**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# The Impact of Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports on Social Capital Development with the Mediating Role of National Identity

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**K E Y W O R D S**

Dominant culture in ritual sports;

Social capital;

National identity;

Cultural integration

**A B S T R A C T**

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the dominant culture in ritual sports and social capital development, with national identity as a mediating variable, from the perspective of faculty members (8 individuals) and PhD students in Sports Management (70 individuals) at Islamic Azad University and Ferdowsi University of Mashhad to propose a model. This descriptive-correlational study employed the standard Nahapiet and Ghoshal Social Capital Questionnaire (1998), a researcher-developed questionnaire on dominant culture in ritual sports, and the National Identity Questionnaire by Rastegar and Rabbani (2013) with 5 subscales. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. SPSS22 and Smart PLS2 software were used for data description and hypothesis testing. The mean score for dominant culture in ritual sports was 2.69 (SD=0.39) out of 5, national identity averaged 3.27 (SD=0.61) out of 5, and social capital averaged 2.52 (SD=0.56) out of 5. Inferential findings indicated significant positive relationships between research variables. National identity did not mediate the relationship between dominant culture in ritual sports and social capital development. Sports, especially ritual and historical sports, help adolescents and youth create identities, model roles, socialize, and embrace norms. Sports unite subcultures and integrate ethnic groups into the national community, defining their identity. Strong sports teams and international success can boost ethnic communities' national identification and social capital, solidarity, and national identity.

## Introduction

In recent decades, a revolutionary change has emerged in the concept of capital, introducing new forms of capital. This concept (social capital) is primarily based on cultural and social factors. Various aspects of connections, cooperation, mutual trust, and communications among network members facilitate the achievement of members' objectives. Furthermore, social capital is crucial for successful development programs. The presence of social capital provides an appropriate foundation for the productivity of human, economic, and physical capital. Conversely, the absence of social capital negates the effectiveness of other forms of capital in achieving development, and without social capital, the path to cultural and economic development becomes challenging and uneven.

This new capital has extensively expanded to other domains such as knowledge management, information technology, structure, social networks and their embedded resources, information flow, capabilities,

skills, and workers' knowledge (Storberg, 2002). One of the most prominent new forms of capital frequently discussed today is social capital. Social capital refers to interpersonal processes that build trust, social norms, and relationship networks, facilitating mutual cooperation and coordination (Cox, 2002).

National identity represents an individual's identity or sense of belonging to a state or nation. It is a shared sense through which people perceive a collective unity, manifested in traditions, culture, or political language. From a psychological perspective, national identity is considered as awareness and feeling of distinction between "us" and "them (Rastegar & Rabani, 2013).

Ritual sports refer to the collection of athletic movements and their associated customs that have been prevalent throughout Iran's historical and cultural domain since ancient times (Abbasi *et al.*, 2014). The role of sports in identity formation, role modeling, socialization, and norm adoption among adolescents and youth is undeniable. Sports serve as an effective mechanism for bringing subcultures together, and the integration of ethnic groups into the national community through sports is one of its identity-forming functions. Given the presence of various ethnic groups (Turk, Kurd, Lor, Arab, Turkmen, and Baluch), strengthening sports teams and achieving international success can enhance the sense of national identity among these ethnic groups and reinforce solidarity through sports.

Considering these factors, we understand the significance of addressing and strengthening ritual sports (Zurkhaneh, local indigenous sports, and heroic wrestling). Through strengthening these sports, important cultural achievements can be attained, particularly given that some of our traditional sports continue to receive remarkable public interest across various social segments.

Moradi *et al.* (2018) in their research titled "The Role of Sports in Developing Inter-cultural and Social Communications" found that sports can influence beliefs, attitudes, and performance. Sports festivals and activities represent manifestations of social organizations and can serve as influential factors in shaping foreign policies and relations, encompassing various social, cultural, and communicative activities with significant impacts (Moradi *et al.*, 2018).

Darcy *et al.* (2014) in their research "Beyond a Sports Organization and Volunteers: Investigating Social Capital Development in Sports Organizations" found that the sense of belonging and mutual support is crucial for club members, from volunteers to board members (Darcy *et al.*, 2014). The strength of bonds within a club provides a powerful foundation for subsequent investment in local, regional, and national communities connected to the organization. Additionally, social capital at both group and individual levels is closely related to the development of human capital through individual skills, while remaining distinct from it.

Given the functions and effects of social capital in society on one hand, and the growing public interest in sports participation at various levels (from recreational to professional) in the recent decade, as well as to develop other researchers' findings in this field and address social issues in urban communities, the present study aims to investigate the impact of dominant culture in ritual sports on social capital development with the mediating role of national identity from the perspective of faculty members and PhD students in Sports Management. The study poses the question: Do the dominant culture in ritual sports and the sense of national identity have a significant impact on the formation of social capital?

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It is hoped that the results of this research will be beneficial in the following areas:

-To serve as a model for conducting similar research in sports organizations and other organizations across the country.

-To enhance the level of social capital in society by relying on sports and its social aspects.

**Materials and Methods**

In this descriptive-correlational study, conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM), the aim was to investigate the relationship between the dominant culture in ritual sports and the development of social capital, with the mediating role of national identity. The study focused on the perspectives of faculty members (8 participants) and PhD students in sports management (70 participants) from Islamic Azad University and Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, and proposed a model based on the findings.

To measure the variables, the following standardized questionnaires were utilized:

-A 13-item social capital questionnaire (covering structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions) by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998).

-A 9-item researcher-developed questionnaire on the dominant culture in ritual sports.

-A 25-item standardized national identity questionnaire (addressing cultural, linguistic, social, political-territorial, and religious dimensions) by Rastegar and Rabani (Rastegar & Rabani, 2013).

The face validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by several sports management faculty members, and content validity was assessed and approved using Content Validity Index (CVI) and Content Validity Ratio (CVR). The reliability of the research instruments, determined using Cronbach's alpha (coefficients greater than 0.7), indicated that the tools were reliable.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, central tendency, and dispersion measures) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient tests, stepwise regression, and structural equation modeling) were employed. Statistical software SPSS 22 and Smart PLS 2 were used for data description and hypothesis testing.

**Results**

Based on the results presented in Table 1, the mean value of the variable "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports" is 2.69, the mean value of "National Identity" is 3.27, and the mean value of "Social Capital" is 2.52, all out of a maximum possible score of 5.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Indices of the Dominant Culture Variable in Ritual Sports.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Possible Minimum | Possible Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports** | 2.6 | 0.39 | 1.78 | 3.44 | 1 | **5** |

As observed in Table 2, the highest correlation is between the "Relational" dimension and the "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports," while the lowest correlation is between the "Cognitive" dimension and the "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports."

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of the National Identity Variable and Its Components.

| Component | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Possible Minimum | Possible Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural | 3.53 | 0.85 | 1.50 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| Linguistic | 3.18 | 0.84 | 1.75 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| Social | 3.05 | 0.94 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| Political-territorial | 3.28 | 0.71 | 1.25 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| Religious | 3.29 | 0.68 | 1.50 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| National identity | 3.27 | 0.61 | 2.03 | 4.60 | 1 | 5 |

Based on the data in Table 3, the mean value for the "Structural dimension" of Social Capital is 2.48, the "Relational dimension" has a mean value of 2.49, and the "Cognitive dimension" has a mean of 2.60, with the overall mean of "Social capital" being 2.52. These values are based on a scale with a possible maximum score of 5.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of the Social Capital Variable

| Dimension | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Possible Minimum | Possible Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structural dimension | 2.48 | 0.71 | 1.00 | 4.75 | 1 | 5 |
| Relational dimension | 2.49 | 0.83 | 1.22 | 5.00 | 1 | 5 |
| Cognitive dimension | 2.60 | 0.79 | 1.69 | 4.75 | 1 | 5 |
| Social capital | 2.52 | 0.56 | 1.41 | 4.30 | 1 | 5 |

Tables 4 to 12 and Figures 1 to 8 examine the relationships between variables, standardized path coefficients, and t-scale standardized path coefficients among the research variables. They also present the model fit indices, the prediction of social capital based on the dimensions of national identity, and the mediating role of national identity in the relationship between the dominant culture in ritual sports and social capital.

As shown in in Table 4, the correlation coefficients between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and the components of Social Capital are all statistically significant (p-value of 0.001).

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and Social Capital.

| Variable | Structural | Relational | Cognitive | Social Capital |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Correlation Coefficient | 0.585 | 0.715 | 0.494 | 0.823 |
| Significance Level (p-value) | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 |

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the standardized path coefficient between the two variables, "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports" and "Social Capital," is 0.854, equivalent to 31.3 on the t-scale.
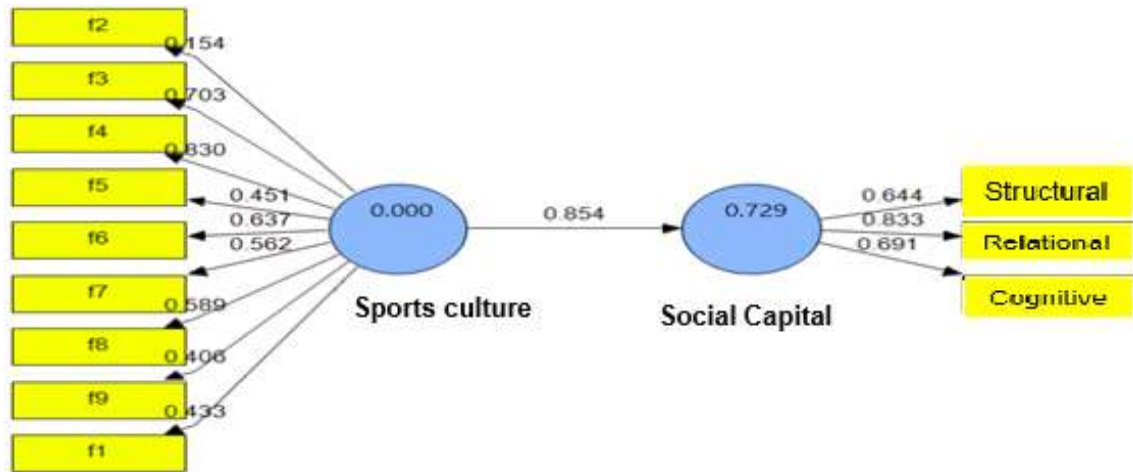
**Figure 1**. Standardized Path Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and Social Capital
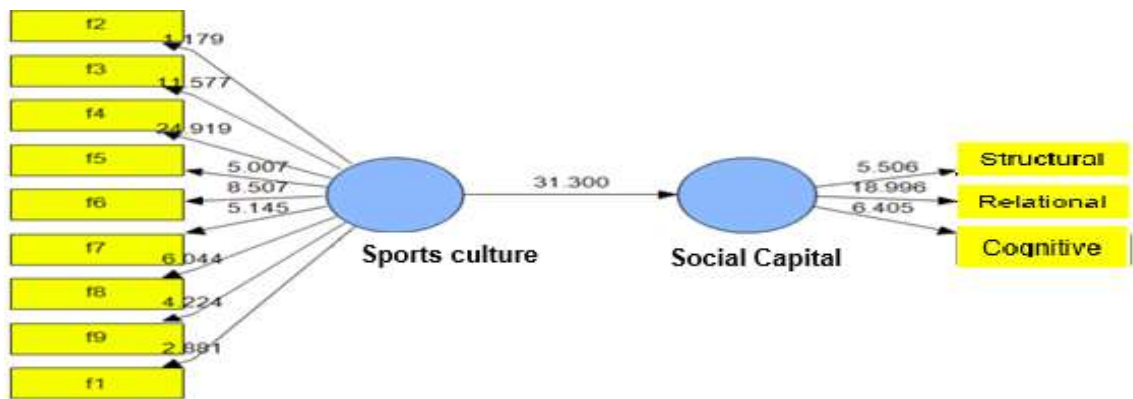


**Figure 2.** Standardized Path Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and Social Capital on the t-Scale

According to Table 5, the model fit indices provide an assessment of how well the model fits the data. The following values are presented for the respective indices:

**Table 5.** Model Fit Indices.

| Index | R² | Q² | GOF | F² |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Value | 0.54 | 0.44 | 0.43 | 0.42 |

As observed in Table 6, the highest correlation is between the "Social" dimension and "Social Capital," while the lowest correlation is between the "Linguistic" dimension and "Social Capital".

To predict "Social Capital" based on the dimensions of "National Identity," the stepwise regression method was used. The results are presented below:

Model 1: Social

Model 2: Social and Cultural

**Table 6.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and National Identity.

| Variable | Cultural | Linguistic | Social | Political-Territorial | Religious | National Identity |
|----------|----------|------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| **Correlation coefficient** | 0.422 | 0.496 | 0.580 | 0517 | 0.600 | 0.686 |
| **Significance level (p-value)** | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 |

As shown in the Figures 3 and 4, the standardized path coefficient between the two variables, "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports" and "National Identity," is 0.709, equivalent to 18.27 on the t-scale.
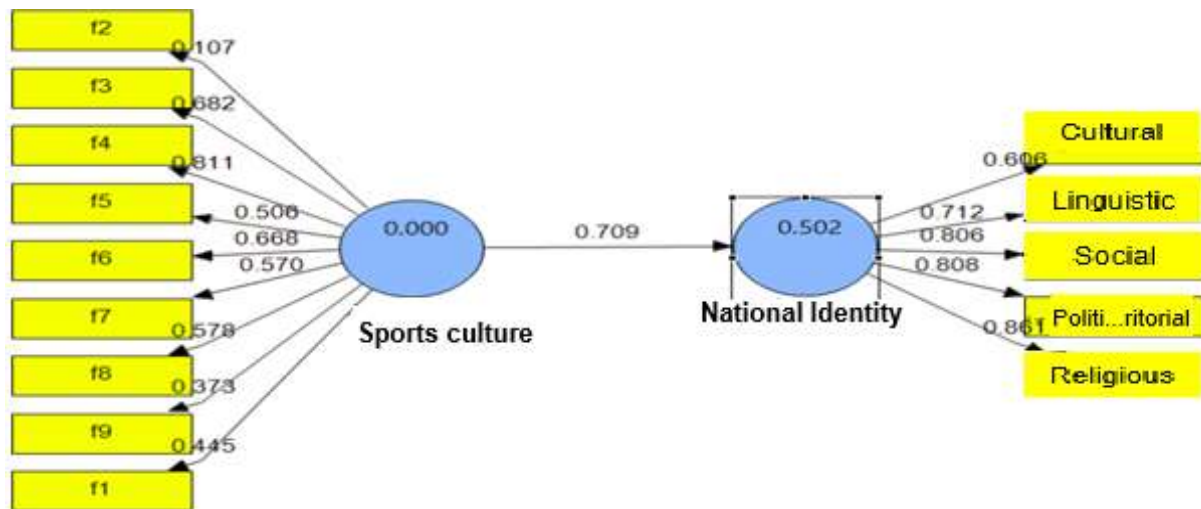


**Figure 3.** Standardized Path Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and National Identity
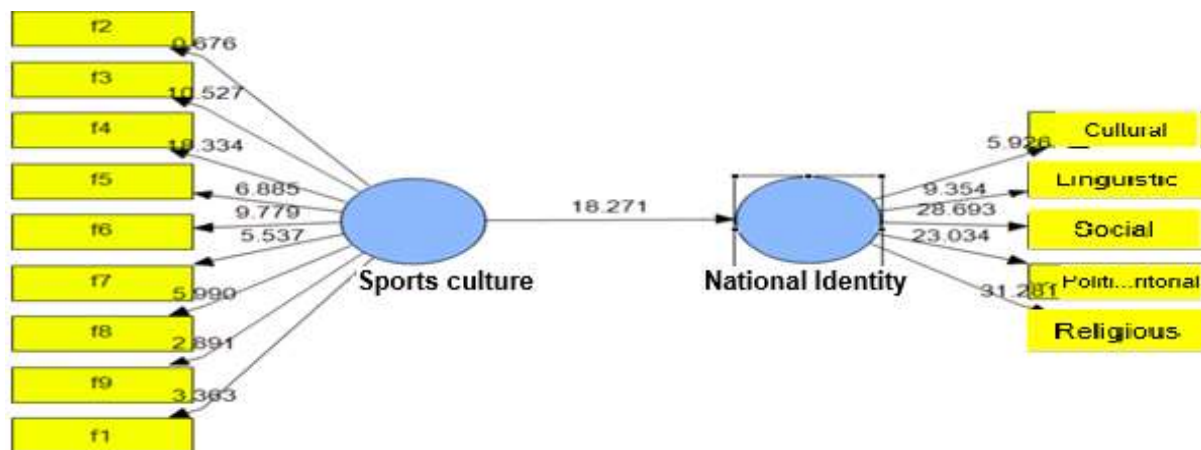


**Figure 4.** Standardized Path Coefficient Between Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports and National Identity on the t-Scale.

Based on Table 7, the model fit indices provide insights into the fit and predictive power of the model. The following values are presented for the respective indices:

**Table 7.** Model fit indices.

| Index | R² | Q² | GOF | F² |
|-------|-----|-----|------|-----|
| Value | 0.49 | 0.37 | 0.34 | 0.33 |

As demonstrated by the data in in Table 8, the correlation coefficients between National Identity and its components, as well as their relationship with Social Capital, are all statistically significant (p-value of 0.001).

**Table 8.** Pearson correlation coefficient between national identity and social capital.

| Variable | Cultural | Linguistic | Social | Political-Territorial | Religious | National Identity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Correlation coefficient** | 0.384 | 0.370 | 0.540 | 0.466 | 0.459 | 0.585 |
| **Significance level (p-value)** | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 |

As indicated by the data in Table 9, the regression models for predicting Social Capital based on National Identity Dimensions are summarized with key statistics for two different models.

**Table 9.** Summary of the Regression Model for Predicting Social Capital Based on National Identity Dimensions.

| Model | Multiple correlation coefficient | R² | Adjusted R² | F statistic | Significance level (p-value) | Durbin-watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.54 | 0.291 | 0.281 | 27.52 | 0.001 | 2.5 |
| 2 | 0.588 | 0.346 | 0.326 | 17.45 | 0.001 | |

Based on the stepwise regression results, Model 2 explains 32.6% of the variance in "Social Capital." Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic, which examines the independence of model errors, is within an acceptable range.

Drawing from the data in Table 10, the coefficients derived from Model 2 provide insights into the relationship between National Identity Dimensions and Social Capital. The table includes key statistics such as VIF, Tolerance, Significance (Sig.), t-values, and both Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients.

**Table 10.** Coefficients derived from model 2.

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | t | Sig. | Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE | Beta | | | | |
| **Constant** | 1.08 | 0.27 | | 4.03 | 0.001 | | |
| **Social** | 0.281 | 0.063 | 0.467 | 4.47 | 0.001 | 0.911 | 1.09 |
| **Cultural** | 0.164 | 0.07 | 0.245 | 2.35 | 0.022 | 0.911 | 1.09 |

The results of the VIF and Tolerance tests also indicate no multicollinearity issues when predicting "Social Capital" based on the dimensions of "National Identity." Therefore, these two dimensions can be used to predict "Social Capital."

Figure 5 exhibits that National Identity influences Social Capital with a path coefficient of 0.594. This suggests a moderate positive relationship between National Identity and Social Capital. Finally, the path coefficient from Social Capital to its components is represented, with the most substantial effect from Relational to Social Capital, as indicated by the factor loading of 0.852.
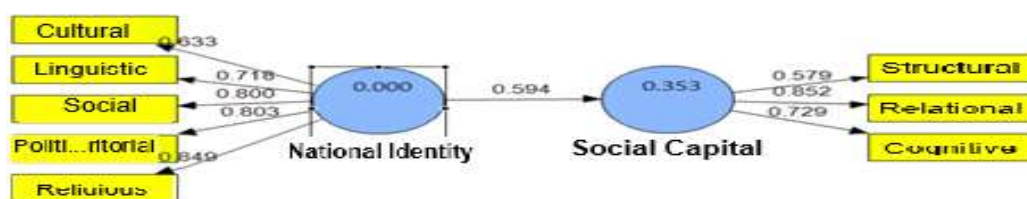


**Figure 5.** Standardized Path Coefficient Between National Identity and Social Capital

As shown in Figure 6, the standardized path coefficient between the two variables, "National

Identity" and "Social Capital," is 0.594, equivalent to 12.95 on the t-scale.
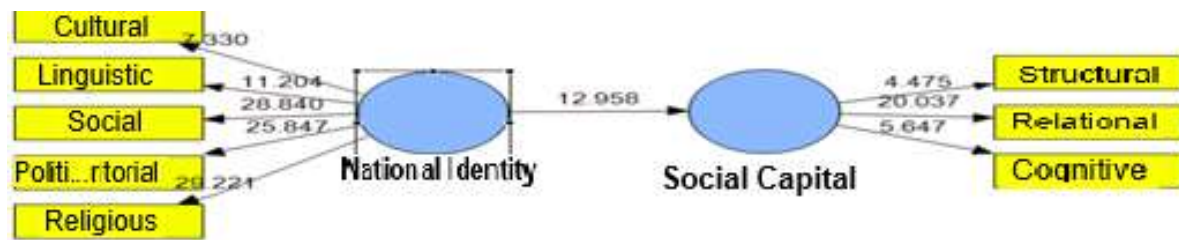


**Figure 6.** Standardized Path Coefficient Between National Identity and Social Capital on the t-Scale

Based on the data presented in Table 11, the model fit indices provide an overview of how well the model fits the data and its predictive relevance. The $F^2$ value is 0.38, indicating a medium effect size. This suggests that the model has a moderate impact on explaining the dependent variable. The GOF (Goodness of Fit) index is 0.39, reflecting a moderate fit between the model and the data. A GOF value between 0.25 and

0.36 is generally considered acceptable, so this value indicates a good fit. The $Q^2$ value is 0.42, indicating that the model has moderate predictive relevance. A $Q^2$ value above 0 suggests that the model has some ability to predict the dependent variable. The $R^2$ value is 0.51, showing that the model explains 51% of the variance in the dependent variable. This is considered a good level of explanatory power for the model.
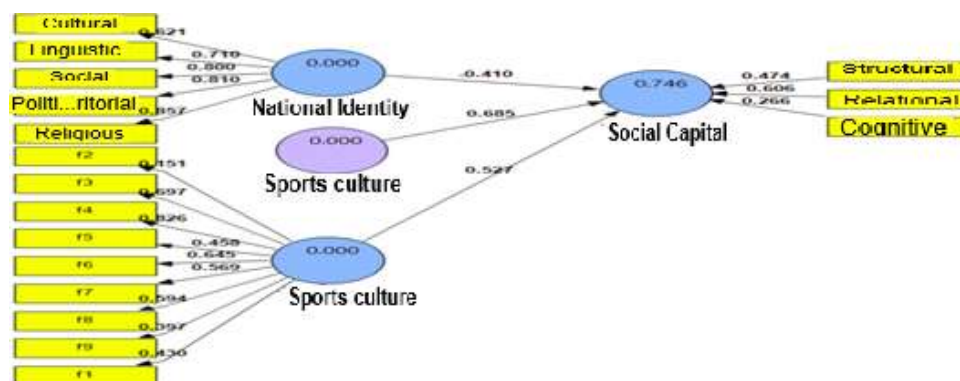
**Table 11.** Model fit indices.

| Index | $R^2$ | $Q^2$ | GOF | $F^2$ |
|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| Value | 0.51 | 0.42 | 0.39 | 0.38 |

The model fit indices indicate that the model is at an acceptable level of fit and is validated.

To examine the mediating role of "National Identity" in the relationship between "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports" and "Social Capital," structural equation modeling (SEM) is used.

As presented in Figures 7 and 8, the negative direction of the path from "National Identity" to "Social Capital" and the insignificance of the indirect effect indicate that "National Identity" does not have a significant mediating role in the relationship between "Dominant Culture in Ritual Sports" and "Social Capital."



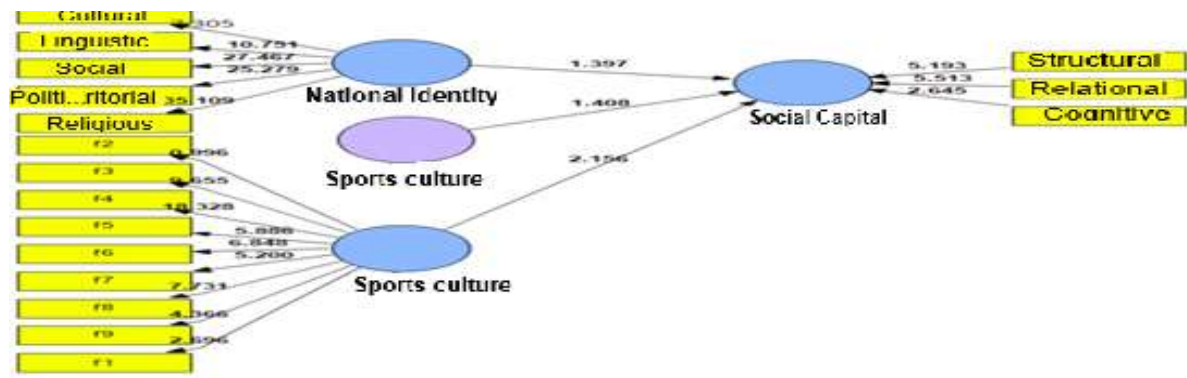**Figure 7.** Standardized Path Coefficients.

**Figure 8.** Standardized Path Coefficients on the t-Scale.

Drawing from the data in Table 12, the model fit indices provide an assessment of how well the model fits the data and its predictive and explanatory power. The F² value is 0.39, indicating a medium effect size, suggesting that the model has a moderate effect on explaining the dependent variable. The GOF (Goodness of Fit) index is 0.42, reflecting a moderate to good fit between the model and the data. Typically, a GOF value between 0.25 and 0.36 is acceptable, so this value suggests a reasonable fit. The Q² value is 0.44, indicating that the model has moderate predictive relevance. A Q² value greater than 0 suggests that the model can predict the dependent variable with some level of accuracy. The R² value is 0.51, meaning that the model explains 51% of the variance in the dependent variable. This is a good level of explanatory power. The model fit indices indicate that the model is at an acceptable level of fit and is validated.

**Table 12**. Model Fit Indices.

| Index | R² | Q² | GOF | F² |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value | 0.51 | 0.44 | 0.42 | 0.39 |

## Discussion

Social capital constitutes a network of relationships and bonds based on interpersonal and intergroup social trust, along with interactions between individuals, institutions, organizations, and social groups. This network leads to social cohesion and solidarity, enabling individuals and groups to benefit from social support and necessary energy to facilitate actions toward achieving individual and collective goals (Adler, 2002).

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between dominant culture in ritual sports and social capital. Based on inferential findings from testing this hypothesis, there exists a significant relationship between dominant culture in ritual sports and social capital.

Goudarzi (2004) focused on the historical formation of Zurkhaneh as a political and social institution, describing its history, customs, and ethical and cultural characteristics alongside physical activities (Goudarzi, 2004). Yazdi (2011) in his research identified Zurkhaneh and its dominant culture as a manifestation of growth and development in group cohesion, mobilization, cooperation, communication, chivalry, courage, and heroism (Yazdi, 2011).

Social capital is embodied in interpersonal relationships and emerges when these relationships transform in ways that facilitate social action. Moreover, participation in Zurkhaneh sports influences social capital through increased group cohesion, mutual interaction, strong interpersonal relationships, self-confidence, expanded social

communications, and enhanced ethical values. Therefore, Zurkhaneh sports can serve as an important arena for creating and maintaining social capital. The research findings regarding the impact of dominant culture in ritual sports on social capital align with studies by (Yazdi, 2011), Tavakol (2020), (Goudarzi, 2004), and (Kiani & Nazari, 2018) titled "The Role of Ancient Sports (Zurkhaneh) in Children's Character Development".

The second hypothesis investigated the relationship between dominant culture in ritual sports and national identity and its dimensions. Inferential findings from testing this hypothesis indicated a significant relationship between dominant culture in ritual sports and national identity.

Zurkhaneh serves as a supreme venue for strengthening nationalist spirit. The epic and national poetry from Ferdowsi, accompanied by the mentor's inspiring voice, profoundly impacts the nationalist spirit of participants. Additionally, various religious invocations and spiritual poems strengthen religious identity (Amini Zadeh & Bostani, 2014). Moeini (2008) defined national identity as a sense of commitment, attachment, and dedication to the national community (Jahangiri & Moeini, 2011). However, Boustani and Aminizadeh (2013) argue that Zurkhaneh's positive functions in society have declined, transforming from a socio-athletic institution to a purely athletic one (Bostani & Amini Zadeh, 2013). While these findings contradict the present study, the positive impact of Zurkhaneh sports on the social dimension of national identity among practitioners and spectators demonstrates its potential for developing the social aspect of national identity. Research findings by (Amini Zadeh & Bostani, 2014), (Goudarzi, 2004), and (Nouri & Taheri Khoshno, 2014) indicate a positive and significant effect of Zurkhaneh sports on national identity, thus aligning with the present study.

The third and fourth hypotheses examined the relationship between national identity and social capital, and the mediating role of national identity in this relationship. Testing these hypotheses revealed a positive and significant relationship between these variables. However, national identity does not play a mediating role in their relationship. High national identity, through creating a sense of solidarity, establishes the foundation for cooperative and trust-based relationships among a territory's residents - cooperation and trust being considered important dimensions of social capital. Conversely, this cooperation and resulting trust can serve as a stimulus for increasing individuals' national identity. The concepts of "commitment" and "belonging" in national identity, and "trust," "participation," and "normativity" in social capital form the basic elements, enabling the analysis of the relationship between these variables (Mirfardi & Vali Nejad, 2018). The research findings regarding the impact of national identity on social capital align with Mirfardi and Valinejad's (2018) study titled "Sociological-Strategic Analysis of the Relationship Between National Identity and Social Capital Among Yasouj University Students" (Mirfardi & Vali Nejad, 2018).

The role of sports in general, and traditional and ancient sports in particular, in shaping the identity, modeling behavior, socialization, and norm adherence of adolescents and young adults is undeniable. Sports serve as a powerful tool for bridging cultural divides and fostering a sense of national identity among diverse ethnic groups. Given the presence of various ethnicities (Turk, Kurd, Lur, Arab, Turkmen, and Baloch) in IRAN, strengthening sports teams and achieving international success can enhance a shared national identity among these groups and bolster social capital, solidarity, and national identity through sports.

Considering the low average of cultural elements in traditional sports (such as zourkhaneh) and the low level of social capital among the study participants, the following recommendations are proposed:

Enhancing traditional sports practices: Emphasizing the rituals of zourkhaneh and promoting values such as humility, selflessness, masculinity, helping the

poor, and fostering a sense of national Iranian identity, resistance against foreign influence, revitalization of the Persian language, and a culture of humility and brotherhood through these sports.

Strengthening social connections: Reinforcing social connections at both micro and macro levels, including interpersonal and institutional relationships. The current breakdown or weakening of these interactions poses a significant obstacle to preserving and strengthening social capital.

Promoting a vibrant civil society: Empowering social forces, especially adolescents and young adults, to engage in civic action within the framework of a civil society, thereby creating the necessary conditions for strengthening social cohesion and solidarity.

**Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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