

*Original Article*

## The effect of brand personality on the loyalty of football clubs fans: A case of Nassaji Mazandaran

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate the effect of brand personality on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. This study was an applied descriptive survey. The statistical population of this study includes all fans of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club in 2021, whose number was unlimited; therefore, 384 people were selected as a sample using the available Krejcie and Morgan table by available sampling method. Data collection tools in the present study are two standard questionnaires: the Siutsu personality questionnaire of sports teams (2012) and the Mahoni et al. loyalty questionnaire of sports team fans (2000). Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data by SPSS and Amos software. The results indicate that the brand personality and its dimensions (competition, prestige, ethics, originality, and credibility) affect the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. It is suggested to the managers and officials of sports clubs to use the results of this research in the sports club in order to increase income and the need for self-sufficiency and attract new fans and fan loyalty.

**Keywords:** branding, brand personality, brand identity, brand recognition, fan loyalty.

## 1. Introduction

In the present era, sport is an industry that has grown significantly internationally and, of course, has generated considerable revenue. Simultaneously with the growth of services in other industries, in the sports industry, the provision of services has grown significantly (Rajabi, Tarighi, and Mizani, 2015). Professional sports have become a big business, and sports managers are increasingly looking at marketing concepts and notions related to customer demand; that is, they take advantage of comprehensive quality management (Sajjadi et al., 2016). Football in Iran is one of the most common and popular sports that, in comparison with other sports, has the most significant number of athletes and spectators (Tarighi, Karami, and Salehi Rostami, 2021). An examination of the performance of some international sports organizations, such as international sports federations, as well as some national organizations of different countries, shows that they have used various sports marketing techniques to achieve their goals and also have been able to achieve significant success in various marketing activities (Tarighi, Hamidi and Rajabi, 2017). One of the necessary abilities to succeed in competition is knowledge and marketing skills in economic institutions. Sports institutions can be considered an essential and integral part of the economic body of the country, which seeks to achieve economic goals to develop public, specialized, and championship sports at the domestic and international levels (Tarighi, Hamidi, and Rajabi, 2014). Sports marketing includes the principles of marketing in the industry, namely the sports trading industry. Therefore, sports marketing is a particular application of marketing principles and processes for sports products and non-sports products through financial support in sports (Tarighi, Talebi, and Salehi Rostami, 2022). In addition, sports organizations, like non-sports organizations, are subject to environmental and global changes and deal with specific issues (Tarighi and Hamidi, 2017). In the sports industry, any team can be considered a brand and its fans as customers. Therefore, managers in this industry can use branding strategies (Tarighi et al., 2021). Managers of professional sports organizations must effectively manage challenges such as high costs, highly competitive markets, the spread of fan dissatisfaction and their collapse, and the explosive growth of new technologies to survive in commercial sports (Tarighi et al., 2017).

In today's world, the principal capital of many organizations is the brand of that organization (Moharramzadeh and Akbari, 2013). In the sports industry, sports teams are brands, and fans are customers; therefore, sports managers should consider and manage their teams as brands. Brand identity is a factor within the organization that promotes brand equity. If the brand identity of a sports team has desirable characteristics that can

meet the defined needs of its fans, the fans will think that the team has the necessary appeal for them. For a brand to be strong, it must remain true to its identity. Different dimensions have been considered for brand identity, which are: brand differentiation, brand credibility, brand similarity, and brand attractiveness (Lee, 2017). Brands in the sports industry should be formed based on meaningful and meaningful concepts to target market members (Maleki, Hosseini, and Tarighi, 2020).

Success in branding while developing export markets also increases the international reputation of countries and, in the future, will cause the revenue from the transfer of the brand to interested companies abroad to exceed the revenue from the direct export of goods (Islam, 2015). Brand equity is brand loyalty, perceived quality of the brand, business associations, and awareness of brand behavior in the market to show that market share is part of dividends and trademarks. Repeated research shows that brand value can provide competitive advantage and financial benefits in several ways (Shuv-Ami, A., Papolomou, I. & Vrontix, D, 2017). Brand value is evidenced by loyalty, positive perceptions, the ability to attract new customers and demand higher prices, ease of entering new markets, and preventing new competitors from entering the market (Tarighi and Sajjadi, 2021). Increasing managerial efficiency, aesthetic nature, and ideological performance of "branding" have forced marketing researchers to constantly revise and re-evaluate this multidimensional structure's theory and conceptual complexity (Tarighi, Alimoradi, Abedi, and Salehi Rostami, 2021). Today, we are witnessing the increasing importance of customer orientation and its emergence as the most critical competitive advantage of organizations and its role in the success and development of organizations. The important thing is that value is determined from the customer's point of view in the market and by the customer's perception of what he pays and receives. Value is not what is produced but what the customer receives. In today's competitive world, no organization can differentiate itself from other organizations by excelling in its operations or innovating its products unless it has a deep understanding of the needs and wants of its customers. In difficult competitive situations, timely and organized communication with customers is the most active way to increase customer satisfaction, increase sales, reduce costs, and gain a competitive advantage (Koper, 2016). Team sports need to develop an effective strategy for their team brands to achieve a positive and appropriate relationship with the fans as their customers and to achieve a higher degree of team loyalty. Therefore, understanding why and how to communicate with sports teams is fundamental in developing the brand of sports teams (Jaberi, Sultan Hosseini, Naderian Jahromi, and Khazaei Pool, 2014). Strong and successful brands have two



aspects of the human index. These two aspects are heart and mind. Solid and successful commercial letters can affect the heart and minds of people, i.e., consumers (Sajjadi et al., 2013).

The term personality is inferred from customers' persistent responses to their environment; therefore, personality can be used to analyze consumer responses to products or brands. Hence, businesses can communicate with their customers and achieve success by creating a distinctive brand personality (Lin, 2010). Upbeat brand personality has consequences such as strengthening customer preferences, increasing customer emotions, and improving trust and customer satisfaction (Heslop, L. A., Cary, D., & Armenakyan, A, 2010). The market is full of similar products, and in order to be able to distinguish a product, we must give it an identity. Using items such as name, symbol or logo, unique colors, and other components is actually to identify the product. In fact, in this way, we try to give personality to our product and create a special place for it in the customer's mind (Roy et al., 2016). Brand personality makes customers feel a particular reaction to a brand's product, service, or goals. *Personality* is the element that gives something originality or shows that it has no originality. Personality is the distinguishing feature of things that are soon forgotten and things that stay in mind for a long time (if not forever) (Su & Tong, 2015). Functions such as creating a vision, displaying talent, resolving tensions, creating cultural values, providing sustainability in the lives of fans, strengthening social cohesion, creating a team loyalty spirit for an organization, and providing a place that increases business profits are considered as pro functions. (Paul et al., 2018).

In this regard, Ebrahimipour et al. (2019), in a study entitled "the relationship between brand personality and loyalty of football team fans," showed a significant and direct relationship between brand personality and fan loyalty. In addition, Ghammat Afzar and Seljuqi (2019) conducted a study entitled "Study of the effect of brand personality on the loyalty of sports team fans by identifying them (Case study: Payam Quchan karate fighters)" and indicated the effect of brand personality and team identity on their loyalty. In addition, brand personality has a significant effect on attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Ghammat Afzar and Seljuqi, 2019). In addition, Garanti (2019) conducted a study entitled "Brand Ethical Perception and Their Impact on Brand Loyalty and Brand Selection Goals: The Mediating Role of Emotional Attachment to the Brand" and showed that brand ethics have a positive

effect on emotional attachment to the brand as well as brand loyalty. On the other hand, Wang and Yang (2011), in the study of the effect of brand personality on shopping desire in China, concluded that brand personality has a significant positive effect on shopping desire and brand reputation as a cheerful moderator in the relationship between personality Brand and willingness to buy, works.

The severe financial dependence of most Iranian football teams on government and quasi-government budgets and their inability to generate revenue has made it vital to pay attention to issues related to sports marketing in the current situation and, in this regard, study the processes related to branding and strengthening it in sports teams will be an increasing need. Considering the importance of the loyalty of sports fans and customers, this study aims to analyze the effect of brand personality on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nasajji Football Club fans. According to the mentioned facts, the present study, by explaining the effects of brand personality on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans in the Iranian Football Premier League, can be considered as a basis for brand development of sports teams by sports managers and marketers. In this regard, whether the brand personality affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans or not.

## 2. Methods

This research was applied in a descriptive-survey method. The statistical population of this study includes all fans of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club in 2021, whose number was unlimited, and 384 people were selected as a sample using the available Krejcie and Morgan table by available sampling method. Data collection tools in the present study are two standard questionnaires: the Siutsu personality questionnaire of sports teams (2012) and the Mahoni et al. loyalty questionnaire of sports team fans (2000). In addition, descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data by SPSS and Amos software.

## 3. Results

According to the descriptive results, the highest percentage of respondents in the marital status section was single people with 70.6% frequency. In the age section, the results showed that the age group of 31-40 years with 50.5% has the highest frequency. From the education table of the respondents, it can be said that 35.2% of the total respondents had a bachelor's degree.



**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of group, gender, age, marriage, field of study, degree

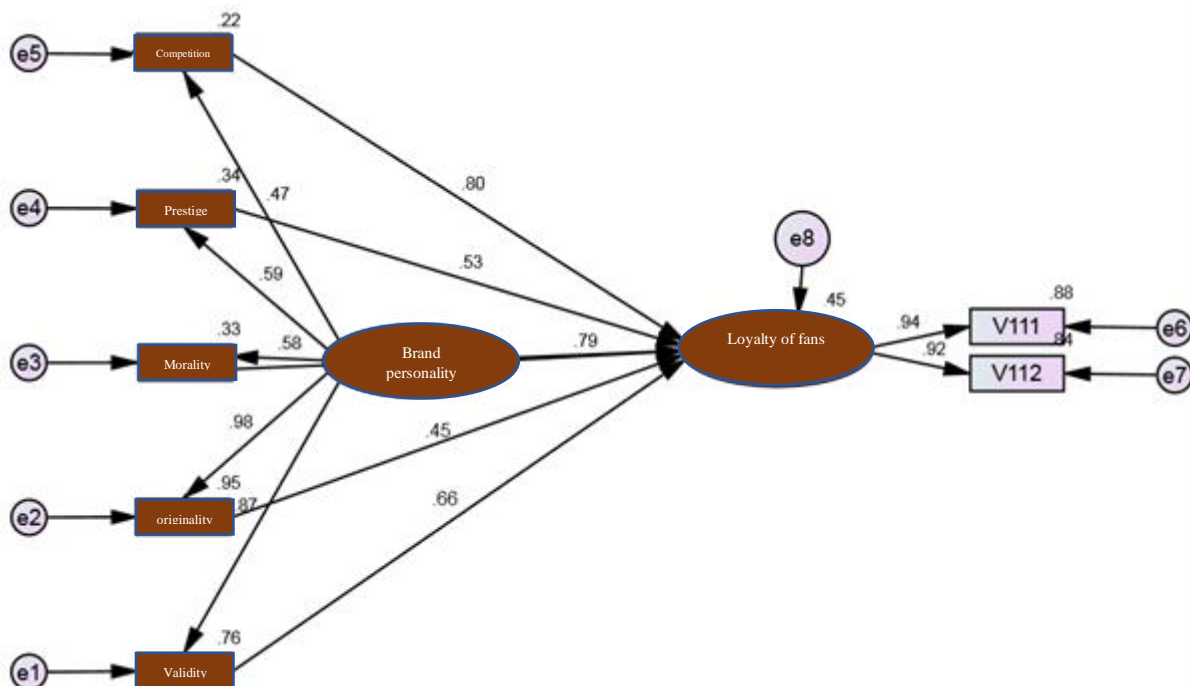
	Explanations	Frequency	Percentage
marital status	Single	271	70.6
	Married	113	29.4
Age	30-21	194	50.5
	40-31	156	40.6
	50-41	34	8.9
Education	diploma	90	23.4
	Associate Degree	94	24.5
	BA	135	35.2
	MA	65	16.9
Total		384	100

**Table 2.** The results of the normality of the variables in the research using the Kolmogorov Smirnov test

Research variables	Statistics	Significancy
Competition	1.712	0.091
Prestige	1.871	0.072
Moralities	1.855	0.077
originality	1.875	0.082
Validity	1.592	0.094
Brand personality	1.309	0.141
Attitudinal loyalty of fans	1.789	0.079
Behavioral loyalty of fans	0.858	0.454
Loyalty of fans	1.343	0.124

**Table 3.** The results of examining the effect of brand personality on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nasaji Football Club fans

Hypothesis	T-Value	Significancy	Standard path coefficient	Result
Main	10.967	0.000	0.793	Confirmed



**Figure 1.** Research model in the case of standardized path coefficients



#### 4. Discussion

The present study showed that brand personality has a direct and positive effect on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. One of the critical dimensions of the brand is the subject of the brand personality, which in Iran, the marketing managers of the organizations, especially the marketing managers of the clubs, have not paid much attention to. Brand personality is an essential category in brand management. When the brand has a strong, durable, and unique personality in the minds of consumers (fans), it will have a stable, lasting, and effective relationship with them, making consumers (fans) loyal to the brand. This communication is the ultimate goal of all marketing activities. In this regard, the current research aimed to investigate the effect of brand personality on the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans.

The findings showed that competition affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji football club fans. Because the dimension of brand personality competition has had the most excellent effect on the loyalty of fans among the dimensions of brand personality, therefore, the managers of Nassaji Mazandaran Football Club should pay attention to the sub-scales of the competition dimension of the brand personality, including the superiority of the team in the competition, the ability of the team to achieve the desired results in sports competitions, the determination of the team to achieve its goals; and in order to achieve these goals, try to increase the number of fans and keep them loyal. Gupta et al. (2020) studied the effect of brand value on brand competitiveness. The findings showed that brand competitiveness affects the creation of brand value. Also, Karjaluoto et al. (2016), in the research entitled "How brand personality, identity and length of relationship cause loyalty in sports," found the importance of sports brand personality in creating fans' identity with the team and its loyalty is emphasized.

In addition, the findings showed that the prestige factor affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. According to the structural model results, the prestige dimension of brand personality affects loyalty. Therefore, the marketing managers of Nassaji Mazandaran Football Club should invest more in the sub-scales of the prestige dimension, including the team's magnificence, being praiseworthy, and distinguishing the team from other competitors. As a result, fans are more interested in the club's brand, buying tickets and products, or watching games on TV. In this regard, Rudbari et al. (2014), in research entitled the relationship between club brand personalities, trust and brand loyalty of Persepolis fans, concluded that there is a direct and meaningful relationship between the components of brand personality, the prestige component, and the honesty of brand personality with fan loyalty. Also, Kim et al. (2018), in research entitled experience,

brand credibility, perceived value (functional, hedonic, social, and financial), and loyalty among customers, concluded that brand credibility has a positive and significant effect on fan loyalty.

On the other hand, the findings showed that the moral factor affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. It can be said that ethical principles have become a part of the official policies and informal culture of organizations and have overshadowed many organizational issues. This issue is also actual regarding companies' names, logos, products, and services. However, the behavioral principles of organizations are not easily defined in this regard. Despite the agreement of most organizations on the ethical nature of brand names, sometimes ethical principles used as a cover for the goals of commercial organizations, such as penetrating the market, increasing profitability, and attracting customers, are neglected. Brand names and logos of companies and institutions often add to the "value" of products and services. This external and internal "value" becomes customers' most critical driving factor in buying and using products and services. The apparent value is manifested in the price of the service product, and the inner value is manifested in the culture and ethics of that society. In this regard, Garanti (2019) addressed research entitled brand moral perception and their effect on brand loyalty and brand choice intentions: the mediating role of emotional attachment to the brand. The research results show that brand ethics have a positive effect on emotional attachment to the brand as well as brand loyalty. In another study, Ebrahimipour et al. (2018), under the title of the relationship between brand personality and the loyalty of football team fans, concluded that the moral factor affects the loyalty of football club fans.

Likewise, the findings showed that the validity factor affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. It can be said that brand credibility is the credibility of information related to the position and position of the product that is available in a brand name. Companies can use several marketing mix elements, such as offering broader warranties to demonstrate product quality. Such actions may or may not be valid depending on market conditions (such as competitiveness or consumer behavior). A reliable brand is a sign of the position and subject of that product, less perceived risks by consumers, and low costs for consumers to collect and process information for decision making. Brand credibility may increase consumer perceptions (or expectations) of product quality. This perception enhancement is because the brand may influence the psychological process in which objective quality levels are transformed into perceived quality. Therefore, two brands with similar quality may have different perceived quality due to their different levels of credibility. Yasin and Mazaher (2019) studied the effect of company reputation, brand awareness,



brand image, and brand loyalty on purchase intention in the telecommunications sector of Karachi. The findings show that the company's reputation, brand awareness, brand image, and loyalty affect purchase intention. Also, Kenny Kenny and Calista (2021) investigated the role of brand image and credibility in increasing loyalty intention through brand commitment. The result of this research showed that brand credibility and brand commitment have a significant effect on loyalty intention.

Also, the findings showed that the authenticity factor affects the loyalty of Mazandaran Nassaji Football Club fans. It can be said that authenticity has emerged as a favorite feature of consumers that reflects the perception of a brand's uniqueness, genuineness, or originality and helps marketers differentiate their brands from competitors. The need for reliable brands may be due to the consumer's lack of confidence in the business. Authenticity is the essential characteristic of the brand, the unique value of the brand, and the reputation of the company. Different products, including luxury products, televisions, and tourist places, can be valued by consumers as authentic or inauthentic. Today's consumers are very aware, curious, interested, and much more socially connected than in the past.

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However, despite the wide range of options, consumers are not only looking for new and different items but also tend to inquire about their current consumer products. In this regard, del Barrio-García, S., and Prados-Peña, M. B. (2019), in research titled "Do brand authenticity and brand credibility facilitate brand equity?" concluded that brand authenticity has a direct effect on brand equity, which affects brand loyalty. Likewise, Ghafourian Shagerdi et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between brand authenticity and brand love, considering the role of the need to be unique in five-star hotels in Mashhad. The research findings showed a positive and significant relationship between brand authenticity, brand love, and fan loyalty.

Despite the importance of concepts such as brand personality and brand loyalty in the branding of sports teams, so far in Iran's sports research field, no studies have been conducted on brand personality, specifically in Mazandaran Nassaji club. Therefore, this study is considered the first research in the field of brand personality in Mazandaran Nassaji Club which examines the effect of this variable on brand loyalty among fans. Mazandaran Nassaji Club fans as the primary sports customers.



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## تأثیر شخصیت برند بر وفاداری هواداران باشگاه فوتبال نساجی مازندران

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۲ و ۳. کارشناس ارشد مدیریت ورزشی موسسه آموزش عالی ادیب مازندران

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**چکیده:** هدف پژوهش حاضر، بررسی تأثیر شخصیت برند بر وفاداری هواداران باشگاه فوتبال نساجی مازندران بوده است. این پژوهش از لحاظ هدف، کاربردی، از لحاظ موقعیت، میدانی و از نوع توصیفی-پیمایشی بود. جامعه آماری این پژوهش، شامل کلیه هواداران باشگاه فوتبال نساجی مازندران در سال ۱۴۰۰ می‌باشند که تعداد آن‌ها به صورت نامحدود بوده است و با استفاده از جدول کرجسی و مورگان ۳۸۴ نفر به شیوه‌ی نمونه‌گیری در دسترس به عنوان نمونه انتخاب شدند. روش نمونه‌گیری این پژوهش نیز به شیوه نمونه‌گیری در دسترس بود. ابزار جمع‌آوری داده در پژوهش حاضر، دو پرسشنامه استاندارد شامل: پرسشنامه شخصیت برند تیم‌های ورزشی سیوتسو (۲۰۱۲) و پرسشنامه وفاداری هواداران تیم‌های ورزشی ماهونی و همکاران (۲۰۰۰) می‌باشد. برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از آمار توصیفی و آمار استنباطی توسط نرم‌افزار SPSS و Amos استفاده شده است. نتایج پژوهش حاکی از آن است که شخصیت برند و ابعاد آن (رقابت، پرستیژ، اخلاقیات، اصالت، و اعتبار) بر وفاداری هواداران باشگاه فوتبال نساجی مازندران تأثیر دارد. پیشنهاد می‌شود به مدیران و مسئولان باشگاه‌های ورزشی در جهت درآمدزایی و لزوم خودکفایی و جذب هواداران جدید و وفاداری طرفداران از نتایج این پژوهش در باشگاه ورزشی استفاده نمایند

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** برند سازی، شخصیت برند، هویت برند، شناخت برند، وفاداری هواداران.

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استناد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.

