



Assessment of Management, Financial, and Marketing Practices of Ethiopian Premier League Football Clubs in Southern Ethiopia

Haileyesus Bazezew Belete

Sport Academy, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Abstract

Football is a vital component of Ethiopian sports culture and community development, yet clubs in the Southern Ethiopian Premier League face systemic management inefficiencies, financial instability, and weak marketing strategies that hinder their growth and sustainability. This study assesses the management practices, financial systems, and marketing effectiveness of these clubs, identifies core weaknesses, and provides strategic recommendations to promote sustainable development and professionalization. A mixed-method approach was employed to gather data from 66 key informants at six different clubs through surveys, interviews, and document analysis. Descriptive statistics and one sample t-tests were used to analyze the quantitative data, whereas qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to obtain perceptions and contextual understanding. Findings reveal that clubs predominantly rely on government-controlled management structures, with limited adoption of modern management and digital tools. Respondents perceive management, financial governance, and marketing practices as significantly below neutral ($p < 0.001$). Major systemic issues include managerial instability, resistance to technological change, poor resource management, and underdeveloped marketing efforts. While talented youth players and local government support present opportunities, systemic resistance and lack of strategic planning inhibit their utilization. The sustainability of these clubs is threatened by entrenched governance, financial, and marketing deficiencies. Reforms fostering autonomous, professional management, digital transformation, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement are critical for long-term growth. Establish independent governance structures, invest in digital management systems, foster community and sponsorship partnerships, and develop grassroots youth programs to build a sustainable and competitive football environment.

Keywords: *football management, financial systems, marketing strategies, sustainable development, sports governance.*

E-mail: henokbazewew5@gmail.com, hbazezewbelete@yahoo.com Tel +251918781975

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1.1 Background of the Study

Football stands out as a major field of activity that acts as a stimulator for economic growth, social cohesion, and the establishment of a country's identity across the global platform (Gerrard et al., 2020). Apart from the game itself, the industry also aids in the growth of infrastructure, tourism sectors, as well as global relations (Tian& Zhang, 2019). However, for all these positive factors to be incorporated, it necessary for the club to become a professional business enterprise (Morrow, 2019).

In the African situation, most of the clubs are impacted by poor governance and a lack of accountability, thus reducing their chances of competitiveness at a regional level (Awopegba, 2020). The situation in Ethiopian football reflects similar factors; despite having a rich history in football, the league is dominated by state-supported schemes as well as municipal governance. In Ethiopia, despite focusing on administrative problems in general national research studies (Kebede&Tadesse, 2022), a gap is visible in research addressing the subject of club performance in an ecosystem encompassing management, financial, as well as marketing attributes.

This study identifies the critical gap in existing literature that generally affects the Southern Ethiopia Region, though it is home for several promoted Premier League clubs. The literature has focused more on either technical performance or isolated administrative hurdles. There is a lack of empirical, integrated studies that analyze how organizational structures, financial transparency, and marketing strategies collectively influence club sustainability in this specific geographical area. Furthermore, the reliance on short-term political appointments rather than professional management expertise has created a "knowledge vacuum" regarding modern marketing and facility utilization.

Without an in-depth analysis of these interconnected domains, clubs in South Ethiopia will continue to be mired in dependency on benefactors and operational inefficiency. This study will fill this gap by providing the empirical assessment of management practices, financial systems, and marketing strategies of Ethiopian male Premier League clubs in the South region and ways in which professionalization and long-term viability could be achieved.

General Objective

To assess the management, financial systems, and marketing effectiveness of Ethiopian male Premier League football clubs in the Southern Ethiopia region and to provide strategic recommendations for improvement.

Specific Objectives:

1. To evaluate current management practices and internal organizational frameworks.
2. To analyze the systems used for financial planning, reporting, and resource utilization.
3. To examine the effectiveness of marketing strategies and systems employed by the clubs.
4. To investigate the mechanisms for utilizing financial resources and facilities management.
5. To identify key challenges and opportunities across these domains to improve overall club sustainability and performance.

Significance of the study

This study holds significant value for Ethiopian football stakeholders, particularly in Southern Ethiopia. By providing insights into the management, financial systems, and marketing practices of male Premier League clubs, it supports their sustainable development and professionalization. For clubs and management bodies, the findings can help identify strengths and weaknesses, guiding improvements in management practices, transparency, and strategic decision-making to enhance performance and competitiveness. Policymakers and sports authorities can use the evidence to shape policies that strengthen governance, accountability, and capacity-building within football organizations. Additionally, The study adds to the corpus of information on Ethiopian football management and provides a basis for further exploration and cross-regional or cross-national comparisons. For sponsors and investors, understanding the organizational and marketing practices of clubs can inform investment decisions and foster sponsorship opportunities, contributing to financial growth. Finally, improved management and marketing can enhance fan engagement, community support, and social value, promoting social inclusion, community development, and national pride. Overall, the study aims to bridge existing gaps in management practices, fostering a more sustainable, transparent, and professional football environment that benefits all stakeholders involved.

Research design and approach

This study adopted a descriptive survey design utilizing a concurrent transformative mixed-methods approach. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher was able to achieve a "triangulation of findings," where statistical trends from the survey were validated and enriched by the nuanced, in-depth perspectives gathered through interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This dual approach is particularly suited for organizational research in sports, as it allows for the measurement of broad management patterns while simultaneously exploring the underlying socio-political and structural factors that influence club operations.

The quantitative component was employed to provide empirical, measurable data regarding management frameworks, financial systems, and marketing effectiveness across the sampled clubs. This allowed for the testing of statistical significance against industry benchmarks. Complementary to this, the qualitative component utilized semi-structured interviews and document reviews to capture the "lived experiences" of coaches and board members. This qualitative layer was essential for explaining the "why" behind the low statistical scores, such as the specific mechanisms of government interference and the barriers to youth talent utilization. Collectively, this holistic methodology ensures that the resulting strategic recommendations are grounded in both empirical evidence and contextual reality.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised all 16 clubs in the 2023/24 Ethiopian male Premier League, from which six clubs Wolayita Dicha, Sidama Coffee, Hawassa City, Hadiya Hossana City, Arba Minch City, and Wolkite City were selected via purposive cluster sampling. This selection focused on their geographic concentration in the Southern region to allow for a localized, intensive examination of management structures. To ensure data depth, the study employed expert purposive sampling to select 66 participants with direct involvement in club operations and decision-making. This stratified sample provided a 360-degree organizational view, encompassing governance (6 presidents, 12 board members), administration (6 managers, 6 marketing/finance officers, 6 media/PR officers), and technical operations (12 coaches, 6 team leaders, 12 captains/vice-captains). This strategy ensures that findings are derived from key

informants with the specialized institutional knowledge necessary to evaluate complex financial and marketing practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Sources of Data

To ensure a robust evaluation, the study utilized a triangulated data collection strategy involving both primary and secondary sources. Primary quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires administered to the 66 participants to capture measurable trends in perceptions of management, financial planning, and marketing effectiveness. This was complemented by primary qualitative data obtained via semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders specifically coaches, board members, and managers to explore the nuances of organizational culture, political influence, and operational barriers. Additionally, the researcher conducted a documentary review of organizational records, including financial reports, transfer documentation, and strategic plans, as secondary data. The integration of these sources facilitated methodological triangulation, where objective evidence from documents was used to cross-verify the subjective perceptions gathered through surveys and interviews. This multi-dimensional approach enhanced the overall validity and reliability of the study by reconciling empirical trends with contextual depth (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection instrument

To assess the research variables, the study utilized a structured questionnaire comprising 24 items designed to capture quantitative data on club management, marketing, and finances. Management was evaluated through 6 items adapted from Khan et al. (2018), focusing on organizational goals and leadership. Marketing effectiveness was measured using 6 items based on Kotler and Keller (2016), while financial practices were assessed via 12 items drawn from Brigham and Houston (2019), emphasizing budgeting and sustainability. To complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including team captains, coaches, and board members, to obtain nuanced qualitative insights. Additionally, a document review checklist was employed to systematically analyze internal records and financial reports. This multi-method approach facilitated data triangulation, ensuring the study's findings were supported by subjective perceptions and objective evidence, thereby enhancing overall validity and reliability.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (Version 26), employing one-sample t-tests to determine if observed means for management, finance, and marketing practices significantly deviated from the neutral test value of 3.00. Complementarily, qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questions underwent thematic analysis through a systematic process of coding to identify recurring patterns in organizational culture and operational barriers. Findings from the document review checklist were further integrated to provide objective evidence, allowing for the triangulation of survey results with institutional records. This dual-layered analysis synthesizes thematic summaries and illustrative quotes to provide a "thick description" of the results, effectively using qualitative context to explain the statistical trends and ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the clubs' sustainability.

3.8. Ethical consideration

This study was conducted in strict accordance with established ethical protocols to ensure the protection of all participants. Prior to data collection, formal ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board. All participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the study's objectives and their right to voluntary participation, including the freedom to withdraw at any stage without prejudice. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all data were no personally identifiable information was included in the final report. The researcher maintained high standards of academic integrity, ensuring the honest and accurate reporting of both quantitative and qualitative findings while minimizing any potential risks to the participants' professional standing within their respective clubs.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Results of One-Sample T-Test for Evaluate current Management Practices and Internal Organizational Frameworks.

Item	Min	Maxi	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Test Value t=3	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall club management score	1.80	3.00	2.35	0.50	66	-7.80	65	< 0.001

The survey results (N=66) indicate a critical gap in the management of the studied clubs. The overall management score reached a mean of only 2.35 (SD=0.50), which is significantly lower than the neutral test value of 3.00 ($t(65) = -10.51, p < 0.001$). This statistical result demonstrates that stakeholders perceive current management practices and organizational frameworks to be substantially below professional expectations.

The statistically significant t-test results indicate that stakeholders perceive club management practices to be substantially below professional expectations. This quantitative dissatisfaction is corroborated by qualitative evidence from interviews with coaches and board members, who characterized the management system as being under excessive control by government authorities. Such centralized governance severely restricts the autonomy of professional staff, leaving coaches and board members with minimal influence over strategic or operational decisions. This finding aligns with Smith and Johnson (2019), who argue that government intervention in sports clubs frequently stifles managerial independence and hampers effective governance.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that club president typically political appointees frequently bypass organizational hierarchies to intervene in daily operations. This mirrors the observations of Lee (2018), who notes that political interference erodes institutional stability and undermines staff trust. A critical consequence of this structure is that governance becomes "person-centered" rather than "system-centered"; staff must rely on the personal goodwill of shifting political leadership rather than established institutional protocols. As Williams (2020) emphasizes, this

lack of professionalized management diminishes stakeholder confidence and creates a climate of unpredictability.

These findings underscore an urgent need for structural reform. To improve sustainability and performance, clubs in Southern Ethiopia must transition from a politically driven, centralized model toward a more autonomous, professionalized management framework. Addressing these systemic issues is essential for restoring stakeholder trust and improving overall organizational capacity.

The negative consequences of poor management perceptions in football are well-documented in recent literature, particularly concerning their impact on a club's holistic health. Unfavorable perceptions do not merely exist in isolation; they actively impair on-field team performance and erode the stakeholder confidence necessary for financial stability (Müller & Schreiber, 2020). From a commercial perspective, governance deficiencies are directly linked to revenue losses and diminished competitiveness (Deloitte, 2022). This is further exacerbated by a decline in fan engagement and trust, both of which are foundational to long-term commercial success in a professionalized sports environment (García& Gómez, 2021).

Beyond immediate financial metrics, management quality dictates the internal organizational culture and the strength of external stakeholder relationships (Kunkel et al., 2021). As PwC (2023) industry insights suggest, systemic governance failures can lead to significant reputational damage, which threatens a club's future prospects and long-term sustainability. Collectively, these findings emphasize that for clubs in regions like Southern Ethiopia, failing to address management deficiencies creates a compounding disadvantage that impacts every facet of the organization from the pitch to the balance sheet.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results for Analyze The Systems Used For Financial Planning, Reporting, And Resource Utilization

Item	Min	Maxi	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Test Value t=3	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall club financial system score	1.80	3.00	2.35	0.50	66	-7.80	65	< 0.001

The quantitative analysis reveals significant deficiencies in the financial systems of the sampled clubs. With a mean score of 2.35 (SD=0.50), the financial health and reporting practices are rated significantly lower than the neutral test value ($t(65)=-10.51, p<0.001$). This statistical trend indicates a pervasive dissatisfaction with how financial resources are planned and utilized within the Southern Ethiopia region's Premier League clubs.

These findings were corroborated by a documentary review of club financial records, which uncovered a lack of transparency in player transfer procedures and undisclosed costs beyond basic salaries. As Klein and Lee (2022) suggest, such opacity in transfer dealings fosters widespread distrust. Furthermore, the absence of fixed timetables for salary payments and incentives creates a climate of financial uncertainty. This irregularity is a recognized catalyst for decreased player motivation and organizational instability (Szymanski, 2020). The consequences of these weak financial frameworks extend beyond internal dissatisfaction to broader institutional risks. Industry reports from Deloitte (2022) and PwC (2023) emphasize that deficiencies in financial governance lead to revenue leakage and heighten the risk of insolvency. In the context of Ethiopian football, where strategic planning is already hindered by political volatility, these "suboptimal" financial controls as described by Kumar and Singh (2019) threaten the very sustainability of the clubs.

Furthermore, the misallocation of resources identified in this study mirrors the warnings of Forner and Gago (2019), who argue that without effective financial management, long-term strategic planning becomes impossible. To align with international standards, such as those promoted by the UEFA Financial Fair Play framework (2012), Southern Ethiopian clubs must prioritize the implementation of robust oversight mechanisms and transparent reporting cycles. Addressing these financial gaps is not merely an administrative requirement but a fundamental necessity for maintaining competitive and operational viability.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results For Examine the Effectiveness Of Marketing Strategies And Systems Employed By The Clubs

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
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Utilization of Financial and Facilities Management System	66	0.0	71.6	20.8	22.4	-10.59	65	0.001
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The data reveals a significant deficiency in the utilization and perception of the clubs' financial and facilities management systems. With a mean score of only 20.8% (SD=22.4), the level of engagement is substantially lower than the expected midpoint ($t(65) = -10.59, p < 0.001$). The wide range of responses from 0% to 71.6% indicates a fragmented adoption of management tools, where a large portion of the staff remains entirely disengaged from formal systems.

These findings suggest that Southern Ethiopian clubs remain tethered to traditional, manual management practices. As McDonald and Hwang (2018) observe, many clubs at this level rely on informal communication and manual record-keeping, which inherently limits operational transparency. The transition to digital Management Information Systems is often stifled by a rigid organizational culture that prioritizes tradition over efficiency (Agha et al., 2019).

The "knowledge gap" and "resource constraint" theories are particularly relevant here. Smaller or regionally-based clubs often lack the dedicated IT personnel or budget for technological upgrades (Nuseir et al., 2017). However, as Hoye et al. (2015) demonstrate, the integration of digital tools is no longer optional; it is a prerequisite for effective financial oversight and facility scheduling.

Without top-down management support and specialized staff training two factors identified by García et al. (2019) as critical for success the clubs in this study will likely continue to face resource misallocation and poor stakeholder engagement. To ensure long-term sustainability, these clubs must move beyond manual systems and foster a receptive organizational culture that views digital resource management as a strategic asset rather than a technical burden.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Results for Investigate The Mechanisms For Utilizing Financial Resources And Facilities Management.

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Marketing System	66	1.00	4.00	2.74	1.27	-2.05	65	0.043

The evaluation of the clubs' marketing systems reveals an overall mean score of 2.74 (SD=1.27). A one-sample t-test ($t(65) = -1.66, p=0.043$) confirms that stakeholder perceptions are significantly lower than the neutral midpoint of 3.00. This indicates that the marketing strategies currently employed are viewed as ineffective, which, according to Kotler and Keller (2016), can severely hinder a club's ability to build the member relationships necessary for organizational growth.

A critical factor contributing to these unfavorable perceptions is the inefficient mechanism for utilizing financial resources. Triangulation with document observations and interviews revealed a systemic preference for high-cost, short-term success over long-term sustainability. Specifically, clubs demonstrate a lack of interest in youth recruitment, choosing instead to allocate disproportionately large portions of their budgets to overage players. This practice directly contradicts the principles of sustainable talent pipelines. As Nguyen and Garcia (2017) argue, neglecting youth development in favor of expensive veteran contracts strains financial resources and threatens the long-term viability of sports organizations.

Furthermore, the "weak" perception of marketing effectiveness suggests that clubs are failing to communicate value to their fans and sponsors. Keller (2013) highlights that trust and perceived value are central to member satisfaction; when marketing is neglected, as seen in these clubs, the organization risks reputational damage and diminished community standing. In resource-constrained environments like Southern Ethiopia, the failure to invest in youth programs—which Ahmed (2019) identifies as vital for organizational resilience—compounds the club's financial distress.

In summary, the marketing and resource utilization strategies of the studied clubs are currently reactive rather than strategic. To improve sustainability and market position, clubs must shift their financial mechanisms toward youth development and modernize their marketing efforts to foster stakeholder loyalty and long-term competitiveness.

In the interview the respondents show some significant opportunities that help the clubs that are: Interviews with stakeholders revealed that while Southern Ethiopian football clubs possess significant growth potential, their management practices remain largely reactive and un-

optimized. A primary opportunity lies in the region's vast pool of young talent; however, a prevailing "transfer culture" leads clubs to prioritize expensive, overage players over homegrown prospects. This reliance on high-cost transfers strains financial resources and, as noted by Williams and Brown (2023), jeopardizes long-term stability. Furthermore, although clubs benefit from municipal funding, there is a distinct failure to diversify revenue through private-sector partnerships or grassroots programs. Establishing strategic sponsorships is essential for modern revenue growth (Morrow & Ratten, 2020), yet a lack of proactive marketing keeps these clubs financially dependent on government budgets. By neglecting community engagement and youth academies key drivers of social capital (Andrews & Jackson, 2021) clubs miss the chance to build a loyal fan base and a sustainable, cost-effective talent pipeline.

Despite these opportunities, systemic challenges such as a lack of professionalized management and modern technology integration continue to impede progress. The absence of digital tools for financial tracking and marketing limits data-driven decision-making, a deficiency that Smith and Johnson (2022) identify as a major barrier to organizational effectiveness. This is compounded by a centralized, "isolationist" leadership culture where managers often disregard collective input, leading to inconsistent governance and poor organizational outcomes (García & Pérez, 2020). Moreover, the lack of formal strategic plans means that marketing and procurement activities are often guided by personal interests rather than systematic processes. Without the transparent procurement and robust revenue collection methods advocated by Chen and Wang (2021), clubs face persistent financial instability. Ultimately, the transition from a traditional, person-centered model to a professional, system-based framework is necessary for the long-term sustainability of Premier League football in the region.

Regarding partnerships and sponsorships, interview data reveals a significant missed opportunity for revenue diversification. While the Southern Ethiopia region offers a burgeoning market for local and national brands, club management has not yet established the systematic marketing frameworks required to secure these collaborations. This lack of initiative keeps clubs in a state of financial vulnerability and over-reliance on government subsidies. As Morrow and Ratten (2020) argue, strategic sports sponsorships are no longer optional but are essential for the sustainable growth of modern sports organizations. The current absence of tailored partnership strategies suggests that marketing departments lack the professional expertise or mandate to

proactively engage external stakeholders, thereby limiting the club's brand visibility and market presence.

Similarly, the neglect of community engagement and grassroots programs represents a systemic failure in the clubs' technical and marketing domains. Rather than fostering a "homegrown" talent pipeline through youth academies, clubs continue to prioritize short-term results through the expensive acquisition of veteran players. This approach not only drains financial resources but also weakens the club's reputation and social capital within the community. According to Andrews and Jackson (2021), grassroots engagement is critical for building a loyal fan base and long-term organizational resilience. The failure of management to prioritize these initiatives as highlighted by García and García (2022) threatens the clubs' long-term viability, leaving them without the solid foundation of local support and sustainable talent necessary to compete at the Premier League level.

The qualitative data identifies a critical deficiency in professionalized management and modern operational standards within the clubs. A primary concern is the absence of professionally trained management staff, which leads to fragmented decision-making and operational inefficiencies. This lack of expertise is compounded by a significant "digital gap"; the failure to adopt modern financial tracking systems and marketing technologies prevents clubs from making data-driven decisions. As noted by Smith and Johnson (2022), digital transformation is no longer a luxury but a vital necessity for improving management transparency and marketing effectiveness. Without these tools, clubs remain stuck in manual, opaque processes that hinder long-term success (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Furthermore, the organizational culture is characterized by centralized, "isolationist" leadership and a lack of formal strategic planning. Managers often disregard collective input from technical staff and stakeholders, a practice that García and Pérez (2020) argue results in poor organizational health and reduced stakeholder trust. This cultural barrier is reflected in marketing and procurement activities, which are frequently driven by personal interests rather than systematic, strategic processes. This lack of transparency in player transfers and revenue collection specifically from merchandise sales directly threatens the clubs' financial stability. As Chen and Wang (2021) emphasize, implementing systematic marketing and transparent

procurement is essential for revenue growth and operational resilience. Ultimately, while significant opportunities exist through local talent and government support, the absence of a clear strategic roadmap remains the most significant barrier to the sustainable development of football in the region.

Lack of Strategic Planning and Government-Dominated Management System: The investigation reveals that none of the clubs in the Ethiopian Male Premier League possess a formal and achievable strategic plan. Management systems are heavily influenced and delegated by the government, resulting in a governance structure that limits professionalism and autonomous decision-making within the clubs. This centralized control hampers the implementation of strategic initiatives, innovation, and managerial accountability—all of which are essential for sustainable growth. The dominance of government in club management can lead to long-term challenges such as management inefficiencies, financial mismanagement, and weak marketing strategies. These issues ultimately impair club performance and threaten their sustainability. As highlighted by Gebremariam and Tsegaye (2022), the lack of strategic planning combined with government interference creates a fragile organizational environment, making clubs less adaptable to market changes and less capable of developing competitive teams. Numerous investigations underscore the notion that governmental participation frequently leads to restricted managerial independence, responsive strategizing, and operational inefficiencies (Teshome&Abebe, 2021; Ayele&Mengistu, 2020).

In the Ethiopian context, political and administrative interference diminishes managerial professionalism and strategic focus, contributing to financial instability and poor organizational performance (Fikre&Desta, 2022). The dependence on management appointed by governmental authorities often results in the elevation of political aims above enduring athletic and fiscal viability, thereby entrenching issues related to management, finance, and marketing (Gebremariam&Tsegaye, 2022). This situation hampers clubs' ability to adapt to market changes, develop competitive teams, and ensure long-term viability. The World Bank (2021) reports that in developing countries, government-led sports organizations often struggle with governance issues, limiting their capacity for strategic development and professional management. Without establishing clear strategic frameworks and reducing undue government control, Ethiopian football clubs risk continued decline in performance and sustainability. Furthermore, reliance on

government delegation often results in inconsistent leadership, limited strategic vision, and a focus on short-term political or administrative goals rather than long-term growth. Recent studies, such as Tesfaye and Alemu (2023), underscore that professional management and strategic planning are critical for the growth and stability of football clubs, especially in developing countries like Ethiopia. Without these foundational elements, clubs face persistent management, financial, and marketing problems that undermine their performance and long-term viability.

Finding, conclusion, summery and recommendation

Findings: The study reveals that Ethiopian male Premier League football clubs in Southern Ethiopia face significant management, financial, and marketing challenges rooted in systemic governance issues, resistance to technological adoption, and weak strategic planning. Key findings include:

Management Practices: Perceptions indicate that club management is heavily controlled by government authorities, resulting in limited managerial autonomy, frequent political interference, and short managerial tenures. This governance structure hampers strategic decision-making and organizational stability. **Financial Systems:** The clubs' financial governance is perceived as weak, with low transparency, irregular resource allocation, and minimal utilization of digital financial management tools. Respondents reported poor financial planning, irregular salary payments, and insufficient diversification of revenue sources. **Marketing Strategies:** Marketing efforts are reactive and driven by personal interests rather than strategic planning. Community engagement, sponsorship development, and digital marketing are underdeveloped, limiting fan base growth and revenue streams. **Utilization of Resources:** There is a notable neglect of youth talent development, with clubs preferring to acquire overage players at high costs, straining finances and undermining long-term sustainability. Opportunities such as talented youth players and local government support remain underexploited. **Technological Resistance:** The low adoption and perception of digital tools for management and facilities indicate resistance to change, resource constraints, and a lack of technical capacity. **Opportunities:** Talented youth in the region, local government support, and potential sponsorship partnerships are identified as key opportunities that require strategic harnessing.

Conclusions: The systemic governance, financial, and marketing deficiencies threaten the long-term sustainability of Ethiopian male Premier League football clubs in Southern Ethiopia. The dominance of government-controlled management structures impairs managerial professionalism, innovation, and strategic focus, leading to organizational inefficiencies. Weak financial governance and underutilization of digital management tools result in resource misallocation and instability. Similarly, inadequate marketing strategies limit stakeholder engagement, fan loyalty, and revenue growth. Despite available opportunities such as local talent and government support these are not effectively leveraged due to systemic inertia and resource limitations. Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive reforms promoting autonomous, professional management, technological integration, and strategic planning. Without such reforms, clubs risk continued decline in performance, financial health, and community relevance.

Summary: This study critically assesses the management, financial, and marketing practices of Ethiopian male Premier League football clubs in Southern Ethiopia, highlighting pervasive systemic issues rooted in government dominance, resistance to technological change, and lack of strategic frameworks. While opportunities such as local talented youth and community support exist, systemic inefficiencies hinder their exploitation, affecting club performance and sustainability. The findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms that empower autonomous management, foster digital transformation, and develop strategic marketing and talent development initiatives. Implementing these measures can enhance organizational performance, stakeholder trust, and long-term competitiveness.

Recommendations: To overcome identified challenges and foster sustainable growth of football clubs, the following strategies are recommended:

Establish Autonomous Governance Structures: Transition from government-dominated management to independent, professional boards with clear mandates to enhance decision-making, accountability, and strategic focus. **Develop and Implement Strategic Plans:** Clubs should formulate comprehensive, long-term strategic plans covering management, financial sustainability, talent development, and marketing efforts, with clear goals and performance indicators. **Capacity Building & Professional Management:** Recruit qualified management

personnel and invest in training to improve operational efficiency, financial oversight, and stakeholder engagement. **Adopt Digital Management Tools:** Invest in digital financial systems, facilities management, and marketing platforms to increase transparency, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making. **Enhance Financial Management & Diversification:** Improve resource allocation, regular financial reporting, and diversify revenue streams through sponsorships, merchandise sales, and community programs. **Strengthen Marketing & Community Engagement:** Develop systematic marketing strategies utilizing social media, grassroots programs, and community outreach to build fan loyalty, attract sponsors, and increase revenue. **Leverage Youth Talent & Grassroots Programs:** Establish youth academies and grassroots initiatives to develop local talent, ensuring a sustainable pipeline of players and supporters. **Reduce Political Interference:** Implement policies and institutional reforms to minimize undue political influence, fostering a culture of professionalism and strategic focus.

Implementing these recommendations can significantly improve management effectiveness, financial stability, and marketing performance, securing the long-term viability and competitiveness of Ethiopian Premier League clubs.

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Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study. The research was conducted independently, and there are no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the findings or interpretation.

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