

Effective factors on the development of bodybuilding and fitness clubs in Mashhad, Iran

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the effective factors in the development of bodybuilding and fitness clubs in Mashhad, Iran. This study was practical in terms of its goals, with an exploratory and analytical implementation method, classifying it as qualitative research. A total of 27 individuals were targeted and selected as samples until theoretical saturation was reached, including athletes, coaches, managers of fitness and bodybuilding clubs, members of the academic faculty of sports sciences at universities, experts from sports departments, and seniors in the field of bodybuilding in Mashhad. For data analysis, the data coding method was employed within a grounded theory framework. Based on the results, the factors affecting the development of bodybuilding and fitness clubs in Mashhad were identified in four main categories, ten sub-categories, and seventy-two components, according to expert opinions and a literature review in this field. These factors included: 1) Facility and infrastructure factors, 2) Financial and economic factors, 3) Professionalism factors, 4) Human resource factors, 5) Event factors, 6) Scientific and educational factors, 7) Organizational and managerial factors, 8) Motivational factors, 9) Media factors, and 10) Cultural-social factors. By creating and facilitating this model, the development steps for Mashhad's fitness clubs will be implemented to better align with future implementation conditions.

KEYWORDS

Sports Development; Bodybuilding; Fitness; Sports Club; Mashhad

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports play an important role in the lives of many citizens. Among people aged 15 and above, 41% participate in sports activities at least once a week. Sports clubs are a key venue for exercise: in Europe, there are around 700,000 sports clubs with 60 million members (European Commission, 2018). Consequently, there are high expectations for what these clubs should offer. When successful, clubs provide health-enhancing physical activity, foster recreation and social networking, and promote learning (Schuttoff et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it is often said that sports clubs are, if not in crisis, at least struggling with numerous issues. Clubs find it difficult to attract and retain members as more people opt for commercial fitness centers or individual exercise. Some clubs have too few athletes, while others have too many. Their finances are often precarious, and thousands lack adequate facilities (Wicker et al., 2014; Swierzy et al., 2018). A social problem reflects a mismatch between perception and reality. However, problems are inherently socially constructed (Alexander, 2018; Seippel et al., 2018). To understand why something is perceived as a problem and how to properly address it, one must examine the organizational context in which problems arise, the characteristics of the processes that create these problems, and the interests and values of the actors involved (Klein et al., 2016; Swierzy et al., 2018).

In all countries, a sport-for-all policy is essentially a call for the more people to be physically active in the gym, the better. Beyond such overarching sports club policies, there are differences in how countries direct policies toward specific groups based on gender, age, socioeconomic class, minority status, and physical or mental disabilities. There are also differences in the resources countries allocate to such policies and in the policy instruments that sports authorities use to achieve these goals. Some of the most extensive instruments include public funding of sports venues, institutional infrastructure, and, in some cases, direct funding for clubs (Breuer et al., 2015).

Previous research has used several criteria to distinguish between countries' sports development policies. First, Elmoose-Østerlund et al. (2017) differentiate countries based on historical traditions. For example, countries such as Spain, Poland, and Hungary have newer and fewer sports policies compared to most Western European countries. Second, researchers distinguish countries based on types of welfare state. For example, Denmark and Norway have more inclusive sports policies than Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, which in turn are less exclusive than the UK (Elmoose-Østerlund et al., 2017). Third, from a global perspective, developed sports countries tend to be wealthier, but there is still significant variation in their sports development. It is assumed that two factors make the establishment and management of sports clubs less problematic in wealthy

countries. First, the general organizational and material infrastructure is better developed in prosperous nations. Second, an economically affluent population is believed to have more resources (time and money) for leisure activities, leading to more members, more volunteers, and more financial support for recreational pursuits (Sipple et al., 2020).

In addition to gyms, the growing fitness sector (mainly organized by commercial entities without public funding) is the most popular form of physical exercise in many countries. Although there are numerous studies on sports clubs and their challenges, the differences between sports clubs in various countries, and their organizational capacities, this study is the first to bring together all these perspectives in the context of Iran. Using unique data, it provides an overview of the state of sports clubs in the metropolis of Mashhad and offers a comprehensive interpretation of how to understand the problems of clubs in relation to national and organizational characteristics. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the effective factors of the development of bodybuilding and fitness clubs in Mashhad, Iran. Given this complex picture, marked by high activity levels and expectations, alongside past experiences and research findings, the question arises: to what extent do sports clubs in Mashhad face challenges, and what makes it difficult for these clubs to serve their members effectively? In this study, we seek to answer the question: What are the key factors and barriers to the development of Mashhad's fitness clubs?

2. METHODS

For data analysis, the data coding method was used in data-based theorizing (grounded theory). The statistical population of this research included athletes, coaches, managers of fitness and bodybuilding clubs, members of the academic faculty of sports sciences at universities, experts from sports departments, and seniors in the field of bodybuilding in Mashhad. A total of 27 individuals were targeted and selected as samples until theoretical saturation was reached.

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method used to identify the underlying categories of the studied phenomenon. This method was introduced by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The primary method of data collection in this approach is through interviews. By analyzing and coding the interview texts, a paradigm model is developed. In grounded theory, a theory is constructed from a set of data to explain a process, action, or interaction on a broad level.

Data-based theorizing involves three types of coding: open, axial, and selective coding, each of which is described below:

Open Coding: Coding is the process of data analysis. Open coding is a part of this process that involves breaking down, comparing, naming, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. During open coding, data is divided into distinct parts and analyzed to identify similarities and differences.

Axial Coding: Axial coding is the second stage of analysis in grounded theory. The goal of this stage is to establish relationships between the categories produced during open coding. It is called "axial" because the coding process revolves around the axis of a central category. At this stage, the researcher selects one category as the central category, explores it as the central phenomenon of the process, and determines how other categories relate to it.

Selective Coding: The target phenomenon is the central idea and thought, the event, the incident or the event that the flow of actions and reactions are directed towards in order to manage, control or respond to it. The central phenomenon is related to the main question, what does the data indicate? The central category is an idea (image, concept) or a phenomenon that is the basis and axis of the process. This category is the title (conceptual name or label) that is considered for the created framework or design. The category that is chosen as the central category must be sufficiently abstract and other main categories can be related to it. Strauss (1987) describes the features of choosing a central category.

3. RESULTS

The results in Table 1 show that 22% of the sample were aged 25 to 35, 22% were aged 36 to 45, 33% were aged 46 to 55, and 23% were over 55 years old. Additionally, 59% of the sample were male, and 41% were female. Regarding education, 15% had a bachelor's degree, 37% had a master's degree, and 48% had a doctorate.

In terms of roles, 12% were athletes, 15% were coaches, 23% were fitness club managers, 22% were university sports science faculty members, 16% were experts in sports departments, and 12% were bodybuilding experts in Mashhad. Using expert opinions, the factors affecting the development of Mashhad's bodybuilding and fitness clubs were identified through Glaser's coding method, which is discussed further.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Row	Variable	Frequency	Category	Percentage
1	Age	25 to 35	6	22
		36 to 45	6	22
		46 to 55	9	33
		More than 55	7	23
2	Gender	male	16	59
		female	11	41
3	Education	Undergraduate education	4	15
		Master's degree	10	37
		PhD	13	48
4	Specialization/occupation of athletes	Athletes	3	12
		Coaches	4	15
		Managers of gyms	7	23
		Faculty members of sports sciences of universities	6	22
		Experts of sports departments	4	16
		Mashhad bodybuilding seniors	3	12
		Total		27

In open coding, categories are classified based on their relationships to similar topics. The result of this step is to distill and summarize the vast information obtained from interviews and documents into concepts and categories that address these questions. In open coding, the researcher consciously searches for the central variable, which possesses a special theoretical sensitivity, as noted by Glaser & Strauss (1967): while measuring concepts and events against each other, the researcher creates many codes. When attention is focused on one or two codes, the researcher also seeks original themes.

The purpose of axial coding is to establish relationships between the categories generated during open coding. This action is usually based on a paradigm model, which helps the theorist carry out the theorizing process more easily. The communication in coding relies on expanding one of the categories. A main category (such as a central idea or event) is defined as a phenomenon, with other categories linked to this main category.

Regarding theoretical coding, the codes derived from theoretical coding form an abstract model that integrates the categories to synthesize a theory. To combine codes, Glaser & Strauss (1967) introduces 18 categories of theoretical codes as models to inspire real codes. By referencing

each coding category without specifying how to link them, he allows the researcher the freedom to combine and model as desired.

Table 2 presents a detailed framework of theoretical coding that identifies various factors affecting the development of fitness clubs in Mashhad. Each row outlines specific subcategories and main articles grouped under broader categories, highlighting key areas that influence the growth and effectiveness of these clubs.

Table 2. Theoretical coding (identification of factors affecting the development of Mashhad fitness clubs)

Main article	Subcategory	Open source
Interorganizational factors	Professionalism factors	Launching a strong and suitable league between the clubs of the province Having sports teams in sports leagues outside the province and country Regular and focused evaluation of clubs Creating a meritocracy system in bodybuilding hits Using new management methods to improve sports clubs Developing a strategic plan for bodybuilding Increasing attention to the employment of athletes and medalists in bodybuilding Increasing production of quality sports products Equipping clubs with kindergartens for the active participation of mothers
	Social cultural factors	Reducing the gender perspective on bodybuilding A special look at the development of women's bodybuilding Special investment in different age groups and susceptible people from the weaker sections of the society Spreading the culture of dedication in bodybuilding Increasing the culture of paying attention to mental and physical health Paying attention to the sports interests of the people of each region of Mashhad Changing the car lifestyle and promoting a healthy lifestyle Educating and paying attention to the importance of bodybuilding as a basic sport Holding family sports conferences
	Scientific and educational factors	Increasing the experience of fitness trainers Increasing the knowledge of fitness trainers Using the capacity of knowledgeable sports science experts of the university Implementation of the talent search plan for bodybuilding and bodybuilding Increasing coaching courses for women The presence of trained and experienced trainers, referees and athletes in bodybuilding Increasing the courses of promotion and retraining of coaching and refereeing degrees
External factors	motivating factors	Supporting and encouraging medalists in bodybuilding and fitness Special support for bodybuilding athletes invited to national team camps Increasing the championship sports bases of bodybuilding and bodybuilding Hosting for national team camps in Mashhad Increasing financial and spiritual incentives to participate in bodybuilding competitions Formation of fans' centers for the field of bodybuilding and bodybuilding Annual evaluation and recognition of top fitness clubs Increasing the motivation of veterans to attend the club
	Media agents	Using the capacities of social networks for training and talent search Increasing the production of useful sports content by active media Presence of bodybuilding athletes in national and provincial media advertisements Increasing campaigns and sports challenges specific

		to bodybuilding
Internal factors	Organizational and managerial factors	Regular holding of competitions in all age groups The existence of a long-term strategic plan for the development of sports clubs Detailed analysis of sports clubs for proper planning Holding regular and effective meetings of officials with bodybuilding sports activists Being the full-time officials of Hit Bodybuilding and Bodybuilding Establishing sports memorandums between Iraq and Afghanistan Increasing the cooperation of other executive bodies with the Bodybuilding and Bodybuilding Board Increasing the cooperation of provincial organizations to provide their sports facilities to field activists
	Manpower factors	Presence of coaches outside of Mashhad in sports teams The increase of distinguished referees present in sports competitions The presence of caring native managers and experts in high levels of bodybuilding Increase and expansion of organized sportsmen The presence of male/female referees in national and international competitions The high number of young people interested in bodybuilding Creating a database and accurate analysis of sports (athletes, coaches, clubs, etc.)
Trans organizational factors	Financial and economic factors	Planning in attracting financial sponsors for fitness clubs Investing and supporting private sector sports teams Increasing the budget for physical education through the ministry Injecting enough funds into the sports hit of the city Creating revenue generating plans for his bodybuilding and fitness Increasing the support of provincial companies and municipalities
	Facilities and infrastructure factors	The increase of standard sports clubs compared to population growth Increasing the facilities and sports equipment of clubs Increasing fitness clubs for women Establishing and running gym clubs in schools Increasing sports parks equipped with fitness equipment Equipping and renovating old gyms Increasing safe spaces for children to exercise in gyms
	event factors	Increasing the necessary credits for sending bodybuilding athletes out of the province Establishing effective camps for sports teams Creating fitness camps Increasing the hosting of national sports competitions Request to host international sports competitions with neighboring countries The ability to host various sports competitions and conferences Regularly holding competitions of schools and universities in the province in the field of bodybuilding

Overall, 72 concepts, 10 subcategories, and 4 main categories were identified as factors influencing the development of Mashhad's fitness clubs. The four main categories include: inter-organizational factors, external factors, internal factors, and trans-organizational factors. Within these categories, ten subcategories have been identified: professionalism factors, social cultural factors, scientific and educational factors, motivating factors, media agents, organizational and managerial factors, manpower factors, financial and economic factors, facilities and infrastructure factors, and event factors. These factors collectively contribute to the growth and effectiveness of fitness clubs in the region.

4. DISCUSSION

Facilities and Infrastructure

The results indicate that facilities and infrastructure impact the development of gyms in Mashhad. Key factors include increasing standard sports clubs relative to population growth, expanding sports facilities and equipment, enhancing women's fitness clubs, establishing gym clubs in schools, developing sports parks with fitness equipment, renovating old gyms, and creating safe exercise spaces for children. Effective infrastructure is essential for sustainability and residents' well-being (Hananel et al., 2022). Previous research shows that inadequate transportation infrastructure can lead residents to move to areas with better conditions (Uskelnova, 2009). Furthermore, good infrastructure management in educational institutions fosters a suitable learning environment (Agustin & Mu'is, 2023), and it significantly influences motivation in sports (Refinda, 2017). Well-managed infrastructure is vital for sustainable sports development (Ilmi et al., 2023).

Financial and Economic Factors

Financial and economic factors are crucial for gym development in Mashhad. They include planning to attract financial sponsors, supporting private sector sports teams, increasing the bodybuilding budget through the ministry, injecting funds into sports initiatives, and creating income-generating plans. Additionally, enhancing support from provincial companies and municipalities is essential. Financial performance is often measured by profit margins (Schmidgall & DeFranco, 2016), and various regions experience different financial factors impacting development (Apergis et al., 2012). Given the importance of these factors, it is recommended that the government provide financial support, such as repayable loans and allocations for sports budgets.

Professionalism Factors

Professionalism in sports clubs is essential for addressing social and sporting challenges. Factors include establishing a strong league among provincial clubs, participating in sports leagues outside the province and country, centralizing club evaluations, and implementing meritocracy systems. Research indicates that professionalism fosters responsibility and engagement in growth (Turner et al., 2020) and develops leadership skills (Hall-Yannessa & Forrester, 2004). Thus, it is recommended to open bodybuilding leagues for various age and gender categories in Razavi Khorasan province.

Human Resources Factors

Human resources are vital for club development, involving the presence of experienced coaches, distinguished referees, supportive local managers, and a growing pool of organized athletes. Human capital—encompassing knowledge and abilities—is crucial for success. Therefore, effective management of human resources is essential for growth. It is recommended that bodybuilding athletes be provided with activity cards to access organized benefits like discounts on sports facilities. Researchers stated that the importance of social policies and human resources for social development is an issue of special concern in contemporary society (Chagelishvili et al., 2023).

Event Factors

Event factors crucial for club development include increasing credits for sending bodybuilding athletes out of the province, establishing training camps, and enhancing national competition hosting. Holding sports events impacts economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects (Perić et al., 2019). Local events can catalyze urban development (Sánchez-Sáez et al., 2018) and contribute to sustainable tourism. It is suggested that Mashhad host bodybuilding competitions for Islamic countries. However, sports event management is often inefficient and unsystematic, leading to wasted resources and repeated trial and error. On the other hand, researchers stated that local events can have a greater impact on communities, acting as a catalyst for urban development and social and economic dynamics in sports (Sánchez-Sáez et al., 2018).

Scientific and Educational Factors

Enhancing trainers' knowledge and experience, utilizing sports science experts, implementing talent search plans, and increasing coaching courses are vital for club development. Research shows that knowledge and qualified staff are essential for athlete health and success (Ding et al., 2020; Drab-Kurowska & Kuźbik, 2018). Training programs and workshops focused on bodybuilding techniques and healthy practices are recommended.

Organizational and Management Factors

Organizational and management factors include regular competitions, long-term strategic planning, effective meetings among officials, and establishing sports memorandums. Research indicates that effective management is crucial for sustainability and performance (Mong et al., 2022; Bižić, 2022). It is suggested to prioritize detailed planning for sports clubs and implement identification systems for active facilities.

Motivational Factors

Motivational factors include support for medal winners, assistance for national team athletes, expanding championship bases, and increasing incentives for competition participation. Research indicates a positive correlation between motivation and sports participation (Aftab et al., 2022). Strategies to enhance athlete health and reduce injuries should be implemented. Providing special discounts and services to attract and retain gym members is recommended.

Media Factors

Media factors involve utilizing social networks for talent searches, increasing valuable sports content production, featuring athletes in advertisements, and enhancing campaigns. Social media is vital for clubs to promote themselves and engage with fans (Ong & Lang, 2022). It is suggested that the bodybuilding board in Mashhad create a virtual television platform to manage media affairs and disseminate important information. On the other hand, researchers have stated that social media also allows clubs to connect with spectators and increase attendance at matches, although the impact of social media on spectator behavior may be limited (McCarthy et al., 2022).

Social and Cultural Factors

Social and cultural factors include reducing gender bias in bodybuilding, promoting women's bodybuilding, investing in vulnerable populations, and increasing awareness of health. Promoting sports culture is essential for attracting more people to gyms. Raising awareness about bodybuilding's benefits and organizing events in schools and universities can effectively draw interest.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that the development of fitness clubs in Mashhad is influenced by four main categories: inter-organizational factors, external factors, internal factors, and trans-organizational factors. Within these categories, ten subcategories, including professionalism, social and cultural aspects, scientific and educational elements, motivating factors, media engagement, organizational management, human resources, financial and economic conditions, facilities and infrastructure, and event organization, were identified. By creating and facilitating this model, the development steps for Mashhad's fitness clubs will be implemented to better align with future implementation conditions. A comprehensive approach that addresses these interconnected factors, such as enhancing professionalism, promoting gender inclusivity, investing in education and

management, and leveraging media and events, is essential for the sustainable growth of fitness clubs in Mashhad.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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