Relationship Between Brand Association and Brand Loyalty in the Fans of Private Clubs in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate relationship between brand association and brand loyalty in the fans of private clubs in Iran. This research was conducted using surveying–descriptive method and it was an applied research. Its Statistical society consisted of the fans of private Clubs. sample size Estimated by statistical formula was 448. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, it became 435. Measuring instrument of team brand association questionnaire had been developed by Gladden and Funk (2001). Its Validity and reliability were tested (cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0/89 This questionnaire included 5 parts with 58 questions.Data was analyzed using software SPSS, version 19.Results were obtained using statistical tests such as kolmogrovsmirnov and pearson correlation. The findings of this research showed that there was significant relationship between brand association and brand loyalty in the fans of private clubs. In addition, they showed that there was correlation between all three factors of brand association (attributes, benefits, attitudes) and brand loyalty in the fans of private club (p = 0.01). Thus, given the findings, authorities should pay attention to relationship between brand association and brand loyalty in order to choose successful strategies.

Key words: brand association, brand loyalty, fans, private clubs.

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive environment, great organizations should attract customers and buyers in order to be successful and competitive. In successful organizations, marketing sector in responsible for it by marketing processes and activities. In this regard, sport teams and clubs as great organizations should pay special attention to this important sector. In marketing activities, relationship with customer is a central principle and all companies give priority to drawing customer's attention. In this regard, sport industry development by advertising growth and leagues, clubs and sport teams professionalization caused more focus on stable fans as central customers. These customers are income basis and improve competitive advantage for team.

Loyalty in fans is emphasized in sport industry because it is considered as maincomponent of organizational success. Loyal fan is considered as income source and suitable instrument in advertising. As a result, today's organizations intend to identify, manage and use effective methods and patterns towards loyalty creation. It should be emphasized that fans intend to spend more an symbolic aspects in sport industry and one of these symbolic aspects is trade names. Brand is one of intangible assets with the highest value in every company and in institution. Awareness of the relationship between the

dimensions of trade name and consumers behavior and of the dimensions effects on their behavior help companies optimize their marketing plans specially in the area of brand management and advertising effectiveness and support sources consumption toward costumers increase and market share growth. Brand plays important role in marketing activities and actions because costumers consider its functions as an important sign and one of important dimensions of this sign is its association.

Associations introduce a basis for buying decisions and brand loyalty. According to related classifications, product associations and organizational associations are two pillars ofbrand associations classification with the highest extent of referring (Chen, 2001, p 443).

Association benefits help us process and retrieve information, differentiate brand, offer a reason for buying, create positive feelings and attitudes and support brand promotion and development. In sport industry, marketers give priority to these benefits especially in the area of creating positive feelings and attracting fans and they intend to find effective factors on buying decisions and brand loyalty in the fans of professional sport in order to direct great financial resources injected by the fans of sport industry toward their organizations and clubs.

Gladden and Funk (2002) conducted a research about brand management in professional sport with 929 of fans and costumers in professional sport.In this research, they made effort to develop correct perception of brand management in professional sport by the investigation of the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty. Collected information of this research focused on fans with high commitment to a special team. Multi– regression analysis was used to test relationship between brand association and brand loyalty. The results showed that seven dimensions out of thirteen dimensions of brand association were significant predictors (four positive relationships and three negative relationships) of brand loyalty incommitted fans of this research. Interestingly, there was not significant relationship between the factor of team success and brand loyalty in committed fans. These results

corresponded with this assumption that loyal fans to brand provided stable flow of the income, regardless of the function of the team. Kaynak et al (2008) investigated and integrated relationship framework between brand association and brand loyalty among professional teams sports based on the research of Gladden and Funk who had investigated relationship between brand association and brand loyalty among professional sports in America.Finally, on integrated conceptual framework was obtained in order to identify different factors of brand association which were the predictors of brand loyalty in professional sport.

Carlson, Donovan & Cumiskey (2009) conducted a surveying research titled relationship between brand and sport consumer. They investigated relationship between brand characteristics of sport teams and identity, retailing and costumer– oriented outcomes. They collected data from spectators. Results from structural equations model analysis showed that two dimensions of brand success and brand attractiveness mediated team reputation and identification prediction and two dimensions of image association and image affiliation affected identification.

Kunkel et al (2009) conducted a research titled brand associations based on consumer in professional football leagues and investigated existing literature about brand associations of the team that could be used in leagues.They found that 12 out of it tested items have been used in leagues. In addition, there were differences between 4 football leagues in Australia terms of brand associations of the league. Finally, they concluded that league branding was increasingly competition and fans support against other entertainments.

Bordet et al (2010) conducted a research about creating and building brand equity of global football with the analysis of perceived brand equity in professional football clubs in external markets. The results showed that strength of brand equity in professional football in china's market is strongly determined by brand awareness level and perceived quality. However, it results from competition in external markets; and football clubs have to choose strategic marketing in order to

improve brand Soltan Hosseini et al (2011), in their research, tried to determine relative share of brand loyalty from brand association in the fans of super league in Iran. This research was conducted using surveying– descriptive method. Statistical society of this research consisted of the fans of Iranian football super league in 2010. The results showed that there was correlation between three factors of brand association– attributes, benefits, attitudes– and brand loyalty.In addition, the results of multiple regression showed that benefits and attitudes were good predictors of brand loyalty.

Therefore, based on previous paragraphs and research results, Sport organizations and clubs should focus on fans' needs and demands as one of important components in sport marketing; they improve fans loyalty and benefit from it using effective strategies of brand management; Specially, private clubs which have been established with the purpose of sport promotion and income generation should give priority to this area of sport industry, sport organizations and clubs of our country, specially private clubs do not pay enough attention to it.Therefore, the authorities and the mangers of private sport clubs in Iran should change their attitudes about this are and give priority to it and become profitable by it.

Research Method

Because the researchers intended to investigate relationship between brand association and brand loyalty in the fans of private sport clubs in Iran, this research is an applied one in terms of purpose and surveying one in terms of nature.

Statistical Society and Sample

Statistical society of this research consists of the fans of private sport clubs (2014). The researcher conducted an initial study in order to obtain sample size. Sample size was 448 according to initial study and statistical formula.Sampling method was stratified random sampling. Three private sport clubs were selected from among private clubs; and fans were selected randomly from among fans who attended in stadiums in order to watch the competitions of their favourite clubs.Then, questionnaire were distributed and collected. Finally, 435 questionnaire 9out of 448) were used (Selected clubs: Tractorsazi of Tabriz, Foolad in Isfahan, Gitipasand of Isfahan).

Measuring Instrument

In this research, the researchers used team association questionnaire developed by Gladden and funk (2001). Its validity and reliability were tested. In order to determine questionnaire's reliability, questionnaires confirmed by some professors of physical education and sport management group were distributed among the fans of selected sport clubs and then they were collected.Reliability coefficient or internal consistency were calculated using cronbach's alpha coefficient by Software SPSS based on collected data and its amout was 0.89. Then, data was analyzed using statistical, descriptive and inferential methods by software SPSS version 19.

Research Findings

According to table 1, age range of the respondents is 10– 60 years and age mean is 97.2

Table 1: Statistical indeces of age variable

Maximum	Minimum	Age rang	Mode	Median	Mean
60	10	8.64	20	26	27.22

Table 2: kolmogrov smirnov'stest for brand association and brand loyalty

Variables	Statistic	Number	Singificance level
Brand association	1.29	427	0.240
Brad loyalty	0.803	435	0.539

years. Maximum frequency is related to 20 years and median age is 26 year. According to this, most fans of private clubs belong to young age group (below 28 years).

In humanities, parametric or non – parametric tests are used to analyze data statistically. Parametric tests need the normalization of scores distribution and variance equalization of the samples. Therefore, before considering the hypotheses of the research, these presumptions are investigated using kolmogrov smirnov's test. With regard to the results of table 2, the researchers can use parametric tests in order to test the hypotheses of the research.

Coefficients obtained from pearson correlation (table 3) show that there is a significant relationship between brand association (and three factors of brand association) and brand loyalty. According to this table, relationship between brand association and brand loyalty is very strong (r= 0.589). This relationship is positive and it shows that when brand association increases, brand loyalty of the fans to related clubs increases. In addition, relation, relationships between association factors (including attributes, benefits and attitudes) and brand loyalty equal to r= 0.416, r= 0.607 and r= 0.650, respectively and it indicates that there is a direct strong relationship between the variables. In addition, according to the results

of the table, the factor of attributes has the strongest relationship (r= 0.650) with brand loyalty. In general, given the significance of correlation coefficients, there is relationship between the factors of brand association (including attributes, benefits, attitudes) and brand loyalty in private sport clubs of Iran.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Sport fans are considered as main columns of sport industry. This industry is spiritless without fans. Because fans are considered as main costumers of sport clubs and leagues, related organizations should give priority to them. One of success of the organizations is to focus on brand's components in today's world because it causes income acquisition and customers (fans) retention. Therefore, this research investigatesrelationship between brand association and brand loyalty in the fans of private sport clubs in Iran.

According to above tables, there is significant relationship between brand association and brand loyalty in the fans of private sport clubs in Iran. Pearson correlation coefficient test was used as the most suitable test to determine correlation between these two variables.

The results shows that there is a positive, direct, strong relationship between these two variables. Therefore, Brand loyalty in the fans

Table 3: Relationship between the factor of attributes and brand loyalty

Independent Variable	Significance level and Coefficients	Loyalty index
Attributes factor	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	0.417**
	Significance level	0.000
	Reliable number	407
Benefits factor	Person correlation Coefficient	0.607**
	Significance level	0.000
	Reliable number	418
Attitudes factor	Person Correlation Coefficient	0.650**
	Significance level	0.000
	Reliable number	435
Brand association	Person Correlation Coefficient	0.589**
	Significance level	0.000
	Reliable number	433

Correlation is Significant at the level of 0.01

increases with brand association increase. The results from other researchers such as Hunter, lion, Wright (2001); Gladden and Funk (2002); Baer, Sauer and Exler (2008);Alexandre et al (2008);Gardner, Goldberg Govatkin and Akram (2008); Heidarzadeh, Ghaffari and Asadollahi (2009); Soltan Hosseini et al (2011); and Moharramzadeh and Akbari (2013) Confrim this relationship.

The results from pearson correlation test show that there is a significant relationship between attributes of brand association and brand loyalty (r = 0.416).According to these results, when the factors of attributes of brand association including star player, famous head coach, private stadium, team success, bright history, good management, design and logo and team's product supply (eight factors) increase, the level of brand loyalty in the fans of mentioned clubs increase.

Other studies by researchers such as Gladden and Funk (2002); Bear, Sauer and Schmidt (2004); Bear, Sauer and Exler (2005); Kwon, Trail and Anderson (2005); Gardner, Goldberg Govatkin and Akram (2008); Clarkson, Dongwoon and Kamisaki (2009); and Soltan Hosseini et al (2011) Consider micro-scales of the factors of attributes as the factors related to brand loyalty in the fans of sport clubs.

Therefore, the attendance of famous people as player and coach or club's manager, designing attractive logo, Modern and equipped stadium, the gaining of glory and other mentioned factors increase brand loyalty in the fans of the club.

The results from pearson correlation test show that there is a significant relationship between the factor or benefits of brand association and brand loyalty (r = 0.607). Therefore, increase in the factors of benefits of brand association increases brand loyalty in the fans. Based on Glodden's and Funk's model, the researcher evaluates the factors of benefits of brand association using five micro-scales including patriotism, being proud of the city, escape from boring daily life, identification with team and popularity among peer groups. Therefore, the improvement of each microscale increase brand loyalty in the fans of the clubs.

The finding of the researchers such as Gladden and Funk (2002); Bear, Sauer and Exler (2005); Kwon, Trail and Anderson (2005); Gardner, Goldberg Govatkin and Akram (2008); Clarkson, Dongwoon and Kamisaki (2009) and Ghafe lehbashi (2009); Jamalinejad (2009)and Soltan Hosseini et al (2011) emphasize relationship between the factors of benefits of brand association and brand loyalty in consumers, customers and fans.

Given above findings, the factors of benefits of brand association (patriotism, being proud of the city, escape from boring daily life, identification with team and popularity among peer groups) are apart of the components related to brand loyalty in the fans of the clubs. Offering attractive games attractive games and entertaining programs, paying attention to accepted tradition of the city related to team or club and providing suitable conditions for inter- and inter– group relationships of the fans are some elements which provide the factors of benefits of brand association. Clubs management of our country(Iran) should pay attention to micro scales individually and use them in order to advance the strategies of brand promotion in their clubs and benefit from the advantages of brand loyalty.

Pearson correlation test was used to analysisrelationship between the factor of attitudes of brand association and brand loyalty in the fans.The results showed there was relationship between the factor of attitudes of brand association and brand loyalty in the fans with correlation coefficient of 0.650 and confidence level of 0.01. Therefore, When the factors of attitudes of brand association including awareness and information, interaction and brand importance increase in the fans, brand loyalty increases.

The findings from this research are consistent with the findings from Lim and Raziko (1997); Gladden and Funk (2002); Bear, Sauer and Schmidt (2004); Alexandre et al (2006); Bear, Sauer and Exler (2008); Novaka (2008); Heidarzadeh , Ghaffari and Asadollahi (2009) and Soltan Hosseini et al (2011). These researchers showed there was a direct relationship between the factors of attitudes

of brand association and brand loyalty in consumers, customers and consumers.

Given mentioned results, the fans support their favoriteclubs and continue their loyalty to it by the factors of attitudes of brand association including their awareness of the clubs and their information about them; the importance and the value of the clubs from their views; and the quality of their interactions with their favorite clubs. Therefore, offering information to the fans, using programs towards the increase of the interaction with the fans and improving the popularity of the club increase brand loyalty in the fans of the clubs.They are useful for successful management of clubs' brands. In addition, they pave the direction of gaining brand loyalty thatis main purpose of brand management.

Therefore, according to above explanations, considering this framework are useful for good management of the brand and its promotion. These factors are considered as general guidelines in order to recognize the best strategies and short term planning and choose policies that can show investments points for income generation and brand loyalty in fans. Therefore, Clubs' managers can use them in order to allocate their limited resources and gain maximum benefit.

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