

# Systematic Review of Published Articles Related to Iran's Sports Diplomacy (2012-2023)

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** So far, numerous studies have been conducted in the field of sports diplomacy. In the present study, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of studies from the year 2012 to 2023. This article aimed to systematically review the studies in the field of sports diplomacy in Iran that have been published from 2012 to 2023.

**Methods:** A qualitative research method has been employed, and the objective of the study was practical. This research is a secondary systematic review approach. The research was conducted on articles published in scientific research journals throughout the country from 2012 to 2023, totaling 133 articles extracted from databases. The articles were reviewed based on their general structural, functional, and referential aspects.

**Results:** The research findings indicate that the trend of published articles exhibits an upward trajectory within the specified timeframe, with the majority of articles published in the "Strategic Studies of Sports and Youth" journal totaling 21 articles, followed by the "Sports Management Studies" journal with 17 articles. Of the reviewed articles, approximately 62% were published in sports journals, while about 38% were published in non-sports journals.

**Conclusion:** The reviewed articles addressed the functional aspects of the relationship between diplomacy and sports, the research concepts, and the type of diplomacy employed in the research. Upon examining the articles, we found that approximately 74% of the conducted research explored the two-way relationship between sports and diplomacy. The results of the research indicated that in the period of time, the research has been reduced to concepts such as sports washing, sports governance, using sports to cover defects, and most of the researches were related to concepts such as improving international relations and the goals of the political class of countries.

**Keywords:** Sports and politics, International Relations, soft power, Systematic review, Visualizing scientific landscapes (VOSviewer).

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## Introduction

Sports have historically served a variety of purposes, including public health, societal intellectual advancement, military prowess, and political objectives, depending on the prevailing circumstances (Mohibullah Khan Marvot et al., 2024, p. 1). Considering the daily interactions among nations and their continuous engagement in various social, political, economic, and military issues, the approach to dealing with such matters and the implementation of foreign policies are based on the interests of the leaders of nations. Conflicts may arise among nations due to having different perspectives; therefore, the utilization of diplomatic tools such as sports diplomacy could be a first-line option for countries' actions (Chanda et al., 2024, p. 1).

With the emergence of sports history in 776 BCE in cities like Athens, Sparta, and Rome in Greece, the role of sports as evidence for the mentioned roles became evident. With the development of civilization and technology, sports gradually evolved into a distinct domain with departments, ministries, organizations, and separate federations worldwide. Each sport established global governing bodies, and member countries initiated international sports competitions (Mohibullah Khan Marvot et al., 2024, p. 1).

In general, a literature review is a research process in which the author examines and evaluates sources relevant to a specific topic. These sources might include scientific books, academic articles, research reports, and other materials related to a topic. The main objective of a literature review is to describe, summarize, and critically evaluate the concepts, theories, and ideas present in these sources; additionally, it familiarizes the author with the breadth of knowledge in the field. When presented as part of an article, a literature review establishes the author's depth of understanding and expertise on the subject for the readers (pubrica academy, 2020, p.1). A literature review is a critical

component of any research project. Literature reviews typically provide a broad perspective, synthesis, and critical evaluation of previous research, introducing existing concepts as challenges or addressing current issues, and identifying new research directions and research questions. The systematic review approach highlights the importance of examining the

Existing literature during literature reviews (Boell et al., 2015, p. 1). Aghaei et al. (2022) asserted in their article "Content Analysis of Articles Related to Politics and Sports from 2009 to 2019" that they accessed 28 articles by searching for keywords such as politics and sports, sports diplomacy, political sports, politicians in sports, and sports politicians in domestic databases. Their findings indicated a significant growth in the field of sports diplomacy in Iran in 2017. Additionally, Emily Abramczyk (2024) obtained results indicating that despite negative consequences such as increased human rights violations and political corruption, there are also positive aspects, such as bridging cultural gaps and strengthening relationships. Understanding the relationship between sports and diplomacy allows society to use sports and sporting events to promote greater respect for human rights, cultural understanding, and positive political relationships (Abramczyk, 2024, p. 15). Furthermore, Sajadi (2017), in a study entitled "Olympics and the History of Sports in the World," believes that the movement facilitated through play and sports fosters human growth and development, making the world a place for healthy living. The Olympic movement addresses political issues such as the power-seeking tendencies of some countries, the hegemony aspirations of certain national powers, the marginalization of small nations, etc. (Sadati, 2019, p. 74). Furthermore, Malekoutian (2009), in a study entitled "Sports and Politics," examined sports and politics in various dimensions with appropriate categorization and provided recommendations

for improving the country's athletics. Accordingly, the researcher considered the relationship between sports and politics as a two-way relationship (Malekoutian, 2009). Finally, Jalili et al. (2022) found in their study that economic military conflicts and cyber military conflicts have no significant impact on the Middle Eastern sports front (Jalili et al., 2022, p. 135).

Considering the aforementioned points, the present study aims to systematically review scientific-research articles published in Iran's field of sports diplomacy from 2012 to 2023. Additionally, the researcher seeks to elucidate the importance of articles and research related to the field of sports diplomacy in Iran, aiming to provide a better understanding of these articles, subsequently describe the overall and coherent results, and determine research needs

in the field of sports diplomacy in Iran. The aim of this research is to answer the following questions:

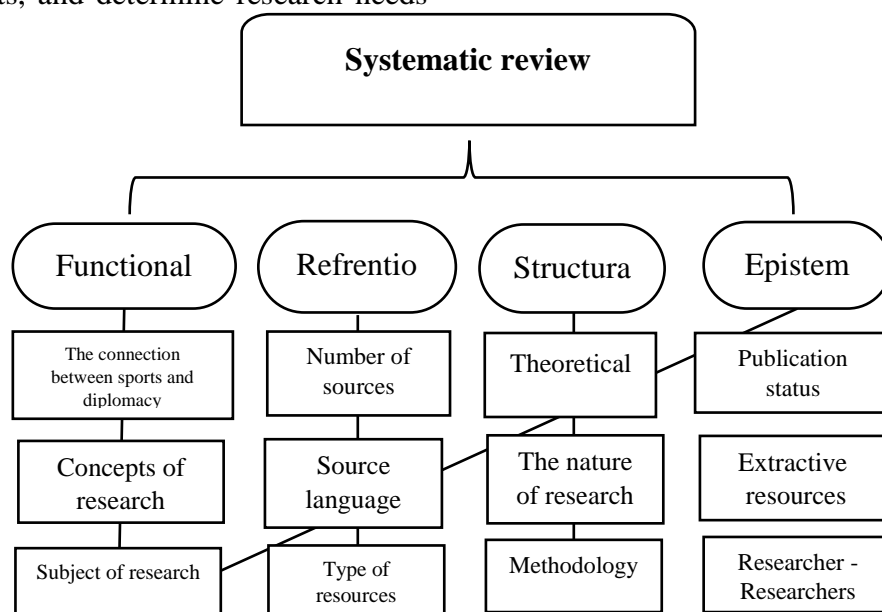
What is the structural status of articles in sports diplomacy?

What is the organizational structure of articles in sports diplomacy?

What is the functional status of articles in sports diplomacy?

What is the status of citations for articles in the field of sports diplomacy?

The study presents the dimensions examined in a structured framework (Figure 1), in line with the aim and questions posed above.



**Figure 1 - Systematic Review Dimensions**

## Materials and Methods

The methodology of the present study is practical and qualitative research based on a systematic review of published articles in Iran's field of sports diplomacy. We conducted electronic searches in Persian-language databases to identify and compile a database of articles in the field of sports diplomacy. These databases include the Scientific Information

Database<sup>1</sup>, Information bank of national publications<sup>2</sup>, Database of Noor specialized magazines<sup>3</sup>, Comprehensive humanities portal<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> SID.IR

<sup>2</sup> Magiran.com

<sup>3</sup> Noormags.ir

<sup>4</sup> Ensani.ir

and Persian scientific searcher Elmnet<sup>Δ</sup>. We collected articles that contained keywords like sports diplomacy, international relations in sports, soft power in sports, foreign policy in sports, political development in sports, and football diplomacy. Additionally, one of the criteria for collecting articles was the possibility of accessing the full text of the article, the presence of at least one author affiliated with an academic institution, confirmation from the citation institution, and monitoring by the Islamic World Science and Technology Institute. We found 509 sources in the initial search, and after removing duplicates, unrelated articles, articles from unreliable journals, and articles without full text, we considered 133 articles eligible for analysis. The articles' timeframe was from 2012 to 2023.

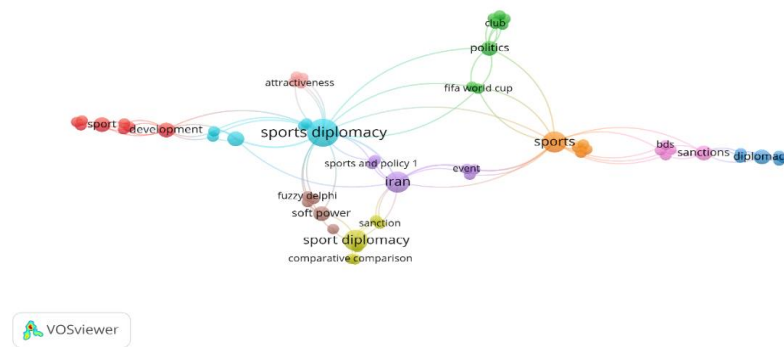
We compiled the characteristics of the collected articles into a list using seven indices and 23 criteria. We ensured the validity of the desired list by obtaining confirmation from relevant experts in the field. Researchers utilized the corrected reliability method and carried out all analytical processes to ensure reliability. We compared the results of these analyses and achieved a reliability of 96%. We used Excel software for data analysis. Finally, we used version 1.6.20 of the VOS viewer software to draw co-citation maps using keywords related to the research topic for scient metric analyses. Data visualization is a technique that facilitates the easy understanding of structures and interrelationships among thousands of documents. There are specialized tools developed specifically for visualization, among which VOS viewer software is notable (Fallah Barzegar & Khalili, 2022, p. 359). We utilized this software to draw co-citation maps of prominent authors and relevant scientific keywords related to the research objectives. A circle with a label represents each concept in the map. The size of the circles indicates the

level of knowledge associated with each concept; the larger the circle, the bigger and bolder the label. The same-colored circles form a cluster. The distance between circles on the map signifies their relationship.

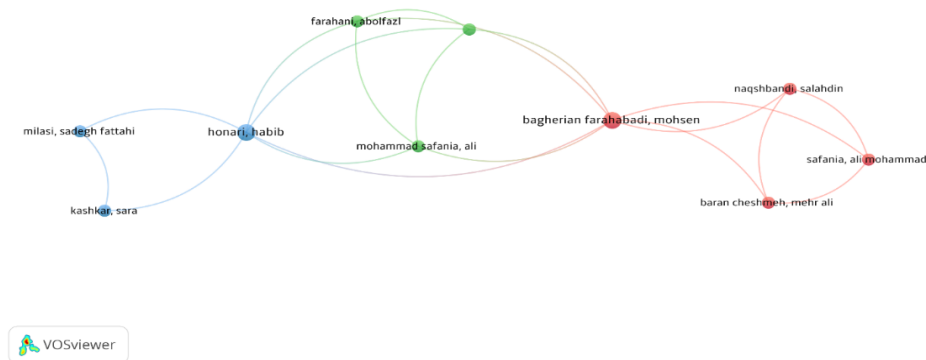
## Results

In the present study, the concurrent occurrence of two items was extracted using all keywords and author co-citations in 133 scientific articles collected from scientific databases, including the Jihad University Scientific Information Database, the National Journals Database, the Noor Specialized Journals Database, the Comprehensive Humanities Sciences Portal, and Scientific Researcher in Persian (ElmNet.Ir). The revisions and analyses conducted, as depicted in Figure 2, indicate that in the field of sports diplomacy between 2012 and 2023, the keyword "sports diplomacy" has the highest cluster-based relationship with other keywords. Figure 3 presents the co-citation network of prominent authors in the field of sports diplomacy from 2012 to 2023, showing that Habib Honari and Mohsen Baqerian Farahabadi had the highest level of research and collaboration during this period.

<sup>Δ</sup> Elmnet.ir



**Figure 2: The co-citation network of prominent keywords in the field of sports diplomacy in the period 2012-2023**



**Figure 3: The co-citation network of prominent authors in the field of sports diplomacy in the period of 2012-2023**

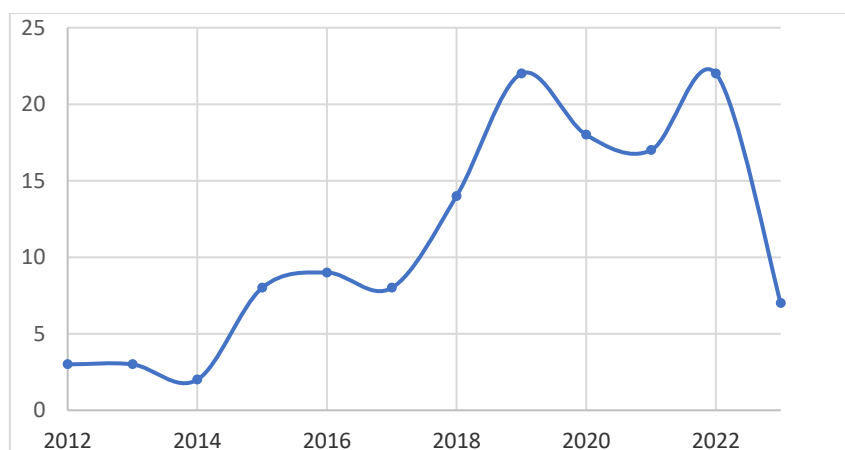
The Epistemology Status of Articles in the Field of Sports Diplomacy from 2012 to 2023

published in the field of sports diplomacy from the year 2012, categorized by the year of publication.

Table 1 illustrates the number of articles

**Table 1. Frequency of articles by year of publication**

Column	Year of publication	Frequency
1	2023	7
2	2022	22
3	2021	17
4	2020	18
5	2019	22
6	2018	14
7	2017	8
8	2016	9
9	2015	8
10	2014	2
11	2013	3
12	2012	3



**Figure 4 - Frequency of articles by publication year**

We reviewed all scientific research articles from domestic journals approved by the Institute for Scientific Information and Monitoring of Science and Technology of the Islamic World, as shown in Table 2. Among these, 22 journals addressed sports diplomacy from the year 2012 onwards. These journals cover various fields, including sports, diplomacy, and international relations. The

journal "Strategic Studies in Sports and Youth" has published the highest number of articles in the field of sports diplomacy, with 21 articles. This could be due to the journal's mission to focus on macro policies, major research, strategic studies, foresight, or development-oriented approaches. Other journals also published 44 articles on sports diplomacy.

**Table 2 - Frequency distribution of articles published in periodicals**

Column	The name of the publications	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strategic studies of sport and youth	21	16%
2	Sport Management	17	13%
3	Sports management studies	10	7%
4	Communication management in sports media	5	3.5%
5	New approaches in sports management	5	3.5%
6	Physiology and management research in sports	5	3.5%
7	Sports management and development (Gilan University)	4	2.5%
8	Politics Quarterly	3	2%
9	International Quarterly Journal of Geopolitics	2	1.5%
10	Organizational behavior management studies in sports	2	1.5%
11	Research paper on sports management and movement behavior	2	1.5%
12	Political research and international relations	2	1.5%
13	Research in sports management	1	1%
14	Sociological strategic studies in sports	1	1%

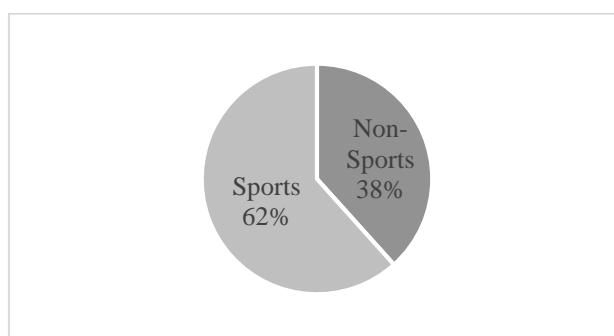
15	Quarterly Journal of Sports Marketing Studies	1	1%
16	Human resource management in sports	1	1%
17	Contemporary researches in sports management	1	1%
18	Applied research in sports management	1	1%
19	International relations research	1	1%
20	Parliament and Strategic Quarterly	1	1%
21	Olympic Social Cultural Studies Quarterly	1	1%
22	Political Studies Quarterly	1	1%
23	Other	44	33%
<b>Total</b>		133	100%

According to Table 3 and Figure 5, out of the 133 articles published from 1391 in the field of sports diplomacy, approximately 62% of the articles were published in specialized sports journals, while about 38% were published in

non-sports journals. This indicates that the topic of sports diplomacy is of interest and importance to non-sports journals, suggesting that the influence of sports approaches in the field of diplomacy can be significant.

**Table 3 - Specialization of publications**

Specializing in publications	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sports</b>	82	62%
<b>Non-sports</b>	51	38%
<b>Total</b>	133	100



**Figure 5 - frequency of specialization of publications**

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 6, the number of authors has been examined. The most

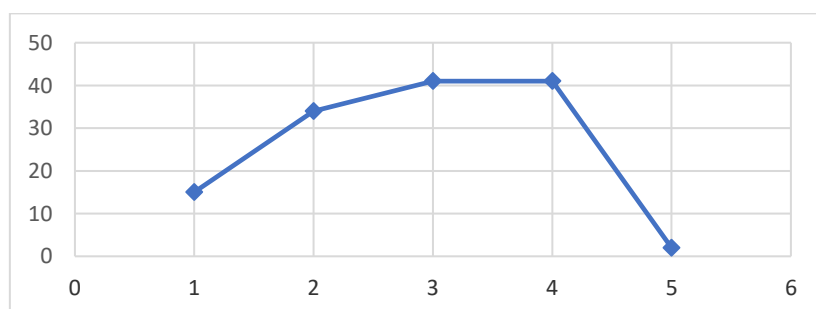
common pattern involves articles authored by three or four individuals

**Table 4 - Number of authors**

Number of authors	Frequency	Percentage
<b>One Person</b>	15	11%



<b>Two Persons</b>	34	26%
<b>Three Persons</b>	41	31%
<b>Four Persons</b>	41	31%
<b>Five Persons</b>	2	1%



**Figure 6 – Number of authors**

The tables below display the gender distribution of the authors of the articles and indicate whether the corresponding author is the same as the responsible author under investigation. According to this table,

approximately 92% of the authors were male. Furthermore, it's important to note that 48% of the first authors and corresponding authors aligned with each other.

**Table 5. Gender of the authors**

<b>Gender of the corresponding author</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Male</b>	122	92%
<b>Female</b>	11	8%

**Table 6. Correspondence of the responsible author and the first author**

<b>Alignment of the Corresponding author and the first author</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Align with each other</b>	64	48%
<b>Different from each other</b>	69	52%

According to Table 7, approximately 69% of the corresponding authors of the articles held academic ranks, with the majority being

assistant professors. Furthermore, among those without an academic rank, the majority were doctoral degree holders.

**Table 7 - scientific rank of the responsible author**

<b>Column</b>	<b>Academic Rank</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
	Professor	11
	Associate Professor	36



<b>Eligible for academic rank</b>	Assistant Professor	45
	Postdoctoral	2
	Ph.D.	21
<b>No university rank</b>	Doctoral student	10
	Master	4
	MSc student	2
<b>Other</b>		2
<b>Total</b>		133

Table 8 shows the field of study of the corresponding authors, indicating that about 56% of the authors studied in sport management.

**Table 8 - Field of Corresponding authors**

Field of responsible authors	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sport Management</b>	74	56%
<b>International Relations</b>	13	10%
<b>Political science</b>	11	8%
<b>Educational methods and programs</b>	3	2%
<b>Political Sociology</b>	2	1%
<b>Other fields</b>	30	23%

In Table 9, approximately 81% of the extracted sources were identified as independent articles, while only 19% of the articles were extracted from specific sources such as thesis, dissertations, and only one case had an unspecified source.

**Table 9 - extracted sources**

The source of the studied articles	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Arising from the thesis</b>	8	6%
<b>Arising from treatise</b>	16	12%
<b>Independent</b>	108	81%
<b>Unknown</b>	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

Table 10. Shows information regarding the academic affiliation of the corresponding

authors for each article. According to this table, 20% of the authors were affiliated with Azad University, which accounted for the highest number. This founding could be attributed to

the widespread presence of Azad University branches across the country. Following that, the University of Tehran accounted for nearly 18% of the academic affiliations.

**Table 10 – Authors' academic affiliation**

Column	Author's academic affiliation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Azad University	27	20%
2	University of Tehran	24	18%
3	Mazandaran University	12	8%
4	Allameh Tabatabai University of Tehran	7	5%
5	Razi University of Kermanshah	7	5%
6	Payam Noor university of Tehran	5	4%
7	Kharazmi University of Tehran	5	4%
8	Gilan University	5	4%
9	Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran	4	3%
10	Tehran Research Institute of Physical Education and Sports Sciences	4	3%
11	Technical and Vocational University of Tehran	4	3%
12	Kish International Campus of Tehran University	3	2%
13	Tehran University of Research Sciences	3	2%
14	Mashhad Ferdowsi University	3	2%
15	Tabriz University	2	1%
16	Yasouj University	2	1%
17	Imam Khomeini International University of Qazvin	1	1%
18	University of Zanjan	1	1%
19	Chamran university of Ahvaz	1	1%
20	Tehran National Defense University	1	1%
21	North Amol University	1	1%
22	Damghan University	1	1%
23	Safa Dasht University	1	1%
24	Ilam University	1	1%
25	Hakim Sabzevari University	1	1%
26	Tarbiat Modares University	1	1%

27	University of Esfahan	1	1%
28	Valiasr University of Rafsanjan	1	1%
29	Research Institute of Education and Training of Khuzestan Province	1	1%
30	other	3	2%
<b>Total</b>		133	100%

The Structural Status of Articles in the Field of Sports Diplomacy in Iran from 2012 to 2023

In this section, we delve into the theoretical foundations and methodological approaches of

the articles. Table 11 outlines the strategies and implementation paths for the investigated articles. Investigations revealed that 53% of the articles employed the qualitative research method.

**Table 11- Strategies and methodologies of the articles**

Based on the strategy	Academic Rank	Frequency	Percentage	Total frequency	Total Percentage
<b>Descriptive</b>		15			
	Descriptive. Analytical	9	45%		
	Survey research	7	27%		
	historical		22%	33	25%
	Correlation research	1	3%		
	Delphi	1	3%		
<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory	24			
	content analysis	15	34%		
	Case Study	14	21%		
	Theme analysis	4	6%		
	Context oriented	2	3%	70	53%
	Systematic analysis	1	1%		
	Discourse analysis	1	1%		
	other	9	19%		
<b>Mixed</b>	Descriptive and qualitative	16	53%		
	Exploratory mix	14	47%	30	22%
<b>Total</b>		133			100%

Table 12 shows the research method based on the objective of each study, indicating that 93% of the articles were applied, while only 3% were conducted with fundamental objectives.

**Table 12 - research method based on the goal**

The type of research based on the goal	Frequency	Percentage
Fundamental	4	3%
Developmental	5	4%
Practical	124	93%
Total	100	100%

In Table 13, data collection instrumentation was examined, revealing that 36% of the instruments were documents and records.

**Table 13 - data collection tool**

Type of tool	Frequency	Percentage
Documents	48	36%
A combination of interviews and questionnaires	32	24%
Interview	24	18%
Interviews and documents	26	17%
Questionnaire	6	5%
Total	100	100%

Additionally, Table 14 shows that opinion group among the authors of the articles. leaders, specialists, and experts were the largest

**Table 14- based on information gathering**

Society and research sample	Male	Female	Mixed	Unknown	Frequency	Percentage
Experts and experts and managers (authors of diplomacy books, elites, veterans in this field and researchers)	3	0	40	40	83	62%
Documents	-	-	-	-	42	31%
Others	0	0	0	0	8	7%
Total	3	0	41	89	133	100%

According to Table 15, the software's used in the articles for data analysis has been investigated. In total, software was utilized 154

times in the research, with SPSS software being used 24 times, accounting for approximately 18% of the total usage.

**Table 15 - Software**

Type of Software	Frequency	Percentage
SPSS	24	18%
Smart PLS	12	9%
Amos	6	5%
Lisrel	5	4%
Maxqda	4	3%
MicMac	2	2%
Nvivo	2	2%
AHP Masret	1	1%
Super Docision	1	1%
Atlas TI	1	1%
Suurvey Monkey	1	1%
Unknown	95	71%

Examination of the geographical scope of the conducted research, as indicated in Table 16, revealed that 85% of the research in this field of

the study was conducted within the geographical boundaries of the country.

**Table 16. Geographical distribution**

Area	Frequency	Percentage
National	113	85%
International	16	12%
Unknown	4	3%

Upon reviewing the theoretical frameworks of the papers, it became apparent that 61% of the

articles lacked a theoretical framework, while 25% of the articles relied on theories.

**Table 17 - Theoretical foundations of researches**

Basics of research	Frequency	Percentage
Without theory	82	61%
Reliance on theory	33	25%

<b>Theorizing</b>	9	7%
<b>Experimental theory</b>	9	7%
<b>Total</b>	133	100%

The functional performance of articles in the field of sports diplomacy in the period 2012-2023

In the section on the functional performance of articles, the following aspects have been examined:

A. Investigating the relationship between sports and diplomacy.

B. Explaining research concepts.

C. Explaining research topics. Subsequent tables corresponding to each of these aspects have been specified:

According to Table 18, this study, which examined 133 papers in the subject of sports diplomacy, found that the bulk of studies (22%), focused on countries' macropolitical interests. Following this, themes connected to enhancing international relations accounted for 18%, while sports as a soft power comprised 14% of the research in other areas.

**Table 18 - Concepts of research related to sports diplomacy**

<b>Concepts of research</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Macro political goals of countries</b>	29	22%
<b>Improving international relations</b>	24	18%
<b>Sports as soft power</b>	19	14%
<b>Professional sports and politics</b>	10	7%
<b>Gaining the benefit of countries</b>	9	7%
<b>National identity through sports</b>	8	6%
<b>Globalization</b>	8	6%
<b>branding</b>	6	5%
<b>Political authority</b>	6	5%
<b>Sports and national security</b>	5	4%
<b>Sports washing and purifying sports</b>	4	3%
<b>governance</b>	3	2%
<b>Exercise as a cover for defects</b>	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	133	100%

In Table 19, the analysis of research topics in this field was conducted, revealing that general diplomacy constituted approximately 83% of

the predominant subject matter that researchers focused on in their studies.

**Table 19 - Subjects of research conducted**

Subjects	Frequency	Percentage
Public Diplomacy	110	83%
New diplomacy	11	8%
Economic diplomacy	7	5%
Cultural diplomacy	5	4%
Classic diplomacy	0	0
Digital diplomacy	0	0
Total	133	100%

Table 20 examines the relationship between sports and diplomacy in the conducted research, revealing that approximately 74% of the studies

found out a bilateral relationship between sports and diplomacy.

**Table 20 - The relationship between diplomacy and sports in the research**

Relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Two ways	98	74%
One way	34	25%
Effectless	1	1%
Total	133	100%

### Citation Status of Articles in the Field of Sports Diplomacy

The Examination of referential status in studies

on Sports Diplomacy has been scrutinized regarding aspects such as: the number of resources, the language of resources, and the type of resources, as outlined in Table 21.

**Table 21- status of articles in the field of sports diplomacy**

Source language					
Source number	English				Persian
Frequency	2120				2255
Minimum number of resources	0				2
Maximum number of resources	58				61
Source type	Book	Article	Thesis/dissertation	Documents	Site
Frequency	808	2681	286	306	292



Figure 7 illustrates the research concepts related to sports diplomacy in the period from 2012 to 2023.



**Figure 7 - Research concepts related to sports diplomacy**

## Discussion

In the contemporary era characterized by the Information Age, extensive communications, and easy access to data, the rapid acquisition of information has become increasingly important for organizations and individuals. This allows them to effectively utilize a vast amount of data in their decision-making processes (Tierney, 2023). Reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing previous studies can provide organizations and individuals with the opportunity to use existing information as a credible source for knowledge (Neuendorf, 2017). Furthermore, this research aimed to systematically review and analyze the articles published in domestic scientific journals in the field of sports diplomacy in Iran from 2012 to 2023. This systematic review serves as a foundation for better understanding the developments and diplomatic activities in Iran's sports sector. Due to the current administration's new strategy and efforts to promote relations with other nations and increase international communications through sports, the years 2012 to 2023 were selected as the time period for this study. Furthermore, noteworthy is the fact that Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region employed this sport

diplomacy strategy to strengthen and expand their relations with other countries during the time period of this systematic review. The research results suggest that research papers, including those not devoted to sports, have devoted considerable attention to investigations in the field of sports diplomacy.

Table 3 presents the journal articles distribution and reveals that majority of the articles (62% of the total number of articles) were published in specialized sports journals. This implies that sports journals primarily concentrate on subjects associated with sports; however, diplomacy has been thoroughly addressed in these publications.

Another reason could be the growing interest and attention of sports experts in the impact of sports on international relations and cultural exchanges. Finally, this may indicate that the scientific and research community in Iran's field of sports has recognized the importance of sports diplomacy as a tool for foreign policy and international relations development. Numerous journals, including "Strategic Studies of Sports and Youth," "Sports Management," "Sports Management Studies", and "New Approaches in Sports Management," have published the majority of articles in sports journals. Therefore, other sports journals should

pay more attention to this area, considering that it encompasses part of sports diplomacy in society, and conduct further studies in this field. According to Table 18, the concept of "national macropolitical objectives" accounted for 22 percent of the 133 articles reviewed, making it the most prominent research concept among others. Additionally, the concept of "sports as a cover for deficiencies" had the least frequency among the research concepts utilized in the studies. This could indicate that researchers are less focused on various aspects of sports diplomacy, such as governance, sports hygiene, sports purification, sports and national security, political power, and branding. Researchers, based on these research concepts, can pay more attention to the field of sports diplomacy and examine it further. In this regard, organizations and universities can significantly contribute by proposing research proposals on various aspects of sports diplomacy and different topics within these orientations.

In the present study, the researcher has identified weaknesses and gaps in previous studies by examining the topics of sports diplomacy and specialized research concepts in sports diplomacy in Table 18, which have received less attention in research related to sports diplomacy. Some of these are highlighted below. One concept that has received considerable attention in current research is addressing the broad political objectives of countries and improving international relations through sports diplomacy. These findings are in line with those of Abramczyk (2024). However, part of Abramczyk findings indicated that sports hygiene is widely used in sports diplomacy today (Abramczyk, 2024). However, during the period from 2012 to 2023, the concept of sports hygiene and sports purification in sports diplomacy received less attention in the studies examined in this article. This could indicate that researchers prioritize topics that are culturally or politically significant in Iran, political considerations, self-censorship,

difficulties in accessing necessary data, and other similar factors that investigators perceive as having high risks. In recent years, various studies have been conducted on concepts such as sports as a cover for deficiencies, governance, sports hygiene, sports and national security, and other concepts; however, they have not been sufficiently addressed, and they can also be examined in other fields such as political science, such as examining the relationship between soft power and hosting mega sports events and other issues. Other topics that have received less attention from authors in this category of articles include subjects such as sports and government, sports and foreign policy, sports and sustainable development, and sports and peace, which may indicate the focus of authors on traditional topics such as international relations and their effects on sports, research challenges, insufficient awareness of relevant topics, and publication constraints. These concepts can also serve as starting points for future research and development of sports diplomacy programs. Researchers need to address the trend of the articles under consideration, which is an indicator of the findings and results. The first aspect of the evolutionary trend was in the geographical scope of the articles. Changes and developments in the geographical scope showed that articles moved from national levels towards international levels. However, it should be noted that there have been relatively fewer articles at the international level, which should also receive more attention. As evident from Figure One, the trend of article publications has been increasing, peaking in 2019 and 2022. Additionally, in 2014, 2013, and 2012, they were at their lowest. It is worth mentioning that in some cases, the publication of articles is delayed due to internal processes of journals, which may diminish the importance of article publication time. The next aspect examined in terms of its evolutionary trend was the methodology of the articles. The results in this regard showed that qualitative methods have

shown more growth in recent years. Although the databases of the Islamic World Science Citation Center and the Science and Technology Monitoring Institute have made efforts to index reputable scientific journals in various scientific research fields, it is possible that some journals have not been covered by this institution for various reasons. This institution currently covers 32 journals operating in the field of sports within the country.

25 of these journals, dedicated to sports humanities, have published articles on sports diplomacy in the past 12 years, according to the keywords used in this research. Furthermore, out of these 21 journals, only 3 have published more than 10 articles on sports diplomacy from 2012 to 2023. Considering the journal "Strategic Studies of Sports and Youth," which has published the most articles in the field of sports diplomacy by far, with an average of 42 articles per issue, it has published approximately 929 articles, about 34 of which are related to sports diplomacy; in other words, 4% of the total articles published in the field of sports diplomacy. Table 14, which shows the population and sample of the conducted research, indicates that experts, specialists, analysts, and managers (authors of diplomatic books, elites, pioneers in the field of diplomacy, and researchers) make up the majority of the research population, with both genders almost equally represented. Following that, documents and records have formed the largest portion of the population and sample. Furthermore, the other items mentioned in Table 13 account for less than ten percent. Asheghi et al. (2022) only analyzed 28 articles in their "Content Analysis of Articles Related to Politics and Sports (From 2009 to 2019)" study, whereas the present research found 69 articles from 2012 to 2019. The difference in the number of articles found is likely due to differences in the keywords used in these two studies. Another reason could be the delay in publishing some articles in certain

journals. Additionally, some findings indicated that the prevalence of qualitative research methods in the examined studies was often in line with the results of the present research (Asheghi et al., 1401, p. 53).

Also, Zare et al. (2023) did a study called "Content Analysis of Studies on Sports Diplomacy in Iran from 2014 to 2023 in 27 Sports and Non-Sports Journals" and found and looked at 54 research works. However, this study looked for and looked at 127 articles from the same time period, which did not match the results of the first study (Zare et al., 1402, p. 26). Possible reasons for the discrepancy in the number of searched articles include variations in search methods and sample selection, different database searches, and different approaches to selecting and evaluating articles.

The researcher encountered limitations in this study, such as restricted access to resources, time constraints, data limitations, changes in sports policies, global events, and socio-political changes. Therefore, it is possible that some of the findings and results of this research have been influenced by these limitations. On the other hand, these constraints can be seen as opportunities for future research to address overlooked aspects of studies. According to the results of the research, it is suggested that due to the interest in sports and the fact that different non-sports publications publish these situations. It is possible to establish cooperation and exchange between sports and non-sports publications. In order to publish articles more widely and increase their effectiveness. Also, considering that most of the articles were published in the field of public diplomacy, it is suggested that international institutions and non-official organizations that operate in this field should cooperate with each other.

## Conclusion

The research's results recommend that researchers focus particularly on the role of

sports as a tool for achieving countries' macro political goals. This includes improving international relations and using sports as a soft power to increase cultural and political influence. Additionally, the development of professional sports and their interaction with politics can contribute to national interests and strengthen national identity. Researchers should explore innovative approaches to examining the impact of globalization and branding in sports, as well as their role in increasing political power and national security. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the complexities of sports diplomacy can emerge from investigating how sports can serve as a cover for shortcomings, as well as their impact on governance and sports laundering. These studies can help develop more effective strategies for using sports as a tool to achieve political and cultural goals.

Ultimately, sports diplomacy can significantly contribute to the development of sports and the improvement of international relations by fostering communication bridges and enhancing international cooperation. Therefore, relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Science, National Sports Federations, and related organizations must identify vital and prioritized topics in this field for examination in specialized working groups. Furthermore, research projects and diverse conferences should provide encouragement and guidance for research activities in this field. This will assist in achieving more accurate and comprehensive results, as well as making quick and effective decisions, ultimately aiding in the advancement of the country's sports diplomacy goals.

In this regard, sports diplomacy can be used as a strategic tool in both practical and theoretical domains to strengthen the country's international position and promote national identity and societal dynamism in various fields, including sports.

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