

Analysis of the key drivers affecting the development of small and medium sports businesses

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to analyze the key drivers affecting the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. The study employed thematic analysis and a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative), collecting data through interviews, library research, and document evaluation. A judgmental sampling method was used to select 17 participants for the qualitative part, including university professors, researchers, and sports business managers, based on their expertise and job history. Data analysis involved a three-stage coding process, with reliability ensured through coding agreement measures. For the quantitative part, a sample of 384 individuals was selected from employees of sports organizations using Cochran's formula. Based on the findings, the key drivers of sports business development include development policies, infrastructure, technical platforms, organizational frameworks, marketing indicators, strategic agility, and individual capabilities. Focusing on these categories can significantly propel the growth and sustainability of sports businesses. By aligning strategic efforts across these areas, sports organizations can enhance their competitive edge and adapt more effectively to the rapidly changing dynamics of the sports industry.

KEYWORDS

Business; Development; Sports; Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, rapid environmental changes have posed significant threats to businesses. Additionally, rapid technological advancements and the explosion of information have intensified the pressure on businesses to survive in the increasingly competitive environment (Shohani et al., 2016). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in driving economic growth, fostering innovation, and creating employment opportunities worldwide (Enaifoghe & Ramsuraj, 2023; Tsatsenko, 2020). Beyond generating employment, SMEs contribute to economic development and help reduce social disparities (Surya et al., 2021).

Governments also play a crucial role in supporting SMEs to ensure economic sustainability and social stability. Successful adaptation and development by SMEs can lead to the creation of more jobs, a reduction in unemployment rates, and positive contributions to local economic growth. Understanding this background highlights the importance of supporting government programs aimed at assisting MSMEs for economic recovery, market adaptation, and technology utilization. Such initiatives are crucial steps toward building a robust and sustainable economic foundation (Sulistyan et al., 2022).

Statistical data reveal that small business entities play a pivotal role in driving economic growth worldwide. For instance, the United States is home to approximately 17 million small businesses, which contribute over 50% of the country's gross national product. Similarly, data from the European Business Association indicate that small businesses are thriving and operating efficiently in the European Union. In Europe, small enterprises constitute 70% to 90% of all businesses, employing more than half of the EU's population (Ugli, 2024).

Various factors contribute to the empowerment of small and medium-sized businesses, which have been explored in different studies. These factors can be categorized and collectively shape the components of business empowerment. Key elements include government and legal support, risk reduction strategies, and financial assistance (Mulhadi & Azam, 2019). Other influential factors include individual characteristics, management practices, socio-political support, leadership, job design attributes, and networking strategies (Hana O-Zapatba & Pirro, 2018). Additionally, dynamic capabilities, entrepreneurial competencies, and marketing factors (Hashim et al., 2018), as well as the identification of entrepreneurial opportunities, international competitiveness, and agility in responding to customer needs (Giuliani et al., 2021), play significant roles. Finally, advancements in

technology, the adoption of e-commerce, and the implementation of technology subsystems are also critical contributors (Alderete, 2020).

Drivers affecting small and medium businesses

With the emergence of new technologies in production and communication, there have been changes in both the production and distribution methods, as well as the organizational structure of businesses. These changes have generally increased the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Despite the significant role such businesses play in the development of countries, their growth and development have not received the attention they deserve (Alderete, 2019).

It is crucial for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to understand and study digital marketing (Fakhriyyah et al., 2020; Sulistyan et al., 2023). In the digital era we are currently experiencing, online marketing strategies have become a key factor in business success. Through digital marketing, MSMEs can reach a wider global market. Another advantage is that digital marketing is more cost-effective compared to traditional methods, enabling MSMEs with limited budgets to allocate resources efficiently. Additionally, digital marketing provides the ability to measure and analyze campaign performance more accurately. MSMEs can track the effectiveness of their campaigns, including website visits, user interactions, and conversions.

Today, sports is not only a game or hobby but also an industry that has spawned many businesses, often in combination with other disciplines such as medical engineering, psychology, nutrition, information technology, tourism, marketing, and more. The sports industry is defined as a market where the products offered are directly related to sports, fitness, leisure, and related products. Products within the sports industry include sports goods, materials, and services linked to sports, recreation, and fitness activities. Additionally, the sports industry encompasses management, financial affairs, marketing, and other administrative and commercial goods and services (Rahimi & Alidoost, 2019).

The sports industry has become one of the largest global sectors due to its positive social, cultural, and economic effects. For most countries, this industry is considered an important source of economic activity, income generation, job creation, and international trade (Rezaei & Salehipour, 2019). Sports businesses require appropriate environmental and cultural conditions, along with an organizational entrepreneurial atmosphere, to encourage new ideas and experimental efforts. This environment helps remove constraints on the use of opportunities and provides the necessary resources (Shohani et al., 2015).

Today, the sports industry holds a significant share in the industrial activities of various countries, and Iran is no exception. Furthermore, the influence of sports on business activities has prompted managers and owners of small and medium enterprises to adopt new technologies and change their approach to business. This shift can foster business growth and help reduce the gap between developing and developed countries in the sports industry. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to analyze the key drivers affecting the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses with a future-focused research approach.

2. METHODS

The research employed an exploratory and structured study, utilizing a thematic analysis approach. Data collection methods included interviews, library research, and document evaluation. The statistical population encompassed human resources and information sources such as scientific, documentary, and library materials. The human component comprised university professors and researchers specializing in fields like sports marketing, sports management, and economics, along with managers and owners of small to medium-sized sports businesses and sports clubs.

A theoretical and judgmental sampling method was applied, with criteria including expertise, job rank, and job history. The sample size of 17 participants was determined based on theoretical saturation. Additional information sources included library resources, scientific publications, reports, executive documents, and media archives. For the documentary part, 66 sources were selected using the same sampling methods, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research framework.

The research employed two primary tools: Library studies and interviews. Techniques such as document evaluation, analysis of prior research, information synthesis, and situational description were used. An initial list of indicators, derived from exploratory interviews, was subsequently refined to develop the research framework.

The validity of the library and interview tools was assessed through expert reviews and reliability measures, such as coding and agreement coefficients (e.g., kappa). After each interview, the resulting model was shared for discussion, enabling interviewees to offer additional insights.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection using a three-stage coding process. Codes were categorized, compared, and refined to identify patterns and develop a comprehensive theory. This iterative approach continued until no new data emerged, confirming theoretical saturation. After completing 17 interviews over six months, data analysis revealed no new insights, marking the conclusion of data collection.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Characteristics of participants

The table below provides an overview of the differences in professional positions and education levels among 17 participants. It is noticeable that most individuals have specialized doctorates and hold positions in universities, while others have managerial roles or are in the sports field.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Row	Gender	Education	Organizational Position
1	Female	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
2	Male	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
3	Female	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
4	Male	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
5	Female	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
6	Male	Master's Degree	Manufacturing Company Manager
7	Female	Specialized Doctorate	Sports Coach
8	Male	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
9	Female	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor
10	Male	Master's Degree	Manufacturing Company Manager
11	Female	Master's Degree	Manufacturing Company Manager
12	Male	Specialized Doctorate	Sports Organization Manager
13	Male	Master's Degree	University Professor
14	Male	Education	Sports Coach
15	Gender	Specialized Doctorate	Organizational Position
16	Female	Master's Degree	Manufacturing Company Manager
17	Female	Specialized Doctorate	University Professor

3.2. Initial coding

The first stage of coding involved extracting the key concepts from the content of the interviews and the literature review. Then, the factors with the highest frequency and the greatest relevance to the research topic were identified. Initially, 145 codes were extracted, and after eliminating similar items, 70 components were ultimately selected, as shown in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2. Initial coding of research findings (extraction of components from interviews and sources)

Compliance with laws related to businesses	Protecting patent rights in sports businesses
Consolidation of administrative laws and procedures	Accelerating access to bank credit
Amendment of support laws with the aim of reducing the costs of creating a business	Revising unnecessary procedures and laws
Tax exemption for new businesses	Improving the business environment for new and growing companies
Support for sports startups	Allocation of government subsidies and aid
Existence of a strong institution or organization related to sports	Strengthening university-industry relations in sports
Quick and easy access to market knowledge	Facilitating presence in target markets
Diversity of sports services and products in the market	Allocation of subsidies for starting sports businesses
Improvement of access and supply of sports raw materials	Developing dedicated guarantee funds for sports businesses
Using experienced and specialized personnel in different sectors	Emphasizing the role of new technologies and awareness of their promotion and development process
Updating the technologies used	Using creative technologies through knowledge production
Producing knowledge, especially through cooperation and carrying out joint projects	Using information technology and business intelligence
Optimal management of the production and services portfolio and investments	Improving labor and capital productivity
Producing value-added products and services	Improving the level of stakeholder satisfaction
Paying attention to environmental considerations and sustainable development requirements	Converging with macroeconomic policies and programs
Paying attention to professional ethics and work commitment	Training human resources in new business methods
Providing entrepreneurship and self-employment training programs to graduates	Supporting the establishment of job placement, recruitment and development centers for sports human resources
Developing entrepreneurship consulting services in the field of sports businesses	Using the resources and potential of other companies
Using capacities and all resources for the company's goals	Emphasizing on saving primary resources in the field of business
Supporting creative practices	Supporting the risk-taking spirit of individuals
Creating incentives for individuals to enter into creative decisions	Accurate market forecasting
Setting future goals for sports business	Program flexibility Long-term
Customer orientation and value creation	Identifying opportunities and paying attention

For customers	to attracting new customers
Close and direct contact with customers	Existence of programs and mechanisms for retaining and maintaining customers
Increasing the speed and quality of after-sales service	Attracting and increasing domestic and foreign investors
Facilitating and creating legal incentives for investors	Creating investment funds for sports activists
Establishing sports trade cooperatives	Creating a guild system for sports professionals
Creating unions and associations of sports-related industries	Ability to interpret, change and survive in the business environment
Ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in business	Intelligence in facing business crises
Flexibility of business development strategies	Transparency of goals and strategies for achieving the desired goals
Execution level related to business development strategies	Speed in carrying out business development-related matters
Creating a culture of teamwork	Leadership skills along with resource-based management
Efforts to increase people's self-confidence in implementing new jobs	Risk-taking and accepting challenges in the business path
Having discipline and following the rules of personal development	Ability to think creatively in the career path
Ability and skills to communicate with others	Ability to solve problems and make timely decisions in critical situations

3.3. Second coding (conceptual nature)

This stage involves categorizing the identified components based on various dimensions. As shown in the table below, the 70 identified components are grouped into 20 dimensions.

Table 3. Key factors and strategic dimensions for the development of sports businesses

Reference	Concept	Open Source
P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P13, P14, P15	Rules Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compliance with laws related to businesses - Protection of patent rights in sports businesses - Stabilization of administrative laws and procedures -Acceleration of access to bank credit
P1, P2, P5, P6, P7, P8, P13, P14, P15	Rules Amendme nt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reforming protectionist laws to reduce the costs of starting a business - Reforming unnecessary procedures and regulations - Tax breaks for new businesses -Improving the business environment for new and growing companies
P1, P2, P4, P12, P13, P15	Government Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for sports startups - Allocation of government subsidies and aid - Existence of a strong institution or organization

		related to sports -Strengthening the connection between universities and industry in sports
P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10	Market Access	- Quick and easy access to market knowledge - Facilitate presence in target markets -Diversity of sports services and products in the market
P9, P10, P12, P14, P15	Resource Access	- Allocating subsidies to start-up sports businesses - Improving access to and supply of sports raw materials - Developing guarantee funds specific to sports businesses -Using experienced and specialized personnel in various sectors
P1, P2, P3, P4, P11, P13, P14	Information Technology	- Emphasis on the role of new technologies and awareness of their promotion and development process - Updating the technologies used - Using creative technologies through knowledge creation - Producing knowledge, especially through collaboration and carrying out joint projects -Using information technology and business intelligence
P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10	Production Management	- Optimal management of production and services portfolio and investments - Improving labor and capital productivity -Producing value-added products and services
P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15	Business Rules	- Improving stakeholder satisfaction - Paying attention to environmental considerations and sustainable development requirements - Convergence with macroeconomic policies and plans -Paying attention to professional ethics and work commitment
P1, P2, P3, P4, P13, P14, P15	Education and Learning	- Teaching new business methods to human resources - Providing entrepreneurship and self-employment training programs to graduates - Supporting the establishment of job placement, recruitment and development centers for sports human resources -Developing entrepreneurial consulting services in the field of sports careers
P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, P13, P14, P15	Resource Synergy	- Using the resources and potential of other companies - Using the capacities and all resources to achieve the company's goals -Emphasis on saving primary resources in business
P10, P12, P13, P14, P15	Organizational Innovation	- Supporting creative actions - Supporting the spirit of risk-taking of individuals -Motivating individuals to enter into creative decisions

P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9	Strategic Planning	- Accurate market forecasting - Setting future goals for sports business -Long-term plan flexibility
P1, P3, P5, P12, P14, P15	Customer Orientatio n	- Customer focus and creating value for customers - Identifying opportunities and paying attention to attracting new customers - Close and direct communication with customers - Existence of programs and mechanisms to retain customers -Increasing the speed and quality of after-sales service provision
P10, P12, P14, P15	Investment	- Attracting and increasing domestic and foreign investors - Facilitating and creating legal incentives for investors -Creating investment funds for sports activists
P1, P29, P10, P11, P13, P14	Business System	- Creation of sports trade cooperatives - Creation of a guild system for sports professionals -Creation of sports-related unions and associations
P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P13, P15	Intelligenc e	- Ability to interpret, change and survive in the business environment - Ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a business -Intelligence in the face of business crises
P11, P12, P13, P14, P15	Agile Strategy	- Flexibility of business development strategies - Clarity of goals and strategies to achieve the desired goals -Executable level related to business development strategies
P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P13, P14, P15	Agile Leaders	- Speed in carrying out business development related matters - Creating a team culture -Leadership skills along with resource-based management
P2, P8, P9, P10, P13, P14	Inherent Characteri stics	- Efforts to increase people's self-confidence in implementing new jobs - Risk-taking and accepting challenges in the business path -Discipline and adherence to the rules of personal development
P4, P5, P6, P7 ,P8, P9, P10	Acquired Characteri stics	- Ability to think creatively in a career path - Ability and skills to communicate with others -Ability to solve problems and make timely decisions in critical situations

Based on the table above, the 20 dimensions presented were derived from the selective coding of 70 components. The identification and categorization of these dimensions were achieved through a

detailed process of conceptual coding, which involved carefully analyzing the components to reveal overarching themes and patterns. The following section provides a detailed description of each dimension identified during the conceptual coding process.

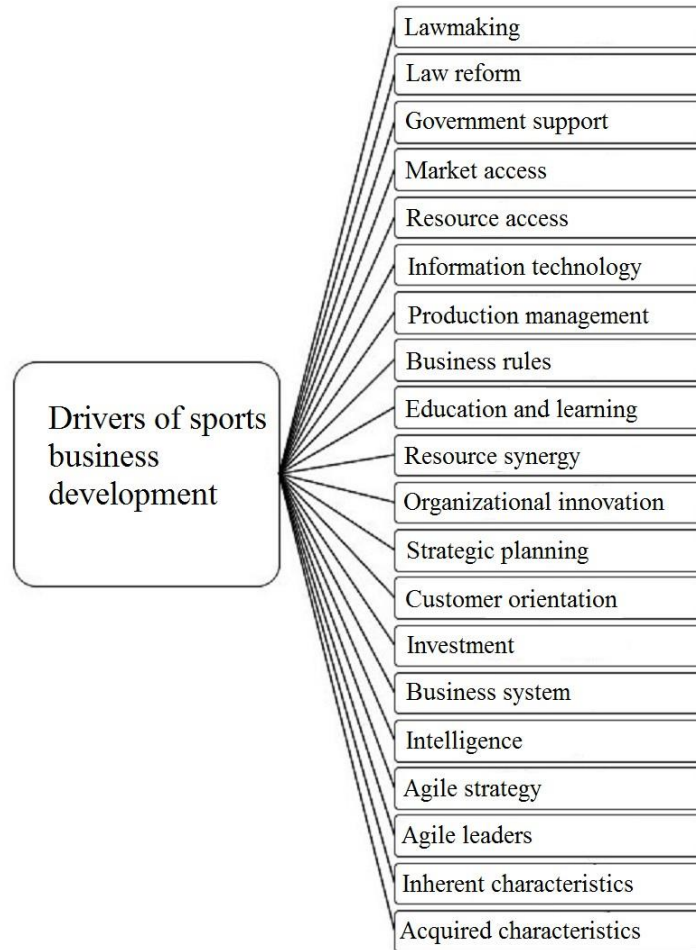


Figure 1. Description of dimensions identified in selective coding

3.4. Selective coding

In the third stage, the 20 dimensions were synthesized into 7 thematic codes, resulting in a comprehensive conceptual framework that encapsulates the key aspects of the study. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding the underlying patterns and relationships within the data, offering valuable insights for further analysis (see Table 4).

Table 4. Dimensions identified in selective coding into thematic codes

Subject	Concept	Open Source
Development policymaking	Rules Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compliance with laws related to businesses - Protection of patent rights in sports businesses - Stabilization of administrative laws and procedures -Acceleration of access to bank credit
	Rules Amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reforming protectionist laws to reduce the costs of starting a business - Reforming unnecessary procedures and regulations - Tax breaks for new businesses -Improving the business environment for new and growing companies
	Government Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for sports startups - Allocation of government subsidies and aid - Existence of a strong institution or organization related to sports -Strengthening the connection between universities and industry in sports
Development infrastructure	Market Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quick and easy access to market knowledge - Facilitate presence in target markets -Diversity of sports services and products in the market
	Resource Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocating subsidies to start-up sports businesses - Improving access to and supply of sports raw materials - Developing guarantee funds specific to sports businesses -Using experienced and specialized personnel in various sectors
	Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on the role of new technologies and awareness of their promotion and development process - Updating the technologies used - Using creative technologies through knowledge creation - Producing knowledge, especially through collaboration and carrying out joint projects -Using information technology and business intelligence
Technical platforms	Production Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Optimal management of production and services portfolio and investments - Improving labor and capital productivity -Producing value-added products and services
	Trade Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving stakeholder satisfaction - Paying attention to environmental considerations and sustainable development requirements - Convergence with macroeconomic policies and plans -Paying attention to professional ethics and work commitment
	Education and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching new business methods to human resources - Providing entrepreneurship and self-employment training programs to graduates - Supporting the establishment of job placement,

		recruitment and development centers for sports human resources -Developing entrepreneurial consulting services in the field of sports careers
Organizational platforms	Resource Synergy	- Using the resources and potential of other companies - Using the capacities and all resources to achieve the company's goals -Emphasis on saving primary resources in business
	Organizational Creativity	- Supporting creative actions - Supporting the spirit of risk-taking of individuals -Motivating individuals to enter into creative decisions
	Strategic Planning	- Accurate market forecasting - Setting future goals for sports business -Long-term plan flexibility
Marketing indicators	Customer Orientation	- Customer focus and creating value for customers - Identifying opportunities and paying attention to attracting new customers - Close and direct communication with customers - Existence of programs and mechanisms to retain customers -Increasing the speed and quality of after-sales service provision
	Investment	- Attracting and increasing domestic and foreign investors - Facilitating and creating legal incentives for investors -Creating investment funds for sports activists
	Business System	- Creation of sports trade cooperatives - Creation of a guild system for sports professionals -Creation of sports-related unions and associations
Strategic agility	Intelligence	- Ability to interpret, change and survive in the business environment - Ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a business -Intelligence in the face of business crises
	Agile Strategy	- Flexibility of business development strategies - Clarity of goals and strategies to achieve the desired goals -Executable level related to business development strategies
	Agile Leaders	- Speed in carrying out business development related matters - Creating a team culture -Leadership skills along with resource-based management
Individual capabilities	Inherent Characteristics	- Efforts to increase people's self-confidence in implementing new jobs - Risk-taking and accepting challenges in the business path -Discipline and adherence to the rules of personal development
	Acquired Characteristics	- Ability to think creatively in a career path - Ability and skills to communicate with others -Ability to solve problems and make timely decisions

3.5. Conceptual Model and Validation

The figure below illustrates a model of the key factors influencing sports career development, identifying the essential components that contribute to this process.

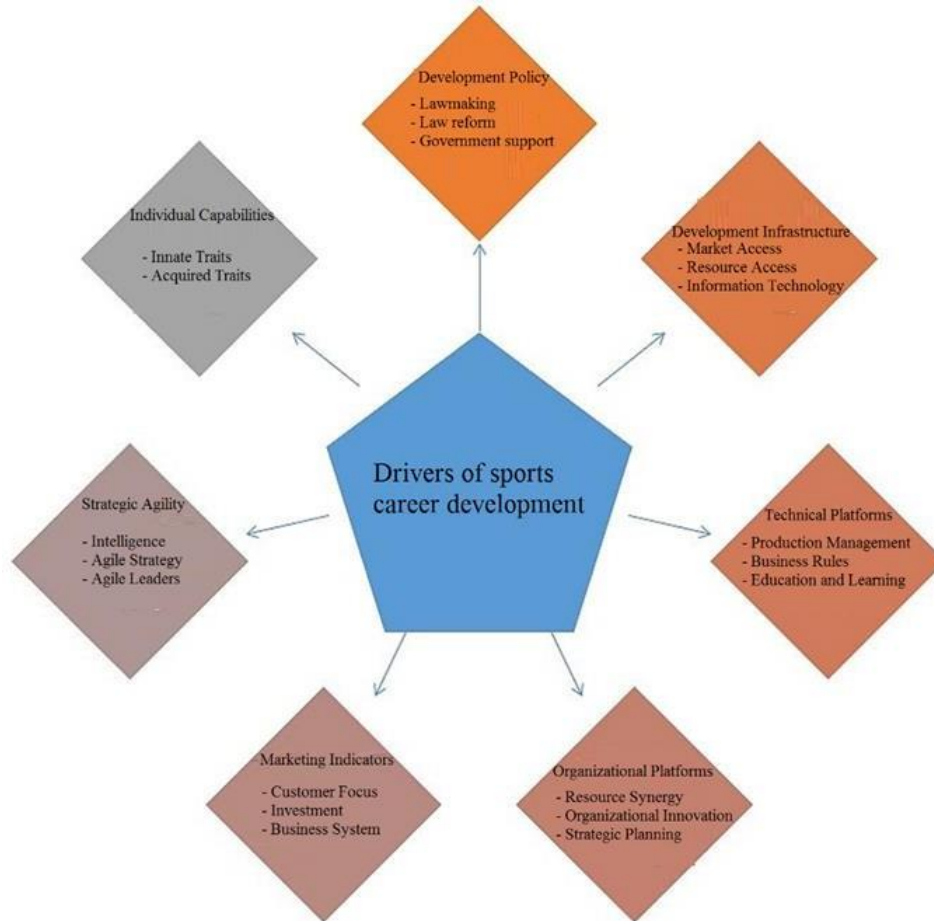


Figure 2. Conceptual research model based on systems analysis theory

In the following, Table 5 presents the findings of the validity and reliability analyses conducted for the final research model.

Table 5. Results of validity and reliability analyses for the final research model

Component	Number of questions	Average variance	composite reliability	Rho	Cronbach's Alpha
Business development	70	0.544	0.988	0.988	0.988

The evaluation of the indicators of the final research model also demonstrates its high validity. Therefore, based on the confirmation of the model, we now present the results of the path analysis in the context of the research model.

To assess the fit of the research's structural model, several indicators have been used, the first and most important of which is the t-statistic. Additionally, the most basic indicator for measuring the relationship between variables in the model (structural part) is the significance values associated with the t-statistic. To understand the intensity of the relationship and compare it with others (relationships in the model), a standardized coefficient can be used. Considering the interpretive pattern in structural equation modeling and the fact that the t-statistic value for all paths is greater than 1.96, it can be concluded that the corresponding paths are significant at the 95% confidence level (Table 6).

Table 6. Path coefficient values and t-statistics for the hypotheses related to the paths in the research model

Relationship		Path coefficient	T	Meaningfulness	Result
Development Policy	→	0.910	75.176	0.001	Confirm
Development Infrastructure	→	0.939	105.823	0.001	Confirm
Technical Platforms	→	0.887	48.200	0.001	Confirm
Organizational Platforms	→	0.773	24.180	0.001	Confirm
Marketing Indicators	→	0.920	82.597	0.001	Confirm
Strategic Agility	→	0.896	57.199	0.001	Confirm
Individual Capabilities	→	0.880	51.899	0.001	Confirm

According to the data in the table below, the resulting values for the Q^2 and R^2 indices fall within a strong range, and the SRMR value is less than 0.1, indicating the satisfactory quality of the tested model. The image of the tested research model, along with the resulting path coefficients for all model paths, is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Table 7. Fit index values for the variables of the research model

Variable	Q ²	R ²	SRMR
Development Policymaking	0.496	0.828	0.093
Development Infrastructure	0.559	0.881	
Technical Platforms	0.455	0.787	
Organizational Platforms	0.425	0.598	
Marketing Indicators	0.538	0.847	
Strategic Agility	0.513	0.802	
Individual Capabilities	0.553	0.775	

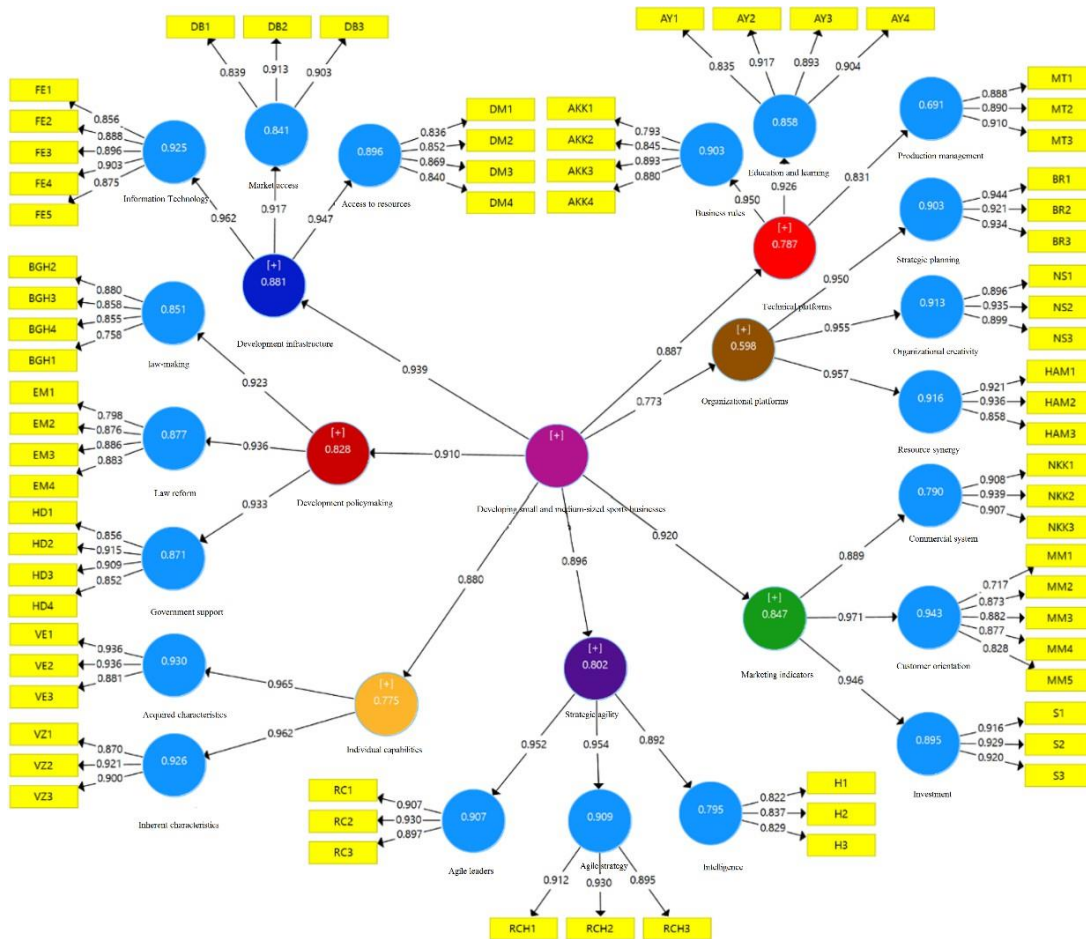


Figure 3. Final research model in the path coefficient and factor loadings mode

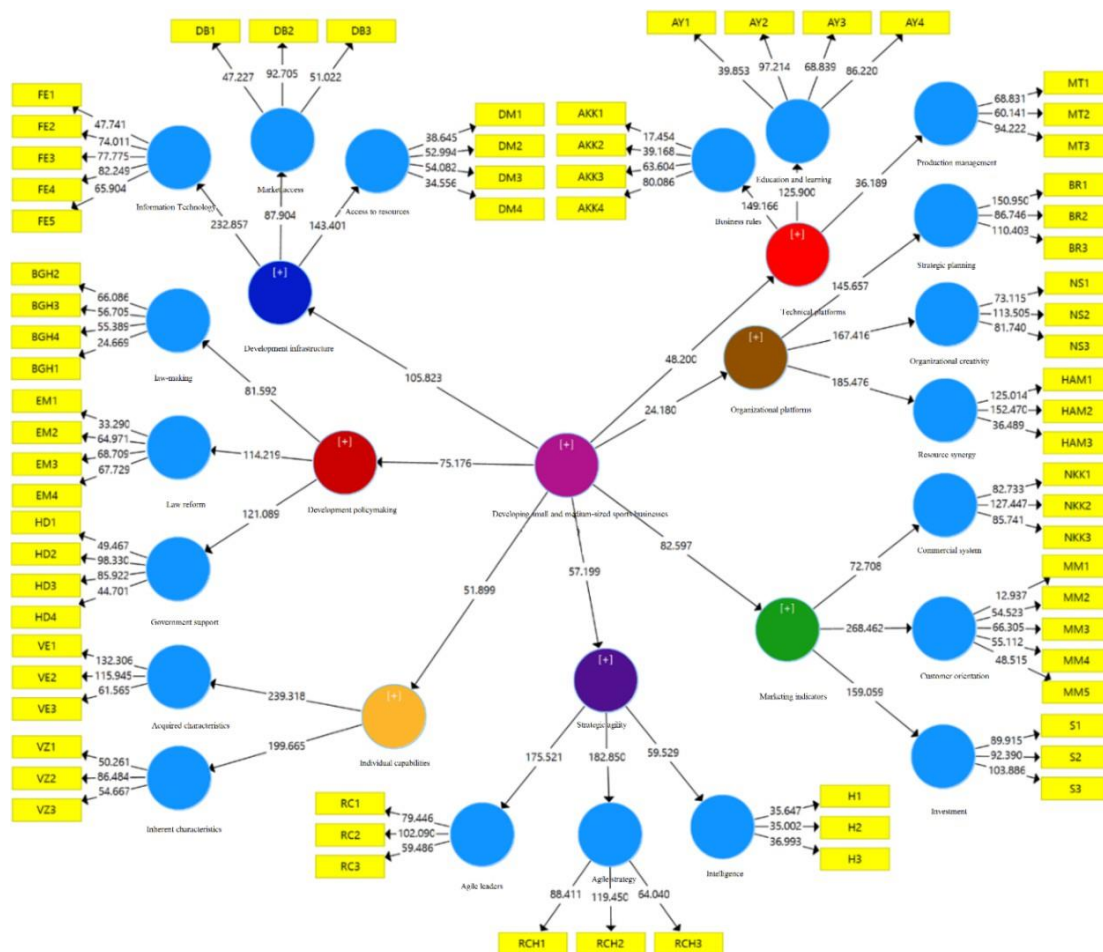


Figure 4. Final research model in the case of significant values

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, development policymaking has an impact on the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. In development policymaking, the indicators of lawmaking, law reform and government support are emphasized. These findings are in line with the results of Parvaz & Eydi (2023); Valipour et al. (2023); Ghasemi et al. (2021). Azimi Dolarsetaghi et al. (2019) believe that government support policies, legal and legal factors are among the contextual factors affecting the establishment of strategic entrepreneurship in sports businesses. These factors point to the main role of government and legal support. Therefore, efforts should be focused on creating laws and maintaining compliance with laws related to businesses and patent rights in sports businesses should also be protected. Access to bank credit should also be accelerated through the consolidation of laws and administrative procedures. In line with the reform of laws, it is also emphasized that the necessary conditions for the development of sports businesses can be created by reforming

supportive laws to reduce business start-up costs, reforming unnecessary procedures and laws, providing tax exemptions for new businesses and improving the business environment for new and growing companies.

Development infrastructure is effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Development infrastructure refers to access to the market and resources and information technology. These findings are consistent with the results of Vaeqi Nazari et al. (2022); Ebrahimi et al. (2023). Market access provides the conditions for the development of sports businesses through quick and easy access to market knowledge, facilitating presence in target markets and diversifying sports services and products in the market. Access to resources also refers to the allocation of subsidies for starting sports businesses, improving access and supply of sports raw materials, developing dedicated guarantee funds for sports businesses and using experienced and specialized personnel in different sectors. Of course, the role of information technology should not be ignored. In information technology, all measures emphasize the role of new technologies and awareness of their promotion and development process, updating the technologies used, using creative technologies through knowledge creation, producing knowledge especially through cooperation and joint projects and using information technology and business intelligence. Zhou et al. (2020) believes that the digital economy is becoming a major driving force for economic development and data elements are also becoming the main factors promoting the development of the digital economy which is carried out through every link of economic activities. Therefore, in sports business, the proportion of data-driven business analysis should be increased to pursue economic development at a faster pace.

Based on the findings of our study, technical platforms are effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Technical platforms refer to all measures in the field of production management, business rules, education and learning that promote the prosperity of sports businesses. These findings are consistent with the results of Parvaz & Eydi (1401); Ghasemi et al. (2021). Production management in sports business development refers to all measures of optimal management of the portfolio of production and services and investments, improving labor and capital productivity, producing value-added products and services that achieve development goals. Business rules refer to improving the level of stakeholder satisfaction, paying attention to environmental considerations and sustainable development requirements, convergence with macroeconomic policies and programs, paying attention to professional ethics and work commitment. One of the most important components affecting business development is the education and learning component which refers to teaching new business methods to human resources, providing entrepreneurship and

self-employment training programs to graduates, supporting the establishment of job centers, attracting and developing sports human resources and developing entrepreneurial consulting services in the field of sports businesses.

Organizational platforms are effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Organizational platforms include resource synergy, organizational creativity and strategic planning. Agha Mohammadi et al. (2023) believe that factors such as entrepreneurial policies, along with the existence of creative opportunities and as a result, the ability to present creative ideas as well as the existence of creative infrastructures, the existence of an innovative culture in society, laws and other environmental factors, can provide the basis for sports businesses to move toward strategic creativity. Resource synergy means using the resources and potential of other companies, using capacities and all resources for the company's goals and emphasizing saving on the consumption of primary resources in business. Organizational creativity is one of the main principles of business development and refers to supporting creative practices, supporting the spirit of risk-taking of individuals and motivating individuals to make creative decisions. Strategic planning is also the key to the development and progress of sports businesses and refers to accurate market forecasting, setting future goals for sports business and flexibility of long-term plans.

Furthermore, marketing indicators are effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Marketing indicators include the components of customer orientation, investment and business system. These findings are consistent with the results of Vaghefi Nazari et al. (2022). This component shows how business develops when customer orientation and customer attention are prioritized. In fact, customer orientation and creating value for customers, identifying opportunities and paying attention to attracting new customers, close and direct communication with customers, the existence of programs and mechanisms to retain customers, increasing the speed and quality of after-sales service, are directly effective in business development. Regarding investment, attracting and increasing domestic and foreign investors, facilitating and creating legal incentives for investors and creating investment funds for sports activists are priorities. Creating a commercial system with an emphasis on establishing sports trade cooperatives, creating a guild system for sports professionals and creating unions and associations of sports-related industries can lead to the development of sports careers.

As for strategic agility, the study showed that this is effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Strategic agility includes the components of intelligence, agile strategy and agile leaders. Intelligence against changes and interpretation and change and survival in

the business environment, the ability to identify business strengths and weaknesses and intelligence in the face of business crises can lead to development and, along with agile strategy, greater effectiveness can be achieved. In agile strategy, there are issues such as flexibility of business development strategies, transparency of goals and strategies for achieving the desired goals and the degree of implementability of business development strategies and when agile leaders use this strategy, business development-related tasks, creating a teamwork culture and leadership skills are accelerated (Esazadeh et al., 2021).

Based on the findings, individual capabilities are effective in the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses. This finding is consistent with the results of Ebrahimi et al. (2023); Mohammadkazemi et al. (2021). Personal capabilities include inherent and acquired characteristics that entrepreneurs and sports business owners should have. Some of these characteristics are inherent and these inherent characteristics also refer to individuals' self-confidence in implementing new jobs, risk-taking and accepting challenges in the business path, discipline and adherence to personal development rules. Of course, some of these characteristics are acquired by the individual. Acquired characteristics also refer to the ability to think creatively in the career path, the ability and skills to communicate with others, the ability to solve problems and make timely decisions in critical situations. Mohammadkazemi et al. (2021) concluded that the model for empowering knowledge-based small and medium-sized businesses consists of five dimensions (personal empowerment, financial empowerment, entrepreneurial empowerment, marketing empowerment and technological empowerment). Also the factors influencing the empowerment of small and medium-sized businesses include personal empowerment and financial empowerment and the affected factors include entrepreneurial empowerment, marketing empowerment and technological empowerment.

In fact, small and medium-sized businesses as the driving force of economic and social development, play a fundamental role in the development process of societies. The impact of small and medium-sized enterprises on the economic growth of countries cannot be ignored so countries tend to make long-term policies and plans and create incentives and conditions to use the potential of small and medium-sized businesses to achieve sustainable growth (Mahbobi et al., 2020). Usually, in each country, depending on the macroeconomic conditions and policies, certain groups of businesses are placed in this category. Small and medium-sized businesses are a vital component of growth in the global economy and their importance in the economic development of developed and developing countries is well known, especially in developing countries, where the power of small and medium-sized businesses in creating sustainable development must be considered (Karimi et al., 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the key drivers of sports business development include development policies, infrastructure, technical platforms, organizational frameworks, marketing indicators, strategic agility, and individual capabilities. It can be concluded that focusing on these categories can significantly propel the growth and sustainability of sports businesses. By aligning strategic efforts across these areas, sports organizations can not only improve their competitive edge but also adapt more effectively to the rapidly changing dynamics of the sports industry.

Future growth will depend on how well businesses leverage these drivers to foster innovation, enhance fan engagement, and drive profitability in an increasingly globalized and digital marketplace. This expanded version emphasizes both the practical steps for development and the broader significance of these drivers in shaping the future of sports businesses.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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