

# Identifying Factors Affecting Team Brand Experience and Sponsor Brand Experience in the Iranian Football League

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This research aimed to identify the factors affecting the team brand experience and sponsor brand experience in the Iran Football League.

**Method:** In terms of exploratory-applied purpose, the present research is part of descriptive-survey research in terms of implementation method; In terms of the place of data collection, it was a field library and in terms of the method of qualitative research, it was the Glazerian method. The research population comprised 18 academic and executive experts of the Premier Football League of Iran. The sampling method was targeted and available.

**Results:** Based on the results of the qualitative data analysis from the interview, the experience of the team brand in the Iran Football League in the form of 4 dimensions, including the role of the club (4 concepts), the image of the team brand (2 concepts), The role of sports officials (2 concepts) and maintaining the team brand (2 concepts) is also the experience of the sponsor brand in Iran Football League has 4 dimensions, introduction of the sponsor brand (2 concepts), organization of the sponsor brand (3 concepts), promotion of the sponsor brand (5 concepts) and sponsoring brand institutionalization (2 concepts).

**Conclusion:** It is recommended that clubs improve the values they provide to their fans by offering seasonal discounts, enhancing communication with players, increasing media relations, and other similar measures that demonstrate their values.

**Keywords:** Team Brand Experience, Sponsor Brand Experience, Iranian Premier League, Competitive Advantage.

## Introduction

Today, many organizations have come to

believe that one of their most valuable assets is the brand of their products and services because creating a strong brand is one of the key factors for achieving competitive advantage, long-term relevance, and long-term survival in the market. (Zare Abandansari & Azizian Kohan, 2023), now most of the sports clubs around the world with the benefit of powerful sponsors and under their cooperation and support have been able to experience an unprecedented economic boom in addition to strengthening and promoting the sports culture and besides covering their expenses, providing suitable advertising opportunities for financial sponsors, due to the increasing expansion of the sports industry and its profitability for many countries in the world, the importance of branding and marketing in the sports industry has increased greatly, and the biggest sports teams in the world are using their brand to can achieve profitability and financial growth because the brand development strategy to enter new sectors and markets is a common strategy of many big teams in the world (Su et al, 2022).

The brand has many components and one of these components is the team itself. Understanding the role of fans' behavior with the team on the sponsor's reaction is an important issue in strengthening the relationship between the team and the sponsor over time. Cornwell (2008) stated that different stimuli can have many effects on the movements of the fans. They stated that the fans are greatly influenced by these provocations and can give effective responses. These stimuli can even be simple brand logos that can communicate a lot and can be used in sponsor-related marketing situations. (Diehl & Terlutter, 2022) In addition, the emotions that fans have when going to matches; affect their attitude toward the financial sponsor. For example, (2017) Abdolmaleki et al stated that the number of games that spectators attend increases their ability to get to know the sponsor better; While (2013) Bicasa et al reported that sponsor awareness can have a

positive effect on fan loyalty. Also, The results of the research of Phiri and Chakauya (2023) shows that a one-day annual sports event sponsorship effectively influences the brand image and brand preference.

When the fans feel that the support is valuable for them; They will have a positive attitude and behavior toward sponsors, for example, if a fan believes that sponsorship will reduce the team's operating costs and lead to lower ticket prices; This belief leads to having the right attitude and behavior towards his sponsor (Noorizadeh et al, 2017), also the attitude towards sponsors was the strongest predictor of fans' willingness to buy from sponsors, the reason is that fans in In this case, it is more likely that they will have a more favorable view of the sponsor and will have a positive attitude towards them, and there will be even a better match. It is necessary, because when these attitudes and behaviors are formed; they can have a great effect on the fans' behavior (Bozorgzadeh et al, 2022).

Today, a lot of money is spent on investing in sports teams and leagues; and sports organizations must prove to sponsors that their investment is profitable. One of the ways to do this is for sports organizations to show that fans are very loyal and want to support the sponsor and buy their products. Because sponsors invest in sports with the hope that through team-sponsor connections, the teams' fan interest will be transferred to their brand (Blank et al, 2018). Although sponsorship is a growing phenomenon and companies are spending huge amounts of money on it, there is still no guarantee of success, this can be due to, for example, the perceived incompatibility between sponsorship and the event, and confusion and disorganization. Be financial support, in these cases the question arises as to how the success of financial support should be increased when forced to face these kinds of challenges (Breuer et al, 2021). The results of the research of Pirjamadi et al. (2022) on the need for managers to pay attention to indicators such as

sports brand history, emotional, functional, social values, past experiences, brand attachment, paying attention to the emotions of sports customers in order to achieve new marketing and customer experience in The sports industry emphasizes. In this research, we state what factors influence the creation of a brand experience during a sponsored event, as well as a direct brand experience, because it increases its intrinsic benefits by intensifying the direct connection of customers with the sponsored brand. Therefore, the current research states that the creation of brand experience in a sponsored event includes what factors and how they can have a positive effect on customer reactions, including mental awareness, rereading, and brand attitude by intensifying real-time communication with the brand. be Knowing that the loyalty of the fans is not enough; Marketers need to know what aspects of the fan experience can influence individual loyalty and sponsor support. Previous studies have focused separately on the records and pasts of fans' loyalties, or the relationship between fans and teams in guarantee reactions, but no comprehensive work has been done to investigate the factors affecting this area. Therefore, the present study aims to identify the factors affecting the team brand experience and the sponsor brand experience in the Iranian Football League. Finally, the main research question is as follows:

What are the factors affecting the team brand experience and the sponsor brand experience in Iran Football League?

### **Materials and Methods**

According to the nature of the subject and research objectives, the current research is qualitative and based on the theory derived from the data using the Glaser method. The research population of the research includes 18 experts who are somehow directly related to the challenges and approaches of branding in sports, which include; University faculty

members in the sports management and Marketing department, sports director (Ministry of Sports, Sports and Youth), officials of Premier League football matches, members of the board of directors of Premier League football clubs, CEOs and coaches of Premier League clubs. They were. The sampling method was purposeful and judgmental. In the selection of statistical samples, people who were directly related to the subject of the research were used. In a way, the working and scientific experience of the participants, their complete satisfaction with participating in the interview process, and their ability to conduct the interview and express the content, were the conditions for entering and selecting the samples. Also, the criteria for the participant's withdrawal from the current research were not having enough desire and motivation to continue collaborating with researchers and the lack of appropriate information in the subject area of the current research.

To comply with the ethical principles and rules in the current research; in the first stage, the goals and the necessity of conducting the research were explained to the interviewees before the beginning of the interviews. In the following, all the participants in the current research participated in it with their consent and initial familiarity with the subject of the study. Also, before the beginning of all the interviews, all participants permitted the interviewers to record all steps of conducting the interview completely by mobile phone. If permission was not given for recording the voices, the entire interview was written on paper with a pen. For this purpose, from all 18 interviews conducted with the research participants, 15 interviews were fully recorded with the permission of the interviewees, and 3 interviews were written on paper with their permission.

Finally, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner until saturation (Interview No. 16). After the end of each interview, the interviews were fully typed and

open, central, and selective coding was done by MAXQDA-2020 software. According to the database theory, while determining the central phenomenon, the extracted codes and articles were placed in causal conditions and the relationship between these factors was determined by selective coding. Four criteria (acceptability, transferability, verifiability, and reliability) are for qualitative research and its criteria are linked with four conventional criteria in quantitative research (internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity), these four criteria in the present study were

reviewed and approved. For this purpose, to validate the existing sources, the interview text and the extracted codes were sent to some participants in the research and their opinions were used. To be transferable, through documentation for other researchers, demographic reports, sample experience, and research environment reports were used. For reliability, the percentage of agreement between two coders was used and the percentage of agreement was reported as 83% according to the table below.

**Table 1.** The results of the inter-coder reliability

Interview number	Total number of codes	The number of agreements	The number of disagreements	Reliability percentage
3	38	16	7	84.21%
6	34	14	6	82.35%
12	36	15	8	83.33%
Total	108	45	21	83.33%

Finally, to validate the confirmability of the research, the opinions of several professors in the sports management group who were outside of the interviews were used and their opinions were applied. In this section, the information

related to the research participants is presented in Table. 2. It should be noted that in the tables the letter “P” stands for the first letter of the English word “Person” which represents the people who participated in the research.

**Table 2.** Information on participants of the research

Source	Type of Activity	Age	Sex	Specialty/working domain
P1	University professor	55	Man	Sport Management
P2		62	Man	
P3		53	Female	
P4		42	Man	
P5		48	Female	
P6	University professor	49	Man	Marketing
P7		35	Man	
P8		38	Man	
P9	Sports Manager (Ministry of Sports and Youth)	40	Man	Sport Management
P10		35	Man	Sport Management
P11	Officials of the football premier league	40	Man	Sport Management

P12		54	Man	Sport physi ol ogy
P13		45	Man	Physical Education
P14	Board of the Premier League Club	39	Man	Sport Managment
P15	sports Manager of the Premier League	37	Fenal e	MBA
P16	club	30	Fenal e	Sport Managment
P17	Coach	37	Man	Sport physi ol ogy
P18		50	Man	Account i ng

**Results**

Based on the results of the coding process; 10 core codes related to the factors affecting the team brand experience and 12 core codes

related to the factors affecting the sponsor's brand experience were identified. Open, axial, and selective codes have been shown in Table.3:

**Table 3.** Open, axial, and selective codes of the Factors affecting team brand experience and sponsor brand experience in Iran Football League

central category	Selective code	Axial code	open code	source
Factors affecting team brand experience and sponsor brand experience in Iran Football League	The Role of the Club	Club performance	Having specialized academies	P2
			Providing fan cards	P12
			The history and brilliant history of the club	P17
			The number of championships and excellence in domestic and foreign leagues	P5
			Having a dedicated stadium	P1
			Professional club management	P7
		Team performance	Attracting star players and keeping them	P16
			The success and superiority of the team in annual competitions	P15
			Playing beautiful games	P11
			Beautiful design of team clothes and famous brand	P5
			Continuous participation in international competitions	P8
		Player performance	Having a famous coach with a successful track record	P17
			Staying away from sidelines and disciplinary issues	P18
			Popularity and national reputation of team players	P2
			Emergence of citizenship behaviors and compliance with society's values	P10
			Having a sense of social responsibility and benevolent intentions in society	P5
			Adhering to contractual promises with the club	P15
			Individual charms and charismatic features of team players	P4
The prejudice of the players towards the team	P2			
			Familiarization of the manager with the strengths and weaknesses of the club	P6

Visualization of the team brand	Development of positive image of the club	Follow-up and emphasis of the club management to develop the team brand	P7
		Manager's awareness of sports branding	P8
		Awareness and understanding of the managers and officials of the club about the interests, demands and values of the fans	P1
		Holding regular meetings with the board of directors and experts in dealing with branding matters	P15
		Improving the image of the club through charitable activities	P12
	Club brand association	Improving the public image of the club by developing men's and women's fan associations	P7
		Creating credibility for the club by holding cultural and sports events	P8
		Build credibility and respect for the club by creating programs to honor veterans and successful managers and employees	P18
		Accreditation through social and environmental support	P2
		Creating a nostalgic feeling and renewing memories for fans	P10
	Better organization of the league	Creating an atmosphere of interaction and friendship between the fans and the club	P11
		Instilling a sense of pride in fans by showing their value to the club	P4
		Creating satisfaction in fans according to their needs	P6
		Holding a league with high-level club teams	P1
		Holding the league as best as possible with experienced referees and up-to-date equipment	P10
The role of sports officials	Quality of service delivery	Regularly holding competitions and paying attention to the time and day of competitions	P12
		Providing side programs during football matches	P7
		Development of charity meetings	P14
		The quality of the stadium where the matches are held	P6
		The quality of holding sports competitions (organizations)	P2
	Loyalty fans to the club	Providing welfare and health services at the stadium level	P8
		Easy access to the venue	P4
		Providing health services and facilities in the platforms	P11
		Providing welfare services and restaurants	P13
		Modern and up-to-date infrastructure	P15
Maintain the team brand	Loyalty fans to the club	Public transport fleet access to the stadium	P3
		Fan's love and fanaticism for the team	P14
		The fans' positive attitude towards the club's performance	P3



Introducing the sponsor brand	Fan expectations	Fan awareness and clarification of the club's activities	P9
		Fans welcome managers, coaches and selected players	P8
		Attendance and support of fans from the stadium	P4
		sense of belonging	P11
		respect	P17
		self-flourishing	P9
		Emotions and feelings	P15
	Cultivation of the brand support	Attention and coexistence	P9
		security	P7
		Identifying the values and preferences of the sponsoring brand	P12
		Identification of native and local prejudices	P16
		Cultural management by leaders and fans	P11
		Identifying cultural and family beliefs about sports and supporting it	P12
		The effort of the club and the sponsor to create a culture of support	P14
Conceptualization of sponsor brand	Holding multilateral tournaments by the sponsoring brand	P10	
	Providing tourist tours focusing on stadium tourism	P1	
	Holding a product or service exhibition with the presence of players and club officials	P5	
	Providing charitable activities with the presence of veterans and club members and players	P18	
	Holding competitions and raffles for fans	P14	
Organization of the sponsor brand	Development of support programs	Making decisions about programs with the presence of the majority and representatives of fan associations	P16
		Benefiting from examples and marketing patterns in developing programs	P13
		Aligning the priority of the programs with the needs of the fans	P14
		Developing short-term strategies to achieve specific goals	P9
		Provide specific perspectives in time frames	P6
		Developing marketing and branding policies	P12
	Matching the sponsor and the target community	The number of audiences engaged with the brand in broadcasting sports competitions	P4
		The number of spectators in sports stadiums	P7
		Age and gender group faced with brand image	P11
		The number of visits to posts and advertisements in social networks	P12
		Time to advertise on social media	P3
		The level of need of the target community for the sponsor's product or service	P9

Promoting the sponsor brand	Development of sponsoring relationships	Communication and cooperation with radio and television	P17	
		Communication and cooperation with the club	P8	
		Communication with the stakeholders of the sponsoring brand	P12	
		Communication and cooperation with other sports teams of the club	P15	
		Communication with club academies	P2	
		Supporter and fan direct communication portals	P10	
		The role of mass media	The influence of the media in order to present the values of the club	P5
	Cultivating the support of sports clubs and the team brand		P2	
	Full coverage of Premier League matches and other leagues and competitions		P16	
	Coverage of age group football matches		P4	
	Promotion and introduction of the team brand in social media		P5	
	Inviting sports marketing experts in television programs and benefiting from their points of view		P9	
	Advertising activities and team brand development in social networks		P16	
	Introducing team brands and their examples in specialized sports networks		P4	
	Specialized marketing		Signing a contract with a sports marketer and encouraging ideas	P6
			Cultivation of sports marketing specialists according to the fan's taste	P3
		Benefiting from the presence of advertising agencies	P7	
		Creation of specialized marketing committee	P10	
		Creating study opportunities and familiarization with foreign successful models for marketers	P16	
	Development of revenue generation and market share	Active participation in distribution channels	P1	
		Activities in the stock market and stock sales	P14	
		Greater share in GDP	P6	
		Controlling expenses and getting to know ways to earn more money	P12	
		Controlling competitors and dealing with their possible developments	P7	
		Presence in the supplier market	P14	
		Active presence in sports supplement markets such as; Production of sports equipment	P16	
	Advertising of the sponsoring brand	Seasonal advertising around the football field	P13	
		Provide more advertising on billboards around the stadium	P14	
		Verification of team players	P9	
Making advertisements focusing on serving and asking sponsors		P6		



Institutionalization of the sponsor brand	of	Exclusive advertisement on the team shirt	P12
		Online store for products and services	P4
		Provide customer club for service development	P7
	Efficiency and information technology	Launching a competitive virtual league to increase brand communication	P11
		Benefiting from the channels and social networks of the club in order to develop the name of the sponsor	P12
	and	Attention to the quality dimension in product or service production	P3
		Innovation in service and creativity in supply	P9
	satisfaction	customer relation management	P15
		The spread of service or product supply agencies throughout the country	P8
		Benefit from active and concerned public relations	P17
	Creating loyalty	Creating a positive image of the sponsoring brand	P15
		Providing marketing incentives and gifts in stadiums	P2
	Creating brand value	Brand assurance	P10
		Honesty in action	P5
		Evaluation of brand activities	P2
		Reasonable pricing	P16
		Customization in service delivery	P4
		Match the product or service with the target community	P18
Creating pleasant experiences		P9	

Based on the results of open, axial and selective coding, 10 central codes related to the causal factors of the team brand experience and 12 central codes related to the causal factors of the sponsor brand experience were identified in the Iranian football premier league.

**Discussion**

This research aimed to identify the factors affecting the team brand experience and sponsor brand experience in the Iran Football League. Based on the results of the qualitative data analysis from the interview, the causal relationship of the team brand experience in the Iran Football League in the form of 4 dimensions, including the role of the club (4 concepts), the image of the team brand (2 concepts), the role of sports officials (2 concepts) and brand preservation The team is (2 concepts) and the causal relationship of the

sponsor brand experience in the Iran Football League has 4 dimensions, introducing the sponsor brand (2 concepts), organizing the sponsor brand (3 concepts), promoting the sponsor brand (5 concepts) and institutionalizing the sponsor brand ( 2 concepts).

The factors affecting the team brand experience in the Iran Football League are the factors that affect the occurrence of the central phenomenon, the research results are in line with the findings of Bozorgzadeh et al (2022), Javani & Aghajani (2022), Diehl & Terlutter (2022), Richelieu ( 2018), Ghasemi & Rasekh (2018) and Lin (2015); Diehl & Terlutter (2022) acknowledged in research; The landscape of brand communication is rapidly changing due to changing market, communication and social and demographic parameters. The goal of many companies is to

create a world of comprehensive and strong brands to establish the brand as an important element in the lives of consumers. From the point of view of companies, the world of successful brands promises a clear, distinct, and long-term brand position and an increase in customer loyalty. However, it is important to note that consumers expect the brand world to make significant and lasting contributions to consumer feelings, memories, and experiences, Bozorgzadeh et al (2022) also acknowledged in research; The main categories include social factors, brand identity, brand attitude including (brand credibility, brand image), celebrities, brand reputation including (integration with sports, brand nature), ethical and behavioral characteristics including (consumer behavior, biological characteristics, personality characteristics), as effective factors on narcissism and brand excellence, also Javani & Aghajani (2022) acknowledged in a research according to the results; The findings of the research show that the brand experience with all its components has a positive and significant effect on the choice of sports goods brand. In addition, Richelieu (2018) showed in research that sports as a potential strategic lever for sports organizations and stakeholders in the sports industry to create a value-added brand experience for fans, Ghasemi & Rasekh (2018) also showed research based on the findings of the research, the sense of sight, sense of smell and sense of hearing influence They had a significant and positive effect on the trust of sports store fans; It is obvious that by creating a sensory experience for fans in sports stores and creating an emotional relationship, the level of trust of fans improves. Lin (2015) also in research according to the results shows that innovative brand experience has a positive effect on equity value and brand satisfaction, on the other hand, many studies examine the role of innovation as a source of competitive advantage, brand innovation experience is very important because it can provide unique functional and emotional elements to create a

strong relationship between brand and fans. Fan experience management is part of fan relationship management and the natural range of communication about a brand or a club. Is created to form the product, the fan experience is vital and necessary fan experience management is considered a new way to measure fan satisfaction, which provides a framework for creating strong supportive relationships to help managers perform in organizations (Ebrahimi & Bagheri, 2018). Fan experience management equips organizations with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop the fan experience across all people, processes, and products that consistently add value to the fan in any differentiated, brand-related way. (Yu et al, 2021), implementing a fan experience management program is a creative and analytical process that focuses on strategy and performance. This process challenges organizations to fully focus on the fan to differentiate the organization, build strong relationships with fans, and ultimately achieve a truly satisfying fan experience. (Mazraeh et al, 2021), from marketing communications to sales processes and offering and using that product or service, fan experience management means managing interactions with fans to create brand excellence and long-term profitability. The fan experience helps the supporters and the club to see the fans and understand the perceptions, feelings, and relationships that determine their quality, instead of looking only at how much the fan is valuable to the organization (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019), the fan experience needs to examine the value of the company for the fan (Asl Roosta et al, 2022).

The factors affecting the experience of the sponsor brand in the Iran Football League are the factors that affect the occurrence of the central phenomenon, the results of the research are in line with the findings; Bozorgzadeh et al (2022), Mohammadi et al, (2023), Diehl & Terlutter (2022), Husain et al, (2022); Diehl & Terlutter (2022) acknowledged in a research;

From the point of view of companies, the world of successful brands promises a clear, distinct and long-term brand position and an increase in customer loyalty. However, it is important to note that consumers expect the brand world to make significant and lasting contributions to consumer emotions. Also, Bozorgzadeh et al (2022) acknowledged in research; The main categories include (brand credibility, brand image), celebrities, sponsors, advertising (commercial advertising, word of mouth), brand reputation (integration with sports, brand nature), differentiating the brand from other competitors and the media factor as factors. It is effective on narcissism and brand excellence, in addition, Mohammadi et al, (2023) in a research, the results showed that the fit of the brand and advertising and the role of the media are determining factors that result in attracting customers. Husain et al, (2022) also stated in a research; Brand experience and brand resonance are both essential to consumption, with the additional moderating role of generation and gender. Additionally, consumer involvement is found to mediate the relationship. Fan-based brand equity refers to the differentiating effect that brand knowledge (including brand awareness and brand image) has on consumer response to that brand's marketing. This knowledge is useful in helping sports team managers understand how to influence fans and engage them intellectually in brands. For sports teams, much of this value comes from experiences tied to specific activities, including attending games and supporting the team in question. (Wang et al, 2017), the specific value of a sports team brand is usually related to a team, sports organizations and factors related to it, including acquiring assets and improving fan relations both in the club and in the field of professional sports, in addition to This, scholars have investigated the antecedents of sports team brand equity; In particular, the types of relationships based on social identity have attracted more attention. According to this idea, factors such as: history,

team experience, and location have a positive effect on social identity leading to team brand equity. Experience and place have a positive effect on the connection and special value of the sports team brand in the field of professional team sports.

### Conclusion

Fan experience management enables the retention of valuable and long-standing fans, fan experience provides a forward-looking view of what fans expect and directly captures the voice of the fan, thus enabling all parts of the organization to be informed when making decisions. Fan experience management provides an approach that enables the creation and maintenance of fan relationships, a key component of fan experience that can be applied to all parts of the organization. Although some people have made efforts to improve customer experience, many have only attempted to measure customer satisfaction, resulting in a wealth of data. To better understand how to achieve satisfaction, sponsors of football league competitions should break it down into the different components of the experience, based on the results of this research. Simply relying on the options provided by sponsors will not be enough; customer experiences provide a complete and global reality of their expectations, both favorable and unfavorable. According to the research results, it is recommended that:

- Various parties should take steps to improve the team brand experience of football clubs. This can be achieved by improving the quality of the stadium where matches are held, providing welfare and health services at the stadium, and holding sports matches whenever possible.
- League and football federation officials should also work to understand their fans better and communicate with them by creating a communication portal and conducting surveys.
- To improve the experience of the sponsoring

brand, decisions regarding support programs should be made with the presence of officials, club board members, and representatives of fan associations.

- Finally, it is recommended that clubs should improve the values they provide to their fans by offering seasonal discounts, enhancing communication with players, increasing media relations, and other similar measures that demonstrate their values.

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