

In The

Name of

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Sports Business Journal

Scientific Quarterly Journal
of **Alzahra University**

Summer 2023

Vol. 3, Issue. 3, Serial Number 7

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Editor-in-Chief Note

In The 5th issue of the **Sports Business Journal** was published, and more audiences know it today. The number of fast-rejected papers has decreased because the journal's scope has found its position among its audience. We are honored that today researchers in the sports business scopes can publish their research results in a specialized journal with the highest qualitative and structural forms.

Through this issue, not only the grammatical editing of the articles with high precision has been done, but all the references have been controlled and automated with End note software. So, all references in the text of the articles have linked to their original pages on the Internet. This quality obtains by spending a lot of time and with high precision, like the other high-quality journals worldwide. This effort makes the sources and references with the minimum errors in each paper, and incorrect references are corrected carefully. Also, all the articles will be carefully uploaded on the researchers' Publons, Research gate, and Google Scholar pages. As well as, every time one of them has been cited by any author around the world, they will be informed. In addition, the journal's reviewers can inform other editors and researchers of their activities by recording their reviews on their personal Publons pages and thus receive the possibility of more review invitations from the different international chief editors.

In addition, sharing articles and journal issues on its social media have increased its and the authors' visibility, increasing the journal's H-index to 8. This growth is a good statistic for a short period from its started activity. In this way, we have tried to register the journal in valid scientific indexes. By the grace of God and the cooperation of dear authors, we hope it succeeds in receiving the highest scientific rank in Iran. Furthermore, we will coordinate that Iranian writers and researchers cooperate more and better with foreign researchers in conducting research work and writing joint scientific articles.

In this way, we are incredibly grateful to the support of the Vice-Chancellor of Research and the Publications Department of **Alzahra University**, who did not hesitate to do everything they could and needed by the executive team of the journal. Also, we are grateful to the dear referees for their careful and compassionate reviews of the articles, the authors of this issue for submitting their valuable papers, and the detailed answers to the corrections requested by the referees, improving the quality of the articles. In line with our mission and to responding the young researchers' requests, we hope to plan and hold two workshops to help young researchers conduct high-quality research and write quality articles in English and at the level of international indexes and promote the articles.

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Estimating Iranian Professional Football Players' Prices A Neural Networks Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study aimed to estimate the price of Iranian professional football league players.

Methodology: The research method was mixed exploratory designs, qualitative and quantitative methods. The research participants in the qualitative section included managers, club coaches, and experts familiar with the football players' market. Therefore, fourteen participants were selected by snowball until we reached saturation. The research tool in the qualitative section included in-depth interviews, so the reliability of the re-test method was 81%. In the quantitative section, the statistical population had all the football players in the Iranian Football Professional League during 2016-2020, and random sampling was done. So, 863 players were selected to use their data for analysis. The quantitative methods were also collected from valid sites and the Iranian Football League Organization. The model was also designed through radial neural networks using software SPSS and R.

Findings: The qualitative section showed that the player's performance, personal characteristics and abilities, club characteristics, and bubble-creating factors are influential in determining the price of football players. In the quantitative section, a model with three hidden layers was designed, which had a nominal error rate in predicting the price of players.

Originality: Today, one of the main problems in the field of transfer in football leagues is the small number of appropriate criteria for pricing players. This study aims to estimate the price of professional football players using artificial neural networks.

Keywords

Football Clubs
Players Market
Players' Value
Pricing, Players Transfer

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/02/03

Accepted: 2023/05/16

How to cite this article:

Salimi, M., Tayebi, M., & Labbaf, A. H. (2023). Estimating Iranian Professional Football Players' Prices A Neural Networks Approach. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 13-28. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.42806.1069>



1. Introduction

The World Football Association, with millions of players and billions of fans, is the world's most popular sports organization (Müller et al., 2017). The budgets of the best football clubs are continually growing, and the value of the best players is also increasing (Majewski, 2021). Due to this increasing amount of money, the sport has become an essential part of the global economy (Klobučnik et al., 2019). Only in 2020 was a slowdown in club spending and revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Metelski & Kornakov, 2021). Many scientists have also tried to determine which factors have the most significant impact on the value of players (Felipe et al., 2020).

From the point of view of sports club management, the most critical decision that affects the success or failure of football clubs and should be carefully considered and then adopted is the attraction of players (Amir & Livne, 2005). The study of Müller et al. (2017) showed that the innovative approach to player recruitment has been a great help in the last two decades to the teams. So, despite the minimum budget spending, they have achieved a good position in the club rankings. Football players are not only human resources for the clubs that attract them; their sports skills and expertise are intangible assets that are valuable and can be traded. Poli (2005) believes that football players have two values. First, they have a virtual value, which they raise or lower through their evolutions on the field and hold if they are legitimated at a club. When the footballer is offered for sale, the virtual value turns into a real deal, with the footballer ready to be sold in return for money (financial value). Of course, this value applies to players with the skills and value to sell for cash, called market value. A player's market value estimates how much a team can sell the player's contract to another group (Herm et al., 2014).

One of the main activities of football clubs is trading (acquisition and disposal) of player contracts (Amir & Livne, 2005). In football, talents are traded in markets specific to the sport, known as transfer markets (Roşca, 2012). The primary justification for the players' transfer and trading system is that the club can regain its capital by training and developing players' skills (Amir & Livne, 2005). Since transferring players significantly affects a club's chances of success (Pawlowski et al., 2010), researchers from various disciplines have long studied the factors that impact transfer fees (Frick, 2007). Of course, it must be acknowledged that most of the transfer fees of football players are related to the price of the players.

However, today, pricing in sports is an art, and pricing decisions reflect a combination of insight, past experiences, and complex analysis. It is one of the critical 4 Ps (Price, Place, Promotion, and Product) in sports marketing that is not created in a gap but is a dynamic and multifaceted process. However, in Iran and some other countries, the pricing of football players does not follow a specific pricing principle and method (Ganj Khanloo et al., 2021; Memari et al., 2020; Sarlab et al., 2022). Also, the study of Dey et al. (2014) showed that some players received more than their competence and performance, and the opposite is true. Besides, although the government provides a lot of financial aid to the clubs and allocates heavy budgets for them, it does not play a role in determining the price of the players, and this is done by the managers and transfer experts of the clubs (Salimi & Tayebi, 2018). Therefore, it can be acknowledged that estimating and predicting the

price of football players is a challenging task. The existence of many parameters, and in many hidden cases, has made a prediction difficult, and complex mathematical algorithms have failed to provide appropriate solutions for an efficient predictive model (Salimi & Tayebi, 2018).

It should be acknowledged that determining players' salaries or contract amounts is an integral part of the sports economy, so minor fluctuations in the amounts will significantly affect a club's income and profitability. Thus, inappropriate planning for determining the value and price of players will impose a heavy load on clubs. In addition, some clubs in Iran face difficulties and challenges in obtaining financial resources. In a way, they are funded by government organizations, and sometimes by the private sector, and generate low income (Izadyar et al., 2016). To eliminate these shortcomings, they use various solutions, such as attracting sponsors and taking loans. However, suppose club managers know the critical factors in pricing football players and the ability to estimate their prices. In that case, the sports budget will be optimally spent, and the risks associated with compensation costs will be reduced (Keefer, 2015). In this regard, the use of statistical data on performance and other characteristics of players using methods of inferring, classification, stability, error correction, and adaptive learning causes awareness and insight of managers and sales officials of football teams able to identify talented and cost-effective players, as well as attract expensive players who have reached their peak with high levels of confidence (Müller et al., 2017; Soltanhoseini et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2015). Given the above and the importance of football players' pricing, this study aims to estimate the prices of professional football players.

2. Methodology

The research method combined qualitative and quantitative methods (GT Approach). The participants in the qualitative section included 14 managers and coaches of football clubs and experts in the Persian Gulf Professional Football League who were familiar with buying, selling, and transferring players. They were determined by purposeful snowball sampling. In the qualitative method, the research tool was an in-depth interview with the statistical sample. The validity of the discussions, as well as the reliability, were investigated by accuracy in determining the subject of the interviews, designing the general planning of the interviews, interviewing with a personal introduction, stating the purpose of the research, expressing data confidentiality and the explanation of why the interviewer was selected for the interview by the researcher during the interviews, taking notes, analyzing the interviews through open, axial and selective coding, and reporting the results of the discussions. In addition, to calculate re-test reliability from the total number of interviews, three interviews were randomly selected, each coded twice at 25-day intervals. Then, the codes specified at these two intervals were compared for the selected interviews, and the stability index at the two coding stages was calculated through existing agreements and non-agreements. The results of this coding are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Calculate the reliability of the interview by the retest method.

Row	Interview title	Total number of codes	Number of Agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability test (%)
1	Interview 3	74	31	12	83%
2	Interview 7	71	29	13	81%
3	Interview 9	70	28	14	80%
	Total	215	88	39	81%

As shown in [Table 1](#), the total number of codes in 25 days is 215, the total number of agreements between codes at these two times is 88, and the total number of non-agreements (expected random arrangements) was equal to 39. The reliability of retesting interviews in this study using the above method is equal to 81%. Given that this figure is more than 60%, it can be said that the reliability of the coding of this research is confirmed. Open, axial, and selective coding methods were used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews.

Besides, the statistical population in the quantitative part to estimate the price of players was all the football players in the Persian Gulf Professional Football League in the years 2016-2020; the number of these teams was 24 teams, and the number of players was 863 people and sampling was done by convenience sampling. In the quantitative method, the given data to estimate the price of football players were extracted from valid sites such as the transfer market¹, the official website of the Iranian football league², the official website of Premier League football clubs, and the official website of the Football Federation of Iran³. The data were also analyzed to design a model for predicting the price of football players by modeling radial bias function (RBF) networks using the software SPSS and R.

3. Results

First, in the qualitative statistics part, interviews were conducted with fourteen experts in transferring football players to find the factors affecting the pricing of football players in Iran. In this study, 215 first codes were extracted during the interview process and became 88 more abstract concepts. After the first coding of identification of the codes in which the rest of the interviewees agreed, they were classified (categorized) based on the similarity of the subject, and a title was assigned to each of these categories that is more abstract than the concepts that make up that set of classes. [Table 2](#) shows the concepts made from the first coding and their categorization.

Table 2. Open and axial coding of factors affecting player pricing.

The concept of selective coding	The concept of axial coding	The concept of open coding
Principles for Responsible Investment	Factors Related to Player Performance	Honor gained by the player
		Number of yellow cards
		Number of red cards
		Game time

¹ <https://www.transfermarkt.com>

² <http://Iranleague.ir>

³ <http://ffiri.ir>

The concept of selective coding	The concept of axial coding	The concept of open coding
		Number of games in the Premier League
		Number of national games
		Scoring goals
		Helping role in scoring goals
		Non-scoring goal
		Clean sheet
		Age of players
	Factors related to personal characteristics	Height of players
		Game post
		Skill to use both feet
		Ball keeping
		Dripple
		Short pass
		Long pass
	Factors related to player abilities	Ability to finish
		Head
		Defense
		Shooting
		Speed
		Ability to keep one's own goal
		Danger repels ability
		Value of club
	Club Characteristics	Honor gained by a club
		History of participation in the Premier League
		News
		Internet
	Factors causing the price bubble	Agents (brokers)
		Popularity of players

After determining the factors affecting the pricing of professional football players, artificial neural networks were used to estimate their prices. An artificial neural network consists of an input layer, one or more hidden layers, and an output layer, each with several neurons. The number of input and output variables determines the number of neurons in the input and output layers. Trial and error usually specify the number of hidden layers and their neurons at the model training stage (calibration).

The pattern of neural connections, the method of determining the connection weights, and the type of activation function determine the structure of the neural network. In this study, according to the input and output variables, the connection model of neurons and the subject of research, Radial Bias Function (RBF) Networks, were used to model and estimate the price of players. RBF networks are commonly used artificial neural networks for function approximation problems. In mathematical modeling, an RBF network is an artificial neural network that uses radial basis functions as activation. The network output linearly combines the inputs and neuron parameters RBF. Radial basis function networks have many uses, including function approximation, time series prediction, classification, and system control. The processing units of this neural network are focused on a specific position in terms of processing, and this focus is modeled through radial bias functions.

Regarding overall structure, RBF networks are not much different from multilayer networks, and only the type of processing that neurons perform on their inputs is other.

However, RBF networks often have a faster learning and preparation process. It is easier to adjust them due to the focus of neurons on a specific operating range.

3.1. Initial model

An artificial neural network with a hidden layer is suitable for approximating any continuing relationship between input and output models. Therefore, in this study, at the beginning of the work, a radial network with a hidden layer and a neuron was used to develop the neural network. Figure 1 shows the designed model for estimating the price of players with a hidden layer and a neuron by software R.

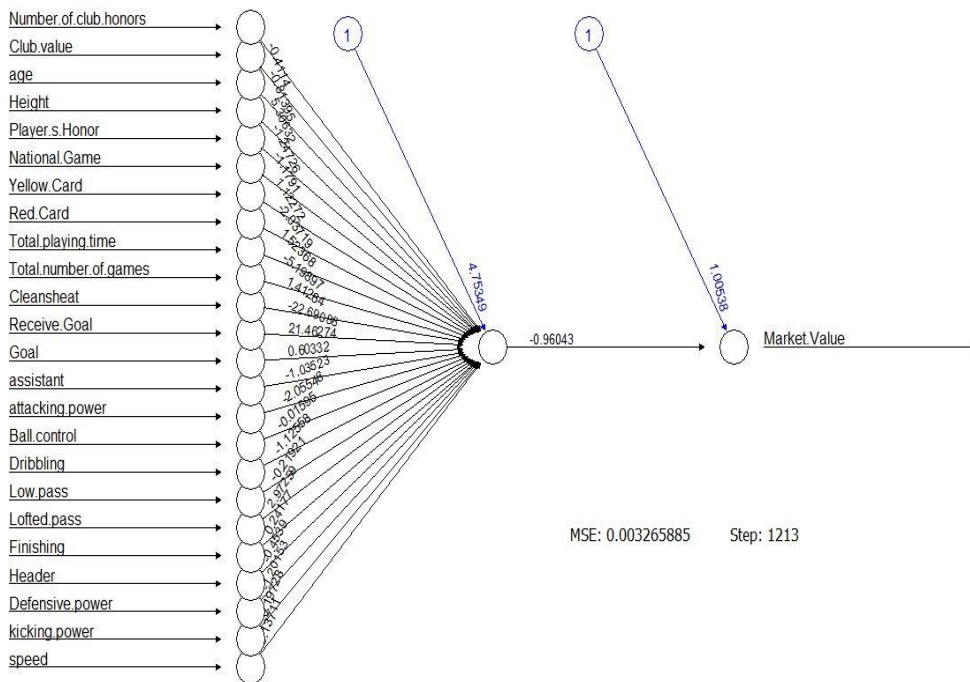


Figure 1. Model designed by RBF neural network with a hidden layer, a neuron, and step 1213.

3.2. Model optimization

A good optimization algorithm can improve the performance of the deep neural network under fixed network architecture (Yu & Liu, 2019). First-order-based optimization algorithms play an essential role in deep learning because of their efficiency and effectiveness in dealing with large-scale optimization problems (Ruder, 2016). In this study, the predicted price of 647 players for model learning was determined randomly, and the accurate price of the rest of the players (216 samples) was considered for model testing.

Table 3. Correlation and error of the predictive model with actual prices.

Number of hidden layers	The number of neurons in the hidden layer	Correlation	MSE	Step	N test	N predict
1	1	0.6430235	0.003265885	1213	216	647
1	2	0.6554715	0.003468584	77	216	647
1	3	0.6958319	0.009816897	3000	216	647
1	4	0.718589	0.003532459	21	216	647
1	5	0.7635277	0.002098218	17	216	647
1	6	0.6301035	0.003590063	17	216	647
2	5&2	0.776117	0.001578392	3675	216	647
2	5&3	0.8154819	0.002168781	19	216	647
2	5&4	0.7070963	0.00300274	19	216	647
3	5&3&2	0.9145935	0.002899686	5458	216	647
3	5&3&3	0.6711332	0.01192906	5458	216	647

According to Table 3, further model training and increasing the number of hidden layers and neurons and different steps, the correlation value increased, and the model error was reduced. Also, with the excessive increase of hidden layers and neurons, the correlation value of the model is reduced to a certain extent, so the optimal model of predicting the price of players in this study includes three hidden layers and five, three, and two neurons, respectively in the first, second and third layers. Figures 2 and 3 show the final model and correlation between the prices predicted by the model and the accurate price of Iranian football players.

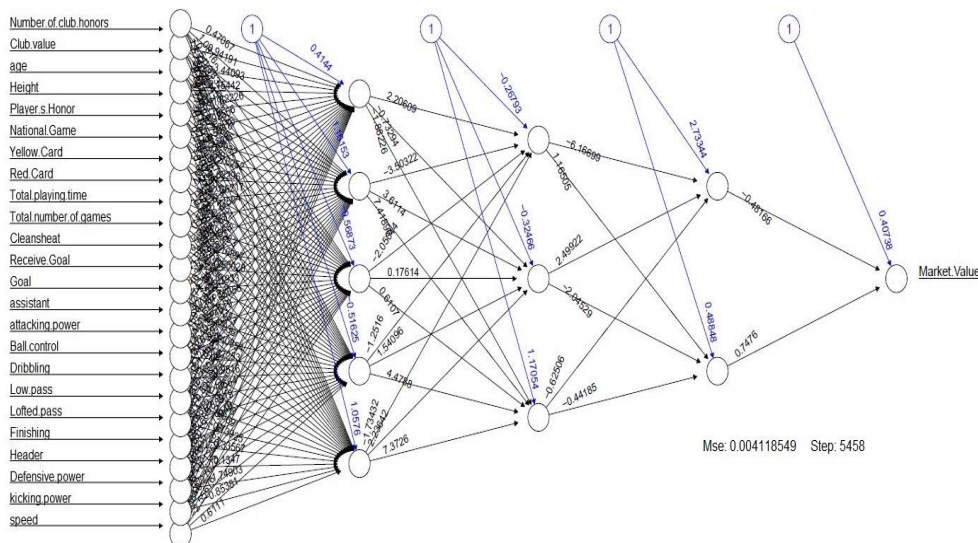


Figure 2. Model extracted using neural networks with three hidden layers and five, three, and two neurons, respectively, in the first, second, and third layers, and step 5458.

According to Figures 2, a neural network with supervised radial functions was used to predict the price of football players. The stimulatory functions of neurons in this network are of the sigmoid function type, and the type of network training is in the form of momentum, in which the amount of acceleration (0.67) was considered. The learning rate

was determined in proportion to the network training data (0.75) and the number of repetitions of the algorithm (5458).

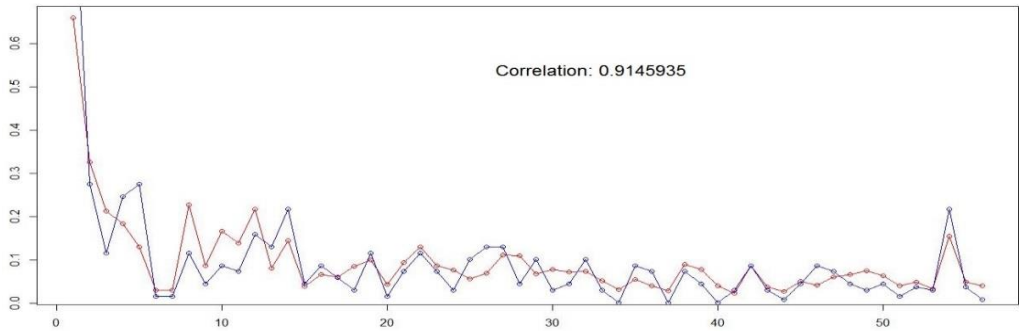


Figure 3. Correlation between the predicted by the final model and the actual price of Iranian football players.

According to [Figure 3](#), the correlation of the model is 0.9145935, which shows the model's high correlation and optimal fit. [Table 4](#) also shows a few examples of the last model's predictions and the accurate price for Iranian football players.

Table 4. The predicted by the final model and the accurate price.

Code player	Real price	Predicted price	Code player	Real price	Predicted price	Code player	Real price	Predicted price
1	3500	2325.754	67	100	198.3818	145	200	319.7121
2	1000	1171.969	71	300	371.3214	151	50	185.8878
5	450	781.377	72	450	495.7539	153	150	127.2368
7	900	684.5204	95	300	345.3614	158	350	349.815
9	1000	498.1041	97	150	313.6257	167	150	178.9636
12	100	154.5379	102	400	242.3666	170	75	143.4966
21	100	150.4425	110	500	288.2361	175	200	220.0255
26	450	830.8387	111	500	432.7378	185	350	193.8088
28	200	346.4264	120	200	428.7168	198	300	258.3179
29	350	623.7996	123	400	281.9238	199	200	277.5929
38	300	527.0626	124	150	316.2712	200	150	305.1878
41	600	798.0123	126	200	299.5382	201	200	266.9699
44	500	329.9487	127	400	303.1407	203	100	187.9471
45	800	550.0001	135	150	229.4202	204	175	216.9882
48	200	181.7339	137	50	157.9934	210	150	161.6197
49	350	279.2557	138	350	236.9837	211	800	581.6456
55	250	255.4742	142	300	185.8389	215	175	215.5675

Code player	Real price	Predicted price	Code player	Real price	Predicted price	Code player	Real price	Predicted price
57	150	343.5186	143	50	145.0164	218	75	189.0269
59	450	391.623	144	300	358.0629	254	350	401.3261

As shown in [Table 4](#), many predictions are close to the players' actual prices, but some differences exist. These differences in predicting players' prices may be due to the irrational and unprincipled determination of the prices of some players in the real world and not paying attention to the scientific indicators of the pricing of some players in the real world, which can be identified through the current research model.

Also, based on the current research on the factors affecting the price of football players and the model presented regarding the estimation of the price of football players, this model can be used at any time and can be developed.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Today, one of the main problems in transfer in football leagues is the small number of appropriate criteria for pricing players ([Memari et al., 2023](#)). With a glance at the number of players' contracts, we will see that not only is it challenging to calculate the price of players due to their multi-faceted nature, but also some football players are costly regarding their performance, and vice versa is true. Therefore, this study aimed to estimate the price of professional football players using artificial neural networks. According to the qualitative results of this study, from the point of view of the interviewees, the most critical factors in estimating the price of players included club characteristics, player characteristics, performance, and abilities, and bubble-generating factors, each of which had a subset that we will describe below.

According to the obtained results from the experts' point of view, the characteristics of the club are among the determining factors in the players' price, including the club's value and brand and the number of honors gained by the club. The value and brand of the club are due to the popularity, equipment, and history of the club. The value and brand of the club are the keys to creating a positive image in the minds of the club's fans, which is inspiring and symbolizes specific values in the minds and mindsets of the fans. The results for the club brand are consistent with the results of ([Izadyar et al., 2016](#); [Tunaru & Viney, 2010](#)). The study of [Izadyar et al. \(2016\)](#) showed that if the player's club brand index increases by 1%, the player's price will increase by an average of 1.45%, with other fixed factors affecting the price.

On the one hand, the number of honors gained by the club not only increases the popularity among the fans but also affects the material value of the club. The study of ([Tunaru & Viney, 2010](#)) showed a positive and significant relationship between club honor and value. The older the club and the longer it is in the prestigious leagues, the better the chances of gaining the club's and players' integrity and value.

According to the study, the characteristics of a player were another factor affecting the price and value of football players. These characteristics include the physical and demographic characteristics of the player, which, according to the study, had the indices

of age, height, play post, and skill of using both feet. Among these features, age was a fundamental index for evaluating the value of buying and selling in the market because it reflects the experience and potential of players. The study of [Bryson et al. \(2009\)](#) showed that age has a nonlinear relationship with the value of buying and selling players, as it increases in the middle of the second decade (mid-twenties) and then reduces. Also, ([Lehmann & Schulze, 2008](#)) showed that age had a relationship with the income and value of football players. However, according to experts, the high price of some exceptions over thirty years old is due to other factors such as experience, increased physical fitness, popularity, and ability to lead.

On the one hand, the height of the players is related to their price and value. This is because the index indicates the player's ability to be hit by the head, which increases the likelihood of gaining and scoring a goal or can prevent the opposing team from scoring by the moderator. The study is consistent with the study of [Fry et al. \(2014\)](#). Another index obtained from the survey was the skill of using both feet for dribbling and shooting. The study of [Brandes and Franck \(2012\)](#) showed that this ability is one of the factors affecting increasing salaries, and the study of ([Herm et al., 2014](#)) also showed the positive effect of this ability on the value of buying and selling football players. However, since the importance of performance indices varies according to the position and most of the players (goalkeeper, defense, midfielder, and forward), these indices should be effective when pricing and evaluating players based on their position. The study of [Brandes and Franck \(2012\)](#); [Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol \(2007\)](#) also showed that to calculate the types of performance indices of players, the sum of these indices should be considered according to the individual game posts and experts.

The player's performance reflects how well he acts and plays on the playground. According to the results obtained from the perspective of experts, the indices of evaluation include the implementation of players have, the honors gained by the player, the duration of the game, the number of national tournaments, the number of fun in the Premier League, the number of goals scored, the player's helping roles, the number of player's errors and yellow and red cards, and the number of non-scored plans and clean sheets of the goalkeepers. In studies, the number of times a player spends on the playground (player playing time) has always been used to evaluate the value of a player's buying and selling. The study of [Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol \(2007\)](#); [Gerrard and Dobson \(2000\)](#) indicated that participation in national and international leagues, as well as playing in the national team, has a positive effect on the price of players and the value of buying and selling in the market. Other researchers made a difference between playing during the match season and the total playing time during professional sports ([Franck & Nüesch, 2011](#)), as a substitute ([Bryson et al., 2009](#)) and for a few minutes ([Ruijg & van Ophem, 2015](#)) used to calculate the actual time spent on the playground. Gaining points in football includes scoring goals against the opponent. The goalkeeper repelled scoring goals and his clean sheets. [Bryson et al. \(2009\)](#); [Frick \(2007\)](#) introduced the average number of goals scored in each season and during the player's professional game as a criterion for evaluating a player's performance. In addition, playing a role in achieving a goal or repelling the danger of an opponent's attack was another criterion for the price and value of football players. For example, [Lucifora and Simmons \(2003\)](#) showed evidence from Italian football that playing

a supporting role in attacking an opponent could increase players' salaries. [Lehmann and Schulze \(2008\)](#) also confirmed this in the German Bundesliga.

Another factor affecting the pricing of football players was their abilities and capabilities, including the variables of the power to keep the ball, the ability to dribble, short and long passes, the power of jump and head, the ability to defend and repel danger, the power and ability to shoot, speed, etc. For example, the study of [Herm et al. \(2014\)](#) showed accurate passes; [Franck and Nüesch \(2011\)](#) showed one-on-one combat to repel an attack, block an attack and steal a ball from opposing players; and [He et al. \(2015\)](#) led tackles and correct errors that repel the opponent's attack.

One of the limitations of this study was the effect of some qualitative variables on a player's price that could not be measured or quantified. These variables include social popularity and acceptance, the impact of agents, intermediaries, and the mass media. In their study, [Izadyar et al. \(2016\)](#), in their study, showed that social acceptance is effective in the equation of pricing of football players, and methods such as confirmation and participation of players in charitable activities can be used to promote the social acceptance of players. The study of [Müller et al. \(2017\)](#) showed that the popularity of players has the power to sell club uniforms and stadium seats to fans. The official agents and sports brokers are also a factor in the price of players. In recent years, even professional players have had to contact authorized agents and brokers to play in different teams. The study by [Yaldo and Shamir \(2017\)](#) indicated that estimating the price and salary of a player is a task determined by negotiation between football clubs, agents, and players' representatives.

Despite the efforts of a few studies in this field, the essential variables for determining the price have not been determined by elites and experts in this field and more by limited information, mathematical equations, and simple regressions without the necessary and sufficient validity. Also, due to the complexity and uncertainty of predicting player prices, some of these studies' methods of calculating the final price determination model were inappropriate. The proposed models do not have the necessary capabilities of correction, adaptive learning, classification, tolerance of error, and, most importantly, inference, and this gap is seen to calculate the price of all players, especially new players and newly discovered talents.

For example, [Izadyar et al. \(2016\)](#) used a researcher-made questionnaire to conduct their research. In addition, [Abdi et al. \(2016\)](#); [Müller et al. \(2017\)](#) based on trial and error and regression; ([Herm et al., 2014](#); [Memari et al., 2020](#); [Yaldo & Shamir, 2017](#)) did their studies based on previous articles Data. The only article that so far used both qualitative and quantitative methods to estimate players' prices was the article by [Tayebi et al. \(2022\)](#).

Considering that the same research group conducted both articles, the findings of both types of research are the same in the qualitative part, but in the quantitative factor in the article by [Tayebi et al. \(2022\)](#), the use of artificial intelligence is with a hidden layer and is not very It is not complicated elementary synthetic intelligence methods were used in this research. The data collected from the players were not extensively and complexly analyzed, and the obtained model for estimating the price has a higher error rate for each variable.

However, this article analyzes the data in several layers and examines it more complexly and profoundly. This will reduce the error of calculating the players' prices and the ability to refer more to the research model. In principle, it can be stated that by identifying the weak points of the previous article and the relative detection of errors in the results in the current paper, an attempt has been made to eliminate them, improve the results, and achieve a more accurate prediction.

In general, it can be acknowledged that the most significant difference between this research and similar research was in the research method, estimation method, and price calculation tool. For example, comparing the research method of this research with other research, it can be acknowledged that the researchers that used the regression method to determine the pricing equation, among the countless variables affecting the price of the players, only Several things (such as physical fitness, technique, age, etc.) have a significant impact on their pricing equation.

For example, in the research of [Izadyar et al. \(2016\)](#), the coefficient of determination (R^2), which expresses changes in the dependent variable (players' prices) by independent variables (price determining factors), is ($R^2=0.2$). Also, this value is ($R^2=0.54$) in [Abdi et al. \(2016\)](#)'s research. This shows that according to the pricing structure that governs the atmosphere of professional football sports, the explained factors affecting pricing in this research have little effect on the changes in player prices, and the players' prices are derived from other influencing factors. Apart from the factors explained in the equations of the above research, this issue is also well-stated.

It should be acknowledged that not using the opinion of experts in this field and relying on the data obtained from existing linear relationships due to the complex and multidimensional behavior of football players' pricing is not very suitable for prediction and all the practical dimensions and variables. It does not cover and therefore requires using models that can have a more complete and better fit on the pattern of existing relationships between influential variables. Considering this issue, this relationship, which is good in simple linear models, is better in polynomial semi-linear models than linear models and very strong in non-linear models (artificial neural networks); therefore, it can increase the accuracy of forecasts and provide the possibility of necessary planning for those in charge.

According to the above issues, using artificial neural networks in this study increases the accuracy of predictions. It provides the necessary planning for those responsible for buying and selling players in Iranian football clubs. Also, neural network methods do not impose any initial assumptions on data distribution, and their value becomes apparent when the relationship between independent variables (football players' prices) and dependent variables (influential factors) is unclear. Besides, the network's generalizability allows the model to predict the right price for a new player with very little error. The correlation obtained from the results of the last model of this research (Correlation = 0.981253) between the predicted price and the actual price of Iranian football players obtained by training the model indicates this issue.

According to the results of this research and from managerial perspectives, it is suggested to save the budget and costs of Iranian clubs and cut the cost of compensation due to the wrong buy of players before making a buy, first with proper analysis by Elite

experts, the strengths and weaknesses of the club should be measured, and with a holistic view, if the deficiencies are not addressed by the internal talents of the club and the urgent need to buy players from outside the club, all performance variables, abilities, and personal characteristics of the players Use the data available in reputable sources and the use of the right software to review and then make a buy with the knowledge of price bubbles in the transfer market.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۱۳-۲۸

شناسه: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.42806.1069



برآورد قیمت بازیکنان حرفه‌ای فوتبال ایران بر مبنای استفاده از شبکه‌های عصبی

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کلیدواژه

ارزش بازیکنان
باشگاه‌های فوتبال
بازار بازیکنان
قیمت گذاری
نقل و انتقال بازیکنان

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف از انجام این پژوهش برآورد قیمت بازیکنان لیگ برتر فوتبال ایران بود.

روش: روش تحقیق، آمیخته اکتشافی و ترکیبی از روش‌های کیفی و کمی بود. جامعه آماری پژوهش در بخش کیفی شامل مدیران، مربیان باشگاه‌ها و کارشناسان آشنا به حوزه بازار بازیکنان فوتبال بودند که چهارده نفر از آنها به روش گلوله برفی تارسیدن به اشباع نظری انتخاب شدند. ابزار تحقیق در بخش کیفی شامل مصاحبه عمیق بود که پایایی آن با روش بازآزمایی ۸۱ درصد محاسبه شد. در بخش کمی، جامعه آماری کلیه بازیکنان لیگ حرفه‌ای فوتبال ایران طی سال‌های ۹۹-۱۳۹۵ بودند که با روش نمونه‌گیری در دسترس، ۸۶۳ بازیکن انتخاب شدند. داده‌ها از سایت‌های معتبر و سازمان لیگ فوتبال ایران جمع‌آوری شد. همچنین این مدل از طریق شبکه‌های عصبی شعاعی با استفاده از نرم‌افزار SPSS و R طراحی شد. **یافته‌ها:** بخش کیفی نشان داد که عملکرد بازیکن، ویژگی‌ها و توانایی‌های فردی، ویژگی‌های باشگاهی و عوامل حباب‌ساز در تعیین قیمت بازیکنان فوتبال مؤثر است. در قسمت کمی مدلی با سه لایه مخفی طراحی شد که کمترین میزان خطا را در پیش‌بینی قیمت بازیکنان داشت.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: امروزه یکی از مشکلات اساسی در زمینه نقل و انتقالات در لیگ‌های فوتبال کم بودن معیارهای مناسب برای قیمت‌گذاری بازیکنان است. هدف از این مطالعه برآورد قیمت بازیکنان حرفه‌ای فوتبال با استفاده از شبکه‌های عصبی مصنوعی است.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۱/۱۱/۱۴

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۲/۲۶



The Private Companies, Motivation in Sponsorship: Persian Gulf Premier League

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Regarding the restrictions of football clubs and insufficient income sources on the one hand and the revenue gained through television broadcasting rights, environmental advertising, and ticket sales, financial support from football clubs by sponsors should be mounted. Unfortunately, some issues have caused private companies to be disinclined in providing capital for football. Therefore, the present research was carried out to identify the factors influencing private companies' motivation for sponsorship.

Methodology: The present research was conducted via a qualitative method based on the phenomenological approach. Predominantly, the phenomenological approach reveals the nature of meaning concealed in experiences and aims to comprehend the experience concept in the same way the person did. The Participants into semi-structured interviews included sport management faculty members, senior managers of the football federation, football clubs, managers, senior managers of private companies, and sports instructors. The validity and reliability of the findings were applied.

Findings: The factors impact the private companies, motivation to support football clubs. They include 52 sub-contents from 8 main contents: Adherence to Behavioral Norms, Financial Growth, Government Support, Development of Refereeing, Media Promotion, Managerial Development, Club Brand Enhancement, and supporting companies' development.

Originality: We found new concepts to increase private companies' motivation in football club sponsorship.

Keywords

Football Club
Premier League
Private Sector
Media
Sponsors

Article type

Research Paper

Received: 2023/03/31

Accepted: 2023/08/23

How to cite this article:

Zare Abandansari, M., & Azizian Kohan, N. (2023). The Private Companies, and Sponsorship Motivation: A Case Study in Persian Gulf Premier League. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 29-44. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43315.1090>



1. Introduction

Football is one of the world's most popular and spectacular sports that attracts much of society's attention (Carlos et al., 2019). It is distinctive from other sports due to its economic, cultural, social, and cultural capacities. The financial aspect and its effect on society are some of the most significant features (Lin et al., 2009). Due to the popularity of football in the world has become one of the most critical influences on human life. With several million fans, it is considered the most popular sport worldwide (Barajas & Rodríguez, 2014). Due to the development of professional football in the past decades, clubs have become football companies that focus on profitability, long-term financial stability, and sports performance (Zülch et al., 2020). Considering the popularity of this sport, millions of people around the world, whether spectators in stadiums or fans through television, internet, and radio, follow the competitions of their favorite clubs through media tools, which is an excellent opportunity for the clubs to earn money (Unlucan, 2015). Therefore, this increasing popularity has accelerated the growth of the football industry in the world and has somehow turned it into an economic activity through which many jobs have been provided (Akanle & Fageyinbo, 2019).

Fundamentally, clubs are the most crucial part of the football industry, so their survival depends on their sustainability, which rests on the clubs' monetizing and profitability (Naghdi et al., 2013). Financing football clubs is one of their most pivotal and critical requirements, and professional clubs worldwide use diversified methods to secure their financial resources and expenses (Singh et al., 2017). In this regard, attracting proper sponsors from sports organizations and authorities is one way to provide funds and financial resources for sports activities, especially championship sports. For this purpose, creating a sound and suitable environment in which the companies and the private sector could invest is required (Andreopoulou et al., 2015).

Regarding the popularity of football in Iran, considered a national sport, holding football matches and filling the stadiums in national and international competitions have attracted many fans from all over the country (Mahmoudi et al., 2018). However, one of the most significant difficulties of Iran football has been the deep-rooted inability of clubs to raise money from its beginning up to the moment. Furthermore, even though the government runs many large and commercial companies in Iran, most clubs' income is provided through the private sector. Financial dependence on the government is either meager or nonexistent. Therefore, it is better to boost the participation of commercial companies in the private sector in football to increase financial support for Iran football clubs. Sohrabi et al. (2023) stated that for effective strategic business development based on a global approach in both sports and income should be provided with appropriate measures, compliance with requirements and taking into consideration considerations basis for making the clubs profitable and, in the future, the financial and managerial independence of the club (Sohrabi et al., 2023).

Several factors increase the motivation of private companies to financially support football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League, which, despite previous research, many essential and practical cases have not been recognized. Hence, the current study seeks to identify all the factors that raise the motivation of private companies to support football

clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League financially. Therefore, the main research question is, “What are the influential factors that increase private companies' motivation in financial support in Persian Gulf Premier League football clubs”?

2. Theoretical Background

Sharifi and Dehghan Ghahfarrokhi (2021) showed that economic, managerial, legal, social, and cultural factors were the most essential obstacles, respectively (Sharifi & Dehghan Ghahfarrokhi, 2021). Ghanbari Firoozabadi et al. (2020) showed some legal, economic, media promotion, feedback, and managerial factors cause the banks not to support sports in the country (Ghanbari Firoozabadi et al., 2020). Razavi et al. (2018) asserted in their research that the noncooperation of managers to support sports, the improper market of the company inside the country, lack of financial elucidation of football clubs, high costs of the clubs, nameless players or intended clubs, the lack of financial support for clubs concerning customers, the distortion of the image of the company due to unethical events in football, inappropriate media coverage, low audience acceptance of competitions, non-compliance with the copyright of sponsoring companies in sports advertisements, lack of proper infrastructure, inadequate government support for the private sector, non-payment of low-interest financial facilities to sponsors, and non-commitment to tax remission or reduction; are the reasons for companies not to support football clubs financially (Razavi et al., 2018).

Also, according to Ehsani et al. (2014), managers of sponsoring companies and Premier League of Iran football clubs, marketing, and sports management experts have significant roles in attracting financial sponsors in the football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League (Ehsani et al., 2014). Hassanpourghadi et al. (2020) stated the sponsoring companies considered only five factors to be effective in the termination of their support, considering the order of importance, these factors include technical factors (players and technical staff), inappropriate supporting incentives, economic, legal, and religious-cultural factors. In general, it can be said that many companies that ended their support were somehow dissatisfied with their patronage, or at least the club's asset in question could not meet their expectations (Hassanpourghadi et al., 2020). Zare Abandansari et al. (2021) showed due to the discussion of outstanding debts to the club personnel, inability to pay the salaries of the employees, the lack of bank financial facilities dedicated to the clubs, political interference in the clubs and the strict rules of the government regarding the entry of the private sector; the participation of the private sector in the financial support of football clubs will be ultimately reduced (Zare Abandansari et al., 2021).

Dees et al. (2019), concerning the goals of sponsors in sports, state that brand awareness is often a primary goal for companies involved in sponsorship and is often used to measure the effectiveness of support (Dees et al., 2019). Bredikhina and Kunkel (2022) declared for activating sponsors, improvements in sponsorship perceptions were significantly more substantial and explained more variance in changes in sponsor brand attitudes (Bredikhina & Kunkel, 2022). Stollings (2021) presented return and potential need fulfillment, budget reliance, preferred sponsee type, and corporate social

responsibility as the primary content firms use to make sponsorship decisions and validate them within their budgets (Stollings, 2021). Breuer and Rumpf (2011) revealed that size and exclusiveness of sponsor logo exposure are critical drivers in generating sponsor identification (Breuer & Rumpf, 2011). Henseler et al. (2011) manifested that the various features of a sports sponsorship package, such as brand exposure and coverage of the sport, are perceived by sponsors to contribute differently to the impact on brand equity (Henseler et al., 2011). Baena (2019) presented that FC Bayern Munich has already taken strides towards addressing the needs of its original local supporter-owners and those of its global fans. Other points discussed include strategies to increase the target market, become more international, and close important deals and sponsorships (Baena, 2019).

Miragaia et al. (2017) explained that sport has recently incorporated entrepreneurial social policies, increasing sports event sponsorship from both a social entrepreneurship and CSR perspective (Miragaia et al., 2017). According to Wagner et al. (2019), sponsorship has positively impacted company performance (Wagner et al., 2019). Demirel et al. (2018) indicated nowadays, sponsorship is a widely used marketing communications tool. It positively predicts perceived benefits to the sponsoring organization, and this relationship is simultaneously moderated by the perceived compatibility and sincerity of the sponsor organization's incentives (Demirel et al., 2018). Walraven (2013) illustrated that an athlete and a commercial organization have several characteristics: dynamism, result orientation, and the goal to perform as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is, therefore, increasingly common for a company to invest in the association with a well-known and beloved sports object, such as an individual athlete, a sports club, or an event (Walraven, 2013). As Mboya et al. (2022) showed, corporate sponsorship is standard in major football leagues worldwide. The study revealed that team-based factors had the highest significant effect on sponsorship decisions, followed by country-based and environmental-based factors (Mboya et al., 2022). Mwisukha et al. (2022) argued that it should give tax incentives to sponsors of Kenya Premier League clubs to enable them to avail more sponsorship (Mwisukha et al., 2022). Abdourazakou and Leroux-Sostenes (2016) showed that sponsorship targets long-term relations (Abdourazakou & Leroux-Sostenes, 2016). Kang and Stotlar (2011) spelled out three factors, 'enhancing brand equity,' 'building corporate reputation,' and 'increasing sales,' emerged as the most prominent influencing sponsorship decision-making regarding the financial support program (Kang & Stotlar, 2011). Turner et al. (2010) expressed that corporate organizations spend remarkable amounts on sponsorship to achieve distinct marketing and overall business objectives. There is strong support within the literature that a corporate organization will be more attracted to sponsoring a sports formation when there is a 'match' between the characteristics of the organizations (Turner et al., 2010). Walzel and Schubert (2021) indicated the successful use of sport sponsorship involves seven tasks: (1) providing personnel and organizational prerequisites, (2) defining sponsorship principles, (3) specifying sponsorship objectives, (4) determining target groups and the scope of sponsorship, image, and brand profile, (5) compiling the overall tableau of individual services offered and developing corresponding sponsorship packages, (6) designing a stringent overall sponsorship concept, and (7) analyzing the relevant market for potential sponsors (Walzel & Schubert, 2021).

As [Aliyari and Savadi \(2023\)](#) pointed out, providing economic, managerial, and cultural solutions as the most critical components can lead to private sector investment and participation in Iran's sports industry ([Aliyari & Savadi, 2023](#)). [Rasekh et al. \(2022\)](#) denoted that the process of attracting and maintaining sports sponsors is affected by the environmental background and structural capabilities and requires the adoption of appropriate strategies and inter-organizational partnerships to take advantage of the capacities and adjust the challenges to reach the expected results ([Rasekh et al., 2022](#)). [Akmali and Nasiri \(2021\)](#) showed that sports managers should take action to remove the obstacles of attracting sports financial sponsors through developing media coverage and suitable advertising facilities so that sponsors can invest in the sports industry more confidently ([Akmali & Nasiri, 2021](#)). [Zardoshtian \(2021\)](#), in his research, explained infrastructure factors, human resources, and economic, managerial, governmental, cultural, media, legal, social, organizational, political factors, interaction with the media, training of expert staff, granting facilitation to sponsors, adjusting rules for sponsors, sponsor attraction development, bedding for sponsor attraction, benefits of sponsorship for sponsors and the society, have an influential role in attracting and expanding sponsors in sports ([Zardoshtian, 2021](#)). [Movakel and Alidoost Ghahfarkhi \(2020\)](#) introduced media and spectators, governmental, managerial-organizational, social-cultural, and economic factors among those that had the most influential roles in attracting financial sponsors in Iran's track and field sport ([Movakel & Alidoost Ghahfarkhi, 2020](#)). In their research, [Ehsani et al. \(2016\)](#) declared enjoying the benefit of media coverage to be exposed to the audience was the financial sponsors' most crucial communication goal ([Ehsani et al., 2016](#)). According to [Afshari et al. \(2018\)](#), managerial and organizational factors were pivotal in attracting financial support from private companies for sports projects. The social and cultural factors were the least important ([Afshari et al., 2018](#)). [Jesmani et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed in their research the lack of using financial exemptions, the uncertainty of investing in sports, the lack of a competitive environment in the context of economic barriers, the lack of financial support programs, the lack of employing business managers, the lack of appropriate procedures for developing fans in the field of management obstacles, were the most remarkable obstacles facing the development of financial support for championship sports ([Jesmani et al., 2019](#)). [Yabalooie et al. \(2022\)](#) argued that to develop the productivity of professional football clubs in the country, marketing, supportive propellants, and planning and talent development, practical factors that are both effective and influential should be on the agenda of sports managers to Iranian clubs to reach a professional level like the clubs in developed countries ([Yabalooie et al., 2022](#)).

3. Methodology

The current research used a qualitative method based on the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is associated with revealing the nature of meaning hidden in experiences. The researcher's goal is to catch the meaning of the experience in the same way that the person lived through it. The purpose of this research was to identify factors. Therefore, the phenomenological method was applied, and the Colaizzi method

was used to analyze the data from the interview. Phenomenology, indeed, deals with clarifying the structure or the essence of the living experience of a phenomenon to find the unity of meaning and its correct description (Colaizzi, 1978). Therefore, according to the nature of the research and the use of the descriptive phenomenological method, the Colaizzi method was chosen as the most practical approach to descriptive phenomenology. According to the use of the Colaizzi method in the research, seven techniques were applied. Colaizzi method includes seven stages: 1) a detailed study of all the essential descriptions and findings of the interviewees, 2) extraction of effective phrases and sentences relating to the desired phenomenon, 3) assigning meaning to the essential phrases and sentences extracted from the interview, 4) sorting, ordering and arranging the descriptions of the interviewees and common concepts in specific categories, 5) turning all the extracted opinions into complete descriptions, 6) converting the comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon into an abbreviated accurate description, and 7) final validation (Colaizzi, 1978).

The Community Participating in Research included university faculty members in the sport management department, senior managers of the football federation, managers of football clubs, senior managers of private companies, and sports instructors. The samples for the interview were purposefully selected. Table 1 is the presentation of the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 1. Demographic information.

Numb	Gender	Specialty	Expertise	Executive Records
1	Male	Associate Professor of Sports Management Department of Mazandaran University	Having specialized football articles and books	More than ten years
2	Female	Associate Professor of Sports Management Department of Mazandaran University	Having specialized football articles and books	More than seven years
3	Male	Associate Professor, Department of Sports Management, Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch	Member of the football committee of Mazandaran province	More than ten years
4	Male	Associate Professor of Sports Management Department of Mohaghegh Ardabili University	Having specialized football articles and books- Sports marketing specialist	More than eight years
5	Male	Professor of Sports Management Department of Mohaghegh Ardabili University	Having technical football articles and books- Sports marketing specialist	More than 25 years
6	Male	Associate Professor, Department of Sports Management, Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch	Having specialized football articles and books- Sports marketing specialist	More than seven years
7	Male	Member of the Board of Directors of the Football Federation	Former head of the Football Federation	More than ten years
8	Male	Member of the Board of Directors of the Football Federation	Member of the Asian Football Confederation Marketing Committee	More than 20 years
9	Male	CEO of football club Nassaji Mazandaran	Former member of the Board of Directors of the Football Federation	More than 20 years
10	Male	CEO of football club Aluminium Arak	Ph.D. in business management from Tehran University of Management	More than six years

Numb	Gender	Specialty	Expertise	Executive Records
11	Male	Board member of Arak Aluminum Company	The former CEO of Bahman Automotive Group	More than ten years
12	Male	Member of the Board of Directors of Kaleh Amol Company	Owner of several companies in the food industry	More than 25 years
13	Male	coach of football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League	Aluminum Arak team coach	More than eight years
14	Male	coach of football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League	Nassaji Mazandaran team coach	More than two years
15	Male	coach of football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League club	Mes Rafsanjan team coach	More than ten years

The semi-structured interviews, with a duration between 30 and 40 minutes for each, were regarded as the data collection tools. The interviews continued sequentially if it was possible to extract completely non-repetitive concepts from the interviews (15 interviews). In this regard, the validity and reliability criteria were applied for the final research validation. For this purpose, the interviews were given to the interviewees after being analyzed, their opinions were involved, and the necessary corrections were made. The intra-subject agreement method was used to check the reliability. Two experts in encoding, familiar with the coding method and the topic related to the current study, coded the interviews, by which the percentage of agreement between the two coders was 82%. According to Table 2, the reliability between the two coders using the mentioned formula was 82%, which is higher than 60%, confirming the coders' reliability.

$$PISA = \frac{2. \text{ the number of agreements}}{\text{total number of codes}} \cdot \%100$$

Table 2. Coding results.

Row	Interview number	Total number of codes	Number of agreement	Number of disagreement	Reliability between two encoders (percentage)
1	P3	18	7	4	77/77
2	P6	14	6	3	85/71
3	P12	17	7	4	82/35
	Total	50	20	11	81/94

Six sports management professors and related field experts outside the research process reviewed all the stages of the research, and their points of view were applied to verify the results.

4. Results

According to the results obtained from the participants in the research, the factors affecting the motivation of private companies in financial support of Persian Gulf Premier League

clubs include 52 sub-contents in the form of 8 main contents: Adherence to Behavioral Norms, Financial Growth, Government Support, Development of Refereeing, Media Promotion, Managerial Development, Club Brand Enhancement, Growth and development of supporting companies. Table 3 shows the main contents and the sub-contents extracted from the research interviews.

Table 3. Coding of findings.

Main contents	Sub-contents
Adherence to Behavioral Norms	1. Proper conduct of the technical staff during and outside the competition
	2. Proper behavior and practical interaction between club directors and adherents
	3. Appropriate interaction of club employees with audio-visual media
	4. Proper behavior of athletes during and outside the competition
	5. No smoking and doping by athletes
	6. No insult from the audience during the competition
	7. No offensive behavior from the audience
	8. Not throwing objects and explosive materials by the spectators during the competition
	9. Appropriate behavior of players, technical staff, managers, and spectators on social media
	10. Reducing scuffle and its consequences in football
	11. Committing players and technical staff to conclude the contract with the club
Financial Growth	12. Decreasing economic difficulties in society and sports
	13. Financial elucidation of football clubs
	14. Lack of negative annual balance of football clubs
Government Support	15. More cooperation between the Department of Sport and the Football Organization with private companies
	16. Increasing governmental support for sponsor companies' incentives
	17. Providing government low-interest loans to sponsoring companies
	18. Alleviation of annual taxation for sponsoring companies
	19. Facilitating the conditions of sponsoring companies to join the football domain
Development of refereeing	20. Noticing the sponsoring companies' copyright
	21. Lowering errors of judging in competitions
	22. Promoting the referee competencies during the season
Media Promotion	23. Using novel judging systems such as video assistant referee (VAR)
	24. Suitable audio-visual coverage of competitions by social media
	25. Increasing the imaging quality of competitions
	26. Covering popular social networks through media
	27. Active and reliable website of the clubs
Managerial Development	28. Appointee of non-political managers in football clubs
	29. Non-interference of the government in sports
	30. Management stability of football clubs
	31. Price-monitoring of the football players and technical staff in the transfer market
	32. Timely payment to the players, technical staff, and personnel according to the contract.
	33. Directors' inclination towards investing in football
	34. The companies' senior managers' certainty about investing risk in football
	35. Development of sport organizations by relevant managers
	36. The attendance of marketing specialists in sponsoring companies
	37. Appropriate connection and interaction between clubs and sponsoring companies
Club Brand Enhancement	38. Numerous adherents at home games
	39. Sports clubs' enjoyment of reputation and name
	40. Having many adherents in the society
	41. Promoting the position of the Persian Gulf Premier League among the Asian football leagues
	42. The use of prominent and methodical instructors in football
Growth and development of	43. Use of well-known and reputed football players
	44. Creating a positive attitude towards the sponsoring company at the community level through supporting football clubs
	45. Meeting the expectations of the sponsoring company by the club

Main contents	Sub-contents
supporting companies	46. Having positive points against competing companies by supporting football clubs
	47. Considering the needs of the sponsoring company
	48. The high impact of supporting football clubs on the annual sales of the sponsoring companies
	49. Dedication of a specific budget for financial support
	50. Increasing the sales of the sponsoring company throughout the year
	51. Access to newer customers by sponsoring football clubs
	52. Clarity of the framework and scope of annual financial support of companies to clubs

The final research model is shown in Figure



Figure 1. Factors affecting the motivation of private companies in financial support of football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Fundamentally, supporting football clubs by private companies is necessary for the survival of the clubs because the budget of Persian Gulf Premier League clubs is limited during the season, and they get very little income through environmental advertising and TV broadcasting rights. Therefore, earning money from financial and commercial sponsors, that is, private companies, can have a significant impact as a source of income on football clubs in the Premier League. Unfortunately, the existence of some problems in the country has caused private companies to be less interested in investing in sports. In this regard, the current research aims to identify the factors that increase the motivation of private companies to financially support football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League

to provide the ground for the growth and development of football clubs as compared with the past.

The first main content concerning increasing private companies' motivation to support football clubs in the Persian Gulf Premier League financially is Adherence to Behavioral Norms. Compliance with moral standards and adherence to societal standards by fans, players, technical staff, and club managers will reduce controversies and consequences in football. Indeed, when there is immorality and non-observance of moral standards in sports, financial sponsors are also much less eager to invest, as they think its consequences in football will result in the infamy of the sponsor's brand. In this respect, (Razavi et al., 2018) also emphasized the importance of complying with behavioral norms and reducing companies' investment risk despite sideline sequels in football, which is in line with the results of the current study.

The second main content in connection with the increase of motivation of private companies to financially support Persian Gulf Premier League clubs is financial growth. In this context, one of the most significant issues is the financial elucidation of football clubs. Ahmadi Bonabi and Javani (2021) stated that sport companies are in very intense competition and working hard to get the club's sponsorship (Ahmadi Bonabi & Javani, 2021). Unfortunately, in our country, most football clubs, especially those that use the state budget, do not provide the necessary financial transparency to win investors' trust. The income and expenses of the clubs during the year are somehow invaluable, while the European clubs determine their annual financial balance during the year. Still, in Iranian clubs, the only clear thing is the negative yearly balance, and there is no trace of financial transparency in contracting with players, technical staff, and business partners. In this sense, (Ghanbari Firoozabadi et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2018) have pointed out in their research the importance of financial transparency and the development of economic issues in attracting the support of business partners for football, which is aligned with the results of the present study.

The third main content is governmental support. Having the motivation to invest is one of the main factors for private companies to support football clubs financially. The government can play a prominent role in this issue by providing low-interest loans and reducing or eliminating the tax on sponsoring companies. Facilitating entry into football for sponsoring companies is of high importance as well. The Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Football Federation must cooperate with sponsoring companies. In this context, (Hassanpourghadi et al., 2020) have accentuated the necessity of supporting incentives from the government for private companies to support football clubs financially, which is in line with the results obtained from the present study.

The fourth main content identified is the referee development in the Persian Gulf Premier League. Mainly, when there are no gross mistakes in the refereeing of football competitions and the team's right is not lost, conflicts and sideline consequences will unquestionably be less, and consequently, investors are more inclined to provide financial support. However, the referees may also inadvertently make mistakes during the game. In this regard, the football federation must provide video assistant referee technology in the Persian Gulf Premier League competitions, and the refereeing errors and, accordingly, the sideline consequences thereof will be reduced.

The fifth content is media promotion. Nowadays, the media has a tremendous impact on society, and media tools are very influential in sports. Therefore, appropriate covering of Persian Gulf Premier League competitions through television and social networks significantly influences attracting audiences, and commercial companies are also enthusiastic about investing in sports with a large audience. Moreover, having an authentic website on the club's part contributes to attracting audiences and business sponsors' tendency to support football clubs. Regarding this matter, the studies conducted by (Ghanbari Firoozabadi et al., 2020; Hassanpourghadi et al., 2020) are consistent, and the reason for being so is the significance of media promotion in attracting commercial sponsors of football clubs.

The sixth specified content is managerial development. According to the research results, one of the critical factors in attracting private companies to support football clubs financially is the lack of government involvement and the absence of politically-oriented managers in the clubs. Besides, the price-monitoring of players and technical staff is among those issues that should be considered because the excessive increase in contract prices at the beginning of the season discourages business partners and may prevent the club from fulfilling its obligations. A marketing specialist and an appropriate connection with the clubs can also be practical for commercial companies. The research results in this section conform with (Ehsani et al., 2014; Ghanbari Firoozabadi et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2018; Sharifi & Dehghan Ghahfarrokhi, 2021), and the reason for the conformity is the importance of management components in supporting football clubs by the private companies.

The seventh identified content is the Club Brand Enhancement. This content is one of the things that should be taken into consideration to attract the support of business partners. For instance, some teams have a brilliant background of winning countless championships or employ famous and well-known players and staff in their club. These clubs have a high chance of attracting good business partners and financial support from private companies. An increased number of club fans is also influential in attracting the sponsorship of private companies. The research results in this part agree with (Hassanpourghadi et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2018), and the reason is the emphasis on the club brand, players, and instructors in absorbing business sponsors.

The last main content pinpointed in connection with increasing private companies' motivation to support Premier League clubs financially is the Growth and development of helping companies. Just as a private company provides the financial needs of a football club, meeting the expectations of the sponsoring company on behalf of the club should also be regarded. One of the main points in this section is the clarity of the scope of the companies' support to the clubs, and the clubs should not ask for an amount outside of the agreement. Companies are not just looking for money; somehow, they must ensure that their investment in supporting sports will return. They can reach new customers and gain a positive advantage over competing companies that do not help clubs. The research results in this section are aligned with those (Hassanpourghadi et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2018), and the reason for the alignment is the importance of reaching more customers and meeting the expectations of private companies in financial support for football clubs.

Considering the limited budget of Iranian football clubs, it is necessary to increase the financial support of private companies to the clubs of the Persian Gulf Premier League, and in this regard, the present research identified the factors that increase the motivation of private companies to support football clubs financially. Therefore, managers should consider the stated factors in the study, provide the background for entering private companies into football, and enjoy the growth and development of football clubs.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نشریه کسب و کار در ورزش

آدرس نشریه: <https://sbj.alzahra.ac.ir/>

تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۲۹-۴۴

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.43315.1090



انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی در حمایت مالی: لیگ برتر خلیج فارس

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کلیدواژه

باشگاه فوتبال
بخش خصوصی
رسانه
لیگ برتر
حامیان

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی

چکیده

هدف: باتوجه به محدودیت‌های باشگاه‌های فوتبال و کمبود منابع درآمدی به دلیل ناکافی بودن درآمد حاصل از حق پخش تلویزیونی، تبلیغات محیطی و بلیط فروشی؛ لازم است تا حمایت مالی حامیان تجاری نظیر: شرکت‌های خصوصی از باشگاه‌های فوتبال افزایش پیدا کند. متأسفانه وجود برخی مسائل سبب شده تا انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی به سرمایه‌گذاری در فوتبال کاهش پیدا کند؛ که پژوهش حاضر با هدف شناسایی عوامل موثر بر افزایش انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی در حمایت مالی از باشگاه‌های فوتبال لیگ برتر ایران انجام شد.

روش: پژوهش حاضر به روش کیفی و براساس رویکرد پدیدارشناسی انجام شد. اساسا رویکرد پدیدارشناسی با آشکارساختن ماهیت معنی نهفته در تجربیات ارتباط دارد. هدف پژوهشگر، درک معنی تجربه به همان صورتی که فرد تجربه کرده است، می‌باشد. مشارکت‌کننده در مصاحبه‌های نیمه ساختار یافته ۱۵ نفر بودند و شامل اعضای هیئت علمی دانشگاه در گروه مدیریت ورزشی، مدیران ارشد فدراسیون فوتبال، مدیران باشگاه‌های فوتبال، مدیران ارشد شرکت‌های خصوصی و مربیان ورزشی بودند. برای اعتبار سنجی و روایی نتایج از ملاک‌های اعتبار و قابلیت اعتماد استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: عوامل موثر بر افزایش انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی در حمایت مالی از باشگاه‌های فوتبال لیگ برتر ایران شامل ۵۲ مضمون فرعی در قالب ۸ مضمون اصلی بودند که به ترتیب پایبندی به هنجارهای رفتاری، توسعه مالی، حمایت دولت، توسعه دآوری، توسعه رسانه‌ای، توسعه مدیریتی، توسعه برند باشگاه، رشد و توسعه شرکت‌های حامی، هستند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: عوامل موثر بر افزایش انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی در حمایت مالی از باشگاه‌های فوتبال، مورد بررسی قرار گرفت و مفاهیم جدیدی به دست آمد.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۱/۱۱

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۶/۰۱



Optimizing the Entrepreneurs' Crowdfunding in Sport Business

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research aims to identify and validate Iranian sports entrepreneurs' optimal use of crowdfunding.

Methodology: The research method is mixed. In the qualitative section, the participants included 16 sports management professors, entrepreneurship management, sports entrepreneurs, and sports business people in the interview, and the data were analyzed by Maxqda version—2020 software. Furthermore, 360 participants participated in the survey during the quantitative section, and the data was analyzed with Smart PLS software.

Findings: The findings showed casual elements, including entrepreneurial attitude, human capital, and policies. The background conditions include the institutionalization of entrepreneurship, business management transparency and improvement, a customer-oriented culture, and cultural and social factors. Also, the intervening factors comprised laws and regulations, financial and economic elements, protective laws, and information technology factors. The practical strategies also included expert forces, trust building, creating supportive and monetary policies, and communicating with entrepreneurs. Finally, the results showed the growth of sports businesses, distribution of justice in financial resources, economic productivity, and positive attitude toward sports entrepreneurs as social capital. According to the results, the identified factors can provide the necessary ground for collective financing by sports business entrepreneurs.

Originality: Funding has always been one of the main challenges of entrepreneurs, and crowdfunding can be an effective way to provide the capital a start-up company needs. The purpose of this study is to optimize collective capital by sports entrepreneurs by a quantitative study.

Keywords

Crowdfunding
Economic
Financial
Sports Entrepreneurs
Sports Business

Article type

Research Paper

Received: 2023/03/14

Accepted: 2023/07/15

How to cite this article:

Hossein Aliani, M., Nemati, N., & Bagherpour, T. (2023). Optimizing the Entrepreneurs' Crowdfunding in Sport Business. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 45-65. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43204.1080>



1. Introduction

One of the topics intertwined with the entrepreneurship debate is small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Although These enterprises require less investment, they have higher returns, have an essential role in job creation, create a suitable platform for ingenuity and inventions, and increase these countries' exports (Leroux-Sostenes & Bayle, 2019). Research has shown that SMEs constitute the majority of enterprises operating in developing countries and employment markets (Hashemi Nekoo et al., 2018). Therefore, creating businesses generates new sources of wealth and leads to new business opportunities. Furthermore, increasing participation in creating businesses increases the number of people directly involved in entrepreneurship and promotes entrepreneurial efforts. Therefore, identifying the efficient factors for creating businesses is important (Roma et al., 2017). As well as in most developed and developing countries, economic policymakers have considered the position of enterprises in SMEs, and efforts are made to utilize the potential of this group of firms to achieve macroeconomic goals. Strengthening the competitive spirit and entrepreneurship in the economy, increasing productivity, and job creation are three main characteristics of SMEs given them such a status. Some experts believe that small and medium enterprises have higher productivity than large enterprises. Still, their problems and obstacles in financing from the financial market and other related entities could prevent their growth and development. Therefore, government support programs, especially in financing, promote economic development (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). Modern sport is developing as a social and entrepreneurial activity (Novak et al., 2018). Today, countries have turned to creativity and innovation for economic growth and progress. Therefore, they are trying to strengthen the entrepreneurial spirit of people in society with all their potential.

Entrepreneurship has been the advancing force of the world's new economy in the past ten years and the future, which meets economic needs every year by creating thousands of new businesses (Brown et al., 2020). Financing has always been one of the main challenges of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs in starting a business should look for methods other than traditional financing (Winborg, 2009). Sports is also expressed as a profitable entrepreneurial activity, and its marketing activity is evolving. There are countless ways to finance sports (Novak et al., 2018). Access to a suitable method of financing has always been a complicated problem for entrepreneurs (Chitsazan et al., 2017), and financing methods of different entrepreneurs have varied based on various stages of the organization's life cycle (Hashemi Nekoo et al., 2018). Among other techniques, fundraising could effectively provide the capital entrepreneurs require (Poursaeed et al., 2019).

Crowdfunding is a new and growing phenomenon in entrepreneurship finance (Cumming & Johan, 2013), based on open and aggregate innovation paradigms. One of these solutions is to create shared value using the Internet and population technology. One of these solutions to create shared value utilizing Internet and population technology that followed the 2007-2008 recession was favored by researchers and entrepreneurs (Xu et al., 2016) and allows entrepreneurs to request funding from a potentially large set of investors who are people (Cumming & Johan, 2013). In 2018, Chitsazan et al. stated that crowdfunding is one of the new financing methods for entrepreneurs, allowing them to

collect financial resources from a wide range of ordinary people who can make little investments (Chitsazan et al., 2017). This method has grown dramatically in most parts of the world in recent years, so it is said to have become an alternative source for financing a wide range of projects and projects (Allen & Evans, 2005; Harzer, 2013). However, more than \$1 billion has been collected by millions of crowdfunding advocates around the world, and many countries, including the United States, are encouraging financing to raise funds to start new businesses (Agrawal et al., 2016). This funding method is a unique and democratic way for organizations to use the internet participation of a large population of people inside or outside the organization to generate ideas, solve problems, and finance their projects (Simons et al., 2019). Looking at the crowdfunding ecosystem, we find that there are three main actors in this process: sports entrepreneurs (capital seekers), funders, and financing platform that acts as intermediaries between sports entrepreneurs (capital seekers) and capital suppliers (Scholz, 2015). Research also shows that funds obtained through financial deposits are classified into four models: donation, reward, loan, and equity (Krupa et al., 2020).

So far, crowdfunding has focused more on its use by start-ups and start-up entrepreneurs on public platforms (Paschen, 2017). On the other hand, Aghajani et al. (2013), in research entitled Explaining financial methods of entrepreneurial projects, consider economic systems as one of the most critical challenges facing entrepreneurs or perhaps the most crucial obstacle to starting and continuing their businesses (Aghajani et al., 2013). Ciechan-Kujawa and Górniewicz (2020) stated that crowdfunding is the primary funding source for many sports teams, amateur athletes, and others. It has become the developer of sports and leisure time (Ciechan-Kujawa & Górniewicz, 2020). Also, providing unique perspectives and solutions can show a clear path toward the sustainable development of the sports industry and the economic development of related businesses for experts, planners, and policymakers (Khoshbakht Ahmadi et al., 2022).

According to the Global Competitiveness Report published by the World Economic Forum (2017-2018), Iran ranks 124th among 138 countries in terms of financing indicators in terms of access to loans and 110th among 138 countries in terms of access to risky investment (Cai et al., 2021). Therefore, sports entrepreneurs have many challenges and difficulties in preparing for loans and access to risky assets. Since financing is an integral part of all entrepreneurial activities, and on the other hand, Iran is in undesirable conditions in terms of financing structure according to statistics, and due to the pandemic conditions of COVID-19, the use of collective financing methods could be very useful and efficient, especially in sports entrepreneurs.

Sport is unable to survive without monetization, and financial collection is a flexible way of providing credit for projects for individuals (e.g., artists, top athletes, or private individuals) or separate structural groups (e.g., associations) or networks (e.g., friends) (Aghamohammadi et al., 2021). The necessary infrastructure for starting businesses, educational planning, financial support, and an appropriate organizational structure for sports entrepreneurship should be considered (Hosseini et al., 2021). Unfortunately, sport relies on government revenues in some countries, seriously damaging sports development (Braet et al., 2013). On the other hand, crowdfunding is a new and growing phenomenon

in entrepreneurship finance, so considering the undeniable importance of financing in sports entrepreneurs' projects, the researcher seeks to answer the question: Which factors affect collective financing by Iranian sports entrepreneurs?

2. Methodology

In this research, we choose the database theory as a research method. Grounded theory methodology provides a tried-and-true set of procedures for building theory from data, which are culturally sensitive and applicable to individuals, organizations, and communities. Larger ones are applicable (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In addition, grounded theory includes systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to build theories from the data itself (Charmaz, 2014). There are three types of grounded theory: classical (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), emergent (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), and foundational theory (Charmaz, 2014). These grounded theory methods have different ontological and epistemological bases (Bertelsen et al., 2017), and they are neither homogeneous nor interchangeable methods (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Since these three grounded theory methods are based on different research philosophies, none is superior to the others. The basis of our study is in the theory of Corbin and Strauss.

The study method was mixed in terms of data collection, which was done in two qualitative and quantitative methods so that interviews were conducted in the qualitative section of sports management university, entrepreneurship management, sports entrepreneurs and activists in the field of sports businesses, and the quantitative method, the extracted codes were set up as questionnaires, and after confirmation, questionnaires were distributed and collected among the statistical population. The statistical population in the qualitative section included the university of sports management, entrepreneurship management, sports entrepreneurs, and activists in the field of sports businesses. Field of study and having scientific compilations related to the subject, managerial positions, executive experiences in entrepreneurship, and sports business were among the indicators of selecting the initial list of experts. The sampling method was non-probability with purposeful selection with maximum variety or heterogeneity. The sample size in this study was 16 based on the theoretical saturation index; each was interviewed, each interview was analyzed, and the codes related to the research were extracted.

Furthermore, the quantitative section of managers and employees of sports clubs, managers and employees of sports businesses, sports entrepreneurs, PhD students in sports marketing, and finally, customers to whom sports services are provided 360 people. According to the statistical samples' occupational, educational, and research backgrounds, those aware of the present study were identified as the study sample. Using the random sampling method, these subjects were identified as samples. The questionnaire was sent in person, by e-mail, and in cyberspace to distribute the questionnaires. The research tool consisted of semi-structured interviews and a researcher-made questionnaire designed in two forms according to the research objectives and methodology. Overall, the questionnaire contained 109 factors identified in the qualitative section. Therefore, according to the identified strategies, ten sports management professors confirmed the content validity, and they were outside the samples of the qualitative section. Then, to

validate the model drawn in most structural equations' method, the questions were designed according to Likert's 5-value spectrum. A mixed method (qualitative-quantitative) was used to analyze the present study's data. Qualitative part analysis was performed using MAXQDA, a software version 2020, and quantitative part analysis (validation) was performed using Smart PLS structural equation model software.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the statistical population in two qualitative and quantitative sections.

Table 1. Research descriptive findings.

	Demographic Characteristics	Groups	Abundance	Percentage
The qualitative section of the research	Sex	Male	9	57.14
		Female	7	42.86
	Education	PhD	12	85.71
		MA	4	14.29
Quantitative section of the research	Sex	Male	225	62.5
		Female	135	37.5
	Age	Under 35	57	15.8
		36-45	186	51.7
		46-55	87	24.2
		Over 55	30	3.8

The results showed that in the qualitative section, 14.57% of the statistical population was male, and 42.86% were female. Also, in the quantitative part, 62.5% of the statistical population were male and 47.5% were female. In the qualitative section, the extracted codes and the components related to each and identifying strategies would affect strategic innovation in sports businesses. In such a way that after decomposition and celebration, it is possible to answer the main and minor questions raised.

Open coding is the first step in constructing grounded theory (Danaeifard et al., 2008). Available encoding is performed row by row, paragraph by paragraph, or on separate pages. A unit of encoding is attached to any of the rows or sentences, meaning, or code. These codes or concepts should be able to saturate the maximum conceptual space and sense (Chitsazan et al., 2017). At this point, all information is encoded. In the initial encoding of the researcher based on the encoding unit, each unit attaches a code (concept, name, label). The concepts or principles obtained in this stage form the cornerstone of the following major categories and the main components of emerging underlying theory (Mohammadkazemi et al., 2019). Now that all data are encoded, and several basic codes or concepts have been created, the second stage of open coding begins. At this stage, the researcher does not work with raw texts but deals with the concepts he has produced. This phase of open encoding, common to "centralized" coding, makes and extracts significant categories. Table 2 describes how to code the first (primary) and second (centralized) levels to understand the meaning of identifying strategies affecting strategic innovation in sports businesses. Table 3 shows the factors affecting Iranian sports entrepreneurs' optimal

use of collective financing. According to the results of this table, by analyzing the text of interviews and after conceptualization in the open coding stage, 109 primary concepts (first level) and 220 significant categories (second level) were identified, which were presented in Table 4 due to limitations in words and pages in the articles of the mentioned stages. It should also be noted that considering the mixed research approach, the significance level and factor loads associated with each factor were reported in Table 4 due to page limitations.

Table 2. Concepts and final codes of strategic innovation strategies in sports organizations.

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level		
Cause factors	Entrepreneurs attitude	Entrepreneurship in attitude	0.42	0.001		
		A traditional look at business and entrepreneurship in sports	0.60	0.001		
		Innovative incentives in sports businesses	0.63	0.001		
		Society's Viewpoints on Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurs	0.63	0.001		
		knowledge of sports entrepreneurs to support the business	0.65	0.001		
	Entrepreneurs' human capital	The level of desire for entrepreneurship and the creation of sports businesses	0.54	0.001		
		The degree of understanding of entrepreneurial opportunities in sports by entrepreneurs	0.65	0.001		
		The desire for independence in obtaining income	0.52	0.001		
		Sports entrepreneurs plan to start sports businesses	0.58	0.001		
		Creating the necessary entrepreneurship platforms in sports businesses	0.65	0.001		
	Entrepreneurial Policies	Creating an entrepreneurial Environment in the Sports Business	0.64	0.001		
		The existence of a culture of entrepreneurship and teamwork	0.63	0.001		
		Supporting innovative ideas in sports businesses	0.55	0.001		
		Boost creativity to improve the atmosphere of sports businesses	0.58	0.001		
		Management method of managers to help the sports business environment	0.64	0.001		
		Risk-taking of managers in sports business environment	0.49	0.001		
		Using charismatic management to develop entrepreneurship in the sports industry	0.65	0.001		
		The Status and Social Status of Entrepreneurs	0.62	0.001		
		Underlying factors	Institutionalization of Entrepreneurship	Institutionalizing entrepreneurship in society	0.65	0.001
				Creating interest and attitude and a kind of behavior in entrepreneurial activities	0.53	0.001

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level
Confounding Factors	Transparency and improvement of business management	Institutionalization related to laws and a competitive market	0.53	0.001
		Institutionalization of economic and social values in society	0.63	0.001
		Transparency in the sports business environment	0.48	0.001
		A healthy competitive environment in the sports business environment	0.47	0.001
		Transparent legal system to improve the pattern of sports businesses	0.52	0.001
		Transparency of the country's laws and regulations for the design of sports businesses	0.42	0.001
		Transparency in setting up and managing sports businesses	0.68	0.001
	The existence of a customer-oriented culture	New patterns in customer orientation for the prosperity of sports businesses	0.47	0.001
		Presenting a new idea to the customer to keep them in sports businesses	0.74	0.001
		Customer recognition for designing a sports business model	0.77	0.001
		Maintaining current customers to stabilize sports businesses	0.71	0.001
	Cultural and Social Factors	Culture of participation in sports	0.47	0.001
		Beliefs and Values	0.52	0.001
		High participation of women and gentlemen in sports	0.46	0.001
		Community interested in sports activities	0.77	0.001
		Reproduce values tailored to the conditions of the day	0.70	0.001
	Laws	Lack of protection laws to create sports businesses	0.49	0.001
		Weakness in policies related to financing in the field of sports entrepreneurship	0.70	0.001
		Legal obstacles to the growth of sports businesses	0.73	0.001
		Not allocating facilities for sports entrepreneurs	0.77	0.001
Economic and financial factors ahead	The role of economic issues in increasing tensions in sports businesses	0.52	0.001	
	Lack of financing for sports business design	0.42	0.001	
	The effect of sanctions on the entrepreneurship growth of sports businesses	0.60	0.001	
	Barriers to obtaining facilities from banks and financial institutions	0.63	0.001	
	The Effect of Restrictions on International Communications on The Growth of Sports	0.63	0.001	

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level
Strategies	Protection laws	Entrepreneurship		
		Lack of suitable platforms for foreign investors in sports businesses	0.76	0.001
		Legal enforcement problems in support of nascent sports businesses	0.55	0.001
		Lack of support from authorities in the boom of manufacturing workshops in the sports industry	0.55	0.001
		Lack of coherent classes in sports entrepreneurship	0.51	0.001
		Insufficient government support for raw materials in sports entrepreneurship	0.65	0.001
		Activities of science and technology parks in sports businesses	0.71	0.001
		Software technologies in sports businesses	0.61	0.001
		Utilization of new technologies in sports businesses	0.65	0.001
		Access to the world's most up-to-date information on sports businesses	0.61	0.001
	The presence of specialists	Growth of sports equipment and supplies in the sports industry	0.55	0.001
		Identify new ideas to create innovative designs and patterns	0.41	0.001
		Entering sports professionals into the sports business market	0.54	0.001
		Nurturing innovative forces in knowledge-based sports businesses	0.55	0.001
		Benefiting from innovative human resources for the survival of entrepreneurial sports organizations	0.76	0.001
		Gaining the trust of domestic and foreign entrepreneurs by boards and federations	0.55	0.001
		Attracting entrepreneurs by providing preventive topics and gaining the trust of entrepreneurs by appointing qualified people	0.55	0.001
		Welcoming and pursuing voluntary entrepreneurs' proposals	0.51	0.001
		Self-sufficiency in performing and continuing entrepreneurs and maintaining entrepreneurs by meeting their needs	0.52	0.001
		Exploiting the achievements of entrepreneurs by entrepreneurs themselves	0.65	0.001
Training and Resource Management	Connecting properly with entrepreneurs	0.53	0.001	
	Identifying health and education benefactors and ways to attract them	0.73	0.001	
	Training knowledgeable and	0.61	0.001	

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level
		capable managers to identify and use the capacity in the community		
		Job description and definition of the framework and procedures of sports entrepreneurs	0.65	0.001
		Referral of entrepreneurs by federations and sports boards to the Ministry of Sport and vice versa	0.85	0.001
		The Use of Women and Youth in the Entrepreneurs Forum	0.68	0.001
		Federations get help from entrepreneurs in sporting events	0.66	0.001
		Government support for sports industry entrepreneurs	0.61	0.001
		Establishing a Support Fund for Sports Businesses	0.54	0.001
	Development of supportive and financial policies	Developing fiscal, monetary, and foreign exchange policies in support of effective sports businesses	0.58	0.001
		Properly implementing privatization policy in the sports industry	0.66	0.001
		Developing strategies for attracting entrepreneurs in the sports industry	0.69	0.001
	Interacting with entrepreneurs	Strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem in sports businesses	0.64	0.001
		Changing approach and policy concerning entrepreneurs in the field of sports industry	0.68	0.001
		Improving the position of sports in the country's businesses	0.74	0.001
		Introducing the nature and different areas of the sports industry in society	0.77	0.001
		Improving the position of exercise in improving community health	0.71	0.001
	Growth of sports businesses	Growth and development of different aspects of the sports industry	0.47	0.001
		Identifying and introducing new sports jobs	0.52	0.001
		Creating employment in the community through the sports industry	0.46	0.001
		Job diversity in the sports industry and its businesses	0.77	0.001
		Suitable dispersion of sports manufacturing industries established in different regions	0.70	0.001
	Justice in Financial Resources	Distribution of sports businesses in different regions of the country	0.49	0.001
		Sports business owners take advantage of entrepreneurs' Financing Fund	0.70	0.001
	Economic Productivity	Lower bankruptcy rates for sports	0.73	0.001

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level
		businesses		
		Enhancing the consolidation of sports businesses	0.77	0.001
		Creating added value in sports businesses	0.52	0.001
		Growth of the share percentage of sports markets	0.42	0.001
		Improve the income of sports businesses	0.60	0.001
		Increasing media attention to sports entrepreneurs	0.63	0.001
		Improving positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship in sport	0.63	0.001
	Positive attitude to sports entrepreneurs as a social capital	Creating an attitude towards sports entrepreneurship as a suitable career option	0.75	0.001
		Social rise of sports entrepreneurs	0.55	0.001
		Strengthening positive attitudes toward risk-taking in society	0.55	0.001
		Creating a sense of social and moral responsibility for entrepreneurs towards society	0.51	0.001
		Improving the position of sports in the country's businesses	0.63	0.001
		Introducing the nature and different areas of the sports industry in society	0.63	0.001
		Improving the position of exercise in improving community health	0.65	0.001
	Growth of sports businesses	Growth and development of different aspects of the sports industry	0.54	0.001
		Identifying and introducing new sports jobs	0.65	0.001
		Creating employment in the community through the sports industry	0.52	0.001
		Job diversity in the sports industry and its businesses	0.58	0.001
Outputs		Suitable dispersion of sports manufacturing industries established in different regions	0.65	0.001
	Justice in Financial Resources	Distribution of sports businesses in different regions of the country	0.64	0.001
		Sports business owners take advantage of intrapreneurs financing fund	0.63	0.001
		Lower bankruptcy rates for sports businesses	0.55	0.001
		Enhancing the consolidation of sports businesses	0.58	0.001
	Economic Productivity	Creating added value in sports businesses	0.64	0.001
		Growth of the share percentage of sports markets	0.49	0.001
		Improve the income of sports businesses	0.65	0.001

Selective	Pivot	Primary Code	Factor load	Meaningfulness level
Axial phenomenon	Positive attitude to sports entrepreneurs as a social capital	Increasing media attention to sports entrepreneurs	0.62	0.001
		Improving positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship in sport	0.65	0.001
		Creating an attitude towards sports entrepreneurship as a suitable career option	0.53	0.001
		Social rise of sports entrepreneurs	0.53	0.001
		Strengthening positive attitudes toward risk-taking in society	0.63	0.001
		Creating a sense of social and moral responsibility for entrepreneurs towards society	0.48	0.001
	Executive Actions	Using people's capitalists interested in sports	0.47	0.001
		Valuation of intangible assets of clubs and federations	0.52	0.001
		Implementation of principled privacy based on rules and regulations	0.42	0.001
		Cutting off government cash contributions to revenue-generating fields such as football	0.68	0.001
		Obtaining business plans and feasibility studies from investors' managers	0.66	0.001
		The possibility of validating the request of the public joint stock cooperative company for the club	0.61	0.001
	Favorable ownership	General shares of the desired ownership model of clubs	0.54	0.001
		Conversion of non-commercial sports cultural institute to commercial company	0.58	0.001
		Combining ownership of investment companies, people, and government for clubs in Iran	0.66	0.001
		Participating in clubs' ownership of your veterans and other stakeholders	0.69	0.001

Continuing in the quantitative part of confirmatory factor analysis, the relationship between factors (hidden variables) and items (observable variables) is measured. In this method, no association between hidden variables is investigated. This type of measurement model ensures that the secret variables are calculated correctly. The relationship between a factor and several items or multifactors could be studied in first-order confirmatory factor analysis. To confirm the extracted factors and factors, the research questionnaires were used using confirmatory factor analysis (first order) based on Smart PLS software. One of the methods for evaluating hidden variables in constructive or hybrid measurement models is using statistical analysis at the level of observable variables (Skinner et al., 2014). Considering that in the current study, the factor analysis of the identified factors is measured in the qualitative part, factor loadings higher

than 0.4 are approved, but if a quantitative model was tested, the factor loadings should be confirmed that the value obtained for each factor should be equal to 0.7 (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). The question arises whether each observant has a share in the hidden variable and conveys the concept's meaning. This study investigates whether this observable variable could be related or unrelated to creating a hidden forming variable. The constituents' meaningful representations are considered to answer this question (Winborg, 2009).

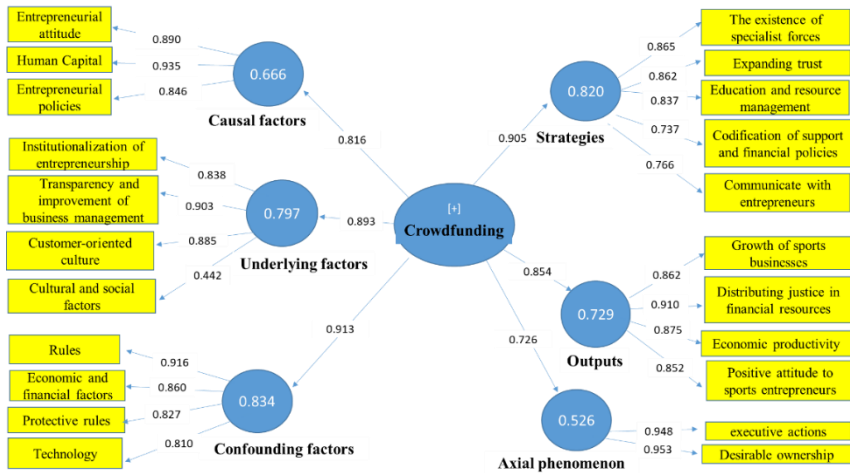


Figure 1. Factors affecting crowdfunding by Iranian sports entrepreneurs (meaningful mode).

According to the shape values (1), all of the significance coefficients of t are higher than 1.96, which indicates the significant relationship between items and structures at the confidence level of 0.95.

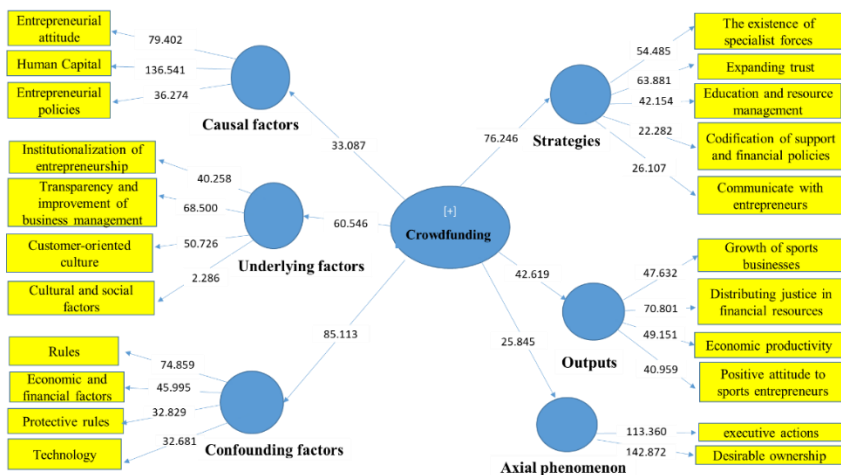


Figure 2. Model of measuring factors affecting collective financing by Iranian sports entrepreneurs (standard mode).

In addition, Figure 2 shows the factor loadings (λ) for each of the reagents (obvious variables). According to the results, the number of factor loadings of obvious variables from the cut-off point was 0.4. The value of their T-statistics was higher than the cut-off point of 1.96> (PIn the following, the convergent, divergent, and reliability validity of the constructs of the factors affecting collective financing have been calculated by Iranian sports entrepreneurs, the results of which are as follows.

Table 3. Reliability coefficients of variable constructs of factors affecting collective financing by Iranian sports entrepreneurs.

Scale crumbs	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho homogeneous reliability	Combined reliability	Convergent validity
Cause factors	0.957	0.961	0.961	0.545
Underlying factors	0.837	0.879	0.908	0.665
Confounding factors	0.783	0.857	0.862	0.824
Strategies	0.780	0.874	0.921	0.795
Outputs	0.786	0.877	0.915	0.730
Axial phenomenon	0.893	0.895	0.949	0.903

The values reported in Table 3 confirm the reliability and convergence validity of the research variables. Furnell and Larker methods were used to investigate the differentiation rate of hidden variable observant.

Table 4. Evaluation indicators of the measurement model, structural and general.

Indicators	Index type	Index name	The final model
Fit indices	Measurement section	CVCom	0.421
		R2	0.407
	structural part	F2	0.077
		CVRed	0.290
	General Section	SRMR	0.076
		GOF	0.554

The goodness of fit index is also a criterion related to the overall assessment of structural equation models. This means that by this criterion, after examining the fit of the measurement part and the structural part of the comprehensive model of his research, the author can also control the fit of the overall part. The criterion was invented by Tenenhaus (2004) and is calculated according to the following model.

$$GoF = \sqrt{Communalities \times R2}$$

This index is the square of the value multiplied by the average of the shared values and the average of the determination coefficient. Wetzels et al. (2009) introduced three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, medium, and strong values for this index. According to the value of 0.554, the criterion of the goodness of fit index shows the overall strong fit of the model. Finally, Le Hir et al. (2016), for the comprehensive assessment of the model,

introduced a measure called the main goodness-of-fit index in structural equation modeling in the variance-based approach, which is the conventional root mean square residual (SRMR) correction. The cut point in this index is considered to be less than 0.08. In this research, this cut point was also observed. In other words, the evaluation indicators of the measurement, structural, and general model, according to the optimal range of these indicators, indicate that the assumed model compiled by the research data is supported. In other words, it fits the data. The model is established. Table 5 divergent validity table matrix by Furnell and Larker method variable constructs of factors affecting collective financing by Iranian sports entrepreneurs.

Table 5. Divergent validity table matrix by Furnell and Larker method variable constructs of factors affecting collective financing by Iranian sports entrepreneurs.

Scale crumbs	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cause factors	0.738					
Underlying factors	0.906	0.815				
Confounding factors	0.893	0.735	0.790			
Strategies	0.818	0.661	0.742	0.892		
Outputs	0.913	0.819	0.759	0.696	0.854	
Axial phenomenon	0.726	0.579	0.644	0.490	0.665	0.951

According to the above matrix, the central diameter values of all structures are higher than the correlation with other structures, which shows the appropriate discriminate validity and good fitting of the measurement model.

4. Discussions and conclusion

This study aimed to identify the factors affecting crowdfunding by Iranian sports entrepreneurs using the grounded theory approach. A systematic approach of grounded data theory presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was utilized to present a systematic and schematic model of the findings derived from encoded data. The systematic model is derived from the separated layers, and based on the placement of these layers together, the final model of the research is presented (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Then, these layers are analyzed separately from the obtained codes. Causal conditions mean categories related to conditions that affect the central category, which is the analysis of the status of sports capital among the audience (Danaeifard et al., 2008). In this regard, the concepts of entrepreneurial attitude, the human capital of entrepreneurs, and extracted entrepreneurial policies can be mentioned. Entrepreneurial attitude is a factor in starting business activities; if a person does not have an entrepreneurial attitude, he does not deal with business. Entrepreneurial attitude in global entrepreneurship is considered a factor for measuring the entrepreneurship process of countries (Aghamohammadi et al., 2021). This issue is essential because the role of entrepreneurs as leaders and senior managers of organizations is considered very important in the institutionalization process, which can facilitate entrepreneurs to take positive steps in collective financing. Another identified factor is the discussion of entrepreneur policies that can contain appropriate ideas related to the present study. Innovation is often widely attributed to accepting a belief or behavior new to the organization. The new concept should not only be adopted by the organization.

Still, it should also be successfully applied, in addition to entrepreneurial policies and policies for integrated practices and building strong relationships that can effectively create collective financing by sports entrepreneurs (Roma et al., 2017). The sports industry creates various opportunities, such as creating possible ways based on existing business connections (Mollick, 2014). These broad opportunities in the sports market make more ground for innovation in this field. In this regard, it seems necessary to apply innovative ideas in a world where there are many creative opportunities, entrepreneurial policies, and welcoming innovation that such policies and policies emphasize the operationalization of innovative ideas. Context conditions are specific conditions that affect strategies (Danaeifard et al., 2008). The underlying factors in this study consist of institutionalization of entrepreneurship, transparency and improvement of business management, customer-oriented culture, and cultural and social factors. Among the necessary grounds for optimal use of collective financing by sports entrepreneurs, providing a platform for the sustainability of sports businesses and institutionalizing it can be mentioned government support, creation of communication institutions, strengthening media performance, and continuing entrepreneurship incentive policies. Government support can be used to support production, allocate subsidies to production, and create banking facilities. Arbitration and Rezaee (2008) were among the necessary platforms for institutionalizing entrepreneurship in society as a platform for entrepreneurship (education and culture building) and leading entrepreneurship in the stage of action (legislative and support).

In the following, successful patterns can be mentioned, which can also be used if possible, and a single model can be achieved to achieve success. These factors are bound to be a strong and successful management that should be among those with the necessary knowledge and sufficient experience in guiding the optimal use of sports business financing. People who work in these sectors must report their activities transparently because transparency is a necessary principle in management issues (Aghamohammadi et al., 2021). Successful management will not be possible without the use of technology. Proper human capital management can not only be one of the causes of strategic innovation, but also managers of responsible institutions in sports, both official and informal, could play an essential role in this field. The community also approved the underlying factors in the quantitative section, indicating the identified factors to improve the status of sports business strategies. Cultural and social factors governing society also do not doubt the optimal use of collective financing through entrepreneurs. They can be one of the necessary platforms, beliefs, and community strategies that can affect entrepreneurs' willingness to finance through entrepreneurs.

Interventional conditions affect strategies (Aghajani et al., 2013). Technology is one of the positive predictors that has led to optimal use and service acceleration in all countries. The discussion of the use of collective supply by entrepreneurs is undoubtedly practical. It creates a suitable space for sports entrepreneurs to also work in the field of sports business because, for entrepreneurs, it will be proven that the sports industry is also associated with the technology of the world and along with these technologies is moving and the quality and potential that exists in the sport for its bright entrepreneurs.

Additionally, institutional quality, including its components, including coordination of institutions, a commitment of sports institutions and businesses to the implementation of laws and programs, support of government institutions from sports entrepreneurship and innovation, the necessity of pivotal planning and strategic planning, and tailoring the objectives of such programs following cultural needs can be in creating strategic innovation. The protection laws should also strengthen policies that positively affect this area. Economic issues and related obstacles in the financial field are among the most critical issues in business or other areas. Like other industries, sports depend on the economy and is one of its most important pillars. There are many economic obstacles facing sports businesses, such as the lack of bank cooperation and they inability to provide appropriate facilities. Law protection can be helpful in the mentioned areas. If the government or related bodies can have the necessary support, the domestic sports production sector will also be willing to continue working. The identified intervention factors in the quantitative section were also confirmed. The obtained factor loads indicated the importance of the codes identified in this field, and paying particular attention to it can ultimately improve the business situation.

Expertise and having specialized staff are among the main success factors. Experts can improve the sports business, and many sports-using experts can use the opportunity optimistically. It is necessary to use educated people with relevant education, such as sports marketing, to apply their knowledge to improve the status of sports businesses. Also, to empower employees and officials, training courses should be maintained so that they can get the necessary training. There are also courses for educated and interested people to attend. Paying attention to branding should also be on the agenda of the authorities. It should be done in a way that creates a variety of brands in the sports business. This is achieved when products are produced according to customer's needs and have the necessary quality, which, if this is not achieved, will not be welcomed by consumers. Of course, in this regard, as long as the copyright law is not respected, a trusted brand cannot be achieved, and poor copyright law has caused investors to take fewer risks and invest in sports. In this regard, it is necessary to set and implement strict rules so that sports businesses have essential prosperity. Government support can be used to support production, allocate subsidies to production, and establish banking facilities. Arbitration and [Rezaee \(2008\)](#) were among the necessary strategies for institutionalizing entrepreneurship in society as a platform for entrepreneurship (education and culture) and leading entrepreneurship in the stage of action (legislation and support). Trust building is another strategy in which it is possible to use communication and attract the appropriate consent of the collective financing entrepreneurs, thereby gaining the necessary trust between the parties. In this regard, if the platforms ensure that entrepreneurs use their achievements optimistically, their confidence will undoubtedly increase. Finally, it can be noted that training and resource management in this regard, factors such as getting help from entrepreneurs in sporting events by federations, which the entrepreneur is active in, and a good opportunity for collective financing by entrepreneurs in the sports field is created.

One of the consequences of this study is the discussion of social justice in sport. Socioeconomic justice was considered in indicators such as the dispersion ratio of sports

industries and businesses in different regions and the ease of access to sports clubs and services. The importance of this issue is that access to sports clubs, and services can result from justice in different regions so that proper location of places based on the needs of the regions can have social and economic productivity. Economic productivity was expressed in indicators such as the bankruptcy rate of sports businesses, the stabilization of sports businesses, the percentage of market share from the export of sports products, the added value created by sports businesses, the value of sports workshops headquarters, the percentage of market share growth, the degree of consolidation of sports businesses, and the competitiveness of sports products. Finally, promoting sports businesses and creating new markets was another consequence; it can be said that when domestic sports businesses prosper, they can compete with foreign products inside and even in the region and be a new domestic market for entrepreneurs and investors. The prosperity of sports businesses will lead to the economic development of sports. In this way, many people will be employed, and new jobs will be created so that people will work in sports, and the wheel of the sports industry will move. Finally, sustainable development can be noted through the prosperity of businesses. Sports, as one of the areas that has a large audience in all generations of society, can play an essential role in the sustainable development of society in a way that if there is an income in the field of sports, no doubt because its audience will increase every day this income and development will become more and more sustainable and attract more and more capital, which also requires taking advantage of new ideas. Considering that the critical consequences of sports are the creation of numerous businesses and sports businesses are ineffective in the growth of different types of sports. Today, we are witnessing the turning to new financial resources in developing the national economy and utilizing the sports industry for the general income and economic independence of the sports sector. In this regard, the creation and success of sports businesses are one of the most critical channels in developing the sports industry's share of GDP, and on the other hand, increasing the forces of the educated sport and diversifying the needs. It can also be concluded that in today's world, governments can no longer take charge of all affairs as in the past. Considering the increase of internal and external threats to the country, the many livelihood problems of the people, the high current expenses of the governments, and the exorbitant expenses needed to develop the infrastructure and solve the fundamental economic and social issues of the country, we cannot expect the country's sports to be the same as in the past. Provide its resources from the government. Therefore, it is inevitable that sports should move from dependence on the government budget and oil economy towards financial independence and a free economy. The fact is that the government of men should realize that the change in the economic policies of professional sports due to more than 30 years of dependence is gradual and not sudden. Unfortunately, most existing plans have a media and propaganda aspect, while today's state-owned sports require incremental measures arising from such research and prosperous countries. The best approach is to start moving towards self-sufficiency within 5 to 10 years and then start making a profit in professional sports. The strategies introduced in the current research, especially the financing methods, can put a clear action plan in front of the experienced sports managers of the country.

Therefore, according to the obtained results, it can be suggested to provide the necessary platforms for the collective financing of sports entrepreneurs by formulating appropriate support and financial policies. In the end, it should be said that every research has limitations. Among the limitations of the current study, it can be mentioned that the results are generalized, which was done in sports, and its effects cannot be generalized to other fields. Therefore, it is suggested that the optimal use of crowdfunding in different fields, such as various existing industries, should be investigated and presented. Another limitation that can be pointed out in the present study is the evaluation of the findings of the present study, which is qualitative, which was not possible to evaluate quantitatively in the present study, so it is suggested that other researchers, after confirming the validity of the identification constructs consider the identified and confirmed factors.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نشریه کسب و کار در ورزش

آدرس نشریه: <https://sbj.alzahra.ac.ir/>

تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۴۵-۶۵

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.43204.1080



بهینه‌سازی سرمایه‌گذاری جمعی کارآفرینان ورزشی

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مالی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی

چکیده

هدف: هدف این پژوهش شناسایی و اعتبار سنجی استفاده بهینه از سرمایه‌گذاری جمعی توسط کارآفرینان ورزشی ایرانی است.

روش: روش تحقیق حاضر آمیخته است. مشارکت کنندگان در این تحقیق در بخش کیفی شامل ۱۶ نفر از اساتید مدیریت ورزشی، مدیریت کارآفرینی، کارآفرینان در حوزه ورزش و فعالان حوزه کسب و کارهای ورزشی بودند که در مصاحبه‌ها شرکت نمودند و نتایج با نرم‌افزار Maxqda نسخه ۲۰۲۰ مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. در بخش کمی تحقیق ۳۶۰ نفر پرسشنامه تحقیق را پاسخ دادند. و نتایج با نرم‌افزار Smart PLS مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها نشان داد عوامل علی شامل کدهای اصلی نگرش کارآفرینی، سرمایه انسانی کارآفرینانه و سیاست‌های کارآفرینانه بودند. عوامل زمینه‌ای شامل نهادینه شدن کارآفرینی، شفافیت و بهبود مدیریت کسب و کار، وجود فرهنگ مشتری مداری و عوامل فرهنگی و اجتماعی بودند. همچنین، عوامل مداخله‌گر شامل قوانین و مقررات، عوامل اقتصادی مالی، قوانین حمایتی و فناوری اطلاعات بودند. راهبردهای موثر نیز شامل نیروهای متخصص، اعتمادسازی، ایجاد سیاست‌های حمایتی و مالی و ارتباط با کارآفرینان بودند و نیز نتایج شامل رشد کسب و کارهای ورزشی، توزیع عدالت در منابع مالی، بهره‌وری اقتصادی و نگرش مثبت به کارآفرینان ورزشی به عنوان یک سرمایه اجتماعی بودند. با توجه به نتایج می‌توان گفت که عوامل شناسایی شده می‌توانند زمینه لازم را برای تأمین مالی جمعی توسط کارآفرینان کسب و کار ورزشی فراهم کنند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: تأمین سرمایه همواره یکی از چالش‌های اساسی کارآفرینان بوده است و جمع‌سپاری مالی می‌تواند راهی موثر برای تأمین سرمایه مورد نیاز شرکت نوپا باشد. هدف از این مطالعه، بهینه‌سازی سرمایه‌گذاری جمعی توسط کارآفرینان ورزشی بر مبنای یک مطالعه کیفی است.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۱/۱۲/۲۳

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۴/۲۴



Exploring the Factors Affecting Sports Tourism Destination Image

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Destination image marketing is a crucial starting point for successful tourism marketing, as visitors' images and expectations of their travel experiences can significantly shape their attitudes towards a particular destination. This study aimed to identify the influential factors forming the sports tourism destination image in Ardabil Province.

Methodology: The study is an applied and descriptive research. The Statistical population of this study consisted of sport management experts, tourism managers and experts of cultural heritage and tourism departments, managers and experts of Sport & youth, tourism agency managers, and visitors of sport tourism. The research questionnaire was a researcher-made that was used after confirmation of its validity and reliability ($\alpha:0.81$). Data from 362 questionnaires were analyzed by SPSS V.26 and Amos V.24 software. Also, the Bartlett test, KMO index, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used.

Findings: The results showed that eight latent factors, including tourism and public infrastructure, local customs and traditions, local attractions, service quality, entertainment and sports events, natural and environmental factors, information and advertising, and social and security factors, are the influenced factors.

Originality: Destination image is one of the most essential variables influencing a tourist's decision to choose a destination. By identifying the factors that affect the formation of the image of sports tourism destinations and using these factors to present a positive image, tourism destination managers and officials can attract more sports tourists and develop their goals.

Keywords

Advertising
Destination Tourism
Marketing
Entertainment
Service Quality
Sports Events
Sports Tourism

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/05/16

Accepted: 2023/08/04

How to cite this article:

Emami, A., Javid, M., Moharamzadeh, M., & Imanzadeh, M. (2023). Exploring the Factors Affecting Sports Tourism Destination Image. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 67-88. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43801.1096>



1. Introduction

In recent years, tourism has emerged as one of the most significant and rapidly expanding economic sectors globally (Naghizadeh-Baghi et al., 2023). Many countries have looked to tourism as a means of earning export revenue, creating jobs, promoting economic diversification, and enhancing the performance of the service sector (Ravinthirakumaran et al., 2019), economic growth (Haini et al., 2023), GDP growth, increasing job opportunities, income and improving standards of living (Ma et al., 2019), facilitates cultural exchange (Chen & Yang, 2022), environmental sustainability (Baloch et al., 2023), Community Development (Brooks et al., 2023; Fazaeil et al., 2020). Also, preservation of cultural heritage (Qu et al., 2023), dealing with problems such as unemployment, limited foreign exchange resources, and monoculture economy (Naghizadeh-Baghi et al., 2023), employment-generating, income-earning and influential industry (Moradi Doliskani & Atghia, 2021) are the further effects.

Most aspects of tourism occur in tourism destinations. Because of this, the World Tourism Organization has suggested that the destination be used as "the fundamental units of analysis in tourism" (Martins et al., 2021; Ranacher-Lackner & Zehrer, 2022). Tourism destinations are a multifaceted combination of various tourism and services (Hanna et al., 2018). These products and services are utilized under the brand name of destinations, offering tourists a complete and fulfilling experience (Shapoval et al., 2017). Tourism destinations refer to a place where tourists tend to spend their time away from home. This geographical unit tourists visit can be an independent center such as a beach resort or a ski slope, a village or a city, a region or an island, or even a country (Javid et al., 2021). It includes accommodation, access, infrastructure and superstructure, tourist attractions, and various facilities. Due to the diverse and numerous components, a destination requires an efficient and effective system to achieve coordinated and integrated performance, meet its goals, and increase the satisfaction of tourists (Juvan & Rok, 2008).

Due to the increasing importance of tourism in today's world and the competitiveness of the worldwide tourism market, tourist destinations are competing intensely to attract tourists. Expanding the tourism industry in any part of the world requires special conditions and facilities such as weather, historical sites, natural attractions, customs and traditions, infrastructure, and facilities and equipment (Ghaffari & Mamramezani, 2019). Therefore, tourism destinations should strive to increase their market share and revenue in the industry. However, in today's fiercely competitive world, the success of a tourism destination is not solely dependent on attracting first-time visitors but rather on repeat visits and effective promotion to potential tourists to ensure long-term success. As a result, effective destination management has become vital for officials and those involved in the tourism industry, focusing on enhancing quality, efficiency, and, most importantly, tourists' satisfaction to create a desirable and memorable image. Achieving this goal requires implementing various tools and strategies, with offering a positive perception of tourism destinations being one of the crucial factors that significantly impact the development of destinations.

Ardabil province, situated amidst mountains and at high altitudes, is a popular destination for tourism and sports tourism in Iran. Its favorable climate, abundant

potential, and various capacities make it an ideal location for different types of sports tourism, including hosting national and international events, winter sports tourism, adventure tourism, hunting tourism, indigenous and local sports tourism, tourism tours, sports camps, ecotourism, and nature tourism. Despite having rich potential and unique natural gifts for tourism, Ardabil has not yet fully utilized these capacities to attract sports tourists. Studies and expert opinions highlight the need to improve the tourism system in each destination through effective marketing, especially during tourism downturns. In this regard, identifying components and factors that influence the formation of the destination image is considered an influential factor in achieving success in destination management. With such components, key strategies can be developed to attract tourists, maintain their loyalty, satisfy them, ensure sustainable development, and gain a strong position in the tourism market. Despite the importance of the destination image in attracting tourists and developing destinations, only a limited number of studies have focused on this topic, and these have primarily investigated it in a general sense. Therefore, this research aims to identify the most important components influencing the formation of the destination image and provide an effective model for improving the sports tourism destination image of Ardabil province by considering all relevant aspects.

2. Theoretical background

2. Destination image

The destination image is a critical element of tourism management and is defined as the sum of beliefs, opinions, and impressions that a tourist retains in their mind about a tourist destination (Bahrainzadeh & Busheri Sangizad, 2019; Gričar et al., 2021; Haller et al., 2021). Zouni et al. (2020) defined the destination image as ‘the sum of cognitive beliefs and ideas and impressions a person has of a destination (Zouni et al., 2020). Gil Arroyo et al. (2023) described the destination image as the sum of tourists' thoughts and feelings about the characteristics of a destination, and stated that the mental image of a tourist destination refers to all the beliefs and perceptions of an individual about a tourist destination. If a tourist destination has a desirable mental image among tourists, the likelihood of traveling to that destination will increase (Mansuri Moayed & Soleymani, 2012). The destination image is one of the main factors in choosing a tourist destination, the decision-making process, and the selection of favorite tourist activities at the destination and recommending the destination (Zhang et al., 2014). An important point to consider about the mental image is that the mental image of a tourist destination (as a complex product) is a multidimensional concept (Ghaffari & Mamramezani, 2019). Tourists shape their mental image of a tourist destination by being exposed to information sources. Word-of-mouth advertising is one of the most influential and prominent information sources concerning the development of the mental image of a tourist destination (Ghaffari & Mamramezani, 2019). In this regard, Li et al. (2023) stated that aligning the presented destination image in information channels with the reality experienced by tourists increases their satisfaction with their experience, which, in turn,

improves the destination image (Li et al., 2023). The results of Gavurova et al. (2023) research indicated that concerns about the safety of the tourist environment could be associated with a negative destination image; thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic, tourists were looking for destinations with better safety conditions (Gavurova et al., 2023). Gorji et al. (2023)'s research on the tourists' perceived destination image and behavioral intentions towards a sanctioned destination showed that visitors generally have a more positive image of the destination than non-visitors, and their motivation for revisiting is also higher (Gorji et al., 2023). Use of culture and identity of the city to increase athletic motivation in sport tourism (Nazari, 2021). This means that direct experience of a destination can change its negative image in the minds of tourists and influence their behavioral intentions (Gorji et al., 2023). Zhang et al. (2018) showed that the destination image significantly impacts tourist loyalty and choice (Zhang et al., 2018). Shirkhodaie et al. (2016) stated that creating a good image of the destination increases tourists' satisfaction, which in turn leads to positive behavioral intentions, increasing future visits and recommending the destination to others (Shirkhodaie et al., 2016). Rajesh (2013), in his article titled "The Impact of tourist perceptions, Destination Image, and Travel Satisfaction on destination loyalty," demonstrated that tourist perception, destination image, and satisfaction all influence destination loyalty (Rajesh, 2013).

3. Methodology

The present study aimed to find solutions to existing problems through descriptive survey research using a questionnaire to gather individuals' views and ideas. The statistical sample consisted of tourism and sports management experts, managers and experts of cultural heritage and tourism departments, experts and managers of sports and youth general office, managers of travel agents, and tourists visiting tourist destinations in Ardabil province. The population was sampled using the random sampling method, and 384 people were selected as the statistical sample using Cochran Formula with an acceptable sampling error of 0.05 for unknown and infinite population sizes due to the lack of accurate information about the statistical sample. Among the distributed questionnaires, 362 were evaluated as suitable and used in the analysis after removing incomplete and distorted ones.

A researcher-made questionnaire was used as the research tool because of the lack of access to a standard questionnaire related to the research topic. To prepare and formulate the questionnaire questions, the researcher first identified the factors and influential factors on the image of a sports tourism destination by referring to relevant books, articles, and research. Then, based on the research topic, the factors and components involved in the image of sports tourism destinations in Ardabil province were extracted. After preparing the questionnaire questions, the questionnaire was given to 10 sports management and tourism experts to determine its content validity, and they were asked to provide their opinions and suggestions regarding the questionnaire. After receiving the views of the professors and experts, their thoughts and suggestions were incorporated into the preliminary questionnaire. Then, the final questionnaire for the research project was prepared with the approval of the supervisor and advisor. The reliability of the

questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α : .81), which was deemed acceptable in a preliminary study involving 30 respondents. To analyze the data, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first applied to estimate the main components and identify latent factors, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the importance and factorial load of elements, determine the most critical indices, verify the structure of the tools used, and offer a model. SPSS V.26 and Amos V.24 were used to analyze the data. **Table 1** presents the demographic status of the research samples.

Table 1. Description of the demographic characteristics of the research samples.

Demographic variables of the research		Frequency	Relative Frequency Percentage
Gender	Men	202	55.8
	Women	134	37.0
	Missing	26	7.2
	Total	362	100.0
Age	Up to 30 years	150	41.4
	30 to 40 years	102	28.2
	Over 51 years old	76	21.0
	Missing	34	9.4
Marital Status	Total	362	100.0
	Single	148	40.9
	Married	166	45.9
	Missing	48	13.3
Education	Total	362	100.0
	Diploma	63	17.4
	Bachelor's degree and undergraduate student	180	49.7
	Master's degree and Ph.D.	82	22.7
	Missing	37	10.2

4. Results

The KMO index is 0.83, which indicates that the sampling data is sufficient for factor analysis since the number is more significant than 0.6. Bartlett's significance number is less than 0.05. Therefore, the obtained value is suitable. Furthermore, the significance of Bartlett's test at a 99% confidence level indicates the presence of a correlation between the desired variables for conducting factor analysis. Due to the suitability of the data for identifying and categorizing factors, an exploratory factor analysis with the varimax rotation method was employed.

Table 2. KMO index and Bartlett's test for research components.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.836
	Approx. Chi-Square	6628.812
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	820
	Sig.	.000

The results indicate that all the items have a suitable status. Therefore, at this stage, there is no requirement to eliminate variables based on their lower factor loading to improve the cumulative percentage of explained variance. To determine the appropriate number of factors for this dataset in the analysis, the Kaiser Criterion was utilized initially. According to this criterion, only factors possessing an eigenvalue of 1 or greater are potential data variation sources. Table 3 shows the extracted factors and their percentage of variance explained. This table indicates that the eigenvalue of Factor 9 was more significant than 1, and collectively, these factors explain 62.125% of the variance in the data. The scree plot determines the number of factors to retain in an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) or principal components to keep in a principal component analysis (PCA). In the Scree Plot, the breaking point occurs at Point 10, where the value is greater than 1, and this factor is an extraction factor. Therefore, nine factors need to be extracted. The rotated factor matrix for the variables is shown in Table 4, which illustrates the relationship between the extracted factors.

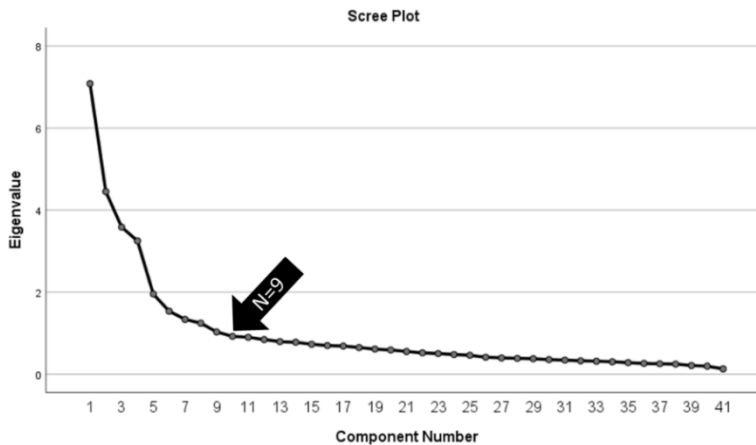


Figure 1. Scree plot to determine the number of factors.

Table 3. The extracted factors affect the formation of sport tourism destination image and their explanation percentage.

Component	Total Variance Explained					
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.084	17.277	17.277	7.084	17.277	17.277
2	4.450	10.854	28.132	4.450	10.854	28.132
3	3.585	8.744	36.875	3.585	8.744	36.875
4	3.250	7.926	44.801	3.250	7.926	44.801
5	1.954	4.765	49.567	1.954	4.765	49.567
6	1.537	3.748	53.314	1.537	3.748	53.314
7	1.337	3.261	56.576	1.337	3.261	56.576
8	1.245	3.036	59.612	1.245	3.036	59.612
9	1.030	2.513	62.125	1.030	2.513	62.125
10	.922	2.250	64.374			
11	.901	2.197	66.571			
12	.846	2.063	68.634			
13	.794	1.936	70.570			

Component	Total Variance Explained					
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
14	.779	1.899	72.469			
15	.730	1.781	74.250			
16	.698	1.703	75.953			
17	.687	1.675	77.629			
18	.650	1.585	79.214			
19	.612	1.492	80.706			
20	.590	1.438	82.145			
21	.553	1.350	83.495			
22	.521	1.270	84.765			
23	.504	1.229	85.994			
24	.478	1.167	87.161			
25	.461	1.125	88.285			
26	.415	1.011	89.297			
27	.397	.968	90.265			
28	.387	.943	91.209			
29	.378	.922	92.130			
30	.355	.867	92.997			
31	.344	.838	93.835			
32	.327	.798	94.633			
33	.317	.774	95.407			
34	.303	.740	96.147			
35	.282	.688	96.835			
36	.263	.641	97.475			
37	.253	.617	98.093			
38	.245	.598	98.691			
39	.212	.517	99.208			
40	.196	.479	99.687			
41	.128	.313	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 5 shows that the ninth factor is excluded from the analysis due to being univariate, and the remaining 40 items are categorized into eight factors.

Table 4. Rotated factor matrix of factors affecting the formation of sport tourism destination image.

	Rotated Component Matrix								
	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q13	.776	.053	.002	.114	-.055	.152	.009	-.080	.183
Q25	.722	.048	.179	.080	-.092	.113	-.095	.013	-.168
Q19	.717	.030	.179	.090	.062	.254	-.048	-.025	.028
Q18	.717	-.018	.137	.026	-.055	.245	-.061	.158	-.046
Q17	.701	.082	-.001	.080	-.022	.044	-.003	.101	.154
Q16	.676	.076	.073	.100	.103	.121	.022	.042	-.030
Q12	.676	.029	.013	.002	.026	.269	.013	-.047	.081
Q26	.658	.098	.028	.165	-.091	.016	-.065	-.015	-.396
Q22	.623	-.020	.005	-.039	.143	.124	-.073	.011	.104
Q14	.001	.819	-.032	.022	.022	.038	.028	-.003	-.022
Q36	.023	.785	.005	.026	-.029	.156	.038	-.041	-.059
Q4	.084	.774	.005	-.013	-.011	.048	.072	.007	.060
Q32	-.020	.759	.022	.078	.034	.048	-.031	.034	-.126
Q40	.080	.750	.005	-.052	-.043	-.072	-.047	.054	.119

	Rotated Component Matrix								
	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q37	.119	.692	-.016	.026	-.002	-.106	-.046	.098	.108
Q24	.126	-.007	.841	.178	.088	.009	.001	-.108	-.065
Q38	.071	.023	.837	.136	.071	-.031	.002	-.017	-.057
Q34	.106	-.053	.789	.257	.068	-.079	.004	-.070	-.208
Q41	.098	.021	.745	.254	-.010	.100	.012	.091	.247
Q33	.122	-.008	.732	.339	.035	.023	.016	.087	.212
Q27	.156	-.039	.213	.803	-.062	-.078	-.001	.042	-.069
Q10	.094	.086	.095	.765	-.055	-.043	.014	-.003	-.149
Q29	.139	-.022	.266	.759	-.052	-.050	-.001	.109	-.032
Q20	.021	.041	.150	.752	.069	-.025	-.037	-.007	.158
Q23	.014	-.017	.017	-.030	.880	.017	-.146	-.063	-.009
Q35	.065	-.021	.063	.071	.838	-.016	-.070	.034	.016
Q39	-.012	.043	.041	-.069	.771	-.046	-.067	-.067	.029
Q8	-.009	-.038	.084	-.036	.708	.087	-.240	-.008	-.043
Q7	.297	.009	.015	-.023	-.049	.680	-.105	.025	.146
Q9	.258	.027	-.034	-.028	.053	.650	.104	-.023	.092
Q6	.176	.111	-.065	-.007	.107	.637	-.080	.167	-.306
Q11	.307	.005	-.016	-.019	-.073	.618	-.102	-.144	.075
Q5	.404	-.015	.124	-.080	.021	.565	-.044	-.067	-.051
Q28	-.057	-.044	-.063	.006	-.153	-.041	.802	-.098	.040
Q30	-.015	.025	.013	-.136	-.041	-.026	.758	.093	-.055
Q1	.014	-.049	-.064	.078	-.191	-.076	.743	-.021	.122
Q31	-.148	.076	.139	.011	-.122	-.004	.627	-.024	-.115
Q2	.026	.096	-.035	.028	-.013	.069	-.011	.793	.127
Q3	.055	.029	.000	.056	-.081	-.111	-.025	.731	-.153
Q15	.019	.016	.267	-.020	.009	.068	-.029	.668	.102
Q21	.438	.194	.064	.069	-.017	.126	-.062	-.044	.565

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

In this study, considering that most of the first factor's variables were concerned with Public and tourism infrastructure, they were named the "Public and Tourism Infrastructure" factor. The second factor, which mainly consisted of questions about the customs and traditions of the province, was called the "Provincial Customs and Traditions" factor. The third factor was "Local Attractions," the fourth factor was "Service Quality," the fifth factor was "Entertainment and Sports Events," the sixth factor was named "Natural and Environmental Factors," and the seventh factor was "Information and Advertising." Finally, the eighth factor was called the "Social-Security" factor. After identifying and classifying the factors using exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the structural validity and identify the most critical factors affecting the formation of the destination image.

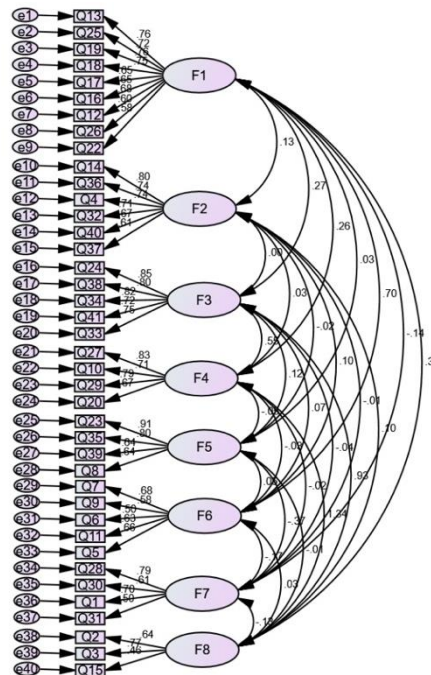


Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis representing the initial measurement model of sport tourism destination image.

The results of the first-order factor analysis are presented in [Figure 2](#). The initial model shows that the factor loadings of all items are acceptable and high. However, when examining the model fit indices, it became clear that some were not confirmed. Therefore, items with excessive skewness and kurtosis should first be removed to access an optimal model with standardized factor loadings. The reason for removing these items is to simplify and adjust the model for final fitting. In this model, items 40, 41, 4, 14, 18, 36, 6, and 11 had the highest skewness and kurtosis. Thus, they were set aside for model fitting. Since some fit indices were still not ideal, the relationships between some variables that significantly impacted the model fit were drawn. Although the correct method of drawing correlations is only the relationship between two variables in one factor, it became clear when examining the nature of the two variables that this correlation was logical and interpretable.

The final model obtained from the Amos software after modification was presented as a [Figure 3](#) report. The modified model shows that the questions have a good explanatory power. The fit indices obtained from the model and their strength are also listed in [Table 6](#).

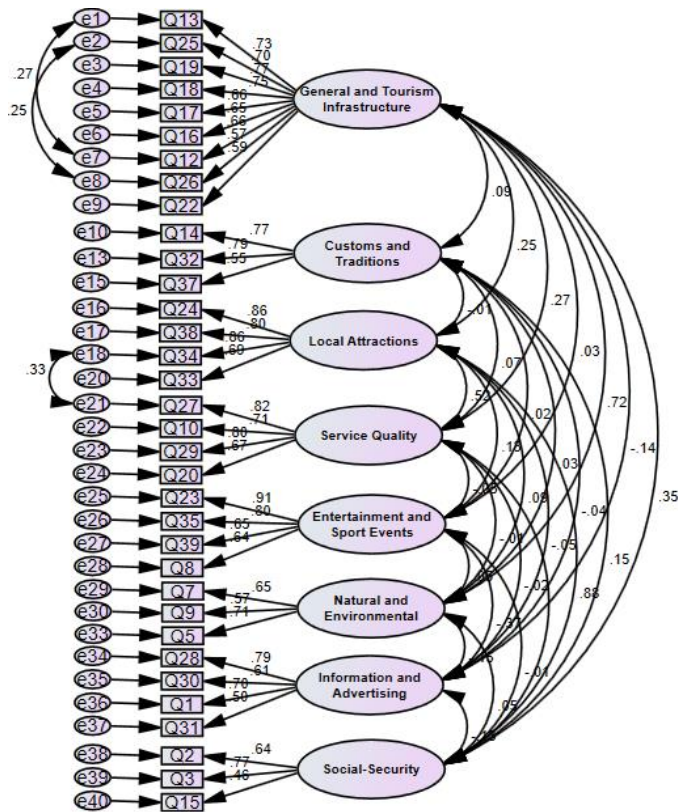


Figure 3. The final model of standard estimation of sport tourism destination image.

Table 5. Factor loading and coefficient of determination.

Factor	Item	Estimate	Coefficient of determination	Rank
Tourism and public infrastructure	Availability and ease of access to suitable accommodation and guesthouses	.73	.53	2
	Exciting routes for travel	.71	.51	3
	Attractiveness of tourist destinations and communication routes	.77	.59	1
	Availability of communication tools such as cable cars and ski lifts	.65	.43	5
	Availability of sports and adventure tourism sites and camps	.66	.44	4
	Easy access to various attractions and destinations	.65	.42	6
	Availability of suitable camping sites and numerous camps	.57	.32	8
	Availability of traditional accommodation based on the province's culture	.58	.34	7
Customs and traditions	Local indigenous and cultural traditions of the province	.77	.59	2
	Hospitality and proper behavior of the host community towards tourists	.79	.63	1

Factor	Item	Estimate	Coefficient of determination	Rank
Local attractions	Pleasant experience from previous travels	.55	.30	3
	Presence of exciting sports and adventure tourism activities and attractions	.86	.74	1
	Good opportunities for mountain climbing and cycling	.80	.64	3
	A wide variety of spa complexes	.86	.73	2
	Numerous visual beauties and attractions	.69	.48	4
Service quality	High-quality local restaurants and food at reasonable prices	.82	.67	1
	Variety of activities and products in sports tourism destinations	.70	.50	3
	Affordable prices for accommodation and recreational facilities	.80	.63	2
	Provision of satisfactory services on tourism websites, accommodations, restaurants, and other tourism facilities	.67	.45	4
Entertainment and sports events	Holding adventurous and exciting events and sports	.91	.83	1
	Food festivals (with attractive entertainment and leisure activities)	.80	.64	2
	Indigenous and local sports festivals	.65	.42	3
	Holding cultural festivals and handicrafts events	.64	.40	4
Natural and environmental	Mountainous terrain and high mountains	.65	.42	2
	Beautiful landscapes and natural scenery	.57	.33	3
	Very favorable weather conditions in the province	.71	.50	1
Information and promotion	Providing a positive image of sports tourism destinations in various media	.79	.62	1
	Provision of electronic tourism services (virtual tours, hotel reservations, ticket purchases, etc.)	.61	.37	3
	Availability of comprehensive information databases and websites for sports tourism attractions and events	.70	.49	2
	Word of mouth and oral advertising	.50	.35	4
Social security factor	Individual and social safety in sports tourism destinations	.64	.40	2
	Suitable social and cultural environment in Ardabil Province for families	.77	.59	1
	The feeling of security in transactions and exchanges in sports tourism destinations.	.46	.21	3

Table 5 shows that, "the attractiveness of routes and communication paths to tourist destinations" with a factor loading of .77 in the public and tourism infrastructure factor, "the spirit of hospitality and appropriate behavior of the host community towards tourists" with a factor loading of .79 in the customs and traditions factor of the province, "the existence of exciting and adventurous sports tourism attractions and activities" with a factor loading of .86 in the local attractions factor, "the presence of high-quality local restaurants and affordable prices" with a factor loading of .82 in the service quality factor,

the "holding of adventurous and exciting sports events and activities" with a factor loading of .91 in the entertainment and sports events factor, "very favorable weather conditions in the province" with a factor loading of .71 in the natural and environmental factor, "presenting a positive image of sports tourism destinations in various media" with a factor loading of .61 in the information and advertising factor, and "suitable social and cultural environment of Ardabil province for families" with a factor loading of .77 in the social and security factor were the most essential variables in each of the factors under study.

The reliability of the measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis using Amos V.24 software. Multiple tests were employed to evaluate how much the model represents the relationship between measurable variables. Different fit indices were used as diagnostic criteria, including GFI, X²(df), RMSEA, AGFI, and CFI (refer to Table 5). A CFI index value greater than .90 indicates an excellent fit of the model, which was observed at the level of .94, signifying excellent quality. The GFI index, which evaluates the relative values of variances and covariances through the model, ranged from zero to one and was acceptable at the level of .89. The chi-square test was equal to 1.573 degrees of freedom, which is one of the permissible values for the perfect fit. Another absolute fit index, RMSEA, which adjusts the model's simplicity, yields zero values for the ideal fit. In practice, a value less than .08 is considered adequate, and in this study, it was observed at the level of 0.04, indicating excellent quality. Other indicators and their numerical values are presented in Table 6. Based on the results obtained, the overall assessment of the model fit confirms its use. All profiles met the acceptable level, confirming the model's suitability through the fit test.

Table 6. The fit indices of the research model.

Index or Indicator	obtained value	Accepted fit	Fit
Chi-Square/degree of freedom (CMIN/DF)	1.573	≤ 3	acceptable
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	.89	≥ 0.9	reasonable
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	.87	≥ 0.9	reasonable
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	.85	≥ 0.9	reasonable
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.94	≥ 0.9	excellent
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.04	≤ 0.05	reasonable

5. Managerial implications

Based on the results obtained, to increase the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations and form a positive image, destination managers and officials must use the identified factors in this study and present a positive image of the sports tourism destinations to attract more sports tourists to the destinations.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Destination image is an essential topic in marketing research and the tourism industry. Many countries utilize promotional and global marketing tools to support their image and

compete with other destinations. The importance of this issue in tourism is so high that it affects tourists' behavior and decision-making, their satisfaction level during the trip, and it plays a crucial role in the destination positioning process, creating and managing a distinctive and attractive image of the destination. Successful marketing is necessary to attract tourists and maintain a competitive advantage in tourism (Mousavi et al., 2018). Sarlab et al. (2022) stated that to improve the development of sport industry, it is necessary to make fundamental changes to the marketing plans (Sarlab et al., 2022).

This study aimed to identify the factors influencing the formation of sports tourism destinations. The results of the exploratory factor analysis showed that eight latent factors, including public and tourism infrastructure, local customs and traditions, local attractions, service quality, sports entertainment and events, natural and environmental aspects, information dissemination and advertising, and social and security factors, influence the formation of the sports tourism destination image in Ardabil. Although researchers have examined various factors affecting the appearance of destination images, these findings are consistent with some researchers' results. In this regard, Rajesh (2013) pointed to factors such as security and cleanliness, price, attractions, infrastructure and facilities, renovation, friendly behavior of the local community, and a calm atmosphere (Rajesh, 2013). Chi and Qu (2008) mentioned factors such as travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment and events, historical attractions, infrastructure, accessibility, tranquility, price, and value as the components of destination image formation (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Another challenge for tourism destinations is the negative image potential tourists, especially those abroad, have about the internal situation and security in Iran. About 60% of foreign tourists said they traveled to Iran with significant risk acceptance. The negative image created in people's minds is one factor that negatively affects tourists' travel (Mohseni, 2010). The image tourists have of a destination significantly influences their travel decisions. In this regard, Chen et al. (2013) examined the relationship between travel constraints and the destination image of young outbound tourists. The results showed that travel constraints affect the formation of destination images in the early stages of the decision-making process (Chen et al., 2013).

Public and tourism infrastructure was one identified factor in this study that formed the destination image. Tourism infrastructure refers to the factors developed to provide services and benefits to tourists and travelers (Boers & Cottrell, 2007). According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the essential tourism infrastructure includes accommodation facilities such as hotels and hostels, roadside rest areas and restaurants, travel services offices, cultural and artistic exhibitions, public parks, the number of public vehicles, investment opportunities, and tourist sample areas (Ferguson, 2007). Infrastructure and infrastructural support in a tourist destination significantly impact the image created in the tourist's mind, ultimately leading to their destination choice and future behaviors. The results of this section of the study are consistent with the studies conducted by Madden et al. (2016), who have referred to tourism infrastructure as a crucial factor in tourists' decision-making.

The following identified factor in the Formation of a destination image is its culture and customs. Tourism experience goes far beyond a one-night stay in a hotel or apartment. This experience starts from the moment of arrival at the destination. The behavior of passport control or customs officials, as well as the mindset of taxi drivers towards tourists, all contribute to the overall tourist experience. Other essential factors at the destination include the quality of food, the behavior of police personnel, the number of beggars on the streets, dirty streets, inappropriate behavior towards tourists in coastal areas or restaurants, and many other factors that can affect the quality of the travel experience. As [Sung Moon et al. \(2011\)](#) showed, local culture and environment can create a unique image of the destination. Although potential tourists consider various features of a goal when choosing a travel destination, this study revealed that the unique customs, traditions, and culture of sports tourism destinations can shape the destination's image ([Sung Moon et al., 2011](#)). Iran's cultural attractions include educational, cultural, pilgrimage tours, performing arts, festivals and events, historical sites, nature, and popular culture ([Aghili et al., 2023](#)). In this regard, [Gorji et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that a destination depicted as attractive and culturally rich can attract visitors and tourists, even if they do not have prior knowledge about it ([Gorji et al., 2023](#)).

One of the most essential factors in shaping the image of a destination in this study was security and safety, which has also been examined in numerous other studies. The sense of security among most tourists and visitors to tourist destinations, and in the tourism industry as a whole, is a significant factor that can affect the image of the destination and the decision-making of visitors to tourist destinations ([Gavurova et al., 2023](#)). If tourists feel uncertain or threatened during their vacation at the destination, it can create a negative image and, in the long run, may lead to a decrease in tourism in the area. If tourists feel threatened or unsafe, they will likely not return to the destination and will not recommend it to others. In this regard, [Gavurova et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that reducing safety concerns related to facilities and services can be associated with a positive image of the destination.

On the other hand, the results showed that reducing health and safety concerns would be accompanied by a positive increase in all aspects of the destination's image ([Gavurova et al., 2023](#)). A destination depicted in the media as dangerous and unstable may create doubt among potential visitors, even if they do not have prior experience with the destination ([Gorji et al., 2023](#)). The results of the [Gavurova et al. \(2023\)](#) study indicate that safety concerns in the tourism environment can be associated with a negative image of the destination; therefore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, tourists were more interested in destinations with better safety conditions ([Gavurova et al., 2023](#)). [Wan et al. \(2022\)](#) developed an active approach to assess tourists' safety attitudes based on health issues, personal safety, travel safety information, police safety, and vulnerability to crime. They focused on safety principles, management, activities and equipment, resources, infrastructure and environment, travel safety risks, and tourist-resident interactions ([Wan et al., 2022](#)).

Information and advertising are one of the practical factors in shaping the image of a tourism destination. Tourists' potential familiarity with the destination is the basis for the perceived image of the destination and the beginning of decision-making to travel to the

destination. The images and content of advertisements presented through information channels and social media play a significant role in shaping the idea of the destination and creating expectations that tourists have before visiting it (Kaosiri et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023). Therefore, if a tourist destination intends to develop or strengthen its image, it is necessary to ensure that tourists perceive it as more familiar than other destinations. Increasing familiarity can help establish an emotional connection between tourists and the destination. Main stakeholders in the sports tourism sector should employ the necessary methods to make a particular destination well-known, which undoubtedly helps increase tourists' familiarity with it. Tourism is an information-based industry, and information technology plays a crucial role in the tourism industry (Shafiee et al., 2018). One of the reasons that compels travelers to visit a specific destination is advertisements.

Moreover, only a place that is known and tourists are aware of its unique features, attractions, type of facilities and amenities available, and assurance of meeting their welfare needs throughout the trip can attract tourists. In fact, without advertising and awareness through media, even if tourist attractions are attractive and worthy of tourism, due to the lack of awareness among travelers and tourists, they will not be successful in this industry, and there will not be much popularity in this area (Javid & Asadi, 2018). Another essential factor is producing trailers and clips in different languages to introduce the tourism capabilities of destinations. Videos convey significant information quickly and are suitable for introducing tourist activities. Making trailers and clips in other languages to introduce the tourism capabilities of destinations can act as an information guide for the desired region and provide brief information about the destination to the audience. However, an essential point that destination management should consider is incorrect information. Misleading advertising information about tourist destinations may lead to negative evaluations by tourists (Li et al., 2023). The tourism industry must accurately and honestly present the destinations to tourists so unreasonable expectations are not created because incorrect advertising information about tourist destinations can lead to negative evaluations by tourists.

An identified factor affecting the image of tourism destinations in local attractions was researched. Living in a self-made environment, urban dwellers have lost opportunities to spend leisure time and travel in nature, limited by distance and time constraints. This issue is more critical in cities, particularly larger ones, where natural tourist and leisure spaces have become subject to competition from various economic groups, creating many constraints in this field. Ardabil province is ideal for sports tourists due to its location, high altitude, and suitable climate. In addition, the presence of numerous tourist attractions in this province, such as suspension bridges, Sabalan Mountain, hot mineral waters, historical attractions, etc., can significantly influence the formation of the image of sports tourism destinations.

The quality of services and products at the destination was another factor in shaping the image of the destination. Positive experiences of tourists with services and products can lead to repeat trips, and satisfied tourists can recommend their travel experiences to friends and family, potentially attracting more tourists. Previous tourist recommendations can also be a more credible source of information for potential tourists (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Customers evaluate the quality of services by comparing them with their expectations, and understanding customer expectations is necessary to provide top-quality services. Tourists compare actual service performance with their expectations; satisfaction is achieved when their expectations are met or exceeded (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). A tourist destination should offer quality goods and services, which is itself a guarantee of maintaining customer satisfaction. The more diverse and high-quality the supply, the higher the income will be from tourism, assuming demand. Offering a variety of high-quality products increases the expenses of each tourist in the destination, attracting tourists with higher financial ability and looking for high-quality services (Caber & Albayrak, 2018). A review of new concepts related to quality shows that good quality means achieving customer needs and desires. In other words, a product is of good quality when it meets the needs and desires of the customer (Saberifar, 2018).

Another identified factor that impacts shaping the image of a sports tourism destination is entertainment and sports events. When an event is held in a city, a vast number of people get to witness the team, players, and beautiful moments of the sport from up close. All these factors lead people toward their desired sports disciplines. Moreover, when events are held in a city, the facilities and equipment used for the event remain, making it easy for everyone to access high-quality sports venues and facilities. Even small-scale tourism events can create a cognitive and emotional brand image of the destination, attracting visitors from outside the region. Holding events leads to the development of tourism destinations from various aspects. A cultural event is not limited to a specific location, so if planned and marketed correctly, it can help create a positive image of the tourism destination and lead to its development. This is one of the methods of attracting tourists in the modern world, holding various tourism, cultural, sports, and social events. In this regard, Carrascal Incera and Fernández (2015) found that infrastructure, urban events, cultural heritage, and tourist attractions positively and significantly impact shaping the image (Carrascal Incera & Fernández, 2015). Shirkhodaie et al. (2016) concluded that events contribute to a good image of the destination, satisfaction of tourists, and positive behavioral intentions (Shirkhodaie et al., 2016). Getz and Page (2016) also reported in a study that hosting sports events can be helpful for tourism destinations by exposing them and developing their image (Getz & Page, 2016).

Finally, according to the results of this study, one of the crucial factors in shaping the image of tourism destinations is information dissemination and advertising of the potential of sports tourism destinations. In today's world, the media, particularly social media, can rapidly transmit news, information, videos, and photos to a global audience in seconds. This unparalleled power has revolutionized how we consume and share information, enabling us to stay informed and connected like never before. Therefore, using the media's potential can be suitable for presenting a positive image of sports tourism destinations in the province. On the other hand, due to the popularity of social media and the use of the internet by most people in trip planning, it is recommended to prepare suitable and attractive teasers and clips in different languages to introduce the capabilities of sports tourism destinations and share them on websites, social networks, and virtual spaces. It is also recommended to properly introduce the local customs and traditions of sports tourism destinations during events and to promote the attractions, local foods, natural and cultural

features of the region, as well as the tourist destination's attractions consciously and unconsciously during tourism tours to improve the cognitive image of the destinations and consequently enhance the sports tourism destination brand.

Furthermore, the quality of services was identified as a crucial factor in shaping the sports tourism destination's image. Specifically, high-quality local restaurants offering affordable prices were the most significant aspect. To enhance the branding of sports tourism destinations, it is recommended that responsible organizations take on the role of destination brand managers. This can be achieved by organizing unique festivals celebrating local and national cuisine and promoting these events through tourism exhibitions focusing on traditional cuisine. By doing so, these organizations can help to improve the image of sports tourism destinations and strengthen their brand identity. Since the consistency between a tourist's expectations of a destination and their experience of that destination significantly impacts their overall travel experience evaluation, sports tourism destination management must accurately and honestly demonstrate the destinations to tourists to avoid creating unrealistic expectations. Misleading advertising information about destinations can lead to unfulfilled expectations of tourists and negative evaluations of the destination, which may result in a lack of return visits or negative feedback to others.

Additionally, since one of the influential factors in the formation of sports tourism destinations in Ardabil province is security-related factors and negative perceptions of security by tourists can also affect the overall image of the destination, managers and policymakers of sports tourism destinations must identify the factors that lead to safety and security concerns and address them to avoid negative experiences by tourists and unfavorable future behavior, such as not choosing the destination or harmful recommendations. In this regard, government organizations such as cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts can collaborate with other responsible tourism organizations and use the media to produce films or reports that depict the pleasant experiences of tourists in destinations and fully describe their experiences. To visualize the presence of safety and security and provide a positive image of sports tourism destinations, travel agencies should film and photograph sports trips of tourists and make them available in their travel programs, brochures, advertisements on their agency's website, and tourism exhibitions outside the province. On the other hand, destination management organizations and other responsible sports tourism organizations should showcase clips or photos of their tours on their websites and activate the section for traveler reviews. This allows tourists to contact them via email and address their questions and concerns.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نشریه کسب‌وکار در ورزش

آدرس نشریه: <https://sbj.alzahra.ac.ir/>

تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۶۷-۸۸

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.43801.1096



بازشناسی عوامل موثر بر شکل‌گیری تصویر مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی

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چکیده

هدف: بازاریابی تصویر مقصد، نقطه‌ی شروع یک بازاریابی گردشگری موفق است، زیرا تصویر و انتظارات از تجربیات سفر که بازدیدکنندگان در آینده خواهند داشت، افکار آنها را به یک مقصد خاص مربوط می‌کند. هدف از انجام پژوهش حاضر، بازشناسی عوامل موثر بر شکل‌گیری تصویر مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی استان اردبیل بود.

روش: روش انجام تحقیق حاضر، کاربردی- توصیفی و از نوع پیمایشی است. جامعه آماری پژوهش حاضر را متخصصان مدیریت ورزشی و گردشگری، مدیران و کارشناسان ادارات میراث فرهنگی و گردشگری، مدیران و کارشناسان اداره کل ورزش و جوانان و مدیران آژانس‌های گردشگری و گردشگران بازدیدکننده از مقاصد گردشگری در استان اردبیل تشکیل می‌دادند. ابزار پژوهش پرسشنامه‌ی محقق ساخته بود که پس از تایید روایی و پایایی استفاده شد (۸۱: α). در تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها و برای برآورد مولفه‌های اصلی و شناسایی عامل‌های پنهان از تحلیل عاملی اکتشافی استفاده شد. سپس به منظور برآورد اهمیت، بارعاملی عناصر، تعیین مهم‌ترین شاخص‌ها، تایید ساختار ابزار مورد استفاده و ارائه مدل تحلیل عاملی تاییدی مورد استفاده قرار گرفت.

یافته‌ها: نتایج تحلیل عاملی اکتشافی نشان داد که هشت عامل پنهان به نام‌های زیرساخت‌های عمومی و گردشگری، آداب و رسوم استان، جاذبه‌های محلی، کیفیت خدمات، سرگرمی‌ها و رویدادها ورزشی، عوامل طبیعی و زیست محیطی، اطلاع‌رسانی و تبلیغات و عامل اجتماعی و امنیتی در شکل‌گیری تصویر مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی تاثیرگذار هستند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: تصویر مقصد یکی از مهم‌ترین متغیرهای است که می‌تواند، تصمیم گردشگر برای انتخاب یک مقصد را تحت تاثیر قرار دهد. با شناسایی عوامل موثر بر شکل‌گیری تصویر مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی و به کارگیری این عوامل و ارائه تصویر مثبت از مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی، مدیران و مسئولان مقاصد گردشگری می‌توانند گردشگران ورزشی بیشتری را جذب مقاصد گردشگری ورزشی نموده و مقصد خود را توسعه دهند.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۲/۲۶

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۵/۱۳



Does Background Is Important? Analysis of Demographic Characteristics to the Sports Entrepreneurial Intention

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research aims to identify and investigate the relationship between demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial intention of physical education and sports science students.

Methodology: 391 participants from the students of the sports science faculty of the selected universities participated in the study were randomly selected. The quantitative method was used, and the six experts confirmed the validity of the questionnaire, And the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.910. SPSS software was used to analyze the data.

Findings: The study identified some main factors that increase people's willingness to be entrepreneurs. This study showed a significant relationship between the university of study, elite sports background, level of education, gender, parents' occupation, age, experience living abroad, and entrepreneurial intention. On the other hand, there is no relationship between marital status and having specialized skills concerning entrepreneurship intention, which indicates that just marital status and having technical skills cannot improve students' entrepreneurial intention.

Originality: The entrepreneur is a combination of risk and willingness to succeed, but it is not easy to achieve due to the influence of the internal and external business environment. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the main factors influencing people's willingness.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial Intention
Entrepreneurship Skills
Innovation, Sports Business
Sports Entrepreneurship

Article type

Research Paper

Received: 2023/05/13

Accepted: 2023/06/12

How to cite this article:

Peymanfar, M. H., & Akbarian, M. (2023). Does Background Is Important? Analysis of Demographic Characteristics to the Sports Entrepreneurial Intention. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.43751.1095>



1. Introduction

The sports industry is constantly evolving and needs innovation to stay competitive (Mondalizadeh & Kavyani, 2023). In this context, one of the fields that should be paid more attention to is entrepreneurship in the sports industry. Entrepreneurship plays an essential role in the economic development of all human societies. As stated by Schumpeter, entrepreneurship is the mechanism within economic progress, while nationality cannot achieve success without economic development (Soomro et al., 2019). Many TV programs, training, workshops, and seminars are organized annually nationwide for community and individual action to increase awareness about the importance of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship plays a fundamental role in the development of any economy and is vital in maintaining competitiveness and creating wealth and job opportunities in countries (Rashed Hasan Polas et al., 2019). Being an entrepreneur means combining personal characteristics - financial means and resources in the work environment; many personality traits can be developed, and with their help, one can succeed in business.

People who start a business should be well aware of their strengths and weaknesses because entrepreneurship is related to the skills and talents of the entrepreneur (Forsati Juybari et al., 2021). In this regard, Developing entrepreneurial activities of young people and training students with entrepreneurial abilities has become an urgent need for universities in most parts of the world (Molaei et al., 2014) various factors have influenced entrepreneurship. At first, many authors considered certain personality traits to be the cause of entrepreneurial activities, but after some time, the importance of the demographic variables role became clear (Kordheydari et al., 2019). In this regard, intentions have been identified as one of the main drivers of sustainable entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and activity (Thelken & de Jong, 2020). So far, much research has been conducted on factors affecting the intention of entrepreneurship and starting a business and investigated the factors affecting the entrepreneurial intention of sports science students in Yazd province. Findings showed that the dimensions of the theory of planned behavior had a significant relationship with the entrepreneurial intention of sports science students. Also, the regression test results showed that the three dimensions of the theory of planned behavior, including attitudes toward behavior, perceived behavioral control, and mental norms, significantly affected the entrepreneurial intention of sports students. Hardianto et al. (2020) showed that trust does not affect students' entrepreneurial intentions. Entrepreneurial attitudes, cognitive norms, and perception of behavioral control positively impact entrepreneurial intention. Confidence does not affect entrepreneurial attitudes, mental norms, and perception of power, while it affects entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial attitudes, cognitive norms, and perception of behavioral control (Hardianto et al., 2020).

The intention towards a particular thought or idea is a precursor to the future course of action. Entrepreneurial definition, which shows the disposition towards entrepreneurship, can thus be used to forecast the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur. Previous researchers have attributed various factors to the formation of entrepreneurial intention. Studies such (Fini et al., 2009) and (Stanworth et al., 1989) have highlighted that

demographic characteristics form entrepreneurial intention. In entrepreneurship, demographic variables refer to education, age, gender, education level, and previous work experiences. The available literature shows that these variables affect the level of entrepreneurship relatively. Based on the theory of planned behavior, people's demographic variables can indirectly affect their entrepreneurial intention and behavior through motivational factors (attitude towards entrepreneurship, mental norms, and perceived behavioral control). For example, some studies show the effect of gender on the attitude towards creating a business; Some indicate the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intention; others also show the impact of gender on mental norms. Other studies also show the effect of age, work experience, and education level on the entrepreneurial intention of people (Keshavarz, 2014). The survey by Singh and Singhal (2015) examined the core association of demographic variables with entrepreneurial choice among professional students of Uttarakhand, India (Singh & Singhal, 2015). The struggle has been made to investigate the effect of demographic variables on the entrepreneurial objective. Results exposed that gender, type of family, family background, and degree were noticed and found to have a significant effect on entrepreneurial intention. Fragoso et al. (2020) in the study of the determinants of entrepreneurial choice among university students in Brazil and Portugal, found that personality traits, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial attitude are essential predictors of entrepreneurial intention and the effects of social cognition and country of origin they are not effective in this regard Paiva et al. (2020) in the study of planned behavior and religious beliefs as factors that create entrepreneurial intention in students concluded that personal attitude, perceived control and religious beliefs affect students' entrepreneurial sense, but mental norms are not practical (Paiva et al., 2020).

The family in today's society has transformed due to the change in attitude, production method, lifestyle, and the roles of parents within the family. In such a way, each of the parents, with their behavior, can play prominent roles in developing self-confidence, creating new ideas in the family, and determining the children's career path. The duty of parents in such conditions is to explain the expansive dimensions of economic activity as a primary value for the child and guide him in the right direction, which will bring success in starting a business (Russell & Radin, 2014). The level of education, type of occupation of parents, the structure of a family, family relations (especially the relationship between parents and children), family income, and the amount of welfare facilities can affect the formation of work culture in the family. Different people have different capabilities; if they are guided in a certain way from their youth, they can facilitate changes in the production process and, of course, in the technology process by creating new ideas (McQuaid & Chen, 2012). Ward et al. (2019) in the study of the effects of entrepreneurship and gender, the role of personality traits in students' entrepreneurship intention showed that there are not many differences between men and women. Only purposes, perceived behavioral control, and mental norms in men. More has been reported (Ward et al., 2019).

This study was carried out to determine the influence of demographics on the entrepreneurial intentions of physical education and sports science students in Tehran

province. Studying the various factors influencing the decision to become an entrepreneur is essential to promoting entrepreneurship in Iran. The background and theoretical foundations show demographics have been identified as the significant factor influencing entrepreneurship. This study aims to fill a research gap by investigating the influence of demographics on the entrepreneurial intentions of physical education and sports science students in Tehran province. This will help policymakers to support potential entrepreneurs. As a necessity of such information, it proposed the following hypotheses for investigation in Iran.

- **H1:** There is a positive and significant relationship between the University of Study and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H2:** A positive and significant relationship exists between elite sports background and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H3:** There is a positive and significant relationship between the Level of education and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H4:** There is a positive and significant relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H5:** There is a positive and significant relationship between the age of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H6:** A positive and significant relationship exists between the father's occupation and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H7:** A positive and significant relationship exists between the mother's occupation and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H8:** A positive and significant relationship exists between marital status and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H9:** A positive and significant relationship exists between the experience abroad and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H10:** A positive and significant relationship exists between having a specialized skill certificate and entrepreneurial intention.

2. Methodology

For this study, primary data. Data were collected using two questionnaires. The entrepreneurial intention of students using the (Liñán & Chen, 2009) questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale and students' demographics using a self-administered questionnaire from 391 students of Iranian Universities in Tehran province. these universities included: Shahid Beheshti, Tehran, Kharazmi, Alzahra, and Allameh Tabatabai.

Six experts confirmed the validity of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also used to verify the reliability of the questionnaire. According to the minimum reliability acceptance level of 0.7, the reliability of the dependent variable was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This coefficient was 0.910, which indicates that the measurement tool had the required reliability to an acceptable level. After the necessary coordination, these questionnaires were randomly distributed and collected in person. The data collection period was April and May 2023. Descriptive

and inferential statistics methods were used for data analysis, especially correlation tests, using SPSS software.

3. Results

3.1. Sample adequacy test

Before testing the hypotheses, the KMO index and Bartlett's test were used to determine the appropriateness of the correlation between the observations to use the factor analysis. The obtained KMO statistic is 0.803, which shows that the sample size is sufficient for factor analysis. The high value of Bartlett's test index (2169/325) and its significance of 0.000 shows that the results are significant.

Table 1. Sample adequacy test.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.803
	Approx. Chi-Square	2169.325
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the sample in the university of study, background of elite sports, Level of education, gender, age, occupation of parents (mother and father), experience abroad, marital status, and specialized skills.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the statistical sample of students.

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent		
University of study	Tehran	78	19.9	Gender	Females	251	64.2
	Shahid Beheshti	78	19.9		Males	140	35.8
	Kharazmi	80	20.5	Occupation of father	Salaried	171	43.7
	Al-Zahra	78	19.9		Business	220	56.3
	Allameh Tabatabai	77	19.7	Occupation of mother	Employed	138	35.3
no	217	55.5	Housewife		253	64.7	
background of elite sports	Individual sports	92	23.5	Marital status	Married	54	13.8
	Team sports	82	21		Single	337	86.2
	Level of education	One year	44	11.25	Experience of abroad	Yes	132
two years		89	22.8	No		259	66.2
three years		148	37.85	Specialized skills	Yes	211	54
Four and more		110	28.13		No	180	46
Age	18 to 22	239	61.1				
	23 to 25	125	32				
	25up	27	7				

Table 3. Scoring of the statistical sample of entrepreneurial intention.

	Likert scale	Frequency	Percent
Entrepreneurial intention	1	62	15.9
	2	64	16.4
	3	65	16.6
	4	48	12.3
	5	55	14.1
	6	71	18.2
	7	26	6.6

According to the findings of Table 2, the intention to be an entrepreneur is high among the students of the studied universities. The scoring of the statistical sample from the intention of entrepreneurship to the separation of faculty was calculated as an average, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 4. Universities from the components of entrepreneurial intention.

Faculty Variable	Alzahra	Tehran	Kharazmi	Shahid Beheshti	Allameh Tabatabai
entrepreneurial intention	3.07	2.33	2.14	2.83	2.55

The data in Table 4 shows that the highest average of entrepreneurial intention was related to Alzahra University Sports Science Faculty, with an average of 3.07, and the lowest was related to Kharazmi University Sports Science Faculty, with an average of 2.14.

Determining the correlation coefficients between the demographic components and the entrepreneurial intention variable was the hypothesis of this research, which was obtained by using the Pearson correlation test and the significance level in a two-domain test in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation coefficient analysis of research variables.

Variables	Mean	STD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
University	3	1.410	1										
Elite	1.69	0.900	-.021	1									
Education	5.63	1.949	.316**	-.043	1								
Gender	1.36	0.480	.032	-.028	.154**	1							
Occupation of father	1.56	0.497	-.163**	-.005	-.124*	-.051	1						
Occupation of mother	1.65	0.497	-.109*	.005	-.044	.024	.101*	1					
Marital status	1.86	0.345	.026	-.055	-.062	.113*	.006	-.031	1				
Age	1.46	0.622	.223**	.006	.351**	.068	-.097	-.001	-.218**	1			
Experience of abroad	1.66	0.473	.106*	-.071	.027	-.053	-.041	.143**	-.019	-.057	1		
Skill	1.50	0.616	.058	.054	-.196**	-.062	.031	.112*	.037	-.018	.107*	1	
Entrepreneurial intention	4.85	1.52	.333**	.161**	.181**	-.103*	-.156**	-.103*	-.091	.169**	.118*	.052	1

Table 6 shows the correlation between entrepreneurial intention's independent and dependent variables. As presented, variables of university, elite sports, Level of education, gender, occupation of father, occupation of mother, and age had a significant correlation with the dependent variable at different levels, while the marital status and experience of abroad were out of the significance level. The independent variable of the university of the study was identified as the highest influencing factor on students' entrepreneurship intention with a positive and significant correlation (**0.333); the sports champion (individual or team) correlated with the dependent variable, which was substantial at **0.161 level. The university variable was identified as the highest influencing factor on students' entrepreneurial intention with a positive and significant correlation (**0.333); the elite sport (individual or team) was also correlated with the dependent variable, which was substantial at **0.161 level. Also, the level of education of a person had a positive and significant correlation with the dependent variable (**0.181); Age status had a positive and significant correlation with the dependent variable (**0.169), and the experience of abroad had a positive and significant correlation with the dependent variable (*0.118). On the other hand, people's gender parents' occupation had an inverse correlation with the dependent variable (-0.103*, -0.156*, -0.103*, respectively). In addition, the marital status and specialized skill variable was not significant with the dependent variable (-0.091, 0.052).

Determining the regression model of demographic components and the variable of entrepreneurial intention was one of the hypotheses of the current research, which was done with a step-by-step multivariable regression equation and using ten models concerning demographic components, the results of which can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Regression coefficient analysis of research variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
University	**0.333									
Elite sports		**0.161								
Level of Education			**0.181							
Gender				*0.103-						
Occupation of Father					*0.156					
Occupation of Mother						*0.103				
Marital Status							0.091			
Age								**0.169		
Experience of abroad									*0.118	
Skill										0.052
Sig	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.042	0.002	0.041	0.074	0.001	0.02	0.305
R2	0.111	0.026	0.023	0.011	0.024	0.011	0.008	0.028	0.014	0.003
Adj. R2	0.109	0.023	0.030	0.008	0.022	0.008	0.006	0.026	0.011	0.000
F	48.657	10.309	13.248	1.857	9.117	4.198	3.218	11.374	5.457	1.056

According to the results of the above table, the average value of the coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.03$, which shows the explanatory power of the research variables at a low level of approximation. Also, according to the significance level of the regression model ($\text{Sig} > 0.05$), it can be stated that the set of eight independent variables (university of study, Elite sports, Level of education, gender, occupation of father, occupation of mother and age) can explain the dependent variable (entrepreneurship intention), this indicates that 3% of the effects of the variable Eight independent variables in this research describe dependent. Among the independent variables, the marriage variable and specialized skills did not significantly affect the dependent variable of entrepreneurial intention.

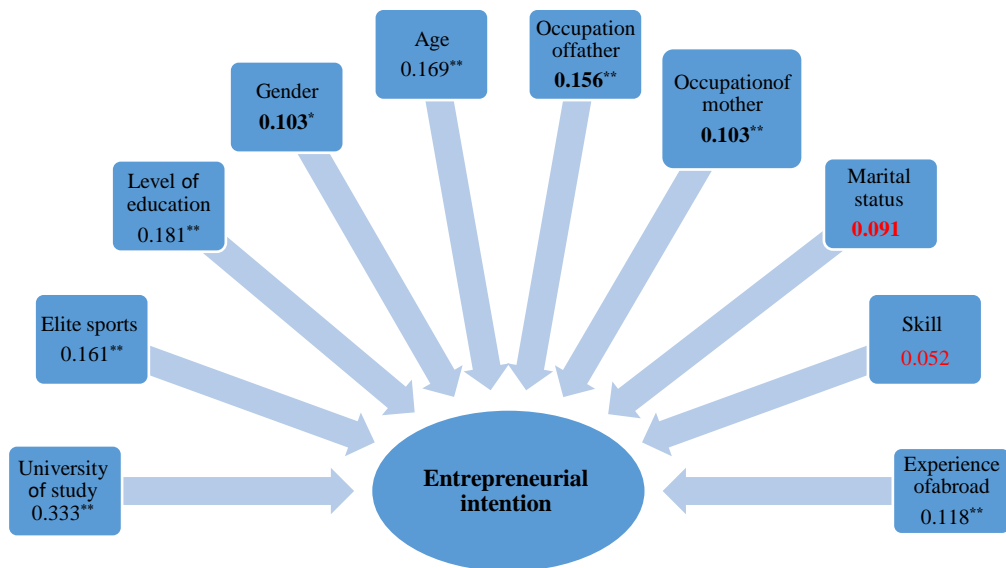


Figure 1. Relationship between research variables.

Considering the significance of eight independent variables on entrepreneurial intention and the non-significance of two variables (marriage and specialized skills) on entrepreneurial intention, the path analysis model is presented in Figure 1.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Entrepreneurial intention is a state of mind that ultimately leads a person to form a new business concept and create a job in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial intention plays a fundamental role in deciding to start any economic enterprise. Intention is a direct antecedent of actual behavior. The stronger the intention for the conduct, the greater the success of predicting the behavior or actual behavior (Chhabra et al., 2021). In this regard, the findings are the results of a survey of 391 questionnaires distributed among sports science students in universities (Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Kharazmi, Alzahra, Allameh Tabatabai), which showed that students of Alzahra had the highest score with

an average of 3.07 and students of Kharazmi University with the average score of 14.2 was the lowest for having an entrepreneurial intention. Also, the results showed a significant relationship between demographic components (University of study, background of elite sports, Level of education, gender, age, occupation of parents (mother and father), and experience abroad) and entrepreneurial intention. In other words, these demographic characteristics can improve students' entrepreneurship direction. In addition, the researchers found no relationship between marital status and having specialized skills concerning entrepreneurial intention. Also, comparing the value of the regression coefficient (r) showed that the demographic components of the university of study, level of education, and the age of students have the most value in predicting and explaining entrepreneurial intention.

The difference between the universities showed that Alzahra University students had higher average scores for entrepreneurial intention despite the small number of answer sheets compared to other universities. Entrepreneurial attitudes should be higher among male students than female students because men are more risk-taking or likelier than women to do entrepreneurial activities. However, these findings are in line with the research results of (Kordheydari et al., 2019) and (Fragoso et al., 2020) is consistent.

Based on the findings, a background in elite sports can affect entrepreneurship intention, although the highest average (217 people with 55.5%) pointed to not having experience in elite sports. The educational status of 38 percent (148 people) of the respondents was higher than the average, which also affected the entrepreneurial intention, which is consistent with the research findings (Farahani et al., 2015; Soomro et al., 2019) and with the results of (Uddin et al., 2016) does not match. In this regard, they argue that the higher the students' academic level, the more they prefer to work in public and private companies with government salaries and benefits rather than directly starting their own business. Age that affected entrepreneurial intention is consistent with (Ansari & Salmanizade, 2008; Soomro et al., 2019). As can be seen, due to the high frequency, the start of entrepreneurial activity is within the limit of a young age. This may be related to more youthful people having a higher entrepreneurial spirit between 18 and 22. The results indicate that 56.3% of the students' fathers are self-employed (220 people), and 65% (253 people) of their mothers are housewives. Based on the research findings, it was determined that the occupation of parents is effective on the intention of entrepreneurship. Having a self-employed father or a self-employed mother affects students' entrepreneurship intention. In other words, people who have an entrepreneurial parent are significantly more successful than people who appear without role models, which researchers (Uddin et al., 2016) and (Mohammadkazemi et al., 2014) confirmed. Since parents are the primary and basic role models for children, they play an essential role in creating an incredible public image of entrepreneurship in their children's minds. The behavior and character of parents create a positive effect on children and make a source of inspiration for them. In most of the research, the results show that the children follow the role models of their entrepreneurial families, especially parents, and these people are significantly more successful than people who do not have such role models.

The present study showed that 86% of people (337) were single. In examining the role of being married, it was found that this index does not affect the level of entrepreneurial intention, contrary to research (Mukhtarpour & Shuraj, 2022). While commitment to the family is an essential factor in women's self-employment, this is not the case for men, as the examination of marital status shows that single people have a high entrepreneurial spirit compared to married people. Of course, part of this may be to achieve financial independence among single women. Based on the average showed that 66 percent (259 people) did not have experience abroad, and the correlation and regression findings showed that this component could be practical, which is consistent with previous findings (Fragoso et al., 2020) and (Ward et al., 2019). According to the results, 54% (211 people) had specialized skills. According to the findings, this component did not affect the entrepreneurial intention, while it was different from the previous results (Dehghan & Peymanfar, 2021) so that people who have specialized skills of creativity, innovation, risk-taking, decision-making power, control and management power, negotiation power and they have more development management than other people who do not have specialized skills. In other words, they have better verbal communication skills, listening skills, environment assessment, and organizational ability than other employees. However, it is not possible to determine the optimal range of specialized skills for entrepreneurial activities, and entrepreneurs can engage in entrepreneurial activities with any technical skills, whether high or low.

Considering the influence of demographic characteristics on students' entrepreneurship intention showed that the childhood environment profoundly impacts people's personalities. The role and importance of the family as a center of innovative thinking in creating the spirit of creativity in people, expanding the spirit of entrepreneurship, and developing new businesses in society is undeniable. The family, in addition to nurturing the emotional and moral aspects of children, is the center of growth and prosperity of self-confidence, self-belief, and self-improvement in children and will play an important role. This can be very influential in starting an economic business and developing job activities in society. Family is a center that can play a vital role in forming these characteristics. Men were in charge of bread-making, and women were in charge of housekeeping and raising children, transferring traditional societies where men mainly carried out business. The new structure of the family in today's society and, as a result, the women leaving home caused the emergence of contemporary manifestations of creativity and innovation in both men and women (Díaz-García & Jiménez-Moreno, 2010). This is achieved when families are given the necessary training and families are informed of the role they can play in their children's entrepreneurship. Increasing the development of a positive understanding of the possibility and desirability of entrepreneurship through appropriate education in universities, strengthening the spirit of entrepreneurship, determining applicable policies, goals, methods, and models, and implementing support and incentive programs in this field can be appropriate. The difference in the findings can be further investigated by considering other variables and controlling them in the regression model.

Proper information should be provided about the government's various support and financial schemes to promote entrepreneurship among students, especially sports science

students. Among the limitations of this study, it is possible to mention considering only sports science faculties of Tehran universities as a statistical sample, which faces the limitation of location feedback. Ideally, the answers may be taken from different universities and faculties of Tehran. Still, the answers were taken only from sports sciences faculties for lack of time, geographical conditions, and other reasons. Also, since the sample size is limited, the findings can only be indicative results. Therefore, it is worth noting that the findings should be compared and confirmed with a study with a larger sample size to achieve better accuracy. The present study can be extended in several directions for further research. For example, it would be interesting to analyze whether Gholum sports faculty students have higher entrepreneurial intentions than students of other faculties. Or how is this factor in different provinces and even countries? In addition, more research can be done to find the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and becoming an entrepreneur.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نشریه کسب و کار در ورزش

آدرس نشریه: <https://sbj.alzahra.ac.ir/>

تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۸۹-۱۰۲

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.43751.1095



آیا داشتن پیشینه مهم است؟

تجزیه و تحلیل ویژگی‌های جمعیت شناختی به قصد کار آفرینی ورزشی

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کلیدواژه

کارآفرینی در ورزش
کسب و کار در ورزش
قصد کارآفرینی
مهارت‌های کارآفرینی
نوآوری

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی

چکیده

هدف: هدف از انجام این پژوهش، شناسایی و بررسی رابطه بین ویژگی‌های جمعیت شناختی و قصد کارآفرینی دانشجویان علوم ورزشی بود.

روش: ۳۹۱ مشارکت کننده از دانشجویان دانشکده‌های علوم ورزشی دانشگاه‌های منتخب که به طور تصادفی انتخاب شدند، در این مطالعه شرکت نمودند. روش انجام تحقیق کمی و ابزار گردآوری داده‌ها پرسشنامه بود که روایی آن با کسب نظر شش تن از خبرگان تایید شد و پایایی آن بر مبنای ضریب آلفای کرونباخ معادل ۰/۹۱۰ به دست آمد. برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از نرم‌افزار SPSS و Amos استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: در این مطالعه برخی از عوامل اصلی افزایش تمایل افراد به کارآفرینی شناسایی شدند. یافته‌ها نشان داد بین دانشگاه محل تحصیل، سابقه ورزش قهرمانی، سطح تحصیلات، جنسیت، شغل والدین، سن، سابقه زندگی در خارج از کشور و قصد کارآفرینی رابطه معناداری وجود دارد. از طرفی بین وضعیت تاهل و داشتن مهارت‌های تخصصی در رابطه با قصد کارآفرینی رابطه‌ای به دست نیامد که نشان می‌دهد وضعیت تاهل و داشتن مهارت‌های تخصصی قبلی در ارتقای سطح قصد کارآفرینی دانشجویان نقشی ندارد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: کارآفرینی ترکیبی از ریسک و تمایل به موفقیت است، اما به دلیل نفوذ محیط کسب و کار داخلی و خارجی، دستیابی به آن آسان نیست. بنابراین، این مطالعه با هدف شناسایی عوامل اصلی که ممکن است بر تمایل افراد تأثیر گذارد، انجام شد.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۲/۰۲/۲۳

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۳/۲۲



Sustainable Revenue in Private Sports Clubs of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the sustainable revenue of private sports clubs in Iran.

Methodology: The research method was qualitative, and we used Strass and Corbin approach. The participants were specialists in sports management and activists in clubs' sports, marketing, and economics issues; then, by theoretical and snowball methods, 16 participants were considered. The research sampling method was theoretical and continued until the saturation. We used depth and exploratory interviews to collect the data, and the validity of the findings was determined by member matching, peer review, and pilot interviews. Open, axial, and selective coding was used to analyze the data.

Findings: The findings showed 15 components include organizational attitudes, technical aspects, budgeting, financial support, value issues, human aspects, scientific procedure, professional behaviors, customer orientation, Organizational structure, outsourcing, information aspects, interdepartmental cooperation, media activities, and equitable distribution have an influential role in sports club fundraising of Iran.

Originality: Since private sports clubs do not have governmental financial support, this study provides a sustainable fundraising concept.

Keywords

Budgeting
Customer Orientation
Financial
Fundraising
TV Right and Media Right

Article type

Original Article

Received: 2023/02/27

Accepted: 2023/04/22

How to cite this article:

Mohammadian Moghadam, M., & Nazari, R. (2023). Sustainable Revenue in Private Sports Clubs of Iran. *Sports Business Journal*, 3(3), 103-118. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2023.42981.1075>



1. Introduction

Rapid and continuous changes have made the world complex, unstable, and unpredictable (Nazari, 2021), where the successful response of organizations in a very dynamic and changing environment depends on their ability to provide the required information and find suitable solutions. Depending on their problems, Organizations must plan, organize, direct, and control in an increasingly compromised environment. Organizations also face rapid and comprehensive changes (Nazari & Abedi, 2013). In this context, theorists and organizational managers focus on the design of an organization's productivity. One of the problems the sports industry faces is its low productivity in developing countries (Yabalooie et al., 2022). Currently, sports is considered a money-making industry that directly and indirectly changes the economy of nations and leads to higher economic growth (Nazari & Hajiheydari, 2021). In the era of globalization, competitiveness is an important issue among the policy makers of various industries, among which one of the most controversial industries is the sports industry. In this regard, sports is one of the essential industries in the international arena, which has contributed a lot to the economy of different societies today (Moradi et al., 2019).

In the world's sports economy, there are more than 600 billion Euros in money circulation, and for example, in football alone, money circulation amounts to 33 to 35 billion Euros; some estimates show that the global sports market with a compound annual growth rate of more than it is growing at five percent and despite the worldwide crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is estimated to reach a value of almost 600 billion dollars or 826 by 2025. Based on the analysis, the sports industry is considered the sixth income generating sector in developing countries (Ljumović et al., 2021). The role of human capabilities in the sustainable development of sports businesses with a qualitative method was investigated. This work aims to expand the existing knowledge about the role of human capabilities in development (Norouzi Seyed Hossini et al., 2022). Memari et al. (2019) identified the most independent, dependent, influential, and minor essential players' tax compliance factors and the relations between these factors. Recognizing each factor's role and level of importance can help governments and policymakers in tax legislation in sports (Memari et al., 2019).

Sports as a factor of economic growth and sports events compete in the development of the global industry by the end of 2017 about 91 billion dollars with other sectors. Today, it must be acknowledged that sport is a phenomenon that, if used optimally, can achieve significant societal growth in many economic, cultural, and social categories. The sports industry is vital in developing developed countries' economies (Moradi Chaleshtari & Nazari, 2019). It directly impacts the production of sports goods and services, employment, export and import, creation of facilities and facilities, household expenses, participation in the stock market, advertising, media coverage, work, and attracting tourism and sponsors. It indirectly improves the health of society, reduces treatment costs, and develops the national health program, also in social cases: reducing delinquency, reducing employee absenteeism, and increasing performance and productivity (Arab Nermi et al., 2018).

Sports in Iran have been considered one of the secondary issues in the economy, while in developed countries, it has been considered a fundamental pillar (Mokhtarian Pourzavareh et al., 2022). In developed countries, a significant part of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is obtained through the economic prosperity of sports. At the same time, Iran provides less than 1% of its GDP through the economy (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021). Therefore, the economic development of sports is significant (Brown & Arnold, 2019).

The sports industry is known as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world (Rezaei, 2018). The sports industry has the characteristics of increasing domestic demand, increasing employment, and creating new points of economic and business growth (Xu & Yang, 2019). With the continuous expansion of the sports industry, the effect of the promotion of the sports industry on economic development has gradually emerged. The interaction between the performance of sports competitions, the national production of sports equipment, and the production of other sports industries related to the regional economy has attracted the attention of scientists (Yang et al., 2020). Governments, individuals, and international organizations fully know the political, social, and economic dimensions and exploit them to achieve their goals (Memari et al., 2019). By having a stimulating factor such as major sports competitions, the sports industry has provided the possibility of benefiting from advertising opportunities in the media, which has created the necessary platform for interaction between industry, business, and sports (Nazari & Shahvali, 2022). Excessive emphasis on the commercial components of the sports industry takes it away from the existential philosophy of the ancient Olympics (Nathan et al., 2018).

Organizations should provide signals that are used to better identify and respond to changes in the environment and inter-organizational relationships. This enables agile organizations to understand how others interpret the social movements they send and shape these signals in ways that improve their inter-organizational relationships (Posthuma et al., 2018). In this regard, examining environmental factors can also enhance sports. Therefore, the economic development of sports is critical (Brown & Arnold, 2019). Sports play an essential role in the development of the economy in developed countries and have a direct economic impact on the production of sports goods and services, employment, export and import, creating places and facilities, household expenses, participation in the stock market, advertising, media coverage, starting job, attraction of tourism and financial sponsors; and it has indirect effects on improving community health, reducing treatment costs and developing the national health program; It also plays a significant role in social matters such as reducing delinquency, reducing employee absenteeism, increasing performance and productivity (Bonakdarchyan & Nazari, 2021). The role of the sports industry in the growing economy is expressed as encouraging scientific research to criticize the broad views of marketing and business operations can help the economy of the sports industry (Zhang et al., 2018). Examining the effects of investment and long-term planning in sports can lead to the economic growth of sports (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Sports, meaning sports to earn money, have become a central part of the sports industry, and if people

are interested in a particular sport, athletes of that sport receive high salaries. These rights are usually provided through ticket sales, television broadcast rights, and corporate support. Sports are a type of business that has a professional nature, and in many developed countries, it has non-governmental organizations and organizations. The pillars of sports are athletes, coaches, and clubs, and the financial resources of sports in Iran include ticket sales and tournament advertisements, public donations, player transfers, television broadcast rights, membership fees, government grants, and financial sponsors (Arab Nermi et al., 2018). Sports are a part of society and are becoming more critical daily. For this reason, officials and managers of sports organizations must pay much attention (Sadeghi et al., 2009).

The infrastructure of the sports industry is formed by clubs that act as factories and economic enterprises (Bonakdarchyan et al., 2020). Creativity and innovation in the sports industry and long-term planning and investments can cause the economic growth of sports (Nazari & Tahami, 2014). The remarkable work of a sports club is success and honor in sports fields. According to the features of the world today, there are many differences from the past decades, and it is mixed with economic cost-benefit calculations. In recent years, due to the growth of professional investment in various sectors, sports clubs have become one of the most important companies for attracting capital to the point where, according to some experts, investment and income generation in the sports industry is on par with initiatives such as cinema. And tourism has grown. The economic empowerment of the clubs will pave the way for the sports success of Iranian clubs and then national sports. In this regard, sports clubs choose ways to make money for their survival and development. Making money is essential in developed countries' economic, political, and social pillars. It seems that the clubs have performed very poorly in this dimension and have not been able to sufficiently and acceptably benefit from income generation for their business (Bennike et al., 2020).

Failure to pay attention to financing methods in sports clubs can cause severe damage in creating financial resources and bring economic problems (Ljumović et al., 2021). In addition, new financing methods have been made in today's economic fields, bringing economic resources in this regard. Generating more wealth and income is a direct result of creating a strong brand and its proper management. A strong brand attracts the emotions and feelings of the organization's customers and keeps them with the organization in economic and technical difficulties (Pedauga et al., 2022). Considering the position of the brand in sports clubs and its importance among fans and spectators, it can be used as one of the crucial sources of income generation, which has always been considered as one of the side topics in the economy in Iran. Developed countries view it as an essential economic, political, and social pillar. The clubs have performed poorly in this aspect and have been unable to use their brand adequately and acceptably for business and income generation. They are finally considering sports' economic role and impact on countries' economic growth and development. It can be acknowledged that there is no sustainable revenue generation paradigm model for private sports clubs so that sports managers and investors can achieve their economic goals and generate stable income in the respective private sports clubs even though there are no specific rules and regulations for sustainable income generation of clubs. We aimed to suggest the platform and grounds for the clubs

to achieve stable income generation by providing suitable solutions. Therefore, the current research seeks to answer the question, what are the most important sources of income for private sports clubs in Iran?

2. Methodology

The research method in this study was qualitative, and by using the data theory strategy of the Strauss and Corbin Foundation, the opinions of the interviewees were analyzed about the factors affecting the promotion of private sports clubs. The statistical population in the scope of the current research was specialists and experts in sports management and economics, marketing, and sports activists, among whom 15 people were considered. The sampling method of the study was theoretical, in such a way that the data was developed during the research, and each data was formed from the analysis of the previous data. Sampling continued until the categories reached theoretical saturation. The search tool was in-depth and exploratory interviews. The questions of the interviews were open-ended and based on the dimensions of the foundation's data theory, causal factors, environmental conditions, background characteristics, strategies, and consequences of brand leveraging were examined to clarify the issue from the interviewees' language. The time taken for each interview was 30 minutes on average. The researcher conducted all the interviews and then implemented them.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Code	Gender	Position	Experience	Experience Field	Age
1	Female	Private Sports Club CEO	5	Sport for all	32
2	Female	PhD	25	Sport Management	63
3	Male	Private Sports Club CEO	10	Fitness & Health	47
4	Male	Private Sports Club CEO	10	Sport for all	44
5	Female	PhD	20	Sport Management	58
6	Male	PhD	10	Sport Management	39
7	Female	Private Sports Club CEO	20	Recreation & Leisure	65
8	Male	Private Sports Club CEO	15	Sport for all	47
9	Male	PhD	5	Sport Management	31
10	Female	Private Sports Club CEO	5	Fitness & Health	29
11	Male	PhD	25	Sport Management	59
12	Male	Private Sports Club CEO	10	Sport for all	45
13	Male	Private Sports Club CEO	25	Fitness & Health	54
14	Male	Director of Sport for all	25	Sport for all	51
15	Male	PhD	15	Sport Management	42

The micro-analysis method was used to analyze the data in such a way that the data were analyzed through open, central, and optional coding and based on the data theory plan of the Strauss and Corbin Foundation. First, considering the role of concepts in explaining the components of promoting private sports clubs, these concepts are in the form of causal factors (causes of the central phenomenon), strategies (strategies that are accepted as the prominent phenomenon in response), background characteristics (specific background conditions affecting strategies), environmental conditions (general conditions affecting strategies), and consequences (results of applying strategies) were theoretically presented through a paradigm model. In the end, to measure the validity of this research, the final report of the data analysis process and the categories obtained above, along with the interview text, was sent to three of the interviewees, and their comments were used in the coding and design of the model. A semi-structured interview was used to collect information and to collect information, in addition to the upstream documents, to know the theoretical foundations, literature, and background of the research related to the research topic.

Four strategies to audit the current research were used: a) credibility means whether the research findings are believable for the researcher -the equivalent of internal validity. b) the researcher re-coded one of the interviews after a month, and the results were compared with Scott's coefficient for credibility checking; c) whether there is a transfer of inference from one platform to another (external validity equivalent) for checking the transferability; and d) finally, the research members' analysis method was used for reliability and transferability. This method evaluated the researcher's report in accuracy and completeness. It was studied because reading the information makes the participants remember new facts or gain a new understanding of the situation. In this regard, reliability means whether the same findings would be reached if someone else coded. Are the same results obtained (reliability equivalent)? Finally, the verifiability of the research findings. The question is whether the findings are derived from the data. Then, the coding process was reviewed by three experts who were not members of the interview group, and their suggestions were used in developing the model. To measure the reliability of the qualitative tool, the researcher arranged two test interviews in [Table 2](#), and after analyzing the results and comparing them with the goals and questions of the research, corrections were made in the questions and prioritization of the questions to increase the accuracy of the research tool.

Table 2. The results of checking the coefficient of agreement.

Agreement	Number Total	Codes Total Percentage
8	17	94%
4	10	80%
5	12	83%
17	39	78%

The reliability of the test was confirmed. The concept analysis method was used to analyze the data. In this research, three stages were used. The first step includes the open coding method. One of the methods is to use open coding so that the data can be classified

into specific categories to conceptualize the data and analyze the information. During the open coding, the concepts from the depth of the data are brought to the surface. Also, the analyst deals with forming types and their characteristics. In the next step, the axial coding process was done. Axial coding is the process of converting concepts into components. For this purpose, the theoretician selects a concept from the set of concepts of the open coding stage as a category. During the process, he associates the meaning with other concepts. This coding is considered central because it takes place around the axis of a research category. By the final stage, selective coding is used.

4. Results

Descriptive findings related to the participant's education level showed that 81.8% of the participants had a doctorate level of education, which was the highest number. We used a qualitative concept analysis method to determine the model of sustainable income generation in private sports clubs in Iran. After coding, the features extracted from the interviews were identified and summarized. Axial coding in Table 3 shows the results of open coding.

Table 3. Axial coding.

Open Coding	Concepts
Having a positive attitude towards sustainable income generation in private sport clubs	Organizational attitudes
The act of wanting from private sports clubs	
Unanimity in the direction of sustainable income generation in private sport clubs	
Collaboration in efforts to generate sustainable income in private sport clubs	
The existence of citizenship behavior in private sports clubs	
Facilitating intra-organizational relationships	Technical aspects
Identification of existing economic opportunities	
Compliance with the requirements of sustainable income generation by private sport clubs	
Creating specific financial goals in private sport clubs	
Estimating the fixed costs of private sport clubs	
Attention to financial levers in private sport clubs	budgeting
Optimizing auction and tender procedures and minimizing procedures	
Redefining the budgeting system of private sports clubs and optimizing the budget according to the existing conditions	
Formation of financial reserve funds in private sport clubs	
Leaping from the budget-oriented life cycle to the economically productive process in sports clubs	
Designing financial support portfolio, active sponsors in private sport clubs	Financial support
Using new marketing techniques and methods in private sport clubs	
Development of individual branding of athletes in the way of using advertisements and endorsements	
Using the capacities of banks and financial institutions	
Using the capacities of economic enterprises and reliable factories of the country in the provinces	
Surveying the economic environment and creating financial capacities in private sport clubs	Value issues
Improving the financial value of private sport clubs	
Improving the spiritual value of private sport clubs	
Formation of the value chain in private sport clubs	
The formation of organizational norms in the path of sustainable income generation in sports clubs	

Open Coding	Concepts
The presence of expert staff in the field of income generation	
The existence of a human resources training system in private sports clubs	
Using expert forces outside the environment of private sports clubs	
Creating human wealth in private sport clubs	Human aspects
The existence of audience attraction systems in private sports clubs	
Empowering expert human resources in private sport clubs	
Regular and documented recruitment system with a sustainable income generation approach	
The existence of scientific content in the field of sustainable income generation in sports	
Elite educational systems in the field of sustainable income generation in private sport clubs	Scientific procedures
Using expert lecturers in the field of strengthening technical knowledge for sustainable income generation	
Land of financial potential	
The existence of sports successes among private sport clubs	
Acquiring valid ISOs from private sport clubs	Private behaviors
Creation of codified standards by private sport clubs	
The existence of an organizational accountability system in private sports clubs	
The existence of a voice call system for customers of private sport clubs	
The existence of a system of offers in private sport clubs	
Quick response to criticism in private sport clubs	Customer Orientation
The existence of a support system for clients and customers according to the presence of discount systems	
Desirable audience in private sport clubs	
Designing a new organizational structure in private sport clubs	
Designing job descriptions compatible with sustainable income generation	
Establishing committees in charge of income generation in private sport clubs	Organizational Structure
Creation of cooperative companies	
Assignment of financial projects in private sports clubs	
Identifying leading private companies in economic fields	
Strengthening the outsourcing process in private sport clubs	
Prioritizing the outsourcing of Private Sport Club programs	Outsourcing
Improving the guarantee of success of outsourcing in the field of income generation	
Identification of a comprehensive database regarding financial potential	
Strengthening the information infrastructure of private sport clubs	
Environmental scanning to discover objective information	Information aspects
Knowledge of existing environmental threats of private sport clubs	
Interaction with sports-supporting organizations	
Creating interpersonal relationships with donors	
Identifying organizational potentials in the field of income generation	
The existence of a flexible system for communicating with public and private organizations	
The existence of accountability to the armed forces from a therapeutic point of view	Intersect oral cooperation
Existence of interaction with municipalities	
The existence of interaction between clubs and university systems	
The existence of interaction between clubs and education systems	
Improving the media consumption regime in private sport clubs	
The formation of critical thinking in specialized round tables of private sports clubs with the presence of all tastes	
Interaction with the media to discover the hidden layers and events of financial existence in private sport clubs	
Directing and stream persuasiveness among the audience of private sports clubs	
Improving media production for private sport clubs	
The existence of advertising and media campaigns	Media activities
Making promotional and educational teasers	
The existence of exceptional animators for sports clubs	
Formation and management of fixed television programs in private sports clubs	
Media coordination for live broadcasts of domestic and foreign events	
Interaction with international media	

Open Coding	Concepts
Application implementation and integrated media structure and information dissemination	
Redefining the budgeting systems of private sport clubs	
Formation of financial reserve funds	Fair distribution of resources
Creating jihadi groups active in the field of sports	
Classification of private sports clubs according to income and financial forecasts	

After the investigations, the number of 15 components under the title of organizational attitudes, technical aspects, budgeting, financial support, value issues, human aspects, scientific procedures, professional behaviors, customer orientation, organizational structure, outsourcing, aspect information, inter-sectorial cooperation, media activities, and fair distribution were identified. Figure 1 shows these 15 components.

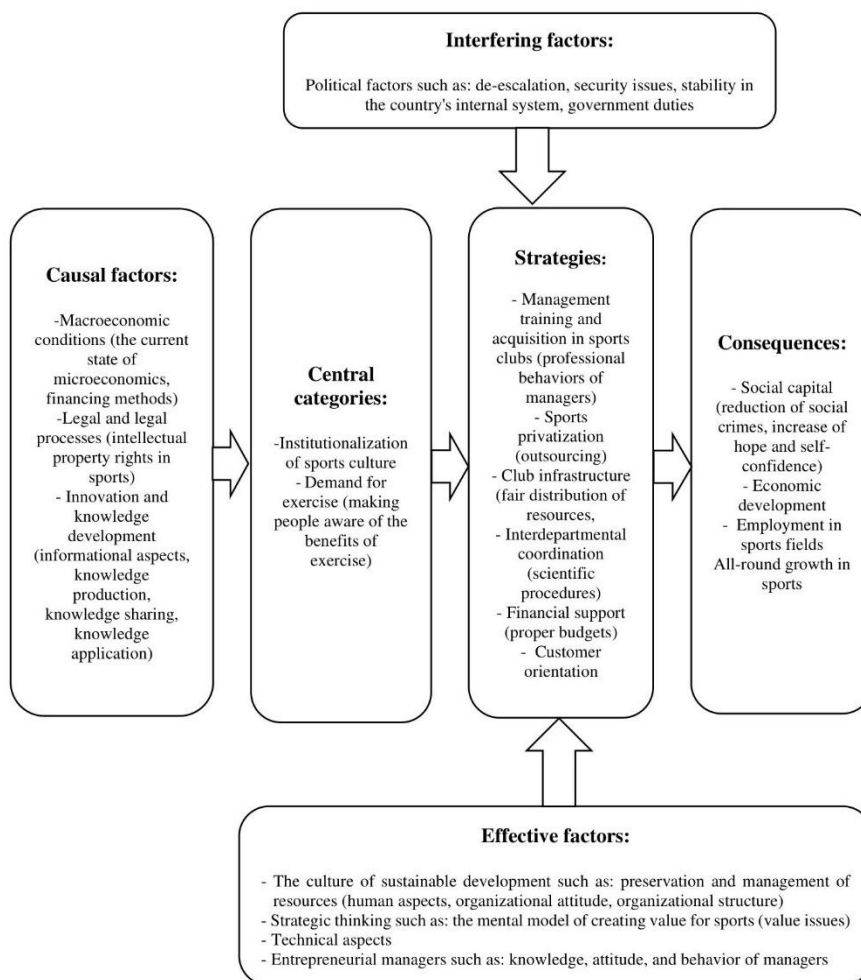


Figure 1. The components of the model for the promotion of private sports clubs in Iran.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The developments and complexities of the present era have raised the need for governments to apply logical measures, especially proper planning, scientific decision-making and management, and creating coordination in matters related to the needs of societies. Using new tax methods, in addition to preventing the slowness of work of government institutions and the wastage of public property, is also very effective in promoting social and economic goals, and governments can allocate financial resources fairly and favorably. Distribute among the desirable destinations of the society and collect taxes accordingly. Monetary policies are the most critical lever for regulating various economic activities to achieve economic development, balance, and social justice. Therefore, it is necessary to look carefully at the exact ways of generating income, which is the most important tool of financial policies. In today's era, tax expenditures (exemptions, preferences, forgiveness, and financial incentives) are one of the main foundations of financial instruments.

The role of clubs in the sports industry is vital, so Private sports clubs are considered its central core. The primary root and core of sports development are formed within the clubs, and the main infrastructure of the sports industry is the clubs that are the production factories and economic enterprises of this. They operate in the industry. We showed that many codes had been identified concerning the ways of sustainable income generation in private sports clubs in Iran, which are in line with the achievements of [Bennike et al. \(2020\)](#), who said that the existence of a general formal and bureaucratic, non-profit and relatively autonomous structure could be one of the ways of income for sports clubs ([Bennike et al., 2020](#)). [Rodriguez-Pomeda et al. \(2017\)](#) concluded that the formation of financial reserve funds, interaction with international media, the existence of notable animators for sports clubs, making promotional and educational teasers, and directing and channeling persuasiveness among the audience of private sports clubs can be effective in the business model of Real Madrid football club ([Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2017](#)), and is consistent with the findings of this research. It seems that proper behavior in private sports clubs, having specific financial goals in private sports clubs, budgeting of private sports clubs, and budget optimization can affect the sustainable income of clubs.

The sports industry cannot survive without income generation. Unfortunately, sports rely on government revenues, and this has caused severe damage to the development of sports in Iran. Also, sustainable income and sports are related. The development of the sports sector, not only in producing sports goods but also in the economy by providing more labor, has a positive effect on the economy, considering that involvement in sports increases the quality of life. Of course, these ways are usually pre-determined, and there are rules to follow within the framework of these rules. Financial resources are the driving force of sports organizations, clubs, and leagues. Generating income is essential for developing, effectively planning, and maintaining the independence of these sports clubs. In this regard, after the investigations carried out, components such as organizational attitudes, technical aspects, budgeting, financial support, value issues, human aspects, scientific procedures, professional behaviors, customer orientation, organizational

structure, outsourcing, informational aspects, inter-sectorial cooperation, media activities, and fair distribution were identified.

McCarthy et al. (2022) concluded that social media had been fully adopted as a critical strategic marketing channel. Also, the importance of trust in clubs that can control a group of passionate fans on social media platforms can be considered an essential factor. Also, it is necessary to notice how clubs use social media to increase their global reach and invest in different sectors (McCarthy et al., 2022). Therefore, we don't have proper planning for using social networks in developing the sports industry. This issue has caused the sports industry development in Iran to fail. In other words, Iran's economy has not been able to benefit from the capacities of the sports industry in the path of the country's economic prosperity.

Financial crowdsourcing platforms are a place to finance activities that act as online financial intermediaries between entrepreneurs with ideas and people with money and skills. In other words, the financial crowdsourcing platform is a user interface between investors. However, using the interface instead of face-to-face communication increases the complexity of relationships. This platform adopts measures that affect investor-investee relations and cause economic development (ERKOÇAK & Mustafa, 2020), which is consistent with the findings of this research. Therefore, financial crowdsourcing and promises significantly affect investors' motivation to invest. Outsourcing of medium-sized economic enterprises plays a substantial role in creating employment, competition, innovation, and economic development, the driver and engine of economic growth, and is considered one of the most important priorities of economic development programs. It is consistent with the findings of this research. So, we propose our suggestions to make decisions and achieve sustainable income in private sports clubs. The use of specific recipes when making a particular decision and the list of influential factors when deciding on sustainable income can make decision-making more accessible and the power of decision-making more effective. Therefore, based on the criteria and the degree of importance identified in this research, it is suggested that guidelines and a list be prepared and given to the officials of the league organization. According to the research results of the main categories related to sustainable income generation in private sports clubs, it was determined that the main categories were identified in 3 sections: approaches, processes, and results. The fact that the clubs are state-owned includes the lack of transparency of the financial statements, the refusal of the TV rights and advertisement payments, the lack of knowledge of the club managers about the proper financing methods, and the limited use of creative managers with commercial expertise. Furthermore, finance at different levels is an essential obstacle to funding Iran's sports clubs.

Sports is one of the most important attractions of any country to attract tourists (Aghili et al., 2023). Sports events include 3.1% of Iran's gross product, and the importance of this sector can cause economic development (Azadi et al., 2023). The development of financial stability causes domestic tourism to grow, causes inflation and the unemployment rate to decrease, and increases investors (Su et al., 2020). Also, short-term and long-term planning will develop economic stability. Some organizations with a good past make spectators buy tickets for sports events and cause economic prosperity (Alonso

Dos Santos & Calabuig Moreno, 2020). Commercial activities outside the sports environment can have a low risk due to the attractiveness of sports. In interpreting this issue, it is necessary to mention that the use of business activities outside of sports, as an essential and critical issue, can play an important role in creating new financial flows in sports clubs. In other words, using commercial activities outside of sports makes new resources for sports clubs essential in forming sustainable financial resources in sports.

The results showed that social media is accepted as a critical strategic marketing channel. Also, the importance of trust in clubs that can control a group of passionate fans on social media platforms can be considered an essential factor. Also, how clubs use social media to increase their global reach and invest in different sectors is necessary. Therefore, it can be said that proper planning for using social networks in developing the sports industry is not done today. This problem has caused sports in Iran not to be very successful today. In other words, the economy of Iran has not been able to benefit from the capacities of the sports industry in the path of its economic prosperity. It seems that managerial factors, including the managers' long-term view of the economy, preventing international debts, interacting with international federations to create financial support, organizing the club system, creating non-sports business activities, and hosting sports events international can provide a severe basis for developing solutions regarding income in the field of sports. Managerial factors can provide a robust foundation for strengthening the marketing infrastructure of sports clubs.

Generally, governments cannot take charge of all affairs as in the past. Considering the development of sustainable income methods for sports clubs, the growth of institutions and the development of sponsors have a significant impact on other criteria for the development of financing methods of sports clubs. So, sports managers must pay more attention to the factors we introduced. The most crucial management consequence for Iranian private sports clubs includes improving the commercialization of private sports clubs. The desired criteria should be used as development policies. Paying attention to cultural, organizational, social, legal, and structural factors can sustainably cause private sports clubs' commercialization. It is necessary to teach sports managers effective fundraising methods and spend money, create hardware infrastructure and software design to develop commercialization models for private sports clubs. In this regard, the use of specialized and educated human resources can help to create sustainable income generation by using new technologies and pave the way for the development of commercialization of private sports clubs. Governments should reduce the restrictive laws and facilitate the conditions by increasing the protective laws that have the positive consequences of commercializing private sports clubs.

Disclosure statement and funding

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest. The present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to give special thanks to all the participants in this study.

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نشریه کسب و کار در ورزش

آدرس نشریه: <https://sbj.alzahra.ac.ir/>

تابستان ۱۴۰۲، دوره ۳، شماره ۳، ص ۱۰۳-۱۱۸

شناسه دیجیتال: 10.22051/SBJ.2023.42981.1075



تامین مالی پایدار در باشگاه‌های خصوصی ایران

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کلیدواژه

بوجه‌بندی
مالی
جلب سرمایه
مشتری مداری
حق پخش تلویزیونی و رسانه‌ای

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف این پژوهش ارائه راه‌های تامین مالی پایدار در باشگاه‌های خصوصی ایران بود.
روش: روش انجام این پژوهش کیفی بود که با رویکرد استراس و کوربین انجام شد. شرکت کنندگان در پژوهش حاضر، متخصصان حوزه مدیریت ورزشی، فعالان حوزه ورزش، بازاریابی و اقتصاد بودند که از بین آنها ۱۶ نفر در این پژوهش مشارکت نمودند. نمونه‌گیری پژوهش، به روش نظری بود؛ نمونه‌گیری تا رسیدن پژوهشگر به اشباع نظری ادامه یافت. ابزار پژوهش حاضر، مصاحبه‌های عمیق و اکتشافی بود. اعتبار یافته‌ها با روش‌های تطبیق توسط اعضا، بررسی همکار و مصاحبه‌های آزمایشی تعیین شد. جهت تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از کدگذاری باز، محوری و گزینشی استفاده گردید.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها نشان داد ۱۵ عوامل شامل نگرش‌های سازمانی، جنبه‌های فنی، بودجه‌ریزی، حمایت مالی، مسائل ارزشی، جنبه‌های انسانی، رویه‌های علمی، رفتارهای حرفه‌ای، مشتری مداری، ساختار سازمانی، برون سپاری، جنبه‌های اطلاعاتی، همکاری‌های بین‌بخشی، فعالیت‌های رسانه‌ای و توزیع عادلانه مناسب در مدیریت درآمد باشگاه‌های ورزشی خصوصی ایران نقش دارند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: از آنجایی که باشگاه‌های ورزشی خصوصی از درآمدهای دولتی استفاده نمی‌کنند، در این تحقیق برای اولین بار تلاش شد الگوی درآمدزایی پایدار برای باشگاه‌های ورزشی خصوصی ایران با رویکرد تأمین منابع مالی، جهت ارائه راهبردهای تامین منابع مالی پایدار ارائه شود.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۱/۱۲/۰۸

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۲/۰۲/۰۱

- ۲۸ برآورد قیمت بازیکنان حرفه‌ای فوتبال ایران بر مبنای استفاده از شبکه‌های عصبی
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- ۴۴ انگیزه شرکت‌های خصوصی در حمایت مالی: مورد مطالعه لیگ برتر خلیج فارس
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ورزشی
محمدحسن پیمان‌فر؛ مهدی اکبریان
- ۱۱۸ تامین مالی پایدار در باشگاه‌های خصوصی ایران
مهدی محمدیان مقدم؛ رسول نظری

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کسب و کار

نشریه فصلنامه علمی

دانشگاه الزهراء (س)

دوره سه، شماره سه، شماره پیاپی ۷

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در ورزش



طراح جلد:

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کسب و کار

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دوره سه - شماره سه، شماره پیاپی ۷

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