

## Brand Positioning in Iran: A Case Study of the Professional Soccer League

**Authors :** Homeira Asadi Kavan, Seyed Nasrollah Sajjadi, Mehrzade Hamidi, Hossein Rajabi, Mahdi Bigdely

**Abstract :** Positioning strategies of a sports brand can create a unique impression in the minds of the fans, sponsors, and other stakeholders. In order to influence potential customer's perception in an effective and positive way, a brands positioning strategy must be unique, credible, and relevant. Many sports clubs in Iran have been struggling to implement and achieve brand positioning accomplishments, due to different reasons such as lack of experience, scarcity of experts in the sports branding, and lack of related researches in this field. This study will provide a comprehensive theoretical framework and action plan for sport managers and marketers to design and implement effective brand positioning and to enable them to be distinguishable from competing brands and sports clubs. The study instrument is interviews with sports marketing and brand experts who have been working in this industry for a minimum of 20 years. Qualitative data analysis was performed using Atlas.ti text mining software version 7 and Open, axial and selective coding were employed to uncover and systematically analyze important and complex phenomena and elements. The findings show 199 effective elements in positioning strategies in Iran Professional Soccer League. These elements are categorized into 23 concepts and sub-categories as follows: Structural prerequisites, Strategic management prerequisites, Commercial prerequisites, Major external prerequisites, Brand personality, Club symbols, Emotional aspects, Event aspects, Fans' strategies, Marketing information strategies, Marketing management strategies, Empowerment strategies, Executive management strategies, League context, Fans' background, Market context, Club's organizational context, Support context, Major contexts, Political-Legal elements, Economic factors, Social factors, and Technological factors. Eventually, the study model was developed by 6 main dimensions of Causal prerequisites, Axial Phenomenon (brand position), Strategies, Context Factors, Interfering Factors, and Consequences. Based on the findings, practical recommendations and strategies are suggested that can help club managers and marketers in developing and improving their respective sport clubs, brand positioning, and activities.

**Keywords :** brand positioning, soccer club, sport marketing, Iran professional soccer league, brand strategy

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