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# **The Effect of Use of Text Messaging on Soccer Fans' Behavior: (The Case of Iranian Professional League-Persian Gulf League)**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of study is to identify the effect of mobile marketing on the Top Iranian Football Clubs fans' behavior in 2019-2020 season. The statistical population are the spectators who had signed up in the fan online system and had watched one of games in the stadium. As an accurate number of the statistical population could not be determined, a statistical population of 396 was considered based on the Morgan's table. In this study, the author collects data on the behavioral loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, and mobile marketing using survey. The cross-sectional regression estimation used to analyze the data. The findings of this study indicate that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between mobile marketing and fans' behavioral loyalty in Iranian soccer Pro league. Also, there is a positive and meaningful correlation between mobile marketing and the attitudinal loyalty of the soccer Club fans. This study has implications for managers and sponsors of soccer clubs.

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## **1. Introduction**

As an economic sector, sports play crucial roles, in practice and as means of entertainment, in the production and consumption of sports services and economic development in various communities. Sports considered as one of the most influential factors in national economic development and profitable industries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ([Mohammadkazemi, 2017](#)). Sports fans represent a significant part of sports consumers. Promotion of sports among sports fans has a high priority, and it could create value, wealth, and employment in communities and pave the ground for success and economic prosperity ([MohammadKazemi, 2015](#)).

Packed stadiums in the local, national, international/continental matches have made football the most popular sport in the world. With the highest number of athletes and fans, it is also the most common and popular sport in Iran ([Estiri, et al., 2010](#)). In general, a fan is someone who likes and supports a sports team, athlete or a particular sport ([Boyd & Shank, 2004](#)).

## **2. Theoretical foundations and research background**

Other than watching matches in stadiums, sports fans use different media such as print media, radio, and television, the internet, cellphones, etc. to stay up-to-date with their favorite teams and athletes ([Goebert et al., 2020](#)). Recently, cell phones have gained so much popularity among sports fans that they use their cellphones to send messages to or receive messages from sports programs to remain up-to-date about their favorite team(s) ([Huang et al., 2020](#)). Since cell phones can use at any time or place, their application in the area of sports is an effective way to reach, entertain, or provide information to fans. On the other hand, communications have effective roles in knowledge transfer, skills, attitudes, and information in the society ([Mohammadkazemi et al., 2014](#)). There are several studies which have attempted to account for attendance at sporting events in different countries such as USA or different sports such as

baseball, basketball, and in different leagues such as NBA, NFL, and NHL too ([Lijuan Huang, et al, 2019](#)). Promotion plays an important role in sports marketing. It is through promotion policies that information is communicated publicly, and sports fans can learn about a sports product, such as a football match ([MohammadKazemi, 2018](#)). Given that the use of SMS systems has gained popularity only recently, their effects on the behavior of spectators have remained unclear. On the other hand, based on the statistics from SMS system over a period of several months, it supports for the national football team reached over 2 million fans. This study provides useful information for the soccer Club's official through which they could develop programs to improve fan behavior effectively.

### **SMS marketing**

In the last two decades, the main means of communication was via text messages or SMS technology, and most of the previous research on mobile marketing is in the context of this technology. SMS technology allows marketers to send messages to consumers through their mobile handsets and can be regarded as a type of "one-to-one" marketing ([Mansour, 2012](#)). SMS technology enables brands to promote goods, services, and ideas through personalized messages that are sent directly to individual consumers. SMS has been used, for example, for voting on radio shows or reality TV, tracking deliveries, and distributing mobile discount coupons. SMS advertising may also be used to reinforce other traditional media such as broadcast and print media ([Fahy. John, et al, 2004](#)). However, the SMS approach has serious limitations as often consumers view text messages from businesses as irritating; an invasion of privacy; and, brand intrusion. On the other hand, marketers view SMS messaging as attractive because there is evidence that mobile advertising campaigns generate higher response rates than direct mail and internet banner ads. SMS messaging is also particularly useful for reaching younger consumers,

who may be more difficult to reach using other channels. In addition, research suggests that recall of SMS messages may be higher than through other channels ([Bowen, et al 2015](#)).

Due to the importance of this subject, the main purpose of this study is to identify the effects that text messages could have on the Club fans behavior. The secondary objective of the paper is to examine the relationship between text messages and behavioral and attitudinal loyalty and to examine the effect of text messages on behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty in the soccer Club fans. Then, through suitable data collection tools, we will try to identify and analyze the required data pertinent to the objectives of our study. Ultimately, some recommendations offered based on these findings. Based on the literature review and the research background the following hypotheses are:

H1: There is a relationship between accepting text messages and behavioral loyalty in the Iranian soccer clubs fans.

H2: Text messages influence the behavioral loyalty of the Iranian soccer clubs fans.

H3: There is a relationship between text messages and attitudinal loyalty in the Iranian soccer clubs fans.

H4: Text messages influence the attitudinal loyalty of the Iranian soccer clubs fans..

### **3. Methodology**

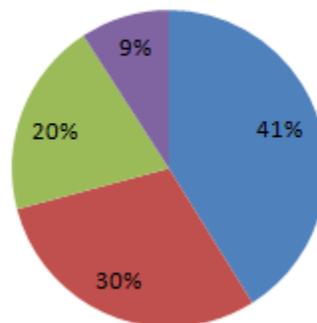
This research is a descriptive-correlational analysis in the form of cross-sectional applied field research. Data collection was performed through questionnaire distribution. The statistical population consists of the spectators who had signed up for the SMS online system and had attended one of the matches in the Soccer Pro League of Iran. As the exact size of the population

could not be determined, a 396 individual statistical sample considered based on the Morgan table.

This paper uses the attitudinal loyalty questionnaire developed by [Mahony, \(1998\)](#). It consists of 14 items over a five-point Likert-scale. The authors began the collection of the required data at the entrance gate of the Iranian Stadiums in which professional clubs had their formal matches. To make sure of the delivery of text messages, the authors asked each fan to produce his fan card issued by the SMS sender company “RIGHTEL”. The statistical method in this paper was employed on two descriptive and inferential levels. Therefore, mean frequency and standard deviation used for data analysis on the descriptive level, while the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, correlation coefficient, and the regression analysis were used for determining the normal distribution of the data. The SPSS software (ver. 22) was used for the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaires.

#### 4. Research findings:

■ 25-18 ■ 35-26 ■ 45-36 ■ بالاتر از 45



**Average age of Fans**

**Table 1. Fans Education on the basis of frequency & Percentage**

| Accumulative frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Education      |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 8.1                    | 32.6       | 125       | High school    |
| 22.4                   | 44         | 169       | Diploma        |
| 84.4                   | 19.8       | 76        | Bachelor       |
| 100                    | 3.6        | 14        | Master or ph.D |
|                        | 100        | 384       | Total          |

**Null hypothesis 1:**

There is no relationship between text messages and behavioral loyalty of the fans.

Table 2. The Pearson correlation matrix between text messages acceptance & behavioral loyalty

|                          | Behavioral loyalty |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Text messages acceptance | 0.452**            |
| Significance level       | 0.01               |

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a direct and significant relationship between text messages acceptance and behavioral loyalty ( $P < 0.01$ ,  $r = 0.452$ ).

**Null hypothesis 2:** Text messages do not influence the behavioral loyalty of the fans. According to Table 3, the results of the Durbin-Watson test indicate a value of 1.253, which confirms the execution of the regression test.

Table 3. Multiple correlations between text messages and behavioral loyalty of fans

| Model                   | Multiple correlations | The coefficient of determination | Adjusted coefficient of determination | Standard deviation | Significance level | Durbin-Watson |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Simultaneous Regression | 0.742                 | 0.551                            | 0.533                                 | 0.349              | 0.001              | 1.253         |

**Null hypothesis 3:** There is no relationship between text messages acceptance and attitudinal loyalty of fans.

Table 4. Pearson correlation matrix on text messages acceptance and attitudinal loyalty

|                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
|                          | Behavioral loyalty |
| Text messages acceptance | 0.536**            |
| Significance level       | 0.01               |

According to Table 4, the Pearson correlation test indicates a direct and significant relationship between text messages acceptance and attitudinal loyalty.

**Null hypothesis 4:** Text messages acceptance does not influence the attitudinal loyalty of the fans. Based on Table 5,

Table 5. Multiple correlations between text messages acceptance and the attitudinal loyalty of fans

| Model                   | Multiple correlation | Coefficient of determination | Adjusted coefficient of determination | Standard deviation | Significance level | Durbin-Watson |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Simultaneous Regression | 0.549                | 0.302                        | 0.0274                                | 0.526              | 0.001              | 1.937         |

In addition, the multiple regression analysis results show that text messages acceptance could predict fan attitudinal loyalty more effectively. Therefore, the regression equation would be as follows: Attitudinal loyalty= 0.229 (text message acceptance) + 4.567

Based on this equation, the amount of fans attitudinal loyalty changes with the text messages acceptance rate. Thus, with every unit of increase in text message acceptance, attitudinal loyalty increases by 0.229.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall purpose of this study is to evaluate the effect of text messages on the behavior of the Iranian soccer fans. The study results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between text message acceptance and behavioral loyalty. Behavioral loyalty described as repeat

purchase and consumption of a given product or service over a longer period of time. In a study of satisfaction and customer loyalty, [Deng et al. \(2010\)](#) also found that customer loyalty increases with text messages. In other words, text messages have a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. The findings in this section are consistent with [Deng et al. \(2010\)](#). The other research findings showed that text messages acceptance has a positive and significant effect on the behavioral loyalty of Iranian soccer fans. Indeed, the more positive the attitude of spectators toward receiving text messages, information and news from fan supporting systems of Iranian soccer clubs, the higher will be fan loyalty and the likelihood of consuming the products or services of the club. Our findings in this section consist with [Deng et al. \(2010\)](#). Among other findings of this research is the positive and significant relationship between text messages and attitudinal fan loyalty. As mentioned earlier, attitudinal loyalty considered as psychological devotion to a product or service that in turn shapes the behavioral loyalty of fans ([Khosravani, et al. 2014](#)). In the psychological continuum model, the first step in advancing an understanding of fans and supporters who are devoted to a team or sport involves the evaluation of the psychological strength and structure of the relationship between the individual and the team/sport ([Wang et al., 2002](#)). Therefore, it seems that text messages can be considered as an important medium for creating a strong and sustainable psychological relationship between fans and a sports team. On the other hand, cellphones can be used at any time or place, which makes them an effective medium for accessing or receiving information. Indeed, it can be argued that, due to their availability, text messages could be very effective in providing up-to-date news, information and creating attitudinal loyalty. [Deng et al. \(2010\)](#) conclude that fan loyalty increases with text messages. In other words, text messages have a positive and significant effect on fan loyalty. Ultimately, the research findings showed that text messages acceptance has a positive and

significant effect on the soccer fans attitudinal loyalty. Through the regular delivery of messages, fans develop a more positive attitude and show more interest in receiving text messages. It creates a stronger relationship between the club and its fans. This leads to increased attitudinal loyalty. They also found that fan loyalty increases with text messages, i.e., they have a positive and significant effect on fan loyalty. The findings in this section are also consistent with Deng et al. 2010, ([Deng et al, 2010](#)). Based on the obtained results about the positive relationship between text messages acceptance and fans behavioral loyalty, it is recommended that the managers of the Pro League clubs prepare the infrastructure for the implementation of fan supporting systems for their clubs. Furthermore, due to the positive and significant effect of text messages on behavioral loyalty, it recommends that sports clubs employ media experts and professionals to facilitate the relationship between customers and delivery of information. Moreover, owing to the positive and significant relationship between text messages and the clubs' fans attitudinal loyalty, it suggest other media technologies such as email services be used to improve this type of fan loyalty. Considering the positive and significant relationship between text messages acceptance and attitudinal loyalty, it is recommended that the Iranian Pro League Football officials obligate the use of fan supporting systems to enhance the fan loyalty of the Pro League Football clubs.

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