

Designing the competitive advantage model to Iranian football clubs based on teams' reputation

Diseño de un modelo de ventaja competitiva para los clubs de fútbol de Irán basado en la reputación de los equipos

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Abstract: The objective of the present study was to design a competitive advantage model for Iranian football clubs based on teams' reputation. In order to explore the components of the model, two rounds of Fuzzy Delphi staged by a half-open researcher-made questionnaire. The results of data analysis of two Fuzzy Delphi rounds indicated that, in the experts' views, the most important components of club reputation were public relations (media and social relations), identity and brand image of the club, performance, tradition, social responsibility, fan orientation, quality of management and financial health of the team or football club. Furthermore, the most important competitive advantage based on team reputation in terms of experts includes the components of efficiency, responsiveness, innovation, quality and loyalty of fans. The model also demonstrated that the club reputation will lead to a competitive advantage through the fans' satisfaction. **Key Words:** Team reputation, Competitive advantage, Fans, Football club, Iran.

Resumen: El objetivo del presente estudio fue diseñar un modelo de ventaja competitiva para los clubs de fútbol iraníes basado en la reputación de los equipos. Para explorar los componentes del modelo, se realizaron dos rondas de Fuzzy Delphi por medio de un cuestionario semiaabierto elaborado por el equipo investigador. Los resultados del análisis de datos de las dos rondas Fuzzy Delphi indicaron que, en opinión de los expertos, los componentes más importantes de la reputación del club eran las relaciones públicas (medios y relaciones sociales), la identidad e imagen de marca del club, el rendimiento, la tradición, la responsabilidad social, la orientación de los fans, la calidad de la gestión y la salud financiera del equipo o club de fútbol en cuestión. ventaja competitiva a través de la satisfacción de los aficionados. Además, la ventaja competitiva más importante basada en la reputación del equipo, según los expertos, incluye los componentes de eficiencia, receptividad, innovación, calidad y lealtad de los fans. El modelo también demostró que la reputación del club generará una ventaja competitiva a través de la satisfacción de los fans.

Palabras clave: reputación del equipo, ventaja competitiva, fans, club de fútbol, Irán.

Introduction

Today, all areas such as science, business, and industry are subject to profound and persistent changes. New patterns followed by new rules emerge every day and abrogate the rules of the past. These changes open up a new chapter for assumptions, impressions, and effective ways of life each time, and advance further steps toward the path of progression (Andrew, 2003). In a secret attempt to preserve survival and dominate their power on the market and individuals, organizations in an endless attempt try to discover and employ these patterns and new rules prior to the rivals and an endless competition is in progress to gain competitive advantage. However, the first and most essential function of competitive advantage is to ensure the survival of the organization; when the organization ensures its survival by relying on competitive advantage, it will prosper and can travel the roads of

success (Stacey, 2010). Competitive advantage should not be complicated or mixed with technology, but the advantage can emerge in the form of a choice with innovation (Stacey, 2010). Competitive advantage is a process that will meet today's competitive needs of the organization along with its ability to meet future competitive needs. Creating a unique combination of resources and capabilities, relying on intangible resources and heterogeneous methods play a determining role to stabilize the mentioned needs (Aparicio et al, 2016; García et al, 2016; Hamidzadeh, & Hosseinzadeh Shahri, 2008; Sánchez et al, 2017).

According to Hill and Jones, four factors assist the company to establish and maintain competitive advantage: superior performance, quality, innovation and responsiveness to customers. Each of these factors is the product of a company's distinctive qualification. In fact, they are to some extent distinct public qualifications that allow the company to differentiate its products, offer more value to its customers, and reduce their costs (Hill & Jones, 2007).

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Business is simply a means of converting inputs to outputs. Inputs are basic manufacturing factors such as labor, land, management capital, and technical information. Outputs are goods and services that a business produces; the easiest way to measure performance is the amount of input that is consumed to produce a determined output. Performance equals the ratio of output to input; lower inputs increase performance to produce specific outputs. A higher performance helps the company (through the low-cost structure) to achieve competitive advantage. The most important component of performance is the productivity of the employees for many companies, which is usually measured by the output of each employee. A company with the highest employee productivity in the industry usually has the lowest cost of production. Quality does not have any meanings other than what the customer really desires. In other words, a product has quality when it meets the customer's demands and needs (Crosby, 1984). Perceived quality is the customer's judgment of the superiority or general advantage of an object, which is a form of attitude that is relevant to satisfaction; however, they are not the same and result from the comparison of expectations with performance perceptions (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). High-quality products are goods or services that are reliable; meaning that they do what they are designed for efficiency and create distinctive features to enhance the value in customer's view. When customers discover that the features of a company's product (in terms of shape, characteristics, performance, durability, reliability, design, style, etc.) provide more value than their competitors, it is claimed it has higher quality. The effect of quality on the competitive advantage is as follows:

- High-quality products distinguish and increase the value of the products for customers. This high perception of value allows the company to consider a higher price for its products.
- Higher performance and lower prices are achieved with quality products.

Innovation can be defined as a company's modern or innovative way of operation or product that it produces. Innovation involves the creation of new products or processes. Perhaps innovation is the most important constructor of competitive advantage; accordingly, it is a stimulus to the competition. Since innovation offers unique advantages to the company (advantages that competitors lack), it can be the main source of competitive advantage. Uniqueness allows the company to differentiate itself from competitors and to consider more prices for its products or to reduce costs much more than competitors (Mazloumi and Dadvand, 2012).

- Product innovation: It is the creation of products customers consider valuable which enhances the company's authority of pricing.

- Process innovation: Creates value by lowering the cost of production.

Responsiveness means identifying and satisfying the needs of customers in a better way than other competitors. The greater value that customers regard for the products of a company leads to the creation of a distinct competitive advantage.

- Higher quality and innovation is one of the integral parts of better customer responsiveness.
- One of the important factors in responding to a customer is to customize the goods and services regarding to customers' demands (individual or group).
- Customer response time is one aspect of responding to a customer.
- In addition to quality, customization, and response time to the customer, other sources of improving customer response include superior design, superior service, after-sales service, and superior support.

Proper response to customers distinguishes a company's products and services and leads to greater brand loyalty and higher pricing (Mazloumi and Dadvand, 2012).

A company achieves competitive advantage when it succeeds in implementing a particular value strategy that competitors do not emphasize in the market or industry. A sustained competitive advantage is obtained by emphasizing mechanisms that maintain a competitive advantage from imitation. Creating a competitive advantage is the basis of superior organizational performance, survival, and development. Strategic management theory proposes that having a good reputation creates competitive advantage and affects the company's performance. Reputation is considered as an intangible and valuable asset. Most organizations make a series of benevolent activities and various types of social behaviors in order to create a good impression and reputation (Eghdami & Nezhadfahim, 2011).

Although the idea of good reputation has been a well-known concept from a very long time ago, related academic research, especially in the field of business and commerce, is more than half a century old. The first phase of such studies dates back to the 1950s and 1970s, and since the mid-1980s, managers have realized the strategic significance of the concept and have tried to create and maintain reputation as a competitive advantage, for which they have made more investments as they believe the best way to trust companies is to have a good reputation. One of the reasons for this is that reputation as an intangible asset cannot be imitated and copied by others, and the owner of this asset does not need legal and property laws to maintain it (Andrew, 2003).

Reputation is a subject which has attracted the attention of many marketing researchers (Walsh et al., 2006). According to Ewing et al., companies today have realized the

role and importance of organizational reputation regardless of where they are located. The reduction of operating costs, high rates of returning customers, and consequently an increase in sales and the possibility of raising product prices can be addressed as advantages of good reputation. Depending on the different attitudes, various definitions have been made, including the concept of reputation as an assessment which different beneficiaries have taken from the company's abilities to fulfill their expectations (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003). A collective system is defined from the subjective beliefs of the members of a social group (Bromley, 2002), indicating something in the minds of multiple societies about the past behavior of the organization and its related features (Eghdami & Nezhadfahim, 2011).

On the other hand, according to Fombrun & Van Riel (2003), twenty features of reputation are grouped into six dimensions: 1. Emotional attractions: how appealing, respected and acceptable a company is. 2. Products and services: understanding the quality, innovation, values, and validity of products and services of a company. 3. Financial performance: understanding the company's profitability, opportunities, and risks. 4. Perspective and leadership: to what extent a company introduces a powerful leader and a clear perspective. 5. Work environment: understanding how well a company is managed and what it does for the well-being of its employees. 6. Social responsibility: understanding how much a company pays attention to a good citizen in relation to the community, staff, and environment (Eghdami & Nezhadfahim, 2011).

The lack of organizational reputation has undermined the employees' sense of belonging to the organization and has diminished the individuals' involve with work and their commitment to the values and objectives of the organization, as well as their sensitivity to achieving these goals. This has led to losing the competitive advantages of the organization and risking its existence in a dynamic and competitive environment where organizations of the present age inevitably engage in. Accordingly, more awareness among managers and directors of various organizations are amid the factors which affect the formation of organizational reputation. The effect of a powerful reputation on the level of employees' commitment, as well as the amount of their involvement with the work of the staff, is necessary in the organization. This situation provides the required background for shaping a coherent organizational reputation as a result of which competitive advantages are achieved (Khadem Qurani, 2014).

In a study entitled "Understanding Reputation of Sports Organization", Tomiyama (2012) points out that in the past few years, a growing collection of academic and specialized literature on "reputation management" has emerged. Maintaining sustainable management by coordinating team objectives with beneficiaries in the long term is an important element in team management. Sports teams are pursuing their

own affairs and based on the support for their beneficiaries act as a symbol of the local community. Reputation can be used as an important indicator for measuring the beneficiaries' way of perception and their support of the specified team. However, little research has been carried out so far on the reputation of the teams and sports organizations and, as a result, there is still no defining and complete scale for measuring the reputation of the teams and sports organizations. Tomiyama's study was conducted with the aim of identifying theoretical fields of sports teams' reputation and determining if the present scales could be applied in sports organizations to measure reputation. The results of the confirmatory analysis using a factor analysis model for the teams and sports organizations indicated that each of the six elements of Fombrun & Van Riel (2003), reputation model was measurable to a certain extent. This indicates that the concept of reputation of large companies for business organizations can also be used for sports organizations, and it confirms that the measurement scale by Fombrun & Van Riel is also reliable for sports organizations. However, it is necessary to identify in the future the reasons why some of the elements of Fombrun & Van Riel reputation model are not proportionate to determine the reputation of sports organizations; the factors that can help strengthen the reputation of sports clubs and organizations have to be identified.

Jang, Ko, & Chan-Olmsted (2015) following the development and validation of Spectator-based Sports Team Reputation by studying the literature of research, proposed six dimensions of team performance, team traditions, team social responsibility, team spectator, quality management, and financial health to create the mentioned scale. He states that positive reputation improves equality and financial performance. In addition, reputation affects the value variable of customers such as trust, satisfaction, verbal behavior, and loyalty directly and indirectly.

In the literature on reputation, it has been mentioned that the reputation of a company is affected by various factors. Individual reputation influences company reputation (Bromley, 2002). The leader or management reputation affects an organization's reputation; a large number of studies have emphasized the importance of the leader's reputation in determining the reputation of an organization, to the extent that they say a leader can be responsible for a maximum of 48% of the organization reputation (Bromley, 2002).

All the content presented indicates the importance of reputation, good name or fame of organizations and companies for gaining competitive advantage, but is reputation important for Iranian sports teams and clubs? Can football teams and clubs be considered as an organization or company that seeks to benefit all domestic and foreign beneficiaries? Can the reputation of football teams be assumed as a strategic source for obtaining competitive advantage? What are the

special components of the reputation of football teams and clubs? What are the factors affecting the club's competitive advantage and team reputation? Considering such issues is one of the concerns of the present study that through a scientific and research methodology will eventually lead to presenting a competitive advantage model of Iranian football club based on the team reputation. According to the research literature, as briefly mentioned, the proposed initial model for presenting the competitive advantage model of the Iranian football club based on team reputation is formulated as follows.

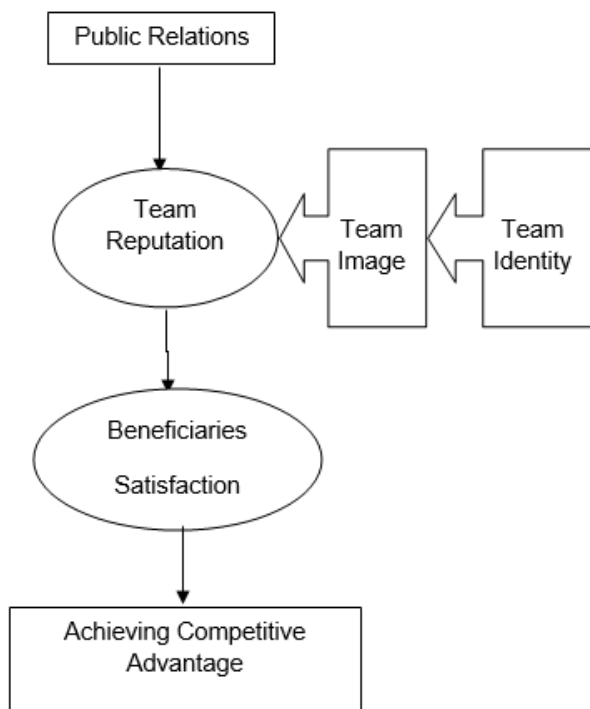


Figure 1. Initial model for the competitive advantage of Iranian football club based on team reputation

Methods

Participants

In the current study, the statistical population included all managers, specialists, and experts in the field of strategic management, organizational reputation, competitive advantage, and sports management in Iran. According to the explanations presented and the features of the present study, which is an interdisciplinary subject, 60 experts who had four attributes of knowledge and experience in the subject, willingness, sufficient time for the company, and effective communication skills, were identified and were invited to participate in

Fuzzy Delphi rounds through purposive sampling method. In the meantime, 25 experts entered the Delphi Fuzzy executive phase after frequent recalls and insistence, finally.

Instruments

The instrument used for gathering the required data was interview-based an opened questionnaire.

Procedures

The present study is a fundamental research which aims to produce theory and develop science. In addition, in terms of how data is collected, it is considered as a survey study that was conducted as a field study. To explore the components of competitive advantage of the Iranian football club and the components of team reputation, the components and sub-components of the conceptual model were fixed through the Fuzzy Delphi method and a half-open researcher-made questionnaire. Considering the central importance of the Fuzzy Delphi method, this method is briefly described.

The Fuzzy Delphi method was developed by Kaufman and Gupta in the 1980s (Cheng, & Lin, 2002). The application of this method, for making decisions and consensus on issues where objectives and parameters are not explicitly stated, leads to very valuable results. The implementation steps of the fuzzy Delphi method are in fact a combination of the implementation of the Delphi method and conducting analyzes on the information using the definitions of the theory of fuzzy sets (Stacey, 2010).

The number of experts in the Delphi/Delphi Fuzzy Method: There is no explicit rule for selecting and number of specialists, and their number depends on factors such as homogeneity or heterogeneity of the sample, Delphi goal or extent of the problem, quality of decision, ability of the research team in the administration of the study, internal and external credibility, time to collect available data and resources, scope of the problem, and acceptance of the response. Some researchers point out that 30 people are usually enough to provide enough information, and as they grow, replies are repeated and new information is not added; others write quantitative empirical evidence of the impact of the number of participants on the credibility and trust of the consensus process available (Powell, 2003)

Sampling in Delphi / Delphi fuzzy method: In most cases, sampling is based on the purpose (Ahmadi et al., 2008); however, if the experts are not identified, snowball sampling is also used. If experts are well-known, random sampling is used. Although some articles criticize Delphi for not having random sampling, it should be noted that the representativeness of samples is not important; rather, the quality of panels is more important than their number (Powell, 2003).

Statistical Analysis

Definition of linguistic variables: The researcher-made questionnaire was designed with the aim of consulting the experts about their agreement with the components of competitive advantage model of Iranian football club based on team reputation. Therefore, experts are supposed to express their consent to propositions through their verbal variables such as very low, low, moderate, high and very high. Since different characteristics of individuals affect their mental representations of qualitative variables, by defining the scope of qualitative variables, experts with the same mindset respond to questions. These variables are defined in the form of triangular fuzzy numbers according to Table 1 and Fig. 2.

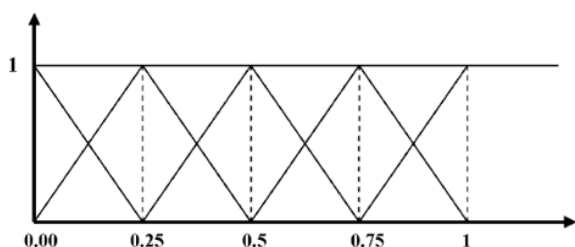


Fig. 2. Triangular fuzzy numbers for five-point Likert scale.

Table 1. Triangular fuzzy numbers of five-point Likert scale.

Verbal variables	Triangular fuzzy numbers (m, α, β)	Defuzzified score (X)
Completely agree	(0.75, 1, 1)	0.958
agree	(0.5, 0.75, 1)	0.75
no idea / average	(0.25, 0.5, 0.75)	0.5
Disagree	(0, 0.25, 0.5)	0.25
Completely disagree	(0, 0, 0.25)	0.0416

Table 2. Some experts' views of the survey in the first round.

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
a) Identifying components of team reputation (clubs)	Q1 The "reputation" of sports teams is capable of changing to "competitive advantage".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This has clearly happened in European leagues. Famous teams like Real and Barça, for example, can easily attract the world's greatest players. Of course, this issue can be carried out in the country if the clubs are private in order to compete and attract customers for the products of the club and provide various and, most importantly, unparalleled products to their customers; therefore, since the majority of the clubs are state clubs and, on the other hand, due to the lack of financial concerns, competitive advantage does not seem to happen in the country.
	Q2 In general, the reputation of a sports team is affected by the following factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public relations of sports team (media & social relations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other cases can also be added such as making professional supporters shareholders.

In the above table, defuzzified scores are calculated using the following formula: Formula 1):

$$x = \frac{m + 4(\alpha) + \beta}{6}$$

Different criteria for achieving consensus are expressed in the fuzzy Delphi method. The threshold is usually 0.7; but, according to the researcher, this threshold can vary in various studies. If the value of the de-dipped value accumulated from the expert opinion is larger than the threshold, then the criterion is consistent. If the benchmark is less than the threshold, it will be eliminated (Habibi, Firoozi, Jafi, & Sarafrazi, 2015).

Results

The results of the data descriptive survey on demographic features of the experts demonstrated that the greatest age distribution of experts is between the ages 35 and 40 with 52% and the least age distribution was related to the age over 50 years with 8%. The highest gender distribution of male experts was men with 80% and the lowest distribution was for women with 20%. 84% of the experts had a Ph.D. degree and 16% had a master's degree. The highest distribution of the experts' academic position was related to the Assistant Professor position with 72% and the lowest distribution was related to the academic position of Instructor with 4%. The highest distribution of the status of experts' work experience was related to groups of 5-10 and 11-15 years of service with 40%, and lowest distribution was less than 5 years of service with 8%.

The results obtained through Fuzzy Delphi in dual rounds are presented in Tables 1 through 7.

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports team image (through identity and personality) • Team's function • The tradition governing a team • A team's social responsibility • Team's support-orientation • The quality of team management • Team's financial health • Other factors (Please note in the expert opinion if you are considering something or other materials that affect team reputation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardware facilities such as private stadiums and solving exercises, as well as the presence of star players, affected team reputation. • The quality of team management is very general, which can be the background to some other options.
Q3	The public relations of the sports teams include two sub-components of "media relations" and "social relations" of the sports teams, which can affect team's reputation and ultimately obtain competitive advantage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opinions
Q4	The "media relations" of the sports teams can be associated with team's reputation if managed properly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation and media are complementary. • Media relations are an extremely important component in promoting team reputation and obtaining competitive advantage. • Of course, one of the items can be media relations, because in this case, the results and fans and even in some teams such as Tractor, ethnicity can be effective. Having affirming players can even lead to team reputation due to their popularity.
Q5	The "social relations" of the sports teams can be associated with team's reputation if managed properly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote reputation in the long term.
Q6	The "brand image" of the sports teams can be associated with team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand is very important in general, but in the Iranian market, especially in the field of sports, people have not come to terms. • Strengthening a brand has not been much emphasized in Iran, and it's not that tangible for the audience.
Q7	The "brand identity" of the sports teams can be associated with team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand identity has not been much emphasized in Iran, and it's not that tangible for the audience.
Q8	The "brand character" of the sports teams can be associated with team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character of a brand has not been much emphasized in Iran, and it's not that tangible for the audience.
Q9	The "performance" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opinions
Q10	The "ruling tradition" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term culture of a club is better to be used. • To some degree ambiguous.
Q11	The "social responsibility" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functionality, along with social behavior, is to some extent more effective.
Q12	The "fan-orientation" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporters are the most important capitals of the teams
Q13	The "management quality" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opinions
Q14	The "financial health" of sports teams can lead to the reputation of sports team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial corruption has a greater impact than financial reputation.
Q15	There are also "other factors" that affect the reputation of sports teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This case must be carefully studied. • Changing supporters to shareholders. • Although winning cups can be categorized as team functions, but it is considered as an important factor • According to the workload, these factors seem to be sufficient.

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
b) Identifying the components of competitive advantage based on team reputation (club)	Q16 Achieving competitive advantage through team reputation (and its components) will be achieved through the fans' satisfaction. In other words, it can be said that "fans' satisfaction is a mediator variable between team reputation and competitive advantage".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The satisfaction of the supporters of competitive advantage results from team reputation, not the mediator variable. • Supporters and shareholders.
	Q17 In general, for the competitive advantage of a football club based on team reputation, the following components are considered (each of the components will be questioned individually and independently). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The productivity of a club • Quality in all club's dimensions • Club's accountability regarding fans' expectations and desires. • Innovation in all aspects of the managerial, technical and executive of the club • Preserving club's current supporters • Attracting rival team's supporters • Other factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The attraction of rival supporters requires more reflection. • Such cases are not much associated with sports, except for cases 6 and 7 that are rightly pointed out. • Preserving and attracting supporters as a result of competitive advantage are considered not the factors of competitive advantage • The "component of attracting rival fans" does not seem appropriate, as it differs from the discussion of goods or services and is linked to the identity of individuals.
	Q18 A football club's "Productivity" is one of the components of the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity is not a tangible choice in football. • When there is accountability, good audit, and transparency, productivity will also rise.
	Q19 "Quality" in all dimensions of a football club is one of the components of the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality cannot be both input and output at the same time. • It overlaps with one of the components of reputation.
	Q20 A football club's "accountability" regarding the fans' expectations and desires, is one of the components of the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability is also assumed as input and output simultaneously.
	Q21 "Innovation" in all managerial dimensions, is one of the components of the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It does not necessarily lead to innovation • The reputation factors do not necessarily lead to innovation. • It is not so relevant • I do not know how you came to this component.
	Q22 "Preserving current fans" of a club is one of the components of the competitive advantage of the club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The logical output is the inputs mentioned. • A famous team can always be tempting for rival supporters.
	Q23 "Attracting rival team's fans" is one of the components of the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opinions
	Q24 There are also "other factors" that affect the competitive advantage of a club based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You think more about this and we will comment. • One can think of other things like attracting investors for the development of the club. • Perceived value of supporters. • It seems like enough work. • No opinion
	c) General analysis of the model	Q25 The proposed model of the competitive advantage of Iranian football club based on team reputation is acceptable in terms of "theoretical and logical content".
Q26 The proposed model of competitive advantage of the Iranian football club based on team reputation is acceptable in terms of "form and relation between components".		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competitive advantage outputs are editable.
Q27 The expert's final opinion on the generalities and details of the Iranian soccer club's competitive advantage model based on team reputation:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's a good questionnaire, but you can add other components as well. • The outputs of the model should match the realities of the sport space. • The beneficiaries' share of the output is less observed. The model needs a field survey.

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The model has a relative cohesion, but the considered outputs are not related to sports in some cases. • It's an interesting model, but there are some ambiguous parts that need to be worked on more. • This model needs to be reviewed further, but it's good to start with. • In general, the questionnaire has been well written.

Table 3. Counting results of the responses of the first round survey (first round of Fuzzy Delphi).

Questions	Amount of agreement with any proposition					
	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral/ no idea	Agree	Strongly agree	total
Q1	0	1	0	6	18	25
Q2	0	0	0	7	18	25
Q3	0	0	0	10	15	25
Q4	0	0	1	8	16	25
Q5	0	0	0	6	19	25
Q6	0	0	1	4	20	25
Q7	0	0	2	10	13	25
Q8	0	0	2	11	12	25
Q9	0	0	0	1	24	25
Q10	0	2	3	9	11	25
Q11	0	0	1	8	16	25
Q12	0	2	1	8	14	25
Q13	0	0	1	6	18	25
Q14	0	1	3	4	17	25
Q15	0	0	5	7	13	25
Q16	0	1	3	6	15	25
Q17	0	0	1	13	11	25
Q18	0	0	2	10	13	25
Q19	0	1	0	9	15	25
Q20	0	1	0	10	14	25
Q21	0	1	4	7	13	25
Q22	1	0	1	7	16	25
Q23	2	7	1	3	12	25
Q24	0	1	9	11	4	25
Q25	0	1	1	13	10	25
Q26	1	1	1	12	10	25

Table 4. Average views of the experts from the first survey.

Questions	Experts' opinions mean (m, α , β)			Defuzzified mean (x) (Crisp value)		
Q1	0.98	'	0.91	'	0.66	0.85
Q2	0.36	'	0.93	'	0.68	0.65
Q3	0.48	'	0.9	'	0.65	0.7
Q4	0.79	'	0.9	'	0.65	0.78
Q5	0.48	'	0.94	'	0.69	0.70
Q6	0.35	'	0.94	'	0.69	0.66
Q7	0.58	'	0.86	'	0.61	0.68
Q8	0.54	'	0.85	'	0.6	0.66
Q9	0.2	'	0.99	'	0.74	0.64
Q10	0.85	'	0.79	'	0.54	0.72
Q11	0.59	'	0.9	'	0.65	0.71
Q12	0.63	'	0.84	'	0.59	0.68
Q13	0.51	'	0.92	'	0.67	0.70
Q14	0.51	'	0.87	'	0.62	0.66
Q15	0.59	'	0.83	'	0.58	0.66
Q16	0.51	'	0.85	'	0.6	0.65
Q17	0.63	'	0.85	'	0.6	0.69
Q18	0.74	'	0.86	'	0.61	0.73
Q19	0.58	'	0.88	'	0.63	0.69
Q20	0.66	'	0.87	'	0.62	0.71
Q21	0.58	'	0.82	'	0.57	0.65
Q22	0.4	'	0.87	'	0.63	0.63
Q23	0.39	'	0.66	'	0.43	0.49
Q24	0.85	'	0.68	'	0.43	0.65
Q25	0.65	'	0.82	'	0.84	0.77
Q26	0.66	'	0.79	'	0.55	0.66

According to the data obtained from the first round of the Fuzzy Delphi displayed in Tables 2, 3 and 4, only nine questions were able to obtain a threshold of 0.7, which can be identified in black color in Table 12.4. However, these nine questions were fixed and were not used in the second round of the Fuzzy Delphi. Questions that could not reach the

threshold were edited and after applying changes in the form and content were provided to the experts in the second round with regard to the views of experts, and the research group and literature.

The results of the second-round Delphi survey are presented in the tables 5, 6 and 7:

Table 5. Expert Opinions in the Second Fuzzy Delphi Round

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
a) Identifying components of team reputation	Q1 In general, the reputation of the sports team is affected by the following factors: (Each item will be questioned individually) 1. Public Relations of sports team (media & social relations) 2. Sports team image (via identity and character) 3. Team performance 4. Dominant team tradition 5. Social responsibility of the team 6. Team fan-orientation 7. Team management quality 8. Team financial health 9. Hardware facilities such as a private stadium 10. Having well-known players and coaches	
	Q2 The "brand image" of the sports teams can be related to team reputation.	
	Q3 The "brand identity" of sports teams can be associated with team reputation.	• Brand identity, image, and character are so close to each other and have internal effects.
	Q4 The "brand character" of sports teams can be related to team reputation.	
	Q5 The "function" of sports teams can be related to team reputation.	
	Q6 "Hardware facilities such as a private stadium" can lead to team reputation.	
	Q7 "Having well-known players and coaches" in sports teams can lead to team reputation.	
	Q8 "Fan orientation" of sports teams can lead to team reputation.	
	Q9 "Financial health" of sports teams can lead to team reputation.	• Factors such as financial immoralities and non-payment of taxes, which are usually hidden, cannot be effective.
	b) Identifying components of competitive advantage on team reputation (club)	Q10 There are other factors which affect sports team reputation as well. Obtaining competitive advantage by team reputation (and its components) can be achieved through supporters' satisfaction.
Q11 In other words, it can be argued that the objective of team reputation is supporter's satisfaction which in turn leads to the creation of competitive advantage for sports clubs.		
Q12 In general, for competitive advantage of football clubs based on team reputation, following components are considered: 1. Club's productivity 2. Quality in all clubs' dimensions 3. Club's accountability towards supporters' expectations and desires 4. Innovation in all club managerial, technical, and executive dimensions 5. Preserving current club fans 6. Attracting fans of the rival teams 7. Other factors		

Sections	Questions	Experts' views
	Q13 Quality in all football club dimensions is one of the components of club competitive advantage based on team reputation.	
	Q14 Football club's accountability to the fans' expectations and desires is one of the components of club competitive advantage based on team reputation.	
	Q15 Preserving current club fans is one of the components of club competitive advantage based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the result of competitive advantage and not its component
	Q16 Attracting fans of the rival teams is one of the components of club competitive advantage based on team reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fan is usually someone who has a high team identity and loyalty to his favorite team. The attraction of rival team supporters, such as those in the field of goods, does not seem to be a good approach to obtain competitive advantage in sports teams.
	Q17 There are other factors which affect club competitive advantage based on team reputation.	
	Q18 The proposed model of competitive advantage of the Iranian football club based on team reputation is understandable and acceptable in terms of form and relation between components.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A model is good and appropriate that classifies the factors in dimensions such as the three-branch model. • The ethics of players and technical staff can lead to team reputation and obtain competitive advantage. • The model should be presented schematically so that it can be investigated appropriately.

Table 6. Counting results of the responses of the second round survey (second round of Fuzzy Delphi)

Questions	Amount of agreement with any proposition						total
	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral/ no idea	Agree	Strongly agree		
Q1	0	1	0	4	20	25	
Q2	0	1	0	3	21	25	
Q3	0	0	0	7	18	25	
Q4	2	3	4	7	9	25	
Q5	0	1	0	3	21	25	
Q6	0	0	1	4	20	25	
Q7	1	0	0	5	19	25	
Q8	0	1	0	4	20	25	
Q9	0	0	0	1	24	25	
Q10	0	2	3	6	14	25	
Q11	0	0	1	8	16	25	
Q12	0	2	0	4	19	25	
Q13	0	0	1	6	18	25	
Q14	0	1	0	4	20	25	
Q15	1	1	0	5	18	25	
Q16	6	1	0	6	12	25	
Q17	0	0	1	7	17	25	
Q18	0	0	2	6	17	25	

Table 7. Average views of the experts from the second survey

Questions	Experts' opinions mean (m, α, β)			Defuzzified mean (x) (Crisp value)
Q1	0.98	α 0.93	β 0.68	0.89
Q2	0.22	α 0.94	β 0.69	0.77
Q3	0.36	α 0.93	β 0.68	0.79
Q4	0.92	α 0.68	β 0.45	0.68
Q5	0.38	α 0.94	β 0.69	0.80
Q6	0.35	α 0.94	β 0.69	0.80
Q7	0.33	α 0.91	β 0.67	0.77
Q8	0.22	α 0.93	β 0.68	0.77
Q9	0.2	α 0.99	β 0.74	0.81
Q10	0.73	α 0.82	β 0.57	0.76
Q11	0.59	α 0.9	β 0.65	0.80
Q12	0.44	α 0.9	β 0.65	0.78
Q13	0.51	α 0.92	β 0.67	0.81
Q14	0.42	α 0.93	β 0.68	0.80
Q15	0.39	α 0.88	β 0.64	0.75
Q16	0.48	α 0.67	β 0.48	0.60
Q17	0.39	α 0.91	β 0.66	0.78
Q18	0.58	α 0.9	β 0.65	0.80

Concerning the defuzzified amount obtained, Table 7 displays all components and sub-components of the proposed model of competitive advantage based on club reputation, except for Proposition No. 4 (“brand character” of sports teams can be related with team reputation) and 16 (attracting rival team supporters is one of the components of club competitive advantage based on team reputation). The threshold limit

of 0.7 or more points was obtained; therefore, based on the Fuzzy Delphi and from the experts' theoretical point of view, most of the propositions of the questioned conceptual model are fixed and significant.

Considering the fixed sections and components, the final model of the competitive advantage of the Iranian football club based on team reputation is summarized in Fig. 3:

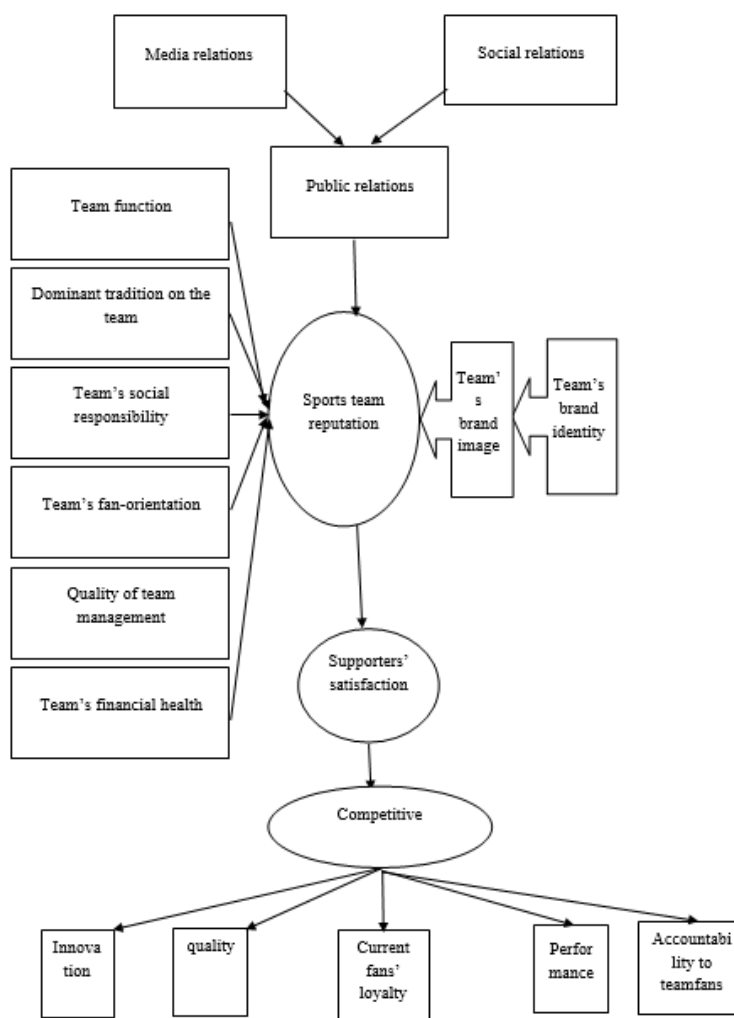


Figure 3. Model of the competitive advantage of the Iranian football clubs based on team reputation.

Discussion

The results obtained from operating two rounds of Fuzzy Delphi led to the evolution of the initial model in all three components affecting club reputation, components of competitive advantage, and the identification of the fans as the most important key beneficiaries. According to the experts, regarding the components affecting club reputation, the components of public relations (social relations and media relations), identity

and image of the club brand, performance, tradition/culture, social responsibility, fan-orientation, managerial quality and financial health of the team or club are the three distinct and independent dimensions which affect the reputation of sports clubs from different angles. It is also worth noting that in the very first line of the proposition, “Sports team reputation has the ability to change to competitive advantage”. The highest level of consensus among the experts was achieved with a dephased score of 0.85%; the components of public relations

with its sub-components included media relations and social relations, and the tradition governing a club and the team's social responsibility were identified and consolidated as the first components effective on club reputation. As a consequence, the reputation of organizations is created through continuous relationship with the beneficiaries of the company through advertising, public relations, websites, logos, media communications, financial support, and other modern tools for organizational relationship. The more significant point is that companies must prove the messages they send in such ways (Deephouse, 2000). In addition, according to Brewer and Zhao (2010), other elements that affect company reputation include organizational moralities, financial performance, beneficiaries value, company branding activities, marketing mixed activities, public relations, relationship with beneficiaries (Brewer & Zhao, 2010). Concerning social responsibility, Baldarelli & Gigli (2014) outlined the reputation motives with a perspective to company responsibility and concluded that tools applied to measure and manage reputation can be usefully employed in terms of organizational responsibility. Vitezic (2011), by examining the relationship between company reputation and social responsibility of major Croatian organizations, states that company social responsibility as a feature is of the least importance from the executives and employees' point of view, while it is important to the customers. Furthermore, Heinze, Soderstrom, & Zdroik (2014) in their study entitled "Towards Strategic and Valid Corporate Social Responsibility in Professional Sports: The Case Study of Detroit Lions" consider that the promotion and institutionalization of corporate social responsibility in sports are among sports directors' agenda. Their findings indicate that the major stages and mechanisms of decision-making process and the implementation of this approach include the role of organizational structure, leadership, and social participation.

In the second round, other components affecting club reputation were identified, with the highest score related to the components of financial health and team performance. Other components, including quality of club management, fan-orientation, identity, and club brand image were also able to reach the threshold limit of 0.7. Along with the results obtained, in the study by Ozturk, Cop, & Sani (2010) entitled "Investigating the Role of Corporate Reputation Management as a Competitive Tool in the Tourism Industry", it was indicated that, according to changing market conditions, the need for sustained success, customer loyalty, satisfaction and obtaining competitive advantage is felt; one of the ways to create a superior corporate performance is definitely through an appropriate corporate reputation. Corporate social responsibility, financial performance, employee commitment, and service quality are among the most important factors for obtaining and retaining reputation. The organization reputation is created through beneficiaries' perception and is a

type of assessment in investment. Moreover, in a study by Caliskan, Icke, and Ayturk (2011), entitled "The Relationship between Organizational Reputation and Financial Performance at the University of Istanbul", the results indicated that although organizational reputation has no effect on a corporate financial performance, the latter can improve organizational reputation. In terms of performance, according to the signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), organizational reputation can be considered as an enlightening indication regarding probable behavior of the organization and the quality of its performance. This will increase the societies' trust in the organization's products and services; it also increases the investors' trust in the organization's performance.

Organizational reputation can be indicative of the company's ability to present valuable products to beneficiaries (Fombrun et al., 2003). In a study by Tracey (2014), entitled "Corporate Reputation and Financial Performance: Major Dimensions of Corporate Reputation and its Relation to Sustainable Financial Performance", the researcher identified three obvious limitations by examining previous studies. The first limitation is the confusion and contradiction in the concept of reputation and its close connection with other subjects, including image and identity.

Furthermore, according to experts, the components of competitive advantage based on club reputation include accountability, efficiency, innovation, quality and preserving supporters of the football club. Moreover, the proposition of "the presented model of the competitive advantage of Iranian football club based on team reputation in terms of form and the relationship between the components is understandable and acceptable", received a positive score of 0.80%. Along with the results obtained, Reyhani (2016) concludes that according to the final model, it can be argued that competitive resources alone do not create competitive advantage; it is only through competitive intelligence and strategic entrepreneurship that competitive resources can be considered as competitive advantages for sports producers. Bar-Eli, Galily, & Israeli (2008) indicated that the main source of success of these teams is their excellent team management and ability to create important historical events.

Conclusion

Lack of access to similar studies regarding the relationship between the concepts of competitive advantage and team reputation in the field of sports can be numbered as one of the limitations of the present study. Moreover, studies that sought to identify the components of competitive advantage and corporate/organizational reputation and the relationship between their components were rarely found in other manufacturing and service industries. In general, it can be argued that the competitive advantage model of Iranian football

club based on team reputation, is consistent with previous studies theoretically, and in the experts' views it has obtained

a good consensus. In order to get better and more reliable results, the model test in the form of a field study is required.

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