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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to develop a valid and reliable model for evaluation of brand equity in sport teams in Iran. In this research, considering the importance and vital role of brand equity in sport teams and infancy of brand equity topic, Ross (2008) model of spectator based brand equity in sport was reassessed and after evaluating it, new Spectator Based Brand Equity in Sport model was proposed of sport teams Iran.

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study is to reassess and develop a valid and reliable model to evaluate brand equity in sport teams of Iran. The importance of intangible assets and possessions of organizations in effectiveness of their actions and also creation and maintenance of their financial turnover and trades has been significance for marketers. Intangible possessions have long life span; while competitors may emulate financial and physical assets; intangible assets represent a more sustainable competitive advantage. Brand equity is an intangible asset which is valuable for marketing plans’ of organizations and very difficult to emulate by competitors. In this research, considering the importance and the vital role of brand equity in sport teams and the fact that brand equity topic is in its embryonic stage, Ross (2008) model of spectator based brand equity in sport was reassessed and empirically tested, then, a new model of Spectator Based Brand Equity is proposed for sport industry of Iran.
Literature Review and Concept Definition

By emergence of ‘brand equity’, many studies during the 1990s focused on the conceptualization of brand equity. During the period of 1991 to 2013, many researchers conducted studies to scrutinize the relationship among various constructs of brand equity. Mishra and Dutta (2011) suggested a model to describe the antecedents of brand equity and their importance to ‘brand assets effects’, like brand name, awareness, personality and consequences, like brand preference and purchase intention on customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Using Aaker’s model of brand equity by the attributes, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand association; Jayakumar et al. (2012) conducted a research to evaluate the customer-based brand equity for the two-wheeler segment for the brand Hero Honda. Kakati et al. (2013) performed a study to measure customer-based brand equity through brand building blocks for durables. The results of their study showed that there exists a positive relationship between brand trust and brand affect and attitudinal and purchase loyalty for both global and Indian brand.

The conceptualization of Brand Equity may be divided into two major categories of economic or financial-based which is briefly defined as firm-based category, and consumer-based brand equity category. To provide a systematic review of the literature on brand equity conceptualization and measurement, and conclude with some directions for future research, Figure 1 is trying to demonstrate tow major categories of consumer-based brand equity; and different methods of its measurement in brief. While firm-based category is not used in this study, emphasize is on later category introduced above, and the research has been followed indirect approach via intermediate measures. Methods categorized in CBBE section, seek to measure brand equity either through its demonstrable dimensions.
The conceptualizations of consumer-based brand equity have mainly derived from cognitive psychology and information economics. The dominant stream of research has been grounded in cognitive psychology, focusing on memory structure (Aaker. 1991; Keller. 1993). Aaker (1991) identified the conceptual dimensions of brand equity as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand assets.

Methods of Brand Equity Measurement

Different methods have been proposed and employed to measure brand equity. Though, the literature does not provide a satisfactory and universal method for measuring the sources of brand equity. There is, however, some agreement that brand equity measurement can be classified into...
two approaches of economic or financial-based and consumer-based (Shocker & Weitz, 1988). The consumer-based approach focuses on relative psychological and behavioral values of a brand name from a consumer’s perspective (e.g., Aaker, 1991, 1996; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Keller, 1993; Park & Srinivasan, 1994) and is typically associated with service-oriented products (Rangaswamy, Burke, & Oliva, 1993) such as spectator sport (Ross, 2008).

Reviewing marketing literature, consumer-based brand equity typically can be defined into two groups of: 1) those involving consumer perceptions (like awareness, brand associations) and 2) those involving consumer behavior (like brand loyalty, willingness to pay). Among the psychological measures, one technique uses consumer preference ratings for a branded product versus an unbranded equivalent (like Aaker, 1991) (Ross, 2008).

Although there can be found many measurement methods in literature, there is no single universal measure which would be ideal for every sector of brand equity. Lipman (1989) says that there is not even agreement on the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach. To financial theorists, the use of consumer attitudes and preferences is flawed due to their inherent subjectivity. However, while financial models for brand equity may be appropriate when determining revenue streams, certain concerns are evident with the application of these models when applied to the sport setting. One problem is space constraints and restrictions that may limit number of seats available for spectators at any sport event. Therefore, if stadium attendance were used as a means to analyze the strongest market share of teams, it would not successfully gauge overall customer interest in a sport organization (Ross, 2008).

The main purpose of the study is to empirically examine and reassess the spectator-based brand equity model (Ross, 2006) which has been examined by him in 2008, to provide a more thorough understanding of what contributes to the creation of sport brand equity.
Brand Equity in Sport

Scrubining literature in brand equity, few studies approached brand equity from a sport perspective (Boone, Kochunny, & Wilkins, 1995; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross, 2006; Ross 2008; Bigdely, 2012). Almost all researches in brand equity suggest that strong brand is important for teams; although the way in which brand equity is conceptualized and measured is often contested in the sport marketing literature (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, 2006).

Gladden et al. (1998) proposed a conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in Division I college athletics using Aaker’s (1996) four suggested components of brand equity, 1) brand awareness, 2) brand associations, 3) brand loyalty, and 4) perceived quality. In the proposed model, three groups of antecedents (organization-related, team-related, and market-related) were defined as precursors to brand equity, which was then reasoned to influence a set of consequences in the marketplace (e.g., national media exposure, corporate sponsorship, merchandise sales). The research suggested that these consequences would create an image of the sport product in the minds of fans (consumers). Gladden and Milne (1999) worked on the importance of brand equity in the professional sport sector. They proposed a refined collegiate-based framework, originally developed by Gladden et al. (1998), would be fine to be used in the understanding of brand equity in the professional team sport field (Ross, 2008).

Recognizing the limitations of previously suggested frameworks and review of literature, Ross (2006) developed a conceptual framework for understanding spectator-based brand equity. Specifically, Ross (2006) suggested that the extant sport brand equity measurements heavily based on models derived from Aaker and Keller models which have a manufactured goods perspective (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993) and were not usable in sport sector, due to the intangible, inconsistent, perishable, and experiential nature of spectator sport. Consequently, Ross (2008) introduced a spectator-based brand equity (SBBE) model that recognized that the customer experience is paramount in spectator sport. The main components of the SBBE model consist of brand awareness and brand associations, the dominating elements on which consumers evaluate and choose a sport service.
Methodology

SBBE model is composed of 49 items which constitute 13 dimensions of Brand logo, Concessions, Social Interactions, Commitment, Rivalry, Team History, Organization Attribute, Team Success, Team Player, Non-player Personnel, Stadium Community and Internalization.

The model examines the relationship between brand associations, a second-order latent variable represented by 11 first order variables, and brand awareness which is a second-order latent variable with 2 first order variables. Taken as a whole, the relationship of the brand association factor and the brand awareness factor was examined in a single joint model to assess the fit of the data. Interviews were conducted with professional sport marketers, university professors and zealous fans to add missed and neglected items in SBBE model. Reviewing literature and the interview added 9 neglected items to questionnaire item pool, which eventually resulted adding 5 items to questionnaire (4 were omitted after finding overlaps with previous items). This may be related to cultural, social and economical variety in Iran comparing other regions. The final questionnaire consisted of 54 questions which were ranked using Likert scale of 1 (standing for completely disagree) and 7 (standing for completely disagree).

The final questionnaire distributed among 60 fans to test its validity and reliability; Cronbach's alpha coefficient was examined to provide evidence of the internal consistency of the instrument. The alpha score computed using Split two was $\alpha=.89$ and its validity was confirmed by 6 Tehran university professors. Researchers were present in stadium 2 hours before commencing a soccer match and 600 questionnaires were distributed among fans; also, an email survey was conducted and the questionnaire was uploaded to a website. Exploratory factor analysis and Rotated Component Matrix were conducted to identify dimensions of new SBBE model. The extraction method was principal component analysis and rotation converged in 7 iterations. Rotation method was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Twelve dimensions were extracted (one dimension of original model omitted) and named considering the content of the questions which were related to each dimension. Using SPSS and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
S) the data were analyzed to test its normality. Considering non-normal distribution, Friedman test was used to prioritize effective elements on SBBE.

**Results**

Out of 600 distributed paper questionnaires, 412 were returned and usable (a rate of 68%); in addition, 357 questionnaires were filled through the website and in response to email survey; A total of 725 questionnaire were usable for further analysis.

More than about one-fourth (26.9%) of the respondents were between 40 and 50 years of age, while 56.1% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 30. The majority of the respondents indicated they were single (67.4%), and were not well educated with 27.6% having a diploma degree.

Exploratory Factor analysis suggested omitting one of 13 dimensions and finally confirming 12 remained dimensions proposed by Ross (2008). You can see results below. The factor loading of each dimension has been shown beside it. Friedman test results are shown in Table1.
Figure 2

Proposed Measurement Model for Spectator-Based Brand Equity in Sport Industry of Iran

- Brand Logo
- Rivalry
- Social Interaction
- Identification
- Team History
- Organization Attribute
- Team Success
- Team Play
- Nonplayer Personnel
- Stadium Community

Brand Association

Brand Awareness

Identification

Internalization

0.71

0.47

0.52

0.62

0.69

0.60

0.60

0.57

0.46

0.52

0.75

0.78

0.59
Friedman test was employed to compare mean values of effective elements of brand equity in soccer clubs of premier league of Iran. Further discussion has been conducted in discussion.

Table 1

Effective Elements of Brand Equity in Soccer Clubs of Premier League of Iran; Mean Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Effective elements of brand equity in soccer clubs of premier league of Iran; mean comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>Team history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>Internalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>Brand logo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>Team success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>Social interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>Non-player Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>concessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>Rivalry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>Team player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>Organization attributes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Although the topic of brand equity even in developed countries is in their embryonic stages, we tried to reassess the model proposed by Ross (2008) in this research and in an environment of a developing country; Iran.

Ross model has been adopted from much used model of Gilladen and Funk (2002), and some alternations in dimensions of brand association and brand awareness has been implemented to original model of Dunk (Ross, 2008). Up to now, and based on literature review, we could not find any research testing capability to generalize SBBE model in other cultures, which have different limitations and restrictions, and also various amenities and facilities. Current results show that after redressing minor changes in SBBE model, it is suitable to use this new model (SBBE) in Iran. Concessions dimension was eliminated in final model, because of low factor loading. Concessions (.21) were not found to be as strong in predicting brand associations. Prior research has also suggested that interpersonal motives such as ancillary attributes such as concessions are not important in the psychological commitment makeup of highly vested fans (full season ticket holders; Funk & James, 2001) (Ross, 2008). This finding may be an indication that the team is doing a poor job at providing luscious food and beverages, decent buffets, and diversity of eating products in stadium. Some dimensions were predictive of their respective second order latent variables. Brand Logo (.71) and Team History (.69) were strongly predictive of the brand association dimension. According to Erdem et al. (2006), brand names act as signals to consumers. A brand signal is defined as sum of that brand’s past and present marketing activities (in this research, history). This indicates that past history of a team is very important for fans; people remember wins and happy times they have had with their team and consequently, that history is combined with the logo and brand of the team. The two proposed factors comprising brand awareness (identification and internalization) were found to be highly predictive (.75 and .78 respectively). This supports previous research that loyalty has an influence on the strength of the brand (Funk & James, 2006) (Ross, 2008).
Friedman test was employed to compare mean values of effective elements of brand equity in soccer clubs of premier league of Iran. Team history had the highest mean value, indicating that it is most important effective element for team fans, while organization attributes had the least importance for fans.

Showing suitability of model for Iran, the factor loading of each item was calculated using exploratory factor analysis. This model is capable of being used by managers and marketers of professional soccer clubs of Iran. They may evaluate their marketing plans efficiency using SBBE. Based on this model, it is suggested that tow dimensions of brand association and brand awareness, are necessary infrastructures to build evaluation tool of brand equity based on spectators. Marketing researches are vital for sport team; e.g. if marketing researches for a new sport brand shows that developing image of the team is most important for tem brand, managers can devote much more resources to strengthen the image and precisely direct their valuable resources. While it is believed that there is no such thing as a universal measurement tool for brand equity, and that the market sector and life-stage of the brand need to be taken into account when selecting an appropriate set of measures to assess brand equity (Baker et al. 2005) (Christodoulides et al.; 2010); the results of this study provide initial prerequisite for future research aiming to develop and evaluate an integrated spectator based brand equity model.

References


**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Mahdi Bigdely MA of sport Management from Allameh Tabataba'i University; has worked in National Olympic Academy of I.R.IRAN for 3 years and has performed as sport deputy in Enghelab sport complex, the most prestigious complex in Iran. He has been an ex-world champion in wrestling FS and has published more than 10 papers in conferences and journal.

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