

IMPORTANCE OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT OF REFEREES: A QUALITATIVE STUDYMücahit Fişne¹Ali Hasaan²**ABSTRACT**

Referees are major stakeholders in any game as their role is to keep both fairness and justice intact in the game, but despite all their effort and contributions, referees often face criticism. Thus, the purpose of this study is to discuss the prospect of good referee qualities along with impression management for referees to make their impression better in public. The study has adopted a qualitative approach and questioned 19 referees from five different sports (i.e., football, cricket, basketball, volleyball, and handball) and four different countries (i.e., Serbia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Italy) regarding their perception of the importance of impression management and if a better image among the public can help them and their decision-making. The study identified three themes: the qualities of a good referee, impression management for referees, and strategies that can help referees to manage their impression better. Strategies were further identified, including pre-match preparation, branding, public apologies, communication skills, and a clear mind.

Key words: Refereeing. Umpiring. Umpire. Branding. Impression Management.

RESUMO

Importância da gestão de impressão dos árbitros: um estudo qualitativo

Os árbitros são as principais partes interessadas em qualquer jogo, pois seu papel é manter a justiça e a justiça intactas no jogo, mas apesar de todo o esforço e contribuições, os árbitros geralmente enfrentam críticas. Assim, o objetivo deste estudo é discutir a perspectiva de boas qualidades dos árbitros juntamente com o gerenciamento de impressão para que os árbitros passem melhor sua impressão em público. O estudo adotou uma abordagem qualitativa e questionou 19 árbitros de cinco esportes diferentes (ou seja, futebol, críquete, basquete, vôlei e handebol) e quatro países diferentes (ou seja, Sérvia, Turquia, Paquistão e Itália) sobre sua percepção da importância de gerenciamento de impressão e se uma melhor imagem entre o público pode ajudá-los e sua tomada de decisão. O estudo identificou três temas: as qualidades de um bom árbitro, gerenciamento de impressão para árbitros e estratégias que podem ajudar os árbitros a gerenciar melhor sua impressão. Estratégias foram identificadas, incluindo preparação pré-jogo, branding, desculpas públicas, habilidades de comunicação e uma mente clara.

Palavras-chave: Arbitragem. Arbitragem. Árbitro. Marca. Gerenciamento de Impressões.

1 - Faculty of Sports Sciences, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey.
2 - Institute of Research & Advanced Studies IRAS, Multan, Pakistan.

E-mail author:
mfisne@cumhuriyet.edu.tr
aili_hasaan@hotmail.com

Orcid author:
0000-0002-3964-874X
0000-0003-3202-2186

Corresponding author:
Dr. Mücahit Fişne
mfisne@cumhuriyet.edu.tr
Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Sivas, Turkey.
Phone: +905326683410
Fax: +903462191251

INTRODUCTION

Referees are major stakeholders in any game as their role is to keep both fairness and justice intact in the game.

The referee is considered an important figure that has always been a key element of competitive sport (Isidori, Müller and Kaya, 2012) as a sport is a competition by its very nature for each individual and group (McGarry and collaborators, 2002).

Therefore, the role of referees is significant because referees have to maintain the decorum of the game and implement a rule of law to make a sport fair and competitive.

Referees (known as umpires in some sports) are assigned by sporting organisations (i.e., authorities) to conduct a match.

Referees demonstrate that refereeing is a practice that requires a specific set of analytical skills, as well as the development of compound knowledge and ways of acting (Isidori, Müller and Kaya, 2012).

However, despite all their effort and contributions, referees often face criticism, not only from the fans but also from coaches, athletes, and the press.

For spectators, the factor of human error factor is non-existent and referees are often considered biased and unfair. Fans blame referees when their team loses a game, while coaches publicly complain about referees: thus, referees become a scapegoat for every bad performance of a club.

For example, Fergie Time, which refers to the former Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, is often considered a popular case of favouritism. Fergie Time is a metaphor referring to the awarded additional time which presents the club with an opportunity to change the outcome of a match (Butler and Butler, 2017).

In a similar vein, Jose Mourinho's handcuff symbol taunting referees, and Real Madrid and Barcelona blaming the Spanish federation for favouring their rival are but two instances of this notion.

While the introduction of technology has improved the situation somewhat, unfortunately, even technology is mishandled sometimes; the 'blame game' is thus not likely to end. As a result, spectators frequently accuse officials of bias against their team (Lopez and Snyder, 2013).

Furthermore, in soccer and many other sports, referees frequently experience criticism and aggression from players, coaches and

fans who are disappointed by referees' decisions.

Indeed, past studies have identified that people tend to be more cooperative when they perceive fairness and unbiasedness (Simmons, 2010).

Moreover, Prapavessis, Grove and Eklund (2004) noted that there is little doubt that the impressions people make on others have implications for how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them.

Therefore, a positive (i.e., fair and unbiased in this case) impression causes a positive effect, while a negative impression casts a negative effect (Hasaan and collaborators, 2018).

In this context, a good impression from reputed referees could induce the benefit of the doubt and his/her mistake could be considered a human error; in contrast, a referee that has low popularity and a casual image could make mistakes that harm him or her more.

Furthermore, a better image of a referee provides an indirect benefit for the sports federations as well as the sports organisations who constitute the final authority in the process of hiring referees.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the prospect of good referee qualities along with impression management for referees to make their impression better in public.

As there is a dearth of studies concerning this topic, the study has adopted a qualitative approach and questioned referees regarding their perception of the importance of impression management and if a better image among the public can help them and their decision-making.

To the best of our knowledge, despite being one of the major stakeholders of sport, the academic literature has largely ignored the marketing and image aspect of referees: there were no studies found that examined this issue.

This is, therefore, a pioneer study focusing on the importance of impression and name management of referees.

LITERATURE REVIEW**Referee biases, consequences, image, and solutions**

Referees are constantly blamed for others' poor performances; the outcomes of poor performances are also often seen as

biasedness. With this in mind, several past studies have identified various irregularities a referee exhibits, including, for instance, referees' bias towards home teams (Scoppa, 2008), referees under social pressure (Page and Page, 2010), awarding unjustifiable injury

time (Brimberg and Hurley, 2009); bias against certain kit colours (Brimberg and Hurley, 2009), bias against race (Price and Wolfers, 2007), and other different types of favouritisms (Dawson and Dobson, 2010). Table 1 examines these biases further.

Table 1 - Referee biases.

Bias	Explanation	Reference
Home advantage	The referee is influenced by home fans	Anders and Rothhoff, 2014; Areni, 2014; Scoppa, 2008
Social pressure	Crowd size and other factors such as crowd density and distance of the crowd from the pitch cause a higher probability of a yellow card for fouls in soccer due to loud audiences	Page and Page, 2010; Scoppa, 2008; Unkelbach and Memmert, 2010
Added time	Referees add more time when the home team is behind	Brimberg and Hurley, 2009; Garicano, Palacios-Huerta and Prendergast, 2005
Kit colour	Soccer referees tend to call a larger number of fouls on teams wearing black jerseys	Brimberg and Hurley, 2009
Racism	More fouls are called against players of different races to the referee	Brimberg and Hurley, 2009; Price and Wolfers, 2007
Favouritism	Referees are biased toward particular teams or players	Dawson and Dobson, 2010; Hlasny and Kolaric, 2017; Scoppa, 2008

No matter whether these mistakes made by referees are intentional or unintentional, they pose various kinds of threats to referees.

For example, fans can react to what is thought to be a bad or unfair call by an official and yell directly at or boo him/her for the disliked call (Smith and Lord, 2018).

Van der Meij and collaborators (2015) observed that aggression further increases when the match result is perceived as unfair due to referee decisions.

Moreover, verbal and physical abuse towards referees has increased recently from players, coaches, and spectators (Webb and collaborators, 2018).

Indeed, this abuse and pressure are so common that Webb and collaborators (2018) noted that in the culture of referees, verbal abuse is expected.

As a result, pressure mounts on referees and due to this pressure, referees experience significant cardiovascular and physiological stress during matches (Leicht, 2004).

Tsorbatzoudis and collaborators (2005) asserted that the fear of physical harm is one of the major sources of stress amongst referees.

Nonetheless, previous studies have also offered various solutions to improve the situation.

These solutions vary from referees' personal improvement to the role of federations. For instance, Cleland, O'Gorman, and Webb (2018) argued that a lack of support for referees in the disciplinary process organised by federations has been identified as a reason behind referees considering leaving their sport.

Hlasny and Kolaric (2017) noted that age and experience are tools to become a better referee: this observation was compounded by Gallo, Grund, and Reade (2013), who suggested that ethnicity, age, experience in the league, a team's prestige or wealth, and players' ethnicity and veteran status have also been found to play a role in referees' decisions.

Simmons (2010) stated that better communication skills also make a better referee. In this context, Mascarenahs, Collins, and Mortimer (2005) presented a model that can improve referees' performances.

According to this model, a) knowledge and application of the law; (b) contextual judgement; (c) personality and management skills; and (d) fitness, positioning and mechanics are key factors in the quest of becoming a better referee. In the case of

basketball, Karacam and Adiguzel (2019) observed that basketball referees' physical fitness, game knowledge, decision-making skills, ability to handle pressure, and communication skills all make them better referees.

Finally, accuracy from the referee, regulation by federations, and professionalism are key elements that contribute to better referee decisions (Lane and collaborators, 2006).

Impression management

Impression management involves the effort to create, maintain, protect, or alter an image of a person (Bolino and collaborators, 2008).

Considering the importance of impression management, Rojek (2001) noted that impression management is a major source in the creation of modern-day celebrities that occurs through media.

Furthermore, Rindova, Pollock and Hayward (2006) noted that social actors' impression management contributes to the media's construction of the celebrity. However, it is not only mainstream media but also social media that plays a major role in the management of impressions (Agyemang and Williams, 2016).

That is why the comments, actions, and statements of a person count towards impression management (Hasaan and Kerem, 2017).

In this vein, St. James (2010) suggested that impression management is achieved through gestures, dress, appearance, or speech patterns to manipulate one's self-image for the purpose of better self-presentation to win the hearts of others. Past studies have identified that impression management is a good strategy in the management of sports brands (Agyemang and Williams, 2013) and sports brands'

antecedents (Hasaan and Kerem, 2017); it is also helpful to deal with stress and challenges (Thatcher, 2005).

Considering the above as well as the elements of a good referee, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What qualities and image make a good referee?

RQ2: What strategies could be useful for referees to better manage the impressions of them?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study selected an inductive qualitative design as a qualitative design allows the researcher to understand phenomena by gaining in-depth knowledge about the topic (Charmaz, 2006).

The current study focused on referees from different sports and countries to explore more comprehensive results and meanings.

Sampling

A purposeful convenience sample was employed to select the study participants. Patton (2002) observed that criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling that is useful to construct a comprehensive understanding (Suri, 2011).

For the current study, participants had to meet the following criteria: 1) participants must be a professional or part-time referee of a sport; 2) participants must be registered with a federation; and 3) participants must have at least two years' experience of refereeing. A series of semi-structured face-to-face or online (via Skype) interviews were conducted. The final sample comprised 19 referees from five different sports (i.e., football, cricket, basketball, volleyball, and handball) and four different countries (i.e., Serbia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Italy; see Table 2).

Table 2 - Participants' details.

Code no.	Gender	Sport	Country	Experience
R1	M	Football	Serbia	8 years
R2	F	Football	Turkey	3 years
R3	M	Cricket	Pakistan	2 years
R4	F	Football	Italy	2 years
R5	M	Basketball	Italy	3 years
R6	M	Basketball	Turkey	4 years
R7	M	Football	Pakistan	2 years
R8	M	Cricket	Pakistan	5 years
R9	M	Football	Serbia	6 years
R10	M	Football	Italy	10 years
R11	M	Volleyball	Serbia	6 years
R12	M	Basketball	Turkey	6 years
R13	M	Handball	Turkey	7 years
R14	M	Volleyball	Turkey	2 years
R15	M	Cricket	Pakistan	2 years
R16	M	Handball	Serbia	2 years
R17	M	Volleyball	Italy	5 years
R18	M	Handball	Turkey	2 years
R19	M	Volleyball	Serbia	2 years

Data collection

Semi-structured interview guidelines were developed to conduct interviews. Interview guidelines simply contain a list of topics and sub-topics to be covered during the interview, leaving the wording and order of questions up to the individual researchers (Mack and collaborators, 2005): this provides flexibility to the interviewer to extract data more deeply according to the interviewee. As the interview served as an instrument to elicit the data (Kvale, 2007), follow-up questions and real-life examples were asked about to extract more details. The interviews were conducted over five months and were transcribed verbatim.

The structure of the guideline remained the same; however, the questions asked to referees were asked according to the sport and countries they represented. At the outset, the participants were asked to sign a voluntary participation form that explained the purpose of the study and confirmed that they accepted being part of the study.

All interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour, depending upon the participant's interest and their willingness to share their thoughts.

To protect the participants' identities, we have assigned a code number for each of the interviews conducted (i.e., R1 was the first interviewee while R19 was last).

Data analysis

The process of data analysis started right after the first interview as this technique permits researchers to become more familiar with the participants' responses and improve future interview levels (Marshall and Rossman, 2014).

The process began with converting the interview into a written form. After reading the responses, the authors noted their first impressions and the initial impressions of the interview were discussed amongst the authors. This process allows the researchers to improve the interview questions for the following interviews and gain a better understanding of the responses of the interviews (Gale and collaborators, 2013; Hasaan and Kerem, 2017).

The current study applied two levels of coding (i.e. open and axial) to analyse the interview data. In this context, the current study followed Corbin and Strauss's (2008) guidelines. Thus, open coding was used for the initial analysis to break the data apart and define concepts to stand as blocks of raw data.

The researchers discussed the responses until they had a complete understanding of the responses of the interviewees. Initial themes in the data were identified through this process. Once the initial themes were identified, axial coding was used to combine the themes of the initial patterns: that is, the authors classified the initial themes

into more defined, concrete themes; in some cases, combining similar themes with those that could not stand alone. The results were then discussed with the other researchers to confirm the findings (McTavish and Loether, 2015).

To make results inclusive and reliable, the study adopted an inter-coder reliability and agreement process to establish agreement among the researchers. Inter-coder reliability is a useful tool to present how one establishes the reliability of coding during in-depth semi-structured interviews (Campbell and collaborators, 2013).

Kuckartz (2014) noted that inter-coder reliability could be achieved through having the research team members operate independently from each other initially, while inter-coding could be achieved through discussion and reconciling coding discrepancies between the research team members once the analysis is completed. For the current study, researchers defined units of an idea (i.e., the beginning and end of a single idea) to achieve inter-coder reliability.

Carey, Morgan and Oxtoby (1996) referred to this process as the conversion of the data into more manageable units. Once the units of analysis were identified, the research team assigned codes and developed themes; the authors then compared their coded transcripts to see whether there were discrepancies in the coding.

The final inter-coder reliability, measured via Cohen's Kappa, was .91. Any remaining discrepancies and disagreements were discussed until an agreement was reached.

RESULTS

This section presents the analysis of the referees' interviews. The results of the study are divided into three main considerations: the qualities of a good referee; impression management and referees; strategies of/for referees.

The qualities of a good referee

Referees participating in this study mentioned various qualities that defined the term 'good referee'. These qualities can be divided into two major groups: physical and mental. For instance:

Physical: Appearance is important. Appearance means fitness. Good referees

should be fit enough to supervise a match in any circumstances. Physically unfit referees will exhaust themselves sooner and that will affect their decisions too [R1].

Physically fit referees can perform better. If you are physically fit, then you can be mentally fit [R11].

Mental: Everything is up to 'good decisions'. Good decisions are the most important thing [R8].

The sports experience is beneficial and helps to develop a good referee. For example, if the referee played football before the refereeing career or during the refereeing career, this helps him to make the right decision [R10].

In sports like football, to be in the right place at the right time is very important [R2].

Referees also talked about the viewpoint of others and their perceptions:

For the media, it is most important to make the correct decision. The correct decision that is correct according to them [R15].

Fans like referees who award the decisions that are in favour of their beloved team [R4].

The media has its own preferences, teams have their own, but a good referee is the one that makes every decision on merit [R13].

Impression management and referees.

When talking about the importance of impression management, referees noted that a referee needs a better image among the public and media as even good and correct decisions cannot prevent referees from the criticism. R15 observed, for example:

When the media criticises the referee, sometimes they forget the laws of the game. Maybe they don't know the laws of the game. Sometimes, the media maybe loves one club and if the referee makes a correct decision against this club that they love, the media criticises the referee even it is the correct decision [R15].

In contrast, some referees indicated that the duty of a referee is to concentrate on the field and ignore what the media and fans might comment after the match, as argued by R14:

For referees, the most important thing is an excellent decision. If you make an excellent decision during the match on the field, everybody accepts and everybody trusts the referee, and also the fans trust the referee.

Although the fans of some clubs don't like a referee because he/she decides a penalty against their club. But if the penalty kick is clear or not? That is more important.

The most important thing is: did the referee make a correct decision on the field [R14].

Participants of the study also discussed the positive effect of a referee with a better image:

The overall reputation matters a lot. For example, a well-named person often escapes from irresponsible behaviour while a person with a bad image or damaged image's good intentions is also scrutinised by others. Same in the sport, where the athlete's image and reputation matter most. For example, divers, sore losers, 'a real sportsman', etc. Thus, this principle occurs in sport as well. For instance, no matter what Howard Webb's [English football referee] intentions were, he was called the twelfth player of Manchester United and Darrell Hair [Australian cricket umpire] was always perceived as biased against Asian cricket teams, whatever the merit of his decisions. In contrast, good-image referees and umpires always get the benefit of the doubt. They face less criticism and their mistakes are pronounced as human error [R8]. A better impression among the public always helps. For example, Steve Bucknor [West Indian cricket umpire] during his last days made some crucial errors but nobody asked the question and criticised him because of his positive image. Darrell Hair was a good umpire but due to his controversial image, he was often criticised for his good decisions, too. Thus, a good impression buys you more breathing space [R15].

Strategies of/for referees

Pre-match preparation: the referee must prepare himself in a good way before the match, and he must analyse both of the teams; he must prepare himself for the physical conditions. Also, the referee must know the laws of the game very well [R18].

Preparing himself for every match in a good way. To be strong. To be ready for every situation [R5].

Branding: In Serbia, Milorad Mažić [Serbian football referee] is the best referee and many young people now want to be referees and to be Mažić because he is a big brand. Because he made a big success and a big career. A lot of young people watch Mažić's big matches because of his popularity. People believe in his decisions [R1].

Billy Bowden [New Zealand's cricket umpire] attracts lots of people because of his style. If you ask my opinion, I would say he might be

not included in the five best umpires of cricket, but his style attracts many. I saw many young boys copying his style during the match. He brought glamour to umpiring. He is a brand. People like him, rely on him and trust him [R3].

Public apologies: Some referees recently publicly apologised after bad decisions. Maybe, if a mistake is clear, and if the referee knows that they made a mistake, OK, he can apologise. It shows that it is a human mistake. It is not deliberate and sends a positive message among the sporting world [R9].

David Jones [American basketball referee] apologised to Rick Carlisle [Dallas Mavericks coach] personally and publicly. To me, that sends a positive message that a referee is a human: he can commit mistakes and he is ready to accept this mistake so he can do better in the future [R6].

Communication skills: Speaking before the match; to be proactive during the match, could avoid athletes' and coaches' criticism. Better communication can solve lots of issues and also make your image better [R10].

Better relations and communication can cause better results. For instance, in the NBA there is much noise that referees are biased. In my opinion, better communication during the game and after the game can change this situation [R5].

Clear mind: If I got the match, I must go to the match and I must manage and make clear decisions. If you have a game, you must go to the game and you must be honest and make a good decision. This is my opinion. If the federation sends the referee, the referee should go, despite what fans call him or nickname him. Honest work is a referee's marketing and impression tool [R12].

For example, a few years ago, Asian handball faced corruption allegations among its referees. But this is nothing to do with an individual. I, or some other referee, am not the one to clear these sorts of allegations but to perform our duty well. If someone is blaming someone, it is not our concern. Our focus should be on the game only [R13].

DISCUSSION

This study has discussed the importance of and techniques for creating a better image and impression among sport stakeholders.

The study identified three themes: the qualities of a good referee, impression management for referees, and strategies that

can help referees to manage their impression better. Strategies were further identified, including pre-match preparation, branding, public apologies, communication skills, and a clear mind.

Previous studies have identified various qualities a good referee should hold. The current study has focused on both physical and mental qualities.

For instance, according to the literature, good referees must be knowledgeable about the rules of the game, have a good level of physical fitness, position themselves correctly during the game, have good visual and auditory acuity, and be highly motivated and capable of making on-the-spot decisions and controlling their emotions (Morillo and collaborators, 2017).

In this study, our participants added appearance and physique, past sporting experiences, and good decisions. This is in line with the findings of Morris and O'Connor (2017), who identified decision-making accuracy or good decisions as the most important factors of a good referee. This study also highlighted the importance of the fit physique of a referee as a quality of a good referee.

However, the significance of past sports experience is an addition to the literature. Participants of the study also mentioned that the media and fans do not judge referees unbiasedly. This is a unique finding since past studies have focused on referees' bias while neglecting the opposite notion: that referees are often criticised unfairly. Indeed, it is a popular saying that even when a referee is right, he is wrong (Malone, 2001).

Participants of the study positively identified the importance of impression management for referees.

Thatcher (2005) noted that managing better impressions among sports officials is a necessary step for stress relief and to meet the challenges of the job. In this vein, better impressions lower the pressure on referees because referees with a better impression are acceptable to all fans and their incorrect decisions are considered human mistakes only.

Participants of this study discussed various strategies to ensure a better impression among referees. The study found that pre-match preparation is particularly important for any referee, as pre-match preparation provides a referee with an

advantage which indirectly helps to make his or her image more positive. This idea is supported by other studies: for example, Warner, Tingle and Kellett (2013) noted that off-court factors (i.e., pre-match preparation) were reported as an influential factor in becoming a better referee. In this vein, Samuel (2015) further described pre-match preparations in the context of various psychological aspects (i.e., psychological, technical, tactical and mental planning).

Finally, Aragão e Pina and collaborators, (2019) examined the referees' preparations in terms of game preparation and individual preparation. The second strategy defined by participants of the present study was branding. Past studies have identified that perusal of branding makes for better impressions: for example, athletes have used a variety of impression management tactics to manage their brand (Agyemang and Williams, 2016) and impression management is an antecedent of an athletic brand (Hasaan and collaborators, 2018). However, no study has discussed the prospect of referee branding.

A public apology is the third technique suggested by participants of this study to make a referee's image better. While previous studies have identified that people respond more positively to public apologies (Hornsey and collaborators, 2020), this study has considered public apology in the specific context of the referee: no study has discussed this context. The fourth technique noted by participants was better communication skills of referees.

This finding is in line with past studies: for example, Simmons (2010) noted that with better communication skills, conflicts between referees and players on the pitch may be prevented; this, in turn, benefits the image of the referee.

Moreover, Karacam and Adiguzel (2019) found that better communication is a key factor in the better performance of the referee and ultimately makes referees' images better. The last option discussed by participants was the clear mentality of a referee.

While no study has discussed the pressure from federations, the role of other social pressures on referees has been examined. For instance, when referees are under pressure (i.e., of any type) they can commit a bad decision (Anders and Rotthoff, 2014; Page and Page, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The current study has discussed the concept of a good referee by determining the qualities of a good referee and the techniques that can make a better referee.

The study results are thus an important contribution to researchers and managers alike. As the data consists of the opinions of professional referees themselves, the contribution and suggestions proposed by this study are also valuable for new professionals who wish to join the field of officiating sporting matches.

Furthermore, the study has observed the importance of impression management for referees and identified strategies that can help referees to better manage their impression. These strategies include pre-match preparation, branding, public apology, communication skills, and a clear mind. The study also categorised the qualities of referees as either physical or mental.

Some concepts highlighted in this study have never been explored before, such as the notion of the referee as a brand and the role of federations in good referee-making. Thus, while the current study has discussed the literature, its findings are useful for future studies as well.

Finally, the current study can help referees to improve their performance through attributes that are less technical and often ignored.

The results of the study are significant for the professional referees that it provides a route to escape from the blame games. Also, current study discussed the opportunity of referee as a brand which is very rarely discussed topic in sport branding.

Following the finding of the current study, referees can build a better image and a brand which will eventually help them in certain ways (i.e., better financially, healthier with less pressure to face, and more committed to the job).

Indirectly, it will also help sport federations as they are responsible for referees' mistakes and errors.

Academically, this study opened a new door of possibilities that is referee branding. Sport is an industry itself now and various stakeholders, (i.e., athletes, teams, endorsers, agents, leagues) are already discussed from the prospect of branding.

However, referees were the least discussed among them. Therefore, this study

contributed in academia by proposing a new dimension in sport branding.

Funding

This work was supported only by the authors.

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained via the Ethics Committee of Institute of Research and Advanced Studies, Multan, Pakistan (Approval no: SC-RA-011220).

REFERENCES

- 1-Agyemang, K. J. A.; Williams, A. S. Creating revenue via organisational "Brandpression" management (OBpM): A marriage of brand management and impression management in professional sport. *International Journal of Revenue Management*. Vol. 7. Num. 2. 2013. p. 171-181.
- 2-Agyemang, K. J. A.; Williams, A. S. Managing celebrity via impression management on social network sites: An exploratory study of NBA celebrity athletes. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. Vol. 6. Num. 4. 2016. p. 440-459.
- 3-Anders, A.; Rotthoff, K. Is home-field advantage driven by the fans? Evidence from across the ocean. *Applied Economics Letters*. Vol. 21. Num. 16. 2014. p. 1-9.
- 4-Aragão e Pina, J.; Passos, A.; Carvalho, H.; Maynard, T. To be or not to be an excellent football referee: Different experts' viewpoints. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. Vol. 37. Núm. 6. 2019. p. 692-700.
- 5-Areni, C. Home advantage, rivalry, and referee bias in representative rugby. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. Vol. 4. Num. 2. 2014. p. 142-157.
- 6-Bolino, M. C.; Kacmar, K. M.; Turnley, W. H.; Gilstrap, J. B. A multi-level review of impression management motives and

behaviors. *Journal of Management*. Vol. 34. Num. 6. 2008. p. 1080-1109.

7-Brimberg, J.; Hurley, W. Are National Hockey League referees Markov? *OR Insight*. Vol. 22. Num. 4. 2009. p. 234-243.

8-Butler, R.; Butler, D. Fergie time and the allocation of additional time: Evidence from the English Premier League 2009 to 2013. *International Journal of Sport Finance*. Vol. 12. Num. 3. 2017. p. 185-203.

9-Campbell, J.; Quincy, C.; Osseman, J.; Pedersen, O. Coding in-depth semistructured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*. Vol. 42. Num. 3. 2013. p. 294-320.

10-Carey, J.; Morgan, M.; Oxtoby, M. Intercoder agreement in analysis of responses to open-ended interview questions: Examples from tuberculosis research. *Cultural Anthropology Methods*. Vol. 8. Num. 3. 1996. p. 1-5.

11-Charmaz, K. *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: SAGE Publications. 2006.

12-Cleland, J.; O'Gorman, J.; Webb, T. Respect? An investigation into the experience of referees in association football. *The International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Vol. 53. Num. 8. 2018. p. 960-974.

13-Corbin, J.; Strauss, A. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (3rd ed.)*. London: SAGE Publications. 2008.

14-Dawson, P.; Dobson, S. The influence of social pressure and nationality on individual decisions: Evidence from the behaviour of referees. *Journal of Economic Psychology*. Vol. 31. Num. 2. 2010. p. 181-191.

15-Gale, N.; Heath, G.; Cameron, E.; Rashid, S.; Redwood, S. Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. Vol. 13. Num. 117. 2013. p. 1-8.

16-Gallo, E.; Grund, T.; Reade, J. Punishing the foreigner: Implicit discrimination in the

Premier League based on oppositional identity. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*. Vol. 75. Num. 1. 2013. p. 136-156.

17-Garicano, L.; Palacios-Huerta, I.; Prendergast, C. (). Favoritism under social pressure. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*. Vol. 87. Num. 2. 2005. p. 208-216.

18-Hasaan, A.; Kerem, K. Establishing athlete brand among female Pakistani fans. *PODIUM Sport, Leisure and Tourism Review*. Vol. 6. Num. 4. 2017. p. 333-351.

19-Hasaan, A.; Kerem, K.; Biscaia, R.; Agyemang, K. J. A. A conceptual framework to understand the creation of athlete brand and its implications. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*. Vol. 18. Num. 3. 2018. p. 169-198.

20-Hasaan, A.; Nawaz, S.; Iqbal, S. J.; Khalid, J. (). Challenges that make/break the athlete's quest to become an entrepreneur: A qualitative study about fans' perceptions. *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*. Vol. 79. Num. 1. 2018. p. 53-61.

21-Hlasny, V.; Kolaric, S. Catch me if you can: Referee-team relationships and disciplinary cautions in football. *Journal of Sports Economics*. Vol. 18. Num. 6. 2017. p. 1-32.

22-Hornsey, M.; Wohl, M.; Harris, E.; Okimoto, T.; Thai, M.; Wenzel, M. Embodied remorse: Physical displays of remorse increase positive responses to public apologies, but have negligible effects on forgiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 119. Num. 2. 2020. p. 367-389.

23-Isidori, E.; Müller, A.; Kaya, S. The referee as educator: Hermeneutical and pedagogical perspectives. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*. Vol. 56. Num. 1. 2012. p. 5-11.

24-Karacam, A.; Adiguzel, N. Examining the relationship between referee performance and self-efficacy. *European Journal of Educational Research*. Vol. 8. Num. 1. 2019. p. 377-382.

25-Kuckartz, U. *Mixed methods: Methodology, research designs and methods of data analysis*. Marburg: Springer. 2014.

- 26-Kvale, S. Doing interviews. London: SAGE Publications. 2007.
- 27-Lane, A.; Nevill, A.; Ahmad, N.; Balmer, N. Soccer referee decision-making: 'Shall I blow the whistle?' Journal of Sports Science and Medicine. Vol. 5. Num. 2. 2006. p. 243-253.
- 28-Leicht, A. Cardiovascular stress on an elite basketball referee during national competition. British Journal of Sports Medicine. Vol. 38. Num. 10. 2004. p. 1-2.
- 29-Lopez, M.; Snyder, K. Biased impartiality among national hockey league referees. International Journal of Sport Finance. Vol. 8. Num. 3. 2013. p. 208-223.
- 30-Mack, N.; Woodsong, C.; Macqueen, K.; Guest, G.; Namey, E. Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide. North Carolina: Family Health International. 2005.
- 31-Malone, E. (2001, October 2). Even when a referee is right, he's wrong. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/even-when-a-referee-is-right-he-s-wrong-1.330084>
- 32-Marshall, C.; Rossman, G. B. Designing qualitative research (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. 2014.
- 33-Mascarenahs, D.; Collins, D.; Mortimer, P. Elite refereeing performance: Developing a model for sport science support. The Sport Psychologist. Vol. 19. 4. 2005. p. 364-379.
- 34-McGarry, T.; Anderson, D.; Wallace, S.; Hughes, M.; Frank, I. Sport competition as a dynamical self-organizing system. Journal of Sports Sciences. Vol. 20. 10. 2002. p. 771-781.
- 35-McTavish, D.; Loether, H. Social research: An evolving process. Noida: Pearson Education. 2015.
- 36-Morillo, J.; Reigal, R.; Hernández-Mendo, M.; Montaña, A.; Morales-Sánchez, V. Decision-making by handball referees: Design of an ad hoc observation instrument and polar coordinate analysis. Frontiers in Psychology. Vol. 8. Num. 1842. 2017. p. 1-9.
- 37-Morris, G.; O'Connor, D. Key attributes of expert NRL referees. Journal of Sports Sciences. Vol. 35. Num. 9. 2017. p. 852-857.
- 38-Page, K.; Page, L. Alone against the crowd: Individual differences in referees' ability to cope under pressure. Journal of Economic Psychology. Vol. 31. Num. 2. 2010. p. 192-199.
- 39-Patton, M. Q. Qualitative research and evaluation methods. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications. 2002.
- 40-Prapavessis, H.; Grove, J. R.; Eklund, R. C. Self-presentational issues in competition and sport. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology. Vol. 16. Num. 1. 2004. 19-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200490260035>
- 41-Price, J.; Wolfers, J. Racial discrimination among NBA referees (No. Working Paper 13206). Cambridge, MA. 2007.
- 42-Rindova, V. P.; Pollock, T. G.; Hayward, M. L. A. Celebrity firms: The social construction of market popularity. Academy of Management Review. Vol. 31. Num. 1. 2006. p. 50-71.
- 43-Rojek, C. Celebrity. London: Reaktion Books. 2001.
- 44-Samuel, R. A psychological preparation framework for elite soccer referees: A practitioner's perspective. Journal of Sport Psychology in Action. Vol. 6. Num. 3. 2015. p. 170-187.
- 45-Scoppa, V. Are subjective evaluations biased by social factors or connections? An econometric analysis of soccer referee decisions. Empirical Economics. Vol. 35. Num. 1. 2008. p. 123-140.
- 46-Simmons, P. Communicative displays as fairness heuristics. Australian Journal of Communication. Vol. 37. Num. 1. 2010. p. 75-94.
- 47-Smith, B.; Lord, J. Bracketed morality and ethical ideologies of sport fans. Sport in Society. Vol. 21. Num. 9. 2018. p. 1279-1301.
- 48-St. James, M. Female sports celebrities targeting female teenagers: A content analysis of magazine advertising. Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER). Vol. 8. Num. 1. 2010. p. 1-13.

49-Suri, H. Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*. Vol. 11. Num. 2. 2011. p. 3-75.

50-Thatcher, J. Stress, challenge, and impression management among sports officials. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*. Vol. 1. Num. 1. 2005. p. 26-35.

51-Tsorbatzoudis, H.; Kaissidis-Rodafinos, A.; Partemian, S.; Grouios, G. Sources of stress among Greek team handball referees: Construction and validation of the handball officials' sources of stress survey. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. Vol. 100. Num. 3 Pt 1. 2005. p. 821-830.

52-Unkelbach, C.; Memmert, D. Crowd noise as a cue in referee decisions contributes to the home advantage. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*. Vol. 32. Num. 4. 2010. p. 483-498.

53-Van der Meij, L.; Klauke, F.; Moore, H.; Ludwig, Y.; Almela, M.; van Lange, P. Football fan aggression: The importance of low basal cortisol and a fair referee. *PLoS ONE*. Vol. 10. Num. 4. 2015. p. 1-14.

54-Warner, S.; Tingle, J.; Kellett, P. Officiating attrition: Considering the experiences of referees from a sport development perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*. Vol. 27. Num. 4. 2013. p. 316-328.

55-Webb, T.; Rayner, M.; Thelwell, R. An explorative investigation of referee abuse in English Rugby League. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*. Vol. 10. Num. 2. 2018. p. 14-25.

Received for publication on 22/05/2021

Accepted on 10/08/2021