

# Competition Outside the Field: Economics and Marketing of Football in Iran



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**Abstract** Iranian football clubs are experiencing a difficult period of time. Financial crisis has been a trend in last three decades and majority of clubs are suffering from heavy debts. Premier league, that aimed to lead football clubs to be managed professionally, was not successful in establishing a sustainable economic structure. Considering these, this research provides an analysis of economics of Iranian football from a marketing perspective. Considering competitiveness as a common concept in business and football, authors suggest that the first step to economic success is to turn sport clubs into sport firms. Accordingly, organizational structure must be adapted with this paradigm shift, including a marketing department that acts in such important levels as that of sporting department. Following these structural changes, some B2B and B2C strategies have been suggested. In B2B, authors recommend co-marketing alliances as a solution to exploit the clubs' brand value; and in B2C, they propose application of customer engagement programs and integrated marketing communication as a solution to generate income from supporters and also to co-create clubs' brand.

## 1 Introduction

Following decades of national league in the country, Iranian Premier League (Jam-e Khalij-e Fars) started in 2001–2002, aiming to promote professional football nation-wide. Besides, it was planned to transform highly government-supported clubs with public-funded structures to private clubs with professional structures that are enabled to generate income and to support themselves with no reliance on the public funds.

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After 16 years, unfortunately, the economic purposes have not been met yet. Iranian football is still highly depended on public-funds and most of clubs are struggling with tight economic situations. Two superior clubs with millions of fans nation-wide are under heavy debts. F.C. Persepolis debts are 2110 billion Iranian Rials (appx. 55 million USD) while F.C. Esteghlal debts are 1180 billion Iranian Rials (appx. 31 million USD) (Tabnak 2017).<sup>1</sup>

Evolution of football as an industry in modern time implies that what happens in the field is just part of a competition. Another part, and more important part, happens in the marketing battleground. Leading football clubs are the ones which have a successful financial performance out of the field. They have shown that success in the field is associated with the success in marketing departments of clubs. For this reason, to be successful in the football field, a club must be competitive in its managerial processes, in doing business and in exploiting of business opportunities to generate money.

At the time of writing of this article, Iranian football faces with a crisis of debt. The nation's qualifiers in Asian champions league are under the threat of withdrawal from these competitions because of their heavy debts. A premier league club that is the winner of last season cup, 'Naft-e-Tehran', is in a total chaos and an accumulation of debts endangers survival of this club. Esteghlal Ahvaz, champion of last season of premier league was faced with tight financial constrains to travel abroad and to host the international matches; and besides, unable to pay the players' salary. In last two decades there are many similar stories of debts, bankruptcies, requests for urgent government supports, and financial challenges of Iranian clubs.

Although AFC required all member clubs to balance their income and expenses, and in spite of FFIRI's (Football Federation of Islamic Republic of Iran) emphasis on economic organization of all member clubs, no success in marketing and economic performance has been reported yet. Marketing and economic management of clubs have been widely criticized and performance of Iranian clubs to exploit their capacity of brand and supporters to generate income has been neglected.

To understand how to improve the financial performance of Iranian clubs, firstly a knowledge from sources of income is necessary. A football club normally generates money from different sources; most important of them include sponsorship, TV right, merchandising, media relation, transfer of players and ticket sale. According to Desbordes (2006, p. 6), three main sources of income for five major leagues of Europe are TV right, sponsorship and Tickets and public relations. Following is the status of each window of income in Iranian context:

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/719961/%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%AF%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%E2%80%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%BE%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

**Sponsorship** Most prominent income source for Iranian clubs has been sponsorship revenues (Khajeheian 2009). However, this revenue source has been historically inconsistent and challenging. Salimi et al. (2012) showed that just three of 18 teams in the sample period of their study were owned privately, none of them currently plays in premier league and just one of them still competes in the first division. A sign of failure exists in private ownership of football clubs. By their findings, most of Iranian clubs are owned by industrial organizations or public institutions, including municipalities, military, or ministry of youth and sport.

Another finding of Salimi et al. (2012), that is one of two academic sources of football marketing in Iranian context found by the authors, is that sponsorship incomes never supported costs of clubs. Firstly, the sponsorship contracts have been problematic, partly because of intellectual property rights and sport law issues, and partly because of not performing of obligations and judiciary procedures. A recent interview with advertising manager of one of major banks reveals that because of their bad experience of sport sponsorship, they have decided not to advertise and support any of sport clubs (source: Authors' interview). Secondly, the sponsorship contracts are a fraction of expenditures. For Esteghlal Ahvaz club sponsorship of Samsung electronics in whole season generates 200,000 USD comparing with 6.5 million USD expenses. In another case, for Bargh Shiraz Club, sponsorship of Samsung electronics generates similar 200,000 USD comparing with 1.8 million USD expenses. Figures and data extracted from their research shows a big gap among the income and expenses of Iranian football clubs.

Recent data from newspapers and common debate in media do not show significant difference. Almost all of football clubs face with heavy debts and low amounts of income. At the time of writing of this article, Asian Football confederation alerted two major Iranian clubs that if they cannot pay their debts until end of August 2017, they will be excluded from the Asian Champions League. Accordingly, the clubs request the government organizations and ministry of youth and sport to assist them to pay their debts.

**Direct support from fans** has been generated considerable income in recent years too. 3090, as a mobile short message system has been promoted by national TV to encourage supporters of three popular clubs to send related digit and pay an amount by daily basis (Fig. 1).

**Broadcasting Rights** Three of big five football leagues are very dependent on broadcasting right, representing more than 50% of the clubs' income in Italy, Spain and French (Desbordes 2006, p. 6). British Premier League recently signed a TV right deal that worth 5.14 billion Pounds over 3 years (2016–2019).<sup>2</sup> Situation in Iran is quite different. Based on the Constitution, Iranian Television and Radio is exclusively controlled by public government administration. In this situation and in absence of private owned broadcasts, broadcasting rights have been denied by public Television, reasoning that football is a public good and IRIB doesn't charge

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.sportskeeda.com/football/looking-importance-shirt-sales-club>



**Fig. 1** 3090, a solution for direct support of fans by daily fee on their phone bills

license fee. There is an ongoing discussion between FFIRI and IRIB and no broadcasting rights have been set yet. IRIB has paid some specific amounts of money in some periods, but no fixed amount of money has been compromised.

**Merchandising** Selling official jersey and accessories with club's brand is one of the major revenue sources for football clubs. In a very recent trend, by transfer of Neymar from F.C Barcelona to Paris Saint German, 10,000 PSG jersey sold in 1 day, by average price of 100 €. <sup>3</sup> In five major European football leagues, merchandising generates following figures: Spanish La Liga: 190.1 million euros, English Premier League: 167.5 million euros, German Bundesliga: 129.7 million euros, Italian Serie A: 76.9 million euros and French Ligue 1: 66.6 million euros. Top Five European football clubs (Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool FC, FC Bayern Muchen), annually sell 1.2 million jerseys on average. <sup>4</sup> Again, in Iran things are completely different. In absence of intellectual property rights, clubs' kit can be bought in many independent sport shops with no permission of the clubs. In fact, the kits are produced by local tailors on their own format and personalization. No money comes to the pocket of clubs and no commission is paid. Practically, there is no restriction in use of a club's brand and logo for self-made products. In such markets, the income of clubs from merchandising is almost zero.

**Tickets** Ticketing is a controversial debate in the country. Recently a scandal of commissioning 35% of ticket price to a private contractor was covered by media. Also in recent years the number of attendants is reduced gradually and many of fans prefer to watch the match at home. In association with the economic situation in the country, ticket sale doesn't raise a considerable amount of money.

**Transfer of Players** Iranian clubs started transfer of players to European league in 2000s, but in 2010s, after several years of success, the transfer of Iranian talents decreased significantly. At the time of writing of this article, no Iranian player is hired in one of five big leagues (England, Spain, Italy, Germany, France) and few players are playing in middle level clubs in Netherlands, Greece, Russia, Sweden

<sup>3</sup><https://www.thelocal.fr/20170805/psg-sell-10000-neymar-shirts-on-first-day>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.quora.com/How-much-do-Football-clubs-make-with-merchandising>

and Norway. In spite of easy and quick qualifying Iranian national team to work cup Russia, Asian football is generally failing and success of Iran has not necessarily led to transfer of players to top leagues (see economics' article of Iran's success reflects the failure of Asian football at 14 June, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

Above mentioned depicts a portrayal of inefficient economics of Iranian football. It underlines the importance of scientific study of the reasons of such historical poor performance and to find a solution for improving competitiveness of Iranian football in different levels. This article reports an analysis of football economics and proposes some solutions to assist the Iranian football to restructure the professional clubs toward a profitable performance and to enhance the competitiveness of clubs in the battleground out of green football field, in the clubs' marketing departments.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This article, part of a larger study of football economics and marketing, is based on a framework that mainly consisted of two major factors: co-marketing and co-creation.

### 2.1 Cooperative Marketing

A co-marketing alliance is a lateral relationship among firms or individuals that intends to amplify or build user awareness of the benefits that they offer. This involves partnership in one or more aspects of marketing and may extend into research, product development or even production (Bucklin and Sengupta 1993). According to Thourunroje and Tansuhaj (2004) co-marketing is a type of strategic alliance in business level competitive strategy that focuses on creating a competitive advantage in specific product markets by sharing resources and capabilities of partner firms at the same stage of the value chain. Farrelly and Quester (2005) emphasize that co-marketing is to market a product, brand or corporate image together as a system. Ahn et al. (2010) argue that co-marketing alliance happens among companies from different sectors, but in similar level of the value chain. Their position in value chain allows them to cooperate on an equal and independent status. By Grieco and Iasevoli (2017) discuss that the term co-marketing includes several different typologies of alliance, such as brand alliances, advertising alliances, co-promotion, co-development of new products, cause-brand alliances and online retail alliances. Salimi et al. (2012) differentiates co-marketing from sponsorship based on the characteristic that partners play a more

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.economist.com/blogs/gametheory/2017/06/how-east-was-lost>

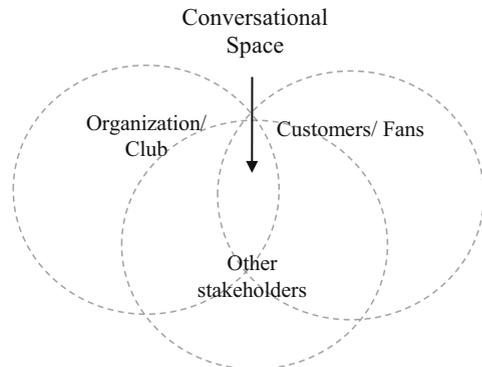
active role in co-marketing. According to them, a football club can use experience, resources, capabilities of the partner to offer value to the supporters and fans. Another important aspect of co-marketing is to provide the club a window to exploit the opportunities in other markets by using its brand advantage to lesser the risks of entry to new markets.

## 2.2 Brand Co-creation

To exploit a club's financial potential, it must be appreciated that a corporate brand plays a fundamental role in the creation and maintain a sustainable relationship between an organization and its multiple stakeholders (Schwaiger and Sarsted 2011). These stakeholders include clients, employees, investors, suppliers and citizens (Davies et al. 2010). Balmer (2012) discusses that a brand must be mentioned as a share property among the organization and its stakeholders, that organization carry the legal ownership and stakeholders own emotional ownership of the brand. In our case, a club's brand is a shared property between the club and its supporters and fans. Following this idea, Iglesias et al. (2013) proposed "organic view of brand" (PVB) as a co-creation model of brand. By their approach, creation of a brand is a social process that involve multiple stakeholders that build this brand together and in a social interaction (p. 671). By de Chernatony et al. (2006), "a brand is a name as well as a set of perceptions based on functional and emotional values and benefits"; Thus, a football club's brand is an image that carries values and emotions that are made from conversation and interaction of club's owners, managers, employees, history, fans, host city and other stakeholders.

Vallaster and Lindgreen (2011), argue that building a brand is an interactive process in a conversational environment. Merz et al. (2009) also emphasize that brand value is co-created by multiple stakeholders (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2** Brand is a set of perceptions that shape in a conversational space between organization and stakeholders (Adopted from Iglesias et al. 2013)



### 3 Methodology

This study was conducted by application of document study and expert opinion. In the lack of resources about Iranian football economics and absence of formal statistics of income and expenses, the researchers had to collect fragmented data from various sources. Newspapers, websites, interviews, TV reports, and any source of information were used for data collection. Then some experts of marketing, sport economics, media management and business requested to provide the researchers with their expert opinion about the collected data. Findings are extracted ideas of experts organized by researchers and framed by the research theoretical framework.

### 4 Analysis

There are three levels for income generations in football industry: (1) Federation Level, (2) League Level, (3) Club Level. In federation level, the main asset is National teams; adult, youth, women, under-19 years, under-16 years, etc. In league level, the main asset is Premier league and first division. In Iran Organization of League (Sazeman-e-League) is in charge of this level. And in club level, the main asset is the clubs' brand. Findings of this article are focused on the third level, football clubs.

#### 4.1 *To Change Approach: Sport Firms Rather Than Sport Clubs*

All of Iranian clubs in premier league and many other clubs nation-wide carry a prefix of "Cultural-Sport Club of ...". Officially they are Cultural-Sport Club of Persepolis, Esteghlal, Sepahan, Zob Ahan, Traktorsazi, Gostaresh Foolad, Padideh, Siahjamegan, Foolad Khuzestan, Esteghlal Khuzestan, Sanat Naft Abadan, etc. This prefix helps form the perception of managers, players, stakeholders, policy-makers and society from their identity as a "cultural and sport not-for-profit organization". A sports club is a non for profit organization oriented to sport competition (Callejo and Forcadell 2006, p. 52). In a business-oriented paradigm, this prefix and the subsequent perception must be changed into a "sport firm". A sports firm, in reverse, aims to make profit from business activities in the area of sports. Thus sport and other operations aim towards profit making.

## 4.2 Restructuring the Club as a Sports Firm

Following the business approach toward identity, the clubs must also be restructured to be appropriate with the new mission. Benchmarking from Florentino Perez's Real Madrid restructuring, the following arrangement can be assumed: Sporting department, marketing department, corporate-economics departments. These departments will be supported by Administrative domains (Fig. 3).

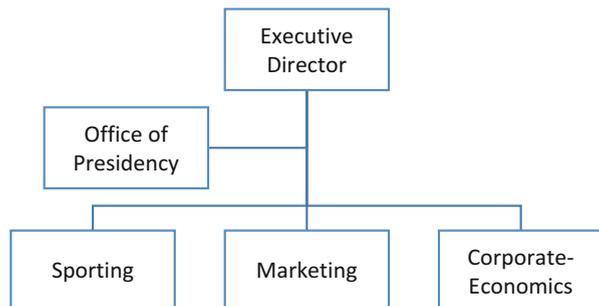
In such organizational structure, sporting department manages operational activities that are core competency of a sports firm. The output of this department is to offer the value of entertainment to the club's customers and fans. Marketing department generates income from the value of sporting department as well as corporate branding and social capital.

Currently, most of studied Iranian clubs lack a real marketing department, and their marketing committees, mostly include one of two persons who are in charge of sponsorship contracts. None of the studied clubs benefit from a marketing department that professionally and knowledgeably explore and pursue the business opportunities rather than usual sponsorship.

Although AFC requires all clubs to be financially independent and to establish their own economic and marketing establishments, and FFIRI has mandated this financial independence, after 16 years of premier league it is still significantly ignored. Authors suggest the FFIRI to require all football clubs of premier league and first division establish their marketing departments with a benchmarked structure and qualified related personnel within a year. Such establishment must be mentioned as pre-requisite for being included in the next season of the related league. With this policy, the clubs that mostly rely on public budgets or industrial funds will start to think and act marketing and business oriented.

An alternative can be to outsource marketing activities of a club to a professional and expert sports marketing agent. In this case, the mechanism is similar and a marketing department undertakes the revenue generating activities, but because of lack of proper sporting marketing staff nation-wide, an external professional agent must be commissioned.

**Fig. 3** Restructuring model of Real Madrid (Adapted from Callejo and Forcadell 2006)



### 4.3 Co-marketing Activities

Historically, Iranian sport clubs were unable to exploit their brand capacity of revenue generation. Some brands are nationally capable (mainly Persepolis and Esteghlal), some regional (e.g. Traktorsazi, Malavan) and some other local. To exploit the money making potential in non-sports areas, established models of co-marketing might be considered. An excellent instance can be seen in Juventus co-marketing alliance with Caffé Mauro.

As it is shown in Table 1, a sports “firm” of Juventus FC exploited the potential of its corporate brand by a commercial partner to earn income from a new market. This successful partnership opened a new window of income by offering the club’s

**Table 1** Co-marketing alliance of Juventus FC and Caffé Mauro (Source: Cherubini 2007) with minor changes

Juventus FC co-marketing alliance with Caffé Mauro
<i>Product</i>
• Name: Juvespresso (Juventus Espresso)
• Packaging: tin, from 250 g, black in color
• Mixture of high quality (70% Arabic/30% robust), beans, grinding by express
<i>Objectives</i>
• To create and market a line of coffee targeting a specific customer market
• To launch the Juventus brand in the coffee market
<i>Target customers</i>
• Supporters of Juventus FC and their social connections that are characterized by young age, medium/low budget and with an above-average female presence
<i>Opportunities</i>
• The distribution of Juventus FC supporters in Italy is in line with the disruption of selling outlets if Caffé Mauro. (brand coverage)
• The typical consumers of Caffé Mauro and Juventus FC have similar characteristics in terms of income, age, sex and geographical distribution
• Both the partners have similar values (energy, passion, popularity, tradition, Italian spirit)
<i>Distribution</i>
• Traditional channels: sold using the distribution channel used by Caffé Mauro (modern distribution, specialized retail, public exercises, overseas market)
• Other channels: innovative distribution channels, such as the merchandising catalogue of the Juventus FC, and the Juvestore
<i>Communication</i>
• The launch of the Juvespresso product was implemented by the following initiatives
– Presentation mailing to the retailer
– Promotion on the point of sale, with testing opportunities in an ad hic stand with the Juventus FC and Caffé Mauro brand
– An advertising campaign on Hurra Juventus characterized by a friendly message, simple and immediate, and structured according a ‘tease and reveal’ approach (double page)
– Promotional activity during the house matches of Juventus
– Consumer promotion with access to exclusive premiums and with loyalty cards

supporters a new value by a new product. The strategic partner also benefited from the market of the club supporters and increased the sale of product and also attached its brand with the club (Fig. 4).

Obviously, establishing such co-marketing alliances will be challenging in an inexperienced context of Iranian football. There are requirements to be met. For example, Salimi et al. (2012) extracted some requirements for a successful co-marketing activity, including strategic compatibility, convergence of goals, mutual commitment, and mutual trust. Finding partners in similar stage of value chain with such common features required for co-marketing is difficult and in lack of previous knowledge and history, will be challenging. However, to reconstruct the collapsed economic building of Iranian football clubs, it is necessary to start. Benchmarking, hiring external experienced experts, international visit of marketing staff from successfully launched projects might facilitate the start of such marketing activities.



Fig. 4 Juvespresso: Co-marketing product of Juventus FC (Photos: Google Image)

To design and perform a co-marketing program successfully, a club must be aware of different stakeholders. There are many different stakeholders in football marketing and dealing with these stakeholders creates a managerial complexity for football executives. Cherubini (2007) coined 'football convergence' to imply different types of interested parties that are involved in a football club. He articulates these different types as following:

**Commercial Partners** Mainly corporations that sponsor sports clubs to promote their product/service/brand using the fans, supporters and audience of a club. Normally, the main sponsor's logo will carry on the team kit for a season.

**Coopetition with Competitors** It is normally the League and the Cup, and teams that compete for trophy following a set of rules and regulations.

**Local Government and Communities** Federation, public institutions and local government are playmakers. They set the rules and regulations and football marketing must be done inside the framework they set.

**Media** Cherubini (2007, p. 111): "Football clubs must offer their services to supporters, as part of a match or a practice, creating entertainment and emotions that can be greatly amplified by the classic media (magazines, radio, television) and more innovative high-tech media (the Internet, mobile phones, etc.). Thus, a match becomes an event to discuss 7 days a week. In fact, no other sport is as attractive to the media as football."

**Football Consumers** They are direct customers that football clubs must deliver them value of entertainment, within a match or beyond the match. Clubs provide them services during a match and 7 days a week by extra services in the form of audience engagement (Fig. 5).

A well-designed and well-performed co-marketing plan evaluates the potentials, resources and capacities of each stakeholder and the value they are seeking for.

## 5 Implications

Traditionally, there are convergences and divergences between clubs and federation. The biggest struggle is that clubs look for more autonomy, whilst federation and governing bodies in general aim to control the wider interests of the league and competitions, such as development of football nation-wide, investment on youth and kids football, long-term investments and so on.

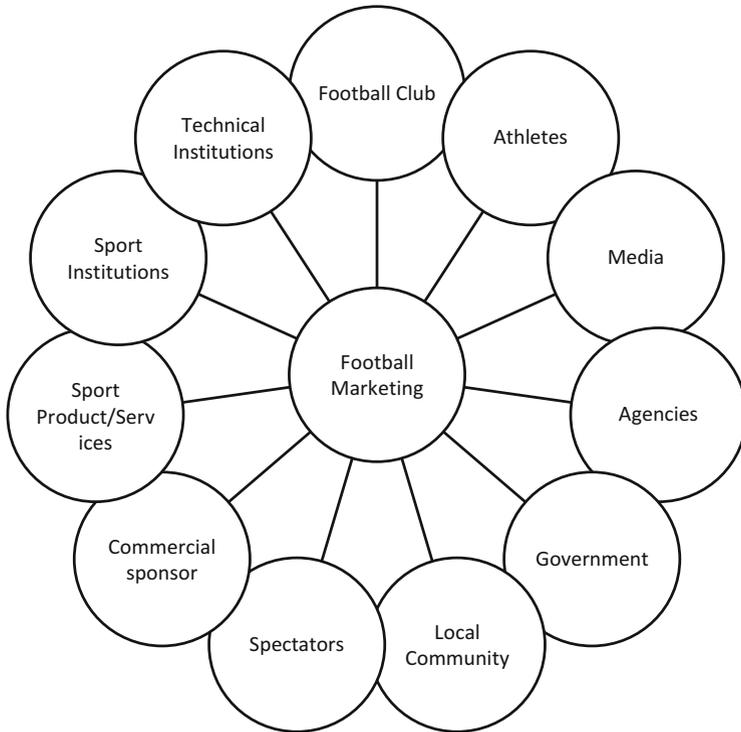


Fig. 5 Football marketing stakeholders (Source: Cherubini 2007, with minor change)

### 5.1 *Marketing Department*

As it said above, the cornerstone of this reconstruction is to establish an efficient and knowledgeable marketing department in clubs. Considering the established mindset of many clubs' managers, authors suggest FFIRI to require all clubs by mandatory guidelines addressing all participating clubs in premier league and first division league. These guidelines must include standards in case of staff, structure and milestones. It is worth to notice that this department might be outsourced to an external marketing agent. The point is that marketing view must be created within the clubs' organization.

### 5.2 *Public Relations*

Public relations is the main contact point of the federation with its stakeholders and the important section in implementation of a corporate marketing strategy. In total marketing approach, public relations play a critical role in corporate branding.

Three main functions of public relations are receiving of information (out-in), communication with external stakeholders (in-out) and managing communication inside the organization (in-in) (Khajeheian and Mirahmadi 2015).

However, public relations of the studied clubs and even FFIRI do not perform the expected functions of total corporate marketing. Considering website as the first contact point of an organizations and customers, and comparing with top level international clubs, there are many shortcomings in the design of sample clubs' websites. Also FFIRI Website still appears in a worn-out fashion with numerous broken links. Analysis of this website reveals that information are outdated and no required data are available. Sell of events' e-tickets is managed by another site (footballticket.ir) and there is no space for the sale of official kits, that can be a considerable source of income. Sponsors have no significant place in the website, and rank of website is very lower than the rank of sport websites. Considering that the website is the contact point with public, FFIRI has ignored one of the main windows of income and sources of public power.

Beyond the website design, modern public relations use audience engagement mechanism to involve fans and supporters in co-creational activities. Gamification plans are very common to encourage fans and supporters to keep visiting the website. In a comparison with the landing page of English Football Federation (thefa.com), football fantasy, sale of official kit, educational courses, have been totally ignored in clubs and federation's websites. The authors recommend the FFIRI, and clubs consider the website as an asset that must be managed carefully on a daily basis. Social media presence must be considered as a compatible activity.

In conclusion, public relations must be seen as an important section of marketing department and in addition to its intrinsic tasks, it must take responsibilities of website and social media, customer engagement programs, advertising campaigns and other marketing related activities.

### **5.3 *Business to Business Strategies***

In these strategies, Federation must be in commercial interaction with commercial partners. These partners are small firms either large corporations that are willing to leverage their businesses using connection with Iranian national teams. They financially support and expect to strengthen their market position. In a strategic partnership, both partners, namely Federation and commercial partner, are seeking for financial benefit and it is critical to consider success of both parts to form a win-win game. For this reason, the current approach of federation that includes searching for a corporate sponsor to pay a money and take sponsorship space on the kits and outdoor advertising places, must be evolve toward a cooperative marketing plan with mutual benefits. Also, it must consider to increase the Federation's marketing capacities for new partnerships.

Authors suggest identify advertising slots and marketing capacities of national teams to “areas of value proposition” for sponsors, advertisers and strategic partners. Areas of value propositions are activities that can be used for partners for promoting their brands against cash or delivering their services. Transfer, food, accommodation, hobby, travels, and clothes are some examples of these areas. Precise and careful identification of these areas will increase the marketing capacity of Federation to generate income from corporate partners.

#### ***5.4 Business to Customers Strategies***

In these strategies, fans, supporters and individuals are targets. They are the source of a very vital asset for businesses: “attention”. Individuals as fan support both national teams and clubs in sport aspect and play as a source of direct and indirect money for Federation. Success in attraction and retention of individuals as customers is the key for creating a stream of income. The analysis shows that neither Federation nor clubs in the Iranian sport environment have been able to use their fans and supports to generate income from corporate partners. Considering fans as sources of attention that advertisers and commercial partners are looking for, authors suggest application of audience commodification as a business model. In this model, the firm sells attention of its audiences to the advertisers (Khajeheian 2016). In our case, football clubs can offer sponsors and partners, access to their fans by cooperative plans that propose the sponsors’ value as an alternative to rival products and services. The idea is pervasively used while the success lays in the detailed and precise design of this plan.

Currently, a customer plan is implemented by the partnership of Iranian telecom company, naming 3090. In this plan customers accept to pay a daily fee on their mobile subscription as their financial aid to their club. The amount of collected money was surprising, and F.C. Esteghlal CEO announced that 220 billion Iranian Rials has been raised by this club’s supporters in last season. But this plan has been criticized, firstly because of its limited capacity of money generation, and secondly because of direct money calculation that may wear the fans out and gradually decrease.

Authors suggest the Federation (and clubs in their own level) pursue a consistent, wisely-designed and customer-oriented audience engagement program to keep the football fans as an asset for sale to marketers. Football fans willingly participate in such programs, when they understand that their participation benefit their favorite clubs and also deliver them affordable value. Using of Gamification mechanism and a consistent and integrated fan management program enable Federation and clubs to benefit from a pool of audiences’ attention that is very interesting for many advertisers and commercial partners and can generate streams of revenue.

Using of Gamification mechanism, mainly, points, leaderboard, rewards and badges, provide users with a showable honor (as a virtual asset) that is enduring during time, in contrast with the current fan program in the country, 3090. It is

worth to notice that details are vital in executing these plans. A good idea can be ruined easily with a careless execution.

All in all, authors propose a total marketing plan for IRI Football Federation that is characterizes by following:

- Expansion of the area of supporters' touch (going through folk using commercial partners);
- Attracting supporters and fans to Federation (by supporters' platforms and programs);
- Creating and increasing sponsorship capacities (by value proposition to commercial partners using of football supporters as a valuable asset);
- An integrated revenue system from sustainable activities of users (by using of audience commodification).

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