



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Identification and Prioritization of Components for Developing Industry-Sports Communication in Gorgan County

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KEY WORDS

Gorgan;
Industry-sports
communication;
Sports development;
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify the components of developing industry relations in sports in Gorgan city. The current research, based on its objective, is exploratory-applied, and based on the data collection method, it falls under qualitative research, which was conducted using qualitative content analysis. The statistical population of the present study consisted of experts and opinion leaders in the field of industry and sports, from whom 14 individuals, including company and business managers, senior managers of Gorgan Sports and Youth Department, professors and faculty members, and researchers, were selected as the statistical sample. The sampling was done purposefully using the snowball sampling method, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The data collection tool in this research was through documentary methods and semi-structured interviews. For data analysis, the conventional content analysis method was used, which included open and selective coding. The results of the research showed that 6 components, including financial support and investment, hosting events, developing sports tourism, the role of media, infrastructure development and privatization, and the link between university, industry, and sports, are among the factors that can lead to the development of industry relations in sports in Gorgan city.

Introduction

At the dawn of the third millennium, sports have undergone significant transformations and are now regarded as one of the most critical economic sectors in societies. The sports industry, driven by factors such as organizing competitions and leveraging advertising and media opportunities, has created a platform for interaction between industry, commerce, and sports. This strategic bridge plays a pivotal role in the development of sports and its economic prosperity (Amini Roshan *et al.*, 2012). Sports possess unique capabilities that have attracted investors and industry

leaders, making it a lucrative market. The economic perspective on the sports industry and subsequent planning in this domain are essential for meeting demand and ensuring satisfaction (Aliabadi, 2015).

Recent decades have witnessed various developments, particularly in industry and technology, influencing the relationship between industry and sports. Today, the circulation of money in the leisure industry, especially in sports, has transformed it into a significant source of national and regional income (Rostamzadeh *et al.*, 2012). The sports industry is a

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type of economic market where individuals, companies, and organizations focus on producing, facilitating, promoting, or organizing sports-related activities. Products in this market include goods, services, people, places, or ideas connected to sports (O'Sullivan & Steven, 2003). Pitts, Fielding, and Miller divided the sports industry into three segments based on products and customers: performance, production, and sports development (Morshedsolouk, 2021).

The economic role of sports can be categorized into direct and indirect effects. Direct effects include the production of sports goods and services, exports and imports, household expenditures, facility creation, advertising, stock market participation, media coverage, employment, tourism attraction, and sponsorships. Indirect effects encompass improved public health, reduced healthcare costs, lower crime rates, decreased employee absenteeism, and enhanced productivity (Sanderson *et al.*, 2000).

One of the major challenges in managing industry-sports communication is the lack of visible, direct returns on investment. However, fostering a positive attitude toward this relationship can yield substantial direct and indirect benefits (Razavi & Nobakhti, 2011). The economic importance of sports and its direct and indirect impacts on societal development cannot be overlooked. Knowledge derived from studying these effects is a crucial tool for economic decision-making and policy formulation (Ghalibaf, 2010).

Macroeconomic impacts of the sports industry, such as its contribution to GDP and employment creation, have prompted countries to regularly assess its influence on their economies (Rezaei & Salehipour, 2017). Consequently, countries increasingly allocate growing budgets to sports, recognizing its long-term economic benefits (Razavi & Nobakhti, 2011). In contrast, Kianmarz and Mohramzadeh (2016) reported that Iran's sports industry contributes only 1.1% to GDP, significantly below the global average.

In Iran, numerous factors hinder domestic industries from competing with foreign counterparts, affecting the competitiveness of companies and businesses in the market (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2012). Studies indicate that extensive and efficient infrastructure is a driving force for competitiveness, and without it, economic success is unattainable (Abbasi *et al.*, 2010).

Despite structural changes, Iran's sports industry has yet to fulfill its potential in achieving sports and non-sports goals. Challenges include the lack of an integrated management system (Shabani, 2012), overlapping organizations, unclear responsibilities (Sajjadi *et al.*, 2016), and the dual role of policy-making and execution in the Ministry of Sports (Ghalibaf, 2010). Rezaei (2016) highlights legislative weaknesses in sports industry policies, while studies reveal financial opacity and reliance on government funding (Rezaei & Nasirzadeh, 2017). These inconsistencies have led to inefficiencies, repetitive programs, and underperformance in international competitions (Rezaei & Salehipour, 2017).

Unlike global trends where sports are viewed as an economic industry, in Iran, it is still seen primarily as entertainment. Given this context, it is essential to foster the growth of industry-sports communication. Gorgan City has shown remarkable progress in sports, such as the success of its basketball team in national leagues. Strengthening ties between sports and local industries could further enhance achievements across disciplines. A review of existing research indicates a gap in studies focusing on industry-sports communication in Gorgan City. This study aims to address this gap by identifying factors that can enhance this relationship and provide actionable recommendations for policymakers.

Materials and Methods

This study, in terms of purpose, is exploratory-applied research, and in terms of data collection method, falls under qualitative research which was conducted using qualitative content analysis. The statistical population of this study consisted of experts and specialists in the

field of industry and sports, including managers of well-known companies and enterprises in the sports industry, board members and senior executives of Gorgan's Sports and Youth Department, faculty members and academic staff in sports management, as well as researchers with publications or research in the field of sports industry, along with professionals and successful individuals in the field of industry and sports in Gorgan City. For selecting the samples, purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods were used, and sampling continued until reaching adequacy and theoretical saturation. In this study, 14 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts to identify the components of developing industry-sports relations in Gorgan. From the 11th interview onward, repetition in the received information was observed; however, to ensure greater reliability, interviews continued up to the 14th interview. The data collection tools in this research included documentary methods (comprising review and use of articles, existing theoretical foundations, and policy documents) and semi-structured interviews. The interviews began with describing the

demographic characteristics of the interviewees, then continued with the main research questions, and finally concluded with open-ended questions such as "Do you think there is any topic in this field that we haven't addressed"? For data analysis, conventional content analysis method was used, which included open and selective coding.

Results

In the initial coding stage, the collected interview data were transcribed verbatim onto paper, followed by line-by-line analysis to generate open codes and concepts. These concepts were derived from the written transcripts and, in some cases, represented verbatim extracts. Following qualitative content analysis of the interviews – incorporating majority consensus among interviewees and reviewing relevant documents on industry-sports collaboration components in Gorgan City – a total of 51 primary codes were extracted from the 14 interviews as developmental components. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Primary Codes for Developing Industry-Sports Communication in Gorgan City.

No.	Semantic Code	No.	Semantic Code	No.	Semantic Code
1	Financial support	2	Sports investment	3	Local industries
4	Supporting companies	5	Private sector	6	Collaboration contracts
7	Industrial cooperation	8	Educational institutions	9	Sports infrastructure
10	Professional equipment	11	Sustainable development	12	Sports marketing
13	Branding	14	Multimedia advertising	15	Sports events
16	Corporate competitions	17	Industrial leagues	18	Professional clubs
19	Job opportunities	20	Experienced coaches	21	Applied research
22	Sports technology	23	Industrial innovations	24	Sports governance
25	Supportive regulations	26	Financial incentives	27	Tax exemptions
28	Social responsibility	29	Strategic planning	30	Public sports
31	Social health	32	Civil participation	33	Tourism attraction
34	Ecotourism	35	Hospitality industry	36	Sports tourism
37	Industrial interaction	38	Organizational support	39	Banking facilities
40	Sports leadership	41	Development strategies	42	Project implementation
43	Macro projects	44	Human resources	45	Economic sustainability
46	Economic growth	47	Job creation	48	Sports businesses
49	Awareness-raising	50	Empowerment	51	Networking

Due to the large number of extracted codes and concepts, similar codes were classified based on conceptual and semantic similarities and grouped into specific categories, ultimately being reduced to six components. Each category was assigned an appropriate concept according to its conceptual weight. Overall, the analysis of interviews in this

study identified six components: financial support and investment, event hosting, development of sports tourism, the role of media, infrastructure development and privatization, and the linkage between university, industry, and sports. These results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Categories Derived from Open Coding

Primary Codes (Concepts)	Secondary Codes
Active role of the Gorgan Department of Sports and Chamber of Commerce in fostering industry-sports networks.	Financial Support and Investment
Formation of joint committees to identify collaboration opportunities. Financial or tax incentives for industries supporting local sports. Simplified regulations to attract industrial investment in sports.	
Organizing regional and national competitions with industrial sponsorship (e.g., Golstan Industrial Cup in football or volleyball). Efforts to host major national sports events in Gorgan.	
Organizing industrial leagues at the City level.	Hosting Events
Promoting public sports with industry participation as part of corporate social responsibility.	
Focusing on sports aligned with Gorgan's dominant industries (e.g., cycling, horseback riding).	
Organizing sports-recreational tours (e.g., hiking) with hotels and transport companies.	Sports Tourism Development
Developing sports ecotourism (e.g., cycling, hiking) with hospitality industries.	
Using local media to promote joint industry-sports successes.	
Co-branding between local brands and sports teams.	Role of Media
Advertising non-sports products through sports.	
Training sports and industry managers on mutual benefits of collaboration.	
Leveraging industries to equip sports facilities (e.g., equipment sponsorship).	Infrastructure Development and Privatization
Participation of local companies (e.g., food, agriculture, construction) in supporting teams and events.	
Building sports facilities with industrial funding.	
Collaboration between Gorgan universities and industries for applied sports research (e.g., sports nutrition, equipment).	University-Industry-Sports Linkage
Internship and employment programs for sports students in related companies.	
Developing sports technologies (equipment, software) with tech industry support.	

Discussion and Conclusion

The research results showed that six components, including financial support and investment, event hosting, sports tourism development, the role of media, infrastructure development and privatization, and the link between university, industry, and sports, are among the factors that can develop the connection with industry in sports in Gorgan city. The financial support and investment component includes concepts such as the active role of the Sports and Youth

Department and the Gorgan Chamber of Commerce in creating a communication network between sports and industry, forming joint committees to identify cooperation opportunities, creating tax or credit incentives for industries that support local sports, and facilitating laws to attract industry investment in sports. Numerous studies, such as the research by Esmaeili *et al.* (2021), Razavi and Norouzi (2020), have shown that attracting private and public sector

investment is one of the main pillars of sports development. The results of this research also confirm that without financial support, the development of infrastructure and the holding of sports events are not possible.

The next component was the hosting of events by the city of Gorgan, which included concepts such as organizing regional and national competitions with the financial support of industries, striving to host major national sports events in the city of Gorgan, organizing industrial league competitions, and promoting public sports with the participation of industries as part of their social responsibility. Similar research such as Hosseini and Mohammadi, 2019; Khalili *et al.*, 2022 have stated that hosting national and international events can boost the economy, attract tourists, and develop the region's sports, which has also been identified as an influential factor in Gorgan city.

The factor of events and sports tourism includes concepts such as focusing on sports that are related to Gorgan's dominant industries (agriculture, tourism), such as cycling or horse racing, holding recreational sports-hiking tours in cooperation with hotels and transportation companies, and developing sports ecotourism (such as cycling, mountaineering) with the cooperation of hotels and related industries. Studies such as the research by Zarei and Safari (2021) have shown that regions with natural attractions (such as Gorgan) can attract sports tourists by developing nature-based sports such as mountaineering and cycling, which is consistent with the findings of the current research.

The role of media was another component identified in this research that can develop the connection between sports and industry, which includes concepts such as using local media to promote the joint successes of industry and sports, joint advertising between local brands and sports teams, and promoting non-sports products through sports. Numerous studies such as Nazari and Rahimi, 2018; Fallah and Karimi, 2023 have emphasized the role of media in

introducing sports events and attracting financial sponsors. This research also introduces media as one of the key factors in developing the connection between industry and sports.

The next component identified in this research was the development of sports infrastructure and privatization, which includes concepts such as training sports and industrial managers to understand the benefits of mutual cooperation, using the capacity of industries to equip sports facilities (such as equipment sponsoring), the participation of large and small companies in the region (such as food, agriculture, construction industries, etc.) in supporting sports teams and events, and constructing halls, sports fields, and recreational-sports centers with the financial support of industries. Similar research such as Jahanbakhsh *et al.*, 2020; Ghasemi and Rezvani, 2022 have shown that without stadiums, sports halls, and suitable facilities, it is not possible to attract major events and investment. This finding is consistent with the results of this research.

The last component identified in this research was the link between university, industry, and sports, which includes concepts such as the cooperation of Gorgan universities with industries for applied research in the field of sports, holding internship and employment courses for sports students in related companies, and developing sports technologies (equipment, software) with the support of technology industries. Studies such as the research by Mousavi and Shah-Hosseini (2021) have stated that the participation of universities in applied research and communication with industry can lead to the development of innovation in sports, which has also been confirmed as an effective factor in the present research.

The findings of this research show that the development of the connection between industry and sports in Gorgan city requires strengthening financial, infrastructural, media, and tourism factors. Also, cooperation between universities, industries, and sports organizations can help create a dynamic sports

ecosystem. To achieve these goals, it is suggested that:

- Attract investors and financial sponsors for the development of sports infrastructure.
- Plan to host national and international events.
- Use the sports tourism potentials of the region (such as mountain sports).
- Utilize the capacity of the media for advertising and attracting audiences.
- Strengthen cooperation between universities and the sports industry for the development of technology and sports management.

This research can be a basis for policymakers and sports managers to better plan for the development of sports in Gorgan city.

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