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## **Identifying factors deterring sponsors from participating from sponsoring professional volleyball league clubs in the country**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Today, sponsorship accounts for a major part of marketing programs of the world's professional clubs in terms of earning income. The current research aimed to identify the most significant factors deterring the participation of sponsors from sponsoring professional volleyball league clubs in the country. This research fell under the category of survey and explorative researches and is a field study in terms of data gathering. This paper was conducted with a sample of 150 people of managers of volleyball federation and professional volleyball league clubs, heads of clubs' marketing affairs and sporting experts and etc. via a simple random sampling method. In order to determine the validity of the tool for measurement, experts' views were used and in order to measure the reliability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied, where its rate for the scales of the questionnaire was over 0.07. The results obtained from the single sample t test were indicative of the fact that five economic, legal, social, cultural and managerial obstacles were among the most important factors deterring sponsors from participating in the sponsorship of professional volleyball league clubs in the country ( $p < 0.001$ ). Freidman test was also used for prioritization of obstacles and indices related to each of the obstacles.

**Keywords:** financial sponsors; professional volleyball league clubs in the country; Sponsors' participation

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Sports, today, have become one of the most profitable industries in the world which has many dimensions. Sport has gone beyond a simple bodily activity and has been widely expanded in various countries and as an economic part of various dimensions, plays a critical role in production and consumption of sports goods and services as well as economic development of various societies. However, that which is taken into account in the Iranian sporting industry under the sporting marketing is only limited to selling tickets and meager financial sponsorship on the part of financial sponsors from some clubs across the country. As regards financial evaluations done in various leagues and clubs across the world, financial sponsorship has been raised as one of the three major sources of income in the sport industry. Special sporting attractions and creation of special tendencies among all societies towards sporting events have all led sports teams to require being converted to an economic firm for their expansion and promotion. Three major income sources within the sports industry that need to be focused attention by sporting marketing include media coverage, financial sponsorship and fans. Today, many of the credible companies have formally attended at the sports arenas as financial sponsors and think of this issue as to how to increase their own trading rate through sports competitions.

In the sports industry (particularly in developed countries), it has been proven that even if financial sponsorship (as an advertisement tool) incurs higher costs for a company, it will be more effective compared to direct TV advertisement (Izadi, 2004), such that companies are turning to financial sponsorship for grabbing more new customers (Wakefield, Becker and Olson and Cornville, 2006). In the modern era, sports, as an economic part plays a sensitive role in production and consumption of sports goods and services and contributes to the economic development of various societies. It is also one of the effective factors in the growth of national economy and one of the most profitable industries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, existence of various economic and legal obstacles has led to deprivation our sport industry in the country (Elahi, 2008).

In this regard, one of the ways for providing enough budgets to conduct sports activities, especially heroic activities is to attract companies and organizations for financial sponsorship. Financial sponsorship is in fact a liaison between sums providers, sources and services and an individual, event or an organization, where the financial sponsor will take advantage of trading privileges for his investment. A financial sponsor, via cooperation and assistance in the event or organization increase his own presence in relevant sets and from a trading perspective, organizations will use financial sponsorship as a tool for attaining more clients. It also has to be admitted that the sport environment is the most appropriate setting for advertising goods and services. On the one hand, sport has numerous fans and clients and on the other hand, various media are interested to get engage in sports activities; companies are constantly invited by various groups to be financially sponsor major events and activities. On the other hand, companies are constantly seeking fir places so to expose the public with their names and hence they expend hefty costs for this. Financial sponsorship is one of the quickest communication and marketing tools across the world. Tripodi (2001) indicated that financial sponsorship has the potentiality to become the marketing tool in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Under such conditions, various sports firms acquire significant part of their own income through selling the franchise of financial sponsorship to trading companies, such that these companies acquire around 35% of their own income through financial sponsorship.

Regular financial sponsorship at a macro level from sport has led some people to pay attention to it as an "industry". In fact, they maintain to predict relationship between sports and commerce within various areas. In the United States of America, financial sponsorship from sport has been estimated to be 24.8 billion dollars. Reciprocal understanding of sports and commerce, and also supporting various sports fields in this era have assumed doubled importance. Thus, in accordance with the strategic nature of global sponsorship of sport, then role of famous people in advertisement and taking results from such advertisements have led the said issue to be one of the largest industries in the globe. Generally, financial sponsors could, in addition to progress in the professional leagues in Iran, entail growth of technology and internal knowledge in sport. According to the information obtained, as much as 25% of the income of English clubs is funded through sponsorship. Other countries, too make use of this way for funding a major part of their team's costs. Of course, in Iran the situation is vice versa and clubs have limited ways for acquiring income; since the income of these clubs are generally limited to selling tickets of competitions, TV coverage and a small portion by financial sponsors (Hamidi 2011).

In our country, since the advent of athletic sports in various levels up to now, the relevant costs have been mostly funded by the government; however in a near future this issue will require substantial changes. New enactments by the Islamic Council implying lack of financial sponsorship of state organs from athletic sports are among the major reasons of these changes. Given these enactments, clubs, teams and other professional teams will not be under the financial sponsorship of the government and they will be obliged to act to attract private companies and institutions for continuing their lives. On the other hand, in regard to the costly and most favored games like football and volleyball and etc., pressure exerted by global authorities in respect to privatization of the premium league until 2013 have also added to this decision (Salimi et al. 2013). Success cannot be obtained in any conditions unless with existence of expert force and applications of relevant proper principles. The issue of financial sponsorship is no exception. Examinations and studies in the area of financial sponsorship related problems and action to eliminate them could result in satisfaction of sports organizations and financial sponsor to a great extent. Thus, identification and determination of guidelines for improving these obstacles will constitute a major part of the subject matter related with financial sponsorship and marketing (Kiekegan, 2005). Widespread researches have been carried out in the area of sports sponsorship in football. Hence, given recent progress and dynamism in the game of volleyball, it is obligatory to conduct more investigations in respect of financial sponsorship for this field of sport. Numerous researches have been done in regard to financial sponsorship for sports, of which we can refer to the following:

In a research, Yarahmadi (2014) has examined the role of sports teams brand identity on the intent for purchasing sponsoring products in the Iranian professional Volleyball league and found out that sponsorship activities are in then rise as among kinds of marketing activities for reaching to the target clients. Research results reaffirmed the relationship of four dimensions of identity of premium league of volleyball brand and belonging of fans to the club through self-defined needs of the fans, impacts of fans' belonging to the clubs on their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward products and services by companies sponsoring their popular clubs. In a research on the effectiveness of sports financial sponsorship among football fans, Eshghi (2012) has cited that sports financial sponsorship has had positive effects on increasing awareness of trading names and brands, promoting prestige of the companies

among the target market clients, increasing the intention of purchase and increasing clients' loyalty to the sponsoring companies. Salimi et al (2013) in a research titled "prioritization of obstacles on the way of expanding financial sponsorship by private companies from athletic sports according to categorization of MADM methods results by using POSET integrated method" have found amazing results, According to the final results, from among six general obstacles defined for the progress of financial sponsorship expansion by private companies from athletic sports, economic obstacles were ranked first and non-achievement of new markets and lack of more solidarity between companies and clients through financial sponsorship were introduced as among other obstacles.

Azadan et al. (2012) carried out a research with the heading of examining guidelines for attracting financial sponsors in the Iranian professional football. Results revealed formulation and correction of six structural -managerial elements, advertisement conditions, sponsorship incentives, professional preparation and media and privatization of media as guideline specific for attracting financial sponsors in the Iranian professional football. Asgarian and Azadan (2012) in a research titled examining obstacles to attracting financial sponsors in the professional football in Iran found out that administration incurred costs and holding sports standing are on the rise.

People, states and clubs are seeking to find ways to fund the sources of these costs, One of the main ways in this regard is to attract sponsorship. The results revealed formulation of seven factors of managerial structural obstacles, lack of financial sponsors' success ion the sponsorship process, not using marketing principles and low level of Iranian professional football, media and legal obstacles, loss of technical aspects in the clubs, loss of grounds for attracting international financial sponsors as obstacles on the way of attracting financial sponsors in the Iranian professional football. Ma'adi et al (2011) offered a paper with the heading of comparison of marketing fusion in the premium league of country's volleyball from the view of managers and experts. Findings revealed that the highest difference from the view of mangers and experts was related with the existing situation of the combined elements of marketing in the factor of dissemination and the least difference was in the factor of product's price. Experts assessed the place factor and mangers assessed the dissemination factor in the better existing situation.

From among the recent researches done in the area of financial sponsorship, one can refer to research carried out by Kenneth K Chen and James J Zhung who carried out a research in 2011 with the heading of examining the characteristics of clients in relation to financial sponsors of academic sports wages and they found out that using athletes and instructors and coaches in teams under sponsorship and appropriate using of event space for advertisement were among the factors which played substantial roles in financial sponsorship successes. Another research was done by David Nickell et al (2011) under the heading of financial sponsorship related with marketing and they found out that increased rate of sale and expansion of sale market of sponsoring companies arising from financial sponsorship have been as a result of successful financial sponsorship.

Abiodum (2011) conducted a research with the goal of the significance of financial sponsorship as a marketing tool in sporting events and tilted factors affecting the efficacy of financial sponsorship in seven cases of having clear and transparent communications, being active, having acceptable adaptability, active management of financial sponsorship multiple contracts of financial sponsorship, using opportunities for prestige and ownership financial

sponsorship. Nicolas Alexander (2009) conducted a research under the title of Specifying value of brand through financial sponsorship and found the following results:

Financial sponsorship has led to the creation of positive perceptions in the minds of clients and change negative thinking. Brands with more credibility and power will engender higher success rates in the areas of financial sponsorship. Relations of players and teams under sponsorship with the target market have had positive effects on the efficacy of financial sponsorship. Media have a major role on the success of financial sponsorship and increasing credibility of the brands, should they can present an appropriate image of the sponsoring companies. Poor performance of sports teams in games and competitions are among the obstacles which deter the sponsors from sponsoring them.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Given the objectives intended, the current research was applied in terms of goal and fell under descriptive and analytical category in terms of nature and meantime, it was a survey type research in terms of administration for the research questions test. The paper was survey and explorative researches and is a field study in terms of data gathering, this paper seeks to identify factors deterring participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring the country's professional volleyball league. The statistical population of the current research was consisted of volleyball federation managers, national teams managers, managers of professional volleyball league, people responsible for marketing of volleyball premium league clubs, people responsible for the Iranian volleyball league and officials in charge of marketing committee of the sponsoring companies and sports experts who amounted to over 250 people. To select the sample volume among the statistical population Morgan table was applied. Using the Morgan formula, as many as 150 people were selected as the research sample and the sampling method was simple random sampling, so that each of the people in the statistical universe would enjoy an equal chance for being selected in the sample. Tool for gathering the data was a questionnaire where the formulated questionnaire included 5 questions in respect to demographic characteristics of the research sample population.

The questions pertained to gender, age, education, educational major, and sports records; also 49 specialized questions were assigned for identifying deterring factors of financial sponsors from participating in supporting and sponsoring volleyball professional leagues of the country on a five degree Likert scale. The inventory's validity was confirmed by experts and professors and the reliability of the tool was reported acceptable at the 0/93 by using the Cronbach's alpha. In order to analyze the information, two descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied where in the descriptive section frequency distribution tables, central statistical indices (averages), and scatteredness indices (standard deviation, range of variations, etc..) were addressed, while in the inferential section, after confirming parametric conditions and distribution of data being natural by using Smirnov-Kolmogorov test, with the help of parametric single sample t test, the impacts of each of the fivefold obstacles on participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring the national volleyball professional clubs were addressed. Thereafter, with the help of Friedman test, the indices of each of the obstacles were compared and prioritized so that the most important and least significant indices in each of the factors deterring the sponsorship are identified.

### 3. FINDINGS

After examining and analyzing statistical findings, the statistical results of this research are as follows:

**Table 1.** Respondents' demographic traits.

	Position					Education al degree				Gender	
	Federation mangers	Clubs mangers	league organization official	Marketing Officials	Sports expert	Diploma and associates'	B.A.	M.A	Doctorate	Male	Female
No.	4	15	2	10	119	36	46	32	36	123	27
Frequency %	2/7	10	1/3	6/7	79/3	23	40/7	21/3	24	82	18

As inferred from Table 1, most respondents under study are sports experts who account for 79%. Most respondents (41%) held B.A. degrees; of course, 23% held diploma and associates, 21% were M.As and 245 were doctorates; also, sex distribution of respondents affirms that 82% of the respondents under study were men while 18% were female participants.

**Table 2.** Examination of natural status of normalcy of data by Smirnov-Kolmogorov test.

Variable	Average	SD	Least	Highest	Smirnov-Kolmogorov test	Sig.
Economic obstacles	43.64	6.77	12	60	1.398	0.062
Legal obstacles	23.33	3.68	6	30	1.240	0.093

Social obstacles	30.06	4.90	8	40	1.818	0.051
Cultural obstacles	44.83	6.49	12	60	0.844	0.474
Managerial obstacles	41.19	6.66	11	55	1.083	0.191

Given Table 2 test error relates to all research variables being higher than the significance level of 0.05 and for the same purpose, the hypothesis of normalcy of data is accepted and in all cases, parametric tests area used.

**Table 3.** T single sample test for examining the impacts of sponsorship obstacles.

Variable Statistics	Average	T	Freedom degree	Expected average	SD	Sig.
Economic obstacles	43.64	13.824	149	36	6.77	0.001
Legal obstacles	23.23	17.734	149	18	3.68	0.001
Social obstacles	30.06	15.136	149	24	4.90	0.001
Cultural obstacles	44.83	16.666	149	36	6.49	0.001
Managerial obstacles	41.19	9.538	149	33	6.66	0.001

According to single sample t test findings ( $t = 13.824, p < 0.01$ ), it can be stated that economic obstacles affect participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country; variation range of the impacts of economic obstacles on the participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country stands between 12-60 with a mean of 36, because the average economic obstacle's effects (43.46) is higher than the hypothetical average (36). According to single sample t test findings ( $t = 15.136, p < 0.01$ ), it can be stated that variation range of social obstacles in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country stands between 8-40 and because the average social obstacle's average (30.06) is higher than the hypothetical average (24), it can be argued that these obstacles have effects on the participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional league of volleyball in the country; According to single sample t test findings ( $t = 17.734, p < 0.01$ ), it can be stated that legal obstacles affect participation of

financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country; variation range of the impacts of legal obstacles on the participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country stands between 6-30 with a mean of 18, thus, the average effects of legal obstacles (23.32) is higher than the presumed average (18). According to single sample t test findings ( $t = 16.666, p < 0.01$ ), it can be stated that cultural obstacles affect participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country; variation range of the impacts of cultural obstacles on the participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country stands between 12-60 with a mean of 36, because the average cultural obstacle's average (44.83) is higher than the hypothetical average (36). Similarly, based on single sample t test findings ( $t = 9.538, p < 0.01$ ), it can be stated that managerial obstacles affect the participation of financial sponsors in sponsoring professional volleyball leagues of the country; because effects of managerial average (41.19) is higher than the presume average (33).

**Table 4.** Comparison and prioritization of indices of factors deterring the participation of financial sponsors.

Variable	Number of items	Items	Rank based average	Priority	Chi-square	Freedom degree	Sig.
Economic obstacles	12	State ownership of most sponsoring companies	8.15	1	103.524	11	0.001
		Weak confidence in investment in football industry	5.25	12			
Legal obstacles	6	Lack of standard and working financial rules in the area of relations of financial sponsors and clubs' managers	3.87	1	17.347	5	0.004
		Insufficient information in utilizing privileges of tax rebates	3.26	6			
Social obstacles	8	Existence of pseudo state sector by using illegal affairs	5.06	1	33.836	7	0.001
		non-acquisition of popularity and prestige for	3.83	8			

		sponsoring companies					
Legal obstacles	12	Weak transference of company's trading message of the sponsor	7.60	1	52.630	11	0.001
		Little attention by media to professional league of volleyball	5.88	12			
Managerial obstacles	11	Little utilization of marketing experts	7.09	1	108.221	10	0.001
		Weak management and planning in holding matches	4.77	11			

In order to compare and prioritize obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring professional league of volleyball in the country, the Friedman test as used where the results of this test is significant at the error level smaller than 0.01; i.e. with confidence level of 99%, it can be stated that there is a significant difference between the importance of all the indices of obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues.

As regards economic obstacles (chi-square = 103.524), according to the results obtained from table 4, the average index of "state ownership of most sponsoring companies" was 8.15, suggesting the highest significance and the average index of " Weak confidence in investment in football industry" was 5.25, suggesting the least significance among the indices of economic obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues. Also, results of the Friedman test for comparing the indices of legal obstacles illustrated that (chi-square = 17.347) the average index of "loss of standard and working rules in the area of relations of financial sponsors and clubs' managers" was 3.87, suggesting the highest significance and the average index of " insufficient information in utilizing privileges of tax rebates" was 3.37, suggesting the least significance among the indices of economic obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues.

As regards social obstacles (chi-square = 33.836), the average index of "existence of pseudo state sector by using illegal relations" was 5.06, suggesting the highest significance and the average index of "lack of popularity acquisition and prestige for the sponsoring company" was 3.83, suggesting the least significance among the indices of economic obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues.

As regards cultural obstacles (chi-square = 53.630), the average index of "weal transference of trading messages of the sponsors" was 7.60, suggesting the highest significance and the average index of " little media attention to professional volleyball league" was 5.88, suggesting the least significance among the indices of economic obstacles deterring

the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues. As regards managerial obstacles, the average index of "little utilization of marketing experts" was 7.09, suggesting the highest significance and the average index of "poor management and planning in holding matches" was 4.77, suggesting the least significance among the indices of managerial obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsors from sponsoring country's professional volleyball leagues.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Sports economy is an extended area which is closely related with other economic sectors. Increasing activities in sports results in increased demands for various goods and services. This set of activities will result in the creation of the sports industry. One of the ways for funding the sufficient budget for the conduct of sports activities is to attract companies and organizations for sponsorship. These is when Iranian professional volleyball leagues have been faced with the challenge of attracting and maintain financial sponsorship recent years; in this regard, understanding obstacles ahead of expansion of financial sponsorship and its impacts on the lack of participation by the financial sponsors is one of the concerns of the researchers. Hence, this research seeks to answer this question: what are the most important obstacles deterring the participation of financial sponsor from participating in the Iranian professional volleyball leagues?

Findings revealed that over half of the respondents were men, where from this number, a substantial number of the research sample (79%) were sports experts; also results arising from examination of educational degrees affirmed that most respondents under study (41%) held B.A.s. And around two third of the respondents were graduates of sports filed majors. Single sample t test results in examining the impacts of financial sponsorship obstacles in sports revealed that all the fivefold economic, legal, social, cultural and managerial obstacles were having some significant effects on lack of financial sponsorship from Iranian professional volleyball leagues.

The results also suggested that economic obstacles affected lack of participation by financial sponsors in sponsoring Iranian professional volleyball leagues; also as regards economic obstacles indices, one of the most important obstacles is "lack of development between the country's economic interactions with the global economy". In this regard, it can be stated that the Iranian economy has sustained losses due to widespread state ownership, lack of interaction with the outside world and etc.

The solution prescribe for moving out of this crisis is establishment of a competitive structure extroversion and expansion of interaction with the global economy. This issue is possible with the expanding role and position of the private sector and its placement as the main element in the activities of ecobomic firms. Also, one of the most important indices of the ecobomic obstacles for attracting financial sponsors is "Provision of most clubs' financial resources by state organizations". In this regard, it has to be stated that due to the sports economy being under state control, clubs do not compete with each other and there is no attempt for generating income; thus, under such conditions, no ground is laid for the participation of financial sponsors. For volleyball to turn to income making and generating, it has to shift from a government based ownership to a private sector ownership, because the state economy is introvert and monopolist and volleyball is no exception.

This finding is in line with many researches which have been conducted in Iran. Salimi et al (2012), Keshti dar et al. (2013), Elahi et al (2010), Seyed Ameri et al (2009), Eshghi (2009), Elahi (2008) and Izadi (2002) have also found similar results in researches they have performed and they have stated that economic obstacles and lack of economic saving for the financial sponsors area among the factors that have caused financial sponsors not to have inclination to Iranian championship. Foreign based researches including Nickell et al (2011), Caps (2011), K Chen and Zhung (2011) have affirmed such results and stated if there is no sufficient confidence in the investment made by financial sponsors, financial sponsorship will face problems. In the view of respondents, legal obstacles were effective on attracting financial sponsorship and in respect to legal obstacles, one of the most important obstacles from the view of respondents was "lack of right for covering TV franchise to the clubs"; this is when TV show of the Iranian professional volleyball leagues assumes importance in attracting financial sponsorship for this sports major; such that some maintain direct TV coverage is one of the most important objectives of financial sponsors. It has to be stated currently, there is no rule for assigning the right of TV coverage and the Broadcasting servers has covered major and various fields of sport favorably. Naturally unless these legal vacuums are solved, financial sponsors will show no tendency for participation in the Iranian professional volleyball leagues. This finding has been obtained in line with some empirical studies. Keshti dar et al (2012), Elahi (2008) have also affirmed these findings and stated that existence of legal obstacles is among the factors that would hinder professional development of sports in Iran. The most important social obstacles in the view of respondents is the "existence of some state like sector by using illegal relations". In this regard it has to be stated that the pseudo state sector has expanded in the past 10 years and so and has possessed some economic and political power which is out of control and until there is illegal relation at work, we seem to be experiencing a lack of participation by then financial sponsors. Elahi et al (2010) and Elahi et al (2009) have stated that pseudo state sector is one of the obstacles to the development of sports. Cultural obstacles are also among obstacles affecting the non-attraction of financial sponsors and also weak communication of trading message of sponsoring companies are among the most important cultural obstacles that would deter sponsors from sponsoring Iranian professional volleyball leagues. In this regard, as long as financial sponsors do not feel comfortable and feel assured and no advertisement is done for them despite huge investment, there will be no participation for sponsorship in Iranian professional volleyball leagues. Thus, clubs' managers need to identify existing obstacles and remove them. Another finding was that in the view of respondents, among the managerial factors "little utilization of marketing experts" was among the most important deterrent cause of participation by financial sponsors. In this regard, it has to be argued that a string marketing committees consisting of sports marketing in the Iranian professional volleyball leagues can offer significant help to increasing income arising from the advertisement and Iranian professional volleyball leagues financial sponsors.

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