

Factors Influencing Soccer Fans' Team Identification in Iran: A Scale Development

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Abstract: Among different fields of sport, soccer has experienced remarkable growth in a short period of time, so that many people as spectators or fans have joined it. Since these persons are regarded as major basis for the sport clubs, it is important to sport managers how to attract and promote the fandom base. The purpose of the current study was to develop a scale to identify factors affecting soccer fans' team identification in Iran. To do this, after a thorough assessment of theoretical framework, literature review and interviews with a panel of experts in the field of sport management, sport psychology and Executive Management, questionnaire was developed. Then 205 fans from one of the teams participating in Iran's professional soccer league (called Esteghlal) in the season 2010-11 were asked to complete the questionnaire. The results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the variables that cause people to support the soccer clubs, loaded on fifteen factors as called: 1) importance, 2) nature, 3) facility, 4) mental health needs, 5) individual needs, 6) athletic needs, 7) affiliation, 8) social commitment, 9) regional tribalism, 10) management, 11) public relation, 12) history (background), 13) performance, 14) belief and 15) coercion. The scale reliability was confirmed through internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha and also ordinal theta and composite reliability. The Comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that is obtained by applying this scale will help sport managers to attract fans through easier ways.

Key words: Team identification • Scale development • Factor analysis • Soccer fan • Iran

INTRODUCTION

Based on its popularity and pervasive place in people's daily lives, sport has become a large and complex industry. This industry has undergone remarkable growth in a short period of time [1]. The sport industry was identified as the 11th largest segment in the American market. In 2001, people spent \$10.1 billion to attend spectator sporting events [2]. Such evidence indicates that sport spectatorship is an important part of the sport industry. One segment experiencing this growth has been professional sport. As the sport industry continues to grow in variety and scope, there will be increased challenges for managing organizations and attracting consumers. According to Howard and Crompton [3], sport organizations face financial difficulties.

During the early years of the 21st century, some European soccer clubs have faced with financial problems. Before the start of the 2002-2003 season,

twenty-three Italian clubs (two in serie A, six in serie B and 15 in serie C) were threatened with exclusion from their respective leagues due to financial problems. In an effort to alleviate the financial problems, several clubs offloaded star players. In addition, many players agreed with reduction in salaries these times [4]. A similar pattern can be observed in the French League 1. However, due to the regular export of players, the problems have not been as devastating as in Italy. Since 1998, more than 50% of the French internationals have played for foreign clubs. According to Deloitte, 35 of 72 clubs in the Football League¹ underwent insolvency proceedings from 2000–2009 [5]. Similar problems have been observed in European leagues further down the revenue ladder. In 2003, the combined debt of the 12 Scottish Premier League (SPL) clubs amounted to 186 million. This was 32 million higher than the clubs' combined annual turnover. At one point during the 2003–2004 season, a quarter of the SPL clubs were in administration [6]. Table 1 shows that

¹Includes all the professional leagues below the Premier League

Table 1: Operating profit/loss per club (€-million)

	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08
England: Premier League*	6.5	8.9	11.1	12.0	10.0	7.1	11.7
England: Championship*	-0.9	-4.7	-2.2	-2.6	-3.2	-4.6	-5.4
Germany	5.6	7.7	4.9	10.2	4.6	13.9	7.6
France	-5.4	-3.1	-5.1	-0.8	1.9	1.2	-4.2
Italy	-22.4	-14.7	-13.0	0.1	-0.1	-2.0	-3.3

*Premier League refers to the top football league, while Championship refers to the second tier football league in England.

Source: Safety in numbers Annual Review of Football Finance. [5]

the problems decreased in the first years of this decade, but were quickly followed by a negative move after the 2006–2007 season. These problems can be seen clearly in Iran's Premier Football League.

Financial burdens have forced many professional sport franchises to either relocate the franchise, or find other revenue sources such as the sale of luxury boxes when facilities are remodeled or new facilities are built [7, 8].

One strategy that many franchises seem to have overlooked for being competitive and generating revenue is maintaining and building a loyal fan base. In order to achieve long-term business success, managers should be concerned about building and maintaining a loyal fan base, because loyal fans provide sport teams with a long-term sustainable source of income.

Although sport scientists and sport marketing professionals have examined a wide range of responses of sport fans, one of the more in-depth lines of research has focused on the antecedents and consequences of sport team identification. Team identification refers to the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a specific team or player [9, 10]. Hence, team identification is the social identity that a group of people have in common in relation to their favorite team [11].

Research shows that compared to lowly identified fans, those high in team identification:

- Tend to report more involvement with a team [9].
- Are more likely to experience greater levels of anxiety and arousal watching their team compete [12],
- Are particularly likely to shout encouragement to their team and to direct harassment toward opponents [10],
- Display a more ego-enhancing pattern of attribution for the teams successes [9],
- Feel that sport spectating is more enjoyable activity [13, 14],
- Posses a greater level of knowledge about their team and about sport in general [15],
- Have more positive expectations concerning future

team performances [16, 17],

- Are more likely to believe that fans of the team they are identified with possess special qualities [9],
- Report higher level of vigor and self-esteem and lower level of tension, depression, anger, fatigue and confusion [18],
- Exhibit greater willingness to invest larger amounts of time and money watching the team play [9, 19].

The findings indicated that sport managers should consider how to enhance team identification as an important element in developing a fan base.

According to some sociologists, organizational identification manifests itself when an individual psychologically perceives his or her fate to be intertwined with that of a group [20, 21]. Therefore, it is logical to assert that fans of a team consider themselves to be members of the organization and part of the team rather than consumers who just purchase team related merchandises and consume other products (attending games, watching televised games, etc.).

There are three elements to explain why fans are considered as members of an organization. First, fans are able to impact the quality of a product. Second, fans have an impact on revenue sources for team. Third, there are several professional sport franchises in which fans are able to become shareholders of the team and considered as officially part of an organization [22].

Although social identification has most commonly been examined as a uni-dimensional variable [e.g., 23-25], a number of investigations have supported the tri-partite conceptualization of social identification offered in SIT² [e.g., 26-28]. It is important to examine identification as a multi-dimensional construct in order to add depth to the study of the concept since identification is a construct that occupies vast meanings [29].

Scholars emphasized how identification is associated with three constructs of organizational and product characteristics and members' affiliation and activity characteristics [30]. The data indicated various factors such as team success, geographical location, players

²Social Identification Theory (SIT)

Table 2: Related references about the factors affecting sport fans team identification

Sources	Variables																	
	Importance	Nature	Facility	Health	Individual	Athletic	Affiliation	Commitment	Regional	Management	Public	Relation	History	Performance	Belief	Stadium	Ritual	Coercion
Kenyon [36]							*											
Sloan [37]							*		*	*		*	*					*
Cialdini <i>et al.</i> [38]				*														
Cialdini and Richardson [39]				*														
Tajfel [40]				*														
Tajfel and Turner [41]				*														
Sutton <i>et al.</i> [42]			*		*		*	*		*		*	*	*			*	
Snyder <i>et al.</i> [43]												*	*					
Branscombe and Wann [44]	*	*				*		*	*				*					
Wann and Branscombe [9]									*				*					
Wann [45]				*	*		*	*					*			*		
Kahle <i>et al.</i> [46]				*	*		*	*				*						
Wann <i>et al.</i> [31]							*		*			*	*					*
Jones [32]									*									
Fisher and Wakefield [47]	*	*	*		*	*							*					
Funk [48]	*			*		*	*					*						
Milne and Mc Donald [49]		*	*	*	*	*	*						*					
Wann <i>et al.</i> [50]		*																
Underwood <i>et al.</i> [51]			*				*	*		*		*	*	*		*	*	
Kolbe and James [52]							*	*	*									*
Funk <i>et al.</i> [53]	*	*			*													
James [54]		*					*					*						
Funk and James [55]			*				*	*	*			*						
Trail and James [56]				*	*		*	*		*			*					
End <i>et al.</i> [57]				*														
Gladden and Funk [58]									*									
Fink <i>et al.</i> [33]				*			*	*										
Funk <i>et al.</i> [59]				*	*													
Trail <i>et al.</i> [60]				*	*		*		*									
Jackobson [61]					*		*	*										
Bemthal and Graham [62]	*				*		*	*					*					
Willems [63]									*									
Neale and Funk [64]				*	*		*						*					
Chen [65]							*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	
Summary	5	6	5	14	12	3	20	11	9	8	6	7	14	1	3	3	3	

²Social Identification Theory (SIT)

and affiliation were important for the origination, continuation and cessation of identification with sports teams. A study by Wann *et al.* indicated that, although there are a lot of reasons to first identify with a particular team, some of them are outstanding [31]. The most common reason listed was that one's parents were supporter of the team (parental and family influence); the second greatest influence was the talent and characteristics of the players. The success of the team was only the fifth most commonly mentioned reason. But they found that the prevailing reason for continued identification with a team was success quantified by the won/loss record. On the contrary, Jones argued that geographical reasons were the most dominant reason for continuing to support a team [32]. Fink *et al.* found vicarious team achievement to be the greatest motivator for team identification [33]. Greenwood *et al.* found however, that the strongest predictor of sport fan team identification was the variable "players and coaches talent" and the second strongest predictor was being a native or a resident in the area [34]. Dimmock and Grove found that preferences for sport teams were significantly related to the preferences of family and friends [35]. For what can be seen, the results vary with the situations where the studies are conducted.

It has been trying to be presented all factors affecting sports fans team identification in the Table 2.

The concept of team identification has been suggested as a valuable tool to enhance a team's long-term fiscal success in spite of the team's poor on-field performance. Thus, it is important to identify the characteristics of the sport environment that could be put to use by managers to initiate strategies for creating and fostering fans' deep sense of affiliation with their team.

Aim: The goal of this study was to identify factors affecting soccer fans team identification in Iran's Premier Football League as a scale development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods has been done in Iran in 2011. The main goal of this research was to develop a valid and reliable scale to identify various factors affecting Iranian soccer fans' team identification. To do this, many books, articles and dissertations with similar context were studied primarily by researchers carefully. Then definition of team identification in the field of sports along with the affecting factors on it was exactly examined. A sample of effective items was generated based on a review of literature and similar existing scales. A panel of experts was also interviewed to evaluate the items and to develop initial questionnaire. In order to establish the questionnaire's face and content validity, the panel included 8 college professors specializing in the study of sport management and sport psychology, 3 managers in professional sport organizations and 15 enthusiastic fans in professional soccer for an average of more than 2 years fandom provided suggestions and comments regarding the representativeness of items for each domain, the correctness of sentences and the appropriateness of words. The main section of survey instrument included 73 questions to identify the factors affecting team identification of participants. Next stage was the data collection using 205 respondents drawn from fans of an Iranian soccer team (called Esteghlal) through a layered random sampling based on seating location in the stadium in a pilot test format. According to Wiersma

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of pilot sample, (N=205)

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent
Age(year)	18-25	107	52.2	Educational Level	Under Diploma	113	55.1
	26-35	73	35.6		Diploma	47	22.9
	34-41	21	10.2		B.sc	41	20
	42-49	4	2		M.sc and higher	4	2
Marital Situation	Single	158	77.1	Number of Favorite Teams	One Team	186	90.7
	Married	47	22.9		More than One	19	9.3
Income(\$)	< 100	67	32.7	Fandom Duration(year)	< 1	4	2
	101-400	62	30.2		1-2	11	5.4
	401-700	47	22.9		3-5	14	6.8
	701-1000	23	11.2		6-10	35	17.1
	>1000	6	2.9		>10	141	68.8

Table 4: Factors extracted from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), (N =205)

Factor	Variable	Factor loading	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings				
			Total	% of Variance	KMO	Bartlett's Test	P
Importance	Soccer is an important part of my life.	.792	2.132	71.075	.688	194.722	.000
	I always think about soccer and I like it.	.874					
	I like the professional level (premier league) of soccer.	.861					
Nature	Soccer is exciting and attractive.	.786	1.882	62.743	.674	107.551	.000
	The end result of playing soccer games can be rarely predicted.	.789					
	In nature, soccer is different from other sports.	.801					
Facility	It is easy for me to follow the club through the press and media.	.840	2.907	72.673	.832	401.449	.000
	Magazine provides information about the owner's management philosophy.	.873					
	Newspaper provides me with information about team.	.829					
	People often discuss about this club together.	.866					
Mental Health Needs	Being a fan of the team enhances self-actualization and personality.	.805	2.397	59.922	.772	210.062	.000
	Being a fan of the team increases sense of pride and self-confidence.	.782					
	Being a fan of the team causes I would be able to overcome stress.	.791					
	Being a fan of the team may be a way to develop cultural and ethical values??	.715					
Individual Needs	I get lots of information about the skills, rules and related matters with the club.	.896	2.534	63.356	.759	324.977	.000
	It is enjoyable to me watching the players' techniques and their team tactics.	.881					
	Fandom provides opportunities for business development and an economic benefit.	.846					
	It makes everyday life different, and problems are forgotten.	.488					
Athletic Needs	I like to participate in the emotional and competitive situations.	.781	2.524	63.106	.778	255.430	.000
	Following up the matters related to the club entertains me.	.754					
	By joining the club I will share in its success.	.784					
	The excitement of watching my team competitions gives me a positive impetus.	.855					
Affiliation	My family members are fans of this team	.802	2.907	58.135	.842	316.153	.000
	Most of my friends are fans of this team	.739					
	Many fans are united to support this team.	.770					
	Most well-known people, with whom I am acquainted, are fans of this team.	.778					
	I am part of the "community" of the team's fans.	.720					
Social Commitment	I feel guilty, if I'm not supporting this team.	.865	2.711	67.786	.800	324.170	.000
	I am committed to the fans of this team.	.845					
	By supporting this team I can appreciate athletes who have good skills to offer.	.789					
	In this way I thank the managers and coaches who are working flawlessly.	.792					
Regional Tribalism	The team represents the city and region in which I live.	.825	2.932	58.643	.835	334.163	.000
	The team is a symbol of the city and region in which I live.	.756					
	The relationship between me and the city will be strengthened by supporting this team.	.718					
	Supporting this team will help me to show my hometown pride.	.709					
	This causes the relationship between me and my intimate friends to be more robust.	.813					
Management	Managers committed to the professional staff (coaches and players) to recruit and retain.	.898	2.236	74.534	.688	248.391	.000
	Consistently, the managers are implementing suitable strategies to improve the club.	.888					
	Managers take advantage of new methods to improve marketing strategies.	.800					
Public Relation	Team members spend time participating in charitable activities.	.864	3.468	69.358	.886	530.573	.000
	Players are involved in community services.	.799					
	There is a close relationship between fans and club members.	.833					
	The club's website offers new favorable information about team situation.	.835					
	The team uses email to stay in touch with fans.	.832					
History (Background)	The team has a long history of operation.	.880	2.808	70.193	.811	363.508	.000
	The team won championships in the past.	.821					
	Many of the most famous soccer players have been members of the team	.808					
	The team has a history of triumph and success.	.841					
Performance	The style of team play is very exciting and attractive.	.823	2.597	64.927	.777	284.762	.000
	The team has several players, so that it is exciting for me to watch their play.	.807					
	Because of their unique style, team plays are very fun.	.839					
	The team demonstrates great teamwork.	.751					
Belief	Team members believe firmly in the professional ethics and fair play.	.887	2.333	77.759	.732	274.212	.000
	The club takes discipline very seriously.	.890					
	Members believe that by working hard they are able to achieve the best success.	.869					
Coercion	There is no other team I would support it.	.668	3.679	61.322	.897	540.275	.000
	It is agonizing to me to be fan of another team.	.851					
	I would be dismal, if the relationship between me and the club does not continue.	.839					
	I got a lot of money, time and energy to show the relationship with the team.	.774					
	It isn't appealing to me to lose all my material and intellectual investment in the team	.755					
	If I do not continue to support the team, my life will be disrupted.	.798					

Table 5: Indicators observed in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), N= 205

Factor	Variable	β	t-value	r ²	P-value	χ^2/df	RMSEA
Importance	Soccer is an important part of my life.	.63	9.17	.40	.19	.00	.000
	I always think about soccer and I like it.	.84	12.35	.71			
	I like the professional level (premier league) of soccer.	.81	11.84	.65			
Nature	Soccer is exciting and attractive.	.65	8.23	.43	.28	.00	.000
	The end result of playing soccer games can be rarely predicted.	.66	8.29	.43			
	In nature, soccer is different from other sports.	.69	8.59	.48			
Facility	It is easy for me to follow the club through the press and media.	.78	12.69	.61	.52	1.56	.000
	Magazine provides information about the owner's management philosophy.	.83	13.92	.70			
	Newspaper provides me with information about team.	.76	12.27	.58			
	People often discuss about this club together.	.82	13.60	.67			
Mental Health Needs	Being a fan of the team enhances self-actualization and personality.	.73	10.43	.53	.16	1.83	.044
	Being a fan of the team increases sense of pride and self-confidence.	.70	9.69	.49			
	Being a fan of the team causes I would be able to overcome stress.	.72	10.31	.52			
	Being a fan of the team may be a way to develop cultural and ethical values??	.58	8.03	.34			
Individual Needs	I get lots of information about the skills, rules and related matters with the club.	.88	14.68	.77	.65	.42	.000
	It is enjoyable to me watching the players' techniques and their team tactics.	.85	14.08	.72			
	Fandom provides opportunities for business development and an economic benefit.	.76	12.20	.58			
	It makes everyday life different, and problems are forgotten.	.63	4.77	.12			
Athletic Needs	I like to participate in the emotional and competitive situations.	.69	10.22	.48	.20	1.56	.039
	Following up the matters related to the club entertains me.	.63	9.15	.40			
	By joining the club I will share in its success.	.70	10.34	.48			
	The excitement of watching my team competitions gives me a positive impetus.	.84	13.12	.71			
Affiliation(Accompaniment)	My family members are fans of this team.	.76	11.65	.58	.36	1.09	.021
	Most of my friends are fans of this team.	.66	9.79	.44			
	Many fans are united to support this team.	.70	10.43	.49			
	Most well-known people, with whom I am acquainted, are fans of this team.	.71	10.71	.51			
	I am part of the "community" of the team's fans.	.63	9.13	.39			
Social Commitment	I feel guilty, if I'm not supporting this team.	.84	13.73	.71	.23	1.44	.046
	I am committed to the fans of this team.	.80	12.73	.64			
	By supporting this team I can appreciate athletes who have good skills to offer.	.70	10.66	.49			
	In this way I thank the managers and coaches who are working flawlessly.	.69	10.58	.48			
Regional Tribalism	The team represents the city and region in which I live.	.78	12.21	.61	.23	1.36	.042
	The team is a symbol of the city and region in which I live.	.69	10.31	.47			
	The relationship between me and the city will be strengthened by supporting this team.	.64	9.42	.41			
	Supporting this team will help me to show my hometown pride.	.61	8.92	.37			
	This causes the relationship between me and my intimate friends to be more robust.	.77	11.87	.59			
Management	Managers committed to the professional staff (coaches and players) to recruit and retain.	.88	13.82	.77	.56	.00	.000
	Consistently, the managers are implementing suitable strategies to improve the club.	.84	13.06	.70			
	Managers take advantage of new methods to improve marketing strategies.	.65	9.80	.43			
Public Relation	Team members spend time participating in charitable activities.	.84	14.19	.70	.81	.45	.000
	Players are involved in community services.	.73	11.68	.54			
	There is a close relationship between fans and club members.	.79	12.98	.62			
	The club's website offers new favorable information about team situation.	.79	12.92	.62			
	The team uses email to stay in touch with fans.	.78	12.83	.61			
History (Background)	The team has a long history of operation.	.86	14.46	.75	.18	1.66	.027
	The team won championships in the past.	.74	11.72	.55			
	Many of the most famous soccer players have been members of the team.	.71	11.07	.51			
	The team has a history of triumph and success.	.79	12.67	.62			

Table 5: Continue

Performance	The style of team play is very exciting and attractive.	.76	11.67	.58	.002	1.85	.014
	The team has several players, so that it is exciting for me to watch their play.	.74	11.14	.54			
	Because of their unique style, team plays are very fun.	.78	11.95	.60			
	The team demonstrates great teamwork.	.65	9.47	.42			
Belief	Team members believe firmly in the professional ethics and fair play.	.83	13.36	.69	.43	.000	.000
	The club takes discipline very seriously.	.84	13.48	.70			
	Members believe that by working hard they are able to achieve the best success.	.78	12.39	.61			
Coercion	There is no other team I would support it.	.60	9.06	.36	.833	.55	.000
	It is agonizing to me to be fan of another team.	.83	13.96	.69			
	I would be dismal, if the relationship between me and the club does not continue.	.81	13.38	.65			
	I got a lot of money, time and energy to show the relationship with the team.	.72	11.41	.52			
	It isn't appealing to me to lose all my material and intellectual investment in the team.	.69	10.83	.48			
	If I do not continue to support the team, my life will be disrupted.	.75	12.11	.57			

Table 6: Instrument Reliability calculated using three different methods

Factor	α^*	OT**	CR***	Factor	α^*	OT**	CR***
Importance	.79	.79	.80	Regional Tribalism	.82	.82	.70
Nature	.70	.70	.70	Management	.83	.82	.83
Facility	.87	.87	.87	Public Relation	.89	.88	.88
Mental Health Needs	.77	.77	.78	History	.86	.85	.85
Individual Needs	.72	.81	.81	Performance	.82	.82	.85
Athletic Needs	.80	.80	.81	Belief	.86	.85	.85
Affiliation	.82	.82	.82	Coercion	.87	.88	.87
Social Commitment	.84	.84	.84				

* Cronbach's α ** Ordinal Theta *** Composite Reliability

[66], a total of 205 samples were deemed sufficient for the pilot study. As was expected, the sample was dominated completely by male respondents, comprising 100 percent of the total sample, because, in Iran, only men are able to go to the men's soccer match. Participation in the survey was voluntary and a participant had to be 18 years of age or older. In the next phase, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify a set of dimensions, create appropriate factors or measures for subsequent analysis, reduce the variables and search the pattern of interrelationships among observed variables.

In EFA, some indicators such as Factor Loading, Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings (Total and Percentage of Variance), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), Bartlett's Test and P-value were examined.

In CFA, other indexes like beta, t-value, R^2 , P-value, X^2/df and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) have been studied.

Results from EFA and CFA are given in Table 4 and Table 5 respectively.

As you can see in Table 6, ordinal theta, alpha α Cronbachs test and composite reliability were used measuring each part reliability of this scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics of sample was presented in Table 2. As it can be seen in the Table below, over 87 percent of sample members have less than 35 years old. 77.1 percent were single and about 86 percent had monthly income below \$ 700. Findings also showed that the highest educational degree of 77 percent of sample members was diploma; over 90 percent of respondents were single-club fans instead of being multi-club fans and finally about 86 percent of the sample experienced supporting their favorite team over five years.

Based on findings of exploratory factor analysis there are 15 factors that cause people to be attracted to soccer clubs. Due to their influences on team identification, these factors include: belief (77.759 % of variance), management (74.534), facility (72.673), importance (71.075), history (70.193), public relation (69.358), social commitment (67.786), performance (64.927), individual needs (63.356), athletic needs (63.106), nature (62.743), coercion (61.322), mental health (59.922), regional tribalism (58.643) and affiliation (58.135). KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy (.764) for the scale is sufficient,

³Ratio of Chi-Square to freedom degree

because the amount is closer to 1, the better. In Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, significant level ($p = .00$) indicates that the data have the potential to become factors. According to Hair *et al.* (1998), the value of the factor loading for each factor (greater than $\pm .05$) is here considered practically significant.

Results of CFA shown in Table 5 confirmed the EFA findings. As it can be seen, all beta, t-value, normed chi-square (NC)³ and RMSEA measures appeared to fit well enough, with the value greater than 0.50, greater than 1.96, less than 2.00 and less than .05 respectively [67-69].

Based on existing literature review about team identification, researchers sometimes examined it as a uni-dimensional variable. For example; affiliation [37], mental well being needs [38, 57], regional tribalism [32] and nature of sports [65] could be considered solely as the factor influencing on sport fans' team identity.

Besides these studies, some researchers have been adopted a different and multilateral approach to this issue. In other words, there is no unique factor that will create solely sport fans team identification, but several factors are contributing in the meantime [31, 33, 37, 42-56, 59-64, 65].

Among these researchers, Sloan [37] believed that factors such as affiliation, regional tribalism, management, history and performance play an important role in creating sport fans team identification. Sutton *et al.*, [42] cited also positive impact of factors like facility, satisfying individual needs, affiliation, social commitment, management, public relation, history and performance on sport supporters' social identity. Wann [45] concluded in his research that team identification by sport fans is the result of variables such as mental health, satisfying individual needs, affiliation, social commitment, players' performance and stadium. Trail and James [56] believed that factors such performance, satisfying individual needs, affiliation, social commitment, management and mental well-being cause the sport fans to be attached to sport clubs. Neale and Funk [64] proved in their research that variables such as promoting individual and mental health needs, affiliation and players' performance can be considered effective in creating sport fans' team identification. Chen [65] also concluded in his study that managerial factors like affiliation, social commitment, regional tribalism, management, public relation, history, performance, belief and sport facilities have a positive impact on sports fans to join their favorite teams. Despite popular belief, he believed that the variable background should be considered as a subset of management factor. In comparing current survey results with other studies can be concluded that factors such as stadium quality and

rituals play a pallor role in the creation of team identity by the Iranian football fans.

The reliability scores - as it can be seen in Table 6 - obtained using three different methods is acceptable in its various parts. Also a value at least .70 of Cronbach's alpha is sufficient reliability coefficient for a research. The value exceeding .70 of composite reliability is considered to represent acceptable level of reliability.

CONCLUSION

Sport spectatorship is an important part of the sport industry particularly from the professional point of view. Based on evidence and experience, it would cause financial problems for many sports clubs to be elevated, because sport fans exhibit greater willingness to invest larger amounts of time and money watching the team play and purchase club's products.

One strategy that many franchises seem to have overlooked for being competitive and generating revenue is maintaining and building a loyal fan base. However, as the sport industry continues to grow in variety and scope, there will be increased challenges for managing organizations and attracting consumers. Therefore, in order to achieve long-term business success, managers should be concerned about building and maintaining a loyal fan base, because loyal fans provide sport teams with a long-term sustainable source of income.

To achieve strategic objectives in the field of sport marketing, soccer clubs' managers need to determine the factors affecting soccer fans' team identification. Because previous researchers have looked at this subject through limited approach, therefore, this study attempts to examine all aspects of the concept. In other words, the main purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive and multidimensional tool for determining all factors affecting Iranian soccer fans' team identity. Results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis showed that in Iranian Major League Soccer there are 15 factors that cause people to be attracted to soccer teams and identified with them. They are as follows: 1) importance, 2) nature, 3) facility, 4) mental health needs, 5) individual needs, 6) athletic needs, 7) affiliation, 8) social commitment, 9) regional tribalism, 10) management, 11) public relation, 12) history, 13) performance, 14) belief and 15) coercion. The only gap in the current study was lack of pay attention to the quality of sport facilities and club's rituals probably due to poor quality of stadiums and the lack of ceremonial rituals.

So, in order to achieve increasing progress in the competitive area, managers are forced to pay attention to the concepts mentioned above.

The end result, it is recommended that sports administrators can use this scale to attract more soccer fans and found sport fandom base.

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