Designing a Network Marketing Model in the Sale of Sports Products

Mina. Raeisi[1] , Seyed Abbas. Biniaz[1]* , Nima. Majedi[1]

[1] Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Qa.C., Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran

* **Corresponding author email address**: abbas.biniaz1351@gmail.com

A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

The aim of the present study was to design a network marketing model for the sale of sports products. This research is applied in nature and employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative section, the sample included experts and marketers active in sports network marketing, managers and heads of marketing committees, sports product manufacturing companies and sponsors, as well as sports marketing professors. A total of 17 individuals were selected through purposive sampling for in-depth interviews, which continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. In the quantitative section, the statistical population included managers of sports product manufacturing companies, sports marketing managers of federations, sports product sponsors, economists and marketers, doctoral students, and experts in the field of network marketing. Using an accessible sampling method based on structural equation modeling, 220 individuals were selected as the sample. The data collection tool in the qualitative part was a semi-structured interview, while in the quantitative part it was a researcher-developed questionnaire. For data analysis, the Strauss and Corbin coding method was applied in the qualitative section, and factor analysis along with structural equation modeling was conducted in the quantitative section using SPSS and PLS software. Based on the qualitative data analysis derived from the interviews, a paradigmatic model was presented within six dimensions, including causal conditions (2 categories), contextual conditions (3 categories), intervening conditions (3 categories), core phenomenon (1 category), strategy (3 categories), and consequences (3 categories). The model indices indicated that the developed framework had an acceptable fit, and all relationships between causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and consequential factors were statistically significant and in a positive direction. The results of this study will be useful for policymaking and developing strategic programs aimed at expanding network marketing in the sale of sports products.

Keywords: Network marketing, sports products, mixed-methods

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global economy, network marketing has emerged as a distinctive and powerful business model that has found considerable application in diverse sectors, including the sports industry. This model emphasizes direct sales through personal networks, leveraging social connections, trust, and digital platforms to expand market reach and consumer engagement (Ismail et al., 2025). Particularly in the context of sports products, network marketing not only facilitates the distribution of goods but also contributes to brand loyalty, community building, and consumer education (Hitesh, 2024). As sports consumption increasingly intersects with digital technology and social platforms, the design of effective network marketing models has become critical to enhancing both organizational performance and consumer satisfaction.

The concept of network marketing, often referred to as multi-level marketing, has long been positioned as a strategic approach for expanding sales and enhancing organizational sustainability. Scholars emphasize that network marketing differs from traditional sales models by relying on structured interpersonal connections, incentivized recruitment, and relationship-driven transactions (Ismail et al., 2025). In sports, where products often carry strong emotional, aspirational, and lifestyle associations, the network marketing model resonates with consumer identity and brand loyalty (Ahmadi Moghaddam, 2019).

With the integration of digital platforms, network marketing has undergone significant transformation. From early strategies emphasizing personal contact and word-of-mouth promotion, the field has shifted toward hybrid approaches that combine offline interactions with social media marketing, influencer partnerships, and e-commerce ecosystems (Yang, 2013; Zhang et al., 2004). This convergence of traditional and digital modes reflects not only the dynamism of consumer culture but also the ability of sports brands to adapt to shifting patterns of consumption (Ouyang, 2024).

Sports marketing is recognized as a vital domain where emotional appeal, performance identity, and cultural symbolism intersect. Scholars have noted that marketing strategies in the sports sector must simultaneously address competitive positioning, brand building, and consumer engagement (Ajeigbe, 2021). Unlike many other industries, sports products often carry strong symbolic meaning related to health, performance, social belonging, and personal achievement (Thakkar, 2024). For this reason, network marketing in sports is not merely a transactional mechanism but a tool for cultivating enduring relationships between brands and consumers.

The global expansion of sports consumption and commercialization has made marketing strategies increasingly complex. With the advent of digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, companies like Nike and Adidas have successfully blended influencer-based promotion with viral content strategies to reach younger demographics (Ouyang, 2024). These strategies not only showcase the adaptability of sports marketing but also demonstrate the relevance of network-oriented approaches in cultivating grassroots brand advocacy (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The integration of big data analytics into network marketing has substantially reshaped the ways in which sports products are marketed. Research highlights that data-driven strategies enable firms to identify consumer preferences, predict purchasing behaviors, and personalize communication channels (Fei, 2019; Han, 2020). For example, predictive modeling can optimize promotional campaigns, while real-time analytics enhance customer engagement by providing timely, tailored content. In this way, the intersection of data science and network marketing strategies has significantly increased the efficiency and effectiveness of sports marketing initiatives.

Consumer behavior studies reveal that individuals engaging with online platforms are increasingly influenced by credibility, trust, and the perceived authenticity of marketing content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In fact, trust-building mechanisms are vital in shaping consumers' willingness to purchase sports goods online, where risks associated with product quality, logistics, and post-purchase support are perceived as higher (Zhao, 2013). Thus, effective network marketing strategies must integrate mechanisms to ensure credibility and reliability while reducing perceived risks.

Social media has redefined the very nature of brand engagement in sports. Consumers now interact with brands not only as buyers but also as co-creators of meaning through sharing, commenting, and endorsing content (Buzeta et al., 2020). This participatory environment aligns with the principles of network marketing, where individuals act as both consumers and promoters of brand value. The strategic use of social media platforms, when aligned with models such as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), has been shown to enhance small business growth, including those operating in sports product markets (Hassan et al., 2015).

The increasing reliance on social platforms has also raised concerns regarding mental health and well-being, particularly in contexts where social validation is closely linked to online engagement (Young et al., 2020). For sports marketers, this dual dynamic presents both opportunities and responsibilities: while social media enables unprecedented reach, it also necessitates ethical considerations regarding consumer welfare.

Despite its promise, network marketing in the sports industry faces structural and cultural barriers. Studies in the Iranian sports market reveal multiple obstacles, including regulatory constraints, lack of managerial expertise, and resistance to change among traditional retailers (Izadi Shahnani & Kashgar, 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of designing network marketing models that are not only efficient but also adaptable to local socio-economic contexts.

Moreover, consumer perceptions of online shopping for sports products are often shaped by trust issues, logistics barriers, and cultural attitudes toward virtual consumption (Benesbordi & Nazari Tarshizi, 2019). Overcoming these barriers requires integrating robust logistics strategies (Zhao, 2013), ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks (Xiangyu & Yake, 2024), and leveraging social trust mechanisms embedded within communities (Sui & Li, 2019).

One of the most significant contributions of network marketing lies in its capacity to build brand communities. Research indicates that community-based marketing in sports not only fosters loyalty but also enhances the diffusion of innovation (Hitesh, 2024). Network marketing allows consumers to transition from passive recipients of brand messages to active participants in brand narratives (Zhang, 2018). This form of engagement deepens consumer-brand relationships, enhances brand image, and supports long-term competitiveness.

Sports brands have also found network marketing effective in sustaining competitive advantage through differentiation. By embedding products in personalized narratives and community-based activities, companies can amplify brand meaning and consumer identification (Chen, 2006). In turn, these strategies elevate sports products beyond functional value to symbolic and cultural capital (Sun & Huo, 2011).

Another critical dimension of network marketing relates to business continuity and resilience. Organizations adopting network-driven models are better positioned to adapt to market contingencies and external shocks (Niemimaa et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, demonstrated how businesses with robust online and network-based models were able to sustain operations despite disruptions to traditional retail channels (Raghavendra, 2019). Within the sports industry, where consumer demand is often volatile and dependent on social trends, resilience through adaptive network marketing strategies is particularly valuable.

Given the diversity of factors influencing network marketing in sports—from digital transformation and social media engagement to consumer trust and regulatory barriers—there is a clear need for comprehensive paradigmatic models. Such models must account for causal, contextual, and intervening conditions that shape marketing strategies, while also addressing the consequences for brand performance and consumer satisfaction (Ismail et al., 2025). In this respect, paradigmatic frameworks not only systematize knowledge but also provide practical guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and academic researchers alike.

Theories and case studies highlight the necessity of aligning network marketing strategies with cultural norms, technological infrastructure, and consumer psychology. For instance, in China, strategic approaches to network marketing emphasize aligning logistics with consumer expectations and integrating local cultural narratives into promotional strategies (Xiangyu & Yake, 2024; Yang, 2013). Similarly, in Iran, studies have underscored the significance of resolving institutional barriers and promoting consumer trust through transparency and community-building (Izadi Shahnani & Kashgar, 2022).

The evolution of network marketing in the sports industry underscores its potential as both a business model and a community-building mechanism. By integrating digital platforms, leveraging consumer trust, and overcoming structural barriers, sports brands can develop innovative strategies that align with global trends while addressing local challenges. The literature reveals that network marketing is not merely a sales strategy but a holistic framework for enhancing brand equity, consumer engagement, and organizational resilience (Ahmadi Moghaddam, 2019; Hitesh, 2024; Zhang, 2018).

The present study aims to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by designing a paradigmatic model for network marketing in the sale of sports products.

2.   Methods and Materials

The present study employed a qualitative approach, which, in terms of purpose, falls under developmental studies. To construct the conceptual model of the research, the grounded theory method was applied. The statistical population consisted of experts and specialists in the sports network marketing industry of the country, managers and heads of marketing committees, managers of sports product manufacturing companies and sponsors, and university faculty members in the fields of sports marketing and economics. These individuals possessed both theoretical and practical expertise in sports product economics and marketing. From this group, 17 individuals were purposively and non-randomly selected until theoretical saturation was achieved to conduct interviews and obtain the necessary data on the research subject. Given the use of grounded theory and interviews for data collection, the snowball sampling technique was employed. Initially, the researcher reviewed previous studies related to sports product network marketing and identified the main influential components. The data collection instrument consisted of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts. Since semi-structured interviews were used instead of structured interviews, the interview protocol included predetermined open-ended questions that allowed the interviewer to probe and clarify issues during the discussion.

For the interviews, general research questions focused on key topics such as causal factors, contextual factors, intervening variables, and strategies (practical approaches). Depending on the progression of interviews and selection of new cases, questions were presented in more detail and specificity. Before conducting interviews, arrangements were made with participants via telephone calls to schedule suitable times. During the interview, participants' conversations were fully recorded with prior consent, and important, ambiguous, or clarifying points were noted by the researcher. This approach also encouraged participants psychologically. Care was taken to ensure that the interviewer's views were not imposed on participants to avoid biasing their opinions. Each interview lasted between 30 to 90 minutes depending on the participant's knowledge and engagement with the subject. Interviews were transcribed onto paper with the assistance of a research assistant. After transcription, responses were sent via email to the participants for validation. The finalized data were then used for analysis. To ensure validity, feedback was obtained from eight specialists. Additionally, three independent experts who did not participate in the interviews contributed to data analysis and interpretation. For assessing

credibility and validity in qualitative research, criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability were applied, and all relevant requirements were observed. In the present study, test-retest reliability was calculated as 0.90, confirming the dependability of the coding process. Data analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's method in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

In the quantitative section, a survey method using structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed. The statistical population included managers of sports product manufacturing companies, marketing managers and experts in federations and sports organizations, professors of sports management and marketing, sponsors of sports products, individuals with management and marketing experience in different levels of the national sports system, economists and marketers familiar with sports issues, doctoral students of sports marketing and management, professionals in sports economics, and experts in network marketing. Based on the SEM sampling requirement of at least 15 samples per latent variable, the minimum sample size was determined. With 14 identified factors, a total of 210 participants were required. Ultimately, 220 respondents were selected through convenient sampling after accounting for incomplete questionnaire returns.

To collect and verify the required data in the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed questionnaire was designed, derived from codes extracted from the interviews. The initial version contained 85 items. This questionnaire was reviewed by the supervisor, consultant, and several marketing experts to establish face and content validity. Data analysis followed a six-step process: conducting and editing interviews, coding responses, categorizing concepts into thematic groups, interpreting emerging concepts, integrating themes and drawing conclusions, and comparing items with prior research findings. After the initial coding and analysis, 389 open codes were identified. Related and conceptually similar items were merged into unified categories. These categories were then organized into a preliminary questionnaire with relevant components. To assess construct and content validity (CVR) and to reduce the number of items, 10 sports marketing professors and experts reviewed the instrument. The final questionnaire consisted of 73 items. Items were close-ended and measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1). The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.70 for all dimensions and 0.88 overall. Data analysis was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling with

SPSS and the partial least squares (PLS) method via Smart PLS 2 (beta).

3. Findings and Results

The findings of the study were based on the analysis of interviews with experts possessing both theoretical and practical knowledge relevant to the research topic. Using Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory method in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, the data were analyzed. The qualitative interviews yielded 145 open codes, 73 concepts, and 16 categories within the dimensions of the paradigmatic model for designing the network marketing framework in the sale of sports products.

Figure 1

The Conceptual Research Model
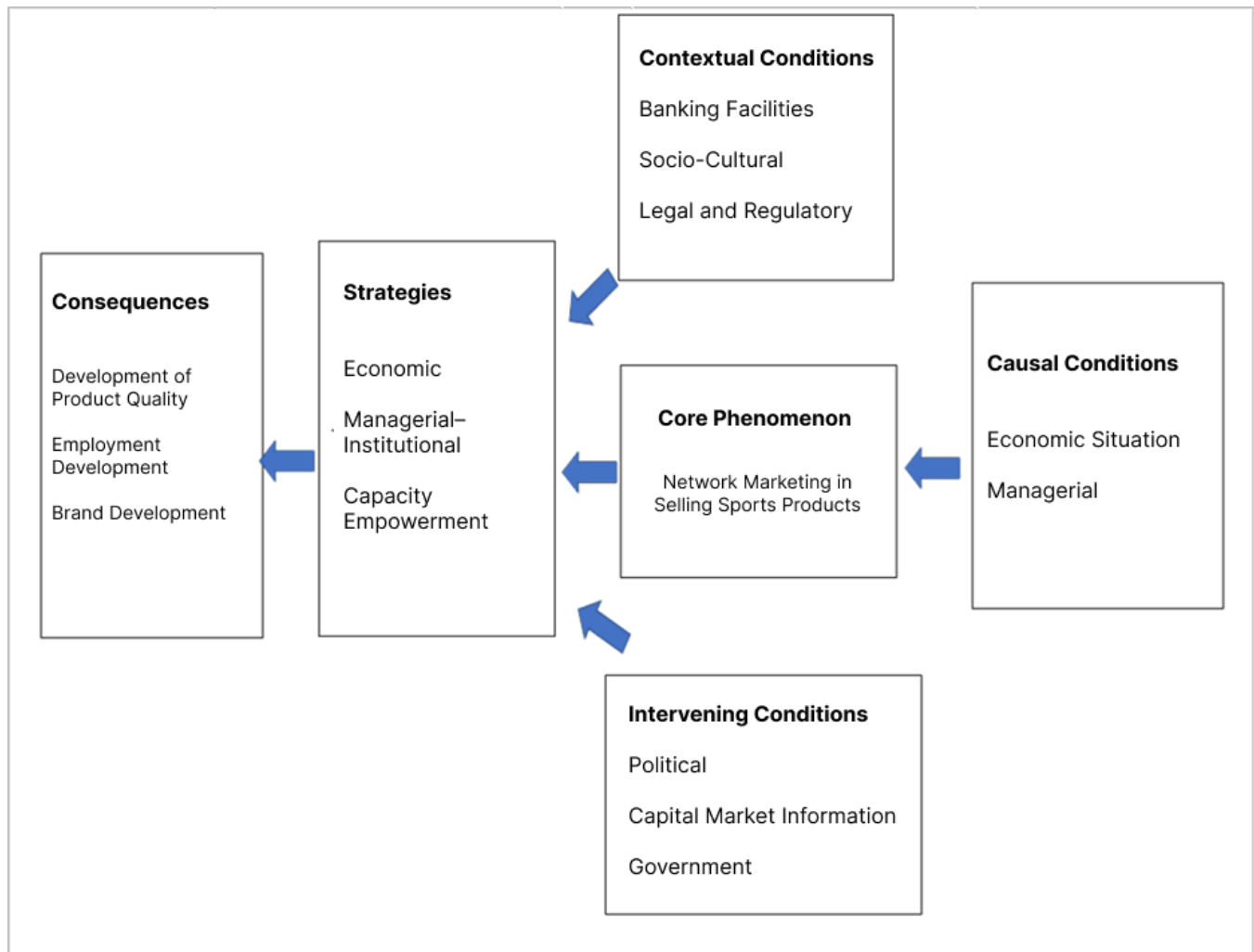
In the quantitative section, confirmatory factor analysis results were presented to validate the model obtained from the qualitative phase. Three criteria were applied to evaluate the fit of the measurement models: reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 1

Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha of Research Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Capital Market Information	0.931	0.933	0.879
Banking Facilities	0.800	0.817	0.630
Legal and Regulatory	0.925	0.926	0.817

Government	0.920	0.938	0.745
Strategic Actions and Interactions	0.794	0.815	0.710
Political	0.730	0.836	0.575
Socio-Cultural	0.923	0.920	0.816
Managerial	0.915	0.916	0.628
Economic Situation	0.910	0.915	0.615
Consequences	0.914	0.926	0.853

As shown in the table, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all six variables exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability of the model.

The AVE criterion indicates the average variance shared between each variable and its own items. In simpler terms, AVE represents the extent of correlation between a variable and its indicators, such that the greater the correlation, the better the model fit. According to Table 1 and the Fornell and Larcker method, the acceptable value for AVE is 0.40 and above. For all variables, the AVE value is greater than

or equal to 0.40. Considering that the acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.70, for composite reliability 0.70, and for AVE 0.40, the reliability and convergent validity of the study can be confirmed.

Discriminant validity is the third criterion for assessing the fit of measurement models, covering two aspects: a) comparing the correlation of an item with its respective variable versus its correlation with other variables, and b) comparing the correlation of a variable with its items versus its correlation with other variables.
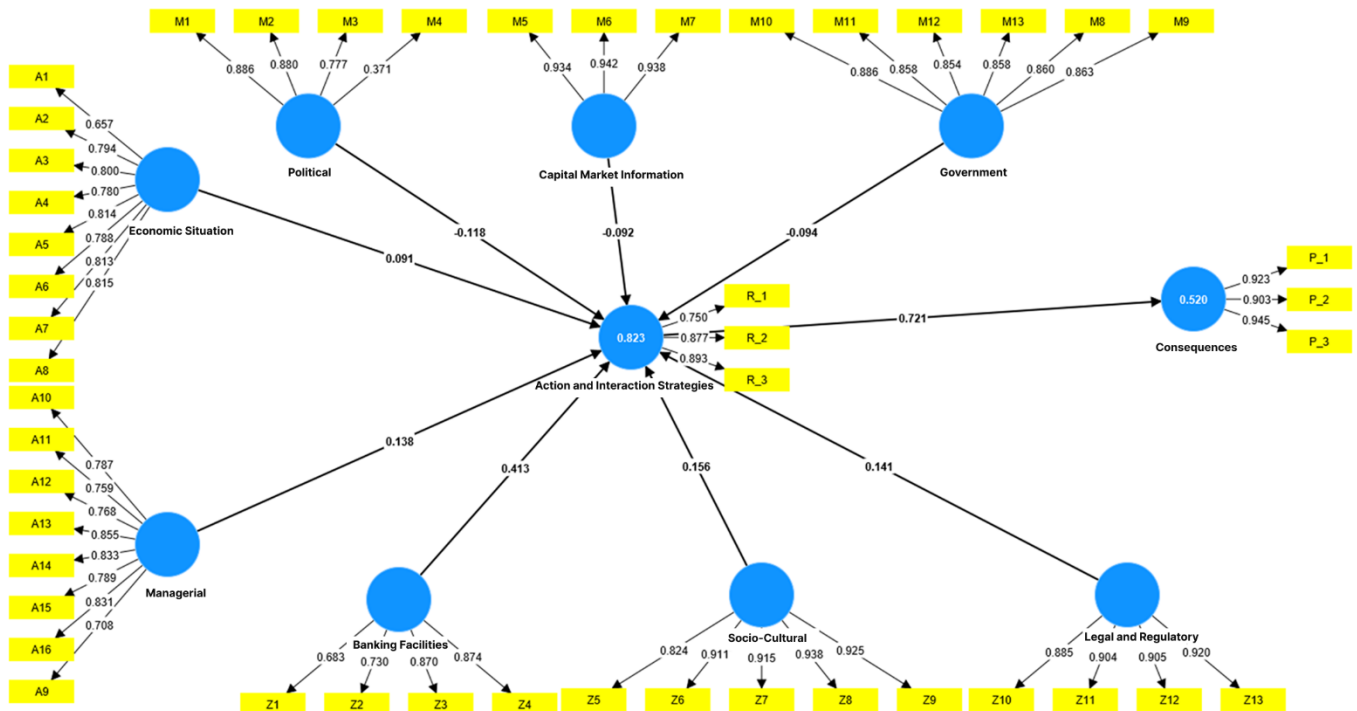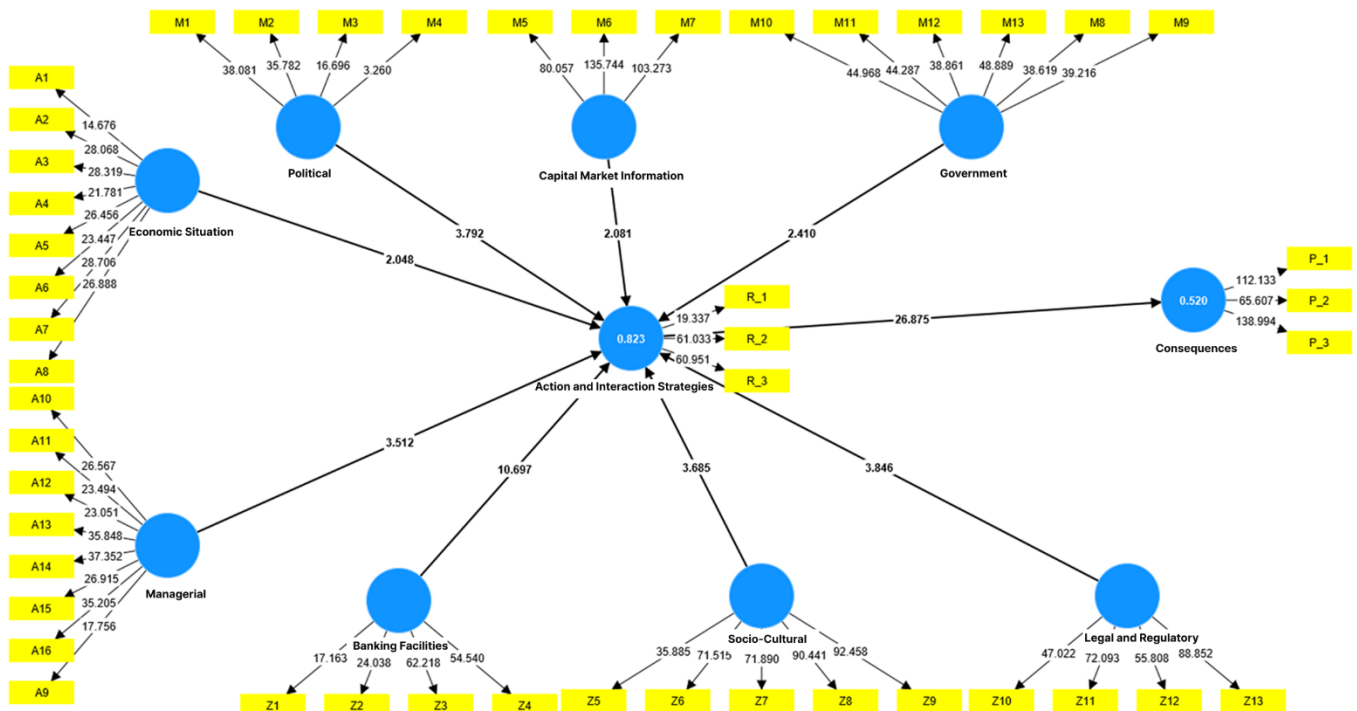
Table 2

Examination of Discriminant Validity (1)

Variable	Capital Market Information	Banking Facilities	Legal and Regulatory	Government	Strategies	Political	Socio-Cultural	Managerial	Economic Situation	Consequences
Capital Market Information	0.938	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Banking Facilities	0.354	0.794	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Legal and Regulatory	0.412	0.629	0.904	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Government	0.692	0.313	-0.205	0.863	-	-	-	-	-	-
Strategies	0.579	0.792	0.699	0.468	0.843	-	-	-	-	-
Political	0.449	0.268	0.107	0.447	0.395	0.758	-	-	-	-
Socio-Cultural	0.560	0.563	0.721	0.352	0.727	0.174	0.903	-	-	-
Managerial	0.365	0.536	0.546	0.242	0.667	0.243	0.592	0.792	-	-
Economic Situation	0.298	0.389	0.456	0.123	0.533	0.078	0.560	0.595	0.784	-
Consequences	0.381	0.646	0.524	0.315	0.721	0.230	0.453	0.421		

Ultimately, the Fornell–Larcker criterion in Table 2 indicated that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable was greater than its

maximum correlation with other latent variables. Therefore, the research variables have acceptable convergent validity.

After examining the fit of measurement models, the fit of the structural model was assessed.

Figure 2

Standardized Path Coefficients

Figure 3

t-values of Paths

Table 3

Model Fit Indices

Variable	Q2	R2	SRMR	GOF
Capital Market Information	-	-	0.069	0.69
Banking Facilities	-	-	-	-
Legal and Regulatory	-	-	-	-
Government	-	-	-	-
Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.571	0.823	-	-
Political	-	-	-	-
Socio-Cultural	-	-	-	-
Managerial	-	-	-	-
Economic Situation	-	-	-	-
Consequences	0.435	0.520	-	-
Acceptable Value	Positive	-	Less than 0.08	Greater than 0.36

In PLS software, the quality of the structural model is measured by the redundancy index, with the most widely recognized criterion being the Stone–Geisser Q² index. Q² values greater than zero indicate that the observed values are well reconstructed and that the model has appropriate predictive ability; in other words, the model demonstrates good quality. Table 4-7 shows the Stone–Geisser Q² values, all of which are positive. Therefore, the structural model possesses good quality. The predictive power of the model for endogenous latent variables is strong. The R² value for strategies was 0.82 and for consequences was 0.52, indicating that the model strongly explains strategies and consequences. Thus, causal, intervening, and contextual factors explained 82% of the variance in strategies of action and interaction, while strategies explained 52% of the variance in consequences.

Finally, Table 3 indicated that the SRMR value was 0.069, which is below the 0.08 threshold, and the goodness of fit (GOF) index for the overall model was 0.69, which is greater than 0.36. These results demonstrate that the model has good fit. The coefficients and values of the structural model for direct paths are shown in the following table.

Table 4

Coefficients and Values of the Structural Model for Direct Paths

Path	b	SE	T	P
Capital Market Information → Strategies of Action and Interaction	-0.092	0.044	2.08	0.037
Banking Facilities → Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.413	0.039	10.6	0.000
Legal and Regulatory → Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.141	0.037	3.84	0.000
Government → Strategies of Action and Interaction	-0.094	0.039	2.41	0.016
Strategies of Action and Interaction → Consequences	0.721	0.027	26.8	0.000
Political → Strategies of Action and Interaction	-0.118	0.031	2.79	0.000
Socio-Cultural → Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.156	0.042	3.68	0.000
Managerial → Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.138	0.039	3.51	0.000
Economic Situation → Strategies of Action and Interaction	0.091	0.044	2.04	0.041

Based on the results, causal, contextual, and intervening factors have a positive and significant effect on effective network marketing strategies in the sale of sports products. Moreover, strategies of action and interaction have a positive and significant effect on the consequences of network marketing in the sale of sports products. In other words, effective strategies lead to the emergence of favorable consequences in network marketing of sports product sales.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that causal, contextual, and intervening factors exert significant positive effects on the formulation of network marketing strategies in the sale of sports products. Furthermore, strategies of action and interaction showed a strong positive relationship with outcomes, confirming that well-designed strategies translate into tangible results for sports organizations. These outcomes emphasize the interdependence of structural,

cultural, and managerial elements in shaping network marketing effectiveness.

The analysis indicated that banking facilities, legal and regulatory environments, socio-cultural conditions, managerial capacities, and economic status were particularly influential in determining how strategies are developed and implemented. Among these, access to financial facilities and supportive regulations emerged as primary enablers, while political and governmental influences presented mixed or even negative relationships with strategic development. This suggests that while institutional support is necessary for facilitating network marketing, excessive interference or instability in the political environment can undermine consistency and trust in sports marketing operations.

The strong link between strategies of action and interaction with outcomes validates the assumption that effective network marketing requires more than structural readiness; it necessitates carefully crafted and executed strategies that mobilize consumer trust, community engagement, and brand loyalty (Ahmadi Moghaddam, 2019; Chen, 2006). This finding aligns with prior research that highlights the importance of credibility, reliability, and relational trust in shaping consumer purchasing behavior in online sports markets (Zhao, 2013).

The influence of financial and banking facilities reinforces the argument that enabling environments are vital for sustaining network marketing initiatives. Without access to adequate financial services, organizations and independent marketers face barriers in expanding their networks, managing cash flows, and investing in digital infrastructures. This is consistent with studies emphasizing the role of supportive infrastructures in facilitating the growth of sports product marketing in both developed and emerging economies (Raghavendra, 2019; Sui & Li, 2019).

Similarly, the role of legal and regulatory conditions as significant predictors of effective strategies resonates with research that underscores the necessity of formalized frameworks to ensure transparency and consumer protection (Izadi Shahnani & Kashgar, 2022; Xiangyu & Yake, 2024). In contexts where regulatory ambiguity persists, consumer trust declines, limiting the effectiveness of network-driven sales. Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that strong governance mechanisms enhance the sustainability of network marketing models.

The negative association observed with government and political factors highlights the potential risks of overreliance on institutional actors in shaping marketing strategies. While governmental support can facilitate market access and regulation, excessive politicization or frequent policy shifts create uncertainty for businesses. Similar observations have been made in analyses of the Chinese and Iranian sports markets, where political fluctuations disrupted the consistency of marketing approaches (Izadi Shahnani & Kashgar, 2022; Yang, 2013).

The results are strongly aligned with previous studies emphasizing the transformative impact of digital technologies on sports product marketing. For instance, the findings echo those of Han (Han, 2020) and Fei (Fei, 2019), who demonstrated that data-driven strategies improve predictive accuracy and enhance consumer engagement. By showing that managerial and socio-cultural factors significantly shape outcomes, this study reinforces the idea that digital and network strategies must be integrated into broader organizational and cultural frameworks (Niemimaa et al., 2019).

The identification of socio-cultural conditions as a critical determinant underscores the significance of aligning marketing strategies with consumer values and community practices. Prior research has noted that sports products are not purely functional but carry symbolic and cultural meanings (Sun & Huo, 2011; Thakkar, 2024). In this sense, network marketing strategies that embed cultural narratives and community-building activities are more likely to achieve long-term effectiveness (Hitesh, 2024; Zhang, 2018).

Moreover, the empirical evidence of this study confirms the view that influencer-driven and community-based approaches amplify consumer engagement. Lou (Lou & Yuan, 2019) emphasized how message credibility and trust foster consumer participation in online brand activities, which mirrors the importance of trust-building mechanisms identified here. Similarly, research on consumer motivations in social media interactions (Buzeta et al., 2020) supports the conclusion that relational engagement is central to successful network marketing strategies.

The findings also highlight the importance of managerial capabilities in implementing strategies effectively. Without adequate leadership and management, even the most resource-rich environments may fail to produce favorable outcomes. This resonates with studies on resilience and continuity of business models, which underline the importance of managerial adaptability in navigating contingencies (Niemimaa et al., 2019). By showing that managerial factors significantly influence strategies, this research contributes to ongoing debates on the role of leadership in sustaining network marketing initiatives.

From a broader perspective, the results reaffirm that network marketing in sports is not merely a distribution mechanism but a holistic model for organizational resilience and consumer engagement (Ismail et al., 2025). By integrating financial, legal, managerial, and socio-cultural factors, the model developed in this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of sports marketing in complex environments.

These results also suggest that network marketing can serve as a powerful tool for brand development and community-building. Studies have shown that consumers involved in brand communities demonstrate higher levels of loyalty and advocacy (Hitesh, 2024; Zhang, 2018). The finding that strategies of action and interaction significantly predict outcomes strengthens the argument that network marketing's true value lies in its capacity to mobilize consumers as active participants in brand ecosystems.

The findings are consistent with global trends where companies such as Nike and Adidas leverage digital and network-driven marketing strategies to engage with younger audiences (Ouyang, 2024). These approaches rely heavily on social media platforms, influencer partnerships, and participatory content creation, all of which embody the principles of network marketing. Similarly, small businesses have found success through strategic use of social media platforms aligned with consumer engagement models such as AIDA (Hassan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the study validates the importance of building resilience in marketing models. As Niemimaa (Niemimaa et al., 2019) emphasized, resilient business models are better equipped to withstand contingencies and disruptions. The positive and significant relationships observed in this study suggest that network marketing not only drives sales but also enhances the adaptability of sports organizations in uncertain environments.

Taken together, the findings extend the body of knowledge on network marketing by empirically validating its effectiveness in the sports industry and highlighting the interplay between structural enablers, managerial capacities, and cultural contexts. This aligns with earlier studies on online sports product marketing (Benesbordi & Nazari Tarshizi, 2019; Sui & Li, 2019), digital marketing strategies (Raghavendra, 2019), and brand promotion (Ahmadi Moghaddam, 2019; Zhang, 2018). By situating these findings within a paradigmatic model, this study offers a structured and comprehensive account of how network marketing can be successfully implemented in sports product sales.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample size, although sufficient for structural equation modeling, was limited to 220 respondents, primarily from specific segments of the sports industry. Broader inclusion of consumers, retailers, and policymakers could have enriched the analysis. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships with certainty, as network marketing strategies and their outcomes evolve dynamically over time. Third, cultural and contextual specificities in Iran may limit the generalizability of results to other countries or regions with different regulatory and socio-economic conditions. Finally, reliance on self-reported measures in the survey introduces the possibility of response bias, which may have affected the accuracy of reported perceptions and behaviors.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic evolution of network marketing strategies in sports. Comparative studies across multiple countries or regions would also provide valuable insights into the role of cultural and institutional contexts in shaping network marketing effectiveness. Furthermore, incorporating consumer perspectives more extensively—through mixed-method designs or large-scale surveys—could shed light on how trust, loyalty, and engagement are cultivated in diverse settings. Additional research on the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and virtual reality into network marketing could also enrich understanding of the future trajectory of sports marketing strategies.

From a practical standpoint, managers and policymakers should prioritize the development of enabling environments that support network marketing initiatives in sports. This includes improving access to financial services, establishing clear and supportive regulatory frameworks, and fostering managerial training programs to enhance leadership capacities. Sports organizations should also focus on embedding socio-cultural narratives within their marketing strategies to deepen consumer engagement. Finally, leveraging digital platforms and influencer-driven strategies in a responsible and consumer-centric manner can help organizations maximize the benefits of network marketing while safeguarding consumer trust and well-being.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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