model Fitness Indicators

Category	χ^2	χ^2/df	P	GFI	AGFI	SRMR	RMSEA (90% CI)	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI	RFI
Identification	5.06	2.53	.001	.98	.95	.01	.06 (.04 ; .08)	.99	.98	.99	.99	.98

χ^2/df , normed chi-square; GFI: Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI: Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; NFI: Normed Fit Index; RFI: Relative Fit Index; IFI: Incremental Fit Index; NNFI: Non-Normed Fit Index; CFI, comparative Fit Index

Obviously, Chi-square to its degree of freedom is <4 which supports model fitness. Fitness indicators, GFI, AGFI, NFI, NNFI, RFI, IFI and CFI were >0.9 and RMSEA and SRMR were <0.08 and 0.10, respectively, which supports validity of the models. As a result, this model is well fitted to support structure of categories. Therefore, regression equation of team-fan identification is as follows: team-fan identification is a function of (0.93 cognitive identification + 0.87 affective identification + 0.86 team identification + 0.82 soccer identification).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Many studies have been conducted about effective factors on fans; all of these studies have confirmed that team success is an important predictor for attitudes toward team, even though the team does not achieve a significant victory for a relatively long time. This is actually important to maintain the relationship between team and fans. Team identification is a phenomenon helping the team to maintain the relationship between the team and fans. In identification, fan is considered not spectator; this is the fan who is interested in his favorite sports, team or player by a constantly high level of identification.

Some authors consider the identification as a one-dimensional construct [39] and some social psychologists consider it as a multidimensional concept [13] Although there are some disagreements on this, there is a consensus that identification indicates the mental relationship between fans and sports events. More importantly, identification is followed by some outcomes; this discussion has been considerably concerned by sport managers and marketers. For example, a

direct positive relationship has been confirmed between identification and consuming behavior of fans. Specially, it is believed that there is a significant positive relationship between team identification and mental health of fans [23, 26].

Therefore, the present study developed dimensions of identification from IPL fans' views. To do so, three stages were undertaken, collecting items from various resources, refining items, refining based on factor analysis, as summarized in Table 1. As Table 1 shows, although there is an evaluative identified in literature of team-fan identification as supported by soccer exports, it is not considered as dimensions of team-fan identification by Iranian soccer fans. Results of exploratory factor analysis (Table 2) showed that confirmatory factor analysis is a good technique to continue the work. Therefore, dimensions of team-fan identification were determined by confirmatory factor analysis outputs of which are shown in Figure 2. Obviously, evaluative identification is not known for IPL fans; thus, IPL fans do not have a good evaluation of their favorite team. A reason can be performance and behavior of teams to their fans. Teams should be aware that they contribute to positive or negative feelings of fans [28]. Therefore, an interaction management system (between team and fans) is needed to maintain the relationship with fans and take advantage of this relationship. As literature showed, the effective factors on team identification were summarized in team-fan attachment as mental, environmental and team-related factors [11]. These factors are called as brand associations or brand identity [5, 7, 8, 18]. It is noteworthy, studies have concluded that sport brand significantly influences on maintain previous fans and attracting new fans and eventually economic success. Obviously, those teams will survive that recognize their identifying elements.

In conclusion, brand coherence results from recognition of identifying elements. Brand coherence refers to commitment to provide a product (game) with unique features. Organizational coherence is of great importance in marketing services, particularly sport marketing. Coherence starts when the spectator feels team identity is distinctive and high prestige or similar to his inner characteristics [10]. Considering the results, Iranian soccer is expected to recede short-term approach to soccer brand management and consider positive thoughts of fans in management followed by brand identification; otherwise, they will experience identity crisis. Naturally, these teams will lose their positions and fans; more importantly, their entity will be threatened.

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Appendix

List of variables and their items based on Likert's spectrum from totally agree (5) to totally disagree (1)

Soccer identification

- I consider myself as a soccer fan.
- My friends consider me as a soccer fan.
- Soccer is more enjoyable than any other entertainment.

Team identification

- My friends and family consider me as fan to my favorite team.
- I complain when people criticize my favorite team.
- Nothing can change my beliefs on my favorite team.
- Even if my close friends are fans of other teams, I will remain loyal to my favorite team.

Cognitive identification

- When my favorite team is criticized, I feel like I am criticized.
- I feel there are many similarities between me and fans of my favorite team.
- I like other fans of my favorite team.
- I feel I am very similar to my favorite team.

Affective identification

- If I have to break up with my favorite team, I will feel discomfort and confusion.
- When my favorite team is admired, I feel like I am admired.
- When my favorite team loses, I feel like I lose.

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