

## Investigating Barriers to Marketing of Sports Clubs during the Corona (Case Study of Mashhad)

Atoosasadat Hozhabrossadati<sup>a\*</sup>, Mohammad Khabiri<sup>b</sup>, Jafar Jaweek<sup>c</sup>, Fatemeh Ganji<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Master of Marketing Management in Sports, University of Tehran

<sup>b</sup> Associate professor of Sports Management, University of Tehran

<sup>c</sup> PhD student of Strategic management in sports organizations at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

<sup>d</sup> Master of Marketing Management in Sports, Payame Noor University, Karaj Branch

\* Corresponding author: Atoosasadat Hozhabrossadati, ashojabr@gmail.com

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the barriers to the marketing of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad. The population of this study was the owners of sports clubs in Mashhad. Research data were evaluated using content analysis. The results of the challenges were classified into two areas: structural and marketing. Research participants also provided solutions tailored to these challenges. Also, strategies for economic recovery in the post-corona period were identified, including political, structural and economic strategies. Finally, the sports authorities of Mashhad city are suggested to plan for the owners of fitness clubs as soon as possible, taking into account the identified challenges, in order to prevent the closure and bankruptcy of most of the clubs, and also with the support of The government should allow bodybuilding clubs to guide new investors, increase the price of sports services, and amend privatization laws in the current special circumstances.

**Keywords:** Corona, Sports Marketing, Emergency Planning, Fitness Clubs, Theme Analysis

### 1. Introduction

The outbreak of the coronavirus is the biggest global crisis since World War II. The coronavirus epidemic has posed a very serious challenge to all societies because it has changed the social interactions of individuals and their lifestyles. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that range from the common cold virus to the cause of more serious illnesses such as SARS, Mers, and Covid. Coronaviruses were discovered in 2016 and continued to be studied until mid-2018. The virus is naturally prevalent in mammals and birds. However, seven types of coronavirus transmitted to humans have been identified so far (1). The latest is Covid 19, or Acute Respiratory Syndrome 2, which broke out in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The elderly and people with acute medical problems, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer, are at greater risk of developing the coronavirus than others (2).

However, in addition to quarantining many communities, the disease has dealt huge fatal blows to various industries and businesses (2). It can be said that all sectors including education, retail, banking and sports have been affected by this disease and its financial impact on the world economies is evident (3). The sports industry, like many other industries, is in crisis and many sports have remained inactive (4). To protect the health of athletes and others involved, major sporting events at the international, regional and national levels were canceled or postponed and for the first time in the history of the New Olympic Games (1889), the Olympic and Paralympic Games were postponed. It will be held in 2021. The global value of the sports industry is estimated at \$ 756 billion annually, which in the face of corona disease is millions of jobs not only for sports professionals, but also for those in the retail and sports services industries related to leagues and events. Travel, tourism, infrastructure, transportation, catering, and media distribution are at risk (2). Sport is in crisis in many ways, such as planning, athletes' health, and most importantly, the economy. Also, exercise at all levels has responded to the consequences of corona disease; whether it is a public sport or a professional sport. For the sports industry, the consequences of this epidemic have been far-reaching and damaging. The problems of this disease are its effect on society's view of professional sports; As Sato et al. (2020) have shown in their research, even people agree with postponing the holding of the world's largest sporting event, the Olympics in Japan, and the closure of professional leagues (5).

Also, some researchers have pointed to the psychological effects of athletes. In this regard, Henriksen et al. (2019) have pointed to the psychological effects of sedentary lifestyle, including an increased risk of anxiety, depression, addiction, and other mental health concerns (6). Also, some studies, including the study of FIFPRO (2020) on the mental health of soccer players in the occurrence of corona disease, have reported various cases of decreased mental health among male and female soccer players (7). Also, it should be said that a wide range of sports community, especially women, are affected by this epidemic; As Clarkson et al. (2020) looked at the corona dimension of the future of British women's football, showing that the organizational and economic consequences, player contracts, immigration, investment and player health are important challenges to act swiftly and decisively. Need (8). One of the

areas that suffered a lot during Corona disease is bodybuilding clubs, which we have many sports clubs all over the country, including in Mashhad.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the barriers to the marketing of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad during the corona.

## 2. Methodology

This research is one of the qualitative researches and is classified as applied studies in terms of purpose. In the present study, the qualitative method of content analysis (theme analysis) has been used. The advantage of content analysis is that explicit and implicit themes about the research problem are identified and the researcher can interpret them. The theme or theme is a reflection on the subject of the research that the researcher seeks to instill in the audience and is a kind of index of the work. A topic can offer different themes. The statistical population of this study includes the owners of sports clubs in Mashhad. Due to the problems related to the corona disease crisis and the difficulty in establishing face-to-face relationships with the owners of these businesses, the easy sampling method was used. This sampling method is used when samples are difficult to access (9). Due to the exceptional nature of the situation, the data collection tool was semi-structured interviews. For this purpose, 9 questions were designed according to the conditions caused by the outbreak of corona disease and each participant answered the questions according to their situation. The two-part questions described the characteristics of the business being interviewed and the economic problems associated with the outbreak of corona disease and their suggestions for improving their current and future business situation. The questions were sent to the owners of sports clubs in Mashhad through virtual media and they were asked to record and send their answers. Also, if it was not possible to record audio, they were asked to submit written responses. In total, research questions were sent to 30 owners of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad. Participants' conversations or writings were examined in the first stage and reported in the form of small and meaningful propositions that were analyzed as open source and then concept, sub-themes and main themes. Finally, a network of themes is drawn, the discussion and conclusions of which are presented.

## 3. Results

The first question of this research was about how to pay the expenses during the holidays. The second question of the research was about their survival in the clubs according to the current conditions; For example, one participant predicted a three-month survival period. The majority of bodybuilding club owners are having a hard time paying their rent, staff salaries, and equipment, and most of the costs come from past incomes or They have deposited a personal form. The duration of their club is between three and four months with the continuation of the current situation. Only club owners who own space do not have a serious problem surviving. However; the capital of all clubs has become stagnant and has not generated any income for them during this period. The third research question was about the willingness to receive a loan and the amount of repayment. Owners of all fitness clubs are interested in getting a loan. In addition, many bodybuilding club owners were willing to take out gratuitous loan to stay in their club. Also, in repaying the loan, attention should be paid to the reopening of fitness clubs, and according to the participants, the repayment period should be at least three years from the start of the club in order to enable the economic survival of these fitness clubs. The fourth and fifth questions of the study were about evaluating customer loyalty during the recent closure and the desire to start Internet clubs if possible. According to the participants, if the status quo persists, there is a possibility of reducing customer loyalty. However; customers of some fitness clubs still follow up. On the other hand, many fitness club owners do not use online services or use them only to advertise or offer a workout program.

The other four questions were to extract the existing challenges and solutions, which are:

Question 6: What was the plan or solution provided by the Sports and Youth Department of Mashhad for the current situation?

Question 7: What do you expect from the Sports and Youth Department of Mashhad?

Question 8: What is your solution to reduce economic problems?

Question 9: What is your strategy for the post-Corona period and the restoration of the economic dimension?

According to the views of the research participants on the questions mentioned above, open source code was extracted and the main and sub-themes of the proposed challenges and solutions were extracted. The challenges facing bodybuilding clubs are many and varied and are divided into structural and business categories. Structural challenges are categorized into macro and micro levels and business challenges are categorized into infrastructure and human resource levels. Then, the solutions of the owners of bodybuilding clubs in case of recent conditions were presented and classified. The solutions to each of these challenges are, in a way, to advance the activities of the sports business so that only these fitness clubs can survive. Due to the limitations of post-corona solutions, only the concepts extracted from the participants' views were presented in three categories, which include political, structural and economic solutions; It should be noted, however, that participants in the study were asked to focus only on their challenges and solutions to the recent crisis in order to better understand the current situation.

#### 4. Discussion

The results showed that the challenges of coronary heart disease are divided into two categories: structural and business. In the structural part, the problems are divided into macro and micro categories. According to all the owners of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad, the Department of Sports and Youth has not had any specific solution to deal with the recent crisis, and this indicates mismanagement in the sports sector, which can cause irreparable damage to the sports body of Mashhad. Slowly According to Barcelona et al. (2016) and Fried (2015), it is essential that all fitness clubs have a crisis management or emergency management plan to be less prone to financial and infrastructural damage in times of crisis (10,11); However, a large part of the planning, and in particular the transfer of facilities to fitness clubs, is in the area of government activities, which according to the available evidence, there is no practical and coherent planning even after several months of the recent crisis. ; It should be noted, however, that decision-making regarding major events such as the Olympics has also been fraught with serious challenges (12). Therefore planning to solve the economic problems of sports businesses obviously requires time to gather information and plan. In addition, bodybuilding club owners expect taxes such as VAT, which are levied on a quarterly basis, to provide adequate facilities in such a situation. Also at the micro level, problems caused by the management of the islands of physical education departments and the lack of proper inter-organizational relations have caused many bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad to go bankrupt. Due to the current situation in Iran, many owners of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad are renters, and negotiating a reduction in rent or offering a discount can help improve the situation of the owners of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad.

On the other hand, the issue of financing is the main challenge facing all bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad, and the option of providing financial facilities by the Department of Sports and Youth is one of the most popular options; However, there have been and still are challenges in this direction. According to research participants, high interest rates on bank loans are one of the most challenging factors given the current situation. Also, rent and discrimination in the transfer of bank loans is a challenge that if ignored, most of the bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad may be closed and bankrupt. Therefore, it is necessary for the relevant authorities to closely monitor the disbursement of loans in order to prevent any waste of financial resources and abuse. Regarding the problems related to the business of the trainers of the gymnasiums of Mashhad city, unemployment insurance and even the placement of sports jobs in the category of official jobs and under the support of the Ministry of Labor, it is necessary for them to be insured and in similar conditions to the markets. They no longer need work to earn a living. In addition, the owners of many sports businesses offered limited opportunities to earn money. Using sports facilities under health guidelines can be a great help to return the fitness clubs of Mashhad to the field of income generation. In this regard, the medical community and psychologists can make a significant contribution to the development of health and mental health and facilitate the return of customers to sports venues.

Also, the owners of sports clubs in Mashhad expressed solutions to restore the economic dimension and even the development of their activities, which include political, structural and economic areas. In the political sphere, despite the legislation in the political sphere on the creation of privatization infrastructure in sports, there is still no obligation to implement these explicit laws (13). On the other hand, improving the infrastructure related to privatization can expand the business of fitness clubs in Mashhad, attract sponsors to sports (14) and improve the competitive market in fitness clubs (15). One of the problems related to bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad is the low use of virtual and internet facilities and services. Virtual media have a large capacity that can well meet the needs of a large part of the sports audience; However, working in a virtual environment, like any other activity, requires proper awareness and information in order to take advantage of the existing capacities in this sector; Therefore, experts and media activists with basic training can facilitate virtual activities for bodybuilding clubs. In addition to activists in the field of sports and media specialists, specialists in the field of health and psychology can also help to improve the situation of bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad. In addition to the development of health guidelines by the medical department, psychologists should also invite the community to engage in sports with appropriate information about the benefits of exercise so that homelessness and quarantine status do not exacerbate the feeling of boredom among members of the community; Because, on the one hand, lethargy due to quarantine and on the other hand, stress and strain (16) can cause inactivity and overweight. Exacerbation of such a situation can spread many mental and physical problems in society. Therefore, proper information by the health care staff can help to restore trust and active presence of people in bodybuilding clubs in Mashhad.

#### 5. Conclusion

Ignoring the bodybuilding clubs of Mashhad city in the current crisis can lead to a waste of material and human resources in the sports sector of this city. Due to the psychological problems caused by the corona disease crisis, bodybuilding clubs are among the best environments for recovering and improving mental states. Hence, the sports authorities have paved the way for the closure and bankruptcy of many sports jobs due to the abandonment of emergency planning and the support of this group. One of the features of the emergency plan is the need to act quickly and make timely decisions to minimize the damage caused by the crisis, and it is natural that the owners of fitness clubs in Mashhad need as soon as possible the appropriate services and facilities for durability benefit from their



activities.

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