



Market-oriented Operations of Khon Kaen FC Football Club in Thailand: Implications for Community Wellness and Lifespan Participation

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Abstract. Local football clubs in Thailand have to find a way to find a balance between community responsibility and football business development. Current research often ignores these clubs, either focusing on how top teams make money or criticizing commercialization in general. Few people have studied the strategic shift of these local clubs to promote community welfare and lifelong sports. Our research is to fill this gap and see how a local football club uses market-oriented methods to create social benefits. By studying the case of Khon Kaen FC, we mainly use SWOT analysis, plus reading documents, comparative analysis and semi-structured interviews to ensure that comprehensive information is collected. This club is very popular with many loyal fans here, but its development has encountered some problems, such as people don't know its brand very well, few people discuss it online, and it is difficult to attract investment. By studying the market carefully, we found some good ways: doing more online activities, developing youth projects, interacting with the community more, and establishing a healthy financial model. All these can help the club to better integrate into everyone's life. Our research regards local football clubs like ours as a hybrid, which has both educational and social functions and the need to make money. Finally, we hope to rethink how much business opportunities sports can bring in developing countries.

Keywords: Khon Kaen Football Club, Sustainable Development, Lifespan Participation

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

The rapid commercialization and capitalization of the global sports industry has changed the role of professional football clubs. They are no longer just competition teams, but have become multi-faceted and market-driven organizations. Now these clubs should not only manage the competition, but also run their own brands, spread culture, stimulate the local economy, and promote people to change the habit of sports consumption (Aygün & Alma, 2023). This change is particularly obvious in Southeast Asia, where the professional league system is becoming more and more mature, so how

to operate clubs in the market like companies has become an important research topic in the sports industry. Recently, football clubs in Thailand have seen significant growth in terms of game scale and financial performance. The "Buriram" mode implemented by Buriram Football Club has greatly promoted the local development. (Puacharoen & Pocharee, 2024). Compared with Buriram FC, Khon Kaen FC is far behind in business operation, brand strength, facility quality and ability to attract investment. This study mainly focuses on the Khon Kaen Football Club, and uses SWOT analysis to carefully look at their current market-oriented management mode and find out the key strategic issues. This case study reveals the unique marketing strategy used by Khon Kaen Football Club. The purpose of the study is to provide useful suggestions and preparations for the club's future business development and transformation. In Thailand, football is one of the well-developed sports in Southeast Asia. Since turning to a professional structure, Thailand's national leagues have been improving and modernizing in recent years. Therefore, Thai football has gradually established a market-oriented framework with league as the core and clubs as the main participants (Chaba et al., 2025). In this context, how local clubs can achieve a breakthrough in marketization under limited resources has become a key question affecting regional sports economic development (Tongkampanit et al., 2022).

In the past decade, community health has gone beyond just looking at personal health data. It is found that environmental support, social relations and mental health have great influence on the overall community health. This broader perspective gave birth to the Social Ecological Model, which holds that healthy behavior is a complex and dynamic network, which is related to social relations and system structure. Health behavior does not exist in isolation, but is shaped by a bunch of interrelated and changing social and health factors. From this point of view, professional football clubs rooted in local communities and similar sports organizations are particularly valuable. Sports advocates believe that when these organizations don't have to compete hard, football clubs will focus on organizing all kinds of planned activities and projects, which will encourage everyone to participate in community activities, shape our local characteristics and enhance the connection between people. Therefore, from an academic point of view, it is meaningful and worthwhile to study how football clubs can help communities become healthier and social welfare become better.

At the same time, lifespan participation theory adds further dimension to sport involvement. From this theory, involvement in sport is expected to continue throughout one's life and not just during the competitive years in one's youth (Bailey, 2006; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). When we were young, exercise was mainly to lay a good physical foundation and learn basic skills. When we grow up, sports will become more like fun, relaxation and making friends, which will allow us to participate more in community activities. Later, when we can't take part in sports so actively, our roles may change, for example, we may feel tired from training or become an audience. This view shows that sports is actually a community and cultural activity, not just an individual behavior. The theories of community health and lifelong participation support the professional football club to take root locally. According to these theories, these clubs have both financial and social effects. Their influence is not only as simple as making money, but also helps to shape the social structure of the community where athletes live and

the relationship between people. From the perspective of community health, a professional football club in a city is not only to bring economic benefits or sports honor to the local area. Similarly, the results of social production in almost any city are fundamentally influenced by the institutional economics of sports.

Now, the research on the commercialization of football clubs has found two common problems. At the beginning, the research mainly focused on the top clubs that are financially successful, which means that the research on those clubs with unstable economy can't truly reflect the more general situation. In addition, these studies often only focus on economy and management, ignoring the basic social factors about market demand and the social identity of the market itself. This study does not discuss the commercial feasibility of clubs, their contribution to the social sustainability of communities, and people's participation in sports activities at different stages of life. Although sports clubs are usually regarded as economic and community assets, their role as social institutions seems immature.

This survey will make up for these shortcomings by introducing a revolutionary market method to measure the social value created by the local football club for the region. This method combines the comprehensive cost accounting of clubs with social system theory and strategic management, thus enriching the existing literature.

2 Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study centered on Khon Kaen FC. We choose the case study method because it can help us to see clearly the complex situation inside an organization, which is difficult to understand in their real environment.

Here, SWOT analysis is not only a research method, but also an important part of a larger SWOT analysis framework in the whole research design. SWOT is used as a strategic tool, which can combine the internal characteristics of the organization with the external environment, so that our research structure is more complete and it is easier to find possible conclusions.

The information we collected comes from relevant academic documents, industry reports, and policy documents related to this research topic. We also took the data of Buriram United FC for comparison. In addition, we also understand the actual situation within this organization through some semi-structured interviews.

The conceptual framework of this study combines SEM and LPT, which enables us to evaluate more comprehensively and deeply how to better coordinate market strategy and organizational change in actual situations.

3 Research Result

3.1 Research analysis on the current situation of Khon Kaen FC Football Club

Located in the northeast of Thailand, Khon Kaen is an important education, transportation and business center in that area. With the steady development of local economy, the functions of this

city are becoming more and more powerful (Sintusingha & Dhabhalabutr, 2025), which has laid a good foundation for its sports development. Now, Khon Kaen FC Football Club is like a symbol of this place. It not only participates in competitions, but also reflects the characteristics and cultural traditions of this city (Vartiainen, 2025). Moreover, as a major city, Khon Kaen provides the necessary social environment for football clubs to take on a wider responsibility than sports. A professional team rooted in the community can become the core of social unity, city pride, intergenerational interaction and sports culture participation. From this perspective, the development of Khon Kaen FC is actually closely related to the construction of a more dynamic and integrated urban sports culture. In Khon Kaen Province in northeastern Thailand, it is currently developing as a regional professional club. In terms of league hierarchy, the team has primarily competed in Thailand's lower-tier professional leagues in recent years, with some fluctuations in its competitive performance. However, it still has a certain social influence in the local area. The club has established a basic professional operational framework but is still in the growth stage in terms of the depth of commercialization, brand expansion, and capital integration.

In terms of commercial operations, Khon Kaen Football Club has a relatively narrow revenue stream, mainly from matchday ticket sales, local corporate sponsorships, and a small number of peripheral product sales. Compared with top clubs in other regions of Thailand, Buriram Football Club, for example, spends about 40 to 50 million Thai baht on match tickets each year. If tourism and sports revenues are also taken into account, the club's revenue would amount to approximately 560 million baht (Pornkhuntod et al., 2023). In terms of products, the club's achievements and unique brand image play a key role in expanding the fan base. A strong team image helps to attract more fans. In terms of pricing, setting reasonable prices for club products such as game tickets, jerseys, and souvenirs can generate greater revenue (Pornkhuntod et al., 2023). (Pornkhuntod et al., 2023) The current sponsors are mostly local enterprises, with less cooperation with national brands, indicating that the club's market bargaining and brand premium capabilities are still limited. In terms of advantages, the club has a stable local fan base and a clear regional market position. Suppose digital marketing and social media operations can be enhanced to create a more recognizable brand image. However, Khon Kaen FC has performed poorly in recent competitions, resulting in a low conversion rate of its fans. When the team performs well, fans' loyalty increases, thereby boosting their willingness to spend. (Kural & Özbek, 2023) There is still much room for improvement in its commercialization capabilities.

The brand influence of Khon Kaen Football Club is mainly in its hometown of Khon Kaen Province. Because it has been playing in the professional league for a long time, this team is a symbol in the local sports world. (Phalitnonkiat, 2019) said that those marketing activities that can improve the social status of individuals are good for the brand value of the team and can also help it better cooperate with the community and schools. However, nationwide, this team rarely makes news, and everyone doesn't know much about it, so its influence can't be local. Although this is a big problem, it also shows that it still has potential for development. If the Khon Kaen team can improve its performance or use some unique cultural symbols to rebuild its brand, it can enhance its popularity and attract more people's attention.

This club regards the Khon kaen Provincial Administrative Organization Stadium as their permanent home, so that there is a fixed place for games and fans to watch the ball. This stadium brings the club closer to the local community and brings everyone together, which is beneficial to the economy and society. However, the venue is a little small and the facilities are relatively old, so it is impossible to hold particularly large activities and business operations are restricted.

In addition, the lack of money for youth development projects and training facilities has affected the team's long-term competitiveness and ability to train future talents. Loyal local fans are good for the club, which can not only bring ticket revenue and brand loyalty, but also make the community more United. Supporting this football team can help cultivate people's emotional ties and social relations, and also make local people feel more collective, especially when the team works closely with schools, families and neighborhood groups, which may even make people's mental health and local pride better. From the perspective of capital attraction, Khon Kaen FC Football Club still primarily relies on local support, and its appeal to external strategic investors remains relatively weak. Due to insufficient league-level and brand exposure to the outside world, the cycle for capital returns is relatively long, and the risks faced during investment are relatively high. Therefore, it is not easy to get a large investment from a big company. However, looking at the business prospects of professional football in Thailand, with the growing market and the closer relationship between local sports and city image promotion, local clubs still have opportunities to develop. They can earn more money by getting good results in competitions, set up a strong youth training camp, or try new business strategies-such as digital membership programs, community activities, and cooperation with enterprises-so as to gradually attract more investors. In the long run, the role of youth training can be more than just training players. It can also cultivate children's love for football from an early age, let them learn discipline and teamwork, and establish a long-term cultural identity for the sport. Therefore, cultivating young players is not only the key to the sustainable development of the market, but also brings long-term benefits to society.

Khon Kaen FC is far worse than Buriram FC in Thailand, and it is not as good as money, company support, brand silence or media exposure. Local clubs usually face the problems of unstable funds and the loss of excellent players. These financial restrictions will affect the competitiveness and market position of the club, and also have a great impact on the market potential. Using the method of strategic management can help us to see what advantages there are inside Khon Kaen FC and what opportunities and threats there are outside. This can serve as the basis for the club's future development and progress.

Based on this framework, our research wants to bring several important contributions to the existing research. The most important thing is to promote the research of sports management by SWOT analysis in the theoretical framework of sports industry. Our research is not only an ordinary SWOT analysis, but also combines social and behavioral theories to explain how to change it from a static evaluation to a dynamic tool.

Secondly, this study turned our attention to the commercialization of grass-roots sports, especially to study the factors that promote market development, which come from football clubs in some areas with poor economic conditions in northeast Thailand.

Thirdly, by combining market strategy with social concern, this study gives us a deeper understanding of how economic and social factors are integrated in football and, more broadly, in sports administration. This dual approach considers both commercial and social aspects, providing a new perspective for sports management and creating new possibilities for community advancement initiatives.

3.2 SWOT Analysis of Khon Kaen FC Football Club

This study uses SWOT analysis to evaluate the business situation of Khon Kaen FC Football Club and see how its strategic development affects community participation, local identity and people's continuous participation in sports. Based on our previous assessment of the current situation of Khon Kaen FC Football Club, the following SWOT analysis table is displayed.

Table 1 SWOT factors for Khon Kaen Football Club

Strength	Weakness
The regional market positioning is clear, with a deep focus on Khon Kaen and the northeastern Thai market.	The brand has limited national influence and insufficient media exposure.
A stable local fan base and a strong sense of community identity.	Weak digital marketing systems and insufficient online conversion capabilities.
Have a fixed home ground.	The derivative product system is single, and the brand's added value is low.
Maintain stable partnerships with local businesses.	The sponsorship hierarchy is low, and the bargaining power is weak.
Opportunity	Threat
The commercialization level of professional football in Thailand has improved.	Strong club brand squeeze.
The popularization of social media and digital platforms has brought about a low-cost communication dividend.	The sponsorship market is highly competitive.
The demand for city brand building has increased, and sports have become a marketing vehicle for cities.	Team performance swings affect brand stability.
The youth consumer group has expanded, and the potential for sports and entertainment consumption has increased.	Regional club marketing models are homogenized.

3.3 Analysis and Suggestions for the SWOT Strategy of Khon Kaen FC Football Club

The SWOT analysis of Khon Kaen FC mentioned an opportunity before, that is, to turn this club into a community-centered professional team closely connected with our region. If we value local fans and regional characteristics more than money or national popularity, the club will be different and may even create a strategic advantage across the country. Our goal is to expand brand value and business model while maintaining regional focus. On a larger strategic level, the club hopes to establish a sustainable model with community interaction and participation as the core. Emphasizing the social and sports needs of different community members can add social value to our local method, thus strengthening the long-term market goal of the club.

The way to enhance the influence of our region should focus on a community-based club model. The goal of this strategy is to make this club the top commercial brand in the local market and make it the best business center in the city. At the same time, this method can also help to enhance the visibility of the city by providing sports. Our regional expansion strategy will also strengthen the market supported by the community by paying attention to socialization and health, and encourage residents to participate more actively in sports and social activities of the club. In addition, this club will promote the happiness and participation of the community by establishing an operation mode with sports as the core and focusing on serving fans. These interactive efforts will focus on community-driven sports events, public health activities and activities suitable for the whole family to participate in.

Develop a digital marketing strategy. The cornerstone of this strategy is a comprehensive digital transformation. Clubs need to implement a systematic social media plan, improve their system for managing member information, establish a clear classification for digital content, launch an e-commerce platform, launch marketing campaigns based on data analysis, increase revenue from fans, and improve the efficiency of converting fans into paying customers. All these can be achieved while reducing the dependence on match-day attendance income. Digital transformation can and should improve the way clubs interact with different people. Older fans may prefer traditional digital relevance, while younger groups may prefer interactive and community-driven communication methods, in which digital interaction is the main engagement method. This redefines digital strategy from a simple commercial venture to a tool that can also ensure continuous and meaningful interaction with fans.

Develop a framework for business alliances and sponsorship. A formal sponsorship model can be designed, such as classifying sponsorship categories according to different levels, and keeping in line with the company's strategic priorities, so as to make the relationship, sponsorship and cooperation with local enterprises and business partners more professional. Through cross-industry cooperation (such as combining sports with comprehensive services), greater commercial benefits can be obtained. The key to sustainable market operation is to show the value beyond short-term monetary return. This requires truly meaningful long-term cooperation, not just letting more people participate in a bigger market. For example, a market-driven system will attract more participants. It is very important to make a training plan for young players. Getting good competition results can improve the efficiency of market operation. The club must invest more resources to train young athletes, establish a systematic method to discover and train local players, and ensure that the team can continue to achieve good results. The youth training program can help reduce operating costs, create independent talent delivery channels, and enhance the brand value of the club.

Considering the growth process of athletes, football clubs can shape all stages of their careers. Plans for young players can encourage children and teenagers to exercise more. As people's enthusiasm for football and community participation increase, young people will also participate more actively in community activities related to sports. Involving families and communities in watching games and sports activities can also promote wider social and economic participation. The elderly also play an important role in creating an active local sports culture and social atmosphere. The continuous progress of Khon Kaen FC will promote people to participate in sports at different stages of their lives.

Khon Kaen FC should adopt a special brand building method. Considering the fierce competition in the market, the club must skillfully use its status as a "symbol of northern culture" and a "community team" to find its position in the market and avoid directly confronting teams with big company backgrounds. The brand positioning of the club should be based on cultural uniqueness, and it should be able to impress people's deep community feelings.

Although Khon Kaen FC has a good foundation in marketing activities, it still needs to make some organizational improvements and enhance the brand value. The club plans to optimize its financial management and enhance its brand equity, which in turn can expand its influence. In order to achieve these goals, the club will concentrate on four key things: deepening the local foundation, upgrading digitally, improving the business framework, and strengthening the training plan for young players.

4 Conclusion

In this study, the SWOT analysis method is used to study the Khon Kaen FC Football Club, and its operation strategy is mainly analyzed from the market perspective. This club has unique advantages in the regional sports service market, such as localization, loyal fans, home court and cooperation with local enterprises. These factors enable Khon Kaen FC to provide sports services in line with regional characteristics and build a community-centered brand. Generally speaking, the club has the potential to develop into a national sports brand and a community-based institution. However, it also faces challenges, such as imperfect digital services, limited sponsorship opportunities and insufficient community interaction, which lead to low user satisfaction.

From a lifetime perspective, this arrangement is very important. Youth training programs are the earliest entrance for children to get in touch with sports. Supporter communities provide young people with a way to build their sense of self-identity. Family-centered participation can maximize the vitality of sports. At the same time, the elderly usually keep in touch with sports by watching games and social activities. These paths are not isolated, but form an interconnected participation network, spanning different ages and social status. This model shows a wider change: sports is no longer just a hierarchical competitive performance, but an all-encompassing, life-long and social activity.

There is a particularly important issue that we need to study more deeply, that is, what is the relationship between market-driven and community-centered results. Many people think that the two are completely opposite. However, recent research found that this view often misunderstood the actual situation. In fact, as long as a balance is found between market interests and community interests, the social value of sports can be maintained. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007) believes that brand building combined with digital community interaction strategy can increase available resources, which in turn can support the community-centered mission. In this way, users' social participation will increase, not just consumer transactions. Therefore, this interaction between social goals and market goals has become the core element of effective participation.

SWOT analysis shows that Khon Kaen FC should make use of its local characteristics and fan culture to build itself into a professional club closely connected with the community, and explore various commercial and brand strategies to enhance its influence. In addition to expanding regional influence and widening the gap with competitors, clubs can also enhance market attraction

and income by strengthening sponsor cooperation, improving digital business solutions and launching brand activities for communities and teenagers.

Khon Kaen FC is developing into a regional club, and its brand and competitiveness will be stronger with the increase of business activities and regional attention. In this way, the club can surpass the current regional status in Thailand and start to compete with other professional clubs in Asia.

Khon Kaen FC shows a new change. They care about the market as well as the community. They pay special attention to health and encourage everyone to take part in sports all their lives. By developing youth programs, cultivating loyal fans, making everyone play football, and involving families and communities, this club has the opportunity to make people of different ages develop healthier living habits, ensure long-term emotional ties, and keep all kinds of participants involved. Therefore, this market-oriented regional football club operation mode has become an example, showing how to achieve sustainable development and innovative strategies suitable for different generations.

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