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Designing Iran's National Branding Model through the Sport Industry

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Abstract

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The main goal of the current research was to design a national branding model of Iran through the sport industry. This research was conducted using Grounded theory qualitative method. The statistical population of the research included specialists and experts familiar with the topic of branding, global marketing in sport and related issues, as well as those involved in the country's sport; who were selected using theoretical and snowball sampling methods and their number reached 18 people. The tool and method of data collection was an individual semi-structured interview. In order to analyze the data, Glazer's approach was used, including three main steps of open coding, selective coding and theoretical coding. During the process of open and selective coding, a total of 134 concepts and 11 main categories were identified. The obtained categories were divided into 2 general dimensions "factors affecting national branding through the sport industry" (6 categories, 93 concepts) and "Consequences of national branding of Iran through the sport industry" (5 categories, 41 concepts). In the theoretical coding stage, the final research model was drawn. Knowing the factors affecting the national branding of the country and its wide consequences, aligning the attitude-behavior of the country's managers and sport and non-sport officials is necessary to move in this direction.

Keywords:

Grounded Theory, Iran, National Branding, Sport Industry

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Introduction

In the era of increasing globalization, competitiveness is inevitable (Salimi & Khodaparast, 2019). This competition takes place among different organizations, cities and countries in order to attract more and better financial and non-financial capitals, and as a result, to flourish as much as possible. Attracting these funds is only possible through strengthening the competitive power, i.e. improving tangible and intangible assets, which can be called the brand as one of the most important intangible assets (Ndlovu & Heath, 2013).

Brand is the primary source of differentiation for anything. Different people, organizations and products all have their own brand and are known through it. Different cities, countries and regions also have brands and their brand is considered as their most valuable asset and position in the world (Kiani & Nazari, 2022). A place in the corner of others' minds, which means the brand owner's commitment to provide value to citizens, tourists, investors and other people, in exchange for material and spiritual receipts, which is called a national brand at the level of a country (Yazdanpanah et al., 2019) and one of the most important issues that has attracted the attention of many countries in recent decades is the issue of national branding and improving its global status (Jordan, 2014).

National branding means using different concepts and actions with the aim of promoting and improving the position of a country at the international level. (Uyi Ojo & Aghedo, 2013). Upgrading and improving the global position of a country through national branding can lead to attracting tourists, creating a safe environment for foreign investments (Kobierecki & Strozek, 2017), strengthening exports, attracting talents and skilled labor and people with higher education, increasing political influence in the international arena, increasing self-confidence and national pride among the people of a country, currency stability and many other things (Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2018); On the other hand, if a country does not have a good status in terms of its reputation and global image, it will have problems in terms of political, social, economic and cultural support and sooner or later it will be removed from the world markets or marginalized; Accordingly, different countries are trying to plan and adopt effective strategies to improve the global position of their national brand in the shortest possible time (Murray & Allen Pigman, 2014). Because this is the national brand of the countries, which to a large extent specifies information about commercial laws, human characteristics, security, political, economic, social stability and other things; And through those countries, they can increase their power by positively influencing the minds of the people of the world (Manoli, 2022).

Various factors affect the national brand of countries and their national branding process (Dubinsky, 2019); which are classified under six general components according to the national brand index, which are: 1- tourism, 2- culture and cultural heritage, 3- export, 4- people, 5- governance, and 6- investment and immigration (Andreja, 2018).

Tourism is considered as one of the most diverse and largest industries in the world today (Yeh et al., 2018); And it is done in different sectors such as cultural, historical, artistic, religious, therapeutic, sport, etc., one of the most important and diverse sectors that has the ability to become a trans-sector issue in the tourism industry is sport, which It is called sport tourism (Masadeh et al., 2017). Sport tourism is a combination of two very important and profitable industries, tourism and sport, which are two vital components of the global economy, and their combination is considered an effective phenomenon in various political, social, cultural and economic dimensions of countries and is effective in national branding of countries (Kasapi & Cela, 2017); Our country also has high tourism potentials, including: cultural tourism, based on which it is among the top ten countries in the world; Natural tourism, which is among the top five countries in the world according to the global ranking; And the existence of young, talented and athletic human resources can use these capacities for the development of the sport tourism industry and national branding (Alaji et al., 2022).

Another important and influential factor in the issue of national branding of a country is the issue of its culture and cultural heritage, which is considered a valuable treasure of civilization and historical roots of a land (Mariutti & Medeiros, 2018). One of the components of the culture of every society is sport (Khodaparast et al., 2018); In such a way that sport progress and the promotion of a country's position in the world sports tables, is an important indicator of the cultural progress of that country along with Social, economic, political and industrial developments are considered (Knott et al., 2016). In addition to being a part of the culture of a society, sport is also a good opportunity to introduce and show the culture of countries to the world, because large sport events, due to their competitive and attractive nature, interest a large number of people to watch these events, involve the emotions and feelings of people, as well as the

significant turnover that they include, attract many audiences such as the media, politicians, industrial owners and other groups, and it is a good opportunity to attract the attention of different nations and display the culture of countries. (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). Accordingly, many countries use sport as a suitable space to introduce their culture to the world; This is while our country, in addition to having a very strong cultural and historical background in the field of literature, art, etc., has many human, financial and natural capacities in the field of sport, and it can introduce the rich culture of the country by using these situations properly, and strengthen its national brand at the global level through the introduction of culture (Vecchi et al., 2021).

The role of the export component in national branding refers to the public image of a country's products and the level of interest and demand for them. The extensive export of high-quality products of a country to different parts of the world can help strengthen the national brand of that country, and on the other hand, a strong national brand can be the best thing that a country offers to its exporters (Andreja, 2018). For example, the power and value that the phrase "Made in Japan" gives to electronic products; And he pointed out the position that the quality electronic products of this country have added to its national brand in every corner of the world. Among the production and export of various products, sport as an industry that has a common language all over the world and includes many diverse products in different disciplines, can create many opportunities and situations in the field of exporting a country and by producing products quality provides the best possible basis for national branding for a country (Wolf et al., 2022).

The people component also refers to the reputation of the people of a country in terms of their competences and abilities, how they behave, friendship and hospitality, and such things, which play an important role in creating a positive mentality of that country (Alhallaq et al., 2020). In relation to sport, the behavior of the people of a country when hosting sport events with their guests, the behavior of athletes, coaches and other sport members of that country when attending a sport event in other countries, can be considered as an expression of the behavior of their nation, and if this behavior is bad and unfavorable, it can lead to the destruction of the overall image of that country and nation and have a negative effect on the national brand of that country; Also, the level of sport capabilities of the athletes, coaches and other sport members of a country in competitive fields can indicate the importance of the issue of sport in that country and the development of various economic, cultural, social, etc. aspects and thus cause strengthen the national brand of that country (Shahan Tinne, 2013).

The component of governance and its role in national branding depends on the extent of the government's activity in the fair and democratic administration of a country, as well as its commitment and responsibility towards issues such as reducing poverty, trying to improve the status of people in the society in various scientific, educational, and health fields, sport, etc. are related. Although the role of the government in sport is different in different countries, it generally includes their attention to the sport per capita of people, the issue of health through sport, the discovery of sport talents and their development, and attention to public sport alongside championship sport (Salimi et al., 2022). In most of the developed countries, governments do not have much involvement in sport and only planning, policies and macro support are done by them (Parent & Hoye, 2018); If in our country the sport structure is mostly governmental and many sport planning and decisions are made by the government; In addition, the attention of government officials to the importance of sport and its impact in different dimensions and the plans and investments made in this regard are not enough and more appropriate measures should be taken (Eydi et al., 2022).

The issue of investment and immigration is also mentioned as another important component of the national brand of countries and it refers to the power of a country in attracting talents, funds and in general the desire of people to study, work and live in that. Having a strong national brand for a country that shows economic success, the existence of equal opportunities and generally expressing that place as a place with a high quality of life can help attract more capital and talents (Shahan Tinne, 2013). A large part of the attraction of foreign capital and talent for any country takes place in the sport sector, and currently developed countries are planning and investing a lot to achieve this issue; But in our country, due to the lack of proper planning in attracting foreign capital, most of the capital required for large sport projects is provided by the government, and as a result, a lot of costs are imposed on the country (Salimi & Khodaparast, 2021); Also, unfortunately, in recent years, a number of country's athletes, coaches and referees have migrated to other countries, which can have negative effects on the country's image at the global level and lead to the weakening of the national brand (Fu Lu, 2021).

A review of the history of research in the country shows that the issue of national branding has been examined from different perspectives, but less attention has been paid to the issue of its globalization through sport and especially sport events. Among the researches carried out, we can mention the research of Mohsenian Rad and Abedi (2019) and Farhangi et al. (2018) which studied the role of international media in national branding and they have considered it very important; Also, Mohammadifar et al. (2019), Feiz et al. (2018), Gholami and Turkauni (2015) and Javani (2014) studied these topics: the consequences of national branding in the country; Examining the current and desired state of the national brand and the factors affecting it; Reasons for not knowing the importance of the national brand in the country's organizations; and the impact of sport brands on the national brand; And they stated that national branding is very important. Among the foreign researches, we can mention the research of Kim (2020), Ahmed (2020), Dubinsky (2019) and Pan (2019) who studied the issue of national branding through sport from different aspects, such as: cooperative strategies of active organizations during sport events; the various stakeholders of these events and their demands; The modern Olympic movement and its different dimensions; and the consequences of hosting these events.

Therefore, according to the stated content and the importance of sport in the field of national branding of countries and its wide capacity in this regard, the main problem of this research is designing the model of national branding of our country Iran through sport; Because there is no such model in our country, and after a lot of searching by the researcher among internal researches, the available materials are very scattered and vague, and most of the researches are related to urban branding and branding of some historical areas of the country; And less attention has been paid to sport in this regard. Based on this, it can be said that this issue is very new in the country; and most of the existing materials related to national branding and sport are related to foreign researches, which have also examined this issue in a different way, and most of their materials are based on the conditions of other countries and their different situations. And it may not be able to be implemented and implemented according to the cultural and special conditions of our country. Accordingly, the existence of a local model in relation to the national branding of the country through the sport industry seems necessary, because it can bring countless results in different sectors of sport, politics, economy, culture, tourism, etc for the country.

Research Methods

The current research is practical in terms of its purpose; and its method is descriptive-survey. This research was conducted using the qualitative approach and the Grounded theory method with the Glazer method, which includes the three main steps of open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding. The statistical population of the research includes specialists and experts familiar with the topic of branding, global marketing in sport, and related issues, as well as those involved in the country's sport; Including: High Advisor to the President of the National Olympic Committee; some heads of different parts and a number of experts of this organization; Some of the leaders of the country's sport caravans in major sport events such as the Olympics and the Asian Games; and a number of managers and deputies of the general sport and youth departments of Isfahan and Tehran provinces. Due to the fact that in qualitative research, the goal is to find people with rich information in the field of research, probability sampling is usually avoided (Foley et al., 2021). Based on this, in the current research, theoretical and snowball sampling methods were used, considering the theoretical saturation index for sampling from the research community. For this purpose, at first, by using the theoretical sampling method which is one of the main features of Grounded theory method, several knowledgeable and expert faculty members in the field of the research subject, in order to obtain a set of comprehensive data, were identified; and were interviewed through in-depth semi-structured interviews, because in Grounded theory method, interviews provide the most desirable type of data; next, using the snowball method, the people who were interviewed were asked to introduce other people who can provide more data, who were also interviewed. This issue continues until the researcher finds out that the received data is repetitive and will not obtain more data, which is called the theoretical saturation index in the term of qualitative research (Busetto et al., 2020).

According to the steps and processes mentioned above, interviews were conducted with 18 people from the statistical population. During the interviews, from the twelfth interview onwards, repetition was observed in the received information, and from the fifteenth interview onwards, the data reached theoretical saturation, but to ensure and further conceptual enrichment of the theory, the interview continued until the eighteenth

person; The interviews were conducted after a review of the literature on the research subject and collecting part of the data through printed and electronic resources available in this field such as articles, authoritative books, authoritative scientific and news sites, and other library studies. Table (1) shows the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample of the research.

Table 1- Demographic characteristics of the statistical sample of the research

Gender		Field of Study		Scientific and executive work experience (years)	
Male	17	Sport Management	16	1-10	3
Female	1	Marketing Management	2	11-20	6
Level of Education		Activity		21-30	9
bachelor	-	Academic	13	Total	
Masters	-	executive	-	18	
Ph.D	18	Scientific/executive	5		

To confirm the validity and reliability in this research, several methods were used, such as: confirming the results by referring to the subjects, reviewing during coding and confirming the research colleagues; Also, to check the reliability of the research, retest method and intra-subject agreement method were used. For this purpose, 4 interviews were selected from among the conducted interviews and in the retest method, each of them was coded twice in a 15-day interval by the researcher; in the intra-subject agreement method, two knowledgeable researchers were asked to participate in the research as coders. In each of the interviews, the codes that were similar to each other were marked as agreement and the codes that were not similar were marked as disagreement. Finally, with the help of the following formula, the reliability of the research was evaluated, and the results obtained are presented in Table (2).

$$\text{intra-subject agreement percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of times} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100\%$$

Table 2- Calculation of reliability by retest method and intra-subject agreement method

Row	The title of the interview	Number of codes		Number of agreements		Number of disagreements		reliability (percentage)	
		retest	intra-subject agreement	retest	intra-subject agreement	retest	intra-subject agreement	retest	intra-subject agreement
1	First	26	32	11	14	4	4	84%	87%
2	sixth	34	39	16	16	2	7	94%	82%
3	fourteenth	28	26	12	10	4	6	85%	76%
4	sixteenth	41	38	18	16	5	6	87%	84%
Total		129	135	57	56	15	23	88%	82%

According to table number (2), the reliability obtained in the retest method and the intra-subject agreement method using the mentioned formula is 88% and 82%, respectively, which is higher than 60%; therefore, the reliability of coding is confirmed.

Findings

The first step of Glazer's approach is the open coding stage, which analyzes the data in order to reach the central category, which in the current research, this category was called "national branding of Iran through the sport industry". The second step is the selective coding stage, which deals with coding the data around the central category, and from the 493 open codes obtained, 134 concepts and 11 main categories were identified. These categories were divided into 2 general dimensions: "factors affecting national branding through the sport industry" (93 concepts) and "consequences of national branding of Iran through the sport industry" (41 concepts). Table (3) shows the concepts and categories related to factors affecting national branding through the sport industry.

Table 3- Concepts and categories related to "factors affecting national branding through the sport industry"

Categories	Concepts
Political-Economic Factors	1. Increasing the diversity of international transactions in different sectors, including sport
	2. Increasing direct and indirect foreign investments in various fields, including sport
	3. The growth of the flow of international exports of non-oil products, including sport goods and services
	4. The strong dependence of the government on the natural resources of oil and gas in the country to meet financial needs
	5. The government's problems in funding various sectors of the country, including sport
	6. The country's recovery from economic stagnation and economic growth in various sectors
	7. Increase in gross domestic product as the most important indicator of a society's well-being
	8. Providing part of the country's foreign exchange needs
	9. Dealing with political and economic sanctions and restrictions on international exchanges
	10. The effective role of the national brand as one of the important tools of soft power
	11. The important role of sport and sport diplomacy on soft power
	12. The importance of membership in various international organizations, including world sport organizations, based on achieving the indicators and standards defined by them.
	13. Iran's conflicting policies with some powerful countries and their enmity with each other
	14. Not having enough funds to implement many projects
	15. Weak commercialization and privatization in various sectors including sport
	16. Non-acceptance of foreign investors to invest in the country
	17. Lack of presence of domestic investors in different parts of the country, including sport
	18. Dominance of political views on different parts of the country
	19. The intervention of the government and its related people in the sport decisions of the country
	20. Adopting wrong economic policies in the sport of the country
	21. The interests of certain groups in maintaining the status quo
	22. Weak political communication at the international level;
Technical - Marketing Factors	1. The importance of the tourism industry, especially in the sport tourism sector
	2. The decrease in the value of the national currency and the affordability of tourism costs in the country
	3. The small share of Iranian sport in the global sport market
	4. Expansion of communication and media and information exchange processes around the world
	5. The supporting role of the national brand on the international credibility of domestic brands
	6. Changing and improving the position of the country's national brand in the minds of the people of the world
	7. Reconstruction of the country's national brand
	8. Lack of sport and non-sport facilities and infrastructure in the country
	9. Neglecting the issue of training and empowering the personnel needed in the field of sport
	10. Lack of specialized and trained human resources in different parts of international sport
	11. Weakness in technical and scientific knowledge and use of modern technologies
	12. Lack of necessary infrastructure for proper media coverage of international sport events
	13. Absence of specialized global marketing committees to guide national branding programs through sport
	14. Absence of special processes, mechanisms and organizations for the national branding of the country

Categories	Concepts
	<p>15. Lack of appropriate information and communication technology platform to control national branding processes</p> <p>16. The number of sport events hosted and their success rate</p> <p>17. Weakness in modeling actions taken in other countries regarding national branding through sport</p> <p>18. Absence of a specific trustee regarding the issue of national branding and lack of follow-up on its progress and development based on global indicators</p>
Management Factors	<p>1. Insistence of managers on traditional methods in providing financial resources needed by the country (their lack of knowledge about new methods of financing)</p> <p>2. The focus of managers and officials on the localization category and their inattention to the issue of globalization and its wide-ranging effects</p> <p>3. Ignoring the issue of the national brand as a competitive advantage for the country</p> <p>4. The lack of independence of the country's sport and its strong dependence on the government</p> <p>5. Dissatisfaction of the people towards the performance of the officials and managers in the sport and non-sport sectors of the country and distrust towards them.</p> <p>6. The influence of politicians and governments at the top of the country's sport decisions</p> <p>7. Lack of managerial stability in Iran in various sectors, including sport</p> <p>8. Managers' resistance to change</p> <p>9. The country's managers only pay attention to short-term issues, quick returns and low risk</p> <p>10. Weak government support for holding international sport events</p> <p>11. Minimal use of think tanks and think tanks</p> <p>12. Inefficiency of university graduates</p> <p>13. Weakness of managers in monitoring and evaluating different projects</p> <p>14. Existence of inconsistency among different organs and organizations of the country regarding various issues</p> <p>15. Not giving a field to young specialists</p> <p>16. Removal of capable and scientific managers from the head and body of the country's sport (limited use of creative managers with commercial and financial expertise at different management levels of the country)</p> <p>17. Lack of self-belief and weak self-confidence of managers and officials of the country regarding hosting major sport events</p> <p>18. Haste and disorganization in doing things</p>
Cultural-Social Factors	<p>1. Efforts to preserve the country's rich culture and introduce it at the international level</p> <p>2. Integration and exchange of cultural characteristics and behaviors and distance from Iranian culture and more tendency towards Western culture by changing attitudes, ideologies, norms, etc.</p> <p>3. Improving the quality of life in the country and increasing the level of hope and satisfaction among citizens</p> <p>4. Strengthening national identity and national pride among citizens by strengthening the global position of the national brand</p> <p>5. Social cohesion, national integration and the connection of people from different generations and ethnic groups</p> <p>6. Increasing immigration of sport and non-sport elites at the international level</p> <p>7. Existence of passionate fans</p> <p>8. Weakness in optimal use of ventilation system</p> <p>9. Minimum satisfaction of domestic sport fans with the country's sport situation and its global position</p> <p>10. Weakness or limitation in entertainment programs for fans before, during and after sport events</p> <p>11. Weakness in producing content in different languages of the world</p> <p>12. The presence of many spectators</p> <p>13. Notoriety of Iran due to unprofessional behavior in international sport and non-sport organizations</p> <p>14. Extensive negative propaganda against Iran by some countries and extensive news coverage</p>

Categories	Concepts
Legal Factors	15. The efforts of the international media to present an unsafe and tense image of the Middle East globally;
	1. Weakness or absence of comprehensive and coherent laws and regulations in parts of the country
	2. Failure to comply with international standards and protocols in various sectors, including sport
	3. Weakness in observing the principles and professional ethics in various fields, including sport
	4. Not having a clear plan and plan regarding the implementation of important actions
	5. Existence of complex rules and regulations in handing over the country's sport to the private sector, as well as domestic and foreign investments in different parts of the country, including sport.
	6. Lack of transparency of financial statements in various sectors, including sport
	7. The existence of weak laws in various organizations of the country and their non-compliance with international standards and protocols
	8. Lack of transparency in the regulations of sport organizations of the country
	9. Lack of an experienced legal committee in the field of international sport in the country
	10. Paying attention to and observing religious, cultural and historical beliefs and restrictions in the country
	11. Observance of hijab for women when attending sport events
	12. The existence of countless legal cases in international forums
	13. Rule of taste in following international regulations and rules
14. Non-membership of Iran in various international treaties	
Geopolitical Factors	1. The extent of Iran's climate in order to develop sport tourism
	2. Iran's neighborhood with some tense, insecure and underdeveloped countries such as Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.
	3. Existence of extremist religious and terrorist groups in the Middle East region
	4. The placement of a large part of the world's Muslim population in the Middle East region in the conditions of the spread of anti-Islamism in the world
	5. The instability of the Middle East region and the conflict of great powers in it
	6. Iran's location in the Middle East region as a sensitive region in terms of economic, political, strategic

According to table (3), six components of “political-economic factors”, “technical-marketing factors”, “management factors”, “cultural-social factors”, “legal factors”, and “geopolitical factors” have been identified as key components of factors affecting national branding through the sport industry, which include a total of 93 concepts. Table (4) also shows the concepts and categories related to the consequences of Iran's national branding through the sport industry, in the form of five main categories of “political development”, “economic development”, “cultural-social development”, “technical-structural development” and “legal development” from a total of 41 extracted concepts.

Table 4- Concepts and categories related to the consequences of Iran's national branding through the sport industry

Categories	Concepts
Political Development	1. Improving public and sport diplomacy and promoting international prestige
	2. Promoting peace and friendship
	3. Developing cohesion and sustainable security
	4. Diminishing political opacity
	5. Solving political challenges and disputes
Economic Development	6. Creating a positive economic cycle in the country
	7. Increasing target markets in relation to different products in the region, continent and the world
	8. Growth of entrepreneurship in the country
	9. Creating direct and indirect job opportunities and helping to reduce the unemployment rate
	10. Strengthening the tourism industry and especially sport tourism
	11. The government's lack of focus on natural oil and gas resources to finance the country's budget

Categories	Concepts
	12. Actualizing the economic capacities of the country
	13. Attracting the attention of international companies and sponsors
	14. The growth of the country's export sector and its economic prosperity
	15. Helping to attract more foreign capital and expand physical capital and technical innovations
	16. Entry of money, capital and foreign currency into the country
	17. Strengthening national identity and increasing national confidence
Cultural-Social Development	18. More interactions with other countries
	19. Reducing the distance and dialogue between civilizations
	20. Increasing international respect
	21. The collapse of international borders and walls
	22. Transferring the culture, morals and character of Pahlavi abroad
	23. Increasing cultural ambassadors abroad
	24. The formation of a lasting legacy for the country
	25. Optimum enrichment of free time and increasing people's satisfaction
	26. Development of industries related to sport
Technical-Structural Development	27. Global competition and global growth
	28. Reducing marketing costs
	29. Strengthening and developing domestic sport
	30. Improving the global status of the country's sport
	31. Increasing the number of quotas in various regional and global tournaments
	32. Attracting more elite immigrants, forming discipline in work
	33. Expanding the national brand globally and selling other products
Legal Development	34. Implementation of bylaws and facilitative regulations in this field
	35. Solving some legal challenges, especially the issue of copyright and television broadcast rights
	36. Forming the necessary legal support to protect material and spiritual assets
	37. Legalization of sport organizations in the country
	38. Reduction of legal cases in international forums
	39. Increasing awareness about legal issues at the head and body of the country's sport
	40. Formation of necessary legal infrastructure for national branding
	41. Transparency in regulations, regulations and contracts

The third step of data analysis is theoretical coding. In Glazer's approach, various models have been introduced to combine the specified codes, such as: 6C's family, type family, process family, cultural family, etc (Safari Jafarloo et al., 2022). That in the current research, a combination of "6C's family" and "type family" in the best possible way, provide the possibility of integrating the categories; And based on this, the model resulting from the research is drawn as figure (1).

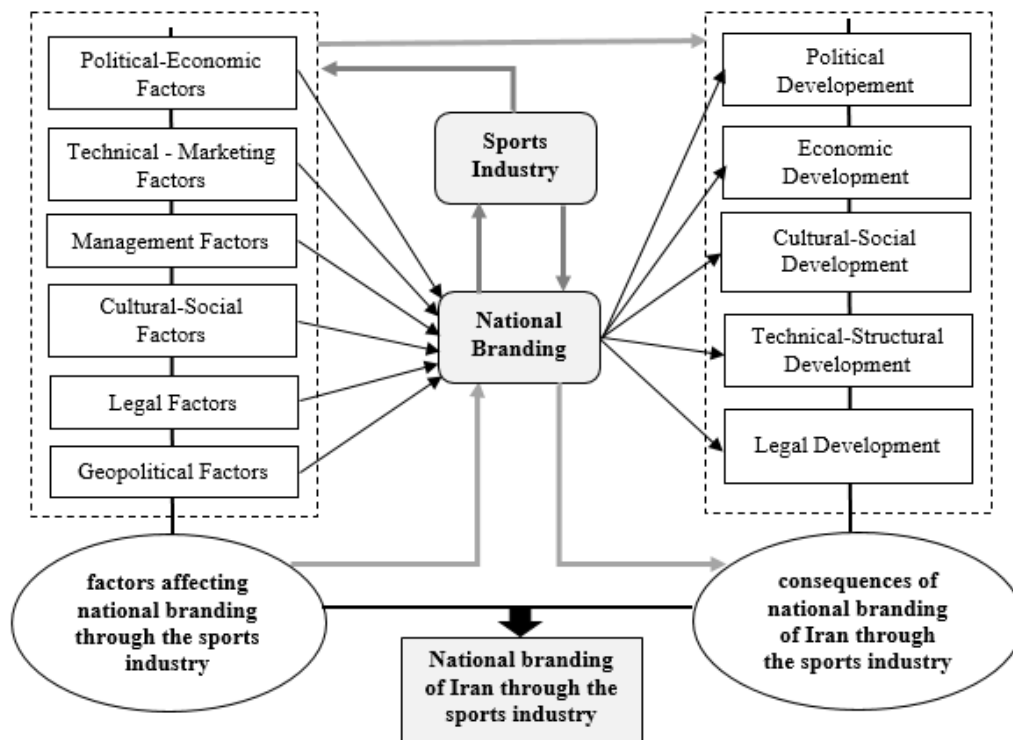


Figure 1. The pattern resulting from the data analysis in the theoretical coding stage

Discussion

The main goal of the current research was to design the national branding model of Iran through the sport industry; Accordingly, after determining the central category of the research (national branding of Iran through the sport industry), other categories were identified; each of them examines the role of the sport industry in the national branding of the country from different aspects and some of the most important ones will be explained below.

Part of the findings of the current research show that the growth of global sport trade and Iran's small share in this regard is one of the factors that confirms the importance of national branding through the sport industry from the point of view of the interviewees; Because the sport industry is considered as one of the most important industries in the world nowadays and it accounts for a very significant financial turnover. The trading diversity of this industry includes different sectors and a large part of its financial achievements are related to large investments made by domestic investors and especially foreign investors in various sectors, especially during major events; Because these events, by attracting the attention of the media, have caused a wide spread of news and information related to them, and thus they are considered a very suitable opportunity to introduce investors and their activities; Also, these events can increase the level of knowledge and awareness of the people in the host country regarding the physical and psychological benefits of exercise and its effects on various aspects of life, causing an increase in their need for exercise and sport facilities and equipment; and with the prosperity of the sport industry in the host country, and increasing the competitiveness of their manufactured sport goods and services, provide the basis for the growth of the export of these products along with the export of other non-oil products; and in this way, in addition to financial achievements and improving the domestic production index, they will cause the employment rate to increase, the unemployment rate to decrease, and of course, the positive psychological effects on the society; this is despite the fact that our country, both in relation to attracting foreign investors in sport and in relation to the export of sport products, has not gained a suitable position in the world so far, and in general, the country's share of the global sport market is very small. Therefore, trying to grow and improve different parts of the country's sport industry, such as trying to host major sport events, can bring many results; Such as: the development of sport and non-sport facilities and equipment, the growth of sport tourism, raising people's awareness of the excitement and benefits of sport and introducing them to different disciplines, introducing other countries to the country's facilities and capabilities in the field of holding competitions, training camps, Investments etc.; and in this way, a very good opportunity is provided for the growth of this industry and the

national branding of the country. Based on this, it is necessary in our country as well, with appropriate plans and actions and the use of human, natural and other capacities, to provide the basis for the growth of this great industry; and by increasing the country's share of the global sport market and achieving its numerous benefits, a more suitable ground for Iran's national branding and the promotion of the country's national brand's global status will be provided. The results obtained in this part of the research are aligned and coordinated with the results of the research of Feiz et al. (2018) and Pan (2019) and are approved.

Among other important and influential categories on the national branding of the country through the sport industry are the budget problems and economic issues of the country. Actually one of the most important indicators of the economic progress of any country and one of the most important indicators for measuring the welfare of a society is their gross domestic product index, which in our country, according to the announced statistics, is not only not acceptable but It is also much lower than the global average; Also, the share of sport in this index in our country is very small, which shows the low influence of this industry in the country's economy. On the other hand, in countries like our country, where a significant part of the financial resources needed by various organizations and projects is provided through the budget obtained from the sale of oil and gas and the country's natural reserves in general, the problems created in this regard can face the process of carrying out many programs and measures that advance the country with fundamental problems; problems such as: non-purchase of oil and gas from some countries, sanctions imposed in this regard, lack of a suitable alternative to provide funding, and issues of this nature; One of the sectors affected by this problem is the sport sector and its related actions. Due to the lack of necessary foreign exchange and riyal resources, many of its construction and non-construction programs are left half-finished or face failure. Based on this, it is necessary to use the different capacities of the country to reduce the dependence of the budget on the natural resources of oil and gas. Undoubtedly, one of the best of these capacities is the ability of the country in various sectors of the sport industry; which can provide the basis for the entry of many financial and non-financial capitals into the country, and in terms of infrastructure, sport and non-sport facilities and equipment, to create significant development and progress in the country and also by providing the conditions for sustainable development, have a significant impact on the national branding of the country and the promotion of its global position; The research results of Ahmed (2020) and Dubinsky (2019) confirm the results of this research section and are aligned with them.

Another important issue regarding Iran's national branding through the sport industry is the importance of soft power in the international system. At the moment, soft power is considered as one of the important pillars of international politics; And it includes various topics as its constituent resources, one of the most important and influential of which is the national brand; By including various aspects of culture, politics, economy, and other issues of a country, it plays an important role in realizing national interests, strategies, and goals, and its weakening can be considered an important obstacle for the global progress of that country. Another important source of soft power is sport, which today is considered a deep and reciprocal relationship between it and diplomacy; in such a way that both diplomacy in advancing the various goals of sport and sport in advancing the various goals of diplomacy can play a very decisive role. In the meantime, an important part where the deep relationship between sport and diplomacy can be seen is various sport events, which are largely dependent on the diplomatic conditions of the countries. In general, the sport industry affects the culture, economy, politics, society and other dimensions of a country, and affects its national brand; and it can be said that there is a deep relationship between sport, national brand, diplomacy (in general) and sport diplomacy (in particular). This relationship plays an important and influential role on the success of countries in the world arena. Based on this, the various parts of the sport industry are an important issue for politicians and senior managers of countries today, and for their growth and development, various plans and measures are taken; Mohsenian Rad and Abedi (2019), Farhangi et al. (2018), Gholami and Tarkavoni (2015), Pan (2019) and Dubinsky (2019) also achieved similar results in this regard.

Another very important and influential issue on the country's national branding is tourism, which is currently considered one of the most important industries in the world and has a large share of the countries' growth and development. In such a way that some governments have turned their main focus to this industry to finance the country's progress; also, the national brand index mentions this industry as one of the most influential components in the global standing of the national brand of countries and explains the reason for its comprehensive impact on the economy, politics, culture, society and other aspects of a society. Among the various sectors of this industry, the sector that has significant growth today and includes many audiences

is sport tourism; which has a lot of variety and scope, and without a doubt, one of the best opportunities for its development and expansion is sport events. These events are held in a specific time frame and in different dimensions and sizes, and the number of tourists varies according to their importance and type. The role of these events in attracting tourists is not only limited to the time of their holding, and the effects left from these events can be considered as a legacy for the sustainable development of the tourism industry and, in general, a catalyst for the progress of that country; therefore, taking into account the important role of sport events on the growth of sport tourism and the role of sport tourism on the economic, political, cultural and social growth of countries, which in total form the national brand, it can be said that success in different parts of the sport industry causes National branding for the country. The results of this part of the research are consistent with the results of the research of Feiz et al. (2018), Kim (2020), Ahmed (2020) and Dubinsky (2019).

Conclusion

In general, the issue of national branding and improving the global status of the national brand is a phenomenon that most countries are currently seeking to achieve in order to benefit from extensive benefits. Therefore, the managers and officials of the country in various sectors, including sport, should have enough focus on this issue and put it at the top of their plans with basic management and planning.

According to the results obtained regarding the many opportunities of national branding of the country through the sport industry, it is necessary that the managers and decision-makers of sport and non-sport of the country solve the challenges of this issue as much as possible with attitudinal-behavioral alignment; and by taking advantage of the opportunities and providing the necessary conditions, provide a suitable field for national branding through the sport industry.

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Conflicts of Interest

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