

Promotion in Iran's Football Pro-league: Important but Weak!

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The present research attempts to clarify and extend the conceptualization and measurement of promotional activities in Iran's football professional league. Based on this, this research was conducted to recognize the promotion activities in Iran's football League and perform an analysis of the current situation of this league in order to compare it with other Asian Leagues such as Japan and South Korea. The review of the Sport marketing and Sport Promotion literatures and the findings from qualitative and quantitative studies conducted by the authors reveal that, promotional activities in Iran's football League consisted of 14 factors. The revealed results regarding Iran's football league position, have shown that Iran's league compared with Japanese and South Korean leagues was not in a desirable position. We conclude the paper with a summary of the main results of the study and directions for future research.

key words: Sport Marketing, Sport Marketing Mix, Sport Promotion,
Professional Football League (Pro-League), Iran

Introduction

The face of sport has changed radically over the last 35 years (Shilbury et al., 2003). Today the sport industry has advanced in many areas. The rapid adoption of technology, the creation of new consumption opportunities, the forging of innovative partnerships with corporations, the development of modern sport facilities, and the opening of new markets are all propelling this industry to new levels of popularity. Unfortunately, sport marketing practitioners and academicians are not keeping pace with the factors mentioned above. While understanding "sport" is still necessary to play the game, it is no longer sufficient to guarantee victory in an increasingly

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competitive marketplace.

Sport can no longer remain the sole domain of traditional sport researchers. Cutting-edge marketing concepts from business schools as well as a clear understanding of the uniqueness of sports through managing it are also required. While these two worlds are colliding it is imperative to create new perspectives and tools in order to understand this complex and rapidly changing industry better (Milne & McDonald, 1999).

By considering the new social values of sports that have entered into the field of economics and arts also, the visible and hidden attractions of this transformation are creating new feelings and tendencies among all societies towards sports events (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Since marketing is one of the profitable and high added value industries, it would be obvious for policy makers at the macro level to be interested in a scientific and systematic approach to this industry (Mc Donald, 2000). Therefore, attraction of huge capital in the marketing of football industry accompanied by the attraction of foreign capital can be the very fruit of scientific planning in sports management (Des & Carruthers, 1998).

In an era where contemporary sport consumers are derided by long-suffering traditional fans as 'theatergoers', it is clear that sport events are no longer confined to the playing field with the spectators 'looking in from the outside.' Fans are now part of the event, and construct the spectacle while simultaneously consuming it. The 'Mexican wave,' various team chants, the interaction of team mascots with the crowd and the use of contemporary music are all examples of the nexus between on- and off-field activities (Shilbury et al., 2003).

The sport experience can present a host of problematic consumer preferences for the sport marketer to target—compounded by the fact that sport no longer faces competition merely from within its own ranks. With decreasing amounts of leisure time and discretionary income being judiciously allocated, sport now has to compete for the consumer dollar with a vast array of both sport and non-sport activities (Shilbury et al., 2003).

The managers of sports organizations and institutes try to gain more market shares through identifying the market, marketing, and market orientation. One of the roles of marketing managers is to decide on the elements of the marketing mix, which forces them to be faced with the process of decision making (Kotler et al., 2006). Having established the range of product attributes in relation to demands, the sport marketer embarks on the challenge of affecting the exchange. Sporting organizations must develop a range of marketing strategies in order to influence

consumers to buy their products, via either attendance or participation (Shilbury et al., 2003). Therefore, the marketing mix model (known as the 4p Model), which studies marketing scientifically from the 4 aspects of product, place, price, and promotion, is one of the best tools to help form a proper strategy in the marketing management of the country's football industry, and based on this, each of the 4 elements can be considered as a controllable variable to formulate the needs of football industry based on the target market (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Kotler et al., 2006; Van Heerden, 2000).

Promotion involves all forms of communication with consumers, not just advertising. Promotion is best seen as the way that sport marketers communicate with consumers to inform, persuade and remind them about a product. The aim of promotion is to encourage consumers to develop a favorable opinion about a sport product which is aligned to a predetermined positioning strategy, and then to stimulate consumers to try the sport product. Promotion concentrates on selling the product (Smith, 2008). Promotion is now an integral and vital part of the sport experience. How the sport marketer and promoter manipulate the promotion mix will be vital to the success of the game, and even the long-term viability of the sport (Shilbury et al., 2003).

There are a number of generalizations that can be made about promotion. Promotions temporarily increase sales substantially; promotion in one product category affect sales of brands in complementary and competitive categories; and promotions can result in increased traffic. Most of the generalizations are true; however, it is important to understand how to utilize these elements in order to ensure that the results are longer lasting and lead to maintaining current and attracting new customers (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Taking advantage of the advertisement and media opportunities can pave the way for further interaction between, sports, industry and trade, and can be a strategic bridge in the development of sports and its economic progress (Des & Carruthers, 1998).

Reconsidering the studies and research on promotion and other related activities, reveal that a large portion of studies and research deal with sponsorship. Other components of promotion in the marketing mix have been less studied and regarding the other parts of promotion such as advertisement and public relations, one can witness some sporadic surveys.

The major objective of this particular research is to promote awareness among the football club managers with regards to the importance of promotional activities in the football league and to compare those elements known to be important in Iran football league with those of Japan and South Korea. Therefore the current study attempts to answer the following questions:

What are the components of promotion in Iran Football league?

What is the current situation of promotional activities in Iran's football league in comparison to Japan and South Korea?

To achieve this goal, the paper is organized as follows. First, a brief review of Iran's football pro league and the importance of promotional activities in this league compared to Japan and Korea professional football leagues (J-League and K-League) will be described. Literature in the field of sport marketing and sport promotion in the next section will be reviewed. Then, related work in this area will be presented. This section is followed by the presentation of methodology and empirical results and finally, the last section establishes the conclusion giving general remarks on this work, limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Iran's Pro league (IPL)

The historical material in this section is based generally on information that has been received from Football federation of Iran a brief review.

There are grounds of activity in the above mentioned areas in sports, but what is considered in this study is the marketing of sports events such as the football league games and the sports competitions. Nowadays the accredited leagues in different continents of the world are not only holding football matches, but also each of them possesses huge potential capital which is exchanged between their federations, teams and league organizations amounting to millions or even billions of dollars. Burton & Howard (1999) states that:

'... For sports leagues, growth in the last 20 years has probably been achieved through greater market penetration (increased media distribution and increased targeting of new fans) and market development (more expansion teams') [1999, p.31].

Therefore, all of the accredited leagues try to improve their standards to maintain their growth trends for the years to come.

Prior to the 1970s, Iran did not have an official national league. Most teams would participate in city championships. Due to the revolution and the Iran - Iraq War, football was no longer a priority. There was no major league competition

during the 1980-1989 period, only a few cup competitions and some local city league championships such as the 17th of Shahrivar league and the Qods Cup. During 1989 and after the end of the war, it was decided to change the format of Qods league in order for play to occur among clubs rather than provinces. Thus, the fifth Qods league, which was the last one, was played among 22 teams, in two groups of 11. This was the first national league after the revolution. In 1991 the Qods league was renamed the Azadegan League in honor of the prisoners of the war that were released and it started in the 1991-1992 season. For the first time in more than ten years Iran finally had a national league again. The 2001-2002 season saw the beginning of the first professional football league in Iran currently known as the Persian Gulf Cup. There are 18 clubs in the league. The season lasts from August to May; each club plays the others twice, once at their home stadium and once at that of their opponents for a total of 34 games for each club, with a total of 306 games in each season.

Unfortunately, many say that the new league is professional in name only and is missing many of the required components of a pro league. Player salaries have risen significantly and other positives in the league are the emergence of provincial teams and raw talent which every IPL team boasts. Teams like Foolad Sepahan, Foolad Khuzestan, Zob Ahan FC and Esteghlal Ahvaz have all shown they can compete, even though they are not residents of Tehran. The league can only continue to get better, and many are hoping that it will help Iran's football, in terms of quality and reputation, to improve. Since the founding of the IPL in 2001, the league has not been sponsored by the private sectors; with some exceptions, the league has been fully funded by the Iranian government.

Various studies and surveys in Iran suggest that what is currently known as sport marketing is very limited to only sales of tickets and sports products, and what is known as promotion is the insignificant support of some of the financial sponsors to sports teams (Khabiri et al., 2004; Elahi, 2005; Eizadi, 2004).

The passage of time has made significant changes to football clubs and professional football in recent years is not any more comparable with the past years. Today, professional football has gone beyond having a pitch and an office building and has experienced giant development in all areas and has been organized as an advanced industry like other organized industries (Khabiri et al., 2004).

The current situation of Iran's Professional Football League indicates that most clubs do not have a high income and receive their budget from the government.

Without a doubt, lack of attention to the issues and to encouraging activities has caused the current situation of the Iran's pro-League. For example, in 2007 Iran's Pro-League's total income from the environmental advertisements at the sport centers from their financial sponsor was approximately \$3 million. However, only a percentage of the income was given to the clubs.

According to the announcement of the Asian Football Confederation about the ranking of football leagues on this continent, the prominent leagues of Japan and South Korea, have the honor of having the best reputations among other leagues. These leagues are of world-class quality, and many world famous players are interested in playing in them.

In Iran many different studies have been carried out on the subject of comparing the Iran's Football League with prominent Asian Football leagues such as Japan and South Korea leagues (Rahnama et al., 2006; Elahi, 2005; Khabiri et al., 2004) According to the belief of these researcher, these leagues can be good scales for comparison with the Iran league.

Based on the studies carried out by Elahi (2005), Japan's Football league has better conditions in comparison with the Iran's Football League in terms of different variables such as financial performance, the average of the incomes and the communications with professionally employed players in the league. It is obvious that the study of the promotional activities in Iran Professional football leagues and comparison with prominent Asian leagues can give valuable results regarding the weak and strong points of Iran's leagues and, furthermore, will bring us valuable new perspectives.

Literature Review

Sport Marketing

Marketing, as defined by Kotler et al. (2006) is,

‘...a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others’[2006, p.7].

The identification of consumer needs and wants is a critical aspect of the

marketer's role. Marketing strategies must be based on known consumer needs (Shilbury et al., 2003).

Sports marketing gained considerable exposure and growth in 1971 when the US government banned cigarette advertising on television and radio. Sports marketing, particularly sponsorship of auto racing and tennis, presented a means of keeping cigarette brand names in front of the spectators and television viewers through broadcasted coverage of sponsored events (Shannon, 1999).

As Kesler (1979) states, sports marketing described the consumers' activities, industrial products and service marketers who use sports as a medium to propagate their products and services through sports sponsorships (Pitts & Stotlar 2002).

The principles and tools of sport marketing represent the essential knowledge sport managers require in order to position their sport, association, club, team, player, code or event in the highly competitive sport market (Smith, 2008). The concepts of Sports Marketing have been analyzed in respect to several separate terms by different researchers. There are still two schools of thought as to what sport marketing is (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). In one, sport marketing focuses on how to sell sports events. This definition and concept involves two points: the selling of sports and selling through sports, or using sports to sell other products (Mullin et al., 2000). In addition, this concept purports that sport consumers fall into two broad categories: the spectator and the participant. The other definition and concept is that sport marketing is marketing applied in any sport business (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002) and that sport marketing is used in every type of sport business. Although the definition of the sport business industry that is used by nearly every author of sport management and sport marketing papers and books concludes that the industry is a nearly \$300 billion one and is comprised of numerous kinds of businesses, the primary focus of these papers and books continues to be selling college athletics and professional sports (Olafson, 1990; Paton, 1987; Pedersen & Pitts, 2001; Pitts, 2001; Slack, 1996; Soucieand Doherty, 1996). On the brighter side, at least the contemporary definition seems to be more accepted and used. However, it appears that we still have a long way to go in regard to expanding the depth and breadth of the literature.

Sports promotion

In sport marketing, the word promotion covers a range of interrelated activities. All of these activities are designed to attract attention, stimulate the interest and awareness of consumers, and of course, encourage them to purchase a sport product

(Smith, 2008).

People will not buy a product if they do not have information about it. The goal of promotion is to inform people about a product. Companies use promotion as an important variant to reach their goal of selling. Also promotion plays an important role in service sections. According to Delpay (2000), organizers of events and sports leagues cannot only open the doors of the sports clubs and wait for participants to notice them. Only a small number of spectators notice sports products without promotion (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Shank, 1999; Van Heerden, 2002).

The majority of consumer promotion is an attempt to stimulate direct demand for a specific product. Sporadically, a manufacturer may promote an element of a product, which may stimulate demand for that component, which in turn may directly stimulate indirect demand for a particular brand (Shilbury et al., 2003).

Promotion is any kind of relation that is useful in terms of informing, convincing and reminding people about the different cases of similar organizations such as goods, services, images, ideas and the amount of relations and their effects on society (Boone & Kurtz, 1998; Van Heerden, 2002).

In general, the word “promotion” brings different meanings to the mind, some are positive and some are not. From a sport marketing point of view promotion means the actions effecting people who are related to sports products and also the level of interference and the image of related sports companies. With this definition, there are different sections and peoples which the organizations linked to the sports industry should pay attention to. It may be necessary for the company or sports organizations to inform their spectators of the advantage of sports, when or where they can obtain them and how to participate in the processes of the company’s services. As mentioned before, relationships can be through people such as sellers, coaches or medias such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, advertising billboards, brochures and internet (Van Heerden, 2002).

Different elements of promotion in sports

Choosing the suitable promotion mix is potentially one of the more difficult decisions facing the sport promoter. When selecting the appropriate marketing mix, the blend of promotion activities engaged in to entice the consumer must reflect the type and nature of the product or service and the specific characteristics of the consumer.

The elements of sport promotions (also known as the sport promotional mix)

include advertising, public relations and publicity, sales promotion, promotional licensing and personal selling, which includes sponsorship and telemarketing (Shilbury et al., 2003; Smith, 2008; Schwarz & Hunter, 2008; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Advertising is a non-personal communication by an identified sponsor. This is the most obvious form of sport and event promotion (Shilbury et al., 2003). Common examples include television commercials, magazine and newspaper advertisements, radio spots, posters, billboards, Internet pop-ups and advertisements on public transport (Smith, 2008). Public relations is the collection of activities, communications, and media coverage that convey who the sport organization is and what they have to offer, all in the effort to enhance their image and prestige (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Personal selling involves one-to-one communication between a consumer and a salesperson. Common examples include talking to a consumer on the phone, talking face-to face, communication through text messaging on a mobile cellular phone or through an Internet portal (Smith, 2008). Evans & Berman (1987) suggest that the key features of personal selling are identifying prospects; determining the customer's needs; selecting a sales strategy; communicating with the buyer; and evaluating the sales strategy (Evans & Berman, 2003). Sponsorship refers to the relationship between a corporation and a sport organization as a tool to develop brand image and customer loyalty as a result of the association (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Sport sponsorship occurs when a sporting organization or an individual athlete is supported by a separate company (or person). The sponsorship is designed to benefit both parties: the sport organization (or sponsor) receives money or products, and the sponsor receives the benefits of positive associations with prominent sporting teams or athletes (Smith, 2008). Sales Promotions: A sales promotion is a short-term program that aims to stimulate an increase in sales. They offer consumers an incentive (or a bonus) to buy the sport product. Common examples include 'two-for-one' offers, prize give-ways, competitions and free trials or samples (Smith, 2008). These Incentives are the benefits or reduced costs that are offered to motivate a sport consumer to purchase the specified sport product or service (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008).

Totally different sports marketing researchers and authors have concluded that different elements and classifications exist in the area of promotion components in the sports marketing mix, but according to conducted researches on the elements of promotion variable in Iran's football league, no standard and coherent frame for evaluating the promotional activities was ever delivered. So the rest of this study is based on methodology of reaching a framework for evaluating promotional activities

in football leagues.

Methods

In this research, in order to recognize the factors affecting promotional activities of football clubs, a combination of exploratory and qualitative methods were used in two separate studies.

First Study

Reviewing the literature and past research on the factors playing a role in promotional activities, with emphasis on sport marketing concepts (Pitts & Stotlar 2002; Kotler et al., 2006; Van Heerden, 2000; Elahi, 2005; Khabiri et al., 2004) and making interviews with sport managers and authors experience and experts in this field, a comprehensive 25 items collection that broadly explains promotional activities of the clubs was designed. Then, the selected items were discussed with two focus groups of sports managers. Responses to the questions were gathered using the Likert scale.

As a preliminary step, 80 questionnaires were distributed among sport managers for assurance of the validity and consistency of the method because it was used for the first time in such a study.

Analyzing the Data from the First Scale

In analysis of collected data from the initial scale, an exploratory factor analysis was used along with a principal component analysis as a data extraction method and Varimax as a rotation method and also Kaiser normalizing on items were used. Later, breaks-in-eigen values criterion were used to determine the initial number of factors to retain. We then went through a series of iterations, each involving elimination of items with low loadings on all factors or high cross-loadings on two or more factors, followed by factor analysis of the remaining items. This repetitive process led to the derivation of the final scale for promotional activities that included 14 items. In the next step, by using of confirmative factor analysis factor structure of promotional activities scale were examined.

Reliability and Validity

Table 1 shows Alpha value for the questions and factor loading derived from the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Cronbach's Alpha for promotional activities is 98% which is well above the usual value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and shows a reasonable level of reliability. This value, as well as the high loadings of the scale items in relation with promotional activities as a general factor (in both exploration and confirmation); support the convergent validity of the scale. Various fit indices in the confirmatory factor analysis show that the indices are very good. Collectively, these findings provide good support for the soundness of both scales' factor structures.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, CFA and EFA for promotional activities

Factor	Loading in CFA		Loading in EFA
	loading	t-value	loading
Promotion ($\alpha=0.98$)			
A1	0.86	7.55	0.65
A2	0.79	6.53	0.61
A3	0.90	8.35	0.71
A4	0.91	8.14	0.73
A5	0.89	7.90	0.69
A6	0.89	7.89	0.70
A7	0.90	8.00	0.71
A8	0.96	9.03	0.71
A9	0.89	7.86	0.68
A10	0.89	7.82	0.75
A11	0.94	8.64	0.68
A12	0.74	5.93	0.59
A13	0.98	7.56	0.83
A14	0.72	5.71	0.64

$\chi^2=120.75$, $df= 62$, $RMSEA=0.080$, $GFI=.97$,
 $AGFI=0.93$, Total variance explained= 0.751

Second Study

Examining data measurement tools in the first study led us to choose a precise tool. However, in the second study we tried to reexamine the measurement tools and the assurance of their outcomes. In this study, 50 sport managers from Iran, South Korea and Japan were analyzed. Based on our purpose in this study only those people that were involved and engaged in sports marketing for their teams in a sense or are in direct contact with the sports decision makers and marketers participated in the study. The present survey study was taken from the managers of the football teams in the Professional leagues (2007-2008 season), therefore the statistical population includes all the Iran football team managers in the Iran's football Professional league (18 managers), South Korea (14 managers), and Japan (18 managers). In order to collect information, the researchers have first prepared a list from all the present football teams in the three Professional leagues and they have sent the questionnaires to their managers to gain data. Cronbach's Alpha is a scale to evaluate promotional activities and is 0.96, well above the usual minimum of 70% (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), which again shows reasonably high reliability.

Results

To investigate the data, descriptive statistics are considered as a first step, followed by the need to describe the promotional elements in the pro-league clubs of the three countries in order to compare the status of each component. Since both variables, dependent variable (which is the promotion element) and the independent variable (Iran, Japan and South Korea), have two levels, among the parametric models we decided to use the One-Way ANOVA.

The results of the current situation of the marketing mix element "promotion" from the manager's point of view, who are employees of Iran, Japan and South Korea's football league, is shown in Figure 1.

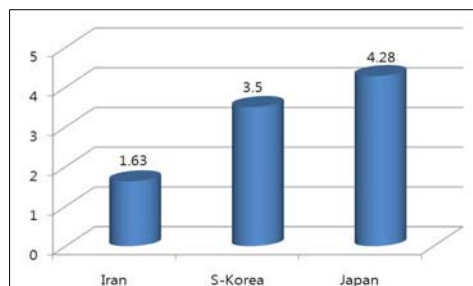


Figure 1. Current situation of promotional activities in IPL, J League and K League

According to the above column chart and emphasizing the given average, we can postulate that the highest amount of the marketing mix element "promotion" belongs to Japan with an average of ($\mu=4.28$) then South Korea with an average of ($\mu=3.5$) and Iran with an average of ($\mu=1.63$). It is necessary to mention that the "promotion" element had 14 factors and also the questions were numbered from 1-5 based on the Likert scale.

As mentioned before, in investigating the perspective of managers who are employees of Iran, Japan and South Korea's football league towards the marketing mix element "promotion One Way ANOVA and relevant continuous examinations were used. Table 2 analyzes the variance of comparing the marketing mix element "promotion" in Iran, Japan and South Korea's pro football leagues by emphasizing the current condition to the desirable condition. Also every studied component is shown in detail.

Table 2. Analyzing the variance of the comparison of the marketing mix element "promotion" in IPL, J League and K League

Studied components	Country	Average		Std. Deviation		fm	F
		Current	Desired	Current	Desired		
Encouragements such as giving exclusive coupons to fans for buying with discount from the shops which have signed a contract with the league organizations or clubs	Iran	1.18	3.75	0.40	1.12	8.295	55.43
	S-Korea	3.20	4.20	1.14	0.77		
	Japan	4.23	4.88	0.83	0.33		
Giving encouraging gifts to spectators during the match(such as cloths and products with the brand of the club or the sponsor on it)	Iran	1.37	3.81	0.61	1.10	8.876	34.30
	S-Korea	3.20	4.33	0.86	0.72		
	Japan	3.88	4.94	1.11	0.24		
Holding celebrations, concerts or entertaining games for the spectators during the half time in order to attract more fans	Iran	1.56	3.62	0.89	1.25	7.824	32.92
	S-Korea	3.53	4.60	1.12	0.63		
	Japan	4.23	4.70	0.90	0.46		

Effective public relations for a suitable relation with beneficiary people in matches (politicians, sponsors, city managers, spectators and etc) in order to gain their support	Iran	1.87	3.93	0.88	1.06	3.608	28.98
	S-Korea	1.87	4.60	0.90	0.73		
	Japan	3.40	4.58	0.91	0.50		
Media coverage for all league matches and clubs	Iran	1.87	4.25	0.88	1.23	3.908	51.12
	S-Korea	1.87	4.85	0.56	0.36		
	Japan	4.07	4.94	1.07	0.24		
An exclusive website for the league or clubs in order to download the previous matches, displaying the results chart, attracting internet advertisements and etc. for the fans	Iran	1.81	4	0.65	.96	12.802	62.12
	S-Korea		4.93	0.34	0.25		
	Japan	3.73	4.93	1.16	0.25		
Agencies for lotteries among the fans and legal bets	Iran	1.81	3.33	0.54	1.39	8.791	52.01
	S-Korea		3.93	0.74	1.33		
	Japan	3.57	4.94	1.45	0.24		
Signing contracts with private mobile offices in order to send the results and the important photos of the matches via SMS and MMS	Iran	1.13	3.31	0.35	1.19	23.872	84.03
	S-Korea		4.88	0.94	0.56		
	Japan	3.86	5.00	0.88	0.00		
Financial supporters (sponsors) for the participant clubs and separately performing matches	Iran	1.93	4.18	0.77	1.04	5.905	36.44
	S-Korea		4.73	0.94	0.59		
	Japan	4.13	5.00	1.06	0.00		
Taking benefits from (famous political, cultural sources) in order to be approved and confirmed by the participant leagues	Iran	2.25	3.12	1.03	1.02	30.376	27.97
	S-Korea	4.56	4.66	0.85	0.61		
	Japan	3.93	4.93		0.25		
Making films and advertising posters about clubs or city hosts by benefiting from famous sports stars among youngsters and spectators	Iran	1.62	3.56	0.71	.96	20.107	47.67
	S-Korea	4.52	4.53	0.78	0.63		
	Japan	3.26	5.00	0.96	0.00		
Sponsors giving free foods to the pro league club fans during the matches	Iran	1.68	3.37	0.79	.95	13.150	16.95
	S-Korea	3.57	4.40	1.01	0.73		
	Japan	2.93	4.64	1.03	0.49		
Increasing the amount of broadcasting hours and rerunning the matches during the week through different Medias	Iran	2.31	3.81	0.87	.98	8.803	24.84
	S-Korea	4.43	4.78	0.72	0.42		
	Japan	3.71	4.62	0.99	0.50		
Exclusive satellite channels with the name of the clubs or the league organizations	Iran	1.06	3.75	0.25	1.00	2.911	19.65
	S-Korea	3.23	4.20		1.05		
	Japan	2.66	4.64	1.34			
Promotion(Total)	Iran	1.63	3.70	0.43	0.89	16.88	81.21
	S-Korea	3.50	4.53	0.63	0.30		
	Japan	4.28	4.85	0.66	0.20		

Based on the above chart, and emphasizing the amount of F gained, there is a significant difference ($\alpha=0.01$) between the averages of managers who are employees of Iran, Japan and South Korea's pro leagues and the marketing mix element "promotion". Therefore by referring to the averages, it can be seen that the first country that has a suitable condition relevant to the studied components, is Japan and afterwards South Korea and then Iran.

It is necessary to put forward the relevant continuous examinations by comparing the averages of Iran, South Korea and Japan, since the amount of F is significant. Thus, since the variances of the three countries are homogenous, the approximate LSD test is used (Table 3).

Table 3. Approximate LSD test, comparing the averages of IPL, J League and K League with the emphasis of promotion element

	Iran	South Korea	Japan
Iran		-1.87	-2.65
South Korea	0.01		-0.78
Japan	0.01	0.01	

Base on the above table and by emphasizing the different amounts of the averages which are significant in the level of $\alpha=0.01$, it can be concluded that in the level of 99% Confidence Interval of the Difference between countries, a significant difference between Iran and South Korea, Iran with Japan and South Korea with Japan can be observed.

Conclusion

However, the literature of sport marketing highlights the importance of the promotion element of the marketing mix, this research attempted to clarify and extend the conceptualization and measurement of promotional activities in Iran's

football professional league. The findings from this investigation mirror the results of investigations conducted within the past few years (Elahi, 2005; Khabiri et al., 2004; Eizadi, 2004). The unpleasant situation of Iran's Football League, regarding its promotional activities, had an obvious effect on the results of the studies.

Many giant industries surround football due to its high sensitivity and famousness among people. The incomes received from transportation, sponsors, licenses to broadcast on television, and advertisements in the media are all parts of the industry that has been created around football and the sensitive nature of it. In order for a pro-league to stay in Iran it is necessary for the clubs to have a professional point of view. Government-owned clubs cannot be managed governmentally and be a professional club at the same time. In order to have a professional point of view the first step would be to privatize Iran's clubs.

Establishing promotion strategies is quite complex yet it is an exciting task. Advertising, public relations and publicity, sales promotion, personal selling, including sponsorship and telemarketing, and promotional licensing are crucial to the success of any sport product, event or service, and as such are vital to the promotion mix. Moreover, the sport marketer not only needs to be fully conversant with the components of the promotion mix, but also needs appropriate application skills for any given situation.

Once the promotion strategy has been established, it is incumbent on sport marketers to analyze consumers within the framework of the frequency escalator to monitor ongoing consumer behavior. Programs and techniques to boost sales and prevent defection need to be established and implemented, to ensure continued consumption of the product and to extract maximal gain from the specific promotion activity. Contemporary sport marketers also need to be able to offer the 'money-back guarantee'.

For the sports leagues, that means the communication strategy of showing availability (network promotional announcements) or the use of advertising to differentiate the game may no longer represent the top priority. Instead, league marketers must employ strategies that can legitimately "alter the product, produce new uses for the product, or introduce new markets". The other options are to drop the product (which, for a sports league, is unthinkable) or tolerate continued declines (Peter & Donnelly, 1995).

Base on the outcome of this investigation, from the managers' point of view Japan's clubs have the highest quality in performing promotion activities

(advertisement, public relations and sponsorship). Relevant to this, South Korea's league can be considered to be similar to Japan's league.

As a huge transformation occurred after the J. League was formed in Japan, football became an important topic among people, and this fact became more obvious after large companies began to sponsor the league, players and the teams. Being a fan of a specific team was an important matter among the youngsters. According to many experts, this is the reason why Japan's league has turned into an icon for all the Pro-Football Leagues in Asia. In 2007, Japan's league earned more than \$130 million.

However, the important point is the significant difference between the promotion element of Iran's pro league compared to Japan's and South Korea's leagues. The current situation of the promotion element (which had 14 components in this research) reflects that the situation of promotion elements in Iran's sports industry is not in a desirable condition. These results are similar to the results of the previous research.

And something which we should highlight here, regarding points of view of the league managers of Iran, Japan and South Korea, is that the current situation in Japan and South Korea's leagues is better than what the Iranian club managers thought. In other words, the plan that the Iran Football League has for its future is to take steps towards emulate the current situation in Japan and South Korea.

By monitoring this subject more closely related to the statistical charts, we can observe that the biggest difference of the studied components between Iran's league and the other leagues was about creating an exclusive satellite, giving encouraging gifts to the fans of the teams and giving free clothes with the clubs logo to students.

Based on the idea and perspective of this research, and the elements that were introduced as factors for improving sports marketing, one thing that can be pointed to is the lack of encouraging and promotional policies in Iran's professional league for creating satellite networks with the clubs name like other developed countries in this field; also that sponsors are not willing to provide sports gifts to the spectators despite their huge investments in other fields, and all these points are the reasons that the average number of promotion elements is lower compared with South Korea and Japan. Based on this, and in order to improve the current situation and Iran's football league, the following suggestions were proposed. A recapitulation of

practical suggestion is provided in Table 4.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that, effective promotional planning for *Iran's Professional Football League* can bring many benefits such as raising awareness of the Football League, recruiting new members, raising funds, signing sponsors, building a positive image and maintaining loyalty among league fans.

Table 4. Recapitulation of major practical suggestions

1. Establishing private satellites Channels with the name of the club in order to increase and facilitate the promotion of each club.
2. Conferring encouraging gifts, with the clubs name on, to the spectators during the matches. Also giving free sports clothes, with the clubs name on it, in schools in order to attract more fans.
3. Designing an exclusive website, creating effective public relations in clubs and signing cooperative contracts with private cell phone companies in order to send the result of the matches and the clubs news.
4. Creating a suitable and multilateral Media coverage for all league matches, attracting various and numerous sponsors to different clubs and giving encouraging coupons to the spectators to buy from the shops which have signed a contract.
5. Making films and advertising posters from the clubs and distributing them between the fans and the spectators, establishing lottery agencies, holding celebrations and entertaining programs before, during and after the matches.
6. Increasing the duration of broadcasting the club leagues football matches and using experts in order to get approved.

This study was conducted to add to the limited amount of empirical research on Iran's football pro league. We believe that the information provided in this study will contribute to better understanding of empirical evidence on the promotion activities in Iran's football pro league, a movement that deserves further investigation by scholars in our field. Iran's football heads, sport management academicians, students and practitioners could benefit through such investigations of the football industry. Furthermore, there are any number of potential practical applications for the findings of this study. For the football media planner in Iran, for example, very different of media strategies would be required to reach the football participant and spectator audiences.

The result reached here should be tempered in light of limitations of this study. Most notably, the moderating effect of other marketing variables were not included in this analysis. Future research should include issues such as these as possible covariates. In addition, the sample frame and particular questions asked were limited by the specific research need of the football club managers. In future research, other football league managers should also be addressed.

Despite these limitations, the result of this study provides important insights for Iran's football pro league practitioners. The intent of this study was to investigate the variables of promotion in Iran's football league. Many unanswered questions remain, and it is hoped that this study will provide the impetus for further evaluation of current thinking.

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