

# Esports Branding in an Era of Globalization: A Multimethod Analysis of FIFAE World Cup

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The research focuses on esports branding in the era of globalization, with a multimethod analysis of the FIFAE World Cup.

**Methodology:** This research was conducted in two parts: quantitative and qualitative. The statistical population of this study was experts in the field of brand and esports. Twenty people from the research community were interviewed and these people were selected as the statistical sample of the research. Fuzzy Delphi, the balanced scorecard, and Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchical Process used in this research.

**Finding:** The qualitative section identified the most important challenges in developing the brand of the FIFAE World Cup using the Fuzzy Delphi method, resulting in 17 concepts. In the quantitative part, the priority of each challenge affecting brand development was determined by the fuzzy analytic hierarchical process. The study found that weakness in the management structure was the most important challenge from the perspective of internal processes, neglect of research was the most important challenge from the perspective of growth and learning, ignorance of new methods of monetization and sponsorship were the most important challenges from the perspective of financial aspects, and weakness in service quality was the most important challenge from the perspective of customers.

**Originality:** The implications of this research suggest that using this model can help familiarize managers with priorities for addressing brand development challenges of the FIFAE World Cup and enable the integration of brand performance evaluation. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the challenges and strategies for developing the brand of the FIFAE World Cup and offers a structured approach for addressing these challenges.

**Key words:** Strategic Analysis, Brand Development, Balanced Scorecard, Esports.

## **1.Introduction**

In the 21st Century, globalization has spurred vast changes in all areas of business. Globalization, the interaction of businesses (or firms) and people worldwide, has accelerated due to advances in technology and communication. As business environments become increasingly competitive, the chances of success decrease. Hence, for firms to remain competitive, they will need to be flexible and develop effective business strategies; however, the factors that are necessary for firm success (or performance) can be challenging to identify (Tallman et al., 2018). Absolutely, identifying operational factors that are relevant to firm performance is crucial for small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) operating with limited resources. Kozechian et al. (2014) likely emphasized the significance of understanding and optimizing operational factors such as production efficiency, supply chain management, cost control, and quality management to enhance the overall performance of SMEs. By focusing on these operational factors, SMEs can improve their competitiveness and sustainability in the marketplace despite resource limitations, as discussed by Sui & Baum (2014). This underscores the importance of strategic and efficient management of operational factors for SMEs to thrive in challenging business environments.

One industry that embodies the effects of globalization is the esports industry. Esports are organized, competitive video gaming tournaments and competitions (Jang & Byon, 2020). The esports industry includes video game publishers and producers, content distribution platforms, events and tournaments, media organizations and sponsors, as well as the fans, teams, and players that support the industry (Carrillo Vera & Aguado Terrón, 2019; Qian et al., 2020). Major esports competitions have become high-profile international events and are increasingly a part of the established sports pantheon (Pizzo et al., 2019). For instance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) will produce the Olympic Virtual Series (OVS), a series of esports competitions designed to encourage physical and non-physical forms of sports (International Olympics Committee, 2021).

A brand contains various elements such as a name, logo, symbol, or a combination of these. These elements distinguish the goods and services of a company from a rival company (Kotler, 2019). Brand can have a competitive advantage in terms of selling products and services and gaining value (Bridgewater,

2010; Lee, 2017). A strong brand causes an integrated image of the company in the minds and as a result of using this brand, for other goods of the company, it will bring high efficiency, growth and reduction of costs (Naha & Hassan, 2018; Saber Sheikh, 2013).

On the other hand, the development of information technology in the world and its rapid entry into everyday life has created new issues and necessities, and e-business has replaced traditional methods. Nevertheless, the world of e-business is very confusing for many newcomers, and many face with a paradox that makes them hesitant to stay in this kind of businesses (FINCH, ABEZA, O'REILLY, & MIKKELSON, 2020). The term of esports is used to describe competitive and organized video games. This growing sector of the sport industry has the potential to affect millions of young people around the world. For example, it is predicted that in 2020 there will be \$ 23.5 billion turnover in this sector (Cunningham et al., 2018; Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018; Pizzo et al., 2018). Today, about 385 million people worldwide are involved in esports, and by 2020 that number will reach 589 million (Baker & Pizzo, 2021; DİLEK, 2019; FINCH et al., 2020; Pizzo, Jones, Baker, Funk, & Kunkel, 2021). For the citizens of Katowice, Poland, it is a familiar sight to see thousands of young people coming to the city to watch video games. For many other people, watching video games may seem an unusual behavior, but the people of this city have a different experience. Since 2013 which the first league of esports was held in the city, the tournament has quickly become a fun event, and every year many people from all over Poland and around the world come to this city for competing and meeting esports enthusiasts (Scholz, Scholz, & Barlow, 2019).

The FIFA Interactive World Cup (FIWC) is a renowned tournament in the world of competitive gaming. It has a rich history, starting in Switzerland in 2004 and expanding over the years. The competition gained recognition in the Guinness World Records in 2010, and by 2013, it had attracted over 2.5 million players. In 2015, the tournament integrated game consoles, allowing participants to compete using Xbox One and PlayStation 4. Subsequently, in 2018, the FIWC was renamed the FIFA e-World Cup (FeWC), and more recently, it has been rebranded as the FIFAE World Cup. Since 2016, the qualifying rounds of the FeWC have been held online using the PlayStation and Xbox networks, with players competing in the EA

Sports FIFA game. They can qualify for the final by participating in FIFA Global Series tournaments throughout the season or by excelling in online qualifiers or playoffs to reach the final 16 players. During the Grand Finals of the FeWC, 32 players compete, divided into four groups (two for each console). The top 16 players from these groups move on to the knockout stage. The tournament format includes a group stage, round of 16, quarterfinals, and semi-finals, with the final being a two-leg match played on both consoles. The FeWC Grand Finals is a multi-day event with draws and competitions spread over three days. The winner receives a substantial prize of \$250,000 and a ticket to the Best FIFA Awards, where they have the opportunity to meet prominent figures from the real football world. The Grand Finals are streamed live on platforms like YouTube and Twitch and have also been broadcast on TV in over 100 countries worldwide. The tournament's growing popularity and global reach, as well as its significant prize money and exposure through live broadcasts, underscore its importance in the world of competitive gaming.

Brand customers depending on their feeling to the brand; act differently (Leventhal, Hollebeek, & Chen, 2014). In essence, positive emotions towards the brand lead to the facilitation of recommendatory advertising for the brand, make customers more loyal, and increase people's willingness to forget brand misbehavior (Mahmoudabadi, 2019). While negative feelings about the brand are often considered inappropriate; because it leads to negative recommendatory advertising, increased complaints and protests, reduced support and retaliatory behaviors (Ramírez, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2019; Rasooli, Khabiri, Elahi, & Aghaee, 2016). The brand management process, if done properly and consistently, can increase the value of organizations. Recent research has also placed great emphasis on the concept of strategic branding (Abdolmaleki, 2020; Jensen & Beckmann, 2009; Price, Farrington, & Hall, 2013; Saatchian, 2012; Schnitzer, Scheiber, Lang, Brandstetter, & Kopp, 2014; Slavich, Dwyer, & Rufer, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014). Research has been done on the branding of sports clubs (Chanavat, 2017; Rezaei, 2015; A Richelieu, 2008), sports leagues (Khabiri, Ghaffari, & Elahi, 2004; Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2014; najafikolori, goodarzi, farahani, & esmaeli bidhendi, 2012; Slavich et al., 2018) and sports organizations (Asagba, 2009; Andre Richelieu & Lessard, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014). Although researchers have suggested

that academic research into esports should be developed (Funk et al., 2018), esports as a fledgling part of the sports industry are still being neglected.

It should be noted that no research has been done to examine the development of the brand in the field of esports. Also, no research has been found that examines branding strategy in sports in general and in esports in particular with a balanced scorecard approach. Therefore, proper brand management and review of the challenges of implementing the league branding strategy is essential to achieve international standards. In this regard, in this study, we try to identify the barriers affecting the development of the FeWC brand and classify and prioritize them based on BSC and fuzzy analytic hierarchical process (FAHP), and finally provide solutions for removing the barriers. So, the main research question is what are the challenges of developing FeWC brand?

## **2.Methodology**

The current study involved two phases. In the first phase, we developed an initial set of challenges and strategies affecting the brand of the FIFAE World Cup and refined this list through applying Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) with a panel of esports branding experts. This phase allowed us to identify the most important factors affecting brand of the FIFAE World Cup.

In the second phase, we collected data from esports branding experts, evaluated the relative importance of each factor according to Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP) method. We review the methods associated with each phase in the following sections.

### ***Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM)***

The Delphi method is a research method that seeks to establish consensus on a complex problem amongst a group of experts in a particular field (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). Experts' opinions are converged, typically via several rounds of questionnaires (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). The approach is well established in studying sport organizations (Abdolmaleki, Mirzazadeh, & Ghahfarokhhi, 2018; Anderson et al., 2019; Costa, 2005). The Delphi method is an effective

process of establishing consensus expert opinions in a given field. However, the method does have weaknesses including: 1) multiple survey cycles are time consuming for both participants and researchers; 2) multiple surveys are expensive to administer and analyze; 3) repeated expert cooperation is required before consensus emerges, needlessly increasing the difficulty of coordination and communication; 4) lack of complete consensus amongst experts makes it easy to misinterpret the collective position, especially for complex contexts; 5) the analytical process can weaken or exclude minority opinions (Hsu & Yang, 2000; Ishikawa et al., 1993).

To overcome these limitations, Murray et al. (1985) proposed integrating fuzzy set theory (Zadeh, 1965) with the Delphi method. Fuzzy set theory enables representation of the uncertainty and imprecision in real world systems. The key underlying principle of fuzzy set theory is that while some sets have sharply defined inclusion criteria, that is not the case in many applications and it can be useful to consider set membership along a continuum from totally not a member to totally a member (Zadeh, 1965). Thus, fuzzy theory has capacity to represent vague or imprecise data, directly incorporating a measure of uncertainty (Kahraman et al., 2004; Naghadehi et al., 2009). Applied to the Delphi method, membership degree establishes the membership function of each expert's perspective on each study element. Further refining the Fuzzy Delphi method (FDM), Ishikawa et al. (1993) introduced the max-min algorithm and fuzzy integration, which allow compilation of expert opinions into fuzzy numbers.

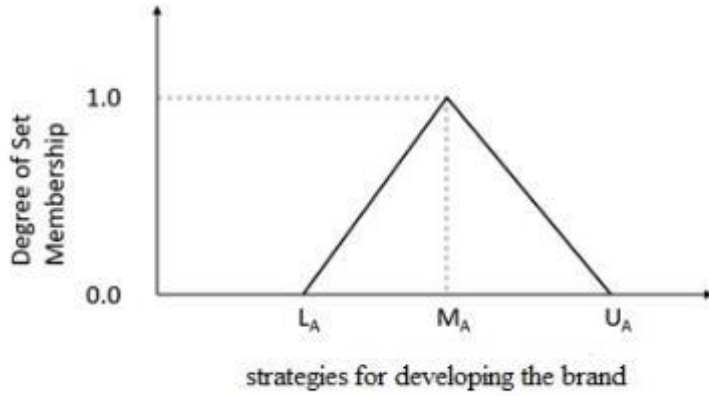
Consistent with previous Fuzzy Delphi studies (Abdolmaleki et al., 2018; Abdolmaleki, Soheili, Varmus, & Khodayari, 2020; Hsu & Yang, 2000; Ishikawa et al., 1993; Kashtidar, Gholizadeh, Okhravi, & Abdolmaleki, 2017), we deployed a four-step approach to data analysis. In the first step, we established an initial list of brand management through application of the BSC method and the four perspectives of finance, customer, internal processes and growth and learning,

drawing candidate factors from the researchers' opinions and interview with esports branding experts. During this review, we identified 20 factors as potentially effective in the affecting brand management of FIFAe World Cup. As an initial filtering step, five esports branding experts (who are faculty member in sport management with publications and practical experiences in esports and sport branding) evaluated each of the barriers. The 20 factors were discussed with each participant as part of a semi-structured interview. Most questions used the identified barrier as a prompt and the participant was asked “Does this make sense?” or “Do you recognize this a factor which is important in esports brand management?” All items were retained.

The second step involved collecting expert opinions of the importance of each factor on the success of esports brand management. We surveyed experts to determine the final version of the criteria. In this way, the factors obtained in the first step were sent to them in the form of an electronic questionnaire on the Likert scale and they were asked to determine the importance of each of these factors from 1 (very insignificant) to 5 (very important).

In the third step, the expert opinions collected from the questionnaires were organized into estimates and triangular fuzzy numbers that were established to permit further evaluation. Triangular fuzzy numbers are established by allocating different weights (in the range between zero and one) to the minimum, maximum, and most likely value. A triangular fuzzy number is shown in Figure 1. The most likely value is best represented by the geometric average of the experts' opinions (Saaty, 1999), a common approach in practical studies using FDM (Wu & Fang, 2011). Thus, we adopted the geometric average for the most likely value score. That is, for each business strategy attribute, we established a fuzzy weight represented by the triple:  $\tilde{A} = (L_A, M_A, U_A)$ , where  $L_A$  represents the lower bound,  $M_A$  is the geometric mean, and  $U_A$  represents the upper

bound of expert opinions. That is, for all experts  $i$ :  $L_A = \min(X_{Ai})$ ;  $U_A = \max(X_{Ai})$ ;  $M_A = (\prod_{i=1}^n X_{Ai})^{1/n}$



**Figure 1.** Triangular Fuzzy Number

In the fourth step, de-fuzzification was used to filter the criteria. De-fuzzification converts from triangular fuzzy numbers to crisp representations that can be evaluated relative to pre-established criteria. Based on previous studies (Abdolmaleki et al., 2018; Abdolmaleki et al., 2020), we used geometric mean  $D(\tilde{A})$  of each indicator’s triangular fuzzy number to denote the consensus of the expert group on the indicator’s appraisal value. For the threshold value  $r$ , the 70/30 rule was adopted with  $r$  set as 0.7 (Abdolmaleki et al., 2018). This indicated that among the factors for selection, “30% of the factors account for a 70% degree of importance of all the factors” (Hsu & Yang, 2000, P30). The selection criteria were:

$$D(\tilde{A}) = \frac{(L_A + (4 \times M_A) + U_A)}{6}$$

If  $D(\tilde{A}) \geq 0.7$ , then the factor is retained

If  $D(\tilde{A}) < 0.7$ , then the factor is deleted



### ***Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP)***

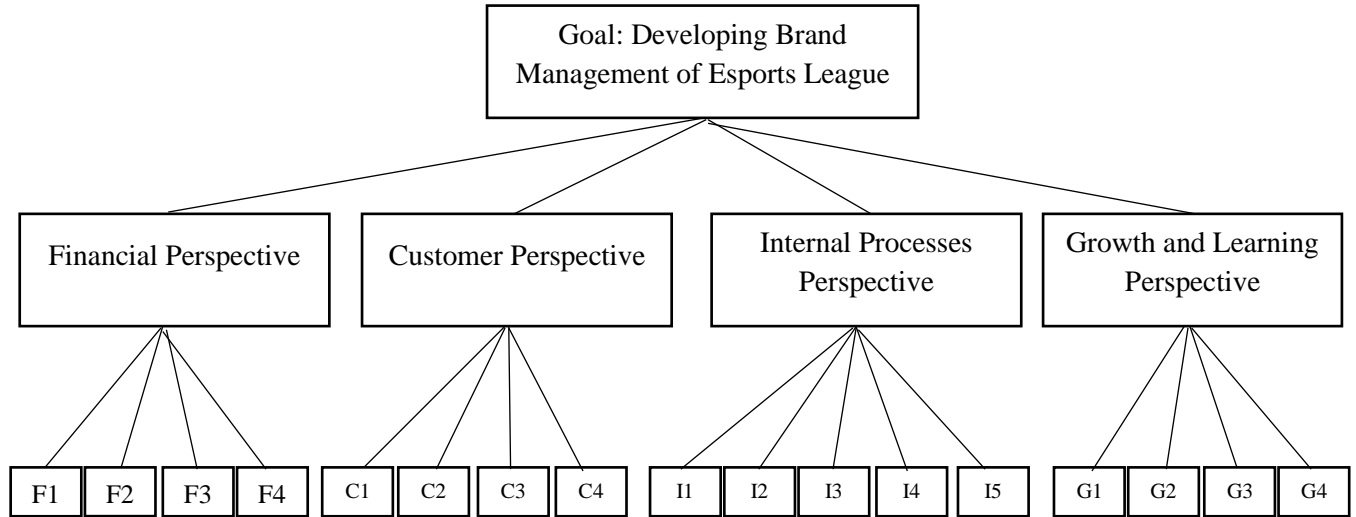
Analytic hierarchy process (AHP) is a popular method for solving complicated decision problems. AHP has been applied extensively by professionals and academics in engineering and management (Pedroso, Bermann, & Sanches-Pereira, 2018). In traditional AHP, a nine-point scale establishes the pairwise comparisons between criteria and sub-criteria. However, the method has been generally criticized because the discrete scale cannot handle uncertainty and ambiguity (Chan & Kumar, 2007). Assigning a triangular fuzzy number (TFN) to each linguistic scale as summarized in Table1 provides a resolution.

**Table 1.** Linguistic Scale (Hsuetal., 2010)

Linguistic scale for the importance	Crisp Value	Fuzzy Number
Equally important	1	(1,1,1)
Judgment values between equally and moderately	2	(1,2,3)
Moderately more important	3	(2,3,4)
Judgment values between moderately and strongly	4	(3,4,5)
Strongly more important	5	(4,5,6)
Judgment values between strongly and very strongly	6	(5,6,7)
Very strongly more important	7	(6,7,8)
Judgment values between very strongly and extremely	8	(7,8,9)
Extremely more important	9	(8,9,9)

FAHP adds fuzzy logic to the AHP method to deal with the impreciseness of opinions from the experts. In this research, we use the extent analysis method proposed by Chang (1996) to implement the fuzzy AHP method. The method uses pairwise comparisons to evaluate the importance of criteria concerning the main goal, and the alternatives concerning each criterion. The following are the five steps of the FAHP method: (1) Problem definition: the goal is to rank

challenges and strategies for developing the brand of the FIFAE World Cup. (2) Hierarchy structure set up: As shown in Figure 2, the hierarchy structure consists of three levels. The top level states the final goal of the problem. The middle layer is four perspectives of BSC and the bottom layer contains the challenges and strategies for developing the brand of the FIFAE World Cup, which are the outputs from the Delphi method.



**Figure 2.** Hierarchy of the Fuzzy Framework

(3) Pair-wise comparisons: The pairwise comparisons involve a linguistic response where experts, based on their knowledge and experience, decide on the relative importance of one item over another. Table 2 defines the linguistic scales and the associated fuzzy numbers.

(4) Fuzzy weight determination per criterion: Since uncertainty is one of the most common features of decision-making problems, FAHP method was developed to answer this problem. This method allows decision makers (esports branding experts - who are faculty member in sport management with publications and practical experiences in esports and sport branding) to express their finite or flexible precedents with fuzzy numbers and in these cases introduce uncertainty in the judgments. Fuzzy theory is a mathematical theory designed to understand vague human

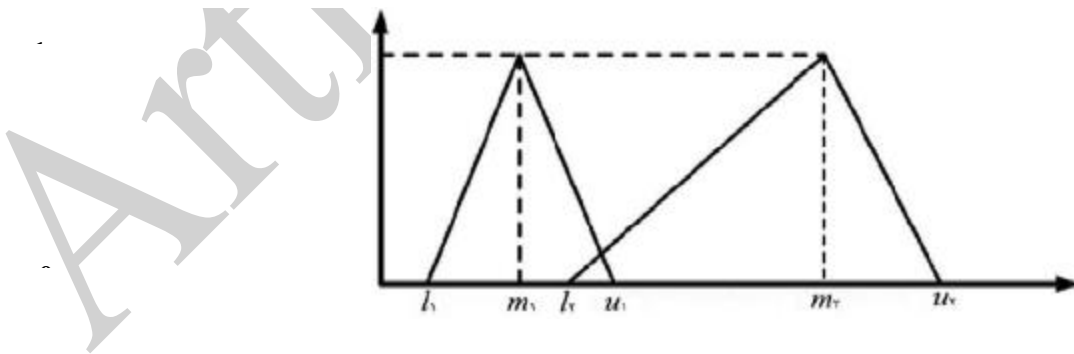
behaviors. The decision maker can express his/her opinion in general in the form of optimistic, pessimistic, moderate, completely relevant and the like (Lotfi, Hossein Zade, Faragi, & Ahmadi, 2012).

This hierarchy is prepared by comparing the options two by two instead of prioritizing the options together at the same time, and these judgments are presented as a degree of precedence. In order to compare the pairs between the indicators, Table 2 is defined for different degrees of priority (Saaty, 1980,2000).

**Table 2.** Different Degrees of Precedence for Triangular Fuzzy Numbers

Linguistic scales	Triangular fuzzy numbers	Inverse triangular fuzzy numbers
Extreme strong	(9,9,9)	(1.1,9.1,9.9)
Very strong	(8,7,6)	(1.1,8.1,7.6)
Strong	(4,5,6)	(1.1,6.1,5.4)
relatively strong	(4,3,2)	(1.1,2.1,3.4)
equivalent	(1,1,1)	(1,1,1)
middle numbers	(3,2,1) (5,4,3) (7,6,5) (9,8,7)	(1,1.1,2.3) (1.1,3.1,4.5) (1.1, 5.1, 6.7) (1.1,7.1,8.9)

The numbers used in this method are triangular fuzzy numbers. Consider the two triangular numbers  $M_1 = (l_1 + m_1 + u_1)$  and  $M_2 = (l_2 + m_2 + u_2)$  drawn in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Triangular Numbers M1 and M2

Its mathematical operators are defined as relations (1), (2), and (3).

$$M_1 + M_2 = (l_1 + l_2, m_1 + m_2, u_1 + u_2) \quad (1)$$

$$M_1 * M_2 = (l_1 * l_2, m_1 * m_2, u_1 * u_2) \quad (2)$$

$$M_1^{-1} = \left(\frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{m_1}, \frac{1}{l_1}\right) \quad M_2^{-1} = \left(\frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{m_2}, \frac{1}{l_2}\right) \quad (3)$$

It should be noted that the multiplication of two triangular fuzzy numbers, or the inverse of a triangular fuzzy number, is no longer a triangular fuzzy number. These relations express only an approximation of real multiplication of two triangular fuzzy numbers and the inverse of a triangular fuzzy number. In this method, for each row of the pair wise comparison matrix, the value of SK, which is itself a triangular number, is calculated by Equation (4):

$$S_k = \sum_{j=1}^n M_{kj} * \left[ \sum_{i=1}^m \sum_{j=1}^n M_{ij} \right]^1 \quad (4)$$

In this equation, k represents the row numbers, and i and j represent the options and indicators, respectively. In the next step, the possibility degrees of SK should be calculated. In general, if two numbers of M1 and M2 are two triangular fuzzy numbers, the possibility degree of M1 to M2, denoted by V, is defined as Equations (5):

$$\begin{cases} V(M_1 \geq M_2) = 1 & \text{if } M_1 \geq M_2 \\ V(M_1 \geq M_2) = \text{hgt}(M_1 \cap M_2) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (5)$$

We also have:

$$\text{hgt}(M_1 \cap M_2) = \frac{u_1 - l_2}{(u_1 - l_2) + (m_2 - m_1)}$$

A convex triangular fuzzy number's possibility degree to be bigger than k convex triangular fuzzy numbers is obtained using Equations (6):

$$V(M_1 \geq M_2 \dots M_k) = V(M_1 \geq M_2), \dots V(M_1 \geq M_k) \quad (6)$$

To calculate the weight of the indices in the pair wise comparison matrix, Equation (7) is used:

$$W'(x_i) = \text{Min}\{V(S_i \geq S_k)\}, \quad k = 1, 2, \dots n. \quad k \neq i \quad (7)$$

Therefore, the weight vector of the indicators will be as follows:

$$W'(x_i) = [W'(C_1), W'(C_2), \dots, W'(C_n)]^T \quad (8)$$

That is the vector of the abnormal coefficients of the FAHP. With the help of Equation (9), the abnormal results obtained from Equation (8) are normalized. The normalized result of Equation (9) is called w.

$$W_i = \frac{w'_i}{\sum w'_i} \quad (9)$$

(5) Evaluate the weights of the criteria: The final weights of the challenges and strategies for developing the brand of the FIFAe World Cup are the product of each perspective of finance, customer, internal processes and growth and learning of BSC.

### ***Data Collection and Participants***

We sent 28 invitations to experts and twenty marketing practitioners accepted our invitation. This number was consistent with the widely accepted size of 15–20 participants for a Delphi panel (Dalkey, Brown, & Cochran, 1970). To be included in the theoretical sample, individuals must have the following characteristics:

- 1- At least a university degree, master of sport management/marketing or related field.
- 2- At least 5 years of marketing experience in esports and sport branding.

Table 3 shows sample characteristics.

**Table 3.**Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Number	
<b>Region</b>	Asia	4
	Europe	5
	America	9
	Australia	2
<b>Age</b>	Under 40	1
	40-50	8
	50-60	6
	More than 60	5

<b>Sex</b>	Men	16
	Women	4
<b>University degree</b>	Master degree	4
	Doctorate degree	16
<b>Years of experience</b>	5 years	4
	5-15	13
	More than 15	3

The data collection from each expert was implemented in two steps. For the FDM, responses were received from 20 of the 28 participants. For the FAHP survey, 20 participants ranked the importance of the factors. Microsoft Excel and MATLAB Software were used to analyze the data.

### 3.Results

According to the Delphi panel members, 17 factors related to the brand development challenges of the FIFA eWorld Cup were obtained. As illustrated in Table 4, 17 factors were placed in four perspectives of BSC.

*Table 4: Results of Fuzzy Delphi Method in four perspectives*

Row	Perspective	Factor	IndexD(A) <sup>~</sup>
1	<b>Internal processes</b>	Weakness in the management structure	0.761
2		Perceptual issues	0.867
3		Weakness in communication with the media	0.774
4		Technological problems	0.853
5		Legal gaps	0.792
6	<b>Growth and learning</b>	Neglect of research	0.740
7		Weakness in fostering creativity	0.790
8		Weakness in manpower management	0.788
9		Weaknesses in the process of talent identification	0.711
10	<b>Financial</b>	Ignorance of new methods of monetization and sponsorship	0.730
11		Ignoring the monitoring position	0.769

12		Lack of attention to players' rights	0.708
13		Lack of attention to target market	0.767
14	<b>Customer</b>	Weakness in brand philosophy	0.772
15		Weakness in culture building	0.811
16		Ignorance of fan loyalty	0.813
17		Weakness in service quality	0.717

The obtained 17 factors were then ranked using FAHP method, as shown in Table 5. Weakness in management structure is the most important challenge from perspective of internal processes, neglect of research is the most important challenge from perspective of growth and learning, neglect of new revenue and sponsorship methods is the most important challenge from perspective of financial and weakness in service quality is the most important challenge from perspective of customer.

Table 5: The final weight of the indicators according FAHP

Row	Perspective	Indicator	Final weight (W <sub>i</sub> )
1	<b>Internal processes</b>	Weakness in the management structure	0.134
2		Perceptual issues	0.095
3		Weakness in communication with the media	0.115
4		Technological problems	0.122
5		Legal gaps	0.081
6	<b>Growth and learning</b>	Neglect of research	0.129
7		Weakness in fostering creativity	0.106
8		Weakness in manpower management	0.122
9		Weaknesses in the process of talent identification	0.088
10	<b>Financial</b>	Ignorance of new methods of monetization and sponsorship	0.133
11		Ignoring the monitoring position	0.096
12		Lack of attention to players' rights	0.103
13		Lack of attention to target market	0.118
14	<b>Customer</b>	Weakness in brand philosophy	0.118
15		Weakness in culture building	0.084
16		Ignorance of fan loyalty	0.098
17		Weakness in service quality	0.125

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, the challenges of brand development of the FIFAe World Cup were evaluated using the BSC model and FAHP. By interpreting the obtained results, 17 challenges in brand development were identified and then prioritized by FAHP. We are going to discuss our findings according to the four perspectives.

##### ***Internal Process***

Weakness in management structure was the first obstacle to brand development. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of weakness in the management structure of the FIFAe World Cup brand. Management instability, lack of reliable approved charts and undefined jobs, lack of strategic plan, Lack of a specific trustee in the brand management issue, secrecy in doing all things and make them look secure, lack of transparency of operations, rule of taste in acting according to regulations and abuse of existing gaps, Lack of command unity in the administration of affairs, personal performance of managers in enforcing laws, reworking due to lack of coordination of managers, which also in researches done by Rasooli et al. (2016) and Rezaei et al. (2015), weaknesses in the football management structure has been noted. The next barrier was legal gaps. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of legal gaps for the FIFAe World Cup brand: Lack of new and coherent laws, lack of executive guarantees for scheduled plans, frequent changes in laws, regulations and directives, ignoring legal issues, lack of specific criteria for concluding contracts, unclear legal contribution of individuals in the organization.

Weakness in communication with the media and weakness in technology management were other challenges in this area. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of poor communication with the media of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Lack of interaction between the media and the officials of the organization, marginalization of events by the media due to unclear media strategy. Weak media coverage of matches may lead to a decrease in sports fans (Schnitzer et al., 2014). Also, in order to develop the brand, strong and systematic interactions must be established between the media and the FIFAe World Cup.



Holding news conferences and establishing dedicated media for the FIFAe World Cup will help you do more effective marketing.

The last obstacle in the internal process dimension was the perceptual barrier. The following were the sub-themes of the challenge of perceptual problems of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Negative view of members towards each other, lack of confidence in perspectives and policies, lack of systemic thinking, getting used to problems, lack of common aspirations of members, feeling of narcissism in managers, weak self-confidence. Therefore, the FIFAe World Cup should solve the perceptual challenges by promoting organizational culture.

### ***Growth and Learning***

Weakness in manpower management was identified as another strategic barrier to the development of the FIFAe World Cup brand. The following were the sub-themes of the challenge of Weakness in manpower management of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Inefficiency and agility of some human resources in the body of the organization, lack of specialized staff, non-practical training of managers due to separation from the real environment of the organization, existence of inefficient and inexperienced managers and their lack of knowledge about branding, Lack of managers' evaluation indicators. According to the study of Kumar (2005), one of the most important elements in the marketing system is human resources and the functions of this element are irreplaceable and effective. In this regard, Chanavat (2017) has positively identified the role of the managers of Paris Saint-Germain, especially the CEO of the team, in the internationalization of the club's brand. Rasooli et al. (2016) also considered the weakness of human resources as one of the internal challenges of brand management. In this regard, the managers of the FIFAe World Cup can provide the necessary ground for the development of human resource productivity by holding workshops and in-service training courses with a focus on branding. Manoli (2020), who examined the capabilities of the brand in English Premier League clubs, considered the existence of training to employees and the provision of specific regulations in the field of brand for taking advantage of brand capacity. Weakness in talent identification was another barrier to the development of the FIFAe World Cup brand. The following were the sub-themes of the challenge of weakness in the process of talent

identification of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Lack of cooperation and coordination with other organizations in potential countries, lack of attention to training skilled manpower in the field of talent identification, lack of integrated, executive and structured plan in talent identification, lack of facilities and equipment for talent identification in some less developed countries, financial problems in talent identification, lack of strategic plan, unfamiliarity with scientific methods of talent identification, ignoring the competitions and sports talents of remote deprived areas. One of the most important things to consider in the field of talent identification is the income of talented players from this sport. If the income level of the players is appropriate, it will be a good model for teenagers and young players, and they will be more inclined to be attracted in this field. Given the complexity and importance of the talent identification process, especially in esports where the ability to identify talent can be slightly different from traditional sports, the talent identification process must be done properly.

Neglect of research and innovation was another known barrier in this research. The following sub-themes were the challenge of ignoring the research of the FIFAe World Cup brand: The gap between esports and the university, non-use of research nuclei, Distance of research from existing realities, lack of cooperation between managers and academics, lack of marketing research and development units. Research by Funk, Pizzo and Baker (2018) has shown that the university-esports relationship model has not been very successful. Keshavarz, et al. (2017) stated that the relationship between university and sports is usually considered as one of the main challenges in sports development. Therefore, the relationship between esports and the university must be improved; it is also necessary to provide the necessary platform for the brand to flourish by using the methods and modeling of the world's leading clubs.

### ***Financial***

Lack of attention to the other players' right was another challenge in this area. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of ignoring the rights of players in the FIFAe World Cup: Lack of awareness and ability of players to protect their rights such as brand and copyright, not allocating part of the revenue to all players. Although \$500,000 was distributed among the finalists in 2019, it is not enough for professional athletes participating in the competitions. For example, a player who successfully competes in

the qualifying rounds and climbs to 32 finalists, and ranking 17th in this round, receives only a \$750 prize. Izadi (2017) and Rasooli et al. (2016) state that in order to receive the rights of football clubs, people should be selected who are proficient in sales negotiation techniques. Individuals should be selected who are proficient in the techniques of negotiating and on time buying and selling club shares in the stock market, and have bargaining power to obtain the most television and internet broadcasting rights. Ignoring the position of supervision and financial corruption was another challenge. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of ignoring the position of supervision in the brand of the FIFAe World Cup: Lack of a capable supervisory organization, lack of reporting as a control tool, laws being written and not implemented, formal, relational and illegal assessments, not punishment of the offenders. Corruption and lack of proper supervisory endanger the organization's liquidity. Najafikolori et al. (2012) stated that cultural factors are the most important factor affecting the incidence of corruption in the football federation, and privatization is the best solution to prevent corruption. The existence of tax evasion tricks, the lack of protection and enforcement laws in the field of these contracts and the weakness of disciplinary and civil laws have contributed to the spread of these problems. Ignoring the target market was another challenge of financial dimension. The following sub-themes were the challenge of ignoring the target market in the brand of the FIFAe World Cup: Ignoring potential fans in countries where the FIFAe World Cup is less well known, Lack of use of international development capacities. The FIFAe World Cup, due to international and global management institutions, has a single specialized language and a global representation. Therefore, it has the ability to attract spectators from all over the world. Just like global professional clubs like Real Madrid, which have countless fans from all over the world. Kim et al. (2020) in their research stated that fans have an important role in creating or destroying brand value. Despite the research conducted in the field of identifying advocacy motives, it is observed that most of the actions taken in the field of loyalty are only focused on finances such as shopping discounts, while the motivation of many fans is emotional and should be paid more attention to this dimension.

The present study also found that new methods of monetization and sponsorship have a broad impact on brand development. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of ignoring the new ways

of monetizing and sponsoring the FIFAe World Cup: Traditional methods of monetization and marketing, cross-sectional economic activities, not using existing monetizing capacities, The low and unknown reputation of e-football at the international level, the lack of use of new technologies in marketing, short-term contracts between the organization and the sponsor, the inadequacy of attractive factors in attracting and retaining sponsors. Among the sources of income, the FIFAe World Cup has only been able to use sponsors, ticket sales and advertising, and is deprived of other sources of income. Creating wealth requires new marketing strategies, which is also weak in this factor. Using the experiences of reputable football clubs can be helpful in this regard. Manchester United, for example, has brand stores that sell a variety of goods. It also has teams at different levels in football and basketball (Andre Richelieu & Lessard, 2014). When there is not enough correlation between sponsors' expenses and incomes, there will be less incentive to invest.

### ***Customer***

Weakness in brand philosophy was one of the challenges in the customer dimension. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of weakness in brand philosophy in the brand of the FIFAe World Cup: Ignoring branding and identity building in sports fans, ignoring brand associations, ignoring word of mouth on social media, neglecting to hold side events to increase brand awareness, ignoring social responsibility. Manoli (2020) stated that the English Premier League brand is strong enough to protect itself and this powerful brand is the result of paying attention to the brand philosophy. In order to present the desired brand philosophy, the elements that make up the brand identity must be considered. Ignorance of fan loyalty was another strategic barrier. The following sub-themes were the challenge of ignoring the loyalty of the fans of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Weakness in the use of advocacy systems, ignoring the diverse needs of the fans, ignoring the interaction and communication with the fans, not paying attention to the needs of the stakeholders, acting passively in attracting new fans, not planning according to the needs of the fans. Rasooli et al. (2016) has introduced insufficient attention to meet the needs of the fans as one of the influential factors in the unfavorable image of football. Despite research in the field of identifying advocacy motives, it is observed that most of the actions taken in the field of loyalty are focused only on finances

such as shopping discounts, while the motivation of many fans has been emotional. Also, the weakness of advocacy systems and debts and the lack of transparency of these systems make the fan hesitate to join and pay. Weakness in service quality of the FIFAe World Cup was another barrier in this research. The following were the sub-themes of the challenge of weakness in the quality of services of the FIFAe World Cup: Poor service to fans, poor attraction and use of international celebrities during events, the existence of alternative entertainment, which is consistent with the findings by Akbari Yazdi et al. (2014) who assessed the quality of services of the Iranian Football League as poor. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of services of the FIFAe World Cup, all aspects affecting the improvement of the quality of services should be considered. Slavich et al. (2018) mentioned electronic facilities, physical facilities and team privileges as effective factors in service quality and fan satisfaction. Weakness in culture building, especially fan culture, was another identified strategic barrier to promoting the brand's reputation. The following were sub-themes of the challenge of weak culture-building in the fans of the FIFAe World Cup brand: Vandalism, lack of advocacy centers, margins, unprofessional and immoral behavior, hooliganism and aggression, disregard to culture building in fans. In this regard, researchers who refer to the new moral and social challenges in football and other sports have stated that ethical standards should be based on the new priorities and responsibilities of good governance in today's globalized sport (e.g., Naha & Hassan, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).

Like any other study, we had limitations in this study. First, the statistical population of the study was limited to experts and specialists in the field of esports. The size of the population was limited and access to individuals was very difficult. On the other hand, the corona virus epidemic exacerbated this problem, Therefore, the researcher for obtaining the required research information used virtual or not in person interviews. By eliminating corona virus outbreak, this problem can be solved and researchers can use face-to-face interviews in their future researches. Second, we only examined the FIFAe World Cup, the results of which cannot be generalized to all esports, because there are other important events in esports that are of a different nature from the present study; therefore, researchers are advised to review other valid esports leagues and compare the results with the present study to reveal the differences.

The possibility of achieving a combined model of BSC and FAHP to evaluate the challenges of implementing a balanced scorecard in strengthening the FIFAe World Cup is the final result of the present study. Although some barriers in branding were examined in previous research, in this research a model with balanced scorecard approach was presented and these barriers were examined more comprehensively and strategies in the direction of these barriers were presented that lack of them have been felt in previous research. Using this model can familiarize managers with the priorities of addressing the challenges of developing the brand of the FIFAe World Cup and provide the possibility of integrating the performance evaluation of the brand of the FIFAe World Cup. This study can help as an active system by considering the contribution of identified criteria in achieving strategic goals and visions.

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