

Original Article

Development of brand equity model of Zob Ahan Sports Club

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Abstract

Today, sports club managers have understood that the effort to achieve the development of a sports club is infeasible without focus and attention to the Brand equity. For this reason, they have been designing and implementing brand equity for the change and development of their clubs. Therefore, because of importance this issue, the purpose of this study was to present a model of the Brand equity management model of Zob Ahan Isfahan sports club setting. The present study was a qualitative research. The statistical population included all professors and experts in management and management sport of the country in the field of branding. Using snowball sampling and based on the theoretical adequacy of the research, 18 people were interviewed.

Regarding, the grounded theory was used to analyze of the categories and indicators affecting the brand equity process of the Zob Ahan club. Also, Glaser (2005) Grounded Theory approach was used to analyze data.

Findings of The study showed numerous indications in terms of organizational structure, marketing, and audience that affect on the brand equity of Zob Ahan club. In the organizational dimension, human resource, management, and structure; in the market dimension, product/ service and marketing; and in the audience dimension, relationship with customer, consumer and brand were identified. With Using the findings of the research, was designed the model of Brand equity management of Zob Ahan club.

**Keywords:** Brand, Brand equity, Zob Ahan sports club setting.

Introduction

Today, companies and clubs create brands in order for growing their business and increase their profitability. Through differentiating themselves from competitors, they try to encourage consumers to buy their products or services, and in order to turn their product to a reliable and familiar brand in their customers' minds, try to convince consumers that their product is more valuable. Brand is considered one of the assets of a company, which is often in the form of a name, word, symbol, design or a combination of these elements whose purpose is to transfer and identify the meanings that distinguish the company's products or services from the competitors (Hamidi et al., 2015, p. 124). According to Decherntuwery (2001), a successful brand is able to rapidly create a strong emotional and personal relationship with customers, and in this way it makes possible the probability of customer's loyalty to brand. A brand is a name that is directly used in sale of goods or use of services; but specifically, brand is not just a name, but it also has a graphic symbol or logo which is unique. Therefore, a brand is a name or symbol which is used with the aim of selling goods or providing services, and the organization uses it for the purpose of value creation for its products (John Miller and David Moore, 1998, p. 12). Today, other elements such as experiences, heard things, narratives and consumers' mental memories about the specific features of brand have interconnected to each other in a set, and all of which together have created the concept of brand (Kotler, 2006, p. 24).

Regarding creating strong brands, Aaker (1991) believes that brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality of brand all lead to creation of brand equity, which is very important for companies. If customers are loyal to the brand, they are willing to pay a higher price for that and marketing plans will be more effective for them, and this will cause the company to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Since customer is considered the key and pivotal factor in enhancing organizational agility, and orientation of all goals, strategies and resources is around attracting and maintenance of customer, so maintaining and enhancing customer loyalty is considered a strategic challenge for organizations which are concerned about maintaining and developing their competitive position in the marketplace. The goal of creating a brand is something more than selling goods or providing target services. Brand, in addition to having control on market share, also offers ways to grow business, and attracts and maintains skilled and talented employees, and also improves its own value for the stockholders of the complex (Hamidi et al., 2015, p. 85).

One of credible concepts in the area of marketing is brand equity which plays an important role in creating long-term interests for the organization. Brand equity exists when the consumer is familiar with the brand and understands the added value of purchasing a particular product or service. Brand equity is an added value that has been granted to a brand because of its name. Therefore, it is a key factor in brand management and branding strategies.

According to Aaker (1991), brand equity is the set of attributes that are linked to the brand and its name and symbol, and increases or decreases the value created by a product or service for an organization or its customers. Aaker claims that four aspects of brand awareness, perceived quality, loyalty to brand, and brand associations directly create brand equity.

Clare (1993), through conceptualization of brand value based on the customer, introduces it as a different impact from brand knowledge on the consumer's response to brand marketing. Customer-based brand equity includes the consumers' reactions to one of the factors of mixed marketing about brand, compared to their reactions to the same factor of mixed marketing but in relation to another anonymous and non-famous product or service. From Clare's point of view, brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand, and the elements that are associated with the brand name (associations) and are kept in mind are unique, pleasant, and strong. For this reason, growth of equity is an important and achievable goal for organizations that can achieve it through development and growing of more pleasant associations and emotions among consumers and the target market.

In line with this view, Rio et al. (2013) evaluated spectator-based brand equity model in French clubs. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between internal factors and ten brand equity factors (brand, rating, social issues, commitment, team history, club status, team success, coach, management and stadium).

In another study, Seifi et al. (2015) examined the impact of financial support on customer-based brand equity in Mahram club. In this study, six factors of prominence, product performance, brand imagery, emotions, judgment and coincidence were introduced as determining factors in customer-based brand equity, among which financial support had a significant impact on all factors. These researchers believe that customer-based brand equity is a good indicator for determining effectiveness of financial support. Also, the results have shown that the image of Mahram brand has had a good position among spectators. Sajjadi et al. (2014) also in their study examined the factors affecting brand equity of Persepolis club. In this study, the ten factors of loyalty to fans, stars, team success, club management, stadium, club background, coach, media, sponsors and logo were identified as factors determining brand equity of Persepolis club. In addition, Farahani et al. (2014) examined the modeling of brand equity and factors affecting loyalty of fan-based brand equity in the Iranian Football Premier League. They reported that the factor of attributes and the factor of brand association advantages have on significant impact on loyalty to brand in fans of Iranian Football Premier League, but the factor of brand association attributes and the factor of brand identity have direct and significant impact on the fans' loyalty to brand. These researchers also pointed out that the collected data were consistent with the theoretical model of research, and all of them showed desirable value and confirmation of the research model.

Additionally, in a study by Anuar et al (2015) on brand equity of International club, they concluded that in order for the club to be able to improve its brand equity from national level to international level, there is need for being active in the market, various marketing activities, and suitable strategic actions. They also stated that in order to raise brand equity from national level to international level, there is need for proper shareholders' performance and efficiency of the club shareholders' rights. They also considered promotion of brand equity of the club as guaranteeing audiences' support and recognizing the club's brand name in the international level, and concluded that a club cannot upgrade to international level without an appropriate brand and support of shareholders. Considering the mentioned issues and high importance of clubs' brand equity and given that Zob Ahan is one of the prominent clubs in the country, and however, it has not had a significant performance in terms of brand equity and club brand identification, in this study, the factors affecting brand equity if Zob Ahan Club are determined, examined and explained and, finally, the model for managing brand equity of this club has been drawn.

### Research methodology

Since in the present study, due to shortage of theoretical foundations, there was no possibility of sufficient knowledge about the important indicators related to the problem and their relationship with each other, qualitative research method was used. Usually qualitative research, which is essentially exploratory, is used in cases where there is some kind of concern about the way of occurrence of phenomena and their relationship to each other, rather than measuring the relationship between variables (Danayee Fard and Mozaffari, 2008, p. 131). In other words, social sciences deal with conceptual and concept making factors, and its researchers theorize about what they do (Dervin and Grossbogg, 2009, p. 55). Hence, while studying natural topics only guarantees single hermeneutics, studying social phenomena requires the help of double hermeneutics (Sayer, 2009, p. 39). Qualitative research uses a set of methods, techniques and tools such as case study, personal experience, introspection, biography, narrative, collaborative observation, non-collaborative observation, deep interviews, types of human artifacts, cultural products, and all types of texts based on observation of historical

texts, interactive and visual texts; and it covers a wide range of interpretations and interpretive analyzes, that one of the methods of interpretation and analysis in that is the Grounded Theory.

Grounded Theory has been designed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in order to study social phenomena. In fact, Grounded Theory method does not follow a fixed and predetermined process, and the process of information collection and its analysis overlap with each other completely. In other words, as in this method the researcher does not seek to test a predetermined hypothesis or theory, and collects the information without any assumed hypothesis, so at the same time with collecting information, he tries to analyze and develop them and understand the relationship between them in order to use these results in the next stages of collecting and analyzing and theorizing. The main process in the Grounded Theory technique is the process of coding and classifying raw data, extracting the concepts and the main categories and the relationships between them. Reviewing the literature of Grounded Theory, we face three major approaches including systematic approach (Strauss and Corbin), new approach (Glaser), and constructivist approach (Charmaz) in the process of information analysis, that they have differences with each other in terms of the role of the researcher and the method of coding the concepts and analyzing the information (Scott, 2006, p. 130). In this research, the new approach (Glaser) was used. According to the new approach, no initial framework was sought and the core codes extracted from the interviews were categorized and then the created categories were compared to each other so that the main categories and dimensions of each one will be identified and extracted. Therefore, all the categories and the relationship between them were based on data analysis; of course at this stage, referring to the theoretical literature of research contributed a lot to the categorization's being more and more precise.

In qualitative studies, including Grounded Theory, What is important to the researcher is that who can be a source full of information for his study. In qualitative studies, people who participate in research are not called case or sample but they are called participant or informer, because there is no intervention conducted on them. They actively participate in the study. This is a type of sampling during which people are selected because of having firsthand information about a phenomenon, or because of having experienced that phenomenon or having a particular point of view about that. Therefore, in this research also the sampling method is non-probabilistic and judgmental, and the method of implementing that is snowball method. The number of participants in qualitative studies, such as in Grounded Theory approach, is not predictable from the beginning; the sample size is determined by the collected data and their analysis. In this method, an initial group is selected for interview, and then the subsequent groups for interview are introduced by the same group; sampling continues until the data is saturated. Saturation in Grounded Theory means completion of code levels and it means that no new conceptual information is obtained which requires a new code or extension of the existing codes. The researcher, through continuous examination of the data, ultimately feels saturated and closes the sample.

Regarding the sample size, a group of people or situations (usually 8 to 20 ones) are selected who cover various aspects of the investigation area. Less than eight informers will lead to an approach that basically relies on case study and more than 20 people probably generates a lot of data that require complete analysis and it leads to collection of additional and unnecessary data (Hooman, 2012, p. 104). According to the Grounded Theory strategy in this research, sampling was not planned in detail from the beginning of the study, but it was focused through snowball method and in parallel to the research progress; and it was ended when all categorizations were saturated.

After that, the present study has tried to investigate and understand the developing meaning of sports brand in the perception and viewpoint of academic experts in the field of sports, branding, or both as well as owners of sports brands, and it has been tried to extract the meaning they had in mind through entering the field of meaning; it means that interviewing the experts and specialists in the field of branding and sports brand equity continued until the next interview did not add any completing contents to the theory components. In this study, 18 people were selected through snowball method. In fact, from the 12<sup>th</sup> interview onward, a repetition in the received information was observed. But in order to be sure, it was continued until the 18<sup>th</sup> interview. From the 13<sup>th</sup> interview, the information was completely repetitive. Data collection lasted six months. Each interview lasted from 15 minutes to 50 minutes depending on the willingness of the interviewee to the subject. Interviews, with permission from the interviewees, were fully recorded and also noting was done during the interview.

Validity in qualitative research is related to the question of whether the used methods, approaches, and techniques are related to each other and measure what the researcher is searching for (Hooman, 2010, p. 56). In the 1980s, Guba and Lincoln considered the concept of trustworthiness as a criterion to replace validity and reliability and they suggested that this concept consists of four elements of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirability (Hooman, 2010, pp. 62-66). In the present study, in order to calculate the reliability of the test, 3 interviews were selected among the conducted interviews and each of them was coded twice within a 15-day time interval by the researcher. The results of this coding are given in Table (1):

**Table 1:** Interviewing about the reliability of retest

Number	Interview title	Number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability of retest (percentage)
1	A <sub>2</sub>	144	15	9	82%
2	A <sub>4</sub>	147	56	26	79%
3	E <sub>1</sub>	89	40	12	87%
<b>Total</b>		280	111	47	82%

As can be seen in the table, the number of codes in two 15-day intervals is equal to 280; the total number of agreements between the codes in these two times is equal to 111, and the total number of disagreements between codes in these two times is 47. The reliability of the retest of the conducted interviews in this study, using the mentioned formula, is equal to 82%. Given that this reliability is more than 60% (Kvale, 1966: 237), reliability of coding can be confirmed. Reliability between two coders: In order to calculate the reliability of the interviews through intra-subject agreement of two coders (assessors), another researcher was requested to participate in the research as a research fellow (coder); the required trainings and techniques for coding the interviews were given to him. Then the researcher along with this research fellow coded two interviews and obtained the percentage of intra-subject agreement, which is used as the index of research reliability; the results of this coding are presented in the table below.

**Table 2:** Calculating the reliability between two coders

Number	Interview title	Number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability of retest (percentage)
1	A <sub>6</sub>	145	52	38	77%
2	E <sub>4</sub>	68	20	14	75%
<b>Total</b>		213	72	52	76%

As can be seen in Table 2, the total number of codes registered by the researcher and his fellow is equal to 213; the total number of agreements between these codes is 72, and the total number of disagreements between these codes is 52. The reliability between the coders for the interviews conducted in this study, using the mentioned formula, is 76%. Given that this reliability is more than 60% (Kvale, 1966, p. 237), the reliability of coding is confirmed, and it can be claimed that the reliability of analysis is appropriate.

### Research results

In the data analysis stage, the conducted interviews were analyzed. Analysis of the obtained data and identification of main and secondary classes, as well as the relationship between the classes and, finally, identification of their hierarchy are among the most fundamental methods of Grounded Theory that ultimately leads to formation and extraction of theory from the conducted interviews. For this purpose, three stages of theoretical coding as below have been used in order to identify the mentioned classes and their relationship with each other and, finally, discovering a conceptual framework from the interviews.

**Open coding:** This is the first stage of coding process in Grounded Theory methodology in which there are two methods for extracting data from interviews: minor analysis and key points' analysis. In this study, firstly the content of all interviews was written and then their open coding was done using key points' coding method, such that the data collected in the interviews was written and then through line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the written materials, open codes were created. Axial coding: After coding the key points, those codes resulted from analysis, which were mentioning "a common subject", are grouped. This common axis is manifested in a title named "concept". In Table (3), an example of the concepts taken from the initial codes is shown.

**Table 3:** An example of the concepts taken from the coding stages

Concepts	A subcategory	Main categories
-Training		
-Employees	-Human source	
-Employees' commitment		
-Employees' role		
-Employee selection		
-Conflict		
-Outlook	-Planning and management	
-Strategy management		
-Re-branding		Organizational dimension
-System design		
-Weak points		
-Organizational cooperation	-Structure	
-Team structure		
-Hierarchical structure		
-Market-oriented structure	-Dimensions and levels of brand	
-Brand levels		
-Corporate brand		
-Individual brand		
-Brand dimensions		

Selectable coding stage (theorizing): Selectable coding is based on coding in the two previous stages and the main stage of theorizing, such that it relates the axial class to the other classes systematically, presents those relations in the framework of a narrative and modifies the classes that need further improvement and development. In this research, the axial codes extracted from the interviews were grouped and then the created groups were compared to each other to identify the main groups and extract the dimensions of each one. Of course, at this point, referring to the theoretical literature of the research helped too much to more precise groupings. In this research, it has been tried that based on the researcher's understanding of the context of the studied phenomenon, namely the brand equity management in Zob Ahan Club, the framework of the paradigm model will be disassembled and the final theory will be shown in graphic form.

Grouping of axial codes in each case and their comparison showed that all the obtained codes can be put in three main groups (Table 4).

1. Organizational level: The codes which were related to the level of organization and club and the method of management and planning, and coordination and recognition of the organization and club in the community, and created conditions for increasing brand equity of the club.
2. Market level: The codes which were related to market and the type of organizational marketing in the club, and increased brand equity of the club.
3. Audience level: The codes which were related to the audience which are the main group and the most influential dimension in increasing brand equity of the club.

**Table 4:** Components of organizational, marketing and audience levels

Components of organization dimension	Components of market dimension	Components of audience dimension
Human source	Product/service	Customer relationship
Management	Marketing	Consumer
Structure		Brand dimensions

**Model of research**

Considering the mentioned issues, in this research, considering the concepts introduced in the area of brand and brand equity, motifs, requirements and approaches of brand equity, the model of brand equity of Zob Ahan Club was designed as below.



**Figure 1:** Model of brand equity management for Isfahan Zob Ahan Club

In this model, after analyzing the collected data, three main dimensions, including organization dimension, audience dimension and market dimension were obtained, and each of these dimensions had some components in the third layer, that the components of the organization dimension were planning and management, human source, and structure; and market dimension included product/service and marketing, and the audience dimension included the components of consumers, customer relationship and brand dimensions, that each of these dimensions has had an impact on brand equity of Zob Ahan Club and has caused increase of brand equity of Zob Ahan Club; and finally the conceptual model of Figure 1 was obtained. In designing the model, it was tried that the obtained model, in addition to being rational and simple, will be comprehensive too and will embrace all key concepts of brand and brand equity area.

### Discussion and conclusion

The results obtained from analyzing interviews with experts using open coding revealed a lot of items (signs) that through combining and adapting these signs, three general categories were obtained that are effective in brand equity of Zob Ahan Club. These categories included organization dimension, market dimension and audience dimension (Table 1).

**Organizational dimension:** Organizational dimension in the model of brand equity of Zob Ahan Club included three concepts of human source, management and planning, and organizational structure. In the organizational dimension, the concept of human source was adapted to components such as training, employees' commitment, employees' role, recruitment, expert staff, effective management, and conflict. The issue of brand and increasing brand equity is a cultural educational issue and branding should be taught to the organization employees. Just as the audience have an association and perception of brand, and brand should fit for them, and that special whole which is a name, shape, color, sound or sign should be created in their minds, the individuals and employees of the organization also must accept the brand. In each organization, prior to organizational structure, there must be an effective management that can do appropriate planning and act well in recruitment and selecting the employees. Researchers such as Farhadi (2014), Kunkel et al. (2014), Rio et al. (2013) and Sajjadi et al. (2014) have acknowledged this in their studies.

As the role of manpower is completely tangible in increasing brand equity, so if the manpower working in the club is trained as required about brand and increasing brand equity, and has good understanding of brand and branding and generally the goals and strategy of the club, surely the club will be moved toward a progressive organization and will be introduced more among the audiences. Hence, human resource component was used as one of the effective indexes in increasing brand equity of Zob Ahan Club.

The second concept of the organizational dimension is the concept of planning and management which includes the components of club's outlook, strategy plan of club, re-branding, individual goals, organizational agility, proper control and organizational philosophy. Strategic planning does not predict future, but it can help a manager in cases such as effective overcoming future requirements, providing timely opportunity, correcting inevitable errors, making the right decision at the right time, and focusing on actions that must be done in order to achieve desired future. Lack of a brand strategy will result in organizational weakness and will have direct impact on brand equity. Re-branding is in fact creating a new look and feeling toward a particular product and service which is done in order to differentiate the club's product and service from the products of the competitors. Attention to alignment of individual and organizational goals requires considering the fact that sometimes some contradictions are created between the goals of the individual and the goals of the club. In the event of non-alignment of individual goals and organizational goals, the club will face problems in achieving its goals, and its effectiveness will be minimized and it will lead to reduction of brand equity of the club. Therefore, the club management must create conditions in order to create an understanding between individual goals and organizational goals that this will lead to alignment of the organizational goals with the obtained results, and ultimately will cause increase of brand equity of the club. Organizational structure in successful countries is usually a pyramid structure, and pyramid structures, due to having agility in the organization, do the interactions more quickly. Zob Ahan Club also due to the increasing pace of technological changes in sports industry on one hand, and the change in nature of the club's audience demand and intensification of competition between clubs on the other hand, should understand the need for organizational agility and strongly seek to gain new competitive advantages for being superior to competitors and supply the customers' needs better.

Appropriate control and organizational philosophy are among the other factors affecting increasing brand equity. If the club management has good control over all three sources of human source, financial resources and infrastructure resources of the club, and directs these three sources in order to achieve organizational goals, it will cause optimal use of these resources and increase of brand equity of the club. On the other hand, the club's organizational philosophy should be in line with the strategic plan or marketing philosophy of the club. If these factors are in line with each other, the organization will achieve its main goal of increasing brand equity; as Seifi (2015), Anuar et al. (2015), Rio et al. (2013), Biscaia et al. and Sajjadi et al. (2014) also have mentioned these points.

Therefore, according to the participants' opinions, as well as analysis of the obtained data at the first stage of the research, the component of planning and management was classified as one of the prerequisites and causal conditions for realization of increase in brand equity of Zob Ahan Club.

The third concept of organizational dimension is the concept of organizational structure which includes components of organizational culture, organizational structure, social responsibility, infrastructures, organization's mission, organizational status, appropriate communications, economic, political and cultural issues, and organizational goals.

Organizational structure must be such that it can explain all scientific and public dimensions of the club, structurally. In our country, today's appropriate structure which is more profitable and can meet the needs of audience and club is market-oriented structure, because it is customer-oriented and competitor-oriented. It is better for Zob Ahan Club, in order to increase brand equity of the club, to design its organizational structure based on market-oriented organizational structure. On the other hand, economic, political and social issues can be effective in promoting the club's brand. In developed countries, mostly economic component impacts increase of brand equity, but in our country, all components, including the component related to political issues, affect promoting a club's brand equity. Foomani (2016), Anuar et al. (2015), Fahad et al. (2013) and Rio et al. (2013) also refer to these points. Zob Ahan Club should consider all the issues mentioned about club's structure and make the best use of them.

**Market dimension:** The market dimension in brand equity pattern of Zob Ahan Club included three concepts of product and service, marketing and reputation, and market features. In market dimension, the concept of product and service was adapted to components such as quality of service and product, product innovation, and diversity of products and services. The process of providing service and producing products in clubs is different with other organizations, because the products and services of sports clubs are intangible and their process cannot easily be changed. In the sports industry, usually the audience faces a series of products and services through which he can satisfy his recognized needs. The audience, given the perception or conception he has about the quality and value of the provided product and service, selects some of them. Quality and value for the customer means the difference between the value and quality resulted from having and consuming a product and service, and the costs he must pay for gaining it. In recent years, many clubs are implementing programs called Total Quality Management, aiming at improving the quality of product, services, and marketing processes continuously. Zob Ahan Club must also consider quality of services and products of the club, and this important work will be realized by using the best planning and the available resources and with full quality management. Organizational innovation as a variable associated with organization and organizational goals can provide the conditions for alignment with the existing changes to some extent and have a significant impact on brand equity of the club. Also one of the most important and main strategies for confronting the problems and adapting to changes is producing diverse products and different services through which the club can gain advantage in the area of global competition. These findings are consistent with the findings of Seifi et al (2015), Rahimnia (2013) and Gilani Nia (2010). Therefore, it is required that the managers of Zob Ahan Club pay special attention to innovation and diversity of products and services and identify the needs and opportunities existing in the competitive market, and based on that, create innovations in their products and processes, and provide conditions for increasing brand equity of the club.

The second concept in the market dimension was the concept of marketing, which included the components of market research, competitive advantage, market changes, and marketing mix. All factors that are active in the marketing of Zob Ahan Club are changeable under the influence of the main forces of environment (population, economic, physical, technological, political, legal, social, and cultural forces). In marketing issue, these forces add to the value of product and service of Zob Ahan Club to a certain extent and provide conditions for increasing brand equity of the club and lead to the club's success. The first issue in the club in order to increase brand equity is marketing manager thinking. After that, there is creation of a coherent and comprehensive marketing structure that can analyze the internal and external environment of the organization well.

The marketing mix and its dimensions including price, location, type of production, advertising, and ultimately provision of services encompass all marketing cases. Zob Ahan Club's Marketing Committee should work fully on all these factors. On the other hand, Zob Ahan Club should have strong marketing researches, and in these researches, it should have complete and comprehensive information about the potential power of market, market share of the club, customer satisfaction amount, audience behavior, as well as about pricing method, type of product, and production, promotion and expansion of service provision in order to be able to create an effective and growing marketing and increase the club's brand equity. Anuar et al. (2015), Jalali Farahani (2013), Ahmadvand (2014) and Sajjadi (2014) have also found out these points in their researches.

**Audience dimension:** The audience dimension in brand equity pattern of Zob Ahan Club included three concepts of customer relationship, consumer, and brand dimensions. In the audience dimension, the concepts of customer relationship and consumer were adapted to components such as integrated communications, fans' club, motivating, advertising, psychological needs, audience satisfaction, and asking the opinions of the consumer. One of the most important factors that have caused linkage of sports events and economics is advertising. Zob Ahan Club should use this advantage and in this way increase its reputation and brand among the audience and sports fans. The Public Relations Department of the club, through receiving ideas of the audience and asking their opinions about the type of provided service, should reflect the service and product deficiencies, and the

needs and ideas of the audience to the other club units, and create a mutual relationship between the audience and the club, and through pervasive advertising, introduce its brand's equity.

The fans' club is one of the other units that can help the club in this important matter, and, through research among the audience and reflecting the useful ideas of fans and audiences to the club, provide the conditions for progress and introduction of the club's brand among the audiences. Four factors that Zob Ahan Club should take into account in order for customers' satisfaction and meeting their needs and create motivation among the audience in order to use the club's brand include product and service valuation, guaranteeing, profitability, and attractiveness. Therefore, this club must make the best use of these advantages and create conditions to increase its brand equity. Azadi et al. (2016), Foomani (2016), Farhadi (2014), Sajjadi (2014) and Farahani (2013) also have referred to these issues.

The third concept of the audience dimension was the concept of brand dimensions, which included components of brand image, brand awareness, brand association, brand popularity, loyalty to brand, and brand personality. Brand image is the simple phenomenon of perception. The customer forms an image in his mind from the combination of all signs presented by the club's brand, including name, visual signs, products, advertisements, official messages and announcements, and so on. When an appropriate image of the club's brand is created in the mind of the consumer, he will pass the process of creating a status for club's brand in his mind more easily. On the other hand, brand awareness refers to the ability to recognize and remind the brand; in the field of sports, it includes consumer's familiarity with a sports organization or a specific sports team. Zob Ahan Club can create brand awareness through high sales and using of media channels and advertising, and can use this index as a base for increasing its brand's equity. The associations related to Zob Ahan Club and its brand, are a significant asset for its business. Given that pleasant, unique and strong associations create strong brands, Zob Ahan Club, through a systematic planning, should try to direct the thoughts and minds of more consumers toward its own brand. Loyalty to brand can be defined as the positive attitude of the customer towards a brand, or the degree of his adherence to the mentioned brand and his intention to continue buying it in future. Increasing the level of mental engagement of Zob Ahan Club's audiences in the products and services of the club leads to increasing of loyalty to the club's brand. High level of loyalty to the club's brand among the customers leads to creation of a series of competitive advantages for the club, and has a positive impact on increasing brand income and reducing marketing costs and, as a result, the club's brand equity; and also it increases long-term customer sustainability, market share and profitability of companies. Zob Ahan Club should codify marketing strategies in order to increase demand through growing and directing the audiences as much as possible in the ladder of loyalty to the brand. Considering that personality is the basis on which the brand communications with consumers is formed, Zob Ahan Club should consider this issue. What is certain is that all brands have personality and if Zob Ahan Club does not design this personality for its brand, according to the club's activities, gradually a personality will be formed in the mind of the consumer that this personality may not be in line with the club's objectives and may create a negative image for the club and may cause losses for the club. Therefore, the club should design and shape its brand personality according to the needs and opinions of the fans and based on five factors of intimacy, excitement, competence, affection and violence, such that they will be in line with the club's goals and can attract more audiences. These features of the branding field are also reported by Azadi et al (2016), Foomani (2016), Seifi et al. (2015), Ahmadvand (2014), Haji Safi (2013) and Gilani Nia (2010) in their studies.

In summary, the results of this study showed that the three major factors of organization (including manpower, planning and management and structure), market (including product and service, marketing and reputation, and obvious features of the club) and audience (including customer relationship and consumer and brand dimensions) affect the equity of Zob Ahan Club. It seems that through proper manpower management, recruiting specialized organizational staff and experienced staff of the club teams, effective management, strategic planning, proper organizational structure, and creation of infrastructures, and improving the quality of services, and attracting credible supporters and fans and appropriate use of modern media and appropriate designing of the logo, which represents the value and background of the club, positive steps can be taken towards increasing brand equity of Isfahan Zob Ahan Club.

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