

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRANIAN PREMIER LEAGUE BRAND BASED ON THE BALANCED SCORECARD (BSC)Gholipour, N.¹, Eidi, H.², Yousefi B.³, Soroush, S.⁴**ABSTRACT**

Purpose: A brand is one of the most valuable intangible assets of any organization and strategic analysis of factors affecting brand development in any organization, including the Iranian Premier League, is absolutely vital. The present study attempts to analyze the factors of developing the Iranian Premier League brand by integrating a balanced scorecard (BSC) approach. **Design/ methodology/ approach:** The study was conducted in two sections, including the qualitative and quantitative sections. The statistical population consisted of sports management faculty with specialized marketing expertise, football experts as well as executives of the league and football clubs. The samples for the study in the qualitative and the quantitative section included 18 and 85 individuals, respectively, which were selected through non-probability judgment sampling (experts' opinion). **Findings:** The results showed that in the qualitative section, 157 elements were identified as influencing league brand development and then categorized in axial coding in 35 concepts and ten groups in the selective coding stage. In the quantitative section, the priority of each of the BSC dimensions and strategies influencing brand development was determined by a paired comparison method using the AHP technique. Among the dimensions of the balanced scorecard, internal processes were at priority. **Originality/value:** Applying this model can familiarize managers with the strategies of enhancing and developing the Iranian Premier League brand and enabling the integration of performance evaluation of the Iranian Premier League brand.

Key words: Brand. Balanced scorecard. Iranian Football Pro-League.

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RESUMO

Estratégias para o desenvolvimento da liga premier iraniana marca com base no Balanced Scorecard (BSC)

Objetivo: Uma marca é um dos ativos intangíveis mais valiosos de qualquer organização e a análise estratégica dos fatores que afetam o desenvolvimento da marca em qualquer organização, incluindo a Premier League iraniana, é absolutamente vital. O presente estudo tenta analisar os fatores de desenvolvimento da marca da Premier League iraniana integrando uma abordagem de balanced scorecard (BSC). **Desenho / metodologia / abordagem:** O estudo foi realizado em duas seções, incluindo as seções qualitativa e quantitativa. A população estatística consistia em professores de gestão esportiva com experiência em marketing especializada, especialistas em futebol, bem como executivos da liga e clubes de futebol. As amostras para o estudo nas seções qualitativa e quantitativa incluíram 18 e 85 indivíduos, respectivamente, os quais foram selecionados por meio de amostragem não probabilística de julgamento (opinião de especialistas). **Achados:** Os resultados mostraram que, na seção qualitativa, 157 elementos foram identificados como influenciadores do desenvolvimento da marca da liga e, a seguir, categorizados em codificação axial em 35 conceitos e dez grupos no estágio de codificação seletiva. Na seção quantitativa, a prioridade de cada uma das dimensões e estratégias do BSC que influenciam o desenvolvimento da marca foi determinada por um método de comparação em pares usando a técnica AHP. Entre as dimensões do balanced scorecard, os processos internos foram prioritários. **Originalidade / valor:** a aplicação deste modelo pode familiarizar os gerentes com as estratégias de aprimorar e desenvolver a marca da Premier League iraniana e permitir a integração da avaliação de desempenho da marca da Premier League iraniana.

Palavras-chave: Marca. De indicadores equilibrados. Liga Profissional de Futebol Iraniano.

INTRODUCTION

The use of brand names as a marketing tool in the sports industry is increasing. Research has shown much profit in dealing with sports brands. These include increasing the interest of sports clubs, increasing media watching, and increasing the power of team supporters (Abosag et al., 2012).

Therefore, managers of teams and leagues should focus their efforts on their brand, since the brand is one of the most critical assets of the company. In addition, brand management can enhance the value of the company if implemented in a consistent way. In recent research, more emphasis is given to the concept of strategic branding and especially the role that brand plays in sport management (Baena, 2017).

The process of brand management, if done correctly and consistently, can increase the value of organizations. Recent research has also emphasized the concept of strategic branding (Jensen, Beckmann, 2009).

Therefore, a proper strategy should be implemented to strengthen the Iranian Premier League brand. But the challenge is to implement strategies that are thought-provoking and systematically adapted.

Kaplan, Norton (2007) devised the balanced scorecard approach as an appropriate solution for the challenge. In general, the purpose of any performance appraisal system is to lead all managers and personnel of the organization to the successful implementation of strategies.

Organizations that have used a performance appraisal system, especially a balanced scorecard in their strategy formulation, have been very successful in implementing the strategy because they have been able to explain the goals of the organization to all of the organization's staff through their scorecard. In other words, BSC provides a comprehensive framework for executives with the opportunity to translate the organization's strategic landscapes into administrative operations (Kaplan, Norton, 2007).

The strengths of a balanced scorecard in sports organizations include systematic thinking, multi-faceted approach, focus on causality, providing a reference framework, and guidance for designing performance measurement systems (Kozma, Ónodi, 2014).

Munoz and Kumar (2004), in their article, stated that with all the debate regarding the prominence of brand as the motive of business value and success, it is surprising that few businesses have created a plan or an analytics system that allows them to measure their brand performance.

Therefore, proper brand management and branding strategies are essential to meeting international standards.

However, Rasouli et al., (2016) in their research, stated that the development of the Iranian football brand faces many challenges. In this regard, this study attempts to identify the factors affecting the development of the Iranian Premier League brand and develop appropriate strategies based on a balanced scorecard.

Literature Review**Brand Development**

A brand contains several elements such as a name, a sign, a symbol, or a combination of these. These elements differentiate a company's products and services from a competitor's firm (Kotler and Keller, 2016). A brand is an enduring wealth for organizations, and its value along with technology, privileges, and employees is of particular importance (Hasani et al., 2012). A brand can easily enter new markets through its reputation and focus (Pyun et al., 2011).

Football brands are also one of the world's highest-paid brands, an industry where media and financial interests are tied together with enthusiasm by supporters and tribal affiliations (Hewer, Ganon, 2017).

The value of the European football brand is estimated at 17 billion dollars. Football is the most popular sport in the world. Since the late 19th century, this sport has spread around the world. Football is now a global game with cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions. FIFA refers to the 250 million members of the FIFA family (players, coaches, referees, medical, and media personnel) in the sport, and about 1.4 billion people worldwide are interested in football globally (Bridgewater, 2010).

Becoming a brand determines the position of the team and the sports league against other sports teams and other entertaining offers within the market. This is becoming increasingly important because business teams are competing against other

leisure options for money that customers spend on entertainment (Richelieu, 2013). Organizers need to be aware of the factors that are likely to influence the branding process in order for organizers to build their brand effectively. A "good" brand enables the event to be viewed favorably by stakeholders such as sponsors and vendors, thereby allowing organizers to obtain resources from those stakeholders (Parent, 2008).

In general, reputable football leagues, especially the five major European leagues, want to develop and operate in different countries for a variety of reasons, including access to new markets and development of new customers, acquisition of resources (staff, international players, equipment, and global initiatives, media and finance), more significant marketing opportunities, brand value promotion, and wealth generation (Lee et al., 2017).

In this regard, the brand of sports leagues is treasured, which needs strategic reinforcement and reflects the benefits and features that the league provides to the consumer (Kunkel et al., 2014). Brand strategy is a set of integrated strategies, and sub-strategies used to achieve business goals (Kennelly, Toohey, 2014). The purpose of the brand strategy is to develop distinctive features of different services or products offered by an organization in order to differentiate the organization from its competitors (Keller, 2011). The strategy is responsible for taking appropriate actions or in other words doing different activities that differentiate an organization from its competitors.

By examining research on brand development strategies in football, it has been concluded that brand reinforcement depends on several factors. For instance, Kunkel et al. (2014) examined qualitatively and quantitatively the strategic factors affecting the development of the Australian Premier League. They identified seven factors, namely: 1) media accessibility and marketing, (2) fan engagement, (3) league expansion, (4) competition structure, (5) product quality, (6) match day experience and (7) unique club identity. In total, 438 codes were identified and allocated to one of the seven above themes.

In another research, Baena (2017) outlined the Bayern Munich Club's global marketing strategy and stated that the club seeks to focus more on the needs of its stakeholders, especially its local and global supporters, in order to make better use of its

brand image. This way, it can increase its market share and improve its revenue.

Also, Chanavat (2017) mentioned that French football and the Paris Saint-Germain club have focused on attracting foreign investors from Russia and Qatar in suggesting that this strategy could raise awareness and promote the club's brand and revenue.

Richelieu (2008) also looked at how a team can become an international and global brand in a study entitled "The internationalization of sports teams' brand: a study of European football teams" who investigated the way a team can develop into an international brand through the use of one of the four strategies (Brand reputation, Brand affinity, Brand challenger, Brand conquistador), a strategy which is consistent with its situation and position; however, these strategies can be combined, and they do not need to be applied separately.

In another study, Giroux et al., (2013) examined "the development of sports brands at the international and global levels from the fan's point of view", while at the same time emphasizing the need for a clear brand identity and structure to develop brand territory from the fans' point of view.

Based on the results of the qualitative study including the in-depth interviews with the fans, the essential features of sports teams branding strategies include:

- Importance of longevity and history in building brand internationalization
- Importance of on-field performances and the existence of a strong rivalry
- Importance of clear and distinctive brand values and personality
- Importance of visual identity (logo and colors) and exposure

Richelieu (2016, 2014) outlines five strategies for different sports brands to succeed in entering global markets. These strategies included:

- 1) Localization
- 2) Storytelling
- 3) Sportainment
- 4) Co-branding
- 5) Fan-actors

Moreover, with a qualitative approach, the internal factors and challenges of brand management in Iranian Premier League clubs include culture, communication, branding, marketing, financial issues, legal issues, management, planning, staffing, the essence of sports clubs, fan club, football attributes, facilities, clubs, media and structure.

Balanced Scorecard

Balanced Scorecard is an effective and verified tool that allows organizations to successfully implement different strategies (Niven, 2002). The Balanced Scorecard is a performance measurement framework that provides a complete overview of the organization's performance with a set of financial and non-financial scales (Rojoi et al., 2017).

Regarding to develop and manage an appropriate business strategy, an ever-increasing number of sport companies aim at applying processes employed in business solutions; the German football team VFB Stuttgart is a good instance in this case, being the first in Bundesliga to introduce the Balanced Scorecard method for the definition of strategic directions and process control (IFUA Horváth and Partners, 2004).

In this regard, Kozma and Onodi (2015) in their paper clarified the challenges of and opportunities for implementing a Public Sector Scorecard system in professional sport through an in-depth case study of a handball club in Hungary. They provided a model for managing sports organizations in line with strategic objectives, balancing out stakeholder expectations for sports results, stakeholder involvement and commercial success.

Seyedi et al., (2014) also examined the performance of Khuzestan football team based on the Balanced Scorecard. The results of this study showed that football academy of Foolad

Khuzestan is in good condition in internal processes, financial process and learning and growth and has some shortcomings regarding the fans.

In another study, Jafari Eskandari et al., (2013) investigated the performance of Abadan Oil Industry Team using the Balanced Scorecard. This study was performed by the fuzzy Delphi method. Seven items (Capabilities to apply information systems, Coaches training and knowledge management, Staff satisfaction, Internal communication, Employ and retain competent athletics, Team work, Number of training coaches) were identified in the growth perspective, five items (Selection criteria, Talent management, Response of discovering mistakes, Effective information systems, Ability of coordination) in the Internal Processes dimension, ten items (Fans satisfaction about competitions, Good performance by a team, Good quality matches, Suitable ticket prices, Merchandise Vip section, service Management of sponsors, Number of fans and match attendance, Valuable and effective advertising space, Media presence) in the Customer perspective, and three items (Income from sponsors, Income from athletics, transformation Government subsidies) in the Financial Perspective dimension.

Becsky (2011) examined the performance of a balanced scorecard in sports teams. The results presented in this study are presented in Table (1).

Table 1 - Strategic objectives and indicators.

| Perspectives | objectives | Indicators |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Financial perspective | Increase of income | Income from sponsors |
| Customer perspective | Increase of sponsorship Number of contracts contract | Number of contracts |
| Internal processes perspective | Selection, talent management | Increase of selection criteria |
| Learning and growth perspective | Development of professional work | Number of trainings for perspective professional work coaches |

Coşkun, Tetik (2013) develop a Balanced Scorecard model for soccer clubs. In the Soccer Balanced Scorecard they used the following four perspectives: financial sustainability perspective, fans perspective, internal process perspective, and infrastructure

perspective. In the study after developing the perspectives of the soccer balanced scorecard they defined strategic objectives, performance measures relating to these objectives, performance targets for each measure and initiatives. they suggested that if soccer clubs

use the balanced scorecard as a strategic performance management tool it may help them to be strategy focused and may better serve their missions.

Ahmed, Asbah (2018) conducted a study entitled (Applying the Balanced Performance Model in A Confrontation the Risks of Investing in Egyptian Sports Clubs). the results of this study showed that; the Egyptian sports clubs didn't use the balanced performance model in evaluate, measuring performance and facing the risks of investment, the main risks was lack of a climate of stability in Security, economic and political. The study presented a modified model for the Egyptian environment that helps to measure the performance of the Egyptian sports clubs in a balanced manner as an important tool to face the investment risks. Model consists of five dimensions (financial, investor, internal activities, growth and learning, environment and society).

In his research, Nieplowicz (2015) described the effect of using a balanced scorecard in implementing strategies to support sport and leisure development in Lublin City. He indicated that Lublin's sports sector had more than four indoor and outdoor athletes.

The overall conclusion indicated that both financial and non-financial indicators should be used for the development of sport and leisure in Lublin, since achieving equilibrium among different facets is the essential aspect of the balanced scorecard (Nieplowicz, 2015).

A review of the research indicates that research in this area is limited and new and has received less attention than other marketing areas. Therefore, it was attempted to conduct comprehensive research in this regard. Also, since branding in Iran is a nascent subject and many world-renowned football leagues and clubs are now refurbishing their brand portfolios and adopting global marketing strategies to develop their brand, the Iranian Premier League clubs will have to expand their brand in the future.

Therefore, identifying brand development strategies provides a perfect platform for achieving it. Therefore, in this research, the researchers attempted to identify and prioritize each strategy using the balanced scorecard model and apply the idea of pairwise comparisons to the AHP technique.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in two parts: qualitative and quantitative

Qualitative section

The research method used grounded theory with a systematic qualitative approach. The statistical population of this study was professors with a specialized field of marketing and sports branding, officials of the marketing committee of the football federation, marketing committee of sports clubs, football experts, as well as league executives and some educated subjects. The interviews were conducted in a purposeful and snowball manner. The study interviewed 18 individuals in the research community.

Although theoretical saturation was achieved in the 14th interview, the 18th interview was also conducted. In-depth, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. This type of interview was used due to its flexibility, and depth is suitable for qualitative research. The general questions regarding brand development strategies were established in four dimensions of BSc, and the rest of the questions were developed during the interview based on the interviewee's response. All conversations were recorded on audio tape and then transcribed verbatim on paper. To confirm the validity and reliability of this study using the concept of trustworthiness and its multiple elements, several strategies such as rechecking the codes, confirmation of results by member checking, and peer debriefing were used.

Quantitative section

The AHP technique was used to prioritize the four dimensions of Balanced Scorecard and the specified strategies and strategic goals. The weighting of the indices was performed step by step by entering information into the Expert Choice program (version 11).

The inconstancy criterion of less than 10% was used to select the indices. Using non-probability judgment sampling (expert opinion), 85 individuals were selected as the statistical sample of the study. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by sport management professors, and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (0.87).

RESULT

The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews with the Balanced Scorecard is presented in the following tables.

Table 2 - Dimensions of Internal Processes for the Development of the Iranian Premier League Brand.

| Internal Processes dimension | | |
|--|--|---|
| Actions and initiatives | Strategic goals | Strategy |
| Planning, organizing properly. Developing Vision and Strategic Planning. | Preparing a Brand Document for Outlook and Scheduling | Strategic management in football |
| Devising professional regulations. Management stability in clubs. The management structure for competition control, marketing and media. Use of systematic procedures | Formulating codes of conduct and rules of professional conduct | |
| Upgrading Media Capacity. Positive interaction between media and the league. Holding press conferences to dispel rumors. Monthly Meetings between Football and Media Officials | Media and Football cooperation (Duncan, 2018) | Technology Management And media |
| Development of technological infrastructure. Enjoy advanced technology. Promote websites with secure communication, exchange, information, reliable advertising. Utilizing information management systems | Development of technological infrastructure (Li, Lee, Law, 2018) | |
| Examine the technologies needed in the organization. Evaluating the organization's capabilities in applying technology. Investigating the Opportunities and Threats of Technology | Technology Needs Assessment | |
| Developing consistent laws. Revise regulations that are not correctly formulated. Transparency of by-laws in the Articles of Association of the Federation and the League. Applying knowledgeable lawyers. Creating and strengthening legal units. Adoption and approval of the standard club system in the Islamic Consultative Assembly | Development of legal infrastructure | |
| Implementation of the Iranian Professional League Act by clubs. Compliance with international standards and protocols. Promoting and adhering to FIFA and international law | Considering international law | Improve the status of the Iranian Premier League at the international level |
| Controlling the country's economic and political programs. Adopt appropriate measures and consult with authorities to resolve women's participation problems. Establishing a sports investment fund | reduce political restrictions | |
| Obtain seats in international forums. Formulate domestic policy to improve international brand image. Strong public relations and international diplomacy. Development of international communication. Increasing interactions with influential authorities in international sporting institutions | international relations | |
| Instead of intervening in football, the government should adopt a supporting stance. Develop specific privatization plans. The Broadcasting organization adherence to contracts. Changing the role of executive machines and industries from club owners to club product applicants. Commercialization of clubs. Transparency. Discipline and accountability. Creating a fair and just competition in football for the government to win all the creditors. Dealing with ownership issues in the country's Premier League brands | Changing the government's consideration | |

Table 3 - Dimensions of Growth and learning dimension for the Development of the Iranian Premier League Brand.

| Growth and learning dimension | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Actions and initiatives | Strategic goals | Strategy |
| Market analysis and studies using different marketing methods (guerrilla, green, etc.). Fighting the culture of anti-research. Performing comparative studies. Forming research teams in clubs. The physical presence of researchers in clubs to better interact, form teams and create a common language with elites and academics | Improving research (Chanavat et al., 2017) | Knowledge-based innovation |
| Modeling the world's top leagues and clubs. Establish a marketing committee or task force. Establishing a specialized sports department sports marketing in football. Establishment of an efficient marketing system for knowledge creation and modeling | Knowledge creation and modeling (Baena, 2019; Pyun, Kwon, Lee, 2011) | |
| Developing a young and creative force in the field of sports marketing. Strengthen the creative and innovative corporate atmosphere. Implement a brand management system in line with the changing environment. Consistent evaluation of brand value. Rewarding innovations | Foster creativity | |
| Recognition and recruitment of knowledgeable, capable, and professional people by the sports authorities of the country. Creating a knowledge management and learning organization. Upgrading the technical knowledge and training of trainers. Upgrading the technical and empirical expertise of managers and staff and sending them to international workshops. Testing the academic literacy of managers in the field of sports management and professional club. Continuously evaluate the performance of managers and employees | Staff empowerment (Brannagan, Giulianotti, 2015; Baena, 2017) | Strengthening human capital |
| Selection and appointment based on scientific and executive experience and background. Pay attention to employee performance and encourage exemplary staff. Apply efficient human resources especially good and professional managers in program development | Meritocracy | |
| Pay attention to core teams, allocate funds to identify and nurture talent. Identifying talented athletes in local clubs. Collaborate with organizations such as education, provincial athletic boards, and talent and championship bases in football talent scouting. Performing Talent Studies. Taking advantage of the private sector in talent scouting. Exit tastes and talent selection based on specialized principles. Strengthening football schools specific to each club | Improve the talent discovering the process (Vaeyens et al., 2006, Vrljic et al., 2008) | |

Table 4 - Dimensions of Financial dimension for the Development of the Iranian Premier League Brand.

| Financial dimension | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Actions and initiatives | Strategic goals | Strategy |
| Establish brand stores in other countries. Sale of the right to name the stadium. Forming teams in other popular sports teams (volleyball, football, basketball). Forming a women's team, strengthening and developing football schools. Manufacture of clothing with the club brand. Establishing sports shops and restaurants | Expanding the portfolio of brand (Chanavat et al., 2017; Ryals, 2006; Riezebos, 2003) | wealth creation |
| Pay attention to digital branding. Establish the organizational media of the club. Make money through websites and social networks. Using digital marketing plans. Creating online stores with the club brand. Sale of goods on official club sites. Enjoy E-sport online marketing and electronic games, apps, and more. Creating a virtual community. Developing Electronic Sport Activities | Digital Marketing Development (Baena, 2017; Chanavat et al., 2017) | |
| Monetizing clubs by connecting with industries. Invest in global image features and quality. There are specific plans and policies to increase the profitability and funding of the league. Injecting the proceeds from the matches into the clubs in the league. Use efficient marketing models, such as the STP model. Applying a centralized marketing strategy. Correct use of all spaces for monetization (such as land use, urban space, etc.) | Integrated marketing development (Reid, 2002; Couvelaere, Richelieu, 2005) | |
| Season ticket sales, discounts for specific groups, pricing according to the venue and level of revenue, online ticketing | ticketing strategy | |
| Enhance the presence of foreign investor companies in the Iranian market. Using all the potential in the sponsorship and marketing process. Long-term contracts with sponsors. Adopt tax breaks with sponsors. Provide specific financial information to sponsors. Holding public and transparent bidding. Submit part of the ad boxes before, during, or after the competition to the sponsor of the Federation Sponsorship. | Sponsoring (Asagba, 2009; Chanavat et al., 2017; Keshock, Christopher, 2004) | |
| Provide a clear picture of professional letters. Create a "program manager" in the transfer process. Organizing the Champions Support Fund. A change in the club's accounting system from state to business. Dealing with and managing financial violations. Designing a mechanism for evaluating financial resources within clubs. Fighting brokers and mediators. Designing a player pricing mechanism. The presence of an impartial internal observer. Proper financial management, oversight, and control of the budget. Reflection of problems in the form of numbers to managers. A clear description of the costs of football club missions and programs. Evaluate managers' assets before and after coming to clubs, dealing decisively with violators | Transparency (Strutner et al., 2014; Michie, Oughton, 2005; Morrow, 2004) | maintaining and controlling liquidity |
| Appreciation of efficient economic managers. Official support for non-indebted clubs. Encourage successful, profitable managers and clubs. Encourage employees to send information and disclosure. Freedom of the Press and Reporting and Disclosure of Corruption. Forcing the authorities to respond to problems. | Promote a culture of accountability (Morrow, 2004) | |
| Careful and impartial monitoring and evaluation. Establishing a powerful and independent oversight body. Supervision and control to achieve the marketing and branding goals of the league. Establish an independent disciplinary committee. Serious interrogation of football players, preparation and development of monitoring and cross-sectoral indicators, evaluation of the effectiveness of monitoring in different periods, and reform of the regulatory supervision structure gradually | Improve supervision and control | |
| Reaching a bilateral agreement between the league and broadcasting company, submitting a television broadcasting bill to the parliament from the government and the Football Federation. Register the club as a trading company. Profit and loss audit department and financial balance sheet. Forming a bargaining committee to solve the problem of broadcasting rights. Using interactive internet TVs and private networks. Follow up and approve the draft comprehensive club system. Using strong advisors and legal, economic, managerial... | legal follow-up | |
| Developing legal solutions from the government such as copyright, mobile write, intellectual property rights, program development, | Protecting laws | |
| Define the target market. Recognize potential supporters in regional countries. Market segmentation. Recognition and aristocracy on fan characteristics. Taking advantage of other countries' cultural, religious and linguistic relationships | Market research and identification | Increasing market share |
| Taking advantage of satellite fans. Open office in neighboring countries. Use talented players from neighboring countries. Establish a youth academy in neighboring countries | Market development | |

Table 5 - Dimensions of Customer dimension for the Development of the Iranian Premier League Brand.

| Customer dimension | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| Actions and initiatives | Strategic goals | Strategy |
| Symbolizing in the stadiums and the creations of sports halls and railroads. Pay attention to brand elements (logo, composition, color, trademark, slogan and typography, heritage). Create pleasant experiences in cyberspace. Establishment of museum and exhibition. Offer free symbolic merchandise to fans before entering the stadium. | Identification (Guenzi, 2015; Richelieu, Pawlowski, Breuer, 2011; Bridgewater, 2010) | brand identity promotion |
| Develop lateral plans to strengthen the brand internationally (such as hosting Asian and international football matches). Successful attendance at major and international football events. Hosting successful events and launching friendly and inter-season summer tournaments in the region and target community | Promoting League brand image (Chanavat et al., 2017; Pyun, Kwon, Lee, 2011) | |
| Collaborate with charities, pay attention to sustainable development. Having humanitarian goals and social commitment. Planning to increase the economic and social benefits of the people. Establishment of a social responsibility unit within the league's organization | Social Responsibility Development (Chanavat et al., 2017) | |
| Creating solidarity (social capital), combating racism, and holism. Using cultural symbols and slogans. Establishing the required standards of fan culture (culture of protest, support, and purchase), etc. Choosing appropriate and ethical leaders. Allocating part of the club's budget to spreading appropriate culture. | Improving the culture of fan (Naha, Hassan, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014) | |
| Meet the diverse needs of fans in different products: good behavior and ethical behavior of all club members. Designing an active exchange mechanism between the club and the fans. Creating client relationship software, creating a fan database. | Improving interaction with Fan Richelieu, Desbordes, 2013; Richelieu, 2008) | |
| Improve stadiums and improve facilities following AFC standards. Proper planning of the date and time for the tournament. Providing appropriate physical facilities in the stadium. Providing ancillary services at the stadium. Keeping fans up to date, enjoying players and coaching stars. Reliable infrastructure such as training camps and dedicated stadiums for clubs. Proper planning and organization of league programs (such as careful planning of games and non-constant changing of day and time of games and interference with important events) | Improving technical knowledge and quality of service (Ko et al., 2011; Slavich, Dwyer, Rufer, 2018) | Fan management relationship |
| Outsourcing essential services and infrastructure, establishing an independent complex in other geographical areas. Creating joint ventures with powerful companies. Use of consulting services of specialized outsourcing companies | Outsourcing | |

The Balanced Scorecard Model for Development of Iranian Premier League Brand is shown in Figure 1.

The next step was prioritized based on the hierarchical analysis of the BSC landscapes and the strategies needed in each dimension.

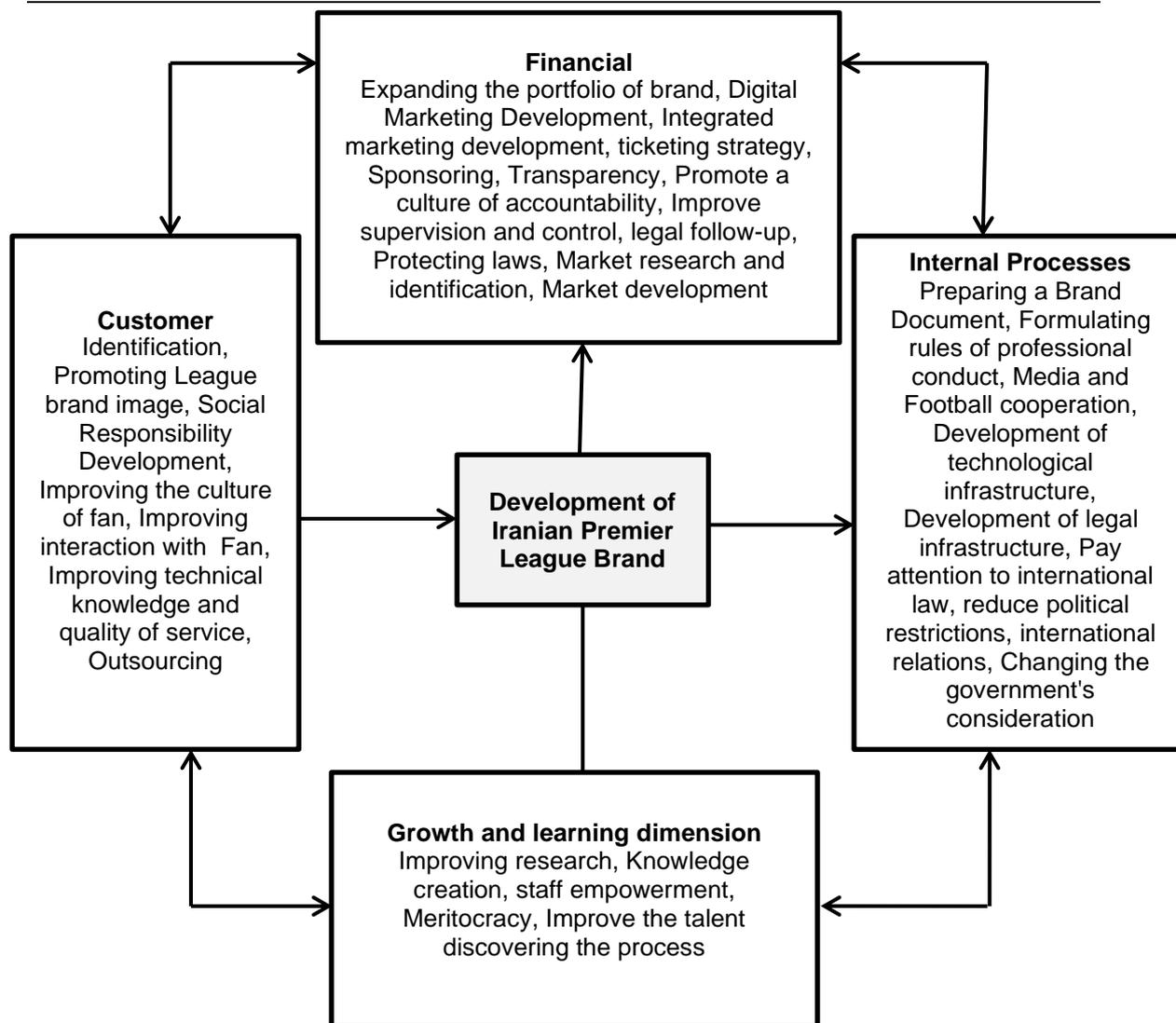


Figure 1 - Balanced Scorecard Model for Development of Iranian Premier League Brand.

Table 6 - Prioritizing bsc dimensions and brand development strategies of Iranian Premier League based on AHP model.

| dimensions | Normalized relative weight | strategy | Normalized relative weight |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| internal processes | 0.442 | Strategic management in football | 0.574 |
| | | Improve the status of the Iranian Premier League at the international level | 0.260 |
| | | Technology And media Management | 0.166 |
| Financial | 0.276 | maintaining and controlling liquidity | 0.556 |
| | | wealth creation | 0.256 |
| | | Increasing market share | 0.179 |
| Customer | 0.183 | Fan management relationship | 0.665 |
| | | brand identity promotion | 0.335 |
| Growth and learning | 0.098 | Strengthening human capital | 0.684 |
| | | Knowledge-based innovation | 0.316 |

The results in Table 6 show that attention to the internal processes dimension is the first priority and the growth and learning dimension is the last priority. They also rank first in the financial aspects of strategic management in football, in the financial aspect of maintaining and controlling liquidity, in the aspect of enhancing and learning human

capital, and in the customer dimension of customer relationship management.

Finally, according to the prioritization derived from the hierarchical analysis of the Balanced Scorecard strategy map to strengthen the Iranian Premier League brand was extracted as follows (Figure 2).

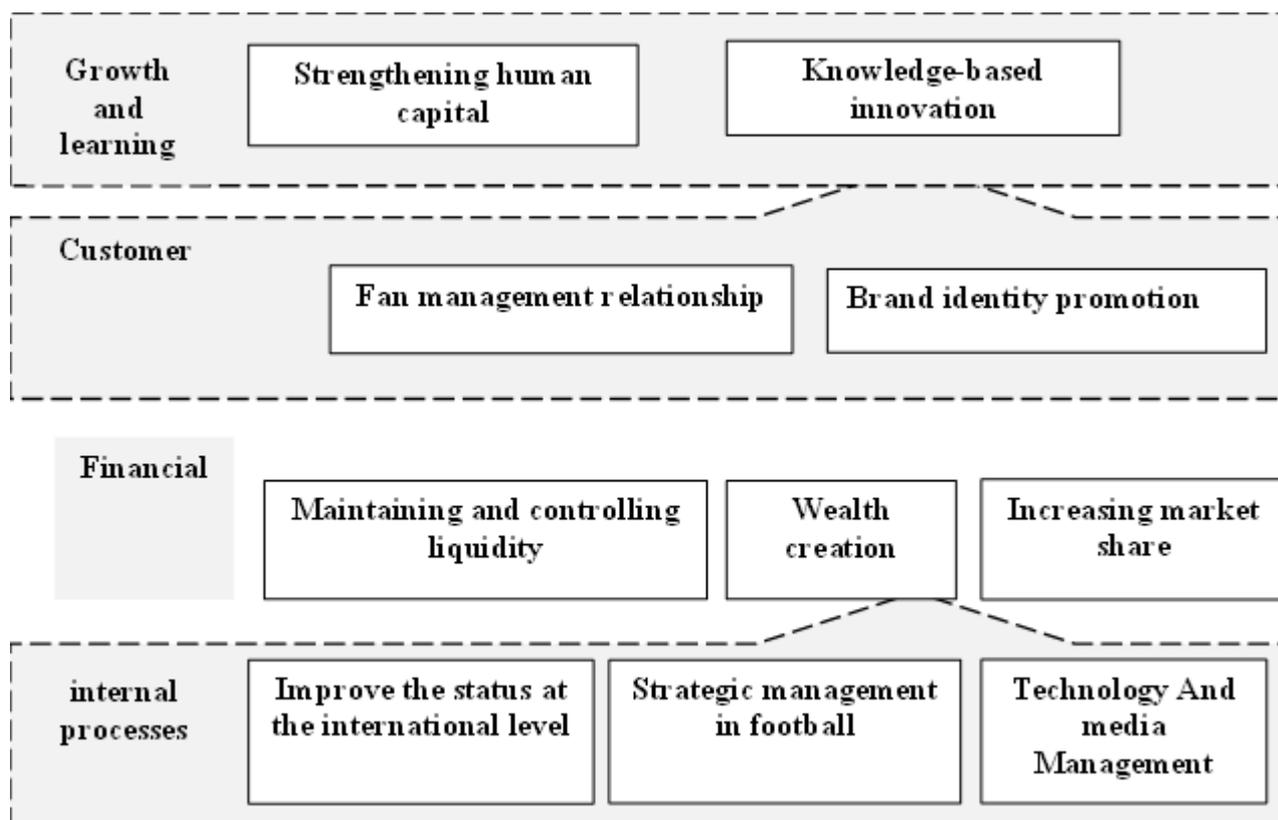


Figure 2 - Balanced Scorecard strategy map to strengthen the Iranian Premier League brand.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, strategies were identified and prioritized to strengthen the Iranian Premier League brand. Research findings suggest that the Iranian Premier League should prioritize four domains of internal, financial, customer and learning processes.

Of course, this ranking does not mean that the prospects that are in the lower priority are unimportant. However, it means that, in the current situation of Iranian football, in order to strengthen the Premier League brand, special attention should be paid to the internal processes.

Financial performance was at the second priority. Therefore, considering the necessary balance between dimensions, the

Iranian Premier League should improve the economic and financial aspects of its organization.

The results of this research are in line with research conducted by Kozma et al., (2015) since these researchers were in agreement with the focus on the four balanced scorecard dimensions.

However, the results concerning Ahmed, Asbahs (2018) research differed with this study according to the number of landscapes identified.

Based on the results 10 Strategic Management Strategies in Football including, improvement of Iranian premier league position in the international level, technology and media management, liquidity management, wealth creation, market share increase, customer

relationship management, league brand promotion, strengthening human capital and knowledge-based innovation were identified from which 35 strategic goals were formulated in line with these strategies and eventually the actions and strategies needed to achieve these strategies were specified. These results suggest that for the sake of its brand success, the Iranian Premier League must become a strategy-centric organization, focusing its strategy on all its activities and, in turn, aligning it with all relevant organizations and implement appropriate structured design strategies.

The success of the Iranian Premier League in developing and expanding the brand requires a strategic plan, cooperation between the government and football officials. A program-centric attitude in the Iranian Premier League is essential to face the challenging and competitive future.

Long-term planning and implementation will result in branding football within a unified framework for achieving macro goals and reduce parallel and redundant activities, as well as an appropriate criterion for controlling and evaluating Iranian Premier League brand performance. This study aimed to identify strategies with a balanced scorecard approach, explaining the goals and measures needed to achieve it and attempted to facilitate the process of applying this model to reinforce the Iranian Premier League brand.

The results of this study can help managers to determine the short-term and long-term goals in line with their strategies to implement the proposed measures in this research and to provide the background for the development of the Iranian Premier League brand at the national and international level.

Limitations and future research

This study suffered from a range of limitations that restrict the generalization of the findings and opens directions for future research. This particular study focused on a sample from only one football league.

Future research should focus on the other leagues. Considering the conceptual framework of this study, it is also suggested that each of the major football clubs in the country will assess the status and position of each of the teams from the perspective of brand development and formulate specific brand development strategies for each club.

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