



## The Role of S.R of Club on Fans' Appreciation and Loyalty (Case Study: on the Team in the Football Premier League of Iran)

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### ABSTRACT

*Aim: The aim of this research is to study The Role of S.R of Club on Fans' appreciation and loyalty on team in the football premier league.*

*Methodology: The present research is of correlation type and has been performed as a field study. The statistical universe includes all fans of premier league teams in 2013- 2014. The statistical sample was selected among the fans attended sport stadia. Considering at least 9000 fans attended each play, the sample size according to Morgan Table was estimated 380 persons (each team: 190) and available sampling method was used. To collect data, The social responsibility (Stewart, 2003)) and so the questionnaires of fans' loyalty (Lat, 2010) and questionnaires of appreciation of team (Lat, 2010) standard questionnaires were used as research tool. The content and construct validity of these questionnaires were confirmed in Bakhshande (2012) research, respectively. This was descriptive- correlation field study. Using smartPLS software, the descriptive statistics (mean, frequency) and inferential statistics (structural equal modeling) were analyzed.*

*Findings: The findings showed that.1) the provided model had good fitness (GOF) with general model 2) social responsibility as the predictor variables could partially predict .... club fans' loyalty also .social responsibility as the predictor variables could predict ..... appreciation of team changes.*

**Keywords:** Social responsibility, Appreciation, Loyalty, Premier league, Fans.

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### INTRODUCTION

Today, football has the most fans and is the most popular sport in the world. In Iran, it has the most athletes and fans too (Asadi, 2009). Undoubtedly, the most important part of a sport event is the attendance of fans in the club (Masoumi, 2008). The level of attitude and fans' support from the football club is considered as a key variable in the income- making section for the club. Therefore, employing some appropriate strategies for attending fans in the clubs requires sufficient awareness of the kind of their support. Since the fans support their own popular team and remain loyal to it according to some various interests, identifying their sport consumption behavior can help attract, protect and develop numerous fans (SaatChian, 2011). Opposition to traditional perspectives, the task of companies and organizations is not only profit taking, but also they have responsibilities in their own business environment whose name is social responsibility (Ebrahimi and Roodani, 2009). In this way, one of the social problems that has been considered by the authors and researchers of the various societies is lack of loyalty and attention of the organizations and managers to their own social duty and responsibility. This subject, especially in Iran is very important due to special conditions and need to the

comprehensive development (NikooMaram&Mohamadian, 2009). Thus, due to the special place of football, there has been a strong relationship between football clubs and their communities. Football clubs don't want to win at any price, but according to Nick Hornby :” they owe a popularity and competence feeling to their fans“ (Rooska, 2011). Walker and Kent (2009) have said that the social responsibility in the sport industry is different from the other areas because this industry has some characteristics which distinguish it from the other organizations in the trade area (Walker and Parnet, 2010). The football club also is an influential force and member of a society like citizens. The football clubs not only in the field but also in the outside initiatives including social responsibility cause to progress the society (Rooska, 2011). Therefore, one of the social problems which has attracted attention of authorities and practitioners of different societies is inattention and lack of loyalty of organizations and managers to their social responsibility and task. This subject, especially in Iran is very important due to some certain conditions and necessity of comprehensive development, (Nikoomaram and Mohamadiansaravi, 2009). In today's comparative world, the fans are in favor of the clubs and their satisfaction is the major factor of taking competitive profit of the clubs. To satisfy the fans requires meeting their needs completely and identifying exactly their demands, expectations, tendencies, abilities and limitations in usage of the services or purchasing

products (Chavoshbashi, 2010). Today, the discussion of the customer's loyalty has been one of the most important discussions in the sport industry. Dishman reports that about a half of subjects beginning to exercise after a short time period become disappointed. Savier and Smith, also, reported that on average 40% customers of sport facilities and equipment eliminate every year. Lif believes that the cost of the new customer attraction is 6 times of that of maintaining the old customer and on average the customer loyalty values 10 times of a new customer (Ki Hoo, 2000). Loyalty is one of the positive behavior of the customers. Since appreciation is an ethical concept, loyalty is its behavioral prospect (Mack Kallo *et al.*, 2001). Additionally, Kim *et al.* pointed out that loyalty is one of the consequences of appreciation (Kim *et al.* 2010). On the other hand, the social initiatives cause appreciation which in addition to profitability result in communicating in the future (Elgo *et al.*, 2008). Today all managers should make decisions and activities that the society accept them and are consistent with its values. They should regulate the gain and loss of their companies and institutions for the society such that the people benefit them more than cost they have paid. These values and considerations as the social responsibility of the organizations have considered (Kavoosi & Chavosh Bashi, 2010). Studying the social responsibility issue is important due to several reasons: 1) The managers' decisions influence deeply the different parts of the society. 2) If the individuals, groups, organizations and institutes of the society hold themselves responsible for various events, happenings and crises and attempt to solve the various problems, many crises and problems will be solved at a short time and a healthy and pacific society will exist. 3) To improve and protect their place in the society, organizations should pay attention to their own social responsibilities and have legality in the society. 4) All performances of organization influence the society and this effect, good or bad, will be reflected on organization itself; therefore managers' malfunction causes many problems for society that finally will involve themselves. 5) The cost of society in which managers haven't any sense of responsibility is very high (Alvani and Ghasemi, 1998; Chavoshbashi, 2010). The football clubs maintain their relation to the citizens of society through doing initiatives of the social responsibility (Vindesour, 2001; Wood and Loosdon, 2001) and thus increase fans' support. One of the ways to return investment for the clubs is such increased support of fans (Rooska, 2011). Moshbeki and Khalili Shojaie, (2010) in their research concluded that there is a positive and significant correlation between the organizational factors and the social responsibility of organization. They stated employees' mental pattern is the most effective major factor on organization social responsibility. Also Hasani and Heydari Zade, (2013) in another research named "Fitness of causal - structural relations of Islamic Ethics in work on the social responsibility and individual responsiveness given to mediator effects of service culture" concluded that there is a positive and significant correlation between Islamic ethics of work with social responsibility and individual responsiveness. Also, the mediator role of service culture in the relationship between Islamic ethics of work with social responsibility wasn't approved, but the findings show the mediator role of service culture in the relationship between Islamic ethics of work with individual social responsibility. Walker *et al.*, (2010) in their research related to the social responsibility of Olympic games named "Social responsibility and Olympic games: The mediator role of customers' characteristics" studied the influence of the social responsibility of Olympic games on customers' responses. Their results showed that in general the spectators' awareness of the social responsibility was low. The results of their research demonstrated the spectators' awareness of the social

responsibility has a positive and significant effect on credit of Olympic games, repeat business, mouth-to-mouth expression and products consumption (Walker, 2010). Abdul Rahim *et al.*, (2011) in a research named "The importance and effect of social responsibility on the customers' behavior in Malaysia" studied the importance of the social responsibility in the customers' behavior. Their results showed that the customers expect the organizations to provide information about what they do and the customers support the organization which follows the initiatives of social responsibility. Dogar *et al.* (2010) also studied the social responsibility of the private companies in two scopes of ethical and social expectations. Their results showed a positive relation between the social responsibility and the financial performance of the organization. These results also demonstrate that there is a positive relation between organization's social responsibility and the levels of customers' satisfaction, but it was not significant. Swaen and Chumpitaz (2008) in their research named "The influence of social responsibility on customers' trust" studied the effect of customers' perception related to the initiatives of organization social responsibility on their trust in the organization. Their results showed the initiatives of social responsibility influence customers' trust, directly and indirectly. Tejari *et al.* (2011) in a research titled "Studying the fans' loyalty of Esteghlal and Perspolis teams showed that an equal play has not the significant effect on the fans' loyalty. Two factors of the participants' fan record and competitive characteristics of these teams explain these findings. It seems that indeed the level of fans' loyalty is independent of the present successes of the teams and this loyalty is related to the team record (Tejari *et al.* 2011).

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is of correlation kind and in terms of objective, is functional. The statistical universe of research includes the fans of 16 teams of football premier league (2013-2014); considering there are millions of fans in throughout Iran, and on average about 9000 spectators attended clubs. For more confidence, the researcher selected his statistical sample only among spectators. The sample size was estimated 380 spectators by Morgan Table (each team 190). Considering the probability of fall and increasing generalizability among the fans of each team, 200 questionnaires were distributed and the available sampling method was used. (200 × 16) In this research, 3 inventories were used. The social responsibility inventory has composed of four aspects of ethical, economic, legal and humanistic responsibilities and was measured by 12 questions from the standard inventory (Stewart, 2003). The inventories of fans loyalty (Let, 2010) with reliability 0.85 and team appreciation (Let, 2010) with reliability 0.87 were used. The social responsibility standard inventory with reliability coefficient 0.88 including four aspects of rules observance (with reliability coefficient 0.78), economic responsibility (reliability coefficient 0.730), ethical responsibility (with reliability coefficient 0.78 and 0.89) and humanistic responsibility (with reliability coefficient 0.83) which has been validated by Bakhshande (2012) in Iran. Additionally, the content validity and structure of this inventory have been confirmed by him. This was descriptive-correlation field study. Using smartPLS software (Partial Least Squares method), the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) and inferential statistics (structural equation modeling) were analyzed.

#### The research findings

1- Age : 51/2% fans have the age range of 18-24 and 8% were above 45.

- 2- Record of support : 38/5% and 9/2% fans have supported their popular team for 2-5 and 11-15 years, respectively.
- 3- Education : 37/2% and 17/6% fans were holder of diploma and M.A and higher level, respectively.
- 4- Attendance in one season : 37/8% spectators attend 1-3 times in the club and 17/6% of them, 7-10 times.
- 5- Following the plays : 68/ 5% spectators follow all plays of their popular team and 6/5% of them don't follow the plays of their own team.

Using software PLS, this study aimed to investigate the role of variables and provide a model. The structural equation model examines model fitness in three parts: 1) Measurement models, 2) Structural model, and 3) General model. The measurement model investigates the reliability and validity of research measurement tools.

Fitness of measurement models: According to PLS algorithm, the reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity were used to study the fitness of measurement models (Nunnally, 1978, quoted by Chou, Lin, Chang, & Chuang, 2013: 5). The AVE of research structure related factors in original research model showed that all research items were qualified to explain relevant variables.

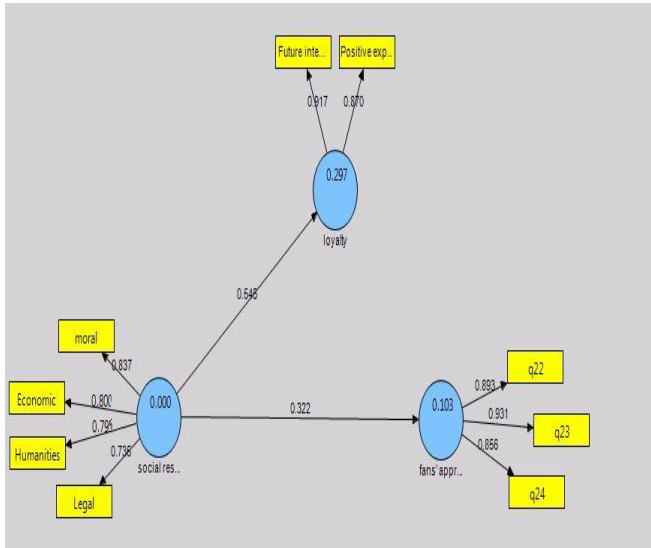


Figure 1. Final model implemented without removing factor loadings.

Table (1): Verify the validity of variables

Variables	fans' appreciation	Loyalty	Social Responsibility	Acceptable values
fans' appreciation	0.894035			scores must be greater than numbers below and numbers in left side (Confirmation of divergent validity)
loyalty	0.410954	0.893974		
Social Responsibility	0.321685	0.545375	0.792792	
Composite Reliability(CR)	0.922667	0.888321	0.871026	
Cronbach's alpha	0.874560	0.751385	0.803205	More than 0.6 (Chu, Lin, Chang, and Chuang, 2013: 5)
(AVE)	0.799266	0.799194	0.628520	More than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

R2	0.103481	0.297434		More than 0.4
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Note: The numbers in table represent the square root of AVE (Fornell and Larcker method to verify divergent validity)

Table (...) showed that in measurement model, the coefficients of factor loadings, Alpha Cronbach, combined reliability, and common values which are used to assess the overall value of model are in good condition. The AVE scores also confirm the convergent validity.

Fitness of structural model: The result of structural model test (i.e. t-value) of two structures are, 27/747, 12/903 (Figure 2). The obtained standard score (=1.96) shows the suitability of research structural model.

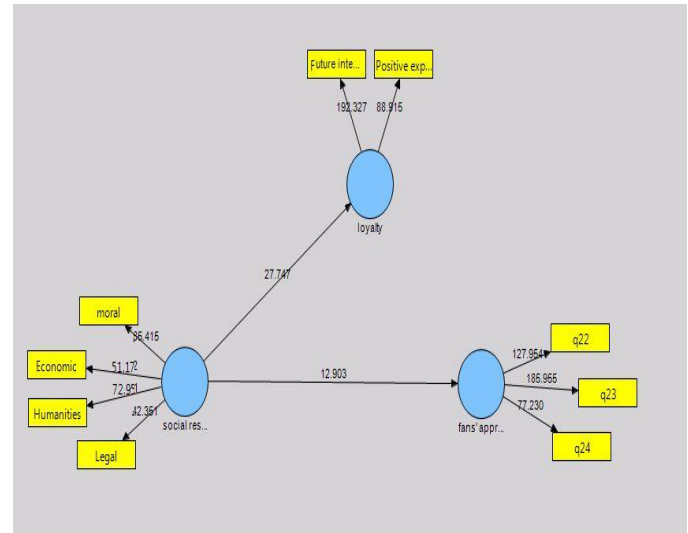


Figure 2: Structural Model of Research

Fitness Of General model: The GOF is used to investigate the fitness of general model. This criterion is the square root of multiplying structures' shared values in R2. The 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are considered as weak, medium, and strong scores for GOF; the 0.385 score shows that the general model has very good fitness (Davari&Rezazade, 2014).

$$GOF = \sqrt{COMMU \times R^2}$$

Table (2): Main hypothesis test

Impact level	Path coefficient	Value T	R2	Impact level	Test result	
S .R ⇒ Loyalty	0/545	27/747	0.297	Very Weak	Acceptance of H	Directly
S .R ⇒ fans' Appreciation	0/322	12/903	0.103	mediate	Acceptance of H	Directly

Since the t-value is greater than 1.96, it can be said that: Social responsibility has a significant impact on fans' Appreciation of Football Premier League teams' fans.(directly). The social responsibility explains 10% of variance fans' Appreciation.(directly). (T=12/903). Social responsibility has a significant impact on Loyalty of Football Premier League teams' fans. The social responsibility explains 30% of variance Loyalty. (T=27/747)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to study The Role of S.R of Club on Fans' appreciation and loyalty on team in the football premier league. The findings showed that Social responsibility has a significant impact on fans' Appreciation and the fans' loyalty of Football Premier League teams'. It means that The social responsibility explains 10% of variance fans' Appreciation.(directly). (T=12/903) and social responsibility explains 30% of variance Loyalty. (T=27/747). The results of this research are associated with the results of Hasani and HeydariZade (2013), Moshbeki and KhaliliShojaie, (2010), Walker et al, (2010), Abdol Rahim et al, (2011), Dogar, (2010) and Russel's, (2010) researches.

The findings showed that Social responsibility has a significant impact on fans' loyalty of Football Premier League teams'. It means that The social responsibility explains 30% of variance Loyalty. (T=27/747). The above results are consistent with the Bakhshande(2012), Babic and Richard Boul(2006), Sarto et al (2011), Anlavoror and Tekankit (2010) and Diew 's researches. It is inconsistent with Klin and Davar 's research (2004).

Bakhshande in a research titled " Studying the situation of social responsibility of the selected clubs of Iran football premier league and its influence on the fans' reaction" found that social responsibility influence fans' loyalty. Since the presupposition of existing influences is the relationship between variables,in above research there was a relationship between social responsibility and loyalty. The above research in terms of sample and universe is similar to the present research. The participates' uniform culture can be the cause of this consistency in two researches.

Sarto et al. (2011) found that social responsibility increases the intention of support and loyalty. The cause of this positive and consistent relationship has been explained in the above research. Social responsibility increases the customers' loyalty and support through improving the image of organization. It seems when the image of organization promotes, customers and fans have a intention to more loyalty with organization. This may be the cause of consistency of the above research with the present research.

The findings showed that Social responsibility has a significant impact on fans' Appreciation of Football Premier League teams'. It means that The social responsibility explains 10% of variance fans' Appreciation.(directly). (T=12/903). The above results are consistent with Klin and Davar(2004), Mack Kalo et al (2001), Elgo et al (2008), Bartlet and Destno(2006) and Tea Song' research (2006). There was no inconsistent relationship in this research. Klinand Davar (2004) found that the social responsibility had a positive role to form brand and product evaluation by customers. The cause of relationship consistency may be this reason that, as explained in Klin and Davar's research (2004), it increases the brand image and when the brand image promotes, customers will appreciate that organization.Elgo et al (2008) found that the social initiatives result in appreciation. Since they had studied profitability in their research and suggested profitability can result in communicating in the future and increasing appreciation, one may say that there is consistency in their researches.

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