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Presenting a Model of Facilitating Factors in the Marketing Activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to present a model of facilitating factors in the marketing activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation using the grounded theory approach and structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This research is applied in terms of purpose and employs a mixed-method (qualitative–quantitative) approach. In the qualitative phase, data were collected and analyzed through semi-structured interviews with 19 participants, including managers, experts, sports marketing specialists, and officials from the Iraq Wrestling Federation. Data analysis was conducted using open, axial, and selective coding within the framework of grounded theory, and components of the paradigmatic model (causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, consequences, and central phenomenon) were extracted. In the quantitative phase, based on the qualitative findings, a researcher-made questionnaire was designed and distributed among 105 employees and managers of the federation. To reduce the number of variables in the model, a category compositing technique was employed. The collected data were analyzed using SmartPLS software. The modeling results indicated that the causal and structural paths of the model had a good fit, and statistically significant coefficients were obtained for all paths. The final model of the study demonstrates that institutionalizing a professional perspective on marketing, systematizing processes, and promoting organizational coherence play a central role in facilitating the marketing activities of the federation. Additionally, leveraging social, infrastructural, and institutional capacities alongside the removal of managerial and structural barriers is a prerequisite for realizing this framework. The findings of this study can assist sports policymakers in Iraq in designing effective and sustainable marketing structures.

Keywords: Sports marketing, Iraq Wrestling, facilitating factors, marketing activities.

1. Introduction

Sports marketing has attracted the attention of sports professionals early on due to its strong connection with revenue-generating activities such as ticket sales, merchandise sales, and television coverage. As a result, sports marketing was initially introduced as a tool to support organizations and individuals in increasing sales and sustaining their commercial operations.



Parkhouse and Ulrich (1979) described sports marketing as a novel, attractive, and inherently interdisciplinary activity with the potential for theoretical development and practical application through scientific research. In their article, sports marketing was introduced alongside general marketing and sales as an emerging topic centered around sports, still considered primarily a profitable marketing tool (Shekhar & Shah, 2023; Sobhani et al., 2024). Nevertheless, numerous studies have been conducted on sports marketing, exploring themes such as consumer behavior and brand attachment in sports marketing (Vieira & Sousa, 2020), marketing intelligence and planning for sports marketing (Ratten, 2016), sports marketing analytics (Mumcu et al., 2017), sports marketing and perceived value (De Souza Dias & Monteiro, 2020), strategic sports marketing (Shilbury et al., 2015; Shilbury & Zeimers, 2020), retro marketing in relation to sports marketing (Schulz et al., 2024), sports marketing with social objectives (Yuksel et al., 2016), contemporary aspects of sports marketing (Kabus, 2016), brand love in sports marketing (Monteiro et al., 2019), and augmented reality in sports marketing (Goebert, 2020), among many other topics.

On the other hand, Mullin (1983) explicitly emphasized the primacy of sports marketing. He deeply examined the importance of sports marketing and proposed three forms of sports marketing. The first aimed at generating interest among fans. The second focused on promoting participation in sports through marketing efforts, and the third concentrated on encouraging consumption of products/brands through sports. Although most studies have emphasized the latter two, Mullin stressed that stimulating fan interest is the most important form of marketing. He also suggested that a deeper examination of the psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing sports marketing is equally important. Mullin's arguments had a significant impact, triggering extensive research in the following years. The discussion of sports branding began a few years after Mullin's study. Authors like Aaker and Keller (1993) initiated debates on brands, brand equity, and its components. Although sports branding had been used previously in universities—particularly in the context of sports sponsorship and advertising (Gardner, 1985)—the notion of brand equity for sports entities such as the Indian Premier League or Major League Baseball was a novel approach. The formal study of sports branding only began around 1985. Since then, many studies have been published examining various dimensions of sports branding (Cortsen, 2014; Jankovic & Jaksic-Stojanovic, 2019). Two decades later, discussions regarding sports personalities, organizations, and events in branding remain ongoing (De Souza Dias & Monteiro, 2020; De Vries, 2020; Jankovic & Jaksic-Stojanovic, 2019; Javani & Naeem Dawood Hammadi, 2024; Kang et al., 2016; Schulz et al., 2024). These discussions highlight the continuing need for the development of marketing practices in this domain.

Technological advancements and the widespread use of social media (Shokar, 2021) have also sparked the interest of sports marketers. Scholars such as Williams and Chinn (2016) explored the implications, prospects, and limitations of social media for sports marketing when such media platforms were newly introduced—even before their widespread adoption in the sports industry (Williams & Chinn, 2016). Topics such as sports sponsorship, fan engagement, and sports branding have all involved analyzing the role of social media and related consumer behaviors. The development and research in sports marketing show no signs of slowing, as emerging technological innovations are continually being adopted and integrated by the sports industry (Shekhar, 2021; Shekhar & Shah, 2023).

However, current models of sports marketing often focus on aspects such as branding, advertising, and communication, with limited attention to the identification and analysis of factors that facilitate and accelerate marketing processes. These may include cultural, social, economic, and technological elements that directly or indirectly affect the success of sports marketing activities. Nonetheless, sports marketing remains a key strategy for increasing public engagement and attracting financial support. Brun et al. (2023) examined the influence of support programs on attracting sponsors and commercial investments in sports. Their findings suggest that appropriate support programs can enhance the trust and willingness of sponsors to invest in sports (Bruhn & Rohlmann, 2023). Thomson et al. (2023) investigated innovative strategies for improving the support systems of sports organizations. Their study recommends enhancing collaboration between sports organizations and commercial enterprises, utilizing modern digital technologies, and improving the education and training of human resources as means to strengthen support programs (Thomson et al.). Stigman et al. (2023) reviewed successful support programs in various countries. This study demonstrates that applying modern marketing models and establishing international collaborative networks can increase the effectiveness of marketing initiatives (Stegmann et al., 2023).



Furthermore, marketing plays a crucial role in the management and development of sports federations, significantly contributing to their performance and success. Sports federations, as entities responsible for organizing and promoting sports at the national and international levels, face numerous challenges in attracting and retaining audiences, securing sponsorships, and enhancing their brand. In this context, marketing serves as a strategic tool that enables federations to achieve their goals and attain greater success. At the same time, marketing supports sports federations in securing necessary financial resources. Sponsors and financial supporters are vital for sports federations, as such resources contribute to the improvement of equipment, infrastructure, and the organization of events. Targeted marketing and strong relationships with sponsors can help secure the necessary funding for federation activities and also lead to broader brand recognition and visibility for the federation. Therefore, marketing functions as a strategic tool in sports federations, playing a vital role in attracting and retaining audiences, securing financial resources, strengthening brand identity and credibility, and enhancing engagement and participation. With the effective use of marketing strategies, sports federations can advance their objectives and elevate their standing at national and international levels.

In this regard, the Iraq Wrestling Federation, as the highest official authority in this sport, has not performed adequately in promoting and developing wrestling. This shortcoming is clearly reflected in the federation's failure to win a significant number of Asian, world, and Olympic medals or to introduce prominent wrestlers to the global arena. The federation has not effectively utilized Iraq's existing potential and has lagged behind the global trends of growth and development in wrestling. One of the main reasons behind this underperformance may be the lack of sufficient financial resources and sponsor engagement. Without adequate financial support, the federation cannot provide high-quality equipment, run training camps, or recruit specialized coaches. The Iraq Wrestling Federation must focus on developing effective marketing strategies and attracting new sponsors. These measures can help secure the necessary funding to elevate the sport and organize various events. However, given the theoretical gap and lack of empirical research regarding the development of marketing activities within the Iraq Wrestling Federation, the present study aims to present a model of facilitating factors in the marketing activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation.

2. Methods and Materials

This study was conducted using an exploratory mixed-method approach (qualitative–quantitative) with the aim of identifying and validating the facilitating factors in the marketing activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation. In the qualitative phase, the grounded theory method based on Strauss and Corbin's systematic approach (2015) was employed to identify the key dimensions and components of marketing in this institution. The quantitative phase aimed to empirically test the conceptual model derived from the qualitative phase using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

In the qualitative section, the statistical population included academic experts, federation managers, marketing committee members, and strategic sport consultants in Iraq. Participants were selected through purposive snowball sampling. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, which, after being recorded and transcribed, was analyzed using MAXQDA software in three coding stages: open, axial, and selective. Theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting 19 interviews. For evaluating qualitative validity, Lincoln and Guba's criteria—including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were used.

In the quantitative section, the statistical population consisted of 105 employees and managers of the Iraq Wrestling Federation, all of whom participated in the study via a census method. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire with 115 items, based on the qualitative findings, designed using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire's face and content validity were evaluated by experts, and construct validity was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis using SmartPLS software. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, both of which yielded values above 0.70 for all variables.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS and SmartPLS software. In the descriptive analysis, indicators such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency were used. In the inferential analysis, model fit was assessed using indicators such as factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), coefficient of determination (R^2), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and Stone-Geisser's Q^2 . To optimize the model and reduce the number of analytical variables, a composite category technique was applied to maintain analytical precision despite sample size



limitations. This integrated approach enabled the synergistic generation and empirical testing of a localized theory within the context of Iraqi sports.

3. Findings and Results

The table below reports the demographic information of the interviewees, followed by the qualitative data analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Research Interviewees

No.	Interviewee Code	Gender	Age (Years)	Education	Specialty	Experience (Years)	Position/Related Role
1	P1	Male	48	PhD	Sports Management	25	Federation Marketing Committee Member
2	P2	Male	43	Master's	Sports Public Relations	20	Media Manager, Federation
3	P3	Female	39	PhD	Sports Sociology	15	University Professor
4	P4	Male	51	PhD	Sports Economics	28	Sports Marketing Consultant
5	P5	Male	35	Master's	Sports Event Management	10	Executive Event Manager
6	P6	Male	46	PhD	Strategic Sports Management	22	Federation Vice President
7	P7	Female	32	Master's	Sports Technology	8	Digital Marketing Expert
8	P8	Male	49	PhD	Sports Brand Management	25	Professor and Branding Consultant
9	P9	Male	40	PhD	Consumer Behavior	16	Sponsorship Consultant
10	P10	Male	38	Master's	Sports Marketing	14	Head of Marketing Committee
11	P11	Female	36	Master's	Communication Sciences	12	Sports Media Researcher
12	P12	Male	45	PhD	Sports Entrepreneurship	20	University Lecturer / Research Evaluator
13	P13	Male	41	PhD	International Sports Marketing	18	Market Development Consultant
14	P14	Male	44	Master's	Sports Club Management	19	Wrestling Club Manager
15	P15	Female	37	PhD	Sports Psychology	13	Faculty Member
16	P16	Male	50	PhD	Sports Law	26	Disciplinary Committee Member
17	P17	Male	42	Master's	Cultural Studies in Sports	17	Federation Cultural Director
18	P18	Male	47	PhD	Sports Policy	23	Advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Sports
19	P19	Male	34	Master's	Digital Marketing	9	Sports Advertising Specialist

The final model of this study, grounded in the principles of grounded theory, provides a holistic mechanism for explaining the facilitating factors in the marketing activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation. This model is based on three main pillars: First, causal conditions, including structural and policy inefficiencies, non-technical perspectives, and weak information systems in marketing decision-making. These factors represent fundamental challenges and highlight the need for a comprehensive revision of existing marketing structures and mindsets within the federation. Alongside these, contextual conditions such as cultural and social capacities, communication infrastructure, and governmental support are recognized as potential assets that, if strategically utilized, can streamline the pathway for effective sports marketing.

Table 2. Analysis of Initial Codes Related to Causal Conditions at Three Levels

Interviewee Codes	Initial Code	Category	Axial Code	Row
P1, P3, P5	Neglect of marketing in macro policymaking	Structural weakness in marketing policy	Ineffective structure and policymaking	1
P2, P4, P7, P9	Lack of strategic definition for marketing			2
P6, P8, P10, P11, P13	Absence of a strategic marketing plan			3
P3, P12, P14	Lack of long-term vision for marketing			4
P5, P6, P9, P15	Absence of an organizational position for marketing	Disruption in the organizational position of marketing		5
P1, P4, P7, P11	Marketing excluded from decision-making processes			6
P2, P10, P13	Ineffective organizational structure in marketing			7
P8, P12, P16, P17	Appointment of non-experts in marketing	Lack of expertise and qualified human resources		8



P3, P6, P14, P18	Appointment of unqualified managers in marketing			9
P5, P7, P9	Lack of professional knowledge at the managerial level			10
P4, P10, P13, P19	Absence of training and empowerment systems for marketing in the federation			11
P1, P11, P15, P17	Traditional view of the marketing concept	Dominance of unprofessional and traditional attitudes	Unprofessional attitude and culture	12
P2, P8, P12	Perception of marketing as a secondary issue			13
P3, P6, P9, P14	Ad hoc and unplanned marketing decisions			14
P5, P7, P10, P16, P18	Subjective-based marketing actions			15
P4, P11, P13	No opportunity for innovation in marketing	Neglect of innovation and strategic revision		16
P1, P8, P12, P19	Lack of revision and update in marketing strategies			17
P2, P6, P9, P15	Weakness in formulating mission and brand values of the federation			18
P3, P7, P10	Ignoring fan behavior analysis in marketing decisions	Absence of market-based decision-making	Weak information systems and market analysis in marketing decisions	19
P5, P13, P16, P17	Absence of data-driven policymaking			20
P4, P8, P11, P14	Lack of interaction between technical and marketing sectors			21
P1, P6, P15	Ignoring fan behavior analysis in marketing decisions	Neglect of market and audience analysis		22
P2, P7, P10, P18	Absence of customer database and purchase behavior tracking			23
P3, P12, P16, P19	Lack of evaluation mechanisms for marketing campaign effectiveness			24
P5, P9, P13	Absence of data-driven policymaking	Lack of infrastructure and culture for data-based decision-making		25
P4, P11, P17, P18	Absence of a management information system for marketing			26
P2, P8, P14, P15, P19	Managerial decisions based on personal preferences rather than statistical analysis			27

Table 3. Coding of Contextual Conditions

Row	Axial Code	Category	Initial Code	Interviewee Codes
1		Cultural and social capacities	Public culture of sports enthusiasm	P2, P11, P16
2			Families' interest in children's sports participation	P19, P5, P10
3			History of social support for wrestling	P13, P15, P8, P6, P3
4			Popularity of combat sports	P9, P7, P1, P14
5			Wrestling presence in schools	P12, P18, P17
6			Athlete-centered role models and branding opportunities	P3, P10, P13
7			Adolescents' emulation of champions	P6, P14, P17
8			Ability to attract audiences through famous figures	P5, P9, P18
9	Media and communication infrastructure	National media and official advertising	Television coverage of matches	P11, P2, P17
10			Collaboration with national broadcasting networks	P3, P19, P8
11		Social media and digital platforms	Role of Instagram in introducing wrestlers	P4, P10, P19
12		Interactive digital campaigns	P7, P13, P16	
13	Local club infrastructure	Cooperation between provincial clubs and the federation	P8, P12, P14	
14		Outdoor advertising by clubs	P1, P14, P12	
15	Institutional support and governmental capacity	Financial and structural support from government	Budget allocation from the Ministry of Sports	P4, P18, P6



16		Implementation of national sports programs within the federation	P5, P11, P9
17		Government commitment to grassroots sports development	P3, P6, P13
18	Digitalization programs in sports	Digital empowerment of federations	P15, P3, P10
19		Equipping federations with information systems	P12, P7, P14
20	Connection with education system	Suitable software infrastructure for marketing	P16, P8, P2
21		Joint programs with schools	P5, P9, P13
22		Wrestling training in public schools	P10, P1, P6
23		Talent identification through school systems	P11, P7, P19

Table 4. Coding of Intervening Conditions

Row	Axial Code	Category	Initial Code	Interviewee Codes
1	Structural and managerial barriers	Managerial instability	Frequent changes in management	P6, P10, P14
2		Lack of long-term planning	P5, P9, P13	
3		Organizational de-prioritization of marketing	Dominance of technical issues over marketing decisions	P6, P11, P18
4	Weakness in resources and capabilities	Lack of specialized human resources	Ignoring marketing's role in revenue generation	P2, P8, P17
5			Absence of marketing professionals	P10, P3, P12
6		Appointment of unqualified managers	P5, P14, P19	
7		Financial constraints	No dedicated marketing budget	P6, P7, P18
8			Uneven budget allocation favoring technical areas	P1, P4, P15
9		Lack of data and analysis infrastructure	Absence of market data analysis systems	P14, P10, P13
10	Structural and communicational conflicts between units	Lack of inter-unit coordination	Subjective decision-making without analysis	P3, P8, P11
11			Siloed functioning of technical, financial, and marketing units	P6, P9, P13
12		Conflicts of interest and organizational resistance	No participation of technical unit in marketing planning	P3, P10, P17
13			Misalignment of goals between departments	P1, P4, P14
14			Resistance of traditional managers to marketing changes	P2, P11, P18
15			Prioritizing personal or group interests	P5, P8, P16
16	Lack of clarity in decision-making responsibilities	P7, P12, P19		

Table 5. Coding of Strategies to Facilitate Marketing Activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation

Row	Axial Code	Category	Initial Code	Interviewee Codes
1	Development of professional marketing infrastructure	Enhancing digital tools	Development of official online platforms	P6, P11, P14
2			Launching a fan membership system	P10, P18, P12
3		Use of professionally managed social media	P14, P3, P7	
4	Organizational brand renewal	Training and empowering managers	Redefining visual identity and brand messaging	P11, P4, P16
5			Designing a unique logo and slogan for wrestling	P8, P15, P19
6			Consistent promotional messaging by the federation	P5, P13, P6
7	Enhancing marketing human capital	Collaboration with academic institutions	Designing marketing training programs for managers	P11, P17, P2
8			Transferring external consultants' experience into the federation	P9, P13, P5
9		Use of theses and university projects	P10, P3, P18	



10			Collaboration with faculty and students for campaign design	P14, P6, P1
11		Recruitment of specialists	Hiring sports marketing experts	P8, P7, P15
12	Expanding engagement with external stakeholders	Commercial partnerships and branding	Forming an internal digital content team	P2, P10, P19
13			Establishing sustainable brand partnerships	P6, P12, P4
14			Designing professional advertising packages	P3, P14, P17
15		Audience and community engagement	Launching interactive fan campaigns	P5, P10, P13
16			Active federation presence in schools and cultural events	P11, P7, P18
17			Responding to fan feedback on media platforms	P9, P14, P1
18	Marketing policy and institutionalization	Drafting a comprehensive marketing document	Absence of a clear marketing roadmap	P2, P4, P11
19				Lack of annual budgeting based on a marketing plan
20				Absence of marketing mission and vision in official structure
21		Institutionalizing organizational position	No formal marketing unit in federation structure	P7, P9, P15
22			Lack of clear job descriptions for marketing roles	P12, P14, P18
23			Exclusion of marketing from high-level decision-making	P1, P8, P17

Table 6. Coding Results: Outcomes

Row	Axial Code	Category	Initial Code	Interviewee Codes
1	Development of resources and financial empowerment	Attraction and retention of financial resources	Attracting long-term sponsors	P5, P6, P12
2			Sustainable budgeting for development programs	P4, P10, P13
3	Social and identity enhancement of the federation	Enhancement of technical services and facilities	Improving the quality of training camps and equipment	P5, P9, P15
4			Increased payments for coaches and staff	P6, P11, P18
5		Social engagement and participation	Increased fan engagement and loyalty	P11, P14, P7
6			Community's financial and moral support for wrestling	P8, P10, P17
7	Branding and sports diplomacy		Rebuilding Iraq's national wrestling brand	P14, P3, P6
8			Increased international credibility of the federation	P2, P11, P19
9			Strengthening the federation's role in sports diplomacy	P4, P13, P15
10	Stimulating demand and expanding the wrestling market	Establishing the federation's social status	Enhancing public and media image of wrestling	P5, P9, P18
11			Increased public approval for sports policy	P1, P7, P16
12		Increased public demand for wrestling	Growth in live match spectatorship	P3, P6, P14
13			Increased engagement with wrestling content on social media	P8, P10, P17
14			Attraction of new audience segments (women, children)	P5, P11, P13
15	Expansion of products and services market		Sales of promotional products with federation branding	P2, P9, P18
16			Expansion of wrestling schools and training classes for youth	P4, P7, P16
17			Increased demand for professional training camps	P1, P12, P15

Table 7. Core Phenomenon: Facilitating the Marketing of the Iraq Wrestling Federation

Row	Category	Initial Code	Interviewee Codes
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1	Institutionalizing a professional approach to marketing	Professionalization of managerial mindset toward marketing	P5, P6, P11
2		Integration of marketing into organizational decision-making structure	P3, P5, P17
3		Moving beyond traditional and ad hoc marketing	P2, P4, P10
4	Systematization of marketing processes	Designing a clear and trackable structure for activities	P12, P13, P4
5		Use of indicators to evaluate campaign effectiveness	P6, P9, P14
6		Creating a continuous cycle of planning, execution, and evaluation	P1, P11, P15
7	Organizational coherence in marketing execution	Coordination among technical, media, and marketing units	P9, P10, P14, P15
8		Alignment of goals and mission within the federation’s structure	P3, P13, P16
9		Multilateral collaboration to build a unified image of the federation	P7, P8, P18

Within this framework, strategies such as the development of professional marketing infrastructure, enhancement of human capital, expansion of stakeholder engagement, and institutionalization of marketing within the organizational structure are defined as practical responses to the existing conditions. The adoption of these strategies, by addressing intervening conditions such as managerial barriers, resource limitations, and organizational conflicts, paves the way for outcomes such as strengthening financial resources, improving the federation’s social standing, and stimulating demand in the wrestling market. Overall, this model emphasizes the necessity of transitioning from a traditional marketing approach to a systemic and professional perspective, offering a strategic transformation pathway for similar sports federations.

Table 8. Demographic Distribution of the Study Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	78	78%	Job Sector	Executive–Administrative	36	36%
	Female	27	22%		Technical–Coaching	29	29%
Age	Under 30 years	24	24%		Education Level	Marketing and Media	40
	30 to 40 years	41	41%	Bachelor's Degree		43	43%
	41 to 50 years	26	26%	Master's Degree		39	39%
	Over 50 years	9	9%	Doctoral Degree		18	18%
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	21	21%				
	5 to 10 years	37	37%				
	11 to 15 years	28	28%				
	More than 15 years	14	14%				

To examine the research model in the quantitative section, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. Figure 1 shows the structural model of the research, and Figure 2 presents the T-values model.

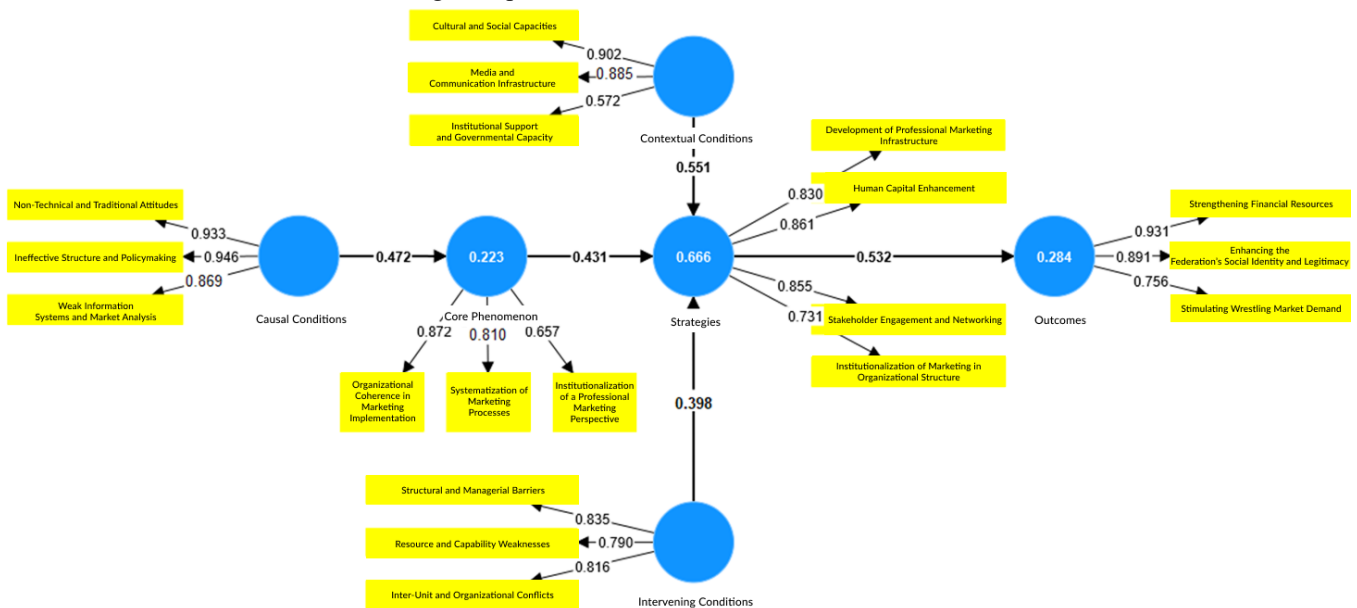


Figure 1. Structural Model of the Research



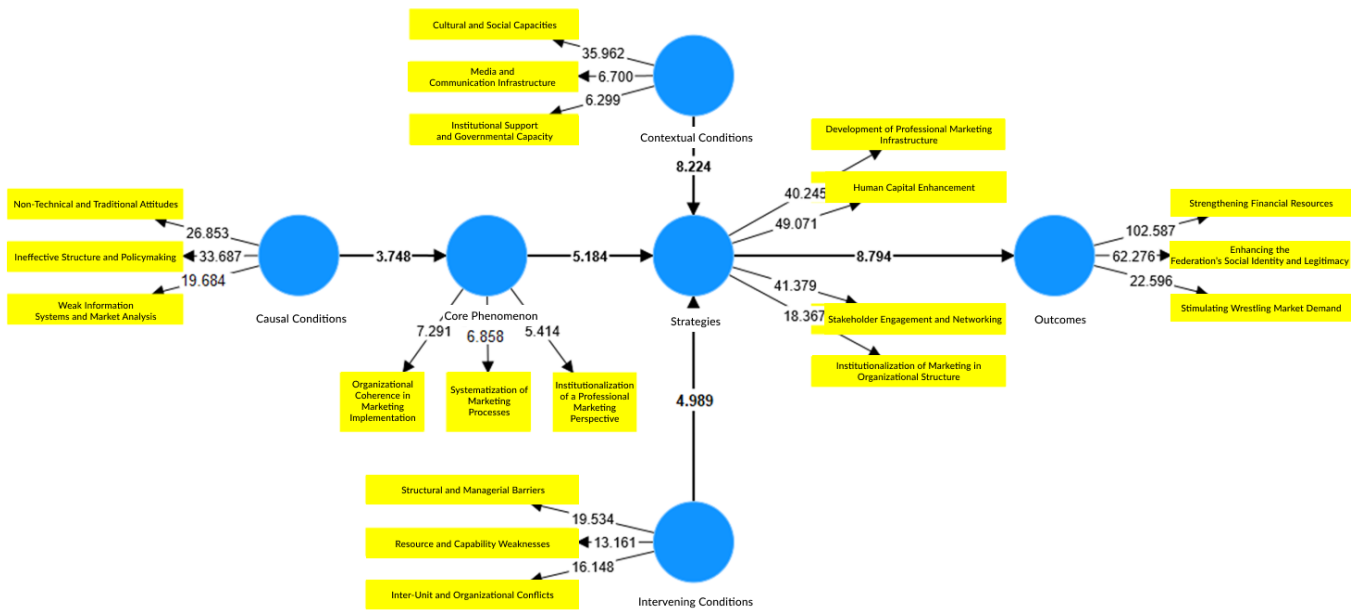


Figure 2. T-values Model

To evaluate the model fit, several indices were used. The first and most fundamental criterion is the **T-values**. If the T-value exceeds 1.96, the relationship between the variables is considered statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. According to the research model results, the relationships in the model presented significant T-values, indicating the meaningful impact of causal conditions on the core phenomenon, and of the core phenomenon, contextual conditions, and intervening conditions on strategies, and strategies on outcomes. Table 9 presents the results of model fit indices.

Table 9. Model Fit Indices

Latent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Convergent Validity (AVE)	R ²	Q ²	Goodness of Fit (GOF)
Causal Conditions	0.87	0.90	0.65	–	–	0.587
Contextual Conditions	0.85	0.88	0.63	–	–	0.692
Core Phenomenon	0.82	0.89	0.71	0.223	0.745	0.587
Intervening Conditions	0.83	0.87	0.61	–	–	0.587
Strategies	0.91	0.93	0.69	0.666	0.656	0.692
Outcomes	0.88	0.90	0.66	0.284	0.712	0.525

The results related to the model fit indices indicate that the values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for all six components are above 0.70, confirming the model's reliability. Furthermore, the results show that the convergent validity (AVE) for all six components is above the threshold of 0.60, suggesting appropriate convergent validity for the study. Discriminant validity was also assessed and confirmed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion (component-by-component matrix).

According to the results, most factor loadings for the components exceed 0.50, indicating an acceptable measurement model. Regarding R² values, with thresholds of 0.19 (weak), 0.33 (moderate), and 0.67 (strong), the core phenomenon and outcomes show moderate explanatory power, while strategies show strong explanatory power. Regarding Q² values, with 0.02 (weak), 0.15 (moderate), and 0.32 (strong), all three endogenous variables in the model exceed 0.32, indicating good predictive relevance. For GOF (Goodness of Fit), with benchmarks of 0.01 (weak), 0.25 (moderate), and 0.32 (strong), the obtained values exceed 0.32 across components, confirming a strong overall model fit. Therefore, the results confirm that the proposed research model enjoys a good overall fit.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The final model of this study, based on grounded theory, presents a holistic mechanism for explaining the facilitating factors in the marketing activities of the Iraq Wrestling Federation. This model is structured around three main pillars: First, the causal conditions, which include inefficiencies in structure and policymaking, non-technical perspectives, and the weakness of the information system in marketing decision-making. These factors represent the origin of challenges and reveal the fundamental



need to reconsider the existing marketing structures and attitudes within the federation. Alongside these are the contextual conditions, such as cultural and social capacities, communication infrastructure, and governmental support, recognized as latent potentials that—if strategically leveraged—can streamline the path for sports marketing. Within this framework, operational strategies such as the development of professional marketing infrastructure, enhancement of human capital, expansion of stakeholder engagement, and institutionalization of marketing within the organizational structure were identified as practical responses to the current circumstances. Adopting these strategies enables the federation to overcome intervening conditions such as managerial obstacles, resource deficiencies, and organizational conflicts—leading to outcomes such as improved financial resources, elevated social standing, and stimulated demand in the wrestling market.

The findings show that causal conditions—including structural inefficiencies and policymaking failures, non-professional perspectives, and weak information systems—are critical challenges for marketing. Structurally, poor policymaking remains one of the main impediments to the development of sports marketing in the Iraq Wrestling Federation. Inefficient administrative structures, complex hierarchies, centralized and outdated decision-making, and mismatched policies with environmental realities have led to missed marketing opportunities. Similarly, Shinohara et al. (2025) argue that optimizing structures and policies, along with synergy with other social institutions, plays a key role in improving the efficiency and sustainability of sports organizations (Shinohara, 2025).

Additionally, a major issue within the federation is the outdated nature of marketing strategies, which often lack alignment with evolving market conditions. Temporary and reactive policymaking—especially in sponsorship, advertising, and media engagement—limits the federation’s marketing reach. Rather than employing evidence-based, strategic planning, decision-makers rely on outdated experiences, resulting in failure to secure sponsorships and partnerships. Transparency in marketing decisions, especially financial ones, is often lacking—further eroding trust among stakeholders. These findings align with Gusliana et al. (2024), who argue that transparency in sports marketing policy is essential to attract funding and build sponsor confidence (Gusliana et al., 2024).

The research also shows that a traditional, non-technical outlook on marketing causes marketing activities to rely on personal experience and trial-and-error instead of market analysis, consumer behavior understanding, brand strategy, and sustained audience engagement. Many federation managers perceive marketing merely as superficial promotional activity rather than as a specialized process. This resonates with the study of Schulz et al. (2024), which emphasized the professionalization of sponsorship management and the need for strategic education among sports managers (Schulz et al., 2024). Similarly, the absence of market research and consumer insights leads to poorly informed marketing actions. These findings mirror those of Shekhar et al. (2023), who found that in developing countries, sports marketing is often viewed as a rudimentary, non-professional practice (Shekhar & Shah, 2023).

Another critical barrier identified is the weakness of the information system in decision-making. The federation lacks integrated data systems, stakeholder databases, and mechanisms for evaluating campaign effectiveness. As a result, decisions are seldom evidence-based. This aligns Sobhani et al. (2024), who stress that data-driven strategies are prerequisites for efficient decision-making in sports organizations (Sobhani et al., 2024). The absence of a centralized information system limits data collection, storage, and analysis—hindering informed planning and performance monitoring.

Findings related to contextual conditions demonstrate that cultural and social assets, communication infrastructure, and governmental support serve as significant enablers for sports marketing. For instance, the historical popularity of wrestling across Iraqi communities and its linkage with national identity provide a strong cultural foundation for sports branding. Cornwell (2022) similarly emphasized that aligning marketing strategies with cultural identity enhances public receptivity in traditional societies (Cornwell, 2022). Moreover, the expansion of digital media and social networks offers new tools for fan engagement, targeted advertising, and feedback collection. As shown by studies (Bindal & Nulkar; Wu, 2024), leveraging digital platforms not only reduces costs but improves targeting and impact assessment.

State support—whether financial, political, or institutional—also plays a crucial role in empowering marketing systems. However, these potentials only materialize when guided by coherent policies, managerial education, and systematic oversight. Regarding intervening conditions, the study found that managerial instability, strategic planning deficiencies, and lack of marketing expertise disrupt operations. Camargo (2024) stress that sustained leadership and marketing-literate managers are essential for success. Without this foundation, marketing efforts become fragmented and ineffective (Camargo Nanuncio,



2024). Financial, human, and technical resource shortages also emerged as major barriers, corroborating Bruhn et al. (2023), who noted that even low-budget marketing campaigns often fail in sports organizations lacking dedicated resources. Furthermore, internal conflicts, inter-unit rivalries, and lack of coordination were found to undermine program integration (Bruhn & Rohlmann, 2023). Garmamo et al. (2024) emphasized that dysfunctional organizational cultures hinder the effective exploitation of marketing potential. Addressing these challenges requires managerial reform, resource reallocation, and cultural transformation (Garmamo et al., 2024). Specifically, stabilizing leadership, increasing investment in staff training, and improving interdepartmental communication are essential steps. Institutionalizing a marketing-centric culture through continuous education, transparent role definitions, and learning from international federations are also critical strategies.

The study also found that practical strategies—such as building digital marketing infrastructure, human capital development, external stakeholder engagement, and formalizing marketing in governance structures—are crucial responses to the identified gaps. One major deficiency was the lack of technical infrastructure. Creating dedicated marketing units, audience databases, and data analytics systems was identified as foundational.

The shortage of qualified marketing professionals also weakened program implementation. Consequently, training programs, hiring practices, and upskilling in digital marketing were recommended. Shi et al. (2024) affirmed that professional human capital drives marketing innovation in sports organizations. Likewise, relationship-building with sponsors, media, clubs, and fans emerged as a strategic imperative—aligned with the principles of relationship marketing, which stress sustained, value-driven stakeholder engagement (Dao et al., 2025).

Ultimately, the elevation of marketing to a strategic and cross-functional role within the federation's governance was highlighted as foundational. Marketing must be viewed not as a temporary campaign function, but as an integral part of organizational culture, administration, and long-term planning. This aligns with Eriksson et al. (2025), who argue that effective marketing depends on structural coherence and leadership integration (Eriksson et al., 2025).

The successful implementation of these strategies requires executive commitment, adequate resource allocation, and the application of national and international best practices in sports marketing. Only through such a comprehensive and transformative vision can the Iraq Wrestling Federation evolve from a traditional sports institution into a professional actor in the marketing and sports development arena.

The research also revealed that the outcomes of facilitating marketing activities include strengthened financial resources, improved social standing of the federation, and stimulated demand in the wrestling market. Strategic actions such as sponsorship acquisition, advertising rights sales, brand management, and service monetization are essential to generate stable and diverse revenue streams. This finding is consistent with Nazari et al. (2021), who maintain that effective marketing enables financial self-reliance and reduces dependence on public funding (Nazari & Hajiheydari, 2021). In addition, marketing activities such as branding, media engagement, and public campaigns contribute to national and regional visibility and enhance public perception—thereby strengthening stakeholder negotiations. Webb et al. (2024) emphasize that cohesive marketing activities are instrumental in reshaping the public image of sports organizations (Webb & Orr, 2024).

Ultimately, implementing the facilitation model is expected to increase public engagement, boost match attendance, expand wrestling schools, and enhance the sale of associated products and services. These outcomes are closely tied to Iraq's goals for grassroots and mass sports development. Javani et al. (2024) also show that targeted marketing increases audience engagement and participation (Javani & Naeem Dawood Hammadi, 2024). Thus, marketing is not just an economic tool but a cultural and social lever for wrestling development in Iraq. Adopting the facilitation model can play a key role in strengthening infrastructure, enhancing organizational performance, and building lasting community ties.

With GOF values exceeding 0.36—classified as strong model fit—this confirms the research model's validity. The final model underscores that institutionalizing a professional marketing perspective, systematizing processes, and enhancing organizational coherence are central to facilitating marketing in the federation. Moreover, leveraging social, infrastructural, and institutional capacities and overcoming managerial and structural obstacles are prerequisites for realizing this framework.

The final model is based on several fundamental components. The first is institutionalizing a professional marketing perspective, which involves integrating marketing into all decision-making levels and viewing it as a strategic process—requiring policies, dedicated resources, and elevated structural positioning. The second is systematizing processes and organizational integration, which entails defining marketing procedures, roles, and inter-unit coordination to improve



efficiency. The third is leveraging social, infrastructural, and institutional capacities, including fan engagement, sponsor relations, digital tools, audience databases, and data analytics—while also addressing obstacles such as centralized decision-making, staffing gaps, and innovation resistance.

In conclusion, the facilitating factors model proposed in this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing marketing within the Iraq Wrestling Federation. It emphasizes both internal organizational elements and external interaction with stakeholders, offering a strategic roadmap for brand elevation, financial sustainability, and increased social engagement.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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