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Effective Factors in Improving the Sports Diplomacy of Iran and the Arab Countries of the Persian Gulf Region

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ABSTRACT

Today, sports diplomacy with different countries is one way to develop the sport at an international level. The current paper was conducted with the approach of improving the diplomacy of sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The paper is qualitative, applied, and was carried out using Colaizzi's phenomenological methodology in 2022. Moreover, Participants in the research included individuals related to the subject. Furthermore, the sampling method was purposeful, and until the extraction of completely non-repeated strategies from the interviews; 21 interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. Factors affecting the improvement of the diplomacy of the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf consist of 75 primary strategies in the form of 11 main categories including: media content, behavioral norms, infrastructure development, management strategy, political dimensions, security dimensions, sports interactions, international solidarity, sports communication, national prestige, and educational experiences. Some of the solutions identified include benefitting from popular social networks such as Instagram to share common content with Arabic language sports pages, no provocative interviews by athletes and coaches, preventing spectators from chanting racist slogans, facilitating the entry conditions of Arab spectators in international sports competitions in Iran and mutual support of the sports federations in Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf to the sports representatives of the Middle East region in sports events at the world level.

Introduction

The role of sports and sports activities has gone beyond a physical pursuit or a form of entertainment and has found various health, social, cultural, economic, environmental, and more importantly political and international functions (Noori et al., 2019). Sports play a key role in promoting relations with other countries and provide opportunities for different countries to do business with other

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countries (Wong & Meng-Lewis, 2023). However, commercial conducts with other countries also attract tourists and economic development (Kahwa et al., 2021). Nowadays, furthermore, sports are spread all over the world. The internationalization of sports has caused countries to pay attention to international sports competitions to advance their national interests and realize their political and international purposes (Sabbaghian, 2016). Although it is repeatedly claimed that sports and politics should not be combined, the popularity and socio-economic nature of sports have been noticed by governments and international organizations in the international system (Mohammadhassan et al., 2022). Sports, therefore, play a key role in international relations, and in fact, sports diplomacy is a crucial part existing diplomatic structure in international relations (Busolo, 2016).

For this reason, in the last two decades, “sports diplomacy” has emerged, by which governments in developed and developing countries have been able to utilize sports to achieve their diplomatic objectives (Dichter, 2021). Sports diplomacy is a new phenomenon that seeks to increase interaction to open new horizons and perspectives and assist to understand the culture among the individuals of the world (Peymanfar et al., 2019); however, sports diplomacy is a tool that expresses political attitudes and is likely to develop the national image. In such way, sports diplomacy creates a foundation for more public opinion orientation and may also establish a beneficial atmosphere between countries to assist resolve disputes (Jankovic, 2017). Furthermore, sports diplomacy is an evolved and developed branch of public diplomacy; even with cultural and social differences among countries around the world, sports grounds are the only place that brings nations together and assists them to understand each other (Mazahir et al., 2020). Therefore, sports diplomacy provides the unique power of sports to bring individuals, nations, and societies closer through a common passion for physical activities resulting from sports (Murray, 2020).

Therefore, several factors provide the ground for the admission of sports into the scene of diplomacy and international relations. Sports, however, may make the voice of a nation more clearly heard by other politicians and play a complementary role in the policies of a government in other sectors. Major sporting events provide imperative public diplomatic opportunities for the host nation. Hosting an international event is the testimonial of the appropriate international citizenship of the individuals of that country and sports diplomacy allows governments to show remarkable flexibility when their diplomatic relations are weak or strong with the other party in the political situation. In a way, sport builds alternative paths for dialogue between nations and inexperienced individuals (Grix, 2013). Moreover, hosting sports events provides an applicable influence in establishing peace, security, and sustainable development in the host country (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021). Sports are regularly operated as a means by governments and nations in building a favorable international image by using the legitimacy of foreign policy and strengthening nation-building efforts across borders. However, due to its global appeal, sport is often considered an asset of soft power to convey positive messages to foreign individuals (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021).

As a result of the growing awareness of the limitations of excessive reliance on the establishment of hard power, governments have shown an increasing desire to add soft power strategies to their repertoire of diplomatic resources with the emergence of sport as a central element (Kang & Houlihan, 2021). Given the importance of sports in diplomacy, different countries around the world use different strategies to capitalize on the effects of sports in international communication. Some of the strategies for using sports diplomacy in Australia include communication between individuals and different institutions related to sports, scholarships for Australian sports, and deep-seated government support.

Among the strategies of using sports diplomacy in the U.S. include awarding scholarships such as political scholarships for elite foreign athletes, developing sports tourism, active participation in sports events, using sports ambassadors by sending 130 athletes to 40 countries during 2015-2018, mediating international sports with sports such as NBA basketball, holding sports parties in the embassies of the United States in other countries for various occasions and the participation of athletes in charitable events. Russia, by promoting relations with its supporting countries, promoting good neighborly relations with the states bordering Russia for strategic reasons, and realizing sports successes in the international environment is one of the strategies of using sports diplomacy in Russia (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019). However, the Arab states in the Persian Gulf are using sport as a tool to enhance diplomacy with the countries of the world as well. By hosting the 2022 World Cup, the

country of Qatar is trying to develop and improve its diplomatic status in the Middle East and Asia (Al-Dosari, 2021). Moreover, by relying on the selection of committed business partners, proper risk management, providing financial resources, and a proper planning system, the country of Bahrain has won the hosting of Formula One (F1) competitions, which is one of the most principal sports events in the world (Abdul-Rahman et al., 2014).

Therefore, sports diplomacy with other countries is an actual prominent issue and causes the growth and development of countries in various dimensions. In the following, related literature is reviewed. In their research on the strategies for the development of sports diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Peymanfar et al. (2021) showed: “to achieve development in the field of sports diplomacy, the country of Iran is facing three types of intellectual, behavioral and structural strategic challenges. However, it is suggested to focus on the strategies of branding and crediting, interaction with the world, and capacity building”. In another study titled “identifying and prioritizing factors affecting the development of sports diplomacy in foreign policy”. Bakhshi Chenari et al. (2021) found that having the support of the diplomatic system, consistent and mutual communication with other governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations, setting the agenda for a targeted system is closely related to recruitment of creative human resources in the field of sports diplomacy, cooperation between the Ministry of Sports and the National Olympic and Paralympic Committee with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, establishing a centralized institution to follow up the actions taken and prevent repetitions, cooperation of the Ministry of Sports and Youth with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, planning, policy-making and goal setting in this area, academic interactions, increasing the activities of universities and gaining international seats in the development of sports diplomacy in foreign policy.

Aghakhani et al. (2022) stated that soccer diplomacy is influential in eight arenas, namely “political development”, “cultural development”, “media development”, “peace and friendship development”, “economic development”, “tourism development”, “unity development” and “national identity” and “gaining international status”. Moreover, Sabzi et al. (2021), in a study with the content of designing a model of the concepts of sports diplomacy on the development of relations between Iran and the United States, stated that “seven factors, namely commercial development, religious affairs, interactions, cultural affairs, national cohesion, diplomatic affairs, and friendship have been affected by the sports environment of Iran in the international arena in four levels”. In another study, “Operational Strategies on Iran's public diplomacy through Sports”, Marashian et al. (2021) found that the consequences include empowerment, communication networks, and public drivers; and finally, the consequences of the role of sports in explaining Iran's public diplomacy include: economic function, cultural function, political function, and social development”.

Furthermore, the results of Mokhtari and Keshishyan Siraki (2020) showed that four broad layers including multilateral development, solidarity, communication management, and international prestige with their sub-tiers are more operational as the main components of sports diplomacy in Iran-US relations. Lazarevich (2021), by exploring the sports diplomacy of Norway and Finland, stated that among the mechanisms and means for the implementation of sports diplomacy are the following: establishing a sense of social trust and strengthening social structures, participation of athletes in international competitions, utilizing the powers of sports ambassadors of prominent athletes, representing member countries in international sports organizations, expanding and developing cooperation with sports organizations in the main fields of sports, hosting the world and European championships in the most popular international sports, the central achievements of the country's sports in major world competitions, not having an undesirable background related to doping athletes and generally, developing human capital.

In another study, “Sports Diplomacy of the Republic of Moldova: Forms and Characteristics of manifestation”, Popov (2021) stated that the success of Moldovan athletes in international competitions plays an essential role in shaping the positive image of this country in the international arena. Moreover, Özsari et al. (2018) under research titled “Sports Diplomacy as public diplomacy”, believe that sports as a diplomatic activity are a soft and logical influence and nations perform sports diplomacy activities through international sports organizations, national brands, media and technology, sports ambassadors and lobbying to demonstrate their superiority in the world of sports. The results of Abdi et al. (2018), “Turning Sports Diplomacy into Diplomatic Consequences:

Introducing the Model of Sports Diplomacy”, showed that the main strategy for sports diplomacy includes maintaining the solidarity of official and sports diplomacy and using sports figures as competent cultural ambassadors and if the appropriate sports diplomacy resources and conversion strategies are implemented in a disciplined, innovative and rigorous manner, countries are likely to expect diplomatic consequences.

However, as the aforementioned cases clarified, although the developed countries in the world and even the developing Arab states of the Persian Gulf are utilizing sports diplomacy to develop sports and the international reputation of their country by using appropriate strategies, the issue has not been well managed in Iran; and in recent years, the diplomatic relations between Iran's sports federations and Arab states of the Persian Gulf have not been favorable which has had many negative consequences in the field of sports as well. Furthermore, unfavorable sports relations between countries may cause differences in political sectors as well. Incidentally, the UAE similarly sought to hold the AFC Champions League football competition between the representatives of the UAE and Iran in a third country, which the Asian Football Confederation opposed.

Additionally, in recent years, some of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf- both in individual and group sports- have responded negatively to Iran's sports federations to hold joint training camps. Moreover, in the holding of formal games between Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf in various sports competitions, aggression, and marginalization from the spectators of the countries is somewhat obvious during the competition, and it is necessary to solve the matter. Lastly, the improvement of sports diplomacy between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf shall increase peace, friendship, and commercial and political interactions between the countries; therefore, the current research seeks to solve the problems stated in this research with the approach of improving sports diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf. However, by establishing peace and tranquility in the region, the commercial and political relations of the countries shall similarly be advanced through sports. Consistent with the stated cases, the main question of the study is as follows: What factors improve diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf?

Methodology

The paper applied a practical procedure and was conducted using a qualitative method by a descriptive phenomenological approach. Considering the experiences of individuals, the paper aimed to identify the factors related to the improvement of diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. However, for this reason, the phenomenological method was employed, and to analyze the interview data, Colaizzi's method was utilized. Moreover, the phenomenological approach deals with revealing the nature of meaning hidden in experiences. The paper aims to understand the meaning of the experience in the same way that the person experienced it; therefore, according to the nature of the research and the use of the descriptive phenomenology method; According to the subject of the paper, Colaizzi's method was selected as the most practical method of descriptive phenomenology.

Work experience and scientific experience of the participating individuals, the complete satisfaction of the individuals to attend the interview, and their ability to conduct the interview and recount the contents, were the criteria for entering and selecting the samples in the paper. The criteria for leaving individuals from the research were the lack of sufficient desire to continue working with the researcher and not having enough information in the desired research area. The sampling method was purposeful and finally. The participants in the interview were experts related to the subject.

To consider the ethical principles in the current research, first, the goals and necessity of the research were explained to the interviewees before the interviews. Subsequently, the participants participated in it with their consent and initial familiarity with the subject of the study. Before starting the interview, individuals were asked to allow the interview process to be completely recorded, and if in any interview, the subjects did not allow the interview to be recorded; with their permission, the interview process was implemented with pen on paper. However, out of 21 interviews conducted, 18 interviews were recorded and 3 interviews were written on paper.

The Data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. To get deeper into the content of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2022 with individuals related to the paper. The duration of the interviews was between 25 and 40 minutes. As long as it was possible to extract completely non-repetitive concepts from the interviews (21 interviews), the interviews continued in a semi-structured manner. To conduct the interview, it tried to establish a relatively intimate and friendly environment with the research participants; nonetheless, considering the appropriate environmental conditions and obtaining the consent of the individuals, the interviews started with a question-oriented design: 1. According to your experience in the present era, what factors help to improve diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf? In the following, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the rest of the questions were asked of the research participants according to the interview process. Some of the questions are listed below: "What management factors are applicable in improving diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf?" "How may the media assist to improve diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf?" The same questions were asked to the participants in other aspects of the research according to the conditions of the interview.

In the following, all the conducted interviews were typed in the word environment and coding procedures were done in MAXQDA v.20. However, the validity and reliability criteria were used for the final validation of the research. Validity refers to the degree of trust in the authenticity of the findings for the participants. For this purpose, after analyzing the interviews, they were given to the interviewees and their comments were applied and the necessary corrections were made. Reliability refers to the stability of data over time and under different conditions, and the method of the intra-subject agreement was used to investigate reliability. Two expert coders, professional at the coding method and the subject of the paper, coded the interviews, and the total agreement among the two coders was 84%.

Results

Table 1 is the presentation of the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 1. Presentation of the demographic information of the interviewees.

Number	Gender	Specialty
1	Male	Professor of Sports Management Department
2	Male	Associate Professor of Sports Management Department
3	Female	Associate Professor of Sports Management Department
4	Male	Associate Professor of Political Science Department
5	Male	Associate Professor of Political Science Department
6	Male	Associate Professor of International Relations Department
7	Male	Member of the Board of Directors of the Football Federation
8	Male	Member of the Board of Directors of the Handball Federation
9	Man	Member of the Board of Directors of the Taekwondo Federation
10	Man	Member of the Board of Directors of the Track and Field Federation
11	Man	Football national team athlete
12	Man	Taekwondo national team athlete
13	Man	Track and Field national team athlete
14	Male	Coach of the national Football team
15	Man	Coach of the national Handball team
16	Male	The head of the national football team
17	Male	The head of the national Handball team
18	Male	Graduated with a doctorate in sports management
19	Female	Graduated with a doctorate in sports management
20	Male	Media activist
21	Female	Media activist

Table 2 presents the applicable factors in improving diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Table 2. Effective factors in improving the sports diplomacy of Iran and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region

Main strategies	Sub-strategies
Media content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of the media in establishing unity and empathy for all ethnicities in Iran. 2. More media attention to the solidarity games of Islamic countries. 3. Absence of some unfair criticism of domestic media on the presence of Iranian athletes and technical staff in Arab states of the Persian Gulf clubs. 4. Criticism and examination of the issue of improving sports diplomacy with Persian Gulf countries in various media programs with the presence of expert experts. 5. Bilateral communication and proper interaction with the television channels and sports press of Arab states of the Persian Gulf by the domestic media. 6. Agreement on the broadcasting rights of important international competitions in Asia with international sports organizations and Arabic-language television channels. 7. Using popular social networks such as Instagram to share common content with Arabic language sports pages. 8. Signing of a joint memorandum of understanding between Iranian media and Arab-speaking countries in order not to publish content with sensitive consequences in face-to-face competitions between Iranian representatives and Arab states of the Persian Gulf
Behavioral norms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Informing Iranian athletes about the lack of exciting happiness after possible victories. 10. Emphasis on peace, friendship, sincerity in action, and racial equality by the high-ranking officials of Iranian sports. 11. Changing the mentality of sports officials in the Persian Gulf countries concerning the overall structure of Iranian sports. 12. Non-interaction between Iranian athletes and coaches in case of inappropriate behavior by athletes and coaches from Arab countries. 13. The warm and magnificent reception of sports officials from the sports caravans sent from Arab countries to the country. 14. Donation of memorial plaques and souvenirs to the members of sports clubs in Arab countries when they leave Iran. 15. Absence of provocative interviews and inappropriate readings by athletes and coaches. 16. Welcoming the spectators to the sports representatives of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf in the stadiums inside the country. 17. Visiting the sights inside the country by the members of the Arab countries' teams with the help of the relevant authorities
Infrastructures Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Improving software and hardware capabilities to host various sports events in the presence of Arab countries. 19. Facilitating transportation conditions to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf by increasing flight lines and other available methods. 20. Development of economic and legal infrastructure to attract business partners from Arab countries in professional sports. 21. Easing the entry conditions of Arab spectators in international sports competitions inside the country. 22. Bringing the standards of building and equipping domestic stadiums closer to international standards. 23. Establishing joint sports stores and agencies between Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf
Managerial strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. Using sports managers' familiar with the Arabic language in negotiations with sports authorities of neighboring countries. 25. Indecent behavior of managers in connection with the rules governing international sports. 26. Employing managers with experience in championship sports and sports experts at the head of the management of sports federations and the general administrations of sports and youth. 27. Managers' effort to bring the country's sports standards closer to global standards

Political aspect	<p>28. The government's serious determination to improve diplomacy with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p> <p>29. Iran's mediation concerning peace and friendship with relative stability in the region.</p> <p>30. Leaving the country's sports space from the state platform and the establishment of efficient private organizations.</p> <p>31. Settlement of territorial disputes over different geographical areas with the Persian Gulf countries in relevant international organizations.</p> <p>32. Favorable use of Iran's geographical position in the region</p> <p>33. Establishing a closer relationship with the ambassadors of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf in Iran through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>34. Cooperation and applicable communication between organizations in charge of sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>35. Development of political relations to improve the economic trade of various organizations inside the country with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p> <p>36. Signing a joint memorandum of understanding and emphasizing the separation of politics from sports in a meeting with the sports officials of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p>			
	Security aspect	<p>37. Controlling spectators in various sports events to prevent chanting of racist slogans.</p> <p>38. More attention to security issues in the field of accommodation of athletes and staff of sports clubs of neighboring countries inside the country.</p> <p>39. Prevention of marginal fights between spectators and members of sports clubs during domestic and international competitions.</p> <p>40. Holding sports competitions inside the country with proper order and security and away from the unpleasant sides.</p> <p>41. Preventing throwing objects and incendiary materials by spectators during sports competitions between Iran and Persian Gulf countries.</p> <p>42. Decisive confrontation with the violent behavior of the spectators in hosting sports from Arab countries.</p> <p>43. Crowd control during the entry and exit of spectators,</p> <p>44. Exercising the latest security systems in various sports events before the entrance of the spectators until after they leave the stadium.</p> <p>45. Preventing the sale of tickets to individuals with ruinous backgrounds in various international events with identification systems at the time of purchase.</p>		
		Sports interactions	<p>46. Holding joint training camps and friendly competitions in various sports fields in Iran and Arab countries.</p> <p>47. Holding different international sports tournaments inside the country and inviting different Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p> <p>48. Establishing joint training and talent centers in various sports fields.</p> <p>49. Proposing joint hosting of various international events with some Arab countries.</p> <p>50. Improving the interaction between the famous sports figures of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p> <p>51. Inviting the sports authorities of Arab countries to visit the sports camps inside</p> <p>52. Facilitating the rules and aspects of the transfer of Iranian athletes and coaches to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p> <p>53. The use of athletes and expert coaches from Arab countries by various sports clubs in the domestic leagues of Iran.</p> <p>54. Mutual support of the sports federations of Iran and the Persian Gulf countries from the sports representatives of the Middle East region in sports events at the world level.</p> <p>55. Signing a memorandum of cooperation in the field of tourism and sports tourism.</p> <p>56. Establishing sisterhood among different sports clubs in Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf</p>	
			International solidarity	<p>57. Focusing on cultural-Islamic values shared between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf.</p> <p>58. Benefiting from common cultural occasions to improve political communication.</p>

	59. Development of social relations between communities in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and Iran
Sports communication	60. Diplomatic negotiations with the representatives of Arab sports clubs against their presence in Iran, in connection with the demands of both parties;
	61. The benefitting from Iranian individuals present in international sports gatherings to develop relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf;
	62. Negotiating with international sports organizations concerning resolving issues expressed by neighboring countries;
	63. Negotiating with international organizations in order not to impose sanctions on the sports industry;
	64. proper selection of the country's sports officials in the voting of the electoral assemblies of the international members of the sports organizations of the Asian continent;
	65. Benefitting from seats in international sports organizations by high-ranking Iranian sports officials to increase the power of negotiation
National prestige/credit	66. Positive depiction of Iran concerning the importance of fair competition in the field of sports.
	67. Increasing the prestige of the country's sports by hosting international events, 68. Increasing the trust of other countries in the world in Iran's sports diplomacy.
	69. Establishing practical connections with other countries of the world in various economic, political, social, and cultural fields.
	70. Attaining top positions in various sports disciplines in important international competitions.
	71. Building unity and participation of members of the community in the field of sports within the country and gaining social support of the community in the field of sports
Educational experiences	72. Taking advantage of the capacities of postgraduate students in the field of using study opportunities in the countries of the Persian Gulf and vice versa.
	73. Formation of a joint strategic document between professors and students of sports management in the country with the sports academic community of Arab countries.
	74. Holding workshops and training classes in various sports disciplines with the presence of teachers from Iran and the Persian Gulf region.
	75. Holding coaching and knowledge-raising classes with the joint presence of coaches from Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf

By analyzing the data, applicable factors in improving media content, behavioral norms, infrastructure development, management strategy, political dimensions, security dimensions, sports interactions, international solidarity, sports communication, national credit, and educational experiences with 75 sub-strategies. Figure 1 exhibits the final model resulting from the research findings.

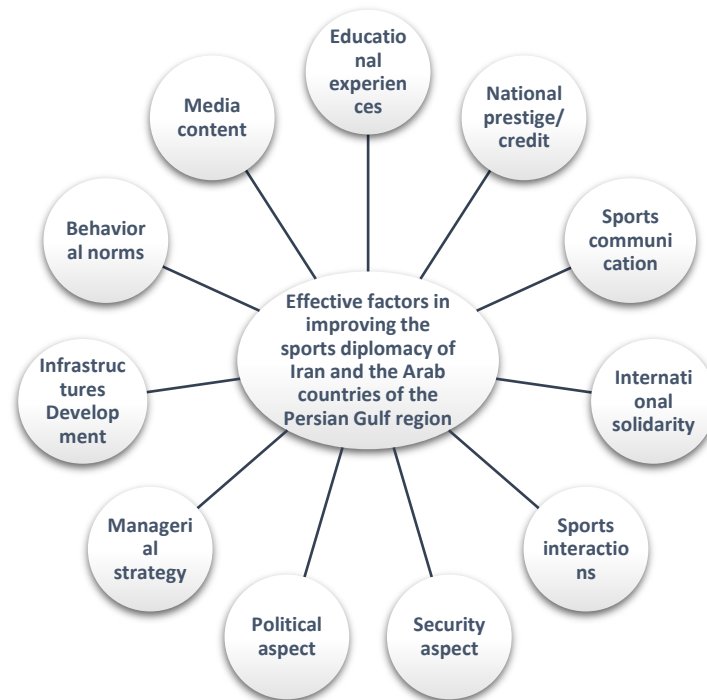


Table 2. The final research model

Discussion and Conclusion

It is quite obvious that politicians of different countries use sports to achieve diplomatic purposes. However, the various sports federations of Iran do not use this opportunity well, and Iran's sports diplomacy with neighboring countries in some sports is not at a favorable level, which in turn, has negative consequences for Iran's international reputation. Particularly, consistent with the findings of the current research, several factors provide the basis for improving sports diplomacy between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf, which include: media content strategies, behavioral norms, infrastructure development, management strategy, political dimensions, security dimensions, sports interactions, international solidarity, national prestige, international communication, and educational experiences.

Considering media content, some of the most imperative strategies are agreement on the broadcasting rights of key international competitions in Asia with international sports organizations and Arabic-language television channels, utilizing popular social networks such as Instagram to share common content with Arab-language sports pages, and the signing of a joint memorandum of understanding between Iranian media and Arab-speaking countries in order not to publish content with sensitive consequences in face-to-face competitions. Fundamentally, with the emergence of the information age and the creation of new communication technologies and the expansion of human relationships, a new world of communication has emerged that is likely to play an applicable role in minimizing the risk of conflict between governments. Furthermore, the space that may be imagined with the presence of new media is a space in which, taking into account the unique characteristics of these media, i.e. fast, cheap and mass transfer of information, it is possible to make a change in defining and redefining accepted concepts such as culture, language, race, peace. The results are consistent with (Özsari et al., 2018) and (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019) since the role of the media in making communication and interaction advantageous with other nations. In general, communication media, however, play a valuable role in improving sports relations between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Considering behavioral norms, some of the most essential strategies are warning Iranian athletes not doing stimulating happiness upon victories, non-interaction between Iranian athletes and coaches in case of inappropriate behavior by athletes and coaches from Arab countries, emphasis on peace, friendship, sincerity in action and racial equality on the part of high-ranking officials of Iranian sports, the warm and magnificent welcome of sports officials to the sports caravans sent from Arab countries to the country, granting memorial plaques to Arab players when leaving Iran and not provocative

interviews and inappropriate readings by athletes and coaches. The results are consistent with (Peymanfar et al., 2021), (Aghakhani et al., 2022), (Sabzi et al., 2021) since the role and importance of developing peace, friendship, and Interaction with other countries aim to improve sports diplomatic relations. In general, the self-restraint of athletes, coaches, and spectators in sports events prevents possible tensions, which has a positive effect on the improvement of relations between the sports federations of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Considering infrastructure development, some of the most essential strategies are improving software and hardware capabilities to host various sports events in the presence of Arab countries, facilitating transportation conditions to Persian Gulf countries by increasing flight lines and other available methods, facilitating the entry conditions of Arab spectators in international sports competitions inside the country and establishing joint sports stores and agencies between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf. However, infrastructure plays an imperative role in hosting international sports events, and hosting key sports events at the international level makes sports diplomacy purposes come true (Javadipour & Rasakh, 2019). The results are consistent with (Lazarevich, 2021) and (Sabzi et al., 2021), given the importance of developing business relations with other countries and developing software and hardware infrastructures to host international events. In general, the development of infrastructure is one of the foremost factors in appealing to the support of international sports organizations and, accordingly, the member countries of these organizations to improve sports diplomacy with the sports federations of Iran.

Considering managerial strategy, the identified strategies are benefiting from sports managers who are dominance in the Arabic language in negotiations with sports authorities of neighboring countries, and managers who not behaving sophisticatedly concerning the rules governing international sports; hiring managers with championship sports experience and sports experts at the head of sports federations and general sports and youth administrations, managers' efforts to bring the country's sports standards closer to global ones. The results are consistent with those of Lazarevich (2021), given the importance of using expert human resources in managerial aspects to develop sports diplomacy relations with other countries. In general, compliance with the rules governing international organizations and benefiting from experts in sports management are operational in improving diplomacy between sports federations between Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Considering political aspects, some of the most essential strategies identified include the sober determination of the government to improve diplomacy with Arab states of the Persian Gulf, changing the state-like platform of the country's sports event and the emergence of efficient private organizations, benefiting from Iran's geographical position in the region, establishing a closer relationship with the ambassadors of Arab states of the Persian Gulf in Iran through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, efficient cooperation and communication between the organizations in charge of sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signing a joint memorandum of understanding and emphasizing the separation of politics from sports in a meeting with the senior officials of sports federations of Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The results are consistent with those of (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019), (Bakhshi Chenari et al., 2021), and (Sabzi et al., 2021), given the role of improving foreign relations is the cooperation of government and sports institutions with each other, the development of diplomatic affairs through the ambassadors of different countries to improve diplomacy with other countries. In general, improving political relations with neighboring countries may have many positive effects on diplomacy between Iran's sports federations and the Persian Gulf countries.

Considering security aspects, some of the most essential strategies identified include: controlling spectators in various sports events to prevent racist sayings, holding sports competitions within the country with proper order and security, preventing throwing objects and incendiary materials by spectators during sports competitions between Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf, utilizing the latest security systems in various sports events from before the spectators enter to after they leave the stadium and preventing the sale of tickets to individuals with apologetic backgrounds in various international events with identification systems at the time of ticket purchase. However, the results are in line with (Aghakhani et al., 2022), given the role of peace and security is to hold domestic competitions in the direction of sports diplomacy with other countries. In general, reflecting the order and security of holding competitions inside the country is such an important issue that managers of

competitions should minimize the formation of conflicts and margins by making appropriate decisions.

Considering sports interactions, some of the most essential strategies identified include holding joint training camps and friendly competitions in various sports fields in Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf, suggesting the joint hosting of various international events with some Arab states of the Persian Gulf, improving the interaction between the famous sports figures of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf, facilitating the rules and aspects of the transfers of Iranian athletes and coaches to Arab states of the Persian Gulf, mutual support of the sports federations of Iran and the Persian Gulf countries to the sports representatives of the Middle East region in sports events at the world level, signing a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of tourism and sports tourism and coining a bond of sistership between various sports clubs in Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The results are consistent with those of (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019), (Lazarevich, 2021), and (Abdi et al., 2018), given that the effect of using sports figures to improve sports relations, holding training camps and friendly games with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. In general, however, it is possible to use the nature of sports itself and the platforms available in the specialized areas of sports; to finally lead to the development of diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Considering international solidarity, the identified strategies include concentrating on cultural-Islamic values shared between Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, utilizing common cultural occasions to improve political communication, and developing social relations between communities in Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The results are in line with (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019), and (Aghakhani et al., 2022), given the importance of using different cultural occasions and generally developing cultural communication to improve sports diplomacy with other countries. In general, there are many common cultural values between the Muslim people of Iran and the countries of the Persian Gulf, which are likely to be operated to develop the social relations of the people of the communities. Eventually, this development of cultural and social dimensions in sports interactions between sports federations of Iran and Arab states of the Persian Gulf similarly holds positive effects.

Considering sports communication, some of the most essential strategies identified include diplomatic negotiations with the representatives of Arab sports clubs against the presence in Iran, in connection with the demands of both parties, benefiting from Iranian individuals present in international sports gatherings to develop relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, negotiating with international sports organizations concerning resolving issues expressed by neighboring countries, appointing proper country's sports officials in the voting of the electoral assemblies of the international members of the sports organizations of the Asian continent and having significant seats in the international sports organizations by the high-ranking Iranian sports officials to increase the negotiating power. However, the results are consistent with (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019), and (Bakhshi Chenari et al., 2021), given the importance of negotiation and understanding with international sports organizations and having significant seats in international sports forums for the development of sports diplomacy. In general, benefiting from influential Iranian individuals in international sports organizations is an essential issue that should be used in line with the negotiation strategy with the sports organizations of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Considering national prestige/credit, some of the most significant strategies identified include the positive portrayal of Iran in connection with the importance of fair competition in the field of sports, raising the prestige of the country's sports by hosting international events; increasing the trust of other countries of the world in Iran's sports diplomacy, establishing practical relations with other countries of the world in various economic, political, social and cultural arenas; attaining top positions in various sports disciplines in important international competitions, establishing unity and participation of members of society in the field of sports within the country and gaining social support of society in the field of sports. However, the results are consistent with those of (Peymanfar et al., 2021), (Aghakhani et al., 2022), (Lazarevich, 2021), and (Sabzi et al., 2021), given the importance of interaction with other countries of the world to develop international trust and the role of developing unity, national identity and hosting international events to increase the trust and social prestige of Iran. In general, the development of national prestige is one of the influential strategies in connection

with the improvement of diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Lastly, considering educational experiences, the identified strategies include taking advantage of the capacities of postgraduate students in the field of using study opportunities in Persian Gulf countries and vice versa; establishing a joint strategic document between the professors and students of sports management in the country with the sports academic community of Arab states of the Persian Gulf; holding workshops and training classes in various sports disciplines with the presence of teachers from Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, and holding coaching and knowledge-building classes with the joint presence of Iranian and Arab coaches. The results are in line with (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019) and (Bakhshi Chenari et al., 2021) given the importance of academic interactions and scholarships in the development of sports diplomacy relations with other countries. However, in general, one of the imperative portions in the field of international relations development is to utilize academic interactions resulting from holding educational seminars and scholarships, since it is possible to benefit from the platform in the field of developing diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and other countries, especially the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Therefore, several factors provide the basis for improving diplomacy between the sports federations of Iran and the Persian Gulf countries. Moreover, Iran's senior sports managers should try to reduce sports disputes and improve diplomacy with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf by planning properly and exercising the applicable strategies identified in this study. With the development of sports diplomacy with these countries, however, the position of Iran's sports diplomacy in the region will be significantly improved. Finally, in addition to the development of sports relations between the Persian Gulf countries, what is applicable are the establishment of peace, tranquility, and friendship and the development of commercial and political relations among the countries.

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