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Requirements for Volunteers' Participation in Sports

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Abstract

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This research was conducted to examine the requirements for volunteer participation in sports. The study employed a descriptive survey method and was applied in terms of its purpose. The statistical population included officials from the sports and youth departments of Isfahan Province (experts, managers, presidents) as well as members of various sports committees in the province. A simple random sampling method was used, selecting 129 individuals as the sample group. The primary research tool was a questionnaire, with its overall reliability confirmed through Cronbach's alpha test (0.988). Data analysis was conducted using a structural equation model with PLS version 3 software. The findings revealed that, Management requirements had a significant positive effect on volunteer participation in sports, with an effectiveness coefficient of 0.978. Social requirements also demonstrated a significant positive effect, with an effectiveness coefficient of 0.915. Individual requirements showed a significant positive effect, with an effectiveness coefficient of 0.829. Cultural requirements had a significant positive effect, with an effectiveness coefficient of 0.917. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that enhancing volunteer participation in sports requires a focus on the key categories identified in this study. Accordingly, platforms for sports volunteer involvement should be developed in alignment with these diverse requirements.

Keywords: Cultural, Individual, Managerial, Social, Volunteers

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Introduction

Volunteering and community service are contemporary phenomena rooted in the tradition of social experiences worldwide (TahmasebiPoor et al., 2018). Voluntary participation is recognized as a fundamental act of citizenship and humanitarianism within society. By dedicating their time, energy, and skills to community-based activities, volunteers not only alleviate the hardships of others and facilitate social processes but also gain valuable skills, self-esteem, and a sense of personal fulfillment. In essence, by improving the lives of others, volunteers enhance their own quality of life (Mallen & Adams, 2013). Voluntary activities yield multifaceted benefits, positively impacting volunteers, event organizations, and the broader community. Volunteers collaborate to achieve shared goals, creating a better environment for everyone and enhancing societal social capital (Babaei et al., 2022). From a sociological perspective, voluntary participation represents a distinct form of social activity, symbolizing a sense of belonging to a specific community or group. This fosters greater solidarity and contributes to societal development (Hustinx et al., 2010). A volunteer is defined as someone who dedicates their time, skills, or services to a particular organization or group, often motivated by altruism and a desire to help others (Babaei et al., 2022). The interplay between sport and society has long been a subject of interest for sociologists and sports researchers. While sociologists traditionally explored the influence of society on sport, recent research has begun examining the reciprocal impact of sport on society, highlighting its cultural and social significance in modern collective life (Rahmani Firouz Jah et al., 2011). The volunteer movement has created meaningful opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in sports and youth development. Sports organizations also benefit significantly from this movement, as volunteerism provides them with rich human resources. In many developed countries, sports systems are largely driven by volunteers who propel these efforts forward (Babaei et al., 2022). While many volunteers are motivated by altruistic and charitable goals, they often report gaining substantial personal benefits from their experiences, including new skills and abilities. Re-engaging previous volunteers in sports events offers significant cost and resource savings, particularly in recruitment, training, and onboarding efforts. This allows organizations to focus on enhancing the quality of volunteer programs (Hwang et al., 2016). Volunteers are a crucial component of human resources in government and non-profit organizations, particularly within the sports sector, where they play a vital role in improving the quality of programs (Howes, 2016). Sporting events, by nature, are planned, time-bound activities aimed at achieving specific goals, often drawing significant audiences (Hemti Moradabadi et al., 2018). The event management industry, due to its scope and specialized requirements, demands meticulous planning and skilled management, particularly for large-scale events with societal impact (Asadi et al., 2015). Event managers must possess diverse skills to handle the complex preparations required for successful execution (Doyle et al., 2013). Cities and countries around the world compete to host major international events, which demand significant human capital for proper organization. Volunteers comprise a substantial portion of this human capital globally (Dickson et al., 2014). Research indicates that the performance and behavior of volunteers, as a key group of human resources, play a critical role in sustaining and enhancing the quality of sports events (Keshtkar, 2019).

About the present research, there have been studies, among which we can mention the research of Babaei et al. (2022). In research titled *Obstacles to Recruiting Volunteers in Education and Sports*, they concluded that based on factor analysis, 32 variables were placed in six groups with psychological, communication-informational, individual, legal, structural, and administrative-organizational headings. Behremand et al. (2021), in research titled *Identifying and Modeling the Factors Affecting the branding of the personality characteristics of Volunteers in sports events*, concluded that volunteers are an integral part of sports and sports events, for this reason, their personalities characteristics should be considered. Seraji et al. (2021), in research titled *Identifying the Factors Affecting the Model of Volunteer Human Resources Architecture in Organizing University Sports Events*, concluded that the factors in five main categories include drivers of volunteer human resources architecture, elements of volunteer human resources architecture, Barriers to the development of volunteer human resources architecture, strategic systems of volunteer human resources architecture, and functions of volunteer human resources architecture were classified. Okada et al. (2022), in research titled *Analyze the level of satisfaction and management strategies for sports volunteer involvement*, concluded that well-organized management strategies such as quality training, proper communication and

appreciation result in higher satisfaction. The results of Rozmiarek et al.'s (2023) study titled Selected Motivations of Student Sports Volunteers in Terms of Professional Activity and Previous Volunteering Experience showed that pursuing a professional career alongside studies and previous experience in sports volunteering had an impact on undertaking sports volunteering. The obtained research results may be important for sports psychologists and organizers of sports events in the context of recruiting volunteers or improving the process of managing sports volunteering. Cho and Kang (2023) In his research entitled How Do Compulsory Volunteer Experiences at Sporting Events Help Improve Sport Participation and Life Satisfaction?, They stated that nostalgia positively affected exercise motivation and extraversion; exercise motivation had a positive effect on extraversion, life satisfaction, and sport participation intention. In addition, extraversion positively affected life satisfaction and sport participation intention. Fithroni et al. (2024), in research titled Participation of sports volunteers in strategies to increase the participation of the sports community: a systematic review, showed that the important role of sports volunteers is effective in increasing the participation of the community to participate in sports activities. Volunteers have the potential to increase motivation to participate in sports events and increase community participation to attend sports events. In addition, sports volunteers are useful for sports clubs to develop strategies for volunteer participation in any sport. Bang et al. (2018), in research titled "The effect of volunteering experience in major sports events on the willingness of volunteers to continue volunteering", the results showed that motivations have a direct and indirect effect (through satisfaction) on the intention to continue volunteering. They volunteer. On the other hand, the results showed that according to the moderating role of previous volunteering experience, the relationship between motivation, satisfaction, and the intention to volunteer again was different between volunteers who had their first experience and volunteers with previous volunteer experience.

Volunteering in sports plays a crucial role in advancing programs and events, promoting grassroots sports, and enhancing social health. However, the rate of voluntary participation in sports in Iran is lower than expected, and many sports organizations and events face significant challenges in attracting, retaining, and organizing volunteers. These challenges may arise from various factors, such as the lack of clear frameworks for defining the requirements and standards for volunteering, insufficient understanding of the motivations and barriers to participation among different populations, and the absence of adequate platforms for training and preparing volunteers, which can affect the quality of their performance. Moreover, the social, economic, and cultural conditions in Iran, such as time constraints, economic pressures, and a lack of supportive infrastructure, may act as barriers to voluntary participation. These factors have left many potential opportunities in this field untapped, preventing the country's sports sector from fully utilizing the capacities of volunteers for program implementation and development. Additionally, few studies in Iran have comprehensively examined the requirements for sports volunteering. International studies often cannot be generalized to the specific social and cultural conditions of Iran. A deeper understanding of participation requirements will help sports organizations design more effective programs for attracting and retaining volunteers. On the other hand, social changes, such as increased economic pressures, reduced free time, and the development of digital technologies, have altered patterns of volunteer participation. This research can assist sports organizations in adapting to these changes and identifying new participation models (e.g., online volunteering or flexible opportunities). Sports organizations in Iran often face management challenges in attracting, training, and organizing volunteers. This study can contribute to the development of practical frameworks and guidelines for better volunteer management.

This research aims to address existing knowledge gaps and provide practical solutions. Research on the requirements for volunteer participation in sports in Iran tackles the challenges in this area and provides opportunities for developing the country's sports and social infrastructure. By identifying these requirements, this study will offer practical recommendations for organizations, policymakers, and local communities, representing a critical step toward increasing volunteer participation and advancing national sports development. It offers an integrated framework combining management, social, individual, and cultural factors to explain volunteering decisions. This research also provides useful and practical information for formulating government and non-government policies aimed at strengthening voluntary participation in sports as a social value.

Therefore, due to the importance of volunteer participation in organizing regular sports events and the lack of research in this field, the current study examines the requirements for volunteer participation in sports.

Research Methods

This research is applied in terms of its purpose and employs a descriptive survey in terms of its nature. The statistical population of the study consisted of officials from the Sports and Youth Department of Isfahan Province (including experts, managers, and heads) as well as representatives from various sports committees in Isfahan Province. A convenience sampling method was used, resulting in a statistical sample of 129 individuals. Researchers reviewed university textbooks and various scientific articles and conducted interviews with sports management professors and experts in the field to compile a list of the most important variables influencing the requirements for volunteer participation in sports. Based on this list, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consisted of four main factors and 48 questions, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 for "very little" to 5 for "very much"). Its face and content validity were confirmed by university professors specializing in sports management and experts in the field. Construct validity was further verified through first- and second-order factor analysis. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.988, indicating a high level of internal consistency. For statistical data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency percentage) were used to describe demographic characteristics. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to determine the reliability of the questionnaires, while structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to test the research hypotheses. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 22) and PLS (version 3) software.

Findings

The research findings were analyzed in two sections: descriptive and inferential. In the descriptive section, demographic characteristics of the sample population are presented. Table (1) provides the frequency and percentage distribution of gender, age, and education among the research participants.

Table 1- Demographic findings

Variable	Frequency	Abundance percentage	Variable	Frequency	Abundance percentage
Gender	Male	61	Marital status	Unmarried	31
	Female	68		Married	98
	Total	129		Total	129
Education	Diploma and below	8	Age	Less than 30 years	10
	Advanced Diploma	4		30 to 40 years	70
	Bachelor's degree	38		30 to 40 years	32
	Masters	65		30 to 40 years	17
	Doctorate	14		Total	129
	Total	129			100

The results in Table (1) indicate that the highest frequency, representing 68 participants (52.7% of the sample), comprises female respondents, while the remainder are male. Additionally, in the marital status

category, the majority of respondents, totaling 98 individuals (76% of the sample), are married, with the rest being single. Regarding age groups, the highest frequency corresponds to participants aged 30 to 40 years, with 70 individuals making up 54.26% of the sample. Conversely, the lowest frequency is observed in participants under 30 years of age, comprising only 10 individuals, or 7.75% of the sample. In terms of education levels, the master's degree group represents the highest frequency, with 65 participants (50.4% of the sample). The lowest frequency is found in the postgraduate education group, consisting of 4 participants, accounting for 1.3% of the sample.

Given the novelty of the model and the relatively small sample size, the use of the partial least squares (PLS) approach is recommended. Accordingly, Smart PLS software was determined to be the most appropriate tool for this research. Initially, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were evaluated, as shown in Table (2).

Table 2- The results related to the validity and reliability analysis of the research variables

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Requirements for the participation of volunteers in sports	0.988	0.988	0.988	0.636
Management factor	0.984	0.985	0.985	0.710
Social factors	0.950	0.951	0.958	0.742
Individual factors	0.914	0.915	0.985	0.710
Cultural factor	0.939	0.942	0.951	0.734

The data in the table indicate that the composite reliability for all variables exceeds 0.8, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for all variables is greater than 0.5. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha and Dillon-Goldstein's rho for the variables are above 0.7, demonstrating a relatively high degree of convergent validity (Chin, 1998).

Table 3- Path coefficient values and t-values Hypotheses related to research model paths

Variable		Path coefficient	T Values	P Values	
Management factor	→	Requirements for the participation of volunteers in sports	0.978	225.588	0.001
Social factors	→		0.915	55.958	0.001
Individual factors	→		0.829	27.492	0.001
Cultural factor	→		0.917	42.188	0.001

Several criteria are used to evaluate the fit of the structural model in the research. The first and most fundamental criterion is the t-statistic. This statistic measures the relationship between variables within the model (structural component). If the t-values exceed 1.96, it confirms the relationship between the variables, thereby supporting the research hypotheses at a 95% confidence level. A significant p-value (less than 0.05) also validates the relationship between the variables at the same confidence level. It is important to note that while the t-statistic confirms the presence of a relationship, it does not measure the strength of that relationship. To assess the strength of the relationships and compare them within the model, standardized coefficients can be used. According to the interpretive framework of structural equation modeling, since the t-statistic values for all paths—except the link between serious leisure time and interest in environmental issues—exceed 1.96, these paths are considered significant at the 95% confidence level. Consequently, the hypotheses examined in this research are confirmed. In the partial least squares (PLS) approach, several criteria are employed to measure the quality and fit of the structural model. The first criterion is the R² coefficients associated with the endogenous (dependent) latent variables in the model. These coefficients indicate the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The benchmark values for R² are 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67, representing weak, moderate, and strong effects, respectively.

The second criterion for assessing the structural model is Q², which evaluates the model's predictive power concerning the dependent variables. The benchmark values for Q² are 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, corresponding to low, moderate, and strong predictive power. To evaluate the overall model, after the obsolescence of the goodness-of-fit (GOF) criterion, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)

index is now used. According to Henseler et al. (2015), an SRMR value below 0.1 or 0.08 indicates a good model fit.

Table 4- Research model fit indicators

	Q ²	R ²	SRMR
Management factor	0.546	0.957	0.067<0.1
Social factors	0.435	0.837	
Individual factors	0.520	0.668	
Cultural factor	0.439	0.841	

According to the information in the table, the values obtained for R² fall within the strong range, and the Q² values also indicate strong predictive power. Additionally, the SRMR value is less than 0.08, signifying the acceptable quality of the research model (Cangur & Ercan, 2015). Furthermore, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the tested research model, including the path coefficients for all paths in the model.

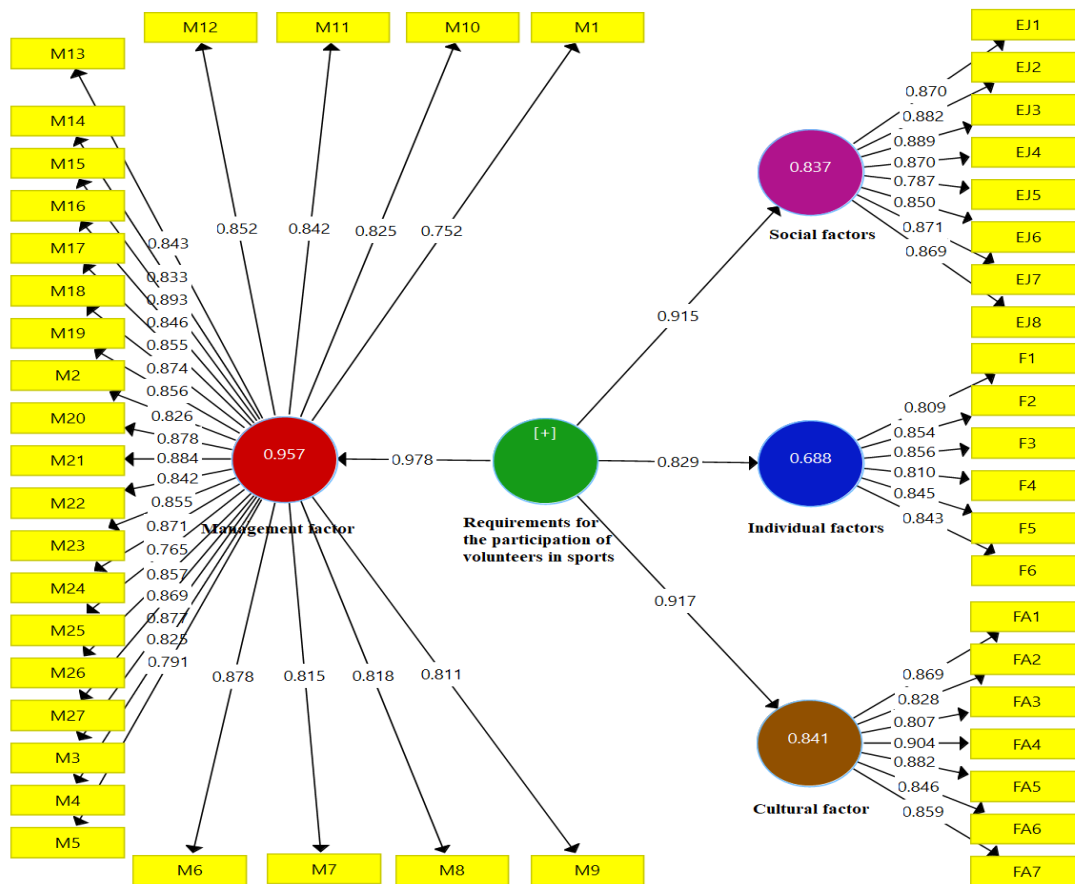


Figure 1. The final research model in the mode of path coefficient and factor loadings

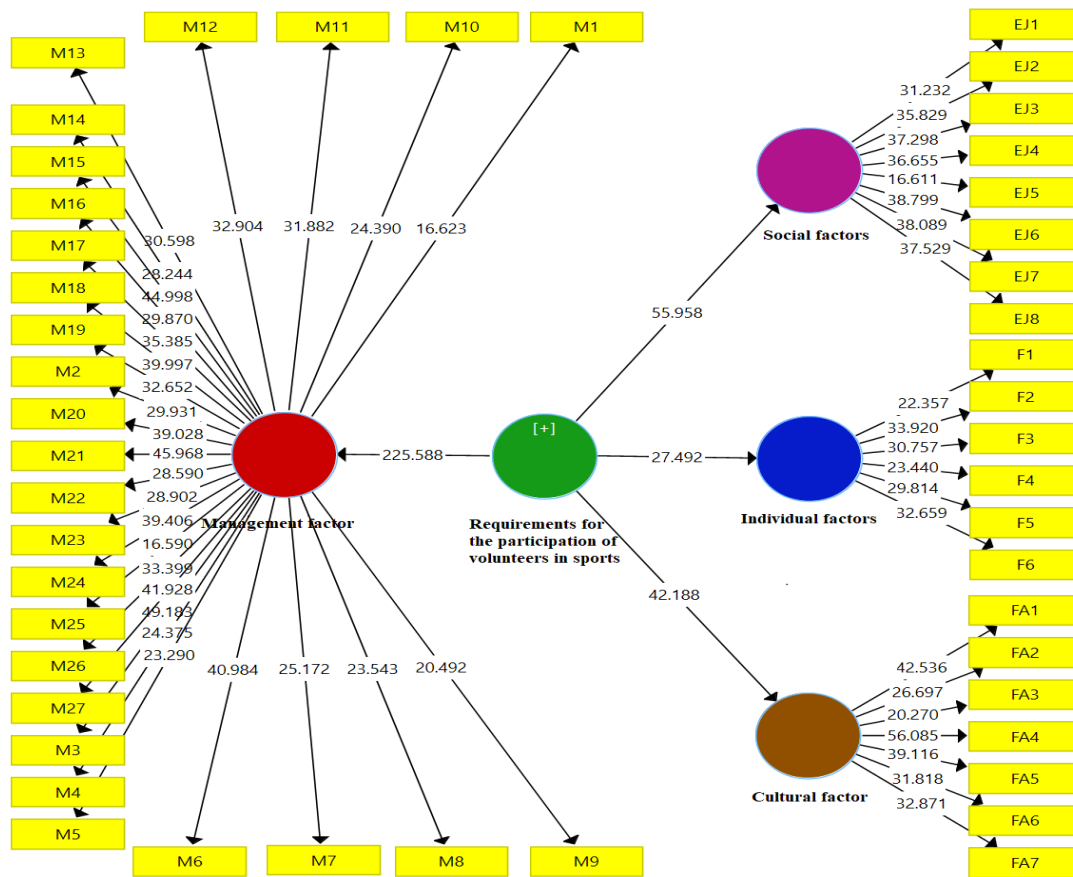


Figure 2. The final research model in the mode of significant values (T. Value)

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the factors affecting the participation requirements of volunteers in sports, which will be examined in the following sections. Based on the findings of the present research, the factors influencing the participation of volunteers in sports include managerial requirements, social requirements, individual requirements, and cultural requirements. Each of these will be described below. Since the impact of managerial requirements was significant at the level of 0.05, it can be concluded that managerial requirements had a positive and significant effect on the participation of volunteers in sports, with an effectiveness of 0.978. The availability of facilities and infrastructural platforms, as well as financial support for volunteers, can create the necessary groundwork for volunteer participation. However, these elements should be complemented by accurate and timely information to attract volunteers, the preparation of manuals for volunteers, the allocation of funds for organizing volunteers, and advertising on radio and television to attract volunteers, all of which can yield better results. Managerial requirements involve identifying the motivations of individuals for volunteering and addressing the specific characteristics of volunteers in each region. The indiscriminate use of the term "volunteer" in various contexts, despite differences such as motivations, types of activities, and the time allocated by volunteers, creates confusion. This makes understanding the true nature of the activities performed by volunteers challenging and complicates the generalization of management policies and results. Clarifying the concept of volunteering is essential not only for researchers, policymakers, and those involved in volunteer management but also for the volunteers themselves, who should benefit appropriately from their participation (Handy et al., 2000). This clarification fosters a proactive managerial perspective in utilizing volunteers and leads to the development of suitable volunteer programs tailored to the demographic, social, and economic variables of each region. Strategies such as creating dedicated organizational units for volunteer affairs, allocating appropriate spaces for volunteers, and providing facilities can be employed. Therefore, to encourage sports volunteers, it is necessary to establish an organizational atmosphere conducive to volunteer engagement, identify and address the limitations faced by volunteers, and create the necessary conditions for their participation from a

managerial perspective. This finding aligns with the results of Oyedele and Simpson (2011), Pan and Ryan (2007), Park and Yoon (2009), and Babaei et al. (2022).

Another factor influencing the participation of volunteers in sports was the impact of social requirements, which was significant at the level of 0.05, with an impact value of 0.915. Because volunteer activities are often group-oriented, research that has provided models for the volunteer environment highlights the importance of the volunteer group. Being accepted in this group significantly affects the volunteering experience and satisfaction derived from voluntary participation. To enhance the participation of volunteers in sports, attention should be given to measures such as organizing volunteers into small groups and developing programs that facilitate interpersonal connections. These actions foster social relationships and, consequently, increase social participation among volunteers. The nature of the event, the management of participants—particularly volunteers—and considerations for different age groups or abilities require tailored approaches. Given the diverse types of sports events held worldwide, which have not only increased in number and scope but have also grown more complex due to factors such as the development of social networks, advancements in technology, evolving needs, and enhanced security measures, the management of sports events is rapidly evolving. Event managers must consider these new conditions to organize sports events effectively (Parent, 2015). Organization managers should aim to create opportunities for collaboration by enabling participants to gain experience in social activities, participate in group work, and prepare for various roles in the community. This will encourage volunteers to commit to sports events. The relationship between sports and society has long been a focal point for sociologists and sports researchers. While sociologists traditionally emphasized the influence of society on sports, acknowledging that sports reflect the social and cultural dynamics of a community, recent research has explored the impact of sports on society. This shift recognizes that the cultural and social elements of collective life are at risk in the modern era. Researchers are working to identify factors that strengthen these elements, and voluntary activity is among the strategies under consideration. The costs of voluntary participation include the time, energy, and effort spent, as well as the social opportunities and pleasures forgone. On the other hand, the benefits of voluntary participation extend beyond monetary rewards (although most volunteers do not expect monetary compensation). These benefits include improving social status and opportunities (recognition), enhancing future earning potential (wealth), fostering social interactions and recreational activities, experiencing satisfaction from engaging in meaningful activities, and feeling a sense of personal fulfillment (Handy et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with the results of Parent (2015), Behermand et al. (2021), and Rahmani Firouzjah et al. (2011).

Since the effect of individual requirements was significant at the 0.05 level, individual requirements have a positive and significant effect on the participation of volunteers in sports, with an effectiveness of 0.829. The experience of voluntary activity has always been associated with increased job opportunities by providing volunteers with the chance to develop new skills, gain experience, network, establish constructive relationships, improve resumes, and try different job positions (Paine et al., 2013). The sense of independence gained through volunteering, along with the increase in self-confidence, can be effective individual indicators for volunteer participation. Although volunteering can help individuals find job opportunities and gain valuable work experience, it should be noted that occupying various job positions and acquiring practical experience are also considered individual requirements. Many volunteers have expressed that their volunteering experience has provided them with the opportunity to develop new skills and abilities. In a study titled "The Effect of Volunteering Experience in Major Sports Events on the Willingness of Volunteers to Continue Volunteering," Bang et al. (2018) examined the effect of motivation and satisfaction on volunteers' intention to continue volunteering at future competitions. They discussed the moderating role of prior volunteering experience in the relationships between motivation, satisfaction, and the intention to continue volunteering. The results showed that motivation had both a direct and indirect effect (through satisfaction) on the intention to continue volunteering. Additionally, the study found that, due to the moderating role of previous volunteering experience, the relationship between motivation, satisfaction, and the intention to volunteer again was different for first-time volunteers compared to those with previous volunteering experience. Therefore, attention to individual factors for volunteering in sports competitions is an important and effective aspect for better organizing competitions, and should be given special

consideration. These findings align with the results of Vos et al. (2012), Bang et al. (2018), Babaei et al. (2002), and Seraji et al. (2021).

Since the impact of cultural requirements was significant at the 0.05 level, cultural requirements have a positive and significant effect on the participation of volunteers in sports, with an effectiveness of 0.917. Sports activities increasingly influence various aspects of human life, including economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions. Sports have penetrated various institutions, such as families, schools, public and private sectors, and have become one of the major social phenomena of the current century by influencing the media. This is especially true when these activities are organized as sports competitions and events. Sporting events are specific, planned, predetermined, and time-limited situations in which participants contribute to or observe the achievement of specific goals. These events typically attract a large number of spectators (Hemati Moradabadi et al., 2018). The level of volunteer participation varies between countries, influenced by cultural differences and the value placed on voluntary participation. Cultural requirements refer to a set of indicators, including consideration of the specific cultural characteristics of each region to attract volunteers, informing the public about volunteering, and promoting this activity through religion and cultural teachings. Filling free time effectively through volunteer programs is another cultural requirement that can create rewarding experiences for volunteers. Since the level of volunteer participation differs across countries due to cultural factors, it is important to establish programs that inform and prepare people culturally for volunteering. This can be achieved by creating platforms for volunteers in society, organizing various meetings in educational and cultural centers, and promoting volunteering through media programs. These initiatives can address cultural challenges related to volunteer participation in sports. Therefore, this should be a priority for sports organization managers. This finding is consistent with the results of Babaei et al. (2022) and Hemati Moradabadi et al. (2018).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the participation of volunteers in sports requires various factors, each of which refers to a specific aspect. However, all these factors must align to ensure effective volunteer participation.

To be efficient in engaging volunteers, the focus should be on the principle of coordination, creating an environment that encourages volunteers' enthusiastic involvement in all aspects. Based on the findings of the present research, to improve volunteer participation in sports events, it is suggested that suitable infrastructure facilities be provided for volunteer participation and that special attention be given to volunteers by applying appropriate infrastructure. It is also recommended that various media outlets focus on and cover the activities of volunteers, as this can create motivation to continue volunteering.

The practical suggestions from the research results are as follows:

1. Financial and moral support for volunteers should be placed on the agenda of managers and efforts should be made to meet the needs of volunteers in various ways. In this regard, budget allocation should be considered for organizing volunteers.
2. The motivations of individuals for volunteering should be identified and based on them, the organization's readiness to meet needs should be increased so that more volunteers can be encouraged to participate.
3. Volunteer programs should focus on filling free time in the best possible way. The volunteering environment should be happy and fun and accompanied by cultural functions, in order to motivate volunteers to participate.
4. By placing volunteers in different job positions, it is possible to create areas for gaining experience and prepare them for taking on suitable jobs in the future.
5. One of the most important motivational factors in any organization is incentive issues. Therefore, in sports organizations, it is also possible to provide a better environment for volunteer participation by having reward and appreciation programs for volunteers.

This research had limitations in its implementation phase, which are mentioned below:

- These studies were conducted in Isfahan province, which limits the generalizability of the results.
- The presence of some considerations in the interviewees' responses to the questions, such as observing organizational principles.
- The lack of cooperation of some individuals in answering the questionnaire.
- The lack of cooperation of some sports boards.
- The information was obtained through a survey, which may have not been accurate enough.
- Due to budget constraints, the researchers were unable to examine larger or more diverse groups.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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