

Original Article

Compiling superstition prevalence model among football fans in ISM method

Mousa AbdolBaghi¹, Reza NikBakhsh², Hossein PoorSoltani Zandi³, Ali Mohammad Safa Nia⁴,

1. PhD Student, Department of Sports Management, Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran.
2. Associate professor of Sport management department, Islamic Azad university, South Tehran branch, Tehran, Iran
3. Assistant Professor of Sports Management, Payame Noor University, Karaj, Iran.
4. Professor, Department of Sports Management, Azad University, Research Sciences Branch, Tehran, Iran.

* Correspondence: NIKBAKHAH_REZA@yahoo.com

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Abstract: Present research is considered applied-developmental in its objective and qualitative concerning the research nature of data, and the research design was the interpretative structural model (ISM). In order to gather data, semi-structured in-depth interviews with experts in the consumer behavior domain, selected by theoretical sampling, have been utilized. The statistical population includes all sports managers, sports specialists, and fans, and sampling continued until theoretical sufficiency was achieved. After research completion, results were sent to two participants, and their opinions were approved by identifying indices related to football fans' superstitious behavior to draw the interpretative- structural model of factors influencing football fans' superstitious behavior. The result indicated the level of dependence and influence power of each index according to which individual characteristics and environmental conditions in the region under the influence include inculcation index in the autonomous region (independent) and indices of relief, the transmission of evil, coercion, and deterrence in the dependent region.

Keywords: Superstition; Fans; Football; Interpretive Structural Model.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, lots of time and energy have been allocated to sports activities, and they have found important status in the culture of societies (Zare, Zare & Emadi, 2017). The behaviors of sports fans are various and indicate the most expansive entertainment and leisure activities (Dwyer, LeCrom, Greenhalgh, 2018). Unfortunately, sports fans' beliefs and behavior do not influence the competitive results of the intended teams (Knobloch et al. 2009). Athletic competitions are influenced by lots of stable and unstable factors (such as skill and how the referee judges or the quality of the competitor team). For this purpose, to control chance or unstable factors and reduce mental stresses, a superstition phenomenon has been created among those engaged in sport, specifically sports fans (Brevers et al. 2011). The tendency to control or confront uncertainty (ambiguity) is a fundamental motivation power in human behavior. Superstitions point to illogical beliefs in which an object, activity, or conditions logically related to a group of events influence its result (Damisch, Stoberock & Mussweiler, 2010). In other words, an event happens, and individuals relate it to another event that they imagine has caused it. These events may be related or related accidentally. Disregarding it, we will search for patterns among events to explain unexpected results and face uncertainty (Beck and Forestmeier, 2007). Meanwhile, Whalen (1968) acknowledges that feeling unable to control an essential implication influences individuals from psychological and physical points of view. Of course, to prevent annoyance and confront uncertainty, sports fans perform rituals before play begins and sometimes implement superstitious attempts during games (Tamir, 2019).

On the other side, previous studies have introduced different factors potentially influencing superstitious behavior. These factors include control source, level of competition, how long a game lasts, type of sports field, type one character, sports identity, personal control, optimism, and pessimism (Burke et al. 2006). According to control source theory, one of the characteristics of a person is to attribute life events to outer phenomena (such as luck, the event of other influences) to inner phenomena (such as will and effort). Those whose control source is external are less motivated by the consequence of the accomplished job, which means continuous failure does not make them motiveless, and success does not excite them that much because they do not attribute the successful efficiency of the accomplished job to themselves. These feel less responsible for their job and try to attribute the consequence of jobs to external factors. On the other side, those whose

control source is internal believe that effort and appropriate decision-making are the causes of their success, and the consequence of their performance will influence their future behavior and will be more motivated after achieving success (Ross and Mirowsky, 2002). While it is impossible to examine the influence of these behaviors on the actual match results and is difficult to be measured, its influence on sports fans has not yet been identified; by the way, it will contribute to sports marketers and managers to know experiences of sports fans, especially how they confront uncertainty (Dwyer et al. 2018). Feeling that one cannot control his emotions from the perspective of fans is an exclusive challenge for sports marketers. Marketers, not regarding the success or failure of a team are continuously trying to improve the positive experiences of sports fans, and in most cases, 50 percent of sports fans experience their team failure every night or week (Dwyer et al. 2018).

On the other side, Hanks et al. (2016) acknowledge that religious rituals may establish sports fans and excite positive emotions created by teams, fans, and advertisers. Therefore, superstitious behaviors are closely related to fans' behaviors and have been mixed with sport and even influenced those fans who do not attend stadiums. These behaviors are typically the result of hypotheses based on uncertainty, increasing one's tendency to be controlled by another factor, and superstitious behaviors may be controlled (Wilson et al. 2013).

In this way, those fans who cannot control their athletic performance believe that they should resort to superstitious behaviors, including eating a specific lunch, wearing special cloth, doing specific jobs, and even having specific beliefs (Dwyer et al. 2017). Even Tamir (2016) found that fanatic fans of professional football consciously avoid watching their favorite team match because they believe that they can influence the result of the game, and if they do not attend the stadium, their favorite team will get better results. However, McDonald et al. (2014) acknowledge that religious rituals (as a subset of superstition) may be helpful for sports fans because they will lead to stress reduction and socialization and ultimately enjoying these experiences. So, considering contradictions in previous research, lack of studies in the area of superstition in sport, and possible cultural differences, the researcher will answer the following question: Does the superstition model have appropriate goodness of fit?



2. Methods

Methods The present research is developmental-applied in its objective and considered qualitative in data collection considering the nature of research. In this research interpretative structural model has been used. In order to collect data, in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts in the consumers' behavior field selected by theoretical sampling have been utilized. The statistical population of research includes all athletic managers, sports specialists, and fans. Sampling continued till attaining theoretical sufficiency, which mentions the situation in which no more data may be found for the researcher to use for the development of each category's characteristics. The scientific samples had an M.A. degree and were trained in sports management with at least five years

of work experience. In the present research, in order to measure validity, indices including being proportionate and applicable were used. In the dimension of being applicable, research findings added to the existing knowledge in the field under study and may be used to understand and manage future situations in the related field practically. For this purpose, results were sent to two participants, and their opinion was approved.

3. Results

In order to draw the structural-interpretative model, initially, the indices influencing the superstitious behavior of sports fans were identified, and then according to stages in table 1, indices were identified, and the model was drawn.

Table 1. How to identify indices of football fans' superstitious behavior

Stages	Measures (actions)
Stage one	Deep interview with research sample
Stage two	Analysis of data obtained from interview using grounded theory based on the following stages
	Open coding interviews and identifying 89 primary codes
	Axial coding and identifying 12 concepts
	Selective coding and identifying 7 categories including
	Coercion
	Deterrence
	Relief
	Transmission of evil
	Inculcation
	Environmental conditions related to superstition
	Personal characteristics

After identifying indices related to football fans' superstitious behavior, in order to draw the structural-interpretative model of factors determining football fans' superstitious behavior, stages included: In order to organize the structural interaction matrix, a seven-by-seven matrix consisting of indices was drawn and provided for the sample. Sample members completed matrices based on the following principles, and for each *i* and *j* the relation of these two variables in the framework of the study is as follows:

V: Index in line *i* contributes to arriving at column *j* index.

A: Index in column *j* contributes to arriving at line *A* index.

x: There is a mutual relation between factors in line *i* and column *j*.

O: indices in column *j* and line *i* have no relationship. Result: self-interaction matrix in figure 1 is indicated.



Table 2. The state of correlation of variables

	Coercion	Deterrence	Relief	Transmission of evil	Inculcation	Environmental conditions	Personal characteristics
Coercion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deterrence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relief	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Transmission of evil	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Inculcation	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Environmental conditions	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Personal characteristics	1	1	1	1	1	0	0

Figure 1 indicates the level of dependency and influence power for each index according to which indices of personal characteristics and environmental conditions in the region under the influence, inculcation index in the autonomous region (independent), and indices of inculcation, the transmission of evil, coercion, and deterrence are in the dependent region. Autonomous factors include

factors with weak and moderate influence on power and dependence. Dependent factors have low influence power but relatively high dependence. These factors are usually targeted or result variables. Linking factors have high guiding power and dependence; influential factors have a high level of influence but low dependence (Malon, 2014).

**Figure 1.** MicMac analysis result

In the second stage, in order to determine indices level and their priority, availability and prerequisite collection for each factor is determined. Availability collection includes indices being influenced by this index, and the prerequisite collection includes indices influencing this index. These effects and influences are attained through the availability matrix. Each target with more significant influence relative to

other targets is located at a lower level in the ISM model because, in the ISM model, influence is rated from down to top. Level points to layers designed for the final model. To attain other levels, it is required that previous levels be separated from the matrix and the process be repeated.

Considering MicMac software output, the final model will be shown in figure 2.



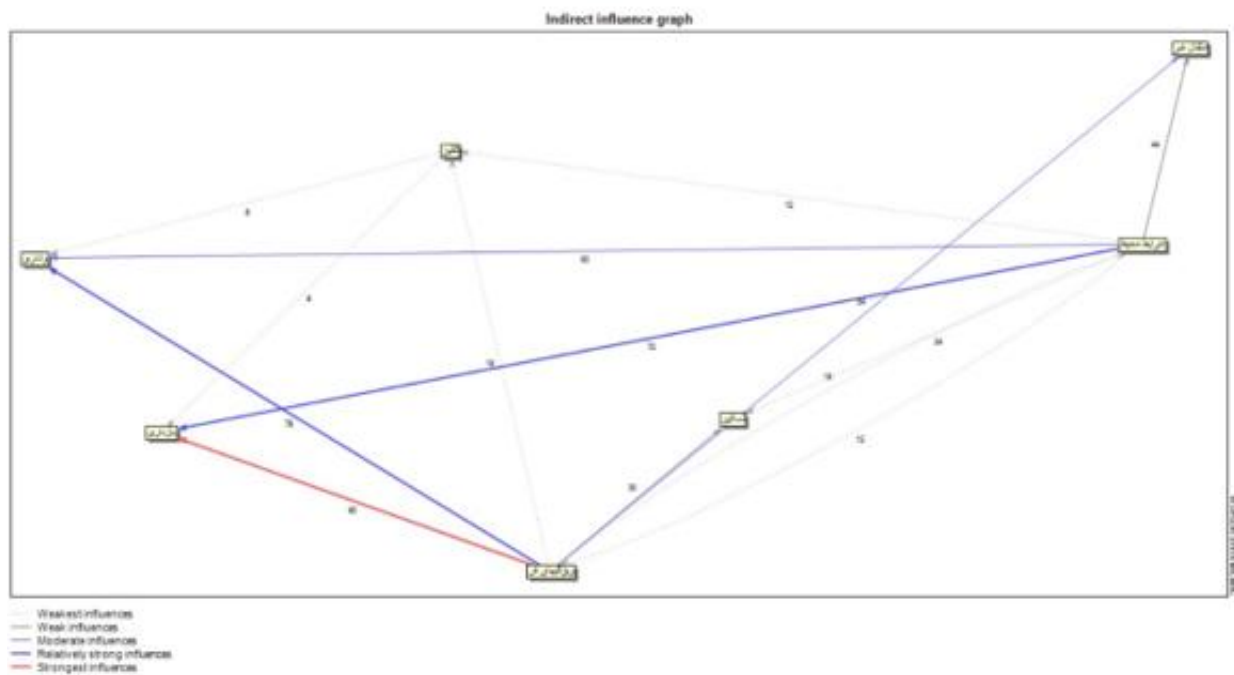


Figure 2. structural-interpretative model of superstitious behavior indices among football fans
 In figure 4 structural interpretative model of indices related to superstition is briefly presented

Figure 2- structural-interpretative model of superstitious behavior indices among football fans

In figure 3 structural interpretative model of indices related to superstition is briefly presented.

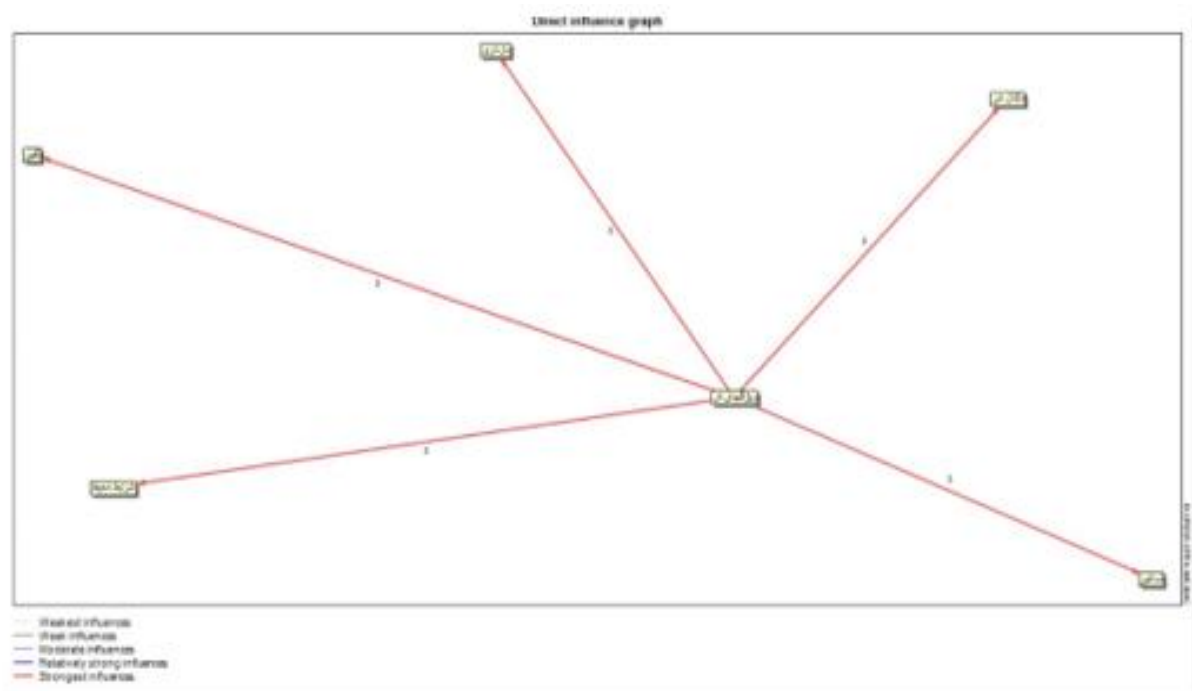


Figure 3. structural-interpretative model of superstitious behavior indices among football fans in simplified mode



4. Discussion

Nowadays, sports activities include lots of time and energy in every society and have found a critical position in culture and attracted many fans. By the way, some fans are fanatic, and some are normal; being fanatic makes them express different behaviors. For instance, fanatic fans' behavior is expressed in different ways, including social superstition, competitive behavior with family members, friends, and competitors, and establishing fan clubs. Meanwhile, numerous pieces of research indicate that people with external control sources are more likely to lean toward superstition compared to those with internal control sources. By the way, the effectiveness of these behaviors on actual results of matches is nearly impossible and difficult to be measured, but its influence on sports fans has remained unknown. By the way, it may help sports marketers and managers be acquainted with the experiences of sports fans, especially confrontation of sports fans with uncertainty because marketers are continuously trying to improve the positive experiences of sports fans without regarding teams' success or failure (Dwyer et al. 2018). Due to the lack of study and research in the field of superstition in sport and especially among sports fans, and also possible cultural differences in this domain with other countries, which may influence reviewing the superstition model in a sport relative to other cultures and countries, the present study was designed to answer the questions related to the model of superstition in Iran.

According to the results, one of the reasons for the tendency to superstition is to coerce people to do jobs that others and sometimes even themselves enjoy benefits but they are not aware of themselves. For this purpose, some requirements that one should develop in himself are introduced as beliefs. In fact, motivating individuals to respect these beliefs help them to avoid unluckiness resulting from disobeying these beliefs and will not motivate them to accomplish these jobs by considering rewards. According to psychology science, the reward is, in fact, a response that people receive by doing actions. It is not surprising that superstitious people suffer from mental impairment due to feeling anxious, depressed, and lack of control over their life events. If people do not feel secure, they will have more tendency toward the belief that some behaviors bring luckiness or unluckiness. In the past, sometimes it was required that people be prevented from undesirable behavior without providing logical ground to make them believe its evilness; so, it was pretended that the mentioned job or behavior would compromise their life or even if they don't regard, their life will be exposed to risk. Research results indicate that some beliefs informally control individuals, and considering them will keep them safe. In fact, feeling afraid of potential risk will provide a guarantee for obeying some rules.

Some part of the obtained results was consistent with the result of research made by ChoobBasti et al. (2009) and Servatyari et al. (2018) and inconsistent with Zarei et al. (2017). ChoobBasti et al. (2009) found in their research that 25% of the research sample are likely to be superstitious. The results of Servatyari et al. (2018) study indicated that just 15.8 percent of individuals under study tended to be superstitious. However, Zarie et al. (2017), in their research on factors influencing the tendency to superstition among Iranian football players, found that the level of the tendency to superstition among Iranian football players is moderate (about 41 percent). The reason for this inconsistency may be different among societies. Zarei et al. (2017) studied football players, and since football players always are concerned about being winner, loser, and luck, these subjects engage them mentally due to the importance of matches and the anxiety before matches begin; for this reason, superstition among these players is more influential compared to sports fans. Concerning this finding, it should be explained that superstition points to illogical beliefs influenced by activities or conditions related logically to a group of events (Damisch et al. 2010). In other words, an event occurs, and individuals relate it to another event that seems to have caused it. These events may be related or accidentally related, and if one disregards this fact, searching for patterns among events is to explain unexpected results and confront uncertainty (Beck and Forstmeier, 2007). By the way, currently, superstition is considered a dilemma in most societies, including sports. Superstition, as a phenomenon made by a human being, may be regarded the only dilemma that continues its life despite changes, transformations, development, and growth of societies which not only has not lowered its intensity but also it seems that its followers and fans have increased. There is no doubt that superstition exists among the world population, including in Iran. Some of these beliefs are considered superstitious because science is unable to prove them; by the way, nowadays, a large part of them, compared with average knowledge of people, seems incorrect and inappropriate. Some of these beliefs originate from myths and particular interpretations of religious principles, which are admitted by words of mouth without any investigation of their accuracy. The importance of superstition is that superstition and superstitious beliefs may have an influence on the superstitious behavior of individuals because human behavior originates from his beliefs and ideas. Dwyer et al. (2018) concluded that superstition in sports significantly influences superstitious behavior. In explaining the obtained result, it may be explained that the most prevalent culture growing increasingly among sports fans is superstitious behaviors (Hanx et al. 2016). Furthermore, sports superstitions are repetitive, formal, and subsequent attempts separate



from technical performance, and the athlete or fan believes that these behaviors may control chance or external factors (Blake and Fredrick, 1998).

5. Conclusions

By the way, one must distinguish between superstitious behaviors and actual behaviors because superstitions are activities with symbolic value. For example, consider a sports fan who sits on a unique chair and place. While this behavior is beyond being a habit but it is confirmed in principle, while superstition is the behavior and attempt that is imagined that may result in specific results. For instance, the same sports fan may sit in all games on a specific chair and argue that there is a causal relationship between his chair and game result; this behavior is considered superstition (Rwan et al. 2014). In this relation, we are required to pay attention to the point that superstitious behavior occurs when in specific situations, there are lots of

presumptions about the reason and influence of influential factors on the specific behavior of an individual. Accordingly, superstitious behaviors occur when predicting the result is impossible and competition is significant (Demeter et al., 2016).

On the other hand, it is proven that these behaviors among fans increase the value of that sports organization, and this may result in the benefit of sports organization in different modes, including goods sale or their different services. Sports teams and organizations take advantage of these behaviors directly or indirectly from establishing behavioral loyalty to positive influence on mental moods, so they should be managed effectively (Dwyer, 2017). Now it is required to pay attention that usually, the perspective of individuals is reflected in their behavior, so those with positive attitudes toward superstition may also express superstitious behaviors.

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تدوین مدل شیوع خرافات در بین هواداران فوتبال به روش ISM

موسی عبدالباقی^۱، رضا نیکبخش^۲، حسین پورسلطانی زندی^۳، علی محمد صفا نیا^۴

۱. دانشجوی دکتری، گروه مدیریت ورزشی، دانشگاه آزاد، واحد علوم و تحقیقات، تهران، ایران

۲. دانشیار گروه مدیریت ورزشی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، واحد تهران جنوب، تهران، ایران

۳. استادیار گروه مدیریت ورزشی، دانشگاه پیام نور، کرج، ایران

۴. استاد، گروه مدیریت ورزشی، دانشگاه آزاد، واحد علوم و تحقیقات، تهران، ایران

* نویسنده مسئول: NIKBAKHAH_REZA@yahoo.com

چکیده: پژوهش حاضر از نظر هدف جزء مطالعات کیفی و از نظر ماهیت پژوهشی داده‌ها از نوع کاربردی-توسعه‌ای است و طرح تحقیق مدل ساختاری تفسیری (ISM) بوده است. به منظور جمع‌آوری داده‌ها، از مصاحبه‌های عمیق نیمه ساختاریافته با کارشناسان حوزه رفتار مصرف‌کننده که به روش نمونه‌گیری نظری انتخاب شده‌اند، استفاده شده است. جامعه آماری شامل کلیه مدیران ورزشی، متخصصان ورزشی و هواداران بودند و نمونه‌گیری تا حصول اشباع نظری ادامه یافت. پس از اتمام تحقیق، نتایج برای دو شرکت‌کننده ارسال شد و نظرات آنها با شناسایی شاخص‌های مربوط به رفتار خرافی هواداران فوتبال برای ترسیم مدل تفسیری-ساختاری عوامل موثر بر رفتار خرافی هواداران فوتبال مورد تایید قرار گرفت. نتیجه، میزان وابستگی و قدرت نفوذ هر شاخص را نشان می‌دهد که بر اساس آن ویژگی‌های فردی و شرایط محیطی در منطقه تحت تأثیر شامل شاخص تلقین در منطقه خودمختار (مستقل) و شاخص‌های امداد، انتقال شر، اجبار و بازدارندگی در منطقه وابسته بود.

واژه‌های کلیدی: خرافات؛ طرفداران؛ فوتبال؛ مدل ساختاری تفسیری؛

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استناد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.