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Sports Business Journal

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of **Alzahra University**

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While we published the first **Sports Business Journal** issue, the Journal has found its position among researchers and reviewers and has been accepted worldwide. Although most visitors to its articles are from other countries, its monthly visits exceed 4,000, half of which are from researchers abroad and five continents. By complying with the necessary form and content standards, we can be more successful in increasing the visibility of the articles and be indexed in more specialized databases. The keywords cloud of the articles also shows that we are still required to comply with the Journal's scope, and we have been able to maintain its specialized position. With the continuous cooperation of dear colleagues and authors, we will be more successful in how we have taken.

Once again, we thank the esteemed vice president for research at **Alzahra University** and our dear colleagues in this field for their support and guidance. We are also grateful to the honourable managers of the Iranian Journals' Commission of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and we hope that they will continue to support the new English language Journals and continue their technical and material support for publishing such publications until the results are achieved. Also, we hope to continue receiving valuable specialized articles towards the publication of technical articles and other activities for the growth of the field and the improvement of the level of writing articles in English.

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The Benefits of Phygital Marketing in Sports Events

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Considering the importance and ever-increasing growth of technology in sports, this study was conducted to identify the benefits of digital marketing in sports events.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative, exploratory approach utilizing a thematic analysis method. The study's research population consisted of experts in sports and modern technologies, and 15 individuals were purposively selected as research participants based on their expertise. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter until theoretical saturation was reached.

Findings: Using thematic analysis in the interviews led to identifying 82 codes, 12 sub-themes, and four main themes. Summarizing and classifying the findings revealed that the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events included "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions." Considering the growing trend of technology in sports, the findings of this research demonstrated that phygital marketing, as one of the key aspects of technology, can lead to significant benefits in sports events.

Originality: This research can be considered one of the first qualitative studies concerning the positive consequences of phygital marketing in sports events on both domestic and international scales.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Sports are an industry, and sports events, besides marketing approaches, have a close and mutual relationship. Due to periodic changes, marketing is a field that is constantly evolving and adapting to new conditions (Celik et al., 2023). These changes will always bring benefits and challenges to themselves, and organizations will be more successful in these changes that take the most advantage of the changes and adopt the best coping strategies. In today's rapidly evolving marketplace, one of the most significant marketing challenges is ensuring a seamless and cohesive customer experience across physical and digital channels. With the increasing prevalence of hybrid environments, where physical and digital elements coexist and interact simultaneously, marketers must find innovative ways to balance the unique demands of both worlds (Belghiti et al., 2018).

The dawn of the digital age in the 1990s brought about a key change in the world of marketing, as advances in computer and Internet technology reshaped the very foundations of the field. With each emerging technology bringing new opportunities and tools to marketers, the traditional marketing approach gave way to a digital-first strategy that leveraged the potential of digital platforms to transform the customer journey and reach more engaged audiences (Kotler et al., 2021). The dawn of the Internet revolutionized the marketing landscape, obliterating the limitations of distance and time to create unprecedented consumer comfort and demand. In today's fiercely competitive marketplace, businesses are under pressure to adapt to their customers' evolving expectations if they are to gain a competitive edge. One such innovative approach is phygital marketing, a term coined by Momentum, an Australian marketing agency, in 2013. Phygital marketing is a hybrid approach that integrates traditional marketing strategies with digital tactics, leveraging the strengths of both worlds to create a unique and immersive experience for consumers (Van Tichelen, 2019).

Phygital refers to an environment where physical and digital tools are applied simultaneously. Phygital experiences bridge the physical and digital worlds, providing consumers with a unique, holistic experience that builds trust, enhances value, and reduces confusion (Purcareau, 2018). These experiences are pertinent to next-generation technology, offering new opportunities that are unattainable without modern innovations (Hollebeek et al., 2019). With the inevitable rise of digitalization, a new path for consumers has surfaced, presenting a novel and efficient way for businesses to engage, interact, and create value in an increasingly connected world. Thus, in this era of digital transformation, companies must master the art of navigating both the physical and virtual realms. These integrated services have allowed companies to be proactive throughout the customer journey. As technology progresses, the global exchange of knowledge about goods and services and the collective sharing of experiential contact has improved (Kotler et al., 2021).

The turn of the millennium witnessed a significant shift in the marketing landscape as the focus transitioned from purely digital to the phygital realm. This paradigm shift initiated a new era in marketing research (Banik, 2021). Phygital is a term that describes the current period in which the physical, digital, and virtual worlds are intertwined using digital and ICT technologies, along with innovative technologies such as artificial

intelligence (AI) and big data (Huang et al., 2023). Phygital marketing is a modern, hybrid strategy that seamlessly blends traditional and digital marketing tools to create an engaging and interactive experience for the tech-savvy, experience-hungry consumers of the 21st century. Today's customers desire brands that distinguish themselves from the competition by crafting bespoke, emotionally resonant experiences that delight and excite while establishing a deeper, more meaningful connection between brand and consumer (Mamina & Tolstikova, 2020). Whether it's integrating digital elements into the physical realm through technology like augmented reality or transporting the real into the virtual world via tools like virtual shopping, phygital offers a dynamic and innovative approach to marketing that engages consumers on both a tangible and intangible level (Delinikolas et al., 2023). Phygital is a response to the need to adapt to customers' evolving behaviors and needs. In fact, customers of a brand continue to purchase products only when brands can surprise them and adjust to the environment and circumstances in which they live (Dal Colle, 2022). Phygital marketing presents an opportunity to meet the sophisticated and discerning needs of the modern consumer by seamlessly merging the tried-and-true tactics of traditional sales promotion with the innovative and immersive power of digital brand activation, crafting a cohesive and captivating customer journey that bridges the physical and digital realms (Singh et al., 2019).

By implementing phygital marketing strategies, we can offer individuals experiences that can only be delivered through digital tools. Moreover, entrepreneurs stand to gain significantly from embracing the technological revolution by leveraging new tools and techniques to cut costs, streamline inventory management, and uncover deeper consumer insights through data collection (Johnson & Barlow, 2021). Phygital marketing can also enhance customer satisfaction by reducing wait times (Delinikolas et al., 2023). Brands that embrace phygital marketing strategies aim to create unforgettable, unique shopping experiences, distinguishing themselves from the competition and establishing a leadership role in their respective markets (Bevolo & Amati, 2024). Interactive technologies can connect the physical and virtual realms, crafting a seamless, immersive phygital journey for customers (Siregar & Kent, 2019).

Phygital forges a profoundly personalized, interactive, and compelling experience that forges lasting bonds of loyalty between brand and consumer (Van Tichelen, 2019). Phygital marketing offers consumers a revolutionary shopping experience, enabling them to intelligently and intuitively engage with products and tools (Chang & Chen, 2021).

The adoption of innovative technologies in the virtual arena has exceeded the entertainment market and digital games, and this phenomenon in business and learning is still at the beginning of the transformation path (Huang et al., 2023). Digitization has dramatically affected the industry and has contributed to the emergence of new concepts to provide a unique experience for customers (Pangarkar et al., 2022). Digital transformation allows customers to move freely in different virtual channels (Cavalinhos et al., 2021). Environmental features entice customers to engage more actively with their surroundings and allow them to craft a unique, memorable experience that heightens their overall interaction with the environment (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). Phygital marketing transcends traditional boundaries, enabling consumers to inhabit both the

physical and digital realms simultaneously, creating an immersive and unforgettable shopping experience (Banik, 2021).

As an electronic company, Amazon also revealed that it will apply a multi-channel method to accomplish its mission and expand it gradually (Fung & Haddon, 2019). Companies like Nike and Adidas also guide and support their customers by developing a phygital environment and using different applications in their physical centers (Mishra et al., 2023). Digital technologies enable customers to plunge into a world of engrossing, interactive experiences that create indelible emotional moments and memories (Foster & McLelland, 2015).

Phygital elements appear to provide more personalized experiences for individuals, leading to greater loyalty, value creation, and customer-based brand equity (Singh et al., 2019). The rise of digitalization has shaken the foundations of luxury consumerism, fundamentally changing how consumers purchase and engage with high-end products. Consequently, luxury brands must adapt their marketing strategies to maximize the experiential value of the customer journey, blurring the lines between physical and digital realms through "phygital" approaches. In phygital conditions, consumers can search for and gather information about a product or service online, then interact with the physical environment to complete the purchase process (Mishra et al., 2023). Consumer empowerment depends on their trust and confidence in the accuracy and authenticity of information gathered from various online and offline channels (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). Multichannel communication effectively fosters positive customer attitudes and enhances trustworthiness (Heinberg et al., 2018).

Phygital marketing helps to promote the brand and improve the brand image (Kwon & Lennon, 2009), and fosters positive changes in attitude, behavioral intention, perceived risk, word of mouth, satisfaction, and loyalty (Qin et al., 2021). From a business perspective, phygital marketing offers numerous advantages, including cost savings, enhanced customer data capture, diverse purchasing options, and improved shopping experiences (Celik et al., 2023).

The findings of Mele et al.'s study (2024) provided an integrated model for customer experience in the phygital space and revealed the dynamic nature of the phygital environment. A survey by Samat et al. (2023) examined the use of phygital marketing in the context of the Olympic Games and found that phygital marketing can effectively increase brand awareness and interaction with Olympic fans. Delinikolas et al.'s (2024) studies showed that combining physical and digital elements is essential to help audiences get used to immersive media. According to the findings of Celik et al. (2023), the evolution of marketing based on phygital marketing will continue. Bonfanti et al. (2023) believe that the phygital experience may provide a memorable experience that results in more significant customer interaction with the environment. The findings of Mishra et al. (2023) showed that phygital integration impacts consumers' phygital experience by increasing the feeling of power and satisfaction, and it helps retain consumers and leads to long-term relationships with them. Celik et al.'s findings (2023) showed that brand purchase intention, decision-making process, and dissatisfaction/satisfaction issues are raised in traditional marketing, and online reviews based on TAM theory have become essential in digital marketing. Based on the findings of (Van Tichelen, 2019), the

implementation and use of phygital channels can be a promising solution to fill the gap between physical and digital marketing. The research results of [Yuce et al. \(2021\)](#) showed that playing in the phygital space led to a sensory, interactive, pleasurable, and suspenseful experience. [Batat \(2024\)](#) showed that the phygital phenomenon has fluidized customers' journeys from online to offline and vice versa and responds to their tangible (quality needs) and intangible (emotional needs) needs according to consumers' values. The study of [Hyun et al. \(2024\)](#) revealed that emotional appeal, web design, and customer service in the phygital space positively affected customer-oriented brand equity and positively contributed to satisfaction and repurchase intention.

According to the literature review, the research on the phygital setting was primarily descriptive ([Shi et al., 2020](#)). Because phygital is a new concept, previous authors have defined it using relevant terms like omni-channel and multi-channel integration ([Batat, 2019](#)). Although the application of the phygital phenomenon is used primarily in business, this phenomenon lacks an academic conceptualization. The current studies explain this term according to the approach of the marketing domain, where phygital is mainly used in multi-channel, cross-channel, or omni-channel approaches. This narrow view of phygital marketing understates its full potential and undersells its ability to revolutionize customer experiences ([Batat, 2024](#)). [Del Vecchio et al. \(2023\)](#) pointed out that the studies published in the field of phygital lack coherence and a clear and specific concept, and therefore, the study of this concept in different fields can help to clarify this concept and coherence in definitions. Since creating phygital experiences for customers has become a "main priority" for marketing researchers and businesses ([Batat, 2024](#)), studying the dimensions of applying this marketing approach in sports events is considered a critical necessity for the future of sports.

Managing the customer experience requires a multi-faceted marketing approach that involves analyzing customer data, prioritizing marketing initiatives, deploying resources, monitoring performance, disseminating brand messaging, and designing visually engaging materials that align with customer needs and preferences ([Jacob et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, phygital marketing can be defined as one of the key tools for enhancing the customer experience in sports, providing them with a more profound and exciting experience of sporting events. In today's market, consumers are seeking experiences in mixed phygital environments rather than simply searching for products. This shift forces companies to move from a product-oriented model to a more experience-focused mindset by revising their marketing methods ([Batat, 2024](#)). Consequently, paying attention to these capacities in sports and sports events as an attractive and growing industry becomes essential. Given that customers' needs and expectations are constantly evolving ([Bonfanti & Yfantidou, 2021](#)), sports managers and marketers must carefully monitor these expectations among sports fans and spectators at various events, anticipating the necessary strategies to implement crucial and ongoing changes. A review of the research literature indicates that many marketing researchers believe that academic exploration of customer experience management in the phygital realm is minimal ([Klaus, 2024](#)). Since the implications of the combined phygital marketing approach remain largely unexplored, studying the potential benefits of phygital marketing at sports events can provide a clearer understanding of the long-term effects of this marketing strategy in the sports industry.

Therefore, recognizing the importance and necessity of phygital marketing in sports, this research aims to identify the benefits of phygital marketing within sports events.

2. Methodology

In This research was a qualitative-exploratory study that adopted an interpretive-constructivist approach and used thematic analysis. It is considered applied research and was conducted from March to June 2023. In the current study, we conducted [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis model for content analysis. The research population consisted of specialists and experts in sports and emerging technologies. Fifteen experts were purposively selected as research participants based on research inclusion criteria. Participants were selected based on their research and educational and executive backgrounds in technology and sports. Participants were selected using the theoretical sampling method until reaching the theoretical saturation stage. Experience and background in conducting research and education relevant to the marketing field in sports events and mastery of theoretical foundations in new technologies were considered when selecting the participants. A semi-structured interview method was used in the research process, which involved direct face-to-face and virtual interviews through social media. Interviews were conducted over a duration ranging from 20 to 45 minutes, with an average duration of 28 minutes. To guide the interview flow, a central question was used based on the title and primary purpose of the research. The main question guiding the interview flow was: "What are the positive consequences of using the phygital marketing environment for sports events?". According to the answer given to this question, other questions were raised to extract the benefits and advantages of phygital marketing in sports events. The study used [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-stage model for data analysis. The first stage involved becoming familiar with the data by reviewing the interviews. Then, initial coding was performed based on the main research question in the second stage. The third stage involved searching for central themes.

After identifying the main themes, the fourth stage involved a more accurate review of these themes, with several rounds of assessment and expert consultation leading to their classification and naming. In the fifth stage, the themes were clearly defined and titled. Finally, the sixth stage focused on interpreting the themes in relation to the main research question. Reliability, or trustworthiness, was used to evaluate the quality of qualitative findings based on four interrelated criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability ([Guba & Lincoln, 2005](#)). Credibility pertains to the internal validity of qualitative studies, and methods such as utilizing multiple data sources, analysts, and techniques were recommended to enhance it—all of which were considered in this study. Dependability signifies the ability to trace the source of the data, its collection methods, and its application within a specific study. One way to bolster the reliability of the findings is through member checking, wherein the researcher reconciles their assumptions with one or more individuals knowledgeable about the subject being investigated. Member checking was integral to the data collection process, validating both the accuracy of the data and the researcher's interpretations as they developed. In this study, the feedback from two interviewees and the research team was used to refine the data and results at various

stages of the analysis. Additionally, re-testing can also be a crucial step in validating this study's findings. The transferability of the research results reflects their generalizability to other similar groups and contexts. By extracting and presenting the most comprehensive findings possible, the study aims to enhance this aspect of validity; in this case, by reviewing numerous interviews and gathering diverse and non-redundant content, an effort was made to adhere to this recommendation. The research findings can be confirmed if others can follow the researcher's methodology and process. This study also endeavors to present the various stages of the research with maximum detail to address this concern.

3. Results

The thematic analysis approach of [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) was conducted to analyze the research data. Based on this, in the first step, the raw data related to the interviews were reviewed several times to get a complete knowledge of the raw data in the first stage. The second stage started with the initial coding to ensure that the data was carefully analyzed at this stage. At this stage, the primary codes were extracted based on the main research question in the form of 82 codes. After coding the data, the search was started to explore the main themes and possible sub-themes. Therefore, the codes were analyzed at this stage, and the codes with more semantic affinity were classified under a central theme. The themes in this stage include the major organized concepts ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions" (four main themes). In the fourth stage, after different revisions and applying experts' opinions, the classification and naming of the main themes were ensured. By conducting several detailed revisions, the sub-themes relevant to each central theme were identified at this stage. By re-examining the codes and conforming to the main themes, sub-themes (12 sub-themes) were identified. At this stage, the sub-themes were extracted according to their semantic and conceptual affinity ([Table 1](#)). In the fifth stage, the themes were defined and labeled as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Codes, sub-themes, and central themes.

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
Event brand development	Brand awareness (9 codes)	P7, P8, P13, P10	• Gaining more information about events
		P3, P9, P12, P14	• Receiving more accurate information about clubs
		P5, P8, P11, P15	• Becoming more familiar with favorite sports
		P1, P6, P7, P13, P14	• Getting up-to-date and timely information
		P2, P4, P9	• Identifying favorite athletes better
		P2, P6, P8, P12	• Understanding better where events take place
		P3, P4, P7, P9	• Receiving news from various sources
		P5, P7, P14, P15	• Recognizing club logos better
		P5, P9, P10, P14	• Increased awareness of sponsors in sports

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
Deeper experience	Brand image (7 codes)	P2, P3, P7, P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive mindset towards the event
		P3, P6, P8, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receiving memorable images from events
		P8, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive image of events
		P9, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive mental image of sporting competitions
		P10, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagining exciting images in the mind
		P3, P4, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not forgetting events and events around them
		P6, P8, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique and memorable image
	Brand loyalty (7 codes)	P2, P3, P8, P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becoming attached to events
		P6, P7, P10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to favorite clubs and events
		P7, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returning to events
		P1, P8, P10, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repurchasing event tickets
		P3, P9, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging others to attend events
		P2, P5, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More follow-up of events
		P3, P4, P8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommending events to others
	Brand identity (7 codes)	P4, P12, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a distinct identity for the event
		P8, P9, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiating the event from similar events
		P5, P9, P10, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiation from competitors
		P1, P9, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the full dimensions and nature of events
		P1, P6, P11, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaining a more real understanding of events
		P2, P4, P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the details and nuances of events
		P3, P5, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closeness of identity with sports events
	Sport experience (6 codes)	P6, P7, P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater sense of closeness to athletes
		P1, P5, P11, P12, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A more colorful experience of being present at events
		P4, P5, P9, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deeper sports experiences at events
		P2, P6, P10, P12, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater sense of participation in the flow of organizing events
		P2, P7, P11, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reduced physical distance between fans and members of sports events
		P5, P6, P9, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More and better engagement with members of sports events
	Non-sport experience (5 codes)	P3, P4, P9, P12, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deeper understanding of the Phenomena around sport events
P2, P5, P8, P9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater involvement with side events 	
P11, P13, P14		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater involvement with event marketing activities 	
P5, P7, P9, P10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater involvement with event sponsors 	

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes		
Service quality	Easy access (6 codes)	P1, P3, P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper personal and social experiences. • Easy ticket purchase 		
		P1, P6, P7, P13, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated product purchase 		
		P8, P9, P11, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to essential needs 		
		P3, P4, P6, P7, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy chair selection 		
		P1, P5, P4, P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to news and information related to the event 		
		P5, P8, P11, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to athletes and members of sporting events 		
		P3, P9, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of physical and virtual games 		
		P2, P3, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased appeal of events 		
		P1, P4, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More enjoyment from events 		
		P10, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater diversity in entertainment at events 		
	Entertainment and excitement (8 codes)	P7, P10, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More entertainment on event days 		
		P1, P3, P6, P11, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater excitement at events 		
		P8, P11, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities for attendance and participation 		
		P2, P9, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wider variety of engaging and exciting games 		
		P7, P9, P10, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better guidance to places 		
		P5, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating responsiveness to expectations 		
		P9, P13, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of pre-event services 		
	Better support (7 codes)	P6, P7, P10, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of post-event services 		
		P1, P10, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster review of complaints and problems 		
		P2, P8, P9, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster provision of services 		
		P5, P11, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster provision of information and data related to the event 		
		Efficient interactions	Interaction with fans (7 codes)	P1, P9, P10, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting familiar with other fans
				P2, P6, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing more communication with the fans
P11, P13, P14				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer communication with the fans 	
P3, P7, P9, P10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher cohesion and coordination of the fans 				
P8, P10, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better management of fan bases 				
P1, P2, P10, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of fan bases 				
P4, P9, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know more about the fan community 				
Interaction with managers (6 codes)	P3, P5, P11, P13		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility of remote communication with managers 		
	P5, P6, P8, P11		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer communication with managers 		
	P7, P12, P13, P15		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication with managers on a virtual platform 		

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
		P1, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating multi-channel ways to communicate with managers
		P1, P9, P10, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better communication channels with managers
		P4, P5, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing the prompt feedback from managers
		P10, P12, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visibility of financial supporters and sports marketers
		P3, P4, P9, P10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better visibility of financial supporters and sports marketers
		P2, P5, P6, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-channel interaction with financial supporters and sports marketers
	Interaction with sponsors and marketers (7 codes)	P9, P10, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased attention to financial supporters and sports marketers
		P3, P3, P9, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better communication with financial supporters and sports marketers
		P1, P2, P5, P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More support from financial supporters and sports marketers
		P2, P6, P9, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More purchases from sponsors
4 main themes	12 sub-themes		82 codes

After examining the content of the interviews, four major themes and several sub-themes were explored. The first theme was “Event brand development.” The importance of this theme is evident in the following statements by P3:

"By applying the phygital tools in sports events, the fans and spectators will have this opportunity to get more accurate information about different issues around the clubs, events, and athletes. This helps them to be more updated and have a pleasant image of the event".

The second theme was “Deeper experience”. The significance of this theme is evident in the following statements by P12:

"The fans and spectators enjoy attending the match with their friends. They can experience deeper excitement by experiencing virtual tools besides physical ones."

The next theme was “Service quality”. The following statements by P11 reinforce this claim:

"Applying both virtual and physical tools facilitate responsiveness to attendees' expectations because this environment is faster and more flexible."

The fourth theme was “Efficient interactions”. P9 expressed his view about this theme as follows:

"Phygital environment allows remote communication with managers, fans, and other spectators. This environment helps individuals have closer interactions".

The findings in Table One have been illustrated in the following graphic model (Figure 1).

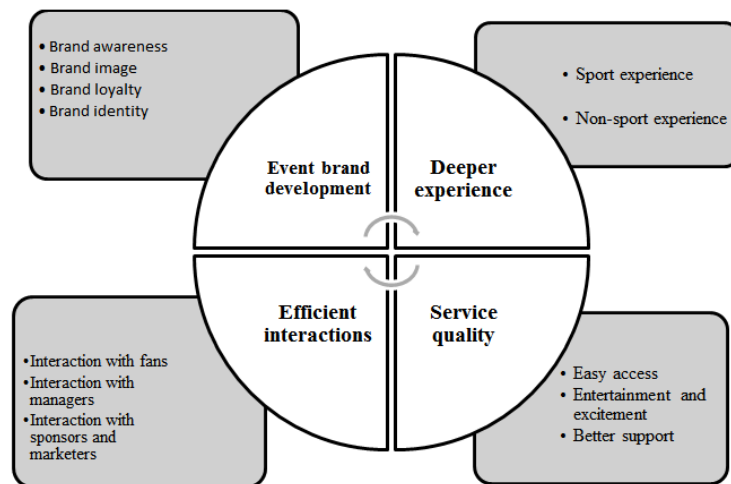


Figure 1. The model of the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events.

Figure 1 represents the research model based on the thematic data analysis, including four main themes and 12 sub-themes as the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This research was conducted to identify the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events. This research can be considered one of the first qualitative research conducted about the positive consequences of phygital marketing in sports events on the domestic and international scale. The findings revealed that the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events included "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions." Considering the growing trend of technology in sports, the findings of this research demonstrated that phygital marketing, one of the key samples of technology, can lead to the creation of significant benefits in sports events.

- **Event brand development:** Brand development of sports events was one of the key advantages of phygital marketing in the sport setting. Phygital marketing combines physical and digital experiences and can influence brand development. Samat et al. (2023) found that phygital marketing in Olympic Games can effectively increase brand awareness and interaction with Olympic fans. Phygital marketing helps to promote the brand and influence the consumers' behavior and attitude. The phygital elements offer personal

- experiences for buyers and lead to increased store interaction, loyalty, value creation, customer engagement, and customer-based brand equity (Singh et al., 2019). Hyun et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotional appeal, web design, and customer service in the physical space positively affected customer-oriented brand equity and positively contributed to satisfaction and repurchase intention. Digitalization plays a critical role in consumers' shopping behavior, and brands attempt to elevate the value experienced by customers via "phygital" marketing (Hyun et al., 2024). Phygital marketing can also increase customer satisfaction by reducing waiting time (Delinikolas et al., 2023). By integrating physical and digital channels, brands can reach a wider audience and raise awareness of their products or services. Phygital experiences can create a more immersive and engaging customer experience, leading to higher brand loyalty and customer retention. A consistent and well-executed phygital strategy can help establish a unique brand identity and differentiate a brand from its competitors. By blending the physical and digital realms, phygital events can create more engaging, immersive, and memorable experiences for attendees, which can help to reinforce the event brand and make a lasting impression. Phygital events offer opportunities for interactivity, gamification, and personalized content that can keep attendees engaged and involved, developing a sense of community and belonging around the event brand.
- **More profound experiences:** Deeper experiences in sports events were found to be other significant advantages of phygital marketing in a sport setting. Digitization has dramatically affected the industry and has contributed to the emergence of new concepts, such as Phygital, to provide a unique experience for customers (Pangarkar et al., 2022). Phygital helps customers live in the physical and digital environment simultaneously to gain more purchasing experience (Banik, 2021). Through phygital marketing, a variety of experiences involve a combination of physical and digital touch at the same time and in the same place (Belghiti et al., 2018). Consumers in the current age favor brands that distinguish themselves from rivals and offer personal, exciting, and unique experiences that stimulate feelings (Mamina & Tolstikova, 2020). Phygital experiences are a harmonious blend of the physical and digital realms, creating transformative, unique experiences that transcend the limitations of traditional methods (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Companies like Nike and Adidas also guide and support their customers by developing a physical environment and using different applications in their physical centers (Mishra et al., 2023). Digital technologies unlock the gateway to immersive, engaging customer experiences, where the virtual and physical boundaries dissolve, creating a heightened level of entertainment, interaction, and personalization (Foster & McLelland, 2015). Applying phygital marketing strategies may provide consumers with experiences beyond those that can only be provided through digital tools. Phygital experiences can create a more immersive experience for sports fans, blending physical and digital elements to allow them to engage with the event fully. Augmented reality technology can enhance the physical environment,

making it more interactive and engaging for customers. Phygital marketing can help events personalize fans' experiences, creating a deeper connection between the brand and sports fans. Phygital events often offer more opportunities for attendees to engage with the content, each other, and the event in creative and interactive ways. This can include everything from augmented reality exhibits to interactive displays and virtual networking platforms. By leveraging digital technologies, phygital events can offer personalized experiences tailored to individual attendees' preferences and demands. This can help create a more intimate, engaging experience that resonates deeply with attendees.

- **Service quality:** Service quality in sports events was another significant advantage of phygital marketing in a sport setting. [Yuce et al. \(2021\)](#) showed that playing in the phygital space led to a sensory, interactive, pleasurable, and suspenseful experience. Phygital marketing reduces costs, captures consumers' data, offers customers more purchasing options, and enhances the buying experience ([Celik et al., 2023](#)). [Batat \(2024\)](#) stated that the phygital phenomenon responds to their tangible (quality needs) and intangible (emotional needs) needs according to consumers' values. The phygital offers consumers a distinctive experience by providing value and trust while reducing confusion ([Purcarea, 2018](#)). Brands that follow phygital marketing approaches try to present a unique experience to their customers and stay on the cutting edge in the face of fierce competition ([Bevolo & Amati, 2024](#)). The findings of [Mishra et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that phygital integration impacts consumers' phygital experience by increasing the feeling of power and satisfaction, and it helps retain consumers and leads to long-term relationships with them. By integrating physical and digital channels, sports events can provide more responsive and personalized customer service, leading to higher fan satisfaction. Digital tools, besides the physical assets, can streamline processes and make it easier for sports events to deliver efficient and effective service to sports fans. Integrating digital and physical tools can enable the managers of sports events to collect and analyze data more effectively, allowing the personnel to identify opportunities for service improvement. Integrating digital technologies into physical environments, phygital environments can offer more channels for customer service, making it easier for attendees to get help, provide feedback, or engage with event staff in real-time. Digital technologies can automate processes and streamline operations, resulting in faster and more efficient service contributing to a higher quality experience for attendees.
- **Efficient interactions:** According to the findings, efficient interactions in sports events were another significant advantage of phygital marketing in the sports setting. [Bonfanti et al. \(2023\)](#) found that the Phygital experience provides indelible memories that result in more substantial customer interaction with the environment. Interactive technologies bridge the virtual and physical worlds, breaking down barriers and creating a seamless, intuitive phygital journey for customers ([Siregar & Kent, 2019](#)). Phygital marketing offers consumers a new opportunity to buy and intelligently interact with products and tools ([Chang &](#)

Chen, 2021). Environmental features serve as catalysts for enhanced customer participation and interaction, empowering them to co-create unique, memorable experiences that impact their perception of the environment (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). Consumers feel empowered when confident in the data from various online and offline channels (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). Multichannel communication creates positive customer attitudes and increases reliability (Heinberg et al., 2018). The phygital experience transcends the realm of consumer preferences and tastes, instead delving into the psychological underpinnings of modern marketing. The harmonious blend of physical and digital elements shapes consumers' perceptions of products, brands, and values, driving individual interpretations and preferences that can be harnessed to create compelling, lasting experiences. The development of technology has opened the way for the widespread exchange of information about goods and services while sharing the experiences of contacting them. By integrating physical and digital channels, sports events can make it easier for fans and spectators to interact with other parts of the event, reducing the time and effort required to get information or receive assistance. Digital tools such as chatbots and self-service portals can enable fans and spectators to access information and resolve issues independently without direct interaction with a customer service representative.

Marketing has experienced a seismic shift in recent years, driven by rapid technological advancements, changing consumer behavior, and intense competition. This evolution, which shows no signs of slowing down, presents challenges for managers who must navigate uncertainty, volatility, and unpredictability to reach, engage, and influence today's consumers. In this constantly evolving landscape, businesses must remain agile, adaptable, and responsive, continuously monitoring trends, leveraging new technologies, and developing innovative strategies that resonate with customers and deliver tangible business value. A literature review indicates that many scholars believe academic research on customer experience management in phygital contexts is minimal (Klaus, 2024). While the consequences of the combined approach of phygital marketing remain largely unknown, this study contributes to the field by identifying the potential benefits of phygital marketing in sports events, thereby enhancing the understanding of the long-term implications of this marketing approach in the sports industry. The results of this research empower sports managers and marketers to grasp the significance of phygital marketing in a sports setting and to integrate physical and digital channels to boost revenue generation. Intense competition prompts clubs and sports organizations to rethink their marketing strategies to seize opportunities to reach more fans and to blend online and offline channels as a strategic move to enhance the phygital experience of their stakeholders. Providing exclusive phygital clubhouses that offer personalized, immersive experiences, including VIP access to players and coaches, unique merchandise, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies, can be highly effective. Hosting lives and virtual watch parties that combine real-world social interactions with interactive digital experiences can be crucial in fostering community and fan engagement. Moreover, developing

interactive digital platforms that allow fans to connect with their favorite teams and players, even when they cannot attend the game, through activities like virtual training sessions or video chats enables sports marketers and managers to efficiently leverage the benefits of a phygital environment in sports events.

Future studies can investigate phygital marketing in other sports research fields. In addition, the qualitative analysis used by this study cannot guarantee the generalization of this research's findings. Therefore, an essential way for future research can be to test the proposed framework on larger samples using quantitative methods. Future studies can focus on various phygital tools, such as artificial intelligence systems, etc., in sports on a case-by-case basis. Generation Z fans, consumers who do not see a difference between the virtual and real worlds compared to other generations, can be one of the essential populations for studying the phygital marketing activity dimensions. Concerns related to the privacy and data security of customers and sports fans in the phygital space can also be one of the interesting topics in future studies.

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منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی

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کلیدواژه

بازاریابی دیجیتال
بازاریابی فیزیکی
رویدادهای ورزشی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: با توجه به اهمیت و رشد روزافزون مصادیق تکنولوژی در حوزه ورزش، هدف کلی این تحقیق شناسایی منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی بوده است.

روش: در این مطالعه کیفی و اکتشافی از شیوه تحلیل تماتیک استفاده گردید. جامعه مشارکت‌کنندگان پژوهش عبارت بودند از متخصصان حوزه تکنولوژی‌های نوین و ورزش که متناسب با هدف پژوهش ۱۵ نفر به عنوان شرکت‌کننده و به صورت هدفمند تا مرحله دستیابی به اشباع نظری مصاحبه شدند. به منظور گردآوری داده‌ها یک مصاحبه نیمه ساختارمند انجام شد. جهت ارزیابی پایایی یافته‌های مستخرج از مصاحبه‌ها، محاسبه توافق درون موضوعی در دستور کار قرار گرفت. همچنین جهت ارزیابی کیفیت و روایی یافته‌ها از معیار اعتمادپذیری یا قابلیت اعتماد که در برگزیده چهار معیار جداگانه اما به هم مرتبط می‌باشد (باورپذیری، اطمینان‌پذیری، انتقال‌پذیری و تأییدپذیری)، استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: در تحلیل‌های انجام شده، ۸۲ کد، ۱۲ مؤلفه فرعی و چهار مؤلفه اصلی شناسایی شدند. تجمیع و طبقه‌بندی یافته‌ها نشان داد که منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی عبارتند از: "توسعه برند رویداد"، "تجارب عمیق‌تر"، "کیفیت خدمات"، و "تعاملات اثربخش". با توجه به ظهور و توسعه مصادیق فناوری در ورزش، یافته‌های این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که فیجیتال مارکتینگ به عنوان یکی از مصادیق تکنولوژی می‌تواند منجر به ایجاد مزایای قابل‌توجهی در رویدادهای ورزشی شود.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این تحقیق را می‌توان یکی از اولین مطالعات کیفی دانست که در رابطه با پیامدهای مثبت بازاریابی فیجیتال در رویدادهای ورزشی در مقیاس داخلی و بین‌المللی انجام شده است.

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Structural Challenges of Attracting and Retaining Sponsorship in Professional Sports

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The current research aimed to identify and prioritize the structural challenges of attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports in Iran.

Methodology: The research employed a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques through thematic analysis. The statistical population comprised experts in the sports sector, including presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, marketing managers of federations, and managers and deputy ministers. A purposeful sampling method was utilized, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 participants until theoretical saturation was reached. The coding technique and NVIVO software were used for data analysis. Following the identification and ranking of challenges, an AHP questionnaire was designed and distributed to 16 experts in the sports and marketing industry.

Findings: The results indicated that structural challenges to attracting sponsors in professional sports were identified across six themes: the marketing literacy of managers and human resources, strategic thinking, inefficiencies in the financial system and legal issues, the need for quick adaptation to changes, university positioning and research, as well as the role of politics and government. Additionally, structural challenges in maintaining sponsors in professional sports were identified across seven themes: the lack of marketing focus in organizational structure, branding and performance of notable teams and players, public relations and infrastructure, appointments and strategic thinking, inefficiencies in the financial system and legal issues, monitoring and evaluation systems, and again the role of politics and government. These challenges were prioritized using the AHP method. The findings of this research can help managers recognize their shortcomings and inappropriate actions regarding attracting and retaining financial sponsors in professional sports, allowing them to implement practical solutions and strategies to tackle these challenges.

Originality: This study is the first to explicitly identify the structural challenges of attracting and retaining financial sponsors in professional sports in Iran. Additionally, it examines and assesses the significance of each identified structural challenge.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Sports is one of the most popular social phenomena of the present era, and it attracts the attention of different sections of society. This broad and diverse audience has caused commercial and industrial organizations to become interested in using competitions and sports organizations to introduce their goods and services. This interest provides a platform for a win-win relationship between commercial and industrial companies, clubs, and organized activities that are graded and targeted to earn money to develop economic and social values" (Ehsani et al., 2013). Thus, common characteristics among professional sports include large fan bases, widespread appeal, and extensive media coverage (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). On the other hand, sponsorship has been described as the financial backbone of many sports properties and can be the central element in the image of an event. In North America, an unsponsored sporting event is often viewed as a secondary event of minor importance (Lamont & Dowell, 2008). Therefore, obtaining financial support is one of the most essential tasks of every sports manager.

Due to the attractiveness of sports as well as the many financial problems in sports, a process has emerged that sports and other fields create a win-win relationship for mutual benefit, one of these fields being the economy; So that sports and economy interact with each other and governments and private companies can benefit from many resources by investing in sports (Reghbati et al., 2019). The importance of professional sports is such that in some research, it has been proven that success in professional sports has direct effects on people's tendency towards leisure sports (Reghbati et al., 2019).

A professional sport is a sport that is governed and managed by its private trustees, i.e., sports clubs. Professional sports organizations can undertake the development and promotion of team or individual sports or both along with their professional goals. In professional sports, athletes receive money in exchange for participating in training programs and sports competitions; it is used as living expenses and other things. Professional sports mean sports activities that financially support the people involved (Reghbati et al., 2019).

Since, according to the definition, professional sports are "sporting and organized activities that are performed in a ranked and targeted manner, to earn money for the development of economic and social values" (Ehsani et al., 2013) on the other hand, standard features among professional sports include large fan bases, wide demand, and extensive media coverage (Greenhalgh et al., 2011), so sponsorship as the financial backbone of many features Sport is described and can be the central element in the image of an event. In North America, an unsponsored sporting event is often viewed as a secondary event of minor importance (Lamont & Dowell, 2008). Therefore, obtaining financial support is one of the most essential tasks of every sports manager.

Sports sponsorships effectively generate significant income for sports clubs and leagues (Koronios et al., 2020). According to information from the Global Advertising Research Center (Handley, 2018), companies paid \$65.8 billion internationally in sponsorship deals in 2018, with the most significant portion of assets spent on sports. In addition, according to the forecasts of the International Sports Marketing Agency, the global sports sponsorship market is expected to reach 86.60 billion dollars (Matthew,

2020). Therefore, companies follow specific reasons and goals to support the sports or other sectors. If the sports managers prepare the ground for this work, the sports sector will experience extraordinary growth with the support of these companies. Undoubtedly, developing and promoting sports disciplines in a general way, as well as championships, requires investment and financial resources other than allocated government credits. For this purpose, financial sponsors play a key role, and finding structural challenges to attract and maintain financial sponsors to invest in professional sports is one of the main goals of the country's sports organizations. Studies show that investing in sports and implementing planned strategies has not had a favorable trend in physical education and sports in the country (Emami et al., 2020); For example, governments and officials have started sports projects at different times, the basis of which may not be correct, and every official introduces the existence of such projects as the legacy of his previous government. The lack of investment in sports and sports facilities in Iran is undeniable (Askarzadeh & Heydarinezhad, 2012). The available evidence confirms the alarming situation in the country. One of the most fundamental ways to overcome stagnation and growth in this situation is to attract financial resources. However, achieving the desired results in this field requires extensive planning based on scientific research and adapting the programs to the basic needs of the studied society (Sadeghipour et al., 2015).

Therefore, considering the key role of financial sponsors, identifying structural challenges to attract and retain these sponsors for investment in professional sports is one of the primary goals for sports organizations in the country. The continuous growth of global sponsorship spending in recent years highlights the increasing importance of sponsorship as a communication tool within corporate marketing. Given its rising economic significance, sports sponsorship is viewed as a strategic marketing decision that necessitates careful planning (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). Since sponsorship is an undeniable aspect of organizations' marketing strategies, its potential as a sustainable competitive advantage is often examined (Hino & Takeda, 2020). Conversely, sponsorship is a vital component of marketing strategy and constitutes a significant portion of the marketing budgets for organizations that engage in large-scale sponsorship. Thus, sponsoring organizations expect a return on their investments. Due to managerial pressure to justify these costs, modern financial sponsors increasingly require effective functional and strategic planning, implementation, and assessment (Choi, 2006; Stotlar, 2012). Developing effective sponsorship strategies is a critical task closely related to broader marketing strategies, and managers must creatively integrate the sponsor brand with marketing plans (Bowdin et al., 2011). Additionally, the environmental factors organizations face have compelled managers to systematically analyze their surroundings and evaluate the strategic direction the organization should pursue. As a result, organizations adhere to a strategic approach across all their economic sectors. However, to compare the relative success of the strategies employed by different organizations, it's essential to establish a framework that captures significant changes in their operating environments (Berrett & Slack, 2001). Therefore, managers must evaluate their organization's strategic path to ensure alignment with the overall goals prior to any action (Dolphin, 2003).

One of the problems related to attracting financial sponsors in our country's sports, Iran, is the desire of big companies and capitalists to support events with more spectators and higher turnover. In this regard, financial sponsors are one of the sources of income in the country's professional sports, which brings the most income for the country's sports organizations and clubs. Financial support of sports, especially professional sports, is a debate that has been of interest for many years, and its importance is increasing daily. It is evident that the cycle of capital, sponsors, and sports, if they come together with positive and principled interaction, will cause the growth and expansion of each other, and its consequences will involve different parts of the society. Most importantly, it will cause the development of the country's sports, ultimately leading to job creation (Besharati et al., 2023).

Based on the material, the significance of financial support for sports teams and organizations is evident. The primary characteristic of professional sports today revolves around generating revenue, yet sports clubs have limited means to earn income. Many sports clubs cite the lack of funding and financial resources for their teams' failures. It is essential to examine the structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports, as addressing these issues could enable relevant institutions within the sports industry to create an environment conducive to investment. However, despite the importance and role of financial sponsors in the sports sector and considering a long-term approach to this aspect in professional sports, it appears that the influence of financial sponsors on achieving sports objectives has not been sufficiently leveraged in Iran. Therefore, establishing a healthy and suitable environment for attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports is necessary. Companies tend to view sports properties as unique ventures that can fulfill specific goals, and they assess sponsorship opportunities individually. Professional sports can benefit from understanding how potential sponsors evaluate these opportunities. Furthermore, professional sports may offer unique prospects that are not available in other sports contexts (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). Thus, the current research aims to identify and prioritize the structural challenges of attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports in Iran.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted with an exploratory nature to expand the existing knowledge and understanding about the structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports. Therefore, the current research is qualitative in terms of applied purpose and is based on data search, and it was carried out with interpretive theme analysis. Among the types of qualitative research methods, thematic analysis was found suitable for achieving the research objectives because Braun et al. (2016) believe that this method clarifies the individual processes of a particular phenomenon. Thematic analysis is one of the most efficient methods in qualitative analysis. This method is used to identify, analyze, and report the patterns (themes) in the data (several interviews with a text) (Braun et al., 2016). The quantitative part used the Analytical Hierarchy (AHP) method to weigh the structural challenges in attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports.

The statistical population of the research comprised experts in the field of sports, including presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, and marketing managers of federations, as well as managers and deputies from the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the deputy of the Center for Partnerships, Investment, and Sports Economy of the Ministry, and the relevant working group. In this study, a purposeful sampling method was employed to identify the samples. Sampling continued until the theoretical saturation stage was reached, and interviews were conducted with three additional samples to ensure data saturation. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees, categorized by gender, age, and other factors, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the research participants.

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	/Federation Ministry	Years of experiences	Position
P1	Female	45	PhD	Ministry	15	Deputy
P2	Male	54	PhD	Federation	22	Presidency
P3	Male	42	PhD	Federation	10	Secretary
P4	Male	47	PhD	Federation	22	Presidency
P5	Female	46	PhD	Federation	21	Vice President
P6	Female	51	PhD	Federation	24	Vice President
P7	Male	43	PhD	Federation	18	Presidency
P8	Male	42	PhD	Federation	14	Secretary
P9	Female	51	PhD	Federation	25	Presidency
P10	Female	39	PhD	Ministry	16	Manager
P11	Male	41	PhD	Ministry	13	Manager
P12	Male	58	MA	Federation	29	Presidency
P13	Male	47	PhD	Federation	29	Secretary
P14	Male	54	MA	Federation	27	Secretary
P15	Male	40	PhD	Federation	15	Presidency
P16	Male	42	PhD	Federation	11	Secretary
P17	Female	46	MA	Federation	12	Vice President
P18	Male	45	MA	Federation	16	Secretary
P19	Male	46	MA	Ministry	14	Deputy
P20	Male	45	MA	Ministry	10	The responsible expert
P21	Male	48	PhD	Federation	28	Presidency
P22	Male	44	PhD	Federation	12	Manager
P23	Male	48	PhD	Federation	29	Manager
P24	Male	40	PhD	Federation	10	Manager

In this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 people. The interview was conducted in person at each participant's workplace, some at the venue of the election meeting of the heads of the committees, and some by phone. The interviews were conducted during 10 months at the end of 1401 (February and early March) and the first 8 months of 1402 (April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November).

In the first part of the research, after conducting the interviews during the 10 months, the data analysis indicated that no new data was added to the previous data because a high percentage of the data extracted from the last interviews was repeated. Therefore, after conducting these interviews and reaching theoretical saturation, the interviews were

ended. Also, in the quantitative part of the research, the AHP researcher's questionnaire, from the first qualitative part, was used to prioritize the structural challenges of attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports, and it was given to 16 experts in the sports and marketing industry.

Data analysis, using coding techniques and NVIVO version 10 software, categorizes data. First, the data are coded manually, and then the codes are recorded in NVIVO qualitative data analysis software for organizational purposes. To ensure reliability and transferability (validity), conditions are first provided for the research to be collaborative. At the same time, some participants are helped in analyzing and interpreting the data. Then, the members implement three basic actions.

Re-coding by the researcher: After coding each interview for a week, the researcher re-coded the data. This research's retest reliability was 81%, which is more than 60%. Thus, the reliability of the codings is confirmed.

NVIVO software was used for data analysis. Creswell (2014) considers using qualitative data analysis software one way to achieve reliability in qualitative research.

Finally, William Scutt's formula was used to gain more confidence and determine reliability (Pandit, 1996). For this purpose, 10% of interviews along with operational definitions were given to another researcher for coding. Coding categories, subcategories, and indicators was done according to the guidelines (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The percentage of agreement between two coders was calculated using Scott's reliability coefficient. Since the Scott reliability coefficient was 81%, this number shows the high reliability of the research because if the agreement coefficient between them is more than 70%, it can be said that there is an agreement between the coders.

3. Results

First, the researcher read the interviews several times to understand the structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors fully. This stage of analysis can be considered inductive (Creswell, 2014), because the researcher is first interested in understanding the statements of the participants and then, based on the research questions, extract codes that can be used. They have more fruitful results in the research process (Delia, 2019) and further, phrases (single words or small collections of several words) were categorized based on semantic units to attach the concepts of codes to them. In the next step, these codes are classified based on themes directly related to the research questions. Then, the obtained categories were re-linked to more abstract codes than the previous step's codes. At this stage, the codes represent the category's content, which helps to remember the reference of the category. To prepare titles and names for the codes, titles that are representative and suitable for their categories in every way. Since the qualitative research process is non-linear, the coding process was repeated many times until, finally, after multi-step coding, extracted codes were obtained in the form of concepts, sub-themes, and main themes. In other words, the initial coding was repeated many times by considering the emphasis and the frequency of their mentions in sub-themes and finally the main themes using a back-and-forth approach until the main and

sub-themes were obtained as described in the following tables. Finally, after multi-step coding, the researcher has listed the extracted codes based on each question as follows:

Table 2. Open, selective, and theoretical coding of structural challenges of attracting sponsorship in professional sports.

Concept	Sub-Category	Main Category
The use of non-sports managers at top management levels	Marketing literacy of managers and human resources	Internal organizational challenges
Failure to use efficient human resources and experts in physical education, especially sports marketing		
Lack of definition of sports marketing specialist in the organizational chart		
Failure to form a marketing committee		
Improper distribution of authority among knowledgeable people in the field of recruitment		
Empowering employees		
Empowering employees		
Failure to adopt new processes to attract supporters	Strategic thinking	
Determine the vision		
Absence of legal requirements to correct and address the problems encountered in the recruitment process	Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	
Lack of transparency in the financial information of clubs, league organization and related federations		
Using general rules in advertising for sports sponsors		
Absence of mandatory rules to attract sponsors		
The ineffectiveness of the rules		
Non-compliance with intellectual property law		
Monopoly in maintaining patronage	The need to develop and quickly deal with changes	External organizational challenges
Use of information technology		
Inadequate conditions of stadiums and stadiums to provide advertisements for supporters		
Lack of development of sports infrastructure in order to hold better competitions		
Increasing organizational identity		
Club brand and reputation		
The challenge of the need to review organizational structures		
The challenge of the need for appropriate mechanisms to deal with rapid changes in the environment of organizations	University position and university research	
Challenges caused by not modifying study methods in the process of selecting a financial sponsor		
Failure to use academic research to develop sponsor attraction		
The need to invest more in marketing research	Politics and the role of the government	
Improper selection and appointment based on relations of managers at high levels		
The financial dependence of the country's professional sports on the public sector		
Challenges caused by the influence of government decisions on professional sports		
The politicization of professional sports		
The country's sports clubs are owned by the government		
Preference of relationships over rules		
Lack of coordination at decision-making levels		

Table 3. Open, selective, and theoretical coding of structural challenges of retaining sponsorship in professional sports.

Concept	Sub-Category	Main Category
Lack of spending for marketing in sports federations	Lack of attention to marketing in the structure	Internal organizational challenges
Absence of marketing specialists in the structure of professional sports		
Failure to form a marketing committee		
Ambush marketing	Branding and performance of famous teams and players	
Invalidity of sponsored sports brand or mark		
Poor performance of teams or famous players	Public relations and infrastructure	
Update and strengthen infrastructure		
Weakness of public relations, website and information and technology centers		
Failure to pay attention to the needs of supporters		
The need for continuous innovation	Appointments and strategic thinking	
Improper selection and appointment of managers at high levels		
Failure to adopt new processes to maintain patrons		
Lack of a suitable and practical strategic plan to maintain the sponsor	Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	
Low percentage of financial exemption in case of financial support		
Lack of flexibility in the financial and economic management structure of the sports field	Monitoring and evaluation system	External organizational challenges
The issue of security in intellectual property rights		
Absence of proper evaluation and control system in two areas of support and sports		
Absence of specific regulations and instructions regarding how to monitor the sponsor's performance		
Failure to establish special administrative organizations in federations in order to monitor the performance of supporters		
Dependence of the country's professional sports on the government sector	Politics and the role of the government	
Mixing politics with professional sports		
Preference of relationships over rules		

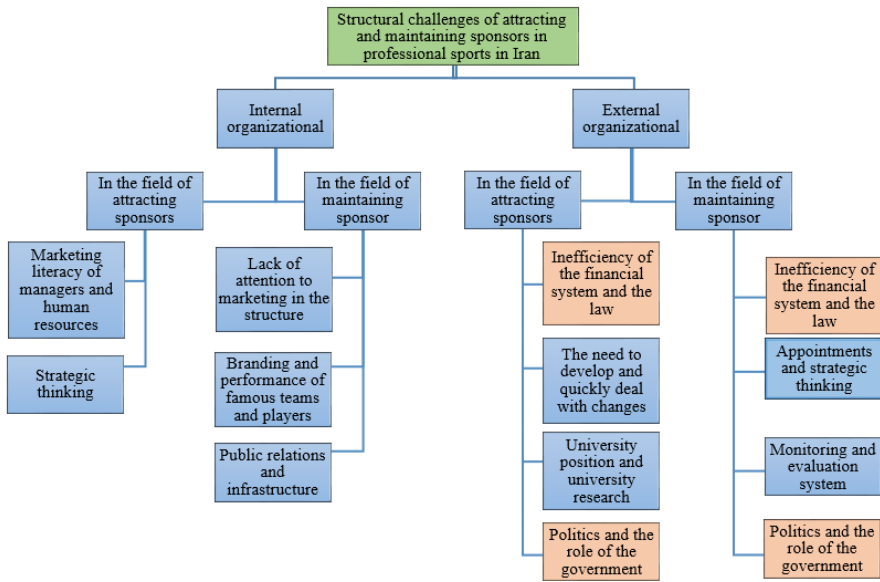


Figure 1. An extractive model of the structural challenges of attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports in Iran.

Finally, after identifying the structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports, they prioritized them separately using the hierarchical analysis method. In the first step of this method, a hierarchical tree was created based on the challenges determined at two levels: the goal and the challenges. Accordingly, the goal—structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports—was prioritized. The second category included the relevant challenges derived from the qualitative research process. In the next step, to determine the weight and priority of each challenge, experts were asked to assess their importance relative to each other through pairwise comparisons. To facilitate this, a questionnaire table was prepared and distributed to the experts, who were asked to make pairwise comparisons and assign a number between 1 and 9 to indicate the importance of each challenge relative to one another. These comparisons reveal the weight of each challenge compared to competing options evaluated in the decision-making process. The completed tables were then collected, and their inconsistency rate was checked. Calculating the inconsistency rate aims to determine whether there is consistency among the paired comparisons. If the inconsistency rate is less than or equal to 0.1, one can say there is acceptable consistency in the pairwise comparisons. Finally, the opinions of the participants were aggregated together.

Table 4. Prioritization of the structural challenges of attracting sponsors in professional sports in Iran.

Structural challenges of attracting financial sponsors in professional sports in Iran	Strategic thinking	Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	The need to develop and quickly deal with changes	Marketing literacy of managers and resources human	University position and university research	Politics and the role of the government	Priorities	final weight
Strategic thinking	1	1/67	3/00	1/29	0/63	0/60	0/201	1
Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	0/60	1	0/75	0/78	0/89	0/78	0/124	6
The need to develop and quickly deal with changes	0/33	1/33	1	0/67	1/40	1/60	0/164	4
Marketing literacy of managers and human resources	0/78	1/14	1/50	1	1/40	0/71	0/165	3
University position and university research	1/60	1/13	0/71	0/71	1	0/78	0/154	5
Politics and the role of the government	1/67	1/29	0/63	1/40	1/29	1	0/191	2
Consistency Ratio (RC) = 0/06								

Table 5. Prioritizing the structural challenges of maintaining sponsorship in professional sports in Iran.

Structural challenges of maintaining financial sponsors in professional sports in Iran	Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	Appointments and strategic thinking	Lack of attention to marketing in the structure	Monitoring and evaluation system	Role of the politics and the government	Branding and performance of famous teams and players	Public relations and infrastructure	Priorities	Final weight
Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	1	0/63	0/50	0/67	0/83	0/67	0/44	0/091	7
Appointments and strategic thinking	1/60	1	0/75	0/56	1/14	0/78	0/67	0/121	5
Lack of attention to marketing in the structure	2/00	1/33	1	0/67	1/29	1/60	0/75	0/163	4
Monitoring and evaluation system	1/50	1/60	1/50	1	1/40	0/86	0/88	0/168	2
Politics and the role of the government	1/20	0/88	0/78	0/71	1	0/78	0/71	0/117	6

Structural challenges of maintaining financial sponsors in professional sports in Iran	Inefficiency of the financial system and the law	Appointments and strategic thinking	Lack of attention to marketing in the structure	Monitoring and evaluation system	Role of the politics and the government	Branding and performance of famous teams and players	Public relations and infrastructure	Priorities	Final weight
Branding and performance of famous teams and players	1/50	1/29	0/63	1/17	1/29	1	1/67	0/167	3
Public relations and infrastructure	2/25	1/50	1/33	1/14	1/40	0/60	1	0/173	1
Consistency Ratio (RC) = 0/01									

4. Discussion and conclusion

The current research aimed to identify and prioritize the structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports in Iran. After conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts in the field of professional sports, the most essential structural challenges of attracting and retaining sponsors in professional sports were identified in the form of two main themes, internal and external. After identification, the challenges were prioritized through a hierarchical analysis process. Analyses related to prioritization were performed on the sub-components of each challenge, and the most important ones in each category of challenges are as follows: The structural challenges of attracting sponsors in professional sports are prioritized by "strategic thinking," with a weight of 0/201. Politicization and the role of the government, "Marketing literacy of managers and human resources," the Necessity of development and rapid coping with changes, "University position and university research, and "Inefficiency of the financial system and law" are ranked second to sixth, respectively, and assigned in this prioritization .

Strategic thinking is a thought process that involves planning and executing effective, targeted actions to achieve long-term goals. This approach consists in analyzing and assessing the current situation, identifying potential solutions, selecting the best option, and implementing it to achieve the desired outcomes, which can significantly attract sponsors in professional sports when applied correctly. Typically, strategic thinking is employed at critical organizational levels, in large businesses, and throughout long-term planning processes. This mindset emphasizes analyzing complex issues, attention to detail, and connecting various factors. As a result, this conclusion aligns with the research conducted by [Cornwell & Kwon \(2020\)](#), who asserted that sports sponsorship is viewed as a strategic marketing decision requiring careful strategic planning due to the growing economic importance of sports. This researcher argues that strategic thinking is often lacking in the management structures of leading sports organizations. [Koronios et al. \(2021\)](#), research has also identified a similar finding.

In major professional sports, the challenges related to politics, the role of government, and its impact on the sports system are intriguing topics. This issue is raised in various ways within the sports field. To address these politicization challenges, several measures are necessary, such as reforming the sports management system, developing sports infrastructure, and enhancing transparency in the financial practices of sports managers. Thus, avoiding politics and the government's role can be considered one of the most critical steps to attract supporters in professional sports. Consequently, this finding from the present research aligns with aspects of the study by (Aliyari et al., 2023).

Marketing literacy in managers and human resources is also critical because marketing plays a vital role in the success of an organization and business development. Marketing literacy refers to skills and knowledge necessary to know customers, market analysis, marketing strategies, marketing communications, and implementation of marketing actions. Therefore, holding marketing literacy training classes for the existing staff is a practical step towards increasing the attraction of sponsors in professional sports. A similar result has been pointed out in the research of Koronios et al. (2021) and Morgan et al. (2020).

Organizations must swiftly adapt and respond to changes. Rapid and frequent shifts occur in the business environment today, significantly impacting organizations' performance and competitiveness. Markets are highly competitive, and fast technological advancements, evolving consumer behavior, market trends, and regulations can intensify this competition. If organizations do not effectively adapt and respond, competitors may strengthen their market positions, leaving the organization behind. The needs and expectations of supporters are also changing. Today's supporters expect organizations to react promptly to their needs and demands. If organizations cannot develop and modify their products and services quickly, supporters may seek out competitors. Market fluctuations can create new opportunities for organizations; however, these opportunities are often fleeting. Organizations that fail to adapt and respond risk missing out on them swiftly. Salimi & Taghavy (2023) have noted similar findings in their research.

Universities also play a key role in providing specialized and experienced human resources in various fields. They provide an environment where students acquire specialized learning and the necessary skills to enter the labor market using available resources and facilities. Also, universities provide an environment for scientific research and innovation. This research can help the development of science and technology and be effective for solving social and industrial problems. This belief was echoed by Koronios et al. (2016), who stated that in addition to the growing interest in sports sponsorship, there is a lack of academic research on the evaluation of sports sponsorships. Also, Sharifi & Dehghan Ghahfarrokhi (2021), in a part of their research, emphasized the need to employ marketing specialists in the Iranian sports scene.

Any country's financial system and law are vital in regulating the economy and society. However, in some cases, we can see deficiencies and inefficiencies in these systems. One of the significant problems in the financial and law system is corruption. Corruption can take many forms, including economic, political, and judicial. These

corruptions can destroy public trust, weaken the legal system, waste public resources, and unjustly change the distribution of wealth and power. In some financial and law systems, lack of transparency and lack of dissemination of sufficient information can lead to problems. This problem can create an environment for corruption and fraud and hinder correct and fair decisions.

Financial and legal regulations can sometimes be quite complex and burdensome. This can create ambiguity regarding individuals' rights and responsibilities, increase costs, and delay legal proceedings. Generally, inefficiencies within the financial and legal framework can result in injustice, inequality, and corruption. There is a pressing need for sociological and political reforms and efforts to improve the economic system and legal structure. These reforms may include enhancing transparency, strengthening supervision and enforcement, simplifying laws, and eliminating discrimination in distributing wealth and power. Moreover, promoting a culture of justice, transparency, and trustworthiness within society can strengthen the financial and legal systems. The findings in this section correspond with some conclusions from [Sharifi & Dehghan Ghahfarokhi \(2021\)](#) and [Morgan et al. \(2020\)](#).

In the structural challenges of maintaining sponsors in professional sports, "public relations and infrastructure" with a relative weight of 0/173 took the first place in hierarchical analysis. The challenges of "monitoring and evaluation system", "branding and performance of famous teams and players", "Not paying attention to marketing in the structure", "Appointments and strategic thinking", "Politicization and the role of the government" and finally, the "inefficiency of the financial system and the law" were ranked second to seventh, respectively.

Public relations and infrastructure play an essential role in professional sports in retaining sponsors. The proper implementation of these two factors can also help attract financial resources. Briefly, media communication and advertising can positively and meaningfully predict the attraction of government resources, private sector sponsors, advertising in matches, broadcasting sports matches, and marketing and introducing services and products. Also, public communication can facilitate the retention of sponsors by promoting sports events and competitions and creating a positive image of sports organizations and their athletes. Therefore, in this context, the support of the media and appropriate advertisements can be significant because the lack of awareness of the effects of sports can be one of the obstacles to the development of sports ([Seyyed Ameri & Mohammad Alegh, 2013](#)). [Firoozi et al. \(2012\)](#) also consider the media's support for the challenges of Iran's medal-winning disciplines of athletics, rowing, and swimming, which aligns with this research's results. Adequate infrastructure for holding competitions and organizing events is essential in maintaining financial sponsors. Infrastructure can provide funding, including government support and private sponsors. In general, coordination between public relations and infrastructure can help attract and retain sponsors in sports.

Monitoring and evaluation also play an essential role in maintaining financial sponsors in sports. Monitoring the performance of sports organizations and projects helps identify strengths and weaknesses. This information can be effective in improving performance and attracting sponsors. Monitoring taxes, managing budgets and

expenses, and securing financial resources are very important. This can ensure the retention of sponsors.

On the other hand, evaluating the quality and impact of sports projects and programs helps to make decisions about financial support. Assessing sponsors' needs and expectations helps to interact effectively with them. This information can be effective in retaining supporters and attracting new ones. Also, statistical analysis using financial ratios and past data can effectively maintain financial sponsors in sports. Therefore, this current research finding aligns with parts of (Morgan et al., 2020).

Branding and performance of well-known teams and players refer to actions undertaken to create and enhance the recognition and value of the team's and players' brand in the minds of the audience and fans. These actions aim to portray the famous team or player as a strong and reliable brand in the sports and entertainment market under the banner of a recognized name. Renowned players can significantly bolster sports tourism. Generally, there is a positive correlation between celebrity player branding and sponsor retention in sports. Promoting personal brands and the ability to attract and retain sponsors can foster the development of the sport and increase sponsorship opportunities. Thus, this finding of the present research aligns with certain studies by (Dehghanpouri et al., 2020).

Suppose there is a lack of attention to marketing and branding in the structure of a team or organization. In that case, it may reduce the recognition and reputation of the team and famous players. Sports marketing is a key factor in the development and commercial success of teams and famous players. Marketing helps fans and audiences draw attention to the renowned team or players. If not, enough marketing is done, and the team or players may face less attention in competition with other competitors and attract fewer fans. The proper marketing can create business opportunities for the team or famous players. For example, cooperation with commercial brands, advertising contracts, and sponsorships can lead to more revenue generation and business growth. Without proper marketing, these business opportunities will not be fully exploited. Without attention to marketing, the brand of the team or players may be less known in the minds of the audience and the market, and as a result, the commercial value will decrease. Famous teams and players usually have high commercial potential. Proper marketing can help them exploit this potential and generate more revenue. But if you ignore marketing, this business potential will not be fully exploited. As a result, it is crucial to pay attention to marketing and branding in the structure of teams and organizations.

Marketing resources and techniques should be carefully considered so the team or famous players can compete strongly and increase their commercial productivity. Marketing plays a crucial role in building and maintaining sponsors. As a strategic process, marketing defines and implements approaches and techniques that help attract and retain sponsors. In general, marketing as a strategic tool can help develop sports and retain sponsors. Similar results have been mentioned in the research of Ferrand & Pagès (1996), Jensen & Cobbs (2014), and Dehghanpouri et al. (2020). So Ferrand & Pagès (1996) have pointed to the low credibility of the sponsored sports sign, and Jensen &

Cobbs (2014) have pointed to the poor performance of teams or well-known players in not expanding the attraction of financial support.

Appointments and strategic thinking within organizations and teams play a critical role in determining the direction and execution of strategies. These factors significantly influence the performance and success of organizations and teams and sponsor retention in professional sports. Strategic appointments of leaders and managers are based on effective planning and strategic insight. Selecting the right managers with the necessary skills to implement strategies can significantly impact the success of organizations and teams. Leaders who demonstrate strategic thinking can communicate innovative visions and new techniques to organizations and teams, promoting sponsor retention in professional sports. A similar finding has been noted in Koronios et al. (2021) research. To navigate structural challenges in the intra-organizational sector, managers must engage in detailed planning and employ appropriate strategies to turn these challenges into opportunities.

Furthermore, managers must address external organizational structural challenges; the organization should maintain enough flexibility to adapt to changes in the needs and expectations of supporters. The organization must respond quickly and make necessary structural adjustments. Decision-making processes within the organization must be transparent and efficient, aiding in timely and effective responses to the needs and expectations of supporters. The organization should be capable of evaluating its performance and identifying necessary improvements for attracting and retaining supporters. Gathering feedback from supporters and establishing constant communication mechanisms can assist in this process.

Additionally, the organizational culture should be designed to include supporters and foster effective communication and collaboration with them. Creating a dynamic and welcoming environment for supporters can help attract and retain them. The organization should strive to build long-term relationships with supporters to ensure their loyalty. This includes ongoing communication, after-sales service, connecting with similar customers, and exploring partnership and collaboration opportunities for sponsors. Therefore, understanding and managing extra-organizational structural challenges can aid the organization in attracting and retaining supporters.

The presence of a financial sponsor is vital for the development of professional sports. In other words, having a financial sponsor is one of the key drivers of professional sports. However, the current shortage of economic resources in sports clubs and organizations is becoming increasingly evident. This issue has led to a growing need for financial support for sports organizations. Therefore, based on the results obtained, managers are encouraged to consider the long-term consequences for their organizations when making marketing decisions, especially regarding the attraction and retention of sponsors. Thoughtful and deliberate decisions can bring people together to achieve shared organizational goals. Additionally, specialized training courses should be offered for managers and employees to enhance marketing literacy, enabling more effective strategies for attracting and retaining sponsors.

Finally, due to the new and essential nature of the structural challenges of attracting and maintaining sponsors in professional sports, the present research should be repeated

in other popular sports fields. Also, the results of the qualitative part of the current research were repeated quantitatively and through a questionnaire at a broader level, and the suitability of the structural equation models for assessing the structural challenges of attracting and retaining financial sponsors in Iranian professional sports was investigated.

5. Limitations and future research

The primary limitation of this research was that some sample members could not participate in the interviews and share their opinions. Although interviewees were assured of confidentiality at the beginning of each interview, various factors impeded their ability to respond fully to the interview questions, which were beyond the researcher's control. Additionally, the limited research conducted in this field presented another limitation. Furthermore, this study encompassed several professional sports areas in Iran, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other fields.

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چالش های ساختاری جذب و حفظ حامی مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای

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چکیده

هدف: هدف از پژوهش حاضر شناسایی و اولویت بندی چالش های ساختاری جذب و حفظ حامی مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای ایران بود.

روش: روش تحقیق از نوع (آمیخته) کیفی و کمی و به صورت تحلیل مضمون بوده و جامعه آماری شامل صاحب نظران حوزه ورزش (رؤسا، نواب رئیس، دبیران و مدیران بازاریابی فدراسیون ها و مدیران و معاونین وزارت) بودند. روش نمونه گیری به صورت هدفمند بود و مصاحبه عمیق با ۲۴ شرکت کننده تا اشباع نظری صورت گرفت. به منظور تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها از تکنیک کدگذاری و نرم افزار ان ویوو استفاده شد. پس از شناسایی چالش ها، با هدف رتبه بندی آنها پرسشنامه AHP طراحی و در اختیار ۱۶ نفر از خبرگان صنعت ورزش و بازاریابی قرار گرفت.

یافته ها: یافته ها نشان داد چالش های ساختاری جهت جذب حامی مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای در ۶ مضمون (سواد بازاریابی مدیران و نیروی انسانی، تفکر راهبردی، ناکارآمدی نظام مالی و قانون، لزوم توسعه یافتگی و مقابله سریع با تغییرات، جایگاه دانشگاه و تحقیقات دانشگاهی، سیاست زدگی و نقش دولت) و چالش های ساختاری جهت حفظ حامی مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای در ۷ مضمون (عدم توجه به بازاریابی در ساختار، برندسازی و عملکرد تیم ها و بازیکنان سرشناس، روابط عمومی و زیرساخت، انتصابات و تفکرات راهبردی، ناکارآمدی نظام مالی و قانون، سیستم نظارت و ارزیابی، سیاست زدگی و نقش دولت) شناسایی و با تکنیک AHP اولویت بندی شدند. نتایج این پژوهش می تواند به مدیران کمک کند تا به اقدامات نامناسب و نقاط ضعف خود در زمینه نحوه جذب و حفظ حامیان مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای پی ببرند و راهکارها و راهبردهای مؤثری جهت به حداقل رساندن تعداد و میزان این چالش ها در دستور کار خود قرار دهند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این مطالعه برای اولین بار و به طور ویژه چالش های ساختاری جذب و حفظ حامیان مالی در ورزش های حرفه ای ایران را شناسایی می کند؛ همچنین میزان اهمیت هر یک از چالش های ساختاری شناسایی شده را بررسی و تعیین می کند.

کلیدواژه

AHP

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تفکر راهبردی

جنبه های حقوقی

روابط عمومی

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Influencing Factors on the Sports Business: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Approach through Championship Sports

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Sports business development is a tool to facilitate sustainable development goals. The research aimed to identify the factors affecting the development of championship sports and their role in promoting the seventeen sustainable development goals.

Methodology: The qualitative research was grounded in an interpretive paradigm and utilized thematic analysis. Using a targeted method, in-depth interviews were conducted with seventeen sports organizations, including universities, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and federations. Analysis was carried out using [Castleberry and Nolen's \(2018\)](#) five-step model, which involves compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. The quality of the findings was validated by calculating the percentage of coding agreement and by establishing the codes through three interview participants.

Findings: Challenges include infrastructural and physical, general, programmatic, financial, economic and business, and attitudinal-cognitive. Basic measures include manpower supply, talent acquisition, culture building, education, and research. Advanced measures include emulating prosperous countries, providing sustainable financial, economic, and business resources, environmental solutions, and creating a professional labor market. Supportive factors include human and media support, which are identified as the study's main sub-themes. The development of championship sports can significantly impact the facilitation of the fourth goal, which includes ensuring equal quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. To promote sustainability in elite sports in Iraq while breaking the cycle of the current system, it is crucial to focus on the essential social processes and basic and advanced stabilization measures. This will help establish a stable framework for elite sports in Iraq, providing positive internal and external functions.

Originality: The innovation of this article focuses on the role of championship sports in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Sports business development refers to policies, processes, and actions combined to create sports opportunities and experiences for all members of society. This definition is linked with other concepts such as public, sports participation, championship, professional, and elite sports (Ramzaninejad & Hozhabri, 2017). Sherry et al. (2024) relate sport development to various sports experiences and introduce a vast and potentially complex field, including policy making, excellence through sport, sport development, future models of sport delivery, and sport marketing. It is professional and sports participation. Elite sport versus mass participation in sport are the two dominant distinct approaches to sport development in different countries (Chapman et al., 2024).

Sport encompasses so many dimensions of experience involving politics, gender, and class that this is a “resonant moment”, as sport seduces the modern world for cultural historians. The economic (trade, foreign direct investment) and reputational (tourism, national perception, brand, influence) effects on a country for hosting a sporting ‘Mega-Event’ like the International Olympic Committee’s Olympic Games (Summer and Winter) and the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. These events have a positive correlation with key economic indicators in Exports (% of GDP), GDP Growth (annual %), and Domestic Currency Exchange Rate as well as indicators related to a country’s global appeal and influence as in tourism (# of arrivals), Nation Brand (Perception survey), Country Index (Societal survey), and Soft Power Index (Influence, finance survey), all else equal (Claire, 2024). Even in the three Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, which have the highest participation rate in public sports, public sports are considered less critical than elite sports, and access to public sports is difficult for everyone due to the dominance of competitive sports over sports organizations (Skelly et al., 2018).

Today, championship and professional sports play a significant role in the sports industry worldwide, substantially influencing countries' economic, business, social, and cultural development (Rezaei et al., 2019). Championship sports are organized competitive activities that focus on skill-oriented physical performance and take place annually under the oversight of a governing body. A champion is determined after one competition season (Smith, 2014). Characteristics of championship sports include high-level physical competition, set governance, uniform rules established by prominent institutions like FIFA, and the presence of a regular season (Boillat & Poli, 2014). International championship sports refer to competitive events and leagues where national teams or clubs from various countries compete under the management of international federations to ascertain the world champion. The teams or clubs with the most significant accomplishments are crowned champions.

Furthermore, the involvement of nations on the global stage gives this type of competition distinct geopolitical significance and cultural relevance (Jiang & Whigham, 2024; Maguire, 2011). Overall, championship sports represent a crucial element in the development of modern nation-states, intertwining with the sports business development process and the training of elite athletes (Alizadeh et al., 2020). At the governance level, championship sports are often viewed as a valuable resource for governments to achieve

various sporting and non-sporting objectives. The rationale behind substantial government and institutional investments in international championships and professional sports is that success in this arena will yield positive outcomes, such as enhanced social participation in sports and increased international prestige (Haut et al., 2017). Examining the link between sustainable development and sports reveals a connection between these concepts under the headings of sports for sustainable development and sustainable sports. Sport for sustainable development, or sustainable development through sport, refers to the intentional use of sports to positively impact public health, support socialization among children, youth, and adults, foster social inclusion for disadvantaged individuals, promote economic and business growth for regions and states, and strengthen intercultural exchange and conflict resolution. In essence, sports promote peace, respect, health, and social education and empower women and youth, highlighting their essential role in sustainable development (Millington et al., 2022). The paradigm of sports for sustainable development gained prominence following the adoption of the United Nations resolution in 2003 titled "Sports: An Outstanding and Powerful Tool for Development in the International Community" (Mwaanga, 2013). Subsequent initiatives, such as the Declaration from the Conference on Sport and Development in Meglingen, Switzerland, in 2003, and the designation of 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education by the United Nations, have heightened awareness of sustainable development through sport as a philosophy aimed at fostering positive advancements (Burnett, 2015).

Regarding the emergence of the second paradigm, i.e., sustainable sports, Escher (2020) states that the growing concern about sustainable development among researchers and practitioners who deal with sports has led to an increase in articles in which the terms sustainable development or sustainability and sports appear together. Also, over time, there are more subject areas in which these terms are combined, and new terms emerge. One of these terms is sustainable development in sports, which Lis & Tomanek (2020) proposed as an emerging field of research. The first paradigm, i.e., sports, is more known for sustainable development than the sustainable development of sports. The increasing awareness of the role and importance of sports in sustainable development has led to the implementation several programs to advance the goals of sustainable development through sports. One of these programs is being carried out under the title of Sports for Sustainable Development with the cooperation and financing of the Erasmus+ program of the European Union. This program shows how sports can contribute to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Also, the said program is not specific to the European Union, and its partners include the European Youth Sports NGO, Japan's Kokushikan Educational Foundation, the Hungarian University of Physical Education, Senegal's Sports and Olympic Committee, and France's Sports and Citizenship Organization. According to the program's instructions, as mentioned earlier, 17 sustainable development goals, also known as global goals, were approved by all UN member states in 2015. These new global goals are based on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals, which seek to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone the 17 goals mentioned seek to develop measures to face the significant challenges that the world will face by 2030; The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are presented in Figure 1 (Engsyouth et al., 2015).

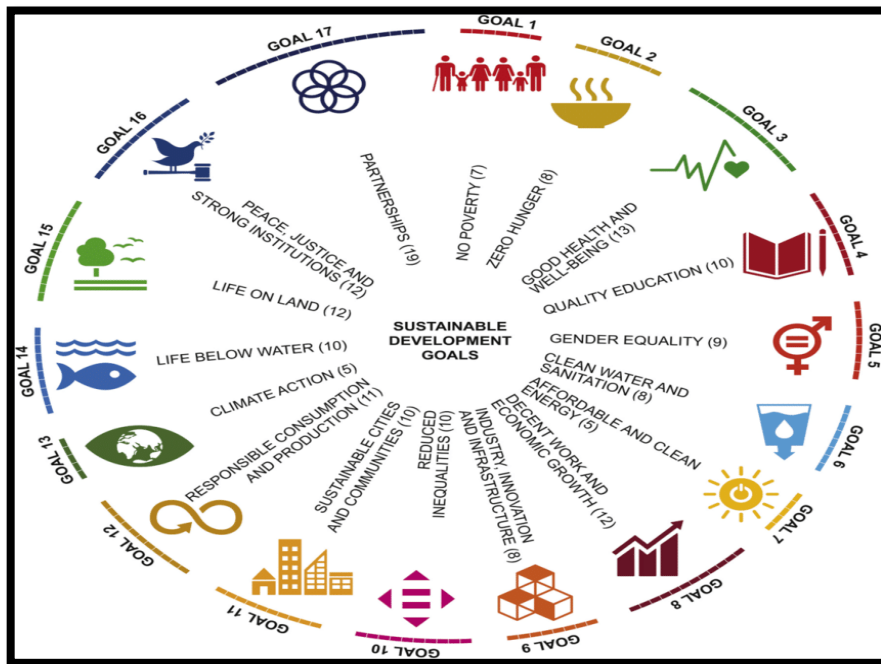


Figure 1. 17 Goals of sustainable development (Lafont-Torio et al., 2024).

Researchers have attempted to conceptualize the relationship between economic development and sustainable development, considering the importance of sports discourse for sustainable development (Goal 8). For instance, [Trail & McCullough \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that involvement in sports campaigns can contribute to environmental sustainability and encourage sustainable attitudes and behaviors. [Orr et al. \(2020\)](#) revealed that initiatives such as venue tours, green teams, and living labs that utilize sports to educate on environmental issues can enhance understanding of environmental sustainability. [Nassaji \(2020\)](#) indicated that sports can play a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability by highlighting the significance of cost savings, the importance of political and financial, economic, and business support from the government, and the development of facilities. [Ghorbani & Safari Jafarloo \(2021\)](#) found in a qualitative study of foundational data that the advancement of sports and physical education in Iran can aid in the sustainable development of society through the four dimensions of social, cultural, political, and economic development. In the review study by [Chong et al. \(2022\)](#), sports were introduced as a cost-effective strategy to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. Nevertheless, the review of research revealed that the efforts made in this area so far have primarily operated at the micro level, and the impacts of sports have not reached the level of macro development within societies. Most of the research in this field has concentrated on environmentally sustainable development or has addressed the concept of sport development in general rather than focusing specifically on championship sport development.

Sherry et al. (2016) state that multiple factors influence the development trajectory of elite sports, and the success of athletes or Olympic teams increasingly depends on the performance capacity of the national system and its effectiveness in utilizing all relevant factors. However, other more fundamental needs and resources in some countries do not favor elite sports. It also emphasizes that investing in sports policies to improve the development of high-performance sports is impossible in Iraq. If we examine the history of Iraqi championship sports, sports development has been mainly based on result orientation. Newer approaches to development through exercise are inconsistent. Iraq's best performance in the Asian Games during the 8 periods of participation is the 10th rank in the 1978 Asian Games in Bangkok, and the average rank of the country's sports contingent during these periods is 22. Iraq's performance in the Olympic Games has been much weaker. During its 15 participations in the Summer Olympics, it won only one bronze medal in the weightlifting field in the 1960 Rome Olympic Games, 64 years ago. Also, until 2000, Iraqi female athletes did not participate in any of the Olympic Games. After that, the participation of Iraqi female athletes in these games was minimal (Stanton, 2014). This situation shows that championship sport is not developed in Iraq, and there is not enough knowledge about the practical factors for its development. So, the search for Iraq's information sources in the database of Iraqi academic publications also indicates the severe limitation of scientific research in the field of championship sports business development, factors affecting it, and sustainable development through sports. The few studies related to sports in this country or parts of it also show several challenges, Ibrahim et al.'s (2022) research on the instrumental use and exercise of party power in sports, the fluidity of the structure and management of sports, and the promotion of sports in a tasteful way and disregard for The capacities of sports are mentioned as the challenges of sports in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The importance of sports discourse for sustainable development has been recognized by international organizations and institutions such as the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee, and at least in the last two decades, efforts have been made to achieve sustainable development through sports. Different countries must develop the development path. Championship sports aligned with the dimensions of sustainable development of societies so that the effects of sports development not only lead to favorable results in international competitions but also ensure the comprehensive development of different cultures. In the meantime, Iraq, as one of the countries in the Middle East region, despite having sufficient wealth and a significant geographical area and population (about 46 million people), can provide many sports talents. So far, he has not been very successful in the field of championship sports in terms of performance.

The current state of sports in Iraq, along with the lack of positive outcomes in international competitions as evidenced by the statistics and figures mentioned above, coupled with an insufficient recognition of the factors influencing the development of championship sports, leaves little room for hope or expectations regarding the Iraqi championship sports system's ability to support the goals of sustainable development in society. Iraq is facing a situation that necessitates serious attention to this area and highlights the need for research. Thus, based on the points raised, several questions

emerge: What factors influence the development of championship sports in Iraq? How significantly can advancing championship sports in Iraq contribute to achieving the seventeen sustainable development goals?

2. Methodology

Based on the onion research model (Saunders et al., 2019), the current research was based on an interpretive paradigm, inductive reasoning, and qualitative study based on thematic analysis. The time horizon of the research was cross-sectional, and in terms of data collection, it was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participants in the study; Iraq's sports experts included selected members of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Iraqi National Olympic Committee, presidents of federations, selected Iraqi athletes with executive experience and prominent professors from Iraqi universities who were selected by a purposeful method of judgment, and by conducting 17 saturation point interviews an opinion was obtained. Data analysis was performed with Castleberry & Nolen's (2018) five-step model, which includes compiling (editing or transcribing), separating, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Codings were performed manually and were formed based on the visual and conceptual similarities of sub- and main themes. The quality control of codings was confirmed by coding four interviews by the second coder and calculating the coding agreement percentage, which shows the intra-subject agreement between two coders (Table 1).

Table 1. Calculation of the reliability of two coders in the interview stage.

Interview number	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Inter-coder reliability
1	29	13	3	89.65
5	26	11	4	84.61
8	23	9	5	78.26
13	21	8	5	76.19
Total	99	41	17	82.82

$$\text{Coding agreement percentage} = 100 \times \frac{2 \times \text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Number of Total Codes}}$$

The interviews were taken and transcribed in Arabic. For coding, all transcriptions were translated into Farsi and then coded by a skilled researcher using the qualitative research method. The primary researcher coded the Arabic transcriptions; the final codes resulted from a comparative review of Persian and Arabic codes and ensured the exact meaning based on the interviews. Finally, the codes created in Arabic were provided to three research participants and approved by them.

3. Results

In this research, 17 experts were interviewed; 14 were men, and three were women. Doctorate in physical education (5 people), master's degree in physical education (5 people), master's degree in management (2 people), master's degree in economic &

business (1 person), bachelor's degree in physical education (3 people), and bachelor's degree in management (1 person). All people had sports experience at the national level, and their average executive experience was 17.65 years, which shows the suitability of the interviewees. Several themes were created through coding and analysis. The first category of codes was named “challenges”, which refers to the current challenges facing Iraqi championship sports and their development. These challenges were categorized into five infrastructural sub-themes - physical, public, programmatic, Financial, economic & business, and attitudinal-cognitive (Table 2).

Table 2. Findings related to the challenges of Iraq's championship sports.

Row	Final Codes	Sub-Themes	Main -Themes
1	Old infrastructure	Physical infrastructure	Challenges
2	Unbalanced distribution of sports facilities		
3	Dilapidated places		
4	Severe lack of facilities and standard camps		
5	Lack of physical infrastructure to the extent needed in all regions		
6	Lack of individual equipment for athletes		
7	Security challenges of the country	General	
8	Political challenges of the country		
9	Disruption of concentration of athletes due to the general problems of the country		
10	The non-priority of sports in the general sense for policymakers	Planning	
11	Absence of long-term plans and plans for champion breeding		
12	Lack of awareness of officials and managers about Sports business development mechanisms		
13	Lack of managerial ability of managers to properly manage and guide the development of sports		
14	The lack of scientific growth of Iraqi teachers in line with global trends		
15	The existence of Financial, economic & business and administrative corruption in the sports structure		
16	Lack of proper training camps		
17	The process of selecting talented people is not oriented		
18	Lack of support for players after a training camp and competition		
19	Dominance of friendly and kinship relationships in sports instead of meritorious selection	Financial, economic & business & economic & business problems of Sports business development, especially championship sports	
20	The cost of achieving success in championship sports		
21	Lack of sustainable Financial, economic & business for the development of sports		
22	The lack of geographical balance in the distribution of sports budgets		
23	Employment of athletes in other jobs due to Financial, economic & business & economic & business problems		
24	Severe Financial, economic & business & economic & business problems of athletes, especially in the early years of Sports business development		
25	Financial, economic & business & economic & business problems of athletes in other stages of life		
26	Not having a source of income in individual athletes		
27	Lack of Financial, economic & business & economic & business support for athletes		
28	Lack of professional life perspective for athletes		
29	Lack of awareness of the potential educational capacity of sports	Attitudinal-cognitive	
30	Lack of awareness of the exemplary role of national athletes		
31	Lack of awareness about the ability of sports for social marketing		
32	Ignorance of policymakers about the economic & business functions of championship sports		
33	Ignorance of policymakers about the international functions of championship sports in improving the image of the country		
34	Ignorance of policymakers about the functions of championship sports in establishing social order		

Table 3. Findings related to the basic measures for the development of Iraqi championship sports.

Row	Final Codes	Sub-Themes	Main -Thems
1	Hiring experienced foreign coaches		
2	Training of sports managers who are proficient in specialized knowledge	Supply human resources	
3	Use of external consultants		
4	Expert manpower, especially managers, trainers, and technical supervisors		
5	Trying to transform current athletes into capable and influential managers and coaches		
6	Continuous talent search from all climates and geographical regions of the country	Talent search	
7	Focus on priority sports disciplines		
8	Focus on ecological interest		
9	Compiling a comprehensive talent search program based on local indicators of different regions of the country		
10	Trying to turn gifted talents into a complete athlete		
11	Spreading the culture of championship sports by including the names of former sports champions in the textbooks of different grades		
12	Attracting the attention of personalities and reference people to support the development of sports	Cultivation	Basic measures
13	Conducting cultural and social studies in order to connect sports successes with the sense of national identity as much as possible		
14	Turning success in championship sports into a public demand of citizens		
15	Turning sports into a cultural and social norm		
16	Trying to confirm the successes of men's championship sports as a background for the development of women's sports		
17	Serious attention to women's sports		
18	Trying to popularize championship sports and succeed in it		
19	Changing the opinion of decision-makers regarding the importance of championship sports		
20	Development of recreational and uplifting games based on sports disciplines to be performed in schools, neighborhoods, etc.		
21	Conducting research to present indigenous theories of the country's Sports business development		
22	Studying the history of Iraqi Sports business developments to improve future planning		
23	Investigating the experiences of managers, supervisors, coaches and players in previous success periods in different disciplines		
24	Explaining the relationship between sports and sustainable development programs		
25	Establishing sports academies in selected disciplines		
26	Continuous training for athletes during sports		

The following themes were made: Factors in the development of sports in Iraq were championships, which included several sections; The development factors of championship sports included basic measures, advanced measures, and supporting factors. The basic measures included human resources provision, talent acquisition, culture building, and education and research (Table 3).

Table 4. Findings related to advanced measures for the development of championship sports.

Row	Final Codes	Sub-Themes	Main -Thems
1	Setting up preparatory camps in different countries of the style	Benchmarking From successful countries	Advanced measures
2	Setting up preparatory camps in Iraq's neighboring countries, especially Iran		
3	Modeling the sports structure of successful Muslim countries such as Iran, Qatar, etc. in the field of championship sports		
4	Modeling the training and preparation processes of athletes in Muslim countries such as Iran		

5	Connecting Iraqi clubs with clubs in Arab countries to use facilities with lower costs in sports camps	
6	Providing legal grounds for the entry of the private and commercial sector into sports	
7	Alignment as much as possible with international sports organizations to obtain their Financial, economic & business & economic & business support	
8	Theorizing the link between Sports business development and social development to receive international aid	
9	Creating a sense of social responsibility in commercial companies to support championship sports	Providing stable financial, economic & business
10	Providing Financial, economic & business resources from neighboring countries, especially Arab countries	
11	Allocation of a part of tax revenues for the development of sports	
12	Diversification of the budgetary resources of championship sports	
13	Paying attention to the economic & business aspects of sports to earn money	
14	Compiling the necessary mechanisms to diversify the income sources of athletes	
15	Compilation of rules of income sources for athletes	
16	Paying attention to the concepts of sustainable development in sports programs	
17	Conducting studies for the compatibility of sports facilities and facilities with environmental indicators in different regions	Environmental solutions
18	Designing new sports facilities based on environmental standards	
19	Adapting the existing sports facilities and facilities to the climatic conditions of each region	
20	Optimal consumption of different forms of energy and water in sports halls and places	
21	Training professional legionnaires to enter the professional sports market of richer Arab countries	Creating a professional labor market
22	Helping Iraqi athletes enter rich Arab clubs as professional athletes	

The advanced measures included taking examples from successful countries, providing sustainable Financial, economic & business, environmental solutions, and creating a professional job market for athletes (Table 4).

Table 5. Findings related to supporting factors for the development of championship sports.

Row	Final Codes	Sub-Themes	Main -Themes
1	Creating continuous Spiritual support mechanisms for athletes		
2	Supporting the university education of athletes	Humanitarian support	
3	Sufficient support from Coach & trainers		
4	Supporting talented athletes after the identification stage		
5	Financial, economic & business support for athletes		Supporting factors
6	Constant monitoring and supporting of talented athletes to peak performance		
7	Not abandoning athletes after sports career		
8	More attention to sports and Sports business development in mass media	Media support	
9	Creating independent and specialized sports media		
10	Increasing the share of sports programs in different media		

Support factors also included two categories of human support and media support (Table 5).

Table 6. Seventeen goals of sustainable development.

Target	Concept
1	Eradicate poverty in all its forms
2	Eradicating hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture
3	Ensuring healthy living and promoting well-being for all in all age groups
4	Ensuring inclusive education of equal quality and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all
5	Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls
6	Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation facilities for all
7	Ensuring access to cheap, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8	Promoting sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth, full and productive employment for all
9	Creating flexible infrastructure, promoting sustainable and inclusive industrialization and promoting innovation
10	Reducing inequality within countries and between them
11	Making cities and places of human habitation safe and stable and making them resistant against accidents in a comprehensive manner
12	Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns
13	Urgent action to deal with climate change and its impacts
14	Conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15	Protecting, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems
16	Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, facilitating access to justice for all and building responsive, effective and inclusive institutions
17	Strengthening the tools necessary to implement and renew global cooperation for sustainable development

By clarifying the current challenges of championship sports in Iraq and the factors affecting the development of championship sports in this country; At this stage, the researchers re-examined the texts of the interviews and the produced codes keeping in mind the seventeen goals of sustainable development (Table 6), to determine to what extent the development of championship sports in Iraq can achieve the development goals by comparing the constructed concepts, for play a stable role, table 7 shows the comparison.

Table 7. Development factors of Iraq's championship sports with the seventeen goals of sustainable development.

Facilitator of sustainable development goals	Sub-theme	Main theme
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Infrastructural and physical	Solving challenges
The fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls)		
The ninth goal of sustainable development (sustainable innovation and flexibility)		
The tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country)		
The third goal of sustainable development (ensuring well-being for all groups)	General	Solving challenges
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Planning	Solving challenges
The eighth goal of sustainable development (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth)		

Facilitator of sustainable development goals	Sub-theme	Main theme
The tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country)		
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The eighth goal of sustainable development (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth)	Financial, economic and business	
The third goal of sustainable development (ensuring well-being for all groups)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)		
The fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls)	Attitudinal-cognitive	
The tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country)		
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Supply human resources	
The 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development)		
The third goal of sustainable development (ensuring well-being for all groups)		Basic measures
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Talent search	
The tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country)		
The fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls)		
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The third goal of sustainable development (ensuring well-being for all groups)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)		
The fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls)	Cultivation	
The tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country)		
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Education and research	
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development)	Benchmarking F successful countries	
The eighth goal of sustainable development (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth)		
The ninth goal of sustainable development (sustainable innovation and flexibility)	Providing stable financial, economic & business resources	Advanced actions
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)		
The 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development)		
The sixth goal of sustainable development (sustainable management of water resources)	Environmental solutions	
The seventh goal of sustainable development (sustainable energy)		

Facilitator of sustainable development goals	Sub-theme	Main theme
The twelfth goal of sustainable development (sustainable consumption and production patterns) The thirteenth goal of sustainable development (combating climate change)		
The eighth goal of sustainable development (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth)	Creating a professional labor market	
The 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development)		
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)	Humanitarian support	Supporting factors
The fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all)		
The 16th goal of sustainable development (promote peaceful societies and facilitate access to justice for all)	Media support	

Based on Table 7, it can be said that the actions taken in the direction of developing championship sports in Iraq, if implemented correctly and with sustainability considerations in mind, can facilitate various goals, for example, talent search, which should be done consistently and comprehensively from all parts of the country based on local indicators. It can be the third goal of sustainable development (ensuring prosperity for all groups), the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all), the fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls), the tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality in within the country), and facilitate the 16th goal of sustainable development (facilitating the achievement of justice for all).

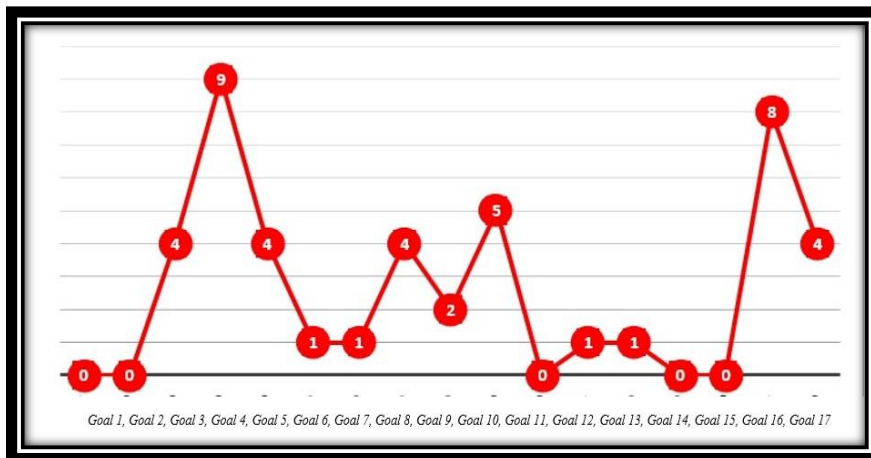


Figure 2. Frequency of repetition of sustainable development goals in terms of overlap.

Figure 2 also shows the frequency of overlapping measures and factors for the development of Iraq's championship sports with the seventeen goals of sustainable development, as an example of the series of measures taken to develop championship sports and even achieve development in this field, it is very likely that the first goal of

sustainable development, which is to destroy poverty in all its forms and the second goal of eradicating hunger, facilitating the achievement of food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, on the opposite point of the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all) with the greatest frequency under the direct influence of many one of the measures to develop the sport will be the championship. That is, improving physical infrastructure, solving programmatic problems, raising attitudinal-cognitive awareness, providing human resources, talent acquisition, culture building, education and research, human support, and media support can all lead to high-quality education and learning opportunities for all, or provoke on the other hand, taking examples from successful countries can directly facilitate the 17th goal of sustainable development, that is, global participation and cooperation for sustainable development.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The The first part of the findings was the number of 32 final codes with the title of current challenges of Iraq's championship sports system in the form of infrastructural and physical categories (5 codes), general (3 codes), programmatic (8 codes), Financial, economic & business (9 codes), and attitudinal categories. Cognitive (7 codes) were categorized. These significant challenges must be solved first for the development of championship sports. Public challenges are related to political, security, and attitudinal issues. Cognitive challenges are also related to policymakers' awareness of the various functions and capacities of championship sports, which is more profound, and policymakers' ignorance can fuel other deficiencies and problems.

On the other hand, the importance of attitudinal-cognitive challenges can be interpreted by referring to [Schein \(2002\)](#) organizational culture model; The Cheyenne culture model includes three levels, respectively, the basic level, i.e. basic assumptions and presuppositions; The second level is the core values and the third level is the set of behavioral patterns. According to this model, behavioral patterns are based on fundamental assumptions and presuppositions, which are unconscious and hidden. This model emphasizes that to change behavioral patterns, their presuppositions and assumptions must first be altered ([Mascarenhas et al., 2024](#)). Based on this, it is possible to realize the higher importance of attitudinal-cognitive issues in sports development, which should first change the attitudes and cognitive assumptions of the Iraqi society's macro policy makers towards sports and championship sports. In this case, we can hope for subsequent positive changes. Some research in Iran has also pointed out the obstacles to the development of sports or sustainable development through sports; [Ghorbani et al. \(2020\)](#) introduce cognitive-cognitive barriers, including educational weakness, weakness in specialization, and insufficient knowledge of sports capacities, which are like attitudinal-cognitive challenges. Infrastructural weakness and economic and commercial problems are other obstacles in the mentioned research, and they are one of the challenges of Iraqi championship sports.

The following central theme, entitled basic actions, was one of the factors for the development of championship sports in Iraq, with final codes in human resources

provision, talent acquisition, culture building, and education and research. Providing human resources indicates the acceptance of the importance of specialized human resources in the development of championship sports; Talent search refers to the logical and scientific processes of talent search. Cultural development is related to the acceptance of the culture of championship sports, and education and research also emphasize the dominance of scientific theories for developing championship sports. On the other hand, the importance of cultural variables in the development of championship sports should not be considered less than the impact of economic & business variables, so that in the research of [Mallaei et al. \(2018\)](#), cultural development (sports culture) had the most significant effect on the development of championship sports.

The following central theme was the advanced actions of the development factors of championship sports with 21 final codes, which are in the form of sub-themes of following prosperous countries (5 codes), providing sustainable Financial, economic & business resources (9 codes), environmental solutions (5 codes) and creating a professional labor market. For athletes, two codes) were categorized. These sub-themes were called advanced because they fundamentally differ from the essential actions; the basic actions were more necessary for developing championship sports. However, the advanced actions will lead the status of championship sports to higher levels, and the driver of positive changes will be more sustainable. Taking examples from prosperous countries refers to using the experiences of more prosperous countries in championship sports. In this regard, one should pay attention to the model's similarities. Providing stable Financial, economic & business resources refers to diversifying and stabilizing the resources needed for championship sports, which makes success in this field more stable. The need to pay attention to the stabilization of Financial, economic & business resources has also been emphasized in other research; [Mohammadamini et al. \(2021\)](#) in the sustainable development of women's sports in Iran mentions the sustainability of women's sports resources, which makes it easier to reach the goals of sustainable development. Environmental solutions are related to adapting current places and facilities to environmental indicators, designing new places following environmental standards, and optimal consumption of different types of energy and water. [Kelly \(2020\)](#) also emphasized saving as a driver of environmental sustainability in hockey in Ontario, Canada. Although research has highlighted the aspects of globalization, professionalization of sports, and the movement of athletes as professional labor forces between different countries ([Agergaard & Ryba, 2014](#)), creating a skilled labor market for athletes in this research is one of the most unique themes. This concept refers to training professional legionnaires to enter the professional sports market in richer Arab countries and helping Iraqi athletes enter Arab clubs. Iraqi athletes can earn much money and grow professionally by participating in Arab leagues. By returning and playing in their national teams in Iraq, these athletes can achieve success in championship sports.

Support factors represent humanitarian and media support, which are essential for developing Iraq championship sports. These factors are called support because they do not play a central role in the development of a championship sport, but they facilitate the successful development of a championship sport. Supporting athletes, looking after

their well-being, and balancing different aspects of their lives are very important in all parts of the world. In the research conducted by [Dohlsten et al. \(2021\)](#) in the Swedish sports community, there was a need to support the sustainable development factors of elite sports. Research by [Mohamed et al. \(2021\)](#) also emphasizes the positive role of the media in the development of professional sports, that the presence of the media can be effective on socialization, the dynamics of development and globalization, and the globalization of sports.

Based on the codes and themes in the research, a series of measures should be taken at different levels to develop championship sports in Iraq. Since the challenges in the form of infrastructural-physical, general, programmatic, Financial, economic & business, and attitudinal-cognitive themes were the first concepts developed in the research, these issues should be resolved first. Solving general and attitudinal-cognitive problems requires the national will of the Iraqi government institutions, including the Iraqi parliament, the Iraqi federal government, and the autonomous provincial governments. The operational solution is to strengthen the legal environment of Iraqi sports in the direction of synergy of development elements. Also, considering the number of political parties in Iraq, most of which have representatives in the Iraqi parliament, these parties' cooperation and joint efforts are necessary to reach a common vision for sports development. This shared vision will cause sufficient support for sports organizations headed by the Iraqi Ministry of Sports and Youth so that this ministry can take steps towards solving the infrastructural-physical, programmatic, and Financial, economic & business challenges.

On the other hand, the series of basic measures of providing human resources and finding talent requires the cooperation of different sports federations with the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Iraq. In this regard, talented fields should be determined based on various feasibility studies, and the required human resources should be trained and recruited for them. Also, the specific talent search program for each field should be implemented, in which the federations related to the executive arm of the delegations associated with the autonomous regions of Iraq will play an important role. In addition to the role of the Ministry of Sports and Youth and various federations, the capacity of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the field of education and research, as well as the Iraqi Ministry of Education and the media can be used in culture building in the series of cultural building measures as well as education and research. Also, in the Iraqi government structure, there are some extraordinary ministers, such as the Minister of National Reconciliation and the Minister of Nomads and Tribes, whose capacity can be used to build culture and reach a shared vision for sports development. Finally, the Iraqi National Olympic Committee should play a much more prominent role in the advanced actions of following prosperous countries, providing sustainable Financial, economic & business resources, environmental solutions, and creating a professional labor market. This prominent role is due to the inherent alignment of each country's National Olympic Committee with the International Olympic Committee. Because the International Olympic Committee was one of the first organizations to coordinate with the United Nations in sustainable development and environmental categories, it is possible to move towards sustainability in Financial, economic &

business fields. The environment is considered one of the critical and inevitable duties of the National Olympic Committees in every country, including Iraq. In creating a professional job market for athletes, the Iraqi National Olympic Committee can provide fields for solving the problems of Iraqi athletes and their professional growth and development by cooperating and synergizing with different federations and professional clubs.

Also, providing human resources requires high-quality education and providing learning opportunities for everyone, which represents the fourth goal of sustainable development. Searching for talent from different parts of Iraq and paying attention to the talents of different groups and minorities can facilitate the third goal of sustainable development (ensuring prosperity for all groups), the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all), the fifth goal of sustainable development (equality gender and empowerment of women and girls), the tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country), and the sixteenth goal of sustainable development (facilitating the achievement of justice for all). Cultivation is also by spreading the culture of sports among different groups of Iraqi citizens and promoting the culture of sports among them to achieve the third goal of sustainable development (ensuring welfare for all groups), the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all), the fifth goal of sustainable development (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls), the tenth goal of sustainable development (reducing inequality within the country), and the sixteenth goal of sustainable development (facilitating the achievement of justice for all). Education and research will also help the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunities for all) and the sixteenth goal (facilitating the achievement of justice for all) by expanding educational opportunities. In the section of advanced measures, taking examples from prosperous countries, considering the expansion of international interactions at least at the regional level, can help the 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development). This claim is since regional sports cooperation can be considered a way to develop sports and peace, which is consistent with sustainable development goals.

Providing sustainable Financial, economic & business resources, considering the diversification of the Financial, economic & business resources needed for sports and also providing a part of Financial, economic & business resources from abroad, can contribute to the 8th goal (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth), the 9th goal (sustainable innovation and flexibility), the 16th goal (facilitation) achieving justice for all) and even the 17th goal of sustainable development (global participation and cooperation for sustainable development). Environmental solutions can also help the sixth goal (sustainable management of water resources), the seventh goal (sustainable energy), the twelfth goal (sustainable consumption and production patterns), and even the thirteenth goal of sustainable development (combating climate change). Finally, creating a professional job market for athletes can improve their living conditions by developing the Financial, economic & business resources of athletes and generating income for them, and even lead to the entry of capital by athletes into other

sectors, which is compatible with the eighth goal of sustainable development (sustainable and inclusive economic & business growth). Regarding supporting factors, humanitarian support will help the fourth goal of sustainable development (quality education and learning opportunity for all), and the media support factor will also help the fourth and sixteenth goal, which is to facilitate the achievement of justice for all. Of course, what is certain is; The whole mechanism of influencing the development of championship sports on the goals of sustainable development is not well known even in foreign research, and the emphasis of the United Nations and the National Olympic Committee is on the role of sports in general in sustainable development. Even in the documents of the European Union's Erasmus+ Sports Program for Sustainable Development, sports are emphasized in a general sense and at different levels, and variables such as affordability, flexibility, popularity, and educational potential have been introduced among the influencing factors of sports on sustainable development. It is obvious that among the above four factors, the popularity and social-cultural effects of championship sports are significant. Suppose championship sports are developed based on central justice and the participation of all groups in Iraqi society. In that case, it will help the sustainable development of the Iraqi society. Also, the educational potential of championship sports and events related to it can be a valuable basis for the dissemination of sustainable development goals, especially goals such as the third goal (ensuring healthy life and promoting well-being for all in all age groups), the fourth goal (ensuring inclusive education of equal quality and promoting learning opportunities). Lifelong for all), the fifth goal (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls), and the twelfth goal (ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns), in simpler words, by taking advantage of the educational potential hidden in championship sports, the necessary training can be provided to presented to the public and by informing, facilitated the achievement of sustainable development goals.

According to the findings, the challenges of the current legal environment for sports in Iraq need to be addressed, with measures taken at both basic and advanced levels that account for human and media factors in developing championship sports. With the emergence of fragile forces within the elite-oriented sports system in Iraq and the implementation of various actions and stages of the foundational social process, the elite-oriented sports system has achieved a new state. A situation with a new composition of structural elements within elite-oriented sports now prevails. This new system has attained stability and will serve distinct functions in two categories. It encompasses aspects within an elite-oriented sports framework and includes sustainable sports performance, sports development, and athlete development. Stability in sports performance is likely the most logical and anticipated outcome of sustainable sports development in Iraq; winning medals in international competitions and maintaining an improved ranking over time is the most apparent possible result. Overall, a stable elite-oriented sports system can foster sports development across different regions of Iraq. Conversely, extra-systemic functions reference elements outside the elite sports system and involve enhancing the international image and social outcomes. Improved sports results will boost bargaining power in global forums, expand sports and even political relationships, and ultimately enhance Iraq's international image. Ultimately, achieving

success in elite-oriented sports sustainably—with a justice-oriented approach and by leveraging the sports talents from all regions of Iraq—can improve social capital, develop citizens' resilience, help ensure stability, and increase the perception of justice, which are all vital social outcomes. A sustainable system is an elite-oriented sports model. Challenges such as coordinating and arranging meetings with interviewees, the shortage of studies related to the institutionalization of championship sports in Iraq, the presence of hidden factors affecting championship sports in Iraq, and the lack of cooperation from some scheduled interviewees remain limitations.

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عوامل موثر بر تعالی کسب و کار ورزشی: رویکرد اهداف توسعه پایدار سازمان ملل از طریق ورزش قهرمانی

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کلیدواژه

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توسعه پایدار
زیرساختی
کسب و کار ورزشی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: امروزه توسعه کسب و کار ورزشی ابزاری برای تسهیل اهداف توسعه پایدار محسوب می‌شود. هدف از این تحقیق شناسایی عوامل موثر بر توسعه ورزش قهرمانی و نقش آنها در تسهیل اهداف هفده گانه توسعه پایدار بود.

روش: پژوهش کیفی و مبتنی بر پارادایم تفسیری بود که با تحلیل موضوعی اجرا شد. هفده کارشناس ورزش از دانشگاه‌ها، وزارت ورزش و جوانان و فدراسیون‌ها به صورت هدفمند برای انجام مصاحبه‌های عمیق انتخاب شدند. برای تجزیه و تحلیل از مدل پنج مرحله‌ای کاستلبری و نولن (۲۰۱۸) شامل تدوین، جداسازی، ترکیب مجدد، تفسیر و نتیجه‌گیری استفاده شد. کیفیت یافته‌ها با محاسبه درصد توافق کدگذاری، مقایسه و تایید کدها بر روی محتوای مصاحبه سه مشارکت کننده، تایید شد.

یافته‌ها: چالش‌ها شامل عوامل زیرساختی و فیزیکی، کلی، برنامه ای، مالی، اقتصادی و تجاری و نگرشی-شناختی بودند؛ همچنین، اقدامات اساسی پیشنهادی شامل تامین نیروی انسانی، استعدادیابی، فرهنگ سازی و آموزش و پژوهش بودند؛ اقدامات پیشرفته نیز شامل استفاده از تجارب کشورهای موفق، ارائه منابع مالی، اقتصادی و تجاری پایدار، راه‌حل‌های زیست‌محیطی و ایجاد بازار کار حرفه‌ای بودند. در نهایت، عوامل حمایتی شامل حمایت انسانی و حمایت رسانه‌ای بودند که به‌عنوان عوامل اصلی و فرعی پژوهش شناسایی شدند. توسعه ورزش قهرمانی می‌تواند بیشترین تأثیر را در تسهیل هدف چهارم شامل تامین آموزش فراگیر با کیفیت برابر و ارتقای فرصت‌های یادگیری مادام العمر داشته باشد. توسعه پایدار از طرق ورزش قهرمانی با رفع چالش‌های موجود، اجرای اقدامات اساسی و پیشرفته و در نظر گرفتن عوامل حمایتی امکان پذیر خواهد بود، لذا پیشنهاد می‌گردد عوامل زیرساختی و فیزیکی، عمومی، برنامه‌ای، مالی، اقتصادی و تجاری و نگرشی-شناختی مورد توجه قرار گیرد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: نوآوری این مقاله بر اساس ورزش قهرمانی مبتنی بر اهداف توسعه پایدار سازمان ملل و نقشی که ورزش در نیل به این اهداف می‌تواند داشته باشد، نگاشته شده بود.

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Investigate the Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Passion in the Impact of Digital Innovation on the Performance of New Sports Businesses

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research aimed to examine the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the effect of digital innovation on the performance of start-up sports businesses, as perceived by sports science students at Mohaghegh Ardabili University.

Methodology: The research method was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of collection. The statistical population of the present study was 524 undergraduate, master's, and doctorate students of sports sciences at Mohaghegh Ardabili University. Cohen's method was used to determine the sample size. Two hundred forty people were chosen, and due to some incomplete questionnaires, 224 questionnaires were approved, and the random sampling method was simple. The measurement tools included the job enthusiasm questionnaire (Kardon and Kirk, 2017), the digital innovation questionnaire (Kianfar and Mousavi, 2014), and the performance questionnaire of the new sports business (Zia and Totifar Tehranpour, 2017). The validity of the questionnaires was measured using diagnostic, convergent and divergent validity criteria and to determine the reliability of questionnaires of entrepreneurial enthusiasm, digital innovation and the performance of start-up sports businesses, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained as 0.83, 0.88 and 0.76, respectively, which shows that all three questionnaires have good reliability. A structural equation model was used to analyze the research hypotheses using SPSS version 19 and AMOS version 23 software.

Findings: The research findings showed that the beta coefficient of digital innovation on the performance of start-up sports businesses was 0.98, entrepreneurial enthusiasm was reported as 0.30, and digital innovation on entrepreneurial enthusiasm was as 0.47. Therefore, based on Baron and Kenny's table, it can be concluded that entrepreneurial passion partially mediates the effect of digital innovation on the performance of new sports businesses..

Originality: The article's originality is that sports science students, especially postgraduate students, who have an entrepreneurial passion, can start new businesses in the field of sports science by using digital innovations in today's era.

Keywords

Business Performance
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1. Introduction

Digital innovation involves utilizing new technologies to enhance products, services, and processes, and it is crucial in the sports industry. This form of innovation may include developing applications to improve interaction between fans and teams, employing analytical data to boost athletes' performance, or crafting engaging digital experiences for customers (Guo et al., 2022). The benefits of digital innovation on business performance include heightened customer satisfaction, streamlined operational processes, and the potential to attract new customers (Bhatnagar & Ramachandran, 2023). Conversely, entrepreneurial enthusiasm is essential for implementing these innovations. Highly motivated entrepreneurs are more likely to take risks and experiment with new technologies. These individuals strive to uncover opportunities and actively work to create and leverage innovations (Lakshmi et al., 2023). For instance, an entrepreneur in the sports sector might analyze data to spot new trends and subsequently design services or products that cater to customer demands. The mediating role of entrepreneurial enthusiasm in the connection between digital innovation and the performance of sports startups is markedly significant. When entrepreneurs are passionate about driving innovations and adopting new technologies, their likelihood of successful implementation increases. Therefore, nurturing this enthusiasm among entrepreneurs can stimulate the development and progress of digital technologies within the sports business landscape. Ultimately, this process can result in improved business performance and a competitive advantage in a fiercely competitive market (Chesbrough, 2010).

Enthusiasm is generally an essential behavioral driver, referring to a person's strong and positive desire for entrepreneurial activities. Passion is related to creative problem-solving; it manifests creativity using available resources. Enthusiasm generates positive feelings, excitement, and energy (Naghizadeh Baghi et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial passion encompasses positive emotions and attitudes towards activities essential to an individual's identity (Hacklin et al., 2018). Passion is considered the core of entrepreneurship and can emerge as a vital element in measuring entrepreneurial behavior and the creation of businesses and their outcomes (Crippa et al., 2021). Among various types of entrepreneurial passion, the passion for business development and innovation significantly contributes to the longevity of a company (Bernardus et al., 2024). In their study, Habibi et al. (2023) assert that passion significantly influences entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention. Consequently, individuals with high entrepreneurial enthusiasm are more likely to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. Vallerand (2015) believes that the object of one's passion can encompass various aspects such as activities, objects, other individuals, or even abstract concepts like ideas, causes, or goals. Cardon & Kirk (2015) concluded that entrepreneurial passion stems from goals related to growth, people, products or services, competition, innovation, and social missions, respectively. However, creating entrepreneurship fosters innovation, job creation, and improvement of human resources (Van Praag & Versloot, 2007). Yet, past research reported that only a tiny percentage of people in society engage in entrepreneurial activities (Bosma et al., 2008). Sports play a crucial role in ensuring the happiness and vitality of society; it is recognized as one of the fastest growing sectors, significantly impacting the main economic sectors

globally. This has consequently led to extensive developments and job opportunities (Alizadeh et al., 2019). Sports represent a unique and dynamic industry that can foster entrepreneurship in various sectors (Ciletti, 2012). Start-up businesses are organizations entrepreneurs establish to develop new products and services in environments characterized by escalating uncertainty (Henseler & Chin, 2010). Parent & Séguin (2008) also define a start-up business as designed for rapid growth. When the term start-up business is mentioned, characteristics such as value creation, opportunism, innovation, technological advancement, evolution, and a forward-looking approach are considered (Mushtaq et al., 2011). Sports startups face unique challenges, including fierce competition, rapid change, and the need for continuous innovation (Xi et al., 2023).

Additionally, sports startups, recognized as innovators in entrepreneurship, have revolutionized the field in less than a decade (Bocken & Snihur, 2020). Conversely, the sports industry, being the sixth most profitable in developed countries, has attracted the attention of many idea owners, entrepreneurs, and innovation centers (Dana et al., 2021). Ramos-Rodriguez et al. (2010) noted that a company faces corporate entrepreneurship issues when dealing with product and market innovation.

Allal-Cherif et al. (2024) concluded in their research that entrepreneurs with characteristics such as courage, creativity, innovation, ability to transfer and adapt to problems can achieve success in this competitive industry, especially in areas that are still in the stages of development has overcome obstacles and progress in the evolving and fast field of electronic sports. Also, Paul et al. (2023) found out in a research titled digital entrepreneurship research that research related to digital entrepreneurship is developing and various axes such as the use of new technologies, its effects on society and economy, as well as the role of governments and non-profit organizations in this field have been examined. Habibi et al. (2023) in a study titled "Investigating the mediation of entrepreneurial awareness, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention in the effect of entrepreneurial enthusiasm on entrepreneurial behavior", they concluded that entrepreneurial passion affects entrepreneurial behavior. In addition, entrepreneurial awareness, entrepreneurial intention, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy were found to mediate this relationship. In their research, Bostan & Ghorbanian (2023) concluded that market performance has more effects on entrepreneurial motivation than entrepreneurship education. In this regard, Nematollahi et al. (2022), in a study, concluded that entrepreneurial leaders help promote creativity and innovation by strengthening employees' self-confidence and entrepreneurial skills. Also, Scillitoe & Birasnav (2022) about the effects of ease of entering the start-up market showed that university, culture of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial passion have a positive relationship with the ease of entering the market by Indian start-up companies. Still, government assistance related to the ease of entering the market is insignificant. Also, in a research, Ratten (2020) reached this conclusion in her research titled "Sports Innovation Associations and the Complexity of Issues in Sports Companies" that that for the development of start-ups related to sports, it is necessary to understand the importance of the role of innovation, enthusiasm and creativity in the field of sports in the society. Kishani et al. (2021) showed in their research that strategic entrepreneurship and institutional environment affect the performance of sports businesses. Spreading and improving the entrepreneurial culture,

mentality, and leadership along with the development of innovation through providing practical training to sports entrepreneurs and developing facilitating laws and improving environmental values can help the better performance of sports businesses. Ziyae & Toutifar Tehranpour (2019) found a positive and significant correlation between entrepreneurial orientation and performance and between electronic readiness and the performance of emerging sports businesses. Kim et al. (2018) showed in their research that the enthusiasm and will of the entrepreneur are essential and valuable factors for the success of start-up businesses. Kos et al.'s research (2018) showed that sports science students, with the use of technological creativity as the ability to reach ideas and transform them into new phenomena to achieve human interests and goals in the context of sports, can be the factor of prosperity and progress of valuable innovations in this field. Amini Khiabani (2018) concluded in the research that the approach of cultivating entrepreneurial people and developing entrepreneurial spirit and passion in this field is that people are trained to replace old technology with new technology.

In today's era, with the increasing development of digital technologies, start-up businesses in sports also depend on a close relationship with these technologies. For a deeper understanding of this relationship and its impact on the performance of these businesses, research on the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in promoting digital innovation and its effect on enhancing the performance of these industries is necessary. Many entrepreneurs in the sports industry have struggled to identify the connection between entrepreneurial passion and innovation. Additionally, current social and economic challenges heighten the necessity of finding new and sustainable solutions, and some areas have yet to leverage digital innovation fully. Therefore, this research can help identify and address existing shortcomings and improve the overall performance of the sports industry. Conducting this research is essential for several reasons. Firstly, identifying new opportunities for creating digital innovation-based products and services in the sports industry can help entrepreneurs attract and retain customers. Secondly, understanding the relationship between digital innovation and entrepreneurial enthusiasm can lead to improved business performance and the development of effective strategies. The novelty of this research lies in examining the relationship between digital innovation and entrepreneurial passion in the sports industry, dimensions that have received less attention in the existing literature. This study identifies emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics for personalized customer experiences, and social media, which can enhance customer experiences and improve the performance of sports businesses. Moreover, the research aims to develop new business models shaped by evolving customer needs and digital innovations. The findings can provide practical solutions for students, entrepreneurs, and sports managers to gain a competitive advantage and improve performance by leveraging digital innovations. This study, therefore, aims to examine more closely how digital innovation impacts the performance of sports startups and the mediating role of entrepreneurial enthusiasm. The findings could assist students, entrepreneurs, and industry practitioners in better understanding these relationships, enabling them to adopt more effective strategies for implementing digital innovations in their startups. This research may provide a foundation for future studies in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurship, and the development of sports businesses. Ultimately, what

is the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the effect of digital innovation on the performance of sports businesses?

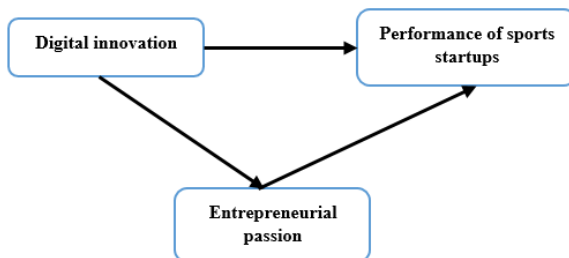


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research.

2. Methodology

The present study was applied with a descriptive-survey research method. A quantitative research method was carried out using the field. The statistical population of the research consists of sports science students of Mohaghegh Ardabili University. According to the statistics and information center of the university, the total number of undergraduate, master's, and doctorate students in sports sciences was 524. Various methods have been considered to determine the sample size, and finally, the sample size was calculated using Cohen's formula based on statistical power analysis. To determine the sample size based on Cohen's formula, the power of the test was 0.80 and the effect size was 0.30 equal to 218 and 10% was added to the statistical sample size due to the possibility of incomplete questionnaires and finally, the total statistical sample size was determined to be 240 people, and due to the existence of incomplete questionnaires, 224 questionnaires were analyzed. The sampling method was chosen by simple random sampling. Measuring tools included: Entrepreneurial Enthusiasm Questionnaire (Cardon & Kirk, 2015), which consists of 15 items in 5 components of growth and development, social mission, products and services, competition and invention, 2- Digital innovation questionnaire (Kianfar & Mousavi, 2021), which consists of 14 questions in 3 components of digital innovation, digital capabilities and digital orientation and 3- Performance Questionnaire of New Sports Businesses (Ziyae & Toutifar Tehranpour, 2019), which is made up of 20 questions in 5 components of innovation, risk-taking, pioneering, aggressive behavior and independence. 10 management and entrepreneurship professors confirmed the content and form validity of the questionnaires. Then, Cronbach's alpha reliability was reported as 0.83 for the entrepreneurial passion questionnaire, 0.88 for the digital innovation questionnaire, and 0.76 for the sports start-up business performance questionnaire. According to research findings, the normality of all components was confirmed. Descriptive statistics methods were employed to analyze the statistical data, such as calculating the mean, standard deviation, and other relevant measures. In the inferential statistics section, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to measure the normality of the data, and all the components of the questionnaires were reported as usual. A structural

equation model (SEM) was employed to analyze the research hypotheses using SPSS version 19 and AMOS version 23 software.

3. Results

The research findings have been analyzed in two parts. The first part concerns demographic findings, including gender, educational level, educational orientation, and academic period. The second part analyzes the data related to the questionnaires using structural equations with AMOS version 23 software.

Table 1. Demographic findings.

Variables		Frequency	Frequency percentage
Gender	Men	129	57.6
	Women	95	42.4
Education level	Masters	117	52.2
	Senior	89	39.7
	Philosophies doctor degree (Ph.D)	18	8.0
	Physical education and sports science	88	39.3
Academic orientation	Sport physiology	66	29.5
	Sport management	47	21.0
	Sports biomechanics	23	10.3
Study period	Daily	148	66.1
	At night	76	33.9

Table 1 reports the demographic findings of male and female students according to gender, educational level, field of study, and academic period. **Table 2** presents a descriptive analysis of research variables for the main research factors.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of research variables.

Variables		Num	Median	Middle	St.D	Variance	Range	Min	Max
Enthusiasm entrepreneurship	Development	224	3.95	4.00	0.67	0.458	4	1	5
	Social mission	224	3.79	4.00	0.59	0.356	4	1	5
	Products and Services	224	3.47	3.67	0.66	0.438	4	1	5
	Competition	224	3.17	3.33	0.44	0.196	2	2	4
Digital innovations	Invention	224	3.77	4.00	1.04	1.085	4	1	5
	Innovation	224	3.80	4.00	0.60	0.360	4	2	5
	Capabilities	224	3.64	3.75	0.45	0.297	4	1	5
	Orientation	224	3.69	3.75	0.73	0.544	3	2	5
Performance sports start-up business	Innovation	224	3.76	3.75	0.52	0.272	4	1	5
	Risk taking	224	3.72	4.00	0.78	0.618	4	1	5
	Pioneer	224	3.86	4.00	0.53	0.288	4	1	5
	Aggressive behavior	224	3.64	3.75	0.74	0.553	4	1	5
	Freedom	224	3.74	3.75	0.53	0.285	3	2	5

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of the research variables including entrepreneurial passion, digital innovations, and the performance of the new sports business. First, the data's skewness is tested. Skewness measures the symmetry or asymmetry of the distribution function.

Table 3. Skewness and kurtosis of the data.

Research variables	Number	Skewness	Kurtosis
Entrepreneurship Passion	224	-1.204	1.783
Digital innovations	224	-1.278	1.993
Performance sports start-up business	224	-1.269	1.877

Generally, the data is considered non-normally distributed if skewness and kurtosis fall outside the range of (-2, 2). According to the findings in Table 3, the skewness and kurtosis values for all three variables in the study were within an acceptable range, suggesting that the data follows a normal distribution.

Table 4. Fit indices of the final drawing model.

Fit index	GFI	AGFI	TLI	IFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit	Bigger than 0.8	Bigger than 0.8	Bigger than 0.9	Bigger than 0.9	Bigger than 0.9	Bigger than 0.9	Smaller than 0.08
Fit is obtained	0.854	0.804	0.922	0.841	0.932	0.907	0.053

According to Table 4, all absolute and relative fit indices are excellent. Also, the RMSEA fit index is equal to 0.053. Therefore, the fitted model is a good fit.

Table 5. KMO test results.

Variables	KMO test	Condition	
Enthusiasm entrepreneurship	Development	0.719	Suitable
	Social mission	0.823	Suitable
	Products and Services	0.785	Suitable
	Competition	0.844	Suitable
	Invention	0.719	Suitable
Digital innovations	Innovation	0.791	Suitable
	Capabilities	0.784	Suitable
	Orientation	0.801	Suitable
Performance sports start-up business	Innovation	0.763	Suitable
	Risk taking	0.768	Suitable
	Pioneer	0.753	Suitable
	Aggressive behavior	0.743	Suitable
	Freedom	0.719	Suitable

Table 5 shows the results of the KMO test of the components of all three variables of entrepreneurial enthusiasm, digital innovations, and the performance of a start-up sports business. According to the report made in this table, the status of all components was suitable; that is, they were greater than 0.7.

Table 6. Assessing the reliability and validity of the structure.

Research variables	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Enthusiasm entrepreneurship	0.837	0.509	0.454	0.316
Digital innovations	0.882	0.603	0.166	0.091
performance of a new sports business	0.768	0.560	0.454	0.244

Table 6 presents the reliability and construct validity of the research variables. The combined reliability for entrepreneurial passion was 0.837, for digital innovations, it was 0.882, and for sports startup business performance, it was 0.768.

Figure 1 shows the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the impact of digital innovation on the performance of start-up sports businesses in standard mode.

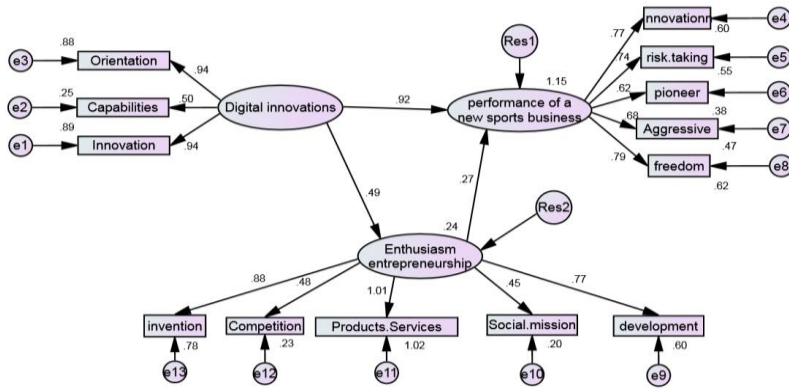


Figure 2. The mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the effect of digital innovation on the performance of sports start-ups (in the standard case).

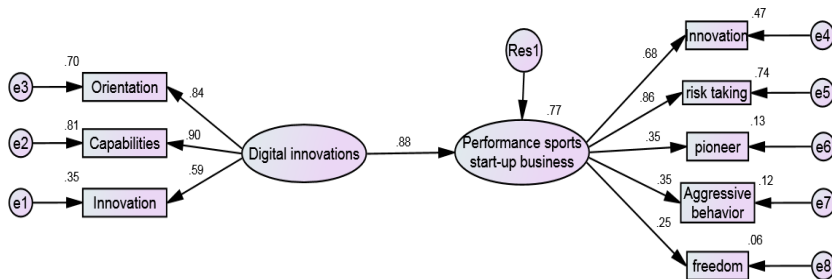


Figure 3. The effect of digital innovation on the performance of start-up sports businesses (without mediating variables).

Table 7. Structural model in standard path coefficient estimation mode.

Research assumptions	B	T-VALUE	P	Result	Mediator type
The impact of digital innovation on the performance of new sports businesses	0.92	13.358	0.001	Confirmation	
The effect of entrepreneurial passion on the performance of start-up sports businesses	0.27	6.437	0.001	Confirmation	
The effect of digital innovation on entrepreneurial enthusiasm	0.49	7.133	0.001	Confirmation	Partial mediator
The effect of digital innovation on the performance of start-up sports businesses (without mediating variables)	0.88	7.494	0.001	Confirmation	

The results of structural model path analysis in [Table 7](#) showed that digital innovations have an effect of 0.92 on the performance of start-up sports businesses, entrepreneurial enthusiasm has an effect of 0.27 on the performance of start-up sports businesses, and digital innovation has an impact of 0.49 on entrepreneurial enthusiasm, which is a significant level 0.001 was reported in all three hypotheses, which indicates the significance of the research hypotheses. On the other hand, because the t-value in all three hypotheses is outside (1.96 and -1.96), at the confidence level of 0.99, hypothesis H0 is rejected, and hypothesis H1 is confirmed. Digital innovations have a positive and significant effect on the performance of new sports businesses, entrepreneurial passion on the performance of new sports businesses, and digital innovation on entrepreneurial passion.

According to [Baron & Kenny \(1986\)](#) table, significant results were reported in three hypotheses with the presence of a mediating variable and the effect of digital innovations on the performance of new sports businesses without the presence of an essential mediating variable. We conclude that the mediator of entrepreneurial passion in the effect of digital innovations on the performance of new sports businesses is a partial mediator.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present study examined the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the effect of digital innovation on the performance of new sports businesses, viewed through the lens of sports science students at Mohaghegh Ardabili University. This research represents one of the first efforts to explore the performance of new sports ventures through the lenses of entrepreneurial enthusiasm and digital innovation within the sports industry. Additionally, the application of innovation in this field, along with clarifying the concept of new sports businesses from the perspective of sports science students, is a novel phenomenon that has recently been acknowledged as a significant approach in entrepreneurship studies.

In examining the first hypothesis of the research, the results showed that digital innovation has a positive and significant effect on the performance of start-up sports businesses from the perspective of sports science Students at the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili. The findings of this hypothesis are consistent with the findings of [Nematollahi et al. \(2022\)](#), [Scillitoe & Birasnav \(2022\)](#), [Ratten \(2020\)](#), [Kishani et al. \(2021\)](#), [Ziyae & Toutifar Tehranpour \(2019\)](#), and [Kos et al. \(2018\)](#). [Kim et al. \(2018\)](#) believe that the enthusiasm and will of the entrepreneur are essential and influential factors for success in new sports businesses. [Oghbaee et al. \(2022\)](#) assert that the rise of digital media in the media industry and the ease of content production and distribution have led to numerous start-up businesses in this sector. In their research, [Rahimi et al. \(2022\)](#) believe that entrepreneurial enthusiasm and interest in micro-scale business can be a factor for the sustainability, growth, and development of sports businesses. In this hypothesis, the researcher concluded that applying innovations and digital technologies and using tools and platforms based on these technologies can lead to improved performance, increased productivity, and the growth of sports businesses. Especially

businesses that are in their initial stages and start-up. This hypothesis is based on the concept that digital innovation creates new tools and opportunities to improve processes and services in the sports industry. It can also contribute to the overall performance of sports businesses by creating better connections with customers, increasing market access, and improving user experience. In addition, due to changes in consumption patterns and customer preferences towards technology and digital, digital innovation can help sports businesses become more competitive and respond to customer needs. As a result, it can be said that sports science students, as people who are familiar with the sports industry and the effects of technology in it, may perceive this connection between digital innovation and the performance of new sports businesses as an opportunity and advantage for both job creation and income and improving Self economic situation.

In examining the second hypothesis of the research, the results indicate that entrepreneurial enthusiasm has a positive and significant effect on the performance of new sports businesses from the perspective of sports science students at the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili. The findings of this hypothesis are consistent with the findings of [Habibi et al. \(2023\)](#), [Nematollahi et al. \(2022\)](#), [Scillitoe & Birasnav \(2022\)](#), [Ratten \(2020\)](#), [Kishani et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Ziyae & Toutifar Tehranpour \(2019\)](#). [Habibi et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that individuals with high entrepreneurial passion are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship and initiate new ventures. In their research, [Derochi & Tasavori \(2023\)](#) showed that policymakers should try to time it by investing in developing a positive personal attitude and mental norm towards entrepreneurship, considering the importance of entrepreneurial enthusiasm. Similarly, [Cardon & Kirk \(2015\)](#) suggested that entrepreneurial passion motivates individuals to identify innovative opportunities and foster intentions to create new businesses. Also, [Karimi \(2020\)](#) showed that entrepreneurial passion helps form entrepreneurial intentions and create new businesses. In this hypothesis, the researcher concluded that Enthusiasm entrepreneurship, if considered an essential and influential factor in the entrepreneurial environment and new sports businesses, can facilitate the improvement of performance and success of these businesses. In other words, it can be said that if sports science students consider Enthusiasm entrepreneurship as an essential factor for developing start-up businesses in sports. They can encourage and facilitate improving the performance and operations of these businesses. According to the findings, this hypothesis is based on the idea that Enthusiasm entrepreneurship stimulates ideation, creativity, and innovation among sports science students. This enthusiasm can lead to the formation and development of new ideas for sports businesses. Also, entrepreneurial enthusiasm can act as a stimulus for the personal and professional development of sports science students and lead them to entrepreneurial experiences and launching new businesses in the field of sports.

Therefore, given their awareness of the importance and effects of entrepreneurship in the sports industry, sports science students may consider their enthusiasm an effective factor in improving the performance and success of start-up businesses in the sports field.

Examining the third hypothesis of the research, the findings indicated that, according to sports science Students at the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, digital innovation positively and significantly impacts entrepreneurial passion. The findings of this

hypothesis are consistent with the findings of Allal-Cherif et al. (2024), Paul et al. (2023), Nematollahi et al. (2022), Scillitoe & Birasnav (2022), and Amini Khiabani (2018). Amini Khiabani (2018) pointed out that the result of the research approach of entrepreneurial people and the development of entrepreneurial spirit and passion in this field is that people are trained to innovate with their creativity and risk-taking. In this regard, Kos et al. (2018) believe that today in sports science, creativity in technology plays a valuable role in sports entrepreneurial activities. Also, Rahimi et al. (2022) state in their research that entrepreneurial enthusiasm was recognized as a driving factor for technological creativity. In this hypothesis, the researcher concluded that by providing new technologies and tools based on these technologies, digital innovation can act as a motivation and source of inspiration for entrepreneurial enthusiasm. In this regard, it can be said that digital innovation provides new possibilities and opportunities for creating sports businesses. Entrepreneurs get inspired by seeing the success and innovative ideas of others in this field and gain more enthusiasm to start or develop their businesses. Also, digital technologies provide easier access to educational and information resources in entrepreneurship and business development. These resources and training can strengthen entrepreneurs' enthusiasm for the next steps towards starting sports businesses, and it can be said that digital technologies provide the possibility of communication and networking with other people and companies in the sports field. These connections can act as a source of information and support for entrepreneurs and increase their enthusiasm for the growth and development of their businesses. Therefore, it can be concluded that digital innovation can be essential in creating and strengthening entrepreneurial enthusiasm. This enthusiasm can help grow start-ups and improve the sports industry, which is invaluable to the growth and development of the sports community.

According to the findings and results of this research, the following suggestions are made:

- Creating and developing platforms and applications that provide diverse and innovative sports services and products can help generate more enthusiasm in sports entrepreneurs.
- Using virtual and augmented reality technologies in sports can accelerate the growth of entrepreneurs in the sports field by creating attractive and innovative experiences for the audience.
- The formation of sports entrepreneurship networks creates new opportunities for cooperation and exchange of ideas, resources, and experiences, which can increase entrepreneurial enthusiasm in students and sports entrepreneurs.
- Using sports management systems that leverage digital technologies and artificial intelligence can enhance the performance and administration of sports businesses, thereby bolstering entrepreneurial enthusiasm.
- Creating training and guidance programs for students and people interested in starting sports businesses can increase their enthusiasm for doing these activities.

Identifying and capitalizing on emerging market opportunities like e-games and e-sports can foster greater enthusiasm for sports entrepreneurship.

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بررسی نقش واسطه اشتیاق کارآفرینی در تأثیر نوآوری دیجیتال بر عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی

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کلیدواژه

اشتیاق کارآفرینی
عملکرد کسب و کار
نوآوری دیجیتال

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف از انجام این تحقیق بررسی نقش واسطه اشتیاق کارآفرینی در تأثیر نوآوری دیجیتال بر عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی از دیدگاه دانشجویان علوم ورزشی دانشگاه محقق اردبیلی بود.

روش: روش تحقیق از نظر هدف کاربردی و از لحاظ گردآوری توصیفی-پیمایشی بود. جامعه آماری پژوهش حاضر، دانشجویان کارشناسی، کارشناسی ارشد و دکتری علوم ورزشی دانشگاه محقق اردبیلی به تعداد ۵۲۴ نفر بودند. برای تعیین حجم نمونه از روش کوهن استفاده شد که در نهایت ۲۴۰ نفر تعیین شدند که به دلیل وجود برخی از پرسشنامه های ناقص ۲۲۴ پرسشنامه مورد تایید قرار گرفت و روش نمونه گیری به صورت تصادفی ساده بود. ابزار اندازه گیری شامل پرسشنامه اشتیاق شغلی (کاردون و کیرک، ۲۰۱۷)، پرسشنامه نوآوری دیجیتال (کیانفر و موسوی، ۱۴۰۰) و پرسشنامه عملکرد کسب و کار نوپای ورزشی (ضیا و طوطی فر تهران پور، ۱۳۹۷) بود. روایی پرسشنامه ها با استفاده از معیارهای روایی تشخیصی، همگرا و واگرا مورد سنجش قرار گرفت و برای تعیین پایایی پرسشنامه های اشتیاق کارآفرینانه، نوآوری دیجیتال و عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی ضریب آلفای کرونباخ به ترتیب ۰/۸۸، ۰/۸۳ و ۰/۷۶ به دست آمد که نشان می دهد هر سه پرسشنامه از پایایی مطلوبی برخوردار هستند. برای تجزیه و تحلیل فرضیه های تحقیق از مدل معادلات ساختاری و به وسیله نرم افزار SPSS ورژن ۱۹ و AMOS ورژن ۲۳ استفاده شد.

یافته ها: یافته های تحقیق نشان داد ضریب بتای نوآوری دیجیتال بر عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی ۰/۹۸، اشتیاق کارآفرینانه بر عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی ۰/۳۰ و نوآوری دیجیتال بر اشتیاق کارآفرینانه ۰/۴۷ اثرگذارند. بنابراین، می توان نتیجه گرفت براساس جدول بارون و کنی، اشتیاق کارآفرینانه در تأثیر نوآوری دیجیتال بر عملکرد کسب و کارهای نوپای ورزشی نقش میانجی جزئی دارد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این پژوهش بر روی دانشجویان علوم ورزشی خصوصاً دانشجویان تحصیلات تکمیلی انجام شده و نشان داد اگر اشتیاق کارآفرینی داشته باشند با استفاده از نوآوری های دیجیتال در عصر حاضر، باعث راه اندازی کسب و کارهای جدید در حیطه علوم ورزشی شوند.

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Investigating the Obstacles to the Development of Sports Marketing in Guilan Province

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Sports marketing, as a unique marketing science and operation, plays a vital role in the development and progress of sports. The purpose of this research is to investigate the obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan Province.

Methodology: The purpose of this research involved applied studies, and concerning the data collection method, it was a descriptive survey conducted in the field. The statistical population consisted of active sports coaches and experts from Guilan province (both male and female), and the statistical sample was determined based on the target population using Cochran's formula, totalling 278 individuals. The measurement tool was a researcher-designed questionnaire that assessed sports marketing obstacles with 28 main questions across four areas: managerial, economic, structural, and technological barriers, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). Research experts confirmed the face and content validity of the questionnaire knowledgeable about the topic, and its reliability was reported based on a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83. The research data were analyzed at descriptive and inferential statistical levels through SPSS version 23.

Findings: The findings of the research showed that the obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan province were ranked as follows using Friedman's test: 1st rank: obstacles and management problems, 2nd rank economic barriers and difficulties, 3rd rank structural obstacles and problems, and 4th rank obstacles and technological problems ($P \leq 0.001$). In management, the issue of "instability of the position of managers in different sports levels of the province" was considered one of the most significant obstacles. In the economic field, the issue of the "lack of appropriate economic laws for the presence of investors" was one of the most significant obstacles. In the structural field, the issue of the "lack of suitable sports facilities for holding sports events" was considered one of the most significant obstacles. Also, in the technology field, the issue of "non-use of technologies in the development of sports marketing" was considered one of the most significant obstacles.

Originality: In this article, the researcher examined the obstacles and challenges facing sports marketing development and proposed the creation, implementation, and assessment of effective sports marketing strategies to address these issues. The findings of this research are practical and valuable for provinces aiming to enhance their sports marketing efforts.

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1. Introduction

One of the crucial events of the last century is the industrialization of sports. The importance of sports for the economy is increasing every day, so sports have become one of the most profitable economic fields (Rahulan et al., 2013). Along with the industrialization of sports, marketing, and especially sports marketing, has also become a global and income-generating industry, resulting in the acquisition of capital and income for sports organizations and the need to pay more attention to customers. Today, customers are the focus of companies' attention, and it is necessary to satisfy customers, fully meet their needs, and accurately identify their desires, expectations, abilities, and limitations in purchasing products. By obtaining such information, it is possible to determine the factors that influence the behavior of customers of service organizations and use it in making marketing decisions of companies (Hassangholipour et al., 2014). In today's era, sports act as a driving tool in the product market, and sports marketing has attracted a wide range of audiences (Poursoltani Zarandi & Zareipour, 2018). Sports marketing has become an essential topic in recent years. The increasing profitability of the sports industry has caused this popularity and profitability to attract the attention of many marketers and investors. One of sports organizations' most complex and vital tasks is its marketing. The first definition of sports marketing was proposed by "Kessler" in 1979, who stated: Sports Marketing is the activities of consumers of industrial products and service marketers who increasingly use sports as a stimulus to promote their products or services through sports sponsorships (Nasirzadeh & Deskereh, 2015). To create a favorable image of goods and products, sports marketing should highlight the main elements of the desired goods and products concerning the chosen name. These features and elements can include the functional quality of the product, the price of the services provided, the distribution channel, and other elements mixed with marketing (Yosefi & Hasani, 2011). Sports marketing is the continuous implementation of marketing activities to ensure the continued existence of sports (all types of sports) and the prosperity of future generations (Sedky et al., 2022). Marketing emphasizes meeting the needs of customers or consumers, but sports marketing emphasizes meeting the needs of sports customers or consumers (Nasirzadeh & Deskereh, 2015). Sports marketing includes a wide range of activities and decisions, which in a comprehensive classification, they are classified in four sports product groups, price, distribution and promotion, and creating coordination between these four classes is the primary goal of sports marketing and the component. The main factors of price, product, distribution, and promotion influence sports marketing (Pourzarnegar, 2022).

Companies should keep in mind that customers' preferences evolve, and it is necessary to make appropriate decisions in this direction (Beheshtian Ardakani & Fathiyan, 2017). Marketing involves understanding the customers' needs and matching the company's products to meet those needs. It also includes the process of making a profit for the company. Marketing is a human activity that satisfies needs and wants through the exchange process. Marketing is a social development that recognizes the needs of consumers through the provision of services or goods to meet these needs and tries to lead consumers to this service or goods. Marketing is essential for any business, and marketers

try to make consumers know this product or service better in the marketing process (Nasirzadeh & Deskereh, 2015). Marketing should seek to find the most suitable markets and sectors in which the organization can be more valuable and practical; Therefore, the basis of the marketing movement is to prevent the wastage of various resources and facilities and to find the most suitable place for the product (McLaren, 2012). A successful organization must first be able to retain its customers and then try to attract new customers because the most significant income of an organization is its old customers (Nasirzadeh & Deskereh, 2015).

The importance and necessity of sports and the expansion of the presence of athletes in national and international events make it necessary to pay attention to sports marketing as the most essential principle in attracting financial sponsors, cultural-social barriers, governmental ideas, legal-legal and customary barriers, and administrative barriers. Organizational, media coverage, and weakness in the sports marketing system are among the main obstacles in marketing professional sports in Iran, especially for women's sports (Sadeghi et al., 2022). Policymakers of the country's sports industry can consider such obstacles before formulating sports marketing development strategies and determining its priorities.

In today's world, providing financial resources, sports marketing, and attracting sponsors are among the challenges sports managers face. One essential skill that sets successful managers apart from their less effective counterparts is identifying resources that generate income and solve problems. This ability can address the financial issues faced by sports organizations. A historical and empirical review of research indicates that some marketing-related challenges have been studied collectively. However, despite the numerous benefits of developing sports marketing and overcoming its hurdles to management, marketing, physical education, and sports sciences, it is crucial to organize the various factors into a coherent framework and consider newer elements from scientific and practical perspectives. Therefore, this research aims to highlight the importance of the topic and provide scientific and pragmatic justifications for conducting the study, ultimately informing readers about the content and analysis presented. The findings of this research are particularly significant, focusing on a study titled "Investigating the Obstacles to the Development of Sports Marketing in Guilan Province." The operationalization and implementation of this research can significantly support managers, planners, and decision-makers in sports organizations by offering detailed planning for effective sports marketing and addressing the obstacles and issues related to its development in Guilan Province.

2. Theoretical background

The realization of the goals of any study depends largely on the quality of the literature section and the background of the research, that is, the analytical and critical review of the existing works and research. In this section, studies and research related to the present research have been reviewed. The literature and research background show that: Alibaygi et al. (2023): Identified production and marketing obstacles in the value chain of agricultural cooperatives in Kermanshah province and announced that production and

marketing improvement obstacles in cooperatives can be identified in six circles according to the value chain that governs them, which are: input procurement, Operations, outbound logistics, governance, human resource management and marketing. Sedky et al. (2022) in a research titled "The role of sports marketing in attracting audiences to less popular sports" showed that elements of sports marketing that can help attract audiences to less popular sports include: sports media, sports advertisements, star athletes and financial support for sports; They also announced that the desired performance of national teams can create a connection between sports marketing advertisements and attracting audiences to less popular sports so that sports marketing can be developed.

Pourzarnegar (2022) in research titled "Taekwondo sports club managers' point of view about sports marketing," it was shown that the main components of price, product, distribution, and promotion influence sports marketing and between the views of coaches and managers of taekwondo sports clubs in the province. There is no significant difference regarding the importance of sports marketing in Guilan; He also suggested that taekwondo sports clubs pay more attention to their students and meet their needs to gain distinction and competitive advantage and adjust their sports marketing strategies to the different conditions and trends of sports students and provide a product or service. Better quality expected and more suitable price, fundamental and broader advertising and more accessible distribution places, which shows the importance of sports marketing, pay special attention.

Nesa Keyghobadi (2021) in research titled "Identifying and prioritizing the marketing problems of newly established sports clubs," it was shown that information technology barriers, financial barriers, managerial barriers, planning barriers, social barriers, and political barriers affect these problems.

Ramya & Kartheeswaran (2019) stated in research that today, digital marketing is a way of electronic communication that connects goods and services to the market by marketers. Digital marketing has expanded the industry worldwide, and the goal of digital marketing is to relate to consumers and allow consumers to engage with the product through digital media and make the best choice. Marketers are trying to check the effectiveness of your work. They further stated that digital marketing is suitable for analysis and turning a regular business into a profitable one. Product innovation with digital marketing will be used more, creating many opportunities and predictions.

Nasirzadh et al. (2019) examined the obstacles and challenges of student sports marketing (case study: Payam Noor University) and declared that the General Department of Physical Education of Payam Noor University has 10 strengths and 10 weaknesses and faces 10 opportunities and 10 threats. The results of his research showed that the formation of the marketing unit, the lack of sufficient knowledge of the university's marketing planning process among the employees, attention to the role of financial sponsors in student sports planning and the lack of allocation of sufficient financial resources for the development and growth of student sports are the highest importance in this study. Also, some obstacles and challenges of student sports marketing were introduced, which include a lack of specialized websites and publications, lack of media coverage, lack of strategic marketing plan, weakness in

attracting financial sponsors, and lack of university meetings with active marketing organizations, which relevant managers should consider.

Contreras & Ramos (2016) in their research entitled "What is marketing?" A study on marketing managers' understanding of the definition of marketing" showed many definitions and interpretations about marketing in academic literature. This multiplicity above conceptualization of marketing has complicated the development of marketing functions. In this study, content analysis methods were used to discover how marketing managers define the concept of marketing in Puerto Rico companies, and their research results showed that 16% of managers define marketing using concepts related to its strategic functions. Do 50% of managers define marketing using concepts related to marketing tactics? Other marketing managers also stated that they reflect both functions in their marketing approach.

The theoretical background of the previous research showed that the challenges in the field of marketing are related to factors such as: politics, human resources, media, services and goods, etc., but in this research, managerial barriers, economic barriers, structural barriers and technological barriers as Barriers to the development of sports marketing are examined. Management is a complex process and central to an organization's success. Managing the efficient and effective use of material and human resources under the accepted value system of an organization according to principles such as planning, organization, leadership, coordination, and control is based on predetermined goals (Jasbi, 2017). Investigating managerial barriers seems necessary in the category of development obstacles in sports marketing, which this research addresses. Economic factors have a direct impact on the methods of selling sports products. Understanding the effects of the relationship between economics and sports marketing can help organizations allocate different resources in response to changing economic conditions. In the category of obstacles to the development of sports marketing, it seems necessary to examine the economic obstacles addressed in this research. One of the other essential factors that can significantly impact sports marketing is its structure, and many challenges to the development of sports marketing are rooted in the sports structure of the province and even the country. In the category of barriers to the development of sports marketing, it seems necessary to examine the structural barriers addressed in this research. Also, people in society use an increasing range of tools and technologies to help them make more informed purchasing decisions, and this evolution in turn reveals the role of sports marketing in their lives. In the category of barriers to the development of sports marketing, it seems necessary to examine the barriers of technology addressed in this research.

3. Methodology

Research methodology determines the general approach to thinking and studying social reality or the phenomenon under study (Ghasemi, 2020). The current research is a descriptive survey regarding practical purposes and data collection methods that are conducted in the field. Active sports coaches formed the statistical population of the research and experts of Guilan province (male and female) who had the necessary

knowledge about the research topic, and the statistical sample was determined based on the target population and Cochran's formula of 278 people. While collecting research data, the researcher collected field and library findings and classified and analyzed them to evaluate the obstacles and problems in developing the questionnaire and finally get the answer based on them. The measurement tool in this research was a researcher-made questionnaire due to the lack of a standard questionnaire. To prepare this questionnaire, the researcher designed a questionnaire by studying the theoretical foundations and background of the research, and with the help of colleagues who are experts in the field of marketing and sports marketing, the questions were reviewed and modified in several stages, and the final approval was obtained and distributed.

This questionnaire asked the obstacles of sports marketing with 28 main questions in four areas of structural barriers (7 questions) with the following items: lack of necessary support to establish private clubs, unwillingness to transfer government clubs to the non-government sector, and lack of suitable sports facilities for holding sports events. Laws to recognize the right to broadcast television, lack of development of sports marketing culture, lack of sports television networks and government ownership of the majority of sports complexes; Economic barriers (7 questions) with items: impossibility to accurately determine the profit of sports marketing, low share of sports in the portfolio of Guilan households, lack of alignment of investment in sports with provincial policies, lack of transparency in financial information of sports clubs, lack of awareness of organizations about the benefits of sponsorship, unfavourable use of the environment of stadiums for income generation and the absence of appropriate economic laws for the presence of investors; Management obstacles (7 questions) with the following items: the instability of the position of managers at different levels of sports in the province, the managers' lack of belief in sports marketing, the lack of hosting significant sports events in the province, poor management in holding sports events, the lack of knowledge and marketing skills among the managers of the province, the ambition of some sports managers and lack of strategic planning by sports managers; And finally, technological barriers (7 questions) with the items: lack of up-to-date facilities for the development of information technologies, lack of use of technologies in the development of sports marketing, inappropriate sports marketing through social networks, lack of ability to create new values for sports marketing, lack of production New technology-based products, non-use of virtual reality in sports marketing and lack of conceptualization of sports marketing activities are measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

In this research, the questions of the questionnaire were made by the researcher following the theoretical foundations and based on other similar studies and according to the details of each of the variables defined, and an exchange of opinions and reviews was done with experts concerning the questions of the questionnaire to correct the validity. The main questionnaire was distributed after the compilation stage. Seven sports marketing professors confirmed the face and content validity of the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire was randomly distributed among 30 respondents to verify its reliability and to calculate the reliability, the reliability of the data collection tool was calculated using Cronbach's alpha as 0.83, and the reliability coefficient of structural barriers 0.82, economic barriers 0.86, management barriers 0.79 and technology barriers 0.85 were

determined separately. The final form of the questionnaire was adjusted to include the number and type of questions so that the questionnaire faced fewer problems while implementing the plan and collecting information. Its reliability was reported based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83. The research data analysis was done at two levels: descriptive and inferential statistics and SPSS 23.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample by gender, age, and education.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the statistical sample.

Property	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	172	62.1
	Female	106	37.9
Age	Less than 30	41	15.2
	31-40	89	30.8
	41-50	97	36.1
	More than 51	51	17.9
Education	Expert	162	57.8
	Masters	83	30.1
	PhD	33	12.1

Table 2 presents the descriptive findings regarding the obstacles and challenges in developing sports marketing in Guilan province, focusing on managerial, economic, structural, and technological issues. The results indicate that among managerial obstacles, "instability in the positions of managers at various levels of sports in the province" is considered one of the most significant challenges, while "the ambition of some sports managers" is viewed as the least important. In terms of economic obstacles, "the absence of appropriate economic laws to attract investors" is noted as a critical issue, whereas "the difficulty in accurately determining the profit from sports marketing" is regarded as the least significant. Regarding structural obstacles, "the lack of suitable sports facilities for hosting events" is seen as a major challenge, while "the insufficient development of sports marketing culture" is considered the least important. Additionally, within technological obstacles, "the lack of technology utilization in sports marketing development" is recognized as one of the key challenges, whereas "the absence of new technology-based product development" is deemed the least significant.

Table 2. Overview of challenges and issues in the development of sports marketing in Guilan province.

Obstacles	Object	Mean	Standard Deviation
Managerial	The instability in position of managers at different levels of sports in the province	4.38	0.872
	The managers' lack of belief in sports marketing	3.70	0.755
	The lack of hosting large sports events in the province	4.02	1.015
	Poor management in holding sports events	4.11	0.911
	The lack of knowledge and marketing skills among the managers of the province	3.85	0.647

Obstacles	Object	Mean	Standard Deviation
Economic	The ambition of some sports managers	3.15	0.766
	Lack of strategic planning by sports managers	4.08	0.420
	Impossibility to accurately determine the profit of sports marketing	3.68	0.709
	Low share of sports in the portfolio of Guilan households	4.10	0.658
	Lack of alignment of investment in sports with provincial policies	3.72	0.962
	Lack of transparency in financial information of sports clubs	4.07	0.777
	Lack of awareness of organizations about the benefits of sponsorship	3.92	0.822
	Unfavourable use of the environment of stadiums for income generation	4.15	0.682
	Absence of appropriate economic laws for the presence of investors	4.22	0.428
	Structural	Lack of necessary support in order to establish private clubs	3.69
Unwillingness to transfer government clubs to the non-government sector		4.01	0.383
Lack of suitable sports facilities for holding sports events		4.38	0.652
Laws to recognize the right to broadcast television		4.30	0.782
Lack of development of sports marketing culture		3.56	1.025
Lack of sports television networks		3.72	0.527
Technology	Government ownership of the majority of sports complexes	4.05	0.485
	Lack of up-to-date facilities for the development of information technologies	4.25	0.769
	Lack of use of technologies in the development of sports marketing	4.42	0.703
	Inappropriate sports marketing through social networks	3.77	0.635
	Lack of ability to create new values for sports marketing	4.12	0.812
	Lack of production New technology-based products	3.28	0.822
	Non-use of virtual reality in sports marketing	3.92	0.745
Lack of conceptualization of sports marketing activities	3.56	0.958	

Table 3 displays the ranking of obstacles and challenges in developing sports marketing in Guilan province. The results indicate that the difficulties encountered in the development of sports marketing in Guilan province, as determined by the Friedman test, are ranked as follows: first place: managerial obstacles (Mean Rank = 3.42), second place: economic obstacles (Mean Rank = 3.05), third place: structural barriers (Mean Rank = 2.98), and fourth place: technological barriers (Mean Rank = 2.55).

Table 3. Ranking the obstacles and problems of sports marketing development in Guilan province.

N	278	
Chi-square	40.82	
P-Value	0.001	
Obstacles	Ranking	Mean Rank
Managerial	1	3.42
Economic	2	3.05
Structural	3	2.98
Technology	4	2.55

5. Managerial implications

Development in sports is viewed as a symbol of a society's strength, and undoubtedly, sports marketing ensures the survival and growth of sports in any country. Sports marketing is one of the most effective ways to profit within the sports industry. It involves boosting sales of various sports goods and services by leveraging sports events and endorsing athletes or sports teams. It also encompasses promoting athletes, sports teams, and sporting events to enhance revenue from the benefits generated. This research indicates that focusing more on eliminating managerial, economic, structural, and technological barriers is crucial for advancing sports marketing. Relevant officials should work to remove all barriers and issues that arise in this context. Furthermore, obstacles and limitations hindering the development of sports marketing ought to be addressed, and greater awareness about the significance of sports marketing within the community should be established.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This research aimed to identify the obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan province. The descriptive results obtained from the obstacles and problems of developing sports marketing in Guilan province indicated that among managerial obstacles, the issue of "the instability in the positions of managers at various levels of sports in the province" was the most significant hurdle. In terms of economic obstacles, the issue of "the absence of appropriate economic laws for attracting investors" emerged as the most notable impediment. Concerning structural obstacles, the challenge of "the lack of suitable sports facilities for hosting sports events" was deemed the most important. Additionally, the issue of "the underutilization of technologies in the development of sports marketing" was considered the most critical obstacle in technological areas. The research results indicated that the obstacles and problems associated with developing sports marketing in Guilan province, as determined by the Friedman test, are prioritized as follows: first rank: managerial obstacles and problems; second rank: economic obstacles and problems; third rank: structural obstacles and challenges; and fourth rank: technological obstacles and issues.

- **Management obstacles and problems:** Managers follow the principles and rules necessary to achieve an organization's goals, which are very important in daily life and in maintaining and improving the organization. Capable sports managers effectively create appropriate strategies to create a favorable image of sports products to develop sports marketing. The results of this research showed that the lack of stability in the position of managers at different sports levels in the province, the weakness of management in holding sports events, and the lack of strategic planning by sports managers are among the main obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan province that must be solved. Successful sports marketing needs a focused strategy and a good work team, without a doubt, increasing the awareness and long-term plan of managers for sports marketing, the need to employ sports marketing specialists

at different levels of sports in the province, cooperation and coordination with employees, regular attendance at knowledge-enhancing courses, maintaining the stability of the position of managers in the organization and the holding of national and international sports events in the region is effective in removing the obstacles and problems of management factors for the development of sports marketing in Guilan province. The results of this research on managerial barriers are in line with the research of [Alibaygi et al. \(2023\)](#), [Contreras & Ramos \(2016\)](#), [Nesa Keyghobadi \(2021\)](#) and [Sedky et al. \(2022\)](#) are consistent; Because these researchers also emphasized the role of management and management factors in the development or non-development of sports marketing by attracting audiences.

- **Economic Obstacles and Problems:** The economy encompasses the total value of transactions among economic actors, including individuals, groups, and organizations. In many instances, sports marketing can be viewed as a subset of economics. This research has shown that the absence of suitable economic laws for attracting investors, the ineffective use of stadium environments for generating income, and the low representation of sports in the portfolio of Guilan households are primary obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan Province. To enhance the sports industry, leveraging the favorable presence of investors in sports and providing them with legal support, alongside utilizing environmental and media advertising, could significantly increase public participation in educational, general, championship, and professional sports while addressing economic barriers to sports marketing development in Guilan Province. The findings of this research regarding economic barriers align with the studies conducted by [Pourzarnegar \(2022\)](#), [Poursoltani Zarandi & Zareipour \(2018\)](#), [McLaren \(2012\)](#), [Nasirzadeh & Deskereh \(2015\)](#) and [Rahulan et al. \(2013\)](#), all of which identified similar factors in their work. They concluded that focusing on economic considerations and ensuring transparency in the financial information of sports organizations can attract more investment in sports, thus enriching the field of sports marketing.
- **Structural obstacles and problems:** The framework structure shows the pattern or organization of related components in a sports organization that can be identified by observing or recognizing the pattern. This research showed that the lack of suitable sports venues for holding sports events, the lack of laws to recognize the right to broadcast television, and the state ownership of most sports complexes are the main obstacles to developing sports marketing in Guilan province. Structure is a part of sports marketing, and structural factors determine the goals of sports organizations. A valuable and solid structure can help the organization and its employees create, implement, and execute sports marketing. Paying more attention to the construction and completion of sports facilities and facilities, handing over state clubs to the private sector, developing the culture of sports marketing, legalizing the right to broadcast television like other countries in the world, and successfully holding sports events are effective in removing structural obstacles for the development of sports marketing in

Guilan province. Is. The results of this research on structural barriers are consistent with the research of Nasirzadeh & Deskereh (2015) and Nesa Keyghobadi (2021), because in their study, they emphasized the role of proper structure in sports marketing.

- **Technological obstacles and problems:** Technology can be defined as all the knowledge, processes, tools, methods, and systems used in producing goods and providing sports services, and technology is the practical application of knowledge and tools to help human endeavours in the sports industry. The results of this research showed that the lack of up-to-date facilities for the development of information technologies, the lack of use of technologies in the development of sports marketing, and the inability to create new values for sports marketing are the main obstacles to the development of sports marketing in Guilan province. The production of sports products according to the latest needs of consumers, the more appropriate use of up-to-date technologies, the development of communication and information technology, the increase of production by reducing costs, and the awareness of people about the value of sports marketing have a significant effect in removing the mentioned obstacles. The results of this research on technological barriers with the researches of Alibaygi et al. (2023), Beheshtian Ardakani & Fathiyan (2017), Nesa Keyghobadi (2021) and Ramya & Kartheeswaran (2019) are consistent, who stated that people in society use technology to perform various tasks in their daily lives and use it in the form of products, processes or organizations. They describe and use it to remove marketing obstacles.

Our new findings are theoretically and practically significant. The results of my research showed that the sports officials of Guilan province should pay more attention to removing managerial, economic, structural, and technological obstacles in sports to develop sports marketing.

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بررسی موانع توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی استان گیلان

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کلیدواژه

بازاریابی ورزشی
توسعه
راهبرد
کسب و کار
موانع

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: بازاریابی ورزشی به عنوان یک علم و عملیات بازاریابی خاص، نقش بسیار مهمی در توسعه و پیشرفت ورزش دارد. هدف از انجام این تحقیق، بررسی موانع توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی استان گیلان بود.

روش: این تحقیق از نظر هدف کاربردی و از نظر روش گردآوری داده‌ها توصیفی - پیمایشی بوده که به صورت میدانی انجام شد. جامعه آماری تحقیق را مربیان و کارشناسان فعال ورزشی استان گیلان (عم از زن و مرد) تشکیل دادند و نمونه آماری براساس جامعه هدف و فرمول کوکران ۲۷۸ نفر تعیین شد. ابزار اندازه‌گیری، پرسشنامه محقق ساخته‌ای بود که موانع بازاریابی ورزشی را با ۲۸ سؤال اصلی در چهار حوزه موانع مدیریتی، اقتصادی، ساختاری و فن‌آوری در مقیاس پنج درجه‌ای لیکرت از ۱ (خیلی کم) تا ۵ (خیلی زیاد) اندازه‌گیری کرد. روایی صوری و محتوایی پرسشنامه توسط صاحب‌نظران حوزه تحقیق تأیید شد و پایایی آن براساس ضریب آلفای کرونباخ ۰/۸۳ درصد گزارش شد. تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌های تحقیق در دو سطح آمار توصیفی و استنباطی و با استفاده از نرم‌افزار SPSS ۲۳ انجام شد.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌های تحقیق نشان داد رتبه موانع توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی استان گیلان چنین است: رتبه اول: موانع و مشکلات مدیریتی، رتبه دوم: موانع و مشکلات اقتصادی، رتبه سوم: موانع و مشکلات ساختاری و رتبه چهارم: موانع و مشکلات فن‌آوری بود ($P \leq 0/001$). در حیطه مدیریتی: گویه "بی‌ثباتی جایگاه مدیران در سطوح مختلف ورزش استان" از مهم‌ترین موانع به‌شمار می‌رفت. در حیطه اقتصادی: گویه "عدم وجود قوانین اقتصادی مناسب جهت حضور سرمایه‌گذاران" از مهم‌ترین موانع بود. در حیطه ساختاری: گویه "کمبود اماکن ورزشی مناسب برای برگزاری رویدادهای ورزشی" از مهم‌ترین موانع به‌شمار می‌آمد و همچنین در حیطه فن‌آوری، گویه "عدم استفاده از فن‌آوری‌ها در توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی" از مهم‌ترین موانع بود.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: محقق در این مقاله به بررسی موانع و مشکلات توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی پرداخت و تدوین، اجرا و ارزیابی راهبردهای صحیح بازاریابی ورزشی را برای رفع موانع و مشکلات توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی پیشنهاد نمود. به نظر می‌رسد نتایج این تحقیق برای استان‌هایی که به دنبال توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی هستند، مؤثر و ارزشمند باشد.

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Customer Repeats Attendance Practices in Sports Clubs: Monitoring Customer Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The current research investigates how customers return to sports clubs by monitoring customer loyalty.

Methodology: The population and statistical sample consisted of 384 customers of sports complexes in Sanandaj, who were randomly selected in a cluster. The measurement tools included questionnaires of functional service quality, technical quality, relationship quality, and customer and future attendance intention. The research method was descriptive correlation. In terms of collecting field information, after verifying the validity of form and content, its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha test. A structural equation model was used for data analysis.

Findings: One of the successful ways for any sports complex to maintain customers is to create appropriate service quality, long-term, high-quality relationships and maintain these relationships. Also, customer loyalty, as a deep commitment to repurchasing a product or service, is precious for organizations because loyal customers can be very profitable.

Originality: Consumer behavior refers to the set of behavioral reactions that the consumer shows after using the services of the center or organization. One of these reactions is the intention to attend in the future or to buy again from customers. Repurchase intention increases the likelihood of returning customers.

Keywords

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Future Attendance Intention
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1. Introduction

In the last decade, marketers have appropriated love as a construct that describes consumers' intense emotional attachments to love objects, whether a brand, product, or service. Every business around the world depends on the customer. The product and profit always increase and decrease with the customer's demand. So, that's why it is necessary to treat them as the king of the market; organizations should continuously provide solutions to deal with changes and global competition, quickly meet customers' needs, and become a customer-oriented organization (Minbashrazgah et al., 2017). In the competitive era, research on customers' behavioral intentions is more critical, and the direct and indirect results of these decisions on organizations have become more severe because the number of these types of organizations is increasing. To attract more customers to buy their services, it is necessary to identify the factors that affect them (Guo et al., 2016). Identifying variables affecting customer behavior is very important for many organizations and companies. It provides the opportunity to reduce costs and consequently increase profits. And it involves many functional areas in organizations (Drennan et al., 2015). Therefore, marketing managers must have a detailed understanding of consumer behavior to recognize and identify these variables and create a suitable marketing mix for a market.

According to consumer behavior researchers describe how consumers make purchase decisions and how to use the purchased goods or services (Hsu & Chen, 2018). Theodorakis et al. (2013) have expressed positive word-of-mouth advertising, desire, and enthusiasm to reorder and buy again as measures of consumer behavioral intentions. Consumer behavior refers to the set of behavioral reactions that the consumer shows after using the services of the center or organization (Esmaeili et al., 2014). One of these reactions is the intention to attend in the future or the intention to buy again from customers. Repurchase intention increases the likelihood of returning customers. The consumer's long-term orientation is the same as the repurchase intention. Studies in recent years confirm that repurchase intention is influential in determining future customer behavior (Inoue et al., 2016).

In the competitive era, research on customers' behavioral intentions is more critical, and the direct and indirect results of these decisions on organizations have become more serious. The number of these types of organizations is increasing, and to attract more customers to buy their services, it is necessary to identify the factors that affect it (Guo et al., 2016). Thus, organizations believe that they can achieve long-term profits only by repeating the purchase of customers, so they are always trying to take a step forward in facilitating the process of repurchasing customers (Aghazadeh et al., 2014). On the one hand, considering that consumers operate in a dynamic and continuously changing environment, and on the other hand, consumer products and services are regularly changing and evolving (Hsu & Chen, 2018). The customers of sports centers are looking for centers that meet their expected demands. Considering the increase in competition and popularity in sports centers today (Cizrelioğulları et al., 2021). Fortunately, in recent years, the number of sports centers in the country has been increasing daily, along with the increase in their number. The competition in attracting customers and providing better

services is expanding. Due to this increase in the number and the emergence of competition to attract and retain customers, developing customer retention solutions should be on the agenda of sports complex managers (Esmaeili et al., 2014).

Measuring the quality of services and identifying the weak and strong points of the organization is the first step toward improving and developing the activities of these groups (Esmaeili et al., 2014), considering the increase in competition and popularity in sports centers today (Cizreliogullari et al., 2021). Paying attention to customers' needs and responding to their demands in the production and service sector has become one of organizations' most essential and necessary tasks or goals (Bonfanti et al., 2023). Service quality was a concept that was first used in the industry and indicated five dimensions of service, including the sensible dimension (conditions and physical space of the service delivery environment such as facilities, equipment, employees, and communication channels), reliability dimension (the ability to perform the service safe and reliable), responsiveness dimension (willingness to cooperate and help the customer), assurance dimension (employees' ability to instill a sense of trust and confidence in the customer) and empathy dimension (employees' ability to deal with each customer especially according to their mental and emotional state) (Noaman et al., 2017). Quality is a multidimensional concept that consists of perceptions, values, general intentions, and specific goals of each target or stakeholder group. It is expressed based on the perceived difference between people's expectations and the services received (Cavallone et al., 2020). In the last two decades, interest in service quality has also been raised in the sports industry. Today, service quality is one of the most essential topics in service management and sports marketing (Polyakova & Ramchandani, 2023).

Customers are interested in receiving services of the highest technical quality and seeking functional quality. The quality of technical and functional services affects consumer happiness (De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). Kasiri et al. (2017) found that functional and technical quality has a vital effect on customer satisfaction by providing high-quality services. Therefore, for different strategies, service quality should be measured in both technical and functional dimensions (De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). Hence, with the intensification of competition among sports service providers, knowing the expectations of customers and the levels of these expectations from sports organizations allows service marketers to determine whether the services provided have an acceptable level of quality (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2023). Sweeney et al. (2016) investigated how service quality indicators, service expectations, and different social conditions affect customers' choice of service locations. The results showed that reputation, friends, and experience influence choosing service locations. The quality and expectations of services were influential, with an effect of 0.65, and personal signs of services were influential, with an impact of 0.35.

Various factors and resources have been involved in gaining a competitive advantage in the service sector. It can be said that the most important of them is human power because the service sector employees interact with their customers to provide services. In this direction, the emergence of relational marketing is also related. It is closely related to the growth of the service sector, so long-term relationships, customer interaction, and participation can be mentioned from the service results; the quality of this interaction leads

to gaining a competitive advantage and creating differentiation between different organizations (Gummerus et al., 2017). Relationship quality is derived from the theory of relational marketing research, which aims to strengthen strong relationships and convert indifferent customers into loyal customers (Siegfried, 2023). Also, the authors believe that relationship quality is a high-order structure with many distinct but interrelated elements. These elements are opportunism, customer orientation, conflict, trust in the product or service provider, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and perceived quality (Mirahmadi Babaheydari & Tabatabaei Nasab, 2016). The quality of the relationship depends on the customer's perception and evaluation of the interactions with the personnel and their behavior in dealing with the customers. New studies regarding this issue have examined and recognized the factors affecting the quality of relationships with customers. They explain how these factors can create opportunities for managers that lead to the design and implementation of relational marketing strategies (Won et al., 2023).

Therefore Quansah (2024), a study titled Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Relationship Marketing, concluded that relationship quality predicts 52% of the variance of participation in the game. Also, in Kim et al. (2011) research, the influence of relationship quality on the behaviors of sports consumers was investigated in an empirical investigation of the relationship quality framework. The results showed that the relationship quality with the team explains 56% of the variance of the intention to attend the game and 66% of the variance of the intention to purchase licensed goods. Obtaining needs and desires can be achieved through exchanging with customers (Collignon & Sultan, 2014). The effect of the quality of communication on the behaviors of the spectators, such as attending the game, customer referral, and financial assistance, was investigated. The results showed that the quality of communication positively affects all three behaviors of the spectators (Gao et al., 2023). Therefore, companies should always monitor the interaction between themselves and their customers (Uhrich et al., 2024). Developing close and stable relationships with the target customers is recommended as a strategic tool to limit market competition and maintain long-term profitability. Depending on some experts' beliefs, the reality is that the relationship is an important factor in establishing a reliable relationship with the customers and ultimately improving the company's performance (Ebrahimi & Aali, 2016). The increase in competition in product marketing forces the company to create a strategy to attract and retain customers. The policy carried out by companies is personal attention to customer needs (Hu et al., 2024). The great interest of sports complexes in creating quality relationships is not surprising. The survival and success of sports organizations depend on providing and strengthening the quality of these relationships with their customers (Nufer & Bühler, 2011). In the case of ignoring the customers' demands and needs, the sports complexes' managers, their repeat purchases, and future attendance will be lost (Esmacili et al., 2014). Also, sports marketers and researchers generally believe that relationship marketing efforts can strengthen relationships and the quality of these relationships with sports consumers. Today, marketing acknowledges the existence of multiple relationships and a network of relationships between different stakeholders (Gummerus et al., 2017). At present, communication with customers is not enough to obtain loyal customers, but the quality of this communication is also essential. The quality of the relationship depends on the

customer's perception and evaluation of the interactions with the personnel and their behavior in dealing with the customers (Moradi & Raissi, 2015). Researchers have examined trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction to investigate relationship quality (Ault et al., 2024). If customers, while trusting and committed to a company, are also satisfied with it, they show less sensitivity to the increase in the prices of that company's products or services. Their purchasing tendencies increase for future purchases, and they encourage others to buy from that company. Ascending the quality of the relationship is one of the main factors affecting the performance of sports complexes (Jowett et al., 2023). However, it seems that the quality of the desired relationship alone cannot be a stimulating factor in the future presence of customers in sports complexes. Also, the increase in competition in service marketing has forced collections to create a strategy to attract and retain customers. It is like reducing the costs and existence of the collections, so the collections should prevent the cost of finding new customers and even turn these satisfied customers into loyal customers who can be the company's defenders in the future. Relationship quality is considered an essential criterion in the customer's choice of an organization, and strengthening it affects customer loyalty. When customers are willing to interact with a company, their relationship becomes closer, and customer loyalty increases. Customer loyalty is one of the most critical issues in the sports industry. Most commercial and service organizations study, evaluate, and implement loyalty strategies and programs to cultivate strong customer relationships (Gummerus et al., 2017). Therefore, collections have found that the cost of attracting new customers is five times that of keeping current customers. The loss of a customer is not only the loss of a selling point but also the loss of the entire stream of purchases that customers make throughout their lives (Armstrong et al., 2014). For this reason, the managers of sports complexes can improve the service quality levels and relationship quality in their service centers. This leads to the future presence of customers and prevents the cost of finding new customers. These satisfied customers will become loyal customers who can become defenders of the company in the future. Hence Compton (2016) concluded that sports teams and athletes could benefit through features outside the sports fields and using them to create, develop, and support fans and maintain their loyalty. Take it also states that the emphasis on features unrelated to the product and the use of various tactics in building the athlete's brand and creating a favorable image for creating and developing. Fan loyalty is significant research that interpreted the relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction and built loyalty models appropriate to consumer behavior. Their results showed that customer satisfaction is related to loyalty, and loyalty, in turn, impacts the performance of service organizations. They suggested that managers can transfer loyalty and create customer loyalty using loyalty models. Huang & Kim (2023), in research examining the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty of private clubs, stated that there is a significant relationship between the components of service quality and customer loyalty. Today, providing services in developed countries is essential to the gross domestic product. So, improving quality and increasing performance is one of the necessary goals of this sector. Being good is not enough in today's turbulent and competitive business world. In the meantime, the issue of "maintaining and strengthening customer loyalty" for companies concerned about maintaining and

developing their competitive position in the market is a strategic challenge. It requires a lot of money to understand and recognize this concept and achieve practical solutions, which they spend on strengthening. With the intensification of competition and the approach of the quantitative and qualitative level of services that exist in the chosen field of customers, it is considered vital and necessary to provide services that can be noticed by them and organized by regular customers. In turn, it will influence the organization's word-of-mouth advertising. Customers are so clever that they know they have the right to choose, and if they have no good experience with the services provided by the organization, they use this right and go to the competitors (Malekzadeh et al., 2015). Unlike other research, the two components of service quality and relationship quality have been examined separately concerning the intention of future attendance. The technical quality of tools and equipment (ASTM and EM) has been used in terms of service quality. On the other hand, the loyalty variable should be considered as a mediator. Therefore, the current research aims to identify the effect of service quality and relationship quality on future attendance intention by mediating customer loyalty.

2. Theoretical background

In the last two decades, interest in service quality has also been raised in the sports industry. Today, service quality is one of the most essential topics in service management and sports marketing (Perez-Aranda et al., 2023). The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) aims to discover the most outstanding share of participation and attitude of its components, which can predict the intention of club members. Customers are interested not only in receiving services of the highest technical quality but also in functional quality. The quality of technical and functional services affects consumer happiness (De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). Kasiri et al. (2017), in a study, found that functional and technical quality has a vital effect on customer satisfaction by providing high-quality services. Therefore, for different strategies, service quality should be measured in both technical and functional dimensions (De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). Thus, with the intensification of competition among sports service providers, knowing the expectations of customers and the levels of these expectations from sports organizations allows service marketers to determine whether the services provided have an acceptable level of quality (Fernando et al., 2023). Sweeney et al. (2016) investigated how service quality indicators, service expectations, and different social conditions affect customers' choice of service locations. The results showed that reputation, friends, and experience influence choosing service locations. The quality and expectations of services were influential, with an effect of 0.65, and personal signs of services were influential, with an impact of 0.35.

Various factors and resources have been involved in gaining a competitive advantage in the service sector, and it can be said that the most important of them is human power because the service sector employees interact with their customers to provide services. In this direction, the emergence of relational marketing is also related. Customer experience management (CXM) research theory is increasingly concerned with the long-term evolution of customer experience journeys across multiple service cycles.

Much of this research suggests that firms should make customer journeys as “consistent and predictable” as possible. It is closely related to the growth of the service sector, so long-term relationships, customer interaction, and participation can be mentioned from the service results; the quality of this interaction leads to gaining a competitive advantage and creating differentiation between different organizations (Gummerus et al., 2017). Relationship quality is derived from the theory of relational marketing research, whose ultimate goal is strengthening strong relationships and converting indifferent customers into loyal customers (Pashaie et al., 2023). Also, the authors believe that relationship quality is a high-order structure with many distinct but interrelated elements. These elements are opportunism, customer orientation, conflict, trust in the product or service provider, confidence, satisfaction, commitment, and perceived quality (Mirahmadi Babaheydari & Tabatabaei Nasab, 2016). The quality of the relationship depends on the customer's perception and evaluation of the interactions with the personnel and their behavior in dealing with the customers. New studies regarding this issue have examined and recognized the factors affecting the quality of customer relationships and explain how each can create opportunities for managers that lead to the design and implementation of relational marketing strategies.

Therefore Ahmad & Akbar (2023), a study titled Validating a Multidimensional Perspective of Relationship Marketing on Brand Attachment, Customer Loyalty, and Purchase Intentions: A Serial Mediation Model concluded that relationship quality has proved to be a significant serial mediator between the linkage of relationship marketing and purchase intentions. Also, in Kim et al.'s (2011) research, the influence of relationship quality on the behaviors of sports consumers was investigated in an empirical investigation of the relationship quality framework, the results of which showed that the quality of the relationship with the team explains 56% of the variance of the intention to attend the game, 66% of the variance of the intention to purchase licensed goods. Obtaining needs and desires can be achieved through exchanging with customers (Collignon & Sultan, 2014). In another study Noorikhanyourdi et al. (2023), the effect of the communication quality on the behaviors of attending the game, customer referral, and financial assistance of the spectators was investigated. The results showed that the quality of communication positively affects all three behaviors of the spectators (Guo et al., 2016).

Therefore, companies should continuously monitor the interaction between themselves and their customers (Gao et al., 2023). Developing close and stable relationships with the target customers is recommended as a strategic tool to limit market competition and maintain long-term profitability. Depending on some experts' beliefs, the quality of the relationship is a critical factor in establishing a reliable relationship with the customers and ultimately improving the company's performance (Ebrahimi & Aali, 2016). The sports retail industry and management need to ensure that substantial customer value is built through high-quality services rendered to the clientele base, employing sports leadership theories such as path-goal, authentic leadership, transformation, situational, and leader-member exchange theories. The increase in competition in product marketing forces the company to create a strategy to attract and retain customers. The policy carried out by companies is personal attention

to customer needs. The great interest of sports complexes in developing quality relationships is not surprising because the survival and success of sports organizations depend on providing and strengthening the quality of these relationships with their customers (Nufer & Bühler, 2011). In the case of ignoring the customers' demands and needs, the sports complexes' managers, their repeat purchases, and future attendance will be lost (Esmaeili et al., 2014). Also, sports marketers and researchers generally believe that relationship marketing efforts can strengthen relationships and the quality of these relationships with sports consumers. Today, marketing acknowledges the existence of multiple relationships and a network of relationships between different stakeholders (Gummerus et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

In The current research method is descriptive correlational type in which the customers of Sanandaj sports complex were selected as a sample. The sample size compared to the size of the population based on the Morgan table, 368 customers randomly clustered in such a way that the area of Sanandaj city was divided into five regions: east, west, center, south and north, and sports complexes of Ahmadpanah in the east, Takhti in the west, Kurdistan University in the center, Ostad Pajouhesh in the south and Shahid Chamran in the north were randomly selected. To measure the quality of functional services form of a 22-question questionnaire (Berry, 2002) to measure the quality of technical services of sports equipment and a 6-question and consolidated questionnaire of ASTM and EN (standard of the American Testing and Materials Association and European Union standard in the equipment sector) and (Kang & James, 2004), to measure the quality of the relationship from an 8-question questionnaire, and to measure loyalty from a 4-question questionnaire (Berry, 2002), to measure future attendance intention from a 4-question questionnaire by (Shang et al., 2006) after translating it into Farsi and applying the necessary changes and corrections, the opinions of experts were used for the formal and content validity of the questionnaire. The researcher was present at the sports complexes; after obtaining verbal consent and stating that it was not mandatory to cooperate and complete the questionnaire, the participants completed the relevant questionnaire. Finally, 410 questionnaires were distributed, and the researcher collected 370 questionnaires to be analyzed. Including 370 valid questionnaires, the response rate was 90%. Since the response rate was more than 85%, the number of distorted questionnaires (%10) is not a threat to the present research (Jordan et al., 2011). According to the obtained factor loadings, questions 6-10-14-15-16, which all belonged to the functional service quality variable, were removed from the total data. According to the results of Cronbach's alpha test, the value of all indicators was more than 0.7. It can be acknowledged that the questions for indicators have good reliability, and the measurement tool has good internal consistency (Table 1). Descriptive statistics were used to organize, classify, and summarize the raw data. In the inferential statistics section, the structural equation model test was used to check the fit of the research model. Data analysis was done using SPSS and PLS statistical software. In Table 2, the validity and reliability of the constructs of the research tool are presented.

Table 1. Components, items for each element, sources used in the questionnaire, and the degree of internal consistency.

Index	Component	Sub-component	Number of questions	Source	Cronbach's alpha
Service quality	Functional quality	Tangible	4	Berry (2002)	0.84
		Confidence	5		0.84
		Answering	4		0.81
		Guarantee	4		0.74
		Empathy	5		0.84
Service quality	Technical quality	6		Kang & James (2004), ASTM and EN	0.83
Relationship quality	Satisfaction	4		Lages et al. (2008) and Huang (2001)	0.87
	Trust	4			0.84
Loyalty	4			Berry (1985)	0.87
Future attendance intention	4			Shang et al. (2006)	0.87

Table 2. Checking the validity and reliability of research structures.

Variables	AVE	CR	A
Service quality	0.47	0.95	0.94
Relationship quality	0.60	0.92	0.90
Intention to attend	0.73	0.91	0.87
Loyalty	0.73	0.91	0.87

As shown in Table 2, all variables in the model are highly reliable. Combined reliability and Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 indicate the reliability of each research construct is acceptable. Also, the criterion value for the acceptance level of validity of convergence (average variance extracted) is 0.4. As shown in Table 1, the AVE values of each construct are more than 0.4, confirming that the present questionnaire's convergent validity is acceptable.

4. Results

The demographic characteristics of the research samples are in Table 3:

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of research samples.

Variable	Frequency				Percentage							
	Male	Female	196	174	0,53	0,47						
Gender												
Education	Diploma and sub-diploma	Associate degree	Bachelor degree	Master's degree and above	218	27	76	49	58,9	7,3	20,5	13,2
		20-25	26-30	31 Years and above	192	74	46	58	51,9	0,20	12,4	15,7
		Single	Married	295	75							
		Non-Professional	Professional	201	169							
Activity	Physical education	Non-Physical education	113	257								

Variable		Frequency			Percentage			
History	Under 1 year	1-3	4-7	8 Years and above	106	126	84	54

The information related to the individual characteristics of the research samples is in Table 2. According to this table, the highest frequency (0.53) based on the gender variable is related to male customers, the highest frequency (58.9) based on the educational level is related to diploma and sub-diploma customers, and the highest frequency (51.9) in the age variable is regarding the age category under 20 years, the highest frequency (79.7) based on the marital status of single customers, the highest frequency (54.3) based on the variable of the level of exercise related to non-professional customers, the highest frequency (69.5) based on the field of study variable related to non-physical education customers and also on the variable of activity history in sports complexes, the highest frequency (1.34) is attributed to 1 to 3 years of experience.

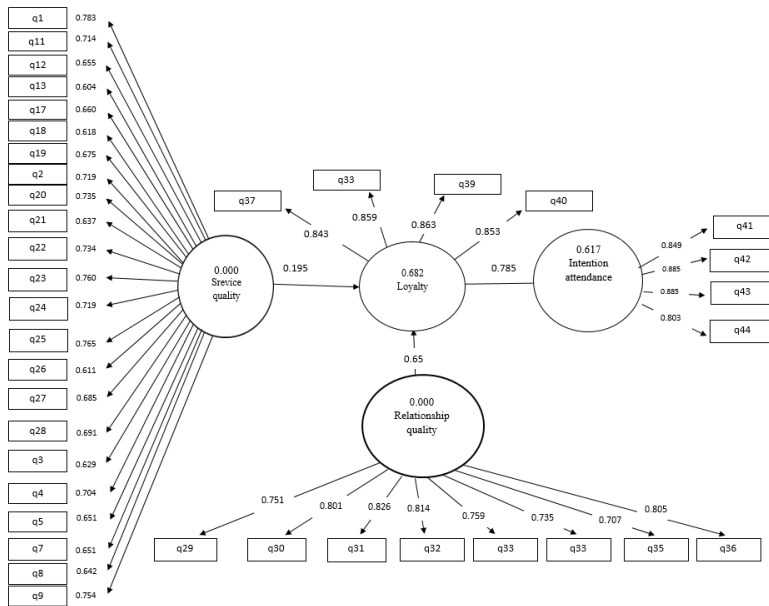


Figure 1. PLS software output in standard mode.

According to the algorithm, several criteria are issued to check the fit of the structural model of the research, and the first and most basic criterion is the significance coefficients Z or t-values (significance mode). According to the table in Figure 8-4, all the paths are at least 1.96, so it can be outlined that all the ways are positive and meaningful research models. According to Figure 4-7, the value of R2 for the structure of loyalty and intention to attend has been accounted as 0.68 and 0.61, respectively, confirming the appropriateness of the structural model fit according to the three criterion values of 0.19, 33, and 0.67. Another criterion that needs to be examined is the prediction power of the Q2 model. Since the value of Q2 of the endogenous structure of

loyalty and intention to attend is 0.44 and 0.49, respectively, according to the three criterion values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, it shows the strong predictive power of the model regarding this structure and the proper fit of the structural model of the research once again. Another criterion that needs investigating is the effect size criterion (f2). This criterion determines the intensity of the relationship between the model structures. According to the obtained results, the f2 value calculated for the path of service quality to loyalty is 0.03, and the manner of relationship quality to loyalty is 0.37, which shows a small effect size and a large effect size. The goodness of fit index or GOF has been calculated as 0.62, which indicates the whole quality of the model. The wellness of fitness value was gained from the following relationship:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communality} \times R^2} = 0/62$$

Finally, the last criterion that needs to be investigated is the prediction power of the Q2 model. Since the Q2 value of the endogenous construct of loyalty is 0.49 and the construct of intention to attend is 0.43, this shows the strong predictive power of the model regarding these instruments. Once again, it notes the appropriate fit of the research's structural model. In the following, the significant effects of indirect relationships were determined using the Sobel test.

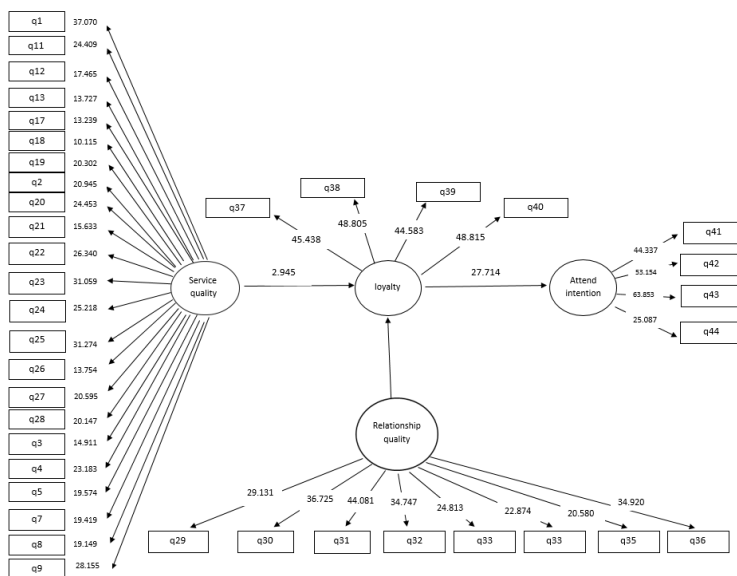


Figure 2. PLS software output in meaningful mode.

Table 4. Results of indirect and significant effects using the Sobel test.

The main hypothesis	The direct effect	The indirect effect	The Sobel test	The result
The path of service quality to the intention of attendance	—	0.15	2.63	Confirmation

The path of relationship quality to the intention to attend	————	0.50	8.49	Confirmation
Significant effect				
The path of relationship quality to loyalty	0.65	————	9.99	Confirmation
The path of service quality to loyalty	0.196	————	2.94	Confirmation
The path of loyalty to the intention to attend	0.78	————	27.71	Confirmation

According to the results of [Table 3](#), the Sobel test indicates that the loyalty variable indirectly mediates the relationship between the quality of service and the quality of the relationship in the intention of customers, considering that it is in the range of more than 1.96.

5. Managerial implications

The loyalty variable indirectly mediates the relationship between the quality of service and the quality of the relationship in customers' intentions.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Today, organizations believe that they can make long-term profits only by repeating the purchase of customers, so they are always trying to take a step forward in facilitating the process of re-purchasing customers; therefore, the existence of various stresses in life has caused people to look for mental peace and release their energy for moments by attending sports complexes. But the fundamental way for customers to reappear in these collections is to make them loyal through efforts to build, develop, and maintain long-term relationships ([Mandić et al., 2023](#)). Professional marketers need to understand how to change the variables affecting loyalty to lead to the future intention of customers ([Zou et al., 2023](#)). In this research, the variables influencing loyalty include service and relationship quality. For this reason, sports complexes can improve the levels of service quality and relationship quality in their service centers, lead to the future presence of customers, prevent the cost of finding new customers, and even turn these satisfied customers into loyal customers who can be defenders of the company in the future.

According to [Mereu \(2022\)](#), the dimensions of service quality include the ability to trust the service, the feeling of responsibility for providing the service, the competence to provide the service, the possibility of accessing the service at different hours, the politeness and humility of the employees, the relationship with the customer, the reputation of the center, security, the understanding of the customer and the tangible aspects of service delivery. Therefore, customer satisfaction and managing a good relationship with the customer are the fundamental goals of sports club management. The quality of service is directly related to the rate of customer retention and the generating of more profit for the center. In addition, providing the best service to the customer requires a system that has the pulse of the customer and makes accurate predictions about the customers. [Kayaman & Arasli \(2007\)](#) Have investigated the effect of five dimensions of service quality on loyalty. He states that two dimensions of

tangibility and responsiveness directly affect loyalty. [Alzaydi \(2024\)](#) has confirmed a positive relationship and a significant effect of service quality on customer loyalty. They state that service quality is one of the most important criteria for customer judgment, and high service quality makes them return. [Shiravand et al. \(2023\)](#) Their research entitled "The Effect of Investment in Relational Marketing on Customer Satisfaction of Tehran Sports Complexes (Mediating the Role of Brand Trust and Customer Appreciation)" concluded that the brand is essential in creating consumer-brand loyalty. This mentality can lead to the satisfaction and loyalty of the users of the sports complex through trust in the brand. According to the current research model results, service quality positively and significantly affects loyalty. Therefore, the complexes can create loyalty in their customers with the quality of service, leading to the profit of the sports complexes. The results of this research are consistent with the study of [Dreher & Ströbel \(2023\)](#), [Kayaman & Arasli \(2007\)](#) and [Sun & Ghiselli \(2010\)](#) regarding the effect of service quality on customer loyalty. Investigating the impact of functional and technical service quality separately on loyalty and quality in customer relationships is suggested.

A high customer loyalty increases the probability of their future presence later. Customer's praise of services from family, friends, and acquaintances attracts more customers, and sports complexes, in addition to satisfying past customers, also do marketing for new customers. Customer satisfaction levels directly affect customer loyalty, and finally, high levels of customer loyalty directly affect the customer's future behavior intention. In this research, the results show the positive and significant effect of loyalty on the future maintenance of customers, and based on this, sports complexes avoid the cost of attracting new customers by making their customers loyal and also cause their loyal customers to return to the complex. The results of this finding are consistent with the research of [Ramos et al. \(2023\)](#), [Pashaie et al. \(2023\)](#), [Sousa et al. \(2024\)](#), and [\(Lee, 2010\)](#). Investigating the relationship of loyalty in attitudinal and combined dimensions and the effect of word-of-mouth advertising on customers' intention to attend is suggested in future research. The relationship quality is considered an essential criterion in choosing an organization by the customer, and how to strengthen it affects customer loyalty.

On the other hand, it should be noted that relationship quality plays an essential role in customer loyalty; when the relationship with customers is of high quality, customers trust the seller and feel satisfied with the relationship with the seller. The literature considers the relationship between trust as a part of customer relationship quality and loyalty; getting trust is the main factor that leads to loyalty. When the customer trusts the service provider, he uses the service continuously and recommends it to others. Trust reduces the customer's fear of risk during the exchange and is considered the most essential variable in the quality of the relationship. Loyalty is a function of customer satisfaction resulting from a person's cognitive comparison of consumption experience and expectations. A positive and meaningful relationship exists between customer loyalty and satisfaction, so satisfaction is considered a prerequisite for loyalty. If the service provider can meet the needs of its customers better than its competitors and satisfy them, it will be easier to create loyalty. In this research, the results showed that relationship quality had a significant effect on the loyalty of the customers of the sports

complexes so that for one unit of change in the quality of the relationship, the loyalty of the customers of the sports complexes can be increased. The results of this finding are aligned with the research of Huang & Kim (2023), Hu et al. (2024), Yaprak (2023), Fernando et al. (2023) and not aligned with the findings of Polyakova & Ramchandani (2023), Biscaia et al. (2023) and Glaveli et al. (2023) in the degree of influence of relationship quality on loyalty.

Therefore, it is recommended to improve and strengthen the activities that are important and valuable to the sports complex by taking advantage of the knowledge of the influential factors in the loyalty and repeat presence of customers in sports complexes while creating a long-term relationship with customers, to attract more customers to the sports complex. Of course, the variables and factors examined in this research do not cover all the factors affecting the loyalty of the customers' intention to attend sports groups again. Thus, in addition to these variables, other factors such as marketing mix (price, place, promotion, product), market orientation, knowledge management, and customer relationship management based on technology can also be investigated in future research.

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حضور مجدد مشتریان در باشگاه‌های ورزشی: پایش وفاداری مشتری

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چکیده

هدف: هدف پژوهش حاضر بررسی شیوه‌های حضور مجدد مشتریان در باشگاه‌های ورزشی با پایش وفاداری مشتری است.

روش: روش پژوهش توصیفی-همبستگی و از نظر گردآوری اطلاعات میدانی بود. جامعه و نمونه آماری شامل ۳۸۴ نفر از مشتریان مجموعه‌های ورزشی شهر سنجند بودند که به صورت تصادفی خوشه‌ای انتخاب شدند. ابزار اندازه‌گیری شامل پرسشنامه‌های کیفیت خدمات کارکردی، کیفیت فنی، کیفیت رابطه، مشتری و قصد حضور آتی بود که پس از تأیید روایی صوری و محتوایی پایایی آن با استفاده از آزمون آلفای کرونباخ مورد تأیید قرار گرفت. برای تحلیل داده‌ها از مدل معادلات ساختاری استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها نشان دادند کیفیت خدمات بر وفاداری مشتری ۱۹٪، کیفیت رابطه بر وفاداری مشتری ۶۵٪، وفاداری بر قصد حضوری ۷۸٪ به طور مستقیم اثرگذار و کیفیت خدمات بر قصد حضوری ۱۵٪، کیفیت رابطه بر قصد حضوری ۵۰٪، به طور غیر مستقیم اثر دارد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: می‌توان گفت یکی از راه کارهای موفق هر مجموعه ورزشی جهت حفظ مشتریان ایجاد کیفیت خدمات مناسب، روابط بلندمدت، باکیفیت بالا و حفظ این روابط است. همچنین وفاداری مشتری به‌عنوان یک تعهد عمیق برای خرید مجدد یک محصول یا خدمت برای سازمان‌ها بسیار با ارزش است زیرا مشتریان وفادار، می‌توانند سودآوری زیادی برای سازمان داشته باشند.

کلیدواژه

قصد حضوری
کیفیت خدمات
کیفیت رابطه
مشتریان
وفاداری

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۳/۰۲/۱۸

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در حالی اولین شماره **نشریه کسب و کار روزش** را منتشر کردیم، که نشریه جایگاه خود را در بین محققان و داوران پیدا کرده و در سراسر جهان پذیرفته شده است. اگرچه بیشتر بازدیدکنندگان مقالات آن از کشورهای دیگر هستند، اما بازدید ماهانه آن بیش از ۴۰۰۰ نفر است که نیمی از آن از محققان خارج از کشور و از پنج قاره جهان هستند. امیدواریم با رعایت استانداردهای فرمی و محتوایی لازم بتوانیم در افزایش دید مقالات و نمایه شدن در پایگاه‌های تخصصی تری موفق‌تر باشیم. ابر واژگان مقالات نیز نشان می‌دهد که ما همچنان ملزم به رعایت محدوده مجله هستیم و توانسته‌ایم جایگاه تخصصی آن را حفظ کنیم. به یاری خداوند متعال و با همکاری مستمر همکاران و نویسندگان عزیز در نحوه برداشت خود موفق‌تر خواهیم بود.

بار دیگر از معاونت محترم پژوهشی **دانشگاه الزهراء (س)** و همکاران عزیزمان در این حوزه به خاطر همراهی و راهنمایی‌هایشان تشکر می‌کنیم. همچنین از مدیران محترم کمیسیون نشریات علمی وزارت علوم، تحقیقات و فناوری کمال تشکر و قدردانی را داریم و امیدواریم حمایت خود را از مجلات نوپای انگلیسی زبان حفظ نموده و همچنان به حمایت‌های فنی و مادی خود برای انتشار این‌گونه نشریات ادامه دهند. همچنین امیدواریم در راستای انتشار مقالات فنی و سایر فعالیت‌ها برای رشد این رشته و ارتقای سطح مقاله نویسی به زبان انگلیسی، همچنان دریافت مقالات تخصصی ارزشمند را ادامه دهیم.

- ۳۱ منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی
اکبر جابری؛ کوروش قهرمان تبریزی
- ۵۱ چالش‌های ساختاری جذب و حفظ حامی مالی در ورزش‌های حرفه‌ای
سمیه محمدی؛ بهزاد ایزدی
- ۷۳ عوامل موثر بر تعالی کسب و کار ورزشی: رویکرد اهداف توسعه پایدار سازمان ملل از
طریق ورزش قهرمانی
مکی محمد صفی؛ رسول نظری؛ حسنین عبدالواحدعباس؛ خسرو جلیلی دهکردی
- ۸۹ بررسی نقش واسطه اشتیاق کارآفرینی در تاثیر نوآوری دیجیتال بر عملکرد کسب
وکارهای نوپای ورزشی
مهرداد محرم زاده؛ اکبر مهدوی قره آغاچ علیا؛ لیلا نقوی
- ۱۰۳ بررسی موانع توسعه بازاریابی ورزشی استان گیلان
جلیل پورزنگار
- ۱۲۳ حضور مجدد مشتریان در باشگاه‌های ورزشی: پایش وفاداری مشتری
فرهاد ابراهیمی؛ زهرا سادات میرزازاده؛ صمد لعل بذری؛ مهدی طالب‌پور

نشریه

کسب و کار

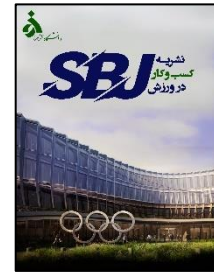
نشریه فصلنامه علمی

دانشگاه الزهرا (س)

دوره پنجم، شماره یک، شماره پیاپی ۱۳

زمستان ۱۴۰۳

در ورزش



صاحب امتیاز: دانشگاه الزهرا (س)

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مدیرمسئول: دکتر ژاله معماری

مدیر اجرایی و صفحه‌آرا: مریم غفاری

طراح جلد:

حمیدرضا عطالهی

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- استادیار مدیریت ورزشی دانشگاه خوارزمی	دکتر محمد حسن پیمان فر
استادیار مدیریت ورزشی دانشگاه شاهرود	دکتر هادی باقری
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دکترای رشته مدیریت دانشگاه تربیت مدرس	دکتر عباس رضایی پندی

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در ورزش

نشریه فصلنامه علمی دانشگاه الزهرا (س)

دوره پنجم، شماره یک، شماره پیاپی ۱۳

زمستان ۱۴۰۳

آدرس: ایران، تهران، میدان شیخ بهایی، خیابان ده ونک، دانشگاه الزهرا (س)

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