

Team Identity and Indirect Sport Consumption of Soccer Fans

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Abstract

Team identity can be perceived as a form of a group or a social identity. This identity can direct fans behavior. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between team identity and indirect sport consumption among the most popular football teams' spectators in Iran. The statistical population of this study consisted of the fans of Esteghlal and Persepolis teams, 374 of which voluntarily took part. The research instruments were Heere and James (2007) team identity questionnaire and Summers and Morgan (2006) sport consumption questionnaire. After confirming the validity of the questionnaires by experts, the reliability of them was tested in a pilot study by Cronbach's alpha. The results of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between Esteghlal and Persepolis fans in team identity and its components ($P > 0.05$). While there was a significant difference between the two groups in indirect sport consumption and its components ($P < 0.05$). At the same time, the correlation between team identity and indirect sport consumption in the Persepolis fans was stronger than Esteghlal fans. According to the results, it seems that managers of popular clubs like Esteghlal and Persepolis, to make stronger the relation between team Identity and indirect sport consumption of fans should have the necessary attention to factors that create team identity.

Keywords: Media Consumption, Merchandise Consumption, Soccer Fans, Team Identity

Introduction

One of the aspects of identity related to the current social humans is team identity or the identity of national or social team, related to the country in which one resides. Team identity is a mental and emotional link that describes the fans of a team with a sense of belonging to a bigger social structure (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). Team identity is an emotional link between a team and its fans, that is, the degree to which a fan feels the sense of a team belonging to him/her (Reding, 2009). Team identity can be perceived as a form of a group or a social identity. Team identity is acknowledged to be related to a team as a concept or thing, which contains emotional attachment and the fans are acknowledged to be the users. Being known with a group enhances one's self-confidence and gives meaning and credit to relations and connections among people (Sutton and et al, 1997). In recent years, some researchers have analyzed team identity in relation to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences fields (Boyle and Magnusson, 2007; Kwon and et al, 2005; Wann and Grieve, 2005). Some other researches have also analyzed the effect of team identity on the national identity of the fans (Bogdanov, 2011). On the other hand, some researches have analyzed team identity in relation to indirect consumption related to teams (Carlson and et al, 2009; Fink and et al, 2009; Reding, 2009; Rowe and Gilmour, 2010). In the analysis of the incentives of the fans, five factors have been taken into account: team identity, consumption incentives (related to entertainment, self-scrutiny, and the potential of increasing association), media, consumption of services, and consumption of goods (Gau and et al, 2009). Through analyzing the indirect sport consumption between American and Asian students, Rowe and Gilmour (2010) reported a meaningful difference. Decrop and Derbaix (2010) analyzed the consumption of fans' sports goods and its relation with the sense of honor and pride; they suggested that fans quickly feel connected to the brand of the related club and consider it as an honor to consume the goods of that club. Nowadays, consumption is studied with regard to cultural and social trends. "Consumption" is not merely a financial activity seeking profits but a sign of culture and identity of citizens of a society; however, it should be noted that this does not lower the value of financial factors. For instance, Bourdieu suggest that "consumption" is not merely satisfying biological needs but it resembles signs, symbols, ideas, and values. According to him, consumption, in new era, is a process that tries to create and maintain an identity in purchased goods (Bourdieu, 1998). In other words, people create their identity, or who they are, through the goods they consume. Thus, it can be said that consumption, nowadays, is identity-creating. Furthermore, Veblen (1981), in his theory of the well-off class, analyzes the consumption features of this class and suggests that the well-off class has "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 2005). Furthermore, it is possible to analyze the living style of people through determining their consumption behavior.

Some of domestic researches conducted on sport and identity have determined the relation of identity and its sorts to fans' sports. For instance Shaji and et al, (2011) have determined various levels of identity of players of Iran national handball team and its relation to sports identity, age, and championship background; his results revealed that family identity, sports identity, educational identity, and religious identity constitute four levels of important sports identity, respectively. Moreover, there is a meaningful reverse connection between sports function identity of players and their sports identity. Goudarzi and et al, (2011) analyzed the religious and national identity of young wrestlers and football players in Tehran and suggested that the level of religious identity in wrestlers and football players is below the expected level. The idea that athletes and national teams are representatives of national identity is named "Imagined Communities" in the theories of Anderson (1983) and it was

emphasized in other research, these studies reveal that there is a connection between sport and team identity (Armstrong and Hognestad, 2003; Bairner, 2008). Previous researches have each analyzed identity and sport through different aspects. Recently, some researchers have studied team identity in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral results (Boyle and Magnusson, 2007; Kwon and et al, 2005; Wann and Grieve, 2005). On the other hand, lifestyle and consumption behavior of people are highly affected by their constituents of living, and one of these constituents is sport teams; the identity-creating connection of these teams makes people connected to them. The abovementioned researches have all confirmed team identity and its effect on the behavior of fans as parts of society; these researches, however, have analyzed team identity through a different aspect. In the globalized atmosphere of today's world, the meaning of identity has dramatically been increasing and numerous studies have been dedicated to this meaning. Sports teams as identity-creating constituents are playing important roles. Considering the effect of team identity and being known as a fan of a team, can this relation affect the fan using media and good purchasing? Those fans that are known with a team are prone to spend some of their budgets on purchasing items related to their favorite teams. Furthermore, fans are also prone to spend some of their time to pursue the issues relate to their favorite teams through media. People who are on a high level of team identity are even prone to spend more time and money on their favorite teams (Gau and et al, 2009). According to studies conducted previously, the researchers of the present study have tried to further analyze this issue among the fans of the most popular teams in Tehran, Esteghlal and Persepolis. Is there a connection between the team identity of these fans and their use of media and good purchasing? This was the central question of the present study. Furthermore, another purpose of this study was to identify the level of team identity and evaluate the indirect consumption of the fans (media and good purchasing) among the fans of Esteghlal and Persepolis teams.

Materials and Methods

The focus of this research is a survey study and the statistical population consists of the fans of Esteghlal and Persepolis teams. The volume of the sample was calculated 190 people for each team through Cochran formula. In total, 420 questionnaires were distributed among fans (210 questionnaires each team). The questionnaires were distributed in 2 games of the teams in question. The return rate of the questionnaires among fans of Esteghlal team was 194 questionnaires (92.3 %); the return rate of the questionnaires among fans of Persepolis team was 180 (85.7 %) and the total return rate of the questionnaires among all fans was 374 (89.04 %). The research team sat beside the fans before the start of the game and made sure that they are interested in taking part in the research; if they were, the team gave those questionnaires. The scale items were taken from Heere and James (2007) for team identity and Summers and Morgan (2006) for indirect sport consumption to measure relationship between team identity and indirect sport consumption of Iranian Soccer Fans. In order to make the questionnaire practical and applicable, the steps below were taken: at the first step, the questionnaire was translated to Persian by experts and to evaluate the equivalence of the translation, the same questionnaire was translated to English by an expert translator. At the second step, in order to measure the accuracy of the translation, one of the fans filled in the Persian form while an expert filled in the English form to detect any possible inequalities. At the third step, after analyzing both versions of the form, both experts came to this conclusion that Persian and English forms are both equivalent in terms of content. Finally, the preliminary questionnaire was given to 7 experts in the field of sports management, and after gathering their comments,

the questionnaire was finalized which included three parts; at the first part, factors such as age, marital status, educational level, and occupation were questioned. The second part included constituents of team identity such as public evaluation, personal evaluation, belonging and unity, sense of interdependence, cooperation, and awareness. The third part was designed to measure the indirect consumption of the fans which contained two sections itself media consumption (press, internet, television, weblogs, and new media) and team related goods consumption (The scarf, T-shirt, The flag of a team). The stability of team identity questionnaire and indirect sport consumption questionnaire was considered 0.88 and 0.84 respectively. For the analysis of the data, the questionnaire was used as the data collection method; SPSS 23.0 was used in the analysis of the data. Frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean values were used to describe whole data. In order to evaluate and transform the data set in terms of meaningful factors, factor analysis (Confirmatory factor analysis) was applied in Amos 23.0 Also, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and independent samples T test were used.

Result

Demographically, most of the participants (52.06 %) in Esteghlal team and (57.78 %) in Persepolis team was younger than 26 years. Most of fans (41.75 %) in Esteghlal team and (41.11 %) in Persepolis team was School Student. Educational Status of 52.06 % in Esteghlal team and 50.56 % in Persepolis team was High School level. Also, in Esteghlal team 63.40 % and in Persepolis team 62.22 % of fans participants 1 to 4 times in a regular season. So, we can say that demographically, the fans of the two teams are similar.

For verification and confirmation of the factor structure, we performed a CFA using Amos 23 in the all samples. In the first step, we evaluated the model of each variable separately (team identity and indirect sport consumption). Then the measurement model was evaluated simultaneously. The fit indices for team identity measurement model were studied and the chi-square value was found to be significant ($p = 0.00$, $\chi^2/df = 1.87$). The values of the fit indices were as follows: RMSEA = 0.072, NFI = 0.85, CFI = 0.94, and AGFI = 0.91. Also, the fit indices for indirect sport consumption measurement model were studied and the chi-square value was found to be significant ($p = 0.00$, $\chi^2/df = 2.13$). The values of the fit indices were as follows: RMSEA = 0.062, NFI = 0.87, CFI = 0.91, and AGFI = 0.89. Finally, the fit indices of whole model were evaluated. After conducting CFA to establish the measurement model, it can be said that all constructs had higher composite reliability (CR) value than recommended level of 0.70 (Hair and et al, 2009). Besides, average variance extracted (AVE) value helps to determine convergent validity as CR value and recommended level for AVE is 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

All constructs in this study had greater AVE value then recommended. Briefly, it can be said all variables are supporting the 3-dimensional construct (see Table 1).

Table 1. CFA of team identity and indirect sport consumption of Soccer Fans

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
Team Identity	Public assessment	0.523	0.873	0.581
	Personal assessment	0.668		
	Belonging and unity	0.741		
	Sense of interdependence	0.643		
	Cooperation	0.694		
	Awareness	0.667		
Indirect Sport Consumption	Media use	The press	0.723	0.532
		Internet		
		Television		
	New weblogs and media	0.793		
	Radio	0.649		
	Purchasing of goods	The scarf of the team		
The T-shirt of the team		0.873		
The flag of the team		0.789		

Fit Indices: X^2/df : 1.974, AGFI: 0.892, NFI: 0.913, CFI: 0.931, RMSEA: 0.070

According to t-test, there was no significant difference between Esteghlal and Persepolis fans in team identity and its components ($P > 0.05$). While there was a significant difference between the two groups in indirect sport consumption and its components include television, radio, and the scarf of the tea, the T-shirt of the team and the flag of the team ($P < 0.05$). According to the Pierson correlation test, there was a significant positive correlation between team identity and indirect sport consumption in Esteghlal fans ($r=0.366$, $p < 0.001$) and Persepolis fans ($r=0.712$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the components of team identity and indirect sport consumption in two group ranked by friedman test (see Table 2).

Table 2. Friedman test of Team Identity and Indirect Sport Consumption components in two group

Team Identity		Indirect Sport Consumption	
Es teghlal fans	Persepolis fans	Es teghlal fans	Persepolis fans
Personal assessment	Public assessment	Television	Television
Belonging and unity	Belonging and unity	The press	Internet
Public assessment	Personal assessment	Internet	The press
Awareness	Awareness	The T-shirt of the team	The T-shirt of the team
Cooperation	Cooperation	New weblogs and media	The flag of the team
Sense of interdependence	Sense of interdependence	The scarf of the team	New weblogs and media
		The flag of the team	Radio
		Radio	The scarf of the team

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relation between the team identity of soccer fans and their indirect sport consumption. Team identity includes constituents such as public assessment, personal assessment, belonging and unity, the sense of interdependence, cooperation, and awareness. Indirect sport consumption also includes constituents related to media and goods use. According to the result, the number of fans with higher education is low at the stadium; the reason behind this may be traced back to the fact that football matches are not interesting enough for such people, or the fact that maybe they are busy with their academic and occupational issues. Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that a large number of spectators consist of students and unemployed individuals. This matter, why other groups and classes of society are not fond of football matches, needs in-depth analysis. As it was mentioned in findings, the correlation between team identity and indirect sport consumption among Esteghlal fans was $r=0.36$, which is an indicator of a low and direct relation between these two variables; that is, the more the level of team identity rises, the more the indirect sport consumption of Esteghlal fans will rise. The correlation between team identity and indirect sport consumption among Persepolis's fans was $r=0.71$, which is an indicator of a high correlation between these two variables; that is, the more the level of team identity rises, the more the indirect sport consumption of Persepolis's fans will rise. The high correlation of team identity and indirect sport consumption among Persepolis spectators and its low rate among Esteghlal spectators may be traced back to factors such as their rationale behind attending the game (being with friends, escaping stress, escaping every-day routine, supporting a team etc.) or social class (belonging to well-off or poor groups of society, high or low education etc.). This matter is in total accordance with the findings of Carlson and et al, (2009); in the findings of their research, they suggested that consumption incentives related to entertainment (communication, making oneself known etc.) are the most important ones; moreover, they suggested that those fans who possess a high level of team identity are prone

to be frequent users of media and goods related to their favorite teams. Nevertheless, one needs an accurate insight and careful observation to further analyze this very issue. The usage level of television and the press was respectively at the first and second ranks among the fans of both teams. It seems that on the one hand, excitement of football and on the other hand, the peculiar ability of television to present unique scenes makes it the most popular means to pursue football. This fact is in complete accordance with the findings of Carlson and et al, (2009) and Melnick and Wann (2011). It should also be noted that the fans of both teams rarely used radio, and it was the last means on the list. The reason behind this issue may stem from the fact that the recent advancements in technology provide the fans with more interesting and visual effects which, in turn, entertain fans more than radio does. In all of the researches, the meaningful relation between team identity and indirect sport consumption has been positively proved. It is worth mentioning that the use of television and press among the spectators of domestic and foreign teams was meaningfully equal (Bogdanov, 2011; Carlson and et al, 2009; Fink and et al, 2009).

Finally, considering the significant relationship between team identity and indirect sport consumption in both of teams, it was determined that one of the main factor in indirect sport consumption is team identity. So team managers of soccer clubs should pay attention on team identity especially in Esteghlal team.

Conclusion

Nowadays, human identity resources have become very diverse and one of most popular human identity resources is sport. The popular sports teams especially soccer teams have a unique identity, but the power of this identity is varies among teams. Team identity is an element that can guide the behavior of fans. In this research, it has been shown that fans with strong team identity have more tendencies to Indirect Sport Consumption. Indeed, when fans feel strong team identity, they display certain behaviors. These behaviors are symbols that the fans are sympathetic to their teams.

Applicable Remarks

- This study helps researchers better understand the relation between team identity and indirect sport consumption and, of course, the priorities of the spectators in using media.
- Sport managers can attract sponsors by strengthen team identity of fans because as sponsors generally support teams that have prominent fans.
- Using the concept of team identity and its impact on indirect sport consumption by Tehran Esteghlal and Persepolis Clubs creates economic value and there by enhances profitability and revenue, increasing their share of the sales market and reducing their dependence on government budget.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.

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