

**THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE BRAND
GLOBALIZATION OF THE IRANIAN FOOTBALL PRO-LEAGUE**Sajjad Soroush¹, Seyyed Nasrollah Sajjadi², Ebrahim Alidoust³, Mehrzad Hamidi⁴**ABSTRACT**

Objective: The main objective of this research was to design the framework of the contextual conditions affecting the brand globalization of the Iranian football pro-league. **Materials and methods:** In order to achieve the goal and according to the specialty of the subject, qualitative study was used by conducting in-depth interviews with the experts of this subject. The interviews were conducted using snowballing technique and ultimately 20 people (18 Iranian people and 2 foreigners) were interviewed. Finally, the data obtained from the interviews were analyzed by grounded theory method through three stages open, axial, and selective coding. **Result:** Reviewing and analyzing interviews with regard to the contextual conditions underlying the brand globalization of the Iranian Football Pro-League 110 initial codes were distinguished, which, with respect to the proximity of the subject, 64 general concepts were considered. Subsequently, by further reviewing the concepts and their combination with each other and finding the initial relations between concepts, 32 final categories affecting the brand globalization of the football pro-league have been identified, which classified in five major dimensions. These dimensions included: managerial, economical, legal, techno- marketing and socio-cultural factors. **Conclusion:** According to the research findings, it is essential for the Iranian football managers and stakeholders to take advantage of the opportunities and meet the existing challenges to provide the required conditions and platforms for moving on the path of globalization.

Key words: Brand. Contextual Conditions. Globalization. Iranian Football Pro-League.

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RESUMO

A Estrutura das Condições Contextuais que Afetam a Globalização da Marca da Liga Pro Iraniana de Futebol

Objetivo: O principal objetivo desta pesquisa foi projetar a estrutura das condições contextuais que afetam a globalização da marca da liga pró-futebol iraniana. **Materiais e métodos:** Para atingir o objetivo e de acordo com a especialidade do assunto, utilizou-se estudo qualitativo, realizando entrevistas em profundidade com os especialistas deste assunto. As entrevistas foram conduzidas usando a técnica de bola de neve e, finalmente, 20 pessoas (18 iranianas e 2 estrangeiros) foram entrevistadas. Por fim, os dados obtidos nas entrevistas foram analisados pelo método da teoria fundamentada em bases, por meio de três etapas de codificação aberta, axial e seletiva. **Resultados:** foram analisadas e analisadas entrevistas com relação às condições contextuais subjacentes à globalização da marca dos códigos iniciais do Iranian Football Pro-League 110, os quais, em relação à proximidade do assunto, foram considerados 64 conceitos gerais. Posteriormente, ao revisar os conceitos e sua combinação entre si e encontrar as relações iniciais entre os conceitos, foram identificadas 32 categorias finais que afetam a globalização da marca na liga profissional de futebol, classificadas em cinco dimensões principais. Essas dimensões incluíam: fatores gerenciais, econômicos, legais, tecnoc Marketing e socioculturais. **Conclusão:** De acordo com os resultados da pesquisa, é essencial que os dirigentes e partes interessadas do futebol iraniano aproveitem as oportunidades e enfrentem os desafios existentes para fornecer as condições e plataformas necessárias para seguir o caminho da globalização.

Palavras-chave: Marca. Condições Contextuais. Globalização. Liga Iraniana de Futebol.

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INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, managers should focus their efforts on the brand of their organization or company because, according to research findings, brand is the most important factor in the identity of today's organizations and companies (Balmer, et al., 2006).

Nowadays, the most important asset of any company is its brand and if it is managed properly and continuously, it can enhance the value of organizations and companies (Kaynak, et al., 2008).

On the other hand, professional sport in the age of globalization is an international business activity which in itself generates entrepreneurship. Accordingly, market orientation is a relatively new phenomenon that most sports clubs seek to adapt to (Shilbury, et al., 2009).

In particular, many sports brands are expanding their geographic scope and seeking globalization due to the global demand for sports consumption. For example, the English Premier League (EPL) has announced that it is looking for a regular overseas option. This new marketing strategy has generally come from the worldwide popularity of football and specifically from the English Premier League (Pyun, et al., 2011).

Background literature attributes the beginning of the global branding movement to Theodore Levitt (1983), who strongly emphasized the convergence of markets, cultures, and needs.

Hollis (2008) considers an international brand to go beyond its cultural roots to build strong relationships with consumers across countries and cultures.

Research evidence suggests that global brands tend to perform better than local brands; they are strong in their native markets, geographically balanced, and have a stronger corporate brand; this in itself means that only strong brands can be globally successful (Pyun, et al., 2011; Richelieu, 2016).

In this regard, for example: Baena (2017) in her research illustrates the Bayern Munich Club's global marketing strategy and states that the club seeks to make the most of its brand image by focusing more on the needs of stakeholders, particularly supporters and it has its own local and global fans to increase its market share and improve its turnover (Baena, 2017).

In line with this research, Blumrodt and Kitchen (2015) have shown that stakeholders can change the feelings and emotions of a brand, enhance its legitimacy, or weaken it (Blumrodt and Kitchen, 2015); it is important to conclude that brands are not born but made (Keller, Lehmann, 2006).

In addition, Chanavat (2017) has focused on attracting foreign investors from Russia and Qatar in his research focusing on French football and the Paris Saint Germain (PSG) in the age of globalization and suggests that this strategy could raise awareness and promote the brand of the club and as a result, increasing its turnover.

Attracting regional and international sponsors is another area of influence for globalization of football brands highlighted by which strengthens the economic vigor of the clubs and leverages the brand in a specific geographical area (Chanavat, et al., 2017).

Also, Richelieu (2016) studied 46 sports clubs in North America and Europe from a structural, financial, and cultural point of view, identifying five strategies (glocalization, storytelling, sportainment, co-branding and fan-actors) for the global Recognized the rise of sports brands and stated that by adopting these strategies, clubs and sports teams could increase their revenue, enhance their brand image and prestige.

Brannagan and Giulianotti (2015) also examined the factors affecting the globalization of Qatari football, showing that hosting the World Cup 2022, raising glocal consciousness, displaying Qatar's superiority as a small country in the Middle East, peace and friendship, security and Cohesion and exposure to national health crises or briefly gaining "soft power" are among the strategies and outcomes of moving on the path of globalization in Qatar.

Sondaal (2013), by presenting a new conceptual model called 'Localism anew' showed that the outcomes of globalization are not the same everywhere and depend on the capacity of the sector and the Local-societal setting. In his research, he emphasizes the growth of international social capital in the context of English domestic leagues coupled with the arrival of foreign players and managers (Sondaal, 2013).

Pyun, et al., (2011) in a study on "the effects of perceived brand globalness, perceived brand quality and ethnocentrism on consumption patterns of the English Premier League" showed that perceived brand

globalness, perceived brand quality and ethnocentrism influenced consumer behavior which is what they called as watching intentions of the league events.

However, little information is available on the contextual conditions affecting this phenomenon. of course, some research including Baena (2017), Richelieu (2016) and Richelieu, Desbores (2009) indicated some of the contextual variables such as: today's advanced stadiums, playground performance (game quality improvement), advanced communication systems (websites, television, team publications, etc.) and new marketing strategies for club revenue generation (eg. Merchendizing).

Meanwhile, the Iranian Football Pro-League and its affiliated clubs have failed to identify their own brand in the absence of specified hardware and software infrastructures and failure to identify specific strategies for brand development to go beyond national boundaries and to the global arena, which is the main reason for the lack of awareness for the Iranian Football Pro- League and its affiliated clubs.

Therefore, identifying the contextual conditions and contributing factors to this phenomenon not only can introduce the challenges facing the globalization of the league brand, but also contribute to its acceptance by Iran's football managers as well as practitioners and provide a suitable platform for moving towards it. Accordingly, the fundamental question of this study is as follows:

What are the contextual conditions and factors affecting the brand globalization of the Iranian Football Pro- League?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method was qualitative and based on grounded theory (GT).

The population of this study included experts familiar with the subject of globalization and global marketing in sport and related football managers.

The data collection tools in this study were derived from primary sources (semi-structured interviews) and secondary sources (printed and electronic resources available in the field of brand globalization and global marketing).

The interviews proceeded in a purposeful and snowballing manner, and finally, after concluding 12 interviews, we concluded that the new information was a repetition of previous information; to increase the conceptual diversity and concentration of the theory, we conducted the 20 interviews (18 Iranian and 2 foreigners).

To confirm the validity and reliability of this study, using the concept of Trustworthiness and its multiple elements, several strategies such as revision at coding, member checking, and peer debriefing were used (Houman, 2010).

The following suggested index is proposed to calculate retest reliability between researcher codings over two time intervals:

$$\text{Reliability percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100$$

During the coding process, 8 interviews were typically coded within a 30-day interval, and then referenced to the initial codes extracted from those interviews and the following table was obtained:

Table 1 - Reliability of coding test.

No	Interview title	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability percentage
1	P1	70	32	10	91%
2	P3	90	35	7	77%
3	P4	83	33	9	79%
4	P5	39	18	4	92%
5	P7	68	30	11	88%
6	P9	69	29	10	89%
7	P11	71	31	8	87%
8	P12	82	33	6	80%
Total		568	241	65	85%

As can be seen in Table 1, the retest reliability of the interviews using this formula is 85%. Since reliability is greater than 60%, reliability of coding is confirmed (Danaeifard, Mozaffari, 2008).

Finally, the data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using grounded theory method with emphasis on contextual conditions through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding (Khanifar, Moslemi, 2017).

Also, using fundamental data processing analysis, the action of summarizing, classification and conclusion of the findings were performed (Khanifar, Moslemi, 2017).

Consequently, the researcher reached the 'theoretical saturation of the categories around the central phenomenon of research, which means that he made sure that nothing

remained in one category and that it was sufficient.

RESULTS

With respect to the descriptive statistics of the present study, in general, out of 20 interviewees 90% of whom were male, 95% had a PhD and 5% had a Masters degree. Also, 95% were educated in the field of physical education and sport sciences. Furthermore, 90% of the research population had a background research in marketing.

But, reviewing and analyzing interviews with regard to the contextual conditions underlying the brand globalization of the Iranian Football Pro-League distinguished 110 initial codes which with respect to the proximity of the subject, 64 general concepts were considered.

Table 2 - Findings from selective coding around contextual conditions.

Dimensions	Categories
Managerial	1- The absence of a comprehensive planning for globalization 2- The lack of good and efficient staff (managers, supervisors, etc.) 3- Weaknesses in deploying and operating existing manpower 4- Lack of coordination and integration of different elements and in the league 5- The lack of scientific and rational processes in global branding 6- Inattention to the issue of training and empowering personnel in the league 7- Weaknesses in monitoring and evaluating professional football organizations
Economical	1- Poor club income and turnover 2- The lack of determination to commercialize and privatize as many clubs as possible 3- Inattention to new marketing approaches in the age of globalization 4- The absence of financial transparency
Techno-marketing	1- Inattention to the branding elements and brand equity of the Premier League 2- Inadequate attention to the grassroots 3- Weakness in talent management 4- Weakness in transfer of players 5- The lack of advanced facilities 6- Having no specialized stadiums for each of the clubs 7- The absence of technical knowledge and professionalism in football 8- Attendance and success at international football events 9- The absence of proper and standard structure 10- Weakness in the use of up-to-date technologies
Legal	1- Poor federation rules for globalization, handling the league and the clubs 2- Lack of transparency in regulations 3- The absence of an experienced legal committee or unit 4- Non-compliance with international standards and protocols 5- Wrong election process at the head and body of the federation 6- Lack of professional codes of conduct
Socio-cultural	1- Having a lot of passionate fans and spectators 2. Poor media coverage in the age of globalization 3. Weakness in producing content in different languages 4. Poor support for the League's globalization 5. Minimal satisfaction of fans with the services provided, especially in the stadiums 6. The lack of competitive atmosphere among clubs to be globalized

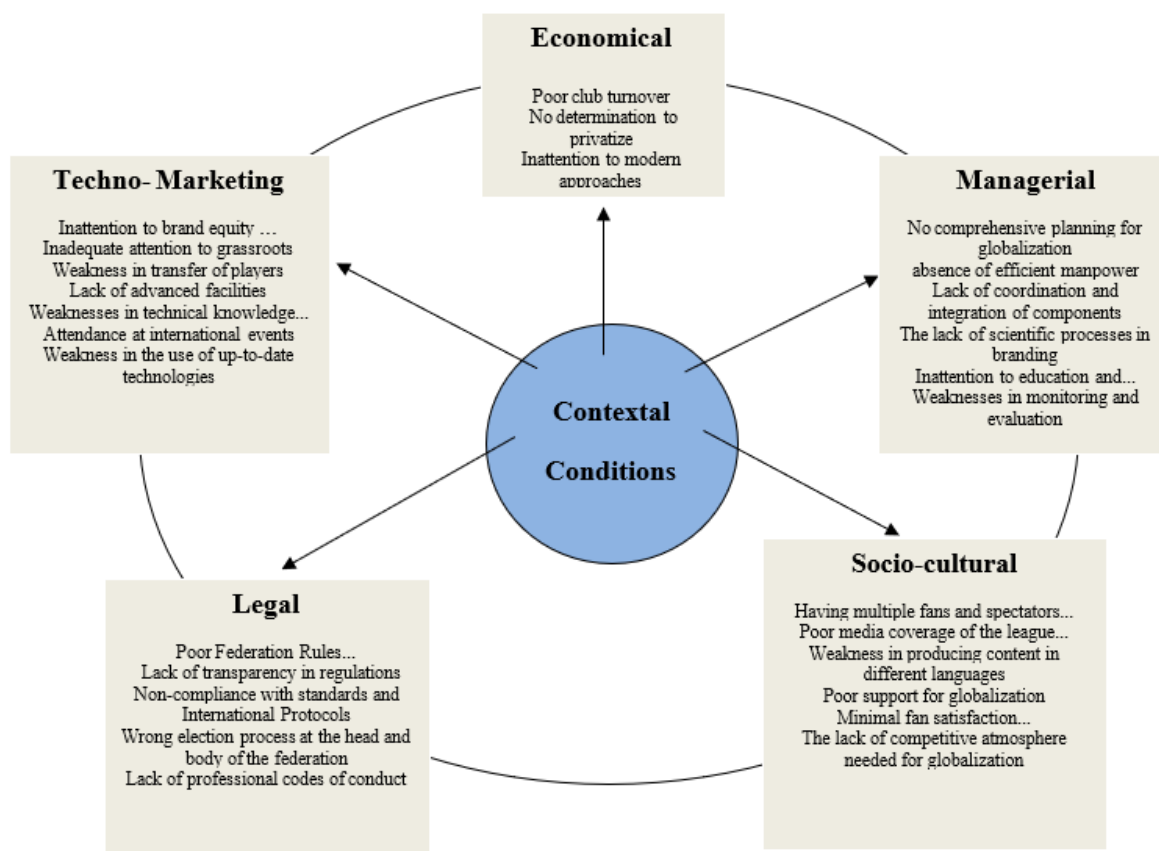


Figure 1 - The framework of the contextual conditions influencing the brand globalization of the Iranian Football Pro- League.

Subsequently, by further reviewing the concepts and their combination with each other and finding the initial relations between the concepts, 32 final categories affecting the brand globalization of the Iranian football pro-league have been identified, which classified in five major dimensions.

These dimensions included: managerial, economical, legal, technical, marketing and socio-cultural factors (Table 2).

In the following, In order to facilitate a broad and sequential review of the conditions, a framework of factors and challenges affecting the globalization of the Iranian Premier League brand are presented (Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between the research factors has been shown to be a chain that expresses the overlap and interaction of the factors altogether. In other words, development in one sector can lead to development in other sectors.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article was to provide a contextual framework that would affect the brand globalization of the Iranian Football Pro-League.

In this regard, by analyzing as well as summarizing the findings, the related concepts were integrated into one another and finally five major dimensions were identified as follows: managerial, economical, legal, techno-marketing and socio-cultural.

The absence of a comprehensive planning for globalization of the league was one of the key factors affecting brand globalization in managerial dimension. Based on literature review, a strategic global marketing planning allows an organization to correctly assess and identify its budget requirements and thus generate revenue (Baena, 2017).

However, so far in the Iranian football industry, there has been no scientifically documented global marketing planning; a fact

that many interviewees have acknowledged. In the meantime, the role of efficient human resources, especially professionals managers for planning, operationalization, coordination and integration of different elements and components in the Iranian football pro-league is inevitable.

This part of the research findings is in line with the results of many studies, including: Richelieu (2011), Richelieu (2016), Rasooli, et al., (2016).

Human resources, with their technical skills in specialized areas, as well as their appearance, fitness, and behavior, form an image of the league and clubs in the community's mind; accordingly, a code of conduct "professionalism" in Premier League clubs are essential in order to shape their behavior and appearance and align them with the philosophy and foundations of the clubs.

In today's business and commerce environment, branding is by far important (Kaynak, et al., 2008).

However, given the findings of in-depth interviews with football professionals and managers, the main concern of many Iranian Premier League clubs is the lack of scientific and rational processes regarding international branding.

And minor attention is paid to branding and brand management. Most of the clubs in the Iranian football pro-league do not have a strong brand planning as well as strong brand elements.

This, in turn causes that local brands in domestic markets tend to have a poorer positioning than foreign brands (Rasooli, et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, the role of staff empowerment, monitoring and evaluation in football clubs and organizations is emphasized (Rezaei, et al., 2015).

On the other hand, regarding the monitoring and evaluation, it can be stated that this factor is not in a good condition and does not comply with the AFC professional criteria (Hosseini, et al., 2015).

According to AFC monitoring criteria, the government does not have the right to intervene in league programs or clubs; the league's governing body must have a management structure for controlling matches, marketing, media and finance. The financial sector of the league must have a profit and loss audit, financial balance sheet and financial auditing of the league must be determined.

But with respect to the economic area and the categories related to which, it is not currently in good status and should be improved by methods and models of the world's leading clubs in this case.

This part of the findings is consistent with the results of many studies, including: Deldar, et al., (2015), Torabi, et al., (2015), Rezaei, et al., (2015); Despite of more than 10 years of work, professional football in Iran does not turn into an industry.

According to the research by Chanavat (2017), Baena (2017), Richelieu (2016), Richelieu and Lesard (2014), Pyun, et al., (2011) and Gupta (2009), due to globalization in the world today, a significant portion of monetization and revenue making in so called Football brand is as a result of increased TV broadcasting rights, international investors and sponsors, but in Iran, due to a lack of determination to commercialize and privatize the country's premier league clubs, this issue stands still and no follow-up or investigation in this case has taken into account.

Other categories to consider include new marketing approaches in the football industry, such as: online marketing and branding, stadiums and electronic games (eSport), etc., which are currently neglected in the country's Premier League.

For example, Beigomi, Hamidi, and Khabiri (2013) showed that the websites of Iranian football clubs except for the context of communication content and speed of access to the site, in other factors (exchange content, information, advertising and routing capability) had lower quality than the websites of successful European football clubs. However, new marketing approaches and tools provide the necessary ground for moving on the path of globalization by providing marketing opportunities and flowing income and communicating effectively with fans and supporters.

There are still many failures in discussing financial transparency, which is one of the largest infrastructures needed to operate in any economy, and in reviewing the literature, financial transparency have been introduced as an internal challenge and one of the major economic hurdles for Brand management, fundraising and privatization of Iranian Premier League clubs (Deldar et al., 2016).

Also, financial transparency by providing relevant and reliable information on course performance, financial status, investment opportunities, strategy and the risks

that each company faces can help users in making investment and Management performance evaluation (Bushman et al., 2004).

Other contextual factors affecting the globalization of the Iranian Premier League can be referred to the technical and structural dimension and related categories.

According to the results of the interviews, the Iranian Premier League is not in a good position in most of the abovementioned categories.

Thus, the league organization and its clubs can increase their brand equity by investing in global image and quality attributes (Pyun et al., 2011). Furthermore, today in the era of globalization and Professional sport levels, adequate attention to grassroot teams, recognition and training of elite and talented athletes are considered essential (Doustdari, et al., 2015).

In football, this issue being enacted by the However, in Iran, due to the lack of financial and material resources for talent recognition, absence of specialized committees, lack of principled program, lack of knowledge of scientific methods regarding talent recognition in clubs, etc, it happens in a non-professional and what is so called as greenhouse manner (Sondaal, 2013).

There are also many shortcomings in the transfer issue, although this has been adjusted in recent years due to the legionnaires' admirable performance, but special attention is needed to make the most of this space.

On the other hand, well-equipped, attractive physical facilities such as home stadiums, training camps, museum club buildings and dedicated club stores will enhance the brand of the country's football pro-league globally.

In the Iranian Premier League clubs, as mentioned earlier, there is a lack of good image in this regard due to the failure to make money and the governmental clubs and stadiums. In addition, the current stadiums are below the global standards.

Baena (2017), Richelieu (2016), Richelieu, Lesard (2014), Richelieu (2011), Shahsavand, Shabani, Gomar (2013), Rasooli et al., (2016) have also pointed out this important issue.

Therefore, appropriate facilities should be provided for the construction or transfer of existing stadiums to teams in the Pro- League.

Other contextual factors affecting the globalization of the Iranian Football Pro-League include technical knowledge of the coaches, adopting professional measures by them, attending and succeeding in the world events. Most clubs in the premier league now encounter many shortcomings in this area. According to Roben Frost, coaches are a key part of the sporting teams.

Today, in the world of football, teams behind team is considered as a new-born approach; among the three factors of athlete, coach and spectator, coach in team leadership is a strong and underlying organizer of any progress (Richelieu, Lesard, 2014).

On the other hand, attending and succeeding in global and international competitions is a launching pad for football globalization. In fact, the pride of victory is so worthwhile and important that football federations and clubs are willing to bear the costs and hire efficient coaches, especially leading international coaches. Therefore, employing internationally acclaimed coaches is seen as the fastest way to reach skillful and efficient individuals (Richelieu, Desbordes, 2009).

Other findings of the research under the techno-marketing dimension can be noted as improper structure in the organization of the Iranian Football League which according to the findings of the research was not in a good status and do not match by many standards of FIFA and AFC.

This part of the research results is in line with the results of many researches such as: Elahi, et al., (2006) and Hosseini, et al., (2015).

This could be due to lack of reliable charts and undefined jobs, absence of systematic thinking, management instability, problems acclimatizing, lack of shared aspirations, disregard for creativity and innovation, conflict between sports organizations in line with the policies of the football federation, strong dependence of the premier league organization on the federation and the lack of specialized committees, which is also evident in previous research (Hosseini et al., 2015).

Also, this research finding is inconsistent with the result of as the researchers have introduced a proper structure in their league and identified it as an essential organizational structure requirement (Conlin et al., 2013).

But one of the most important contextual factors affecting the globalization of the country's Premier League brand is attributed to the legal dimension and its related issues, given the results of the interviews conducted with the shortcomings and failures.

There are many issues in each of these categories: Federation rules and regulations in the age of globalization, transparency of the bylaws and statutes of the Federation and the League, compliance with international standards and protocols, etc which Protect organizations and secure margins by formulating supportive, facilitative plans, rules and regulations in the football industry.

Despite the current conditions, it seems difficult for global football organizations to enter the arena. Therefore, thoughtful measures should be taken to address these problems.

According to the literature, legal practice is particularly important in the Iranian Premier League because of the shortcomings and deficiencies of lawsuits and various complaints at national and international level, not just destruction.

Not only does it ruin the image of football, but it also damages the image of the country globally and in international football organizations such as FIFA and AFC. In addition, the lack of awareness and inability of clubs to protect their rights, such as brand rights and copyrights, will be misused by other organizations and, as a result, will undermine as well as ruin the clubs' brand (Shabani Bahar et al., 2018).

Another important contextual factor that contributes to the development of football sport and its globalization is the socio-cultural component and its related categories.

According to the findings of the study, with the exception of numerous enthusiastic fans and spectators, there are many shortcomings and failures in other categories, such as: media infrastructure and related capabilities such as content production, fans satisfaction, the atmosphere of constructive competition, and support for the issue of globalization.

In this regard, Baena (2016), in a study titled "New Marketing Strategies to Promote Real Madrid Brand" indicated that sport managers need to use interactive marketing media to communicate with customers in today's globalized football (Baena, 2016).

Also, Chanavat et al., (2017), Richelieu, Lesard (2014), and Sondaal (2013) indicated in their research that sports marketers need to recognize sports fans and engage them in sports and psychological commitment to Special teams as much as they can and benefit from it. We are in the process of discussing how to engage fans in professional football in the country.

According to research evidence, in order to embark on globalization at the beginning of the football industry, it must engage and attract regional as well as global customers and fans, then pursue economic goals (Baena, 2017).

On the other hand, the absence of competitive atmosphere to move on the path of globalization in the national football organizations has led to a lot of backwardness and failure in the professional football of the country. In principle, progress in any industry has been dependent on competition (Richelieu, 2014).

Today, world-renowned football clubs are competing with each other in the use of world-class tools and technologies.

The interesting thing about Deloitte's annual reports on the club's economic activities is that of revenue and turnover, the number of fans in the various virtual networks, which indicates that these clubs are in close competition.

However, according to Rahimizadeh, et al., (2016), the websites of the top clubs in Iran have not been successful in this regard.

In the age of globalization where political, economical, legal, cultural and social circumstances are considered vital and constantly evolving, competitive advantage becomes more vital and sustained (Chanavat, 2017).

For this reason, professional football organizations in Iran should strive to achieve the methods that drive them to gain sustainable competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

In general, globalization and market orientation is an emerging phenomenon that most leagues and football clubs in the world are looking to adapt to take advantage of it.

Therefore, managers should focus on the brand of their companies or organizations as the most important asset and manage it over time to create value and enhance their brand.

It seems that based on the research evidence and the consensus of most interviewees on the positive consequences of the globalization of the Iranian Football Premier League, it is essential that the managers and stakeholders of the Iranian football pro-league meet the challenges of the aforementioned contexts (managerial, economic, Legal, techno-marketing and socio-cultural factors), and by identifying hardware-software infrastructures, formulating specific strategies for brand development, and undertaking significant actions in this case, provide the required grounding to move on the path of globalization.

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