

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Identifying and Prioritizing Branding Challenges in Physical Education and Sports Sciences

Soheila Moradi¹, Saeed Sadeghi Boroujerdi², Abed Mahmoudian^{3*}

1. A.M, Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Humanities, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran.

2. Professor, Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Humanities, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran.

3. Assistant Professor, Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran.

***Correspondence**

Abed Mahmoudian

E-mail:

a.mahmoudian@basu.ac.ir

Receive Date: 09/Nov/ 2023

Accept Date: 06/Feb/2024

Published Online: 21/Sep/2025

How to cite

Moradi, S., Sadeghi Boroujerdi, S., & Mahmoudian, A. (2025). Identifying and Prioritizing Branding Challenges in Physical Education and Sports Sciences. *Applied Research of Sport Management*, 14(2), 1-22.

EXTENDED A B S T R A C T**Introduction**

Universities have begun to realize the need to develop sustainable brand strategies. In the marketing of services such as universities and institutions, the image of the name of universities is a new topic that has attracted the attention of many universities in the world, so that the increased competition between universities to attract students and increase the academic performance of students has forced them to create academic credibility for themselves by creating a set of desirable and unique features. Given the increased competition in higher education, branding is an effective factor in promoting the reputation of institutions. It has also become a source of additional revenue for these institutions through the identification of differentiated services. Research results show that branding has a great impact on colleges and universities. In general, the implementation of brand programs will have a significant and positive impact on universities and colleges, including university identification and increased enrollment and increased university recognition. Branding in higher education, as one of the new approaches to management and marketing, has gained a special place in universities and educational institutions around the world over the past two decades, and universities have increasingly paid attention to this area in order to increase competitiveness, attract talented students, and enhance their academic reputation. In the meantime, the field of physical education and sports sciences, as one of the most popular fields affecting the physical and mental health of society, is of great importance, because in addition to its educational and research role, this field has a significant contribution to improving lifestyles, developing sports activities, and improving national health indicators. However, in our country, branding this field faces numerous challenges, and this has caused the social and scientific status of this field at the higher education level, despite its vast potential, to be less than it deserves. A review of theoretical backgrounds and studies conducted at the national and international levels shows that in many universities, educational branding has led to improved quality, increased student satisfaction and loyalty, improved the social status of the university, and ultimately becoming a reputable brand in the global arena. However, in Iran, especially in the field of physical education and sports sciences, no systematic and comprehensive research has been

conducted in this field so far, and mainly scattered and limited research has been conducted on specific dimensions of brand equity or attitudes towards the university. The extensive literature shows that despite the many studies that have been conducted in the field of higher education branding, especially branding of universities and educational institutions, the concept of branding has not yet been transferred to the field of universities, faculties, and educational organizations of physical education and sports sciences. This research gap doubles the need to address the issue, and the present study aims to identify and prioritize the branding challenges in the field of physical education and sports sciences in Iran, in order to enrich the theoretical foundations and also provide practical solutions for managers and policymakers in the field of higher education.

Methodology

The present research method is mixed and of mixed type. Through purposive sampling method, participants included experts in the field of sports branding. 12 interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached. Considering the current corona conditions and the large spatial distance with some participants, with the coordination made, the interviews were conducted as online video calls and through the WhatsApp social network. In order to analyze the qualitative data, the theme analysis method was used. Because, one of the very efficient methods of qualitative analysis is theme analysis. The coding technique and NVivo software version 10 were used to categorize the data. Four criteria of validity, verifiability, repeatability and provability were used to ensure the scientific process of coding and analyzing the interview data. In the quantitative part, the thematic analysis process method was used to rank the extracted themes using Expert Choice software version 11. The thematic analysis process is one of the most comprehensive systems designed for multi-criteria decision making. In this method, the inconsistency rate is considered.

Findings

The findings included 44 initial codes that were categorized into 11 sub-themes and 4 main themes. The qualitative findings were then transferred to the quantitative stage, and the relative weight of each challenge was calculated and prioritized through paired comparison questionnaires and hierarchical analysis using Expert Choice software. The inconsistency rate from this analysis was 0.04, indicating appropriate accuracy and validity of the judgments made. The results of the study showed that the branding challenges of the physical education and sports sciences field can be classified into four main categories: challenges related to education (low public awareness of physical education and low importance of physical education courses in schools), challenges related to the assessment organization (lack of place for physical education courses in the entrance exam and lack of appropriate acceptance criteria), challenges related to the Ministry of Science (unreasonable acceptance, poor facilities and education, poor public knowledge of the physical education field and weakness of professors and students), and management and executive challenges (lack of job security, lack of proper promotion and weak management). Hierarchical analysis showed that "lack of appropriate criteria for student acceptance" with a weight of 0.126 is the most important challenge. This indicates that the admission of students to the field of physical education is carried out without sufficient attention to sports and academic qualifications, and in many cases, the sports resume and practical capabilities of the candidates do not play a role in the admission process, as a result, people enter this field who do not have the necessary interest or specialized ability, and this leads to a decrease in educational and scientific quality. The second important challenge was "weakness of professors and students" with a weight of 0.110, which refers to the weakness of scientific, communication, information technology, and English skills among faculty members and students, and causes the level of science production and competitiveness of this field to decrease in the national and international arenas. The third challenge was "lack of job security" with a weight of 0.106, which has created serious concerns for students, given the conditions of the

labor market and the lack of institutional support. The fourth challenge is "lack of place for physical education in the entrance exam" with a weight of 0.105, which shows that this subject, unlike other subjects, has no role in determining the rank and acceptance of students, and this has reduced the social and mental importance of this field among candidates and families. In addition to these, "low knowledge of the community about the field" with a weight of 0.094, "lack of proper promotion" with a weight of 0.086, "unreasonable acceptance" with a weight of 0.080, "weak management" with a weight of 0.078, "low importance of physical education in schools" with a weight of 0.076, "low awareness of the community about physical education" with a weight of 0.074, and "poor facilities and education" with a weight of 0.071 were ranked as the next priorities, respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

These findings indicate that the existing problems are visible both at the macro-policy level and at the micro-management and educational content level. In fact, the field of physical education and sports sciences, on the one hand, faces a weak attitude and culture in society and the educational system, and on the other hand, structural and management challenges prevent its brand from being promoted. Comparing these findings with domestic and foreign research shows that in many countries, by reviewing the admission process, improving educational quality, strengthening the role of the media, and guaranteeing graduates' jobs, they have been able to promote the social and scientific status of sports disciplines, but in Iran, these measures have not yet been carried out systematically. Accordingly, the research conclusion emphasizes that in order to move towards branding the field of physical education and sports sciences, a set of coordinated measures must be taken at several levels: At the macro-policy level, it is necessary to redefine the position of physical education in the entrance exam and determine specific scientific and sports criteria for student admission in order to increase the quality of the field's entries. At the educational level, it is necessary to improve the capabilities of professors and students, strengthen communication, language and information technology skills, and employ modern educational methods. At the social level, changing society's attitude towards the importance of sports and health through the media and correct advertising must be considered. Also, at the labor market level, it is necessary to create job opportunities commensurate with the capabilities of graduates and consider supportive policies to ensure their future careers. Finally, by identifying and prioritizing the existing challenges, the present study provides a strategic framework for university administrators, officials from the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Education, and related organizations so that they can pave the way for the field to become a brand by designing targeted programs. In addition to their theoretical value and richness in the literature on the subject, these results also have practical applications and can be the basis for decision-making in the country's macro-educational policies.

KEY WORDS

Higher Education, Branding, Physical Education, Sports Sciences, Theme Analysis.

Doi: [10.30473/ARSM.2025.69627.3825](https://doi.org/10.30473/ARSM.2025.69627.3825)

Copyright © 2025 The Authors. Published by Payame Noor University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International

license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). Non-commercial uses of the work are permitted, provided the original work is properly cited.

<https://arsmb.journals.pnu.ac.ir/>