UMZ

Journal of International Marketing Modeling
Volume 6, Issue 2, pp. 63-73, 2026
Journal homepage: *http://jimm.journals.umz.ac.ir*
ISSN 2717-381X

Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences

An Analysis of Personal Branding Tactics Strategies in Athletes' Professional Success

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Abstract

Brands are a symbol of product identity and even of human beings, because much of a person's future success depends on his or her personal abilities and the use of available devices to build and develop a desirable image of oneself. Using personal branding can also be a tool for achieving professional success for athletes. The present study, regarding the purpose, is applied-developmental and, regarding the nature and method of data collection, is descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of this study consists of athletes in Sanandaj. From this population, using non-random sampling and based on the researcher's decision, 100 people were selected as sample members among the athletes of the city. The main tool for data collection in this study is a standard questionnaire and its validity was confirmed by professional professors in management discipline and its total reliability was above 0.7. Regarding the type of research and variables, SPSS software and PLS software have been used to analyze statistical data and test research hypotheses. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses, all the used factors have a significant effect on professional success, among which self-modeling has the highest impact and self-promoting has the lowest impact on the professional success of athletes.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Professional Success, Sanandaj Athletes.

1. Introduction

Success at work has undoubtedly been one of the most important challenges of almost all time. Since it is often argued that individual success is correlated to organizational success, identifying the right predictions and consequently improving professional success predictions is a major concern for business owners. Personality traits can play an important role in this regard and most of a person's decisions and behaviors depend on his/her personality (Paleczek, 2018). Personality traits are closely related to the performance and success of employees' careers so that they can pave the way for achieving predetermined goals (Turban & Moakem, 2016). For a person, career success is a variety of self-growth, job security, job enrichment, achieving a better position, increasing the richness of life and establishing work-family balance (Samiei, Saqian & Abedi, 2014). Career success is a concept that results from assessment of one's current situation and ideals in employment. Success or failure depends on relative estimate of the ideals (Ramaswami, et al., 2016). At individual level, career success refers to attaining financial, power, and job satisfaction. Therefore, awareness of career success helps individuals develop appropriate strategies for career progress (Doubell & Struwig, 2014). Personal branding is a new marketing concept that deals with marketing strategies that people use to introduce themselves to a market.

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Received 28 March 2026; Received in revised form 11 April 2026; Accepted 25 April 2026
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Personal branding is an individualistic approach. Personal branding says that regardless of age, position and business anyone can use personal branding to introduce himself/herself (Khedher, 2014). Branding is to benefit products and services from the power of each brand. Branding generally refers to creating differences. The purpose of branding is to create value that cannot be achieved in any other way (Ahmadi & Mirabi, 2015). Personal branding is marketing oneself in community, which is derived from skills, abilities and lifestyle of the person, and its development is possible through his/her interactions (Johnson, 2017). The first thing to consider in creating a successful brand is to make a difference. The best strategy to form a strong brand is creating a different understanding of the concept, and in addition to being different, the most important step in the process, of becoming a famous brand, is to be different from opponents (Acker, 2013). Career path has different meanings, but a characteristic that is emphasized in most definitions is progress and development. In fact, career path, like life stages, has cycles and steps that passing through each stage of life has impacts on career path. One of the things that can lead to success in your career is personal branding. Personal branding and creating it is easy, but it is difficult to reveal the salient features and to continue and control it since everyone has a personal brand. The attractiveness of personal branding is in the lack of influence from demographic variables and regional restrictions in its creation, so in this study we have selected the statistical population of both men and women, and we have chosen the regional restrictions in a small city because the success of personal branding does not necessarily depend on being international or national, and there are probably many personal brands that have been raised at the regional and local levels and have achieved considerable success. The purpose of this study is determining the effect of personal branding tactics on the professional success of the athletes in Sanandaj. Professional success is actually a way for people to fulfill their needs to achieve success and power in their career. Moreover, career success, as an outcome, is conceptually the objective and subjective elements of success through an individual's work experience (Andrea et al., 2011). The similarity between people's career with their personality traits has a lot merits, including creating a sense of commitment among the employees (Abdollahpour et al., 2016). Professional success has found a high status as a criterion and progress in the lives of most Iranian people, success at work has undoubtedly been one of the most important challenges for almost all ages. Because it is often argued that individual success is related to organizational success, identifying the right predictions and thus improving professional success predictions is a major concern for business owners. Personality traits can play an important role in this regard and many decisions and behaviors of a person depend on his/her personality (Paleczek, 2018). Career work can have different meanings, but the characteristic that is emphasized in most definitions is progress and advancement. In fact, career path work, like life stages, has cycles and stages. Going through every stage of life cannot be without impact on the career path. One of the things that can lead to success in your career is personal branding. Personal branding is easy to create, the difficulty is in revealing the salient feature or features and its continuity and control because everyone has a personal brand. The attractiveness of personal branding is in the lack of influence of demographic variables and spatial range in its creation, so in this study we have considered the statistical population as both women and men and we have considered the spatial range as a small city because the success of Personal branding does not necessarily depend on the brand being international or national, and there are probably many personal brands that have been raised at the regional and local level and have achieved some success. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of personal branding tactics on the professional success of athletes in Sanandaj.

2. Theoretical background

Aspects of career success are:

- *Progress* is a motivation that leads a person to specialize in a job and promote in the organization. This dimension of job success can manifest itself in the organizational position, responsibilities, rights and power of an individual in the organization.
- *Security and freedom* are strong, stable and predictable position of a job within an organization. In this dimension of career success, people are independent enough to be creative in their work.
- *Promotion* is a continuous growth in areas of technical and applied skills that encourages people to achieve skills in their field of work in the organization.

- *Balancing needs and values* are the harmony between working values and non-working values. In addition to working life, individuals should also develop their personal and family life (Samiei et al., 2014).

Professional (career path) success, that is always the most important part of a person's life path, is a continuous and evolutionary process that is affected by a set of general psychological, sociological, educational, economic and random factors. In this process, many factors such as skills, abilities, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that must exist in people to succeed in work and profession need to be considered and investigated (Ragan et al., 2012). These qualifications include non-technical, and general qualifications such as problem solving, systematic thinking, critical and creative thinking, communication, teamwork, social responsibility, management and leadership, lifelong learning (Motaharinejad, 2012). Personal branding is a process of gathering individual skills, personalities and characteristics and then turning them into an identity that is more powerful than opponents. The personal branding power depends on the distinction, appropriateness and compatibility of a brand regarding the person (Frendika et al., 2018). Creating a successful brand requires that branding be regarded as an investment, not a cost. The willingness toward investing in branding is weak in Asia and developing countries. Too much emphasis on short-term thinking and action undermines branding and marginalizes it. In most cases, consistent with changing the good feeling factor to a brand, the value of financial investment to the subject of branding also changes and the brand is viewed as a strategic asset that can have multiple and more values than noticeable assets (Javani, 2017). In order to recognize and promote a personal brand, it must have its own unique features that are easily identifiable. As a result, a personal brand is about a person who separates himself or herself from others. To achieve this goal, one must identify and express the characteristics and propositions of one's own value. There are two characteristics that can be measured in a personal branding. The first is brand talent, it means that the brand must create a clear idea of what the brand is called. The second is brand quality; the brand must have a positive reputation in order to be perceived as a high-quality brand (Pyhtila, 2015). Personal branding saves people from anonymity and introduces them for a specific reason and in a specific field (Luca et al., 2015). A personal brand is a combination of all the expectations, images and perceptions about a character, that is, when people see or hear name of the person, that image or perception that belongs to the brand comes into their minds (Daliri, 2017). A personal brand is basically defined as a name, design, symbol or any combination that helps a person to differentiate in a competition. According to this definition, a person can definitely become a brand. Because any person has a distinct appearance and a unique personality (Arai, 2010). Personal brand refers to a set of connotations of characteristics of a particular person (Parmentier & Fisher, 2012). A personal brand is related to a person's personality to the general public. Therefore, people have a strong role in building their own personal brand (Cortsen, 2013). In fact, personal branding is a process by which individuals and their activities are marked in the form of brands, all through it they manage reputation, perception and understanding of the public in order to differentiate themselves from the others (Karaduman, 2013). Today's modern marketing environment has increasingly become an important setting for creating and promoting personal brands. From a scientific point of view, personal branding is an important issue. Because much of a person's future success depends on his or her ability to use the available tools to create and develop a pleasant image of himself or herself. Many people have unique identities and characteristics that are similar to corporate brands. Similar to traditional products and brands, for example, many professionals have a distinctive symbol, a fan group, and even a set of characteristics that set them apart from their opponents (Hodge & Walker, 2015). A personal brand is something more than just the power to influence sales and marketing in a competitive environment. In the personal brand, the effect of communication and the creation of relationships based on cooperation and the having positive thinking is important (Hubert & Rampersad, 2009).

3. Empirical background

Azizi et al. (2017), in a study entitled "Presenting a personal branding model of business educators based on Grounded Theory" according to the research results, the main phenomenon is personal branding process that according to causal conditions (Motivational models, Role model, Demand increase), underlying factors (individual infrastructure, cultural factors) and intervening factors (legal infrastructure, economic conditions,

competitive environment in the industry) have been formed and through strategies of marketing techniques, determining a standard performance framework, using different types of mass media, active physical presence, trusting, creating differentiation and social attitude lead to four categories of business development outcomes, social acceptance, income increase and credit increase.

Ogoto (2016), in a study entitled "The study of the relationship between personal branding and job success in the Geometric Development Company in Kenya" results showed that personal branding was important to the respondents regardless of their gender, but the interpretations of the statistical sample of the Geometric Company indicate the importance of self-promotion in personal branding.

Pyhtila (2015), in a study entitled "Branding football players through social media" concluded that football players must brand themselves and use media and networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter for branding and introducing themselves and have to design web pages for themselves. In addition, not only should they have a positive image, but also their supporters should have a positive image so as not to damage the brand.

Khedher (2014), in a study examined "personal branding". His results were presented in the form of necessary steps for branding. The first step is to create a brand identity, people need to differentiate and separate themselves from a population, while meeting the expectations of a specific target market. The second step is to develop a business position by creating active communication of brand identity through behavior management, communication and symbolism. The third step is to evaluate a brand image to achieve personal and professional goals, and hence, personal branding practices can help compete in the job market. Individuals involved in personal branding invest their human resources by investing in continuous learning; increasing their social capital through views, legends and access to financial success and economic profitability.

Studies in the field of branding may be extensive, but there are gaps in the study of personal branding, and in Iran, this issue has been less explored systematically, and in this study, it has been attempted to emphasize the fact that personal branding at a regional and local level can also be successful. For this reason, in this study, the desired location was considered as a small western city, namely Sanandaj.

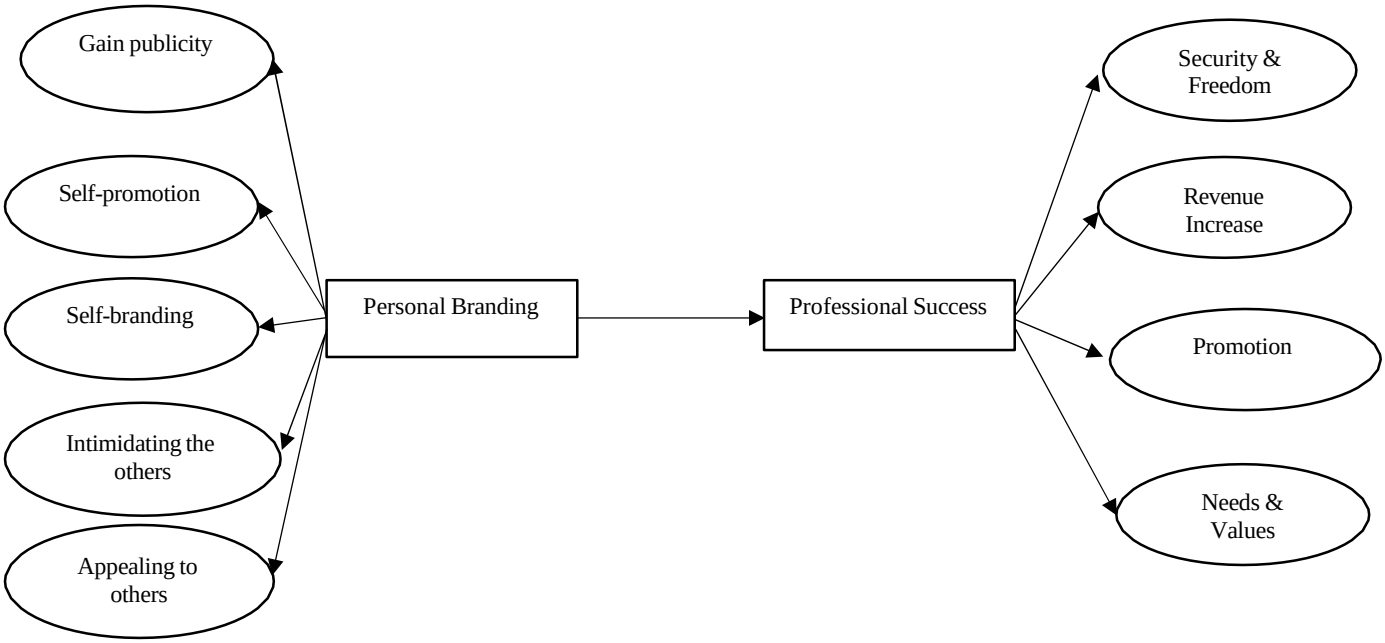

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research based on the theoretical support of research

4. Methodology

The present study, regarding the purpose, is applied-developmental and regarding the nature and method of data collection, is descriptive-correlational. The main data collection tool in this study is the standard questionnaire, which was used for personal branding by Ogoto standard questionnaire (2016) and for professional success, Leicester standard questionnaire (1990). The statistical population of the present study consisted of athletes in Sanandaj, using a non-random-available sampling method, it was tried to use comprehensive samples (from all age and gender groups and ranges, etc.) to maintain the comprehensiveness of the research. A total of 100 people were selected based on the principle of data saturation and receiving multiple opinions of sample members. The validity of the research questionnaires was confirmed by 5 professors of management discipline and the total reliability of the questionnaires was above 0.7, which indicated a good reliability of the research questionnaires. According to the type of research and the type of variables, for analyzing statistical data and examining research hypotheses SPSS and PLS statistical software were used to analyze research hypotheses in two descriptive and inferential parts.

5. Findings

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the research sample members

Demographic variable name	Levels	Frequency Percentage
Marital status		23
	Married	77
	20-30 years	12
Age	31-40 years	29
	41-50 years	30
	More than 50 years	29
	1-5 years	8
Experience		14
	11-15 years	21
	16-20 years	19
	More than 20 years	38
	Between 1 to 2 million tomans	36
Income	Between 2 and 4 million tomans	27
	Between 4 and 6 million tomans	21
	More than 6 million tomans	16
	Soccer	32
	Wrestling	27
Sport	Boxing	15
	Volleyball	16
	Basketball	10

Loadings are calculated by assessing the correlation value of indices of a structure with that structure. If this value is equal to or greater than 0.4, it confirms that the variance between the structure and its indices is greater than the variance of the measurement error of that structure and the reliability of that measurement model is acceptable (Mohammadi & Shaemi Barzaki, 2014). According to Table (5), all the loadings' coefficients values of the questions are more than 0.40, and therefore it is not necessary to remove any of them, and it can be concluded that the model has a good reliability.

Table 2. Loading's coefficients of model structures

Structure	Dimensions	Questions	Loading	AVE validity)	AVE (Divergent validity)
Personal Branding	Self-promotion	Q_1	0.823	0.795	0.721
		Q_2	0.810	0.687	
		Q_3	0.841	0.641	
	Gain publicity	Q_4	0.742	0.712	
		Q_5	0.885	0.761	
		Q_6	0.854	0.801	
	Self-modeling	Q_7	0.870	0.791	
		Q_8	0.869	0.701	
		Q_9	0.782	0.742	
	appealing to the others	Q_{10}	0.864	0.816	
		Q_{11}	0.759	0.683	
		Q_{12}	0.878	0.676	
	Intimidating other competitors	Q_{13}	0.860	0.811	
		Q_{14}	0.824	0.616	
		Q_{15}	0.783	0.714	
Professional Success	Security and Freedom	Q_{16}	0.861	0.866	0.687
		Q_{17}	0.877	0.827	
		Q_{18}	0.886	0.652	
	Revenue increase	Q_{19}	0.840	0.671	
		Q_{20}	0.897	0.625	
		Q_{21}	0.872	0.671	
	Promotion	Q_{22}	0.830	0.621	
		Q_{23}	0.841	0.701	
		Q_{24}	0.762	0.613	
	Needs and values	Q_{25}	0.855	0.671	
		Q_{26}	0.858	0.769	
		Q_{27}	0.833	0.619	

Before examining the research hypotheses, it should be scrutinized whether the data distribution has a normal distribution or not. Kolmogorov and Smirnov tests were used for this purpose. The research findings indicated that the research data were not normal since the significance level was lower than the alpha value (0.05). Therefore, to investigate the relationship between research variables, Spearman nonparametric test was used. On the other hand, since Smart PLS software is not sensitive to the normality of the data, there will be no problem in the test validation.

Table 3. The relationship between personal branding and professional success of the athletes

Variables	Professional Success	Security & Freedom	Security & Freedom	Promotion	Needs & values
Personal branding	0.721	0.689	0.712	0.691	0.705
Gain publicity	0.652	0.641	0.718	0.519	0.593
Self-promotion	0.581	0.593	0.613	0.587	0.619
Self-modeling	0.725	0.703	0.621	0.691	0.647
Intimidating others	0.561	0.655	0.520	0.643	0.681
Appealing the others	0.631	0.609	0.637	0.725	0.712

The results of Spearman test in Table (3) show that the relationship between personal branding and professional success of athletes, with a coefficient of 0.721, is positive and significant. Spearman correlation is also calculated in the sub-indices, the highest one is related to "self-modeling" and "professional success" with a coefficient of 0.725.

5.1. Goodness of fit (GOF)

The general model includes both parts of the measurement and structural model, which, by confirming its fit, examines the fit in a complete model. The GOF criterion is used to check the fit of the overall model. Three values of 0.01, 0.25 and 0.36 are considered as weak, medium and strong values for GOF. This criterion is calculated using the following formula:

GOF = $\sqrt{\overline{communalities} \times \overline{R^2}} = \sqrt{0/71 \times 0/76} = 0.73$

$\overline{communalities}$ Is obtained from the average of the common values of the first-order hidden variables in this study with 0.71. To calculate $\overline{R^2}$ the values of $\overline{R^2}$ must be considered for all the hidden endogenous variables of the model, and their mean values must be calculated (Mohammadi & Shaemi Barzaki, 2014). In this study, this value is equal to 0.76. Considering the three criteria values for GOF and obtaining the number 0.73, we conclude that the model has a strong overall fit.

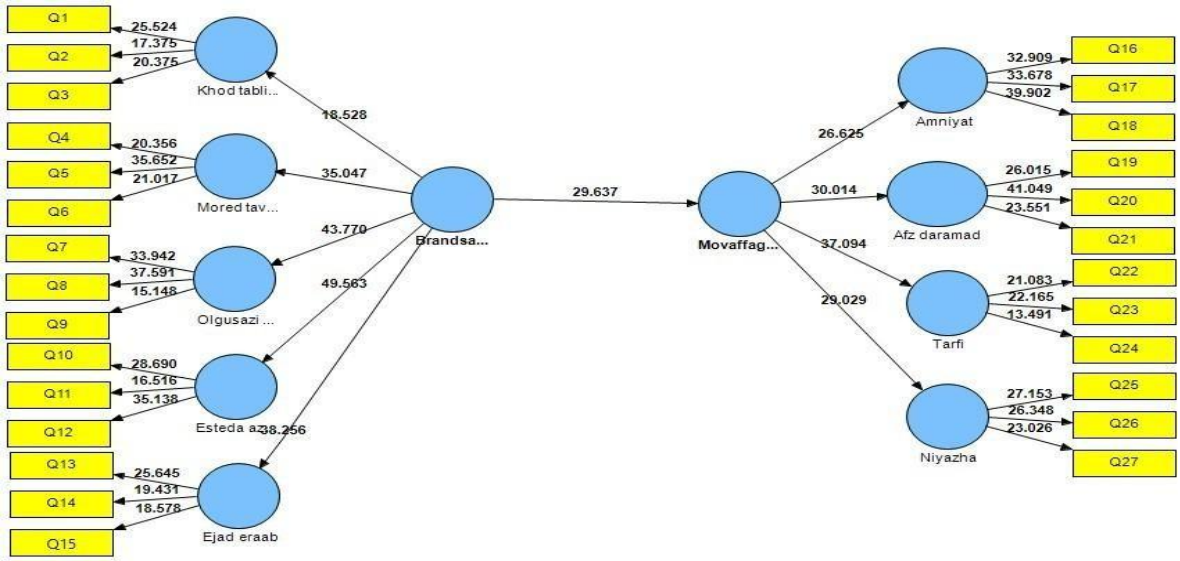

Figure 2. Significance coefficient of Z (T-values) in significance mode

According to Figure (2), that is the final outcome of Smart PLS software, the proposed model has the necessary validity. This is because the significant values, sometimes called the t-statistic or the Z (T-values), are higher than the base value of 1.96. As long as the estimated value is higher than the set base value, the model has the necessary validity and further interpretation of the results does not require any change in the structure of the model. The t-coefficient between personal branding structure and career success is 29.637 that is more than 1.96 then indicates confirmation of the research hypothesis at the assurance level of 0.95 and shows that personal branding has a significant effect on the professional success of the athletes in Sanandaj.

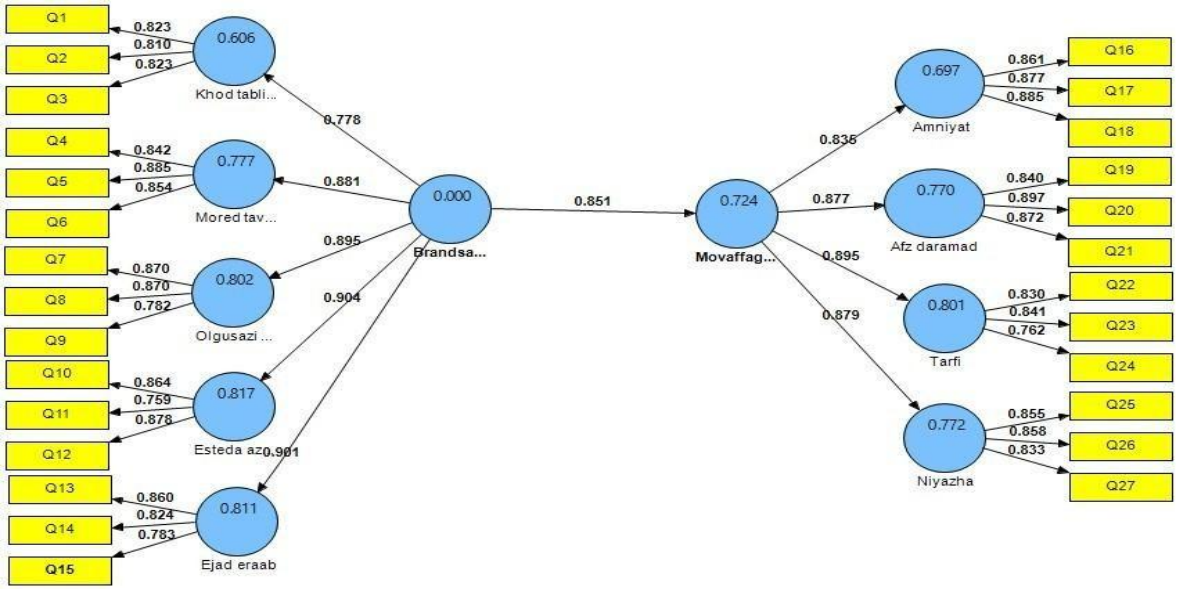

Figure 3. Significance coefficient of Z (T-values) in standard mode

According to Figure (3), the standardized coefficient between personal branding and professional success was 0.851. This means that the impact of personal branding on the professional success of the athletes is positive and significant.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Future success of an individual is mostly depending on his/her ability to use the available tools to develop a desirable image of himself/herself. Creating a personal brand can also foster a person's weakest skills. Personal branding also helps to build your credibility, self-confidence, originality and reliability among other people. The purpose of this study is determining the effect of personal branding tactics on the professional success of athletes in Sanandaj. The results of the statistical analysis showed that the correlation between branding and professional success of the athletes with a coefficient of 0.725 is in a positive direction and in the structural equations section, the Z-value had a coefficient of 29.637 and its standard coefficient was 0.851. The overall results confirmed the effectiveness of personal branding with professional success of the athletes. Among the dimensions of personal branding, the most effective one was the request from others with a coefficient of 0.904 and the least effective was self-promotion with a coefficient of 0.778. The results of the research are in line with the research of Azizi et al. (2017), Ogoto (2016), Pyhtila (2015) and Khedher (2014). Evidently, Ogoto (2016) considered self-promotion as the only used tactic to achieve professional success, whereas in this study, self-promotion had the least impact on professional success. Unfortunately, the personal branding literature, both in Persian and English, is not very rich. There are very limited writings and even they are not very influential. Basically, people who have a reputable personal brand should write about it, though it seems that such people do not like to do so and

expose the most personal parts of their behavior outline and planning. In line with the research, some practical suggestions are presented as follows:

- One of the ways for personal branding is to show the secondary abilities along with the main abilities. Academic education or activities other than sports can be helpful in a successful branding for the athletes.
- Popularity and fame are two completely different categories, since there are many famous athletes, however popular athletes are more limited than famous athletes. Therefore, it is suggested that athletes perform social responsibilities such as participating in popular campaigns or supporting certain organizations for special diseases or helping to combat child labor, etc. By doing so, they can gain popularity along with fame and also strengthen their personal brand.
- What is plainly obvious among athletes is a category called "smack talk". What we call criticizing and threatening opponents, in fact, those people try to create brands for themselves and try to gain popularity among their fans by creating controversies and destroying reputation of their opponents. Sometimes these smack talks may be just a show, but if done properly and ethically, it can be efficacious in branding people.
- For personal branding, it is not always needed to do it individually, athletes can be a part of a club brand in which they play or by introducing and expressing interest in the veterans of the field in which they work and do it at no cost.
- Another category that is new among athletes is called "white contract signing". They may lose some of their contract revenue by doing this, but with the popularity they are gaining from fans, it paves the way for them to earn more revenue. A clear example of this popularity is in cyberspace followers. These athletes can use this space to earn money in other ways, such as advertising.
- Sometimes athletes try to introduce themselves as a player who always tells the truth by saying vague sentences such as "backroom boys" or "sports mafia" and so on. The important point is that these sentences are never addressed to a specific person, and the person only tries to be seen by creating controversies in order to become famous in this way.
- Finally, it is suggested that this subject be surveyed specifically in a specific sport and be compared with the results of this study, because from such comparisons solutions can be offered for the professional success of athletes.

7. Acknowledgments

As the research group, we would like to express our wholehearted gratitude toward all those athletes who helped us to fill in the research questionnaires.

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