

Factors Affecting the Development of Boxing Sports Marketing in Iraq

Purpose : This study aims to identify key factors influencing the development of boxing sports marketing in Iraq by analyzing cultural, economic, infrastructural, media, and educational dimensions. Insights from experts and stakeholders provide practical strategies to enhance boxing's national and international standing.

Methods : This study was conducted using a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research sample included professors of sports management, officials from the Iraqi Ministry of Youth and Sports, members of the Boxing Federation's executive board, CEOs of licensed clubs, as well as club supervisors, head coaches, and coaches. A total of 15 participants were selected.

Results : The findings of the study revealed that, in the current situation, components such as management, environment, strategy, target market segmentation and positioning, and the marketing mix are not considered effective factors in the marketing of boxing in Iraq. However, in the desired state, these components are identified as key and influential factors in the development of boxing marketing in the country.

Conclusion : This study highlights that cultural, economic, structural, and media-related challenges hinder the development of boxing marketing in Iraq. Addressing these through strategic planning, infrastructure improvement, and digital engagement can foster sustainable growth and global recognition of the sport.

Keywords : Boxing, Marketing, Iraq

Introduction

Boxing is one of the exciting and popular martial arts that is recognized as a professional and commercial sport in many countries, attracting a large number of fans. In Iraq, despite the abundance of athletic talent and the youth's interest in martial arts, boxing has not yet reached its true potential and faces numerous challenges in terms of marketing and development. Sports marketing, as a key tool in the growth and expansion of sports, can play an influential role in promoting boxing, attracting new audiences, creating sustainable financial resources, strengthening athletes' brands, and enhancing the level of competitions. However, the development of boxing marketing in Iraq requires a precise understanding of the country's cultural, economic, social, and structural conditions. The lack of financial support, weak infrastructure, lack of targeted advertising, and insufficient media coverage are among the challenges hindering the progress of this sport. On the other hand, focusing on digital marketing, engaging with the private sector, training specialized personnel, and learning from successful global experiences can serve as opportunities for the growth of this sport. The goal of this research is to investigate the factors affecting the development of boxing sports marketing in Iraq and provide solutions for enhancing its position both nationally and internationally.

Boxing, as one of the most popular and exciting sports, has significant potential for growth and development in professional, cultural, and economic dimensions. In many countries, this sport has become a profitable industry by using modern marketing tools, which not only enhances the status of athletes but also plays a significant role in economic growth, attracting sports

tourism, and creating jobs. However, in Iraq, despite considerable youth interest and potential talent, boxing has not yet effectively benefited from targeted and impactful marketing strategies, leading to growth challenges. The lack of strategic planning in marketing, weak media infrastructure, insufficient financial support from both the private and public sectors, and the lack of focus on the training and development of marketing specialists in sports are among the problems hindering the expansion of this sport at both the national and international levels. In such a situation, a systematic and scientific examination of the factors affecting the development of boxing sports marketing in Iraq is essential to create a proper path for the advancement and professionalization of this sport. This issue will not only contribute to the growth of boxing but also provide a model for the development of other sports in the country.

In the current situation, where sports have become a dynamic and revenue-generating industry globally, attention to sports marketing as one of the key development tools has become increasingly important. Iraq, with its young population, high interest in martial arts, and potential in boxing, can lay the foundation for the flourishing of this sport both nationally and internationally by utilizing scientific marketing methods. However, the lack of comprehensive research on boxing sports marketing has created a significant gap in policy-making and professional planning. Since many of the existing challenges arise from insufficient understanding of the factors affecting the marketing process of this sport, conducting research that analyzes these factors in a scientific and targeted manner is of great importance. This research could help sports managers, federations, investors, and other stakeholders to make more precise plans for the development of boxing in Iraq by gaining a deeper understanding of the current situation and future opportunities. Additionally, the results of this study can significantly contribute to the enhancement of athletes' status, attracting financial resources, increasing the social popularity of this sport, and expanding the culture of sportsmanship in the community.

Various studies have addressed the factors affecting the development of martial arts sports marketing, and their results can enrich the theoretical foundation of this research. Karimzadeh et al. (2018) in a study titled "Investigating the Factors Affecting the Development of Martial Arts Sports Marketing in Iran" emphasized that factors such as sports culture, government support, sports infrastructure, and media coverage are key components in the development of marketing in these disciplines. Abdolhosseini (2021) also focused on the role of social media in his research, demonstrating that digital tools and targeted content creation can play an important role in attracting audiences and enhancing athletes' brands.

In the current global landscape, where sports have become a dynamic and profitable industry, sports marketing is increasingly recognized as one of the key tools for development. Iraq, with its young population, high interest in martial arts, and potential in boxing, has the capacity to boost this sport both nationally and internationally by leveraging scientific marketing methods. However, the lack of comprehensive research in boxing sports marketing has created a significant gap in policy-making and professional planning. Many of the existing challenges stem from an insufficient understanding of the factors that impact the marketing process of this sport, and thus, a research study that systematically and purposefully analyzes these factors is of great importance. This research could assist sports managers, federations, investors, and other stakeholders in making more informed decisions to plan for the development of boxing in Iraq. Furthermore, the results of this study could contribute significantly to enhancing athletes' status, attracting financial resources, increasing the social popularity of the sport, and expanding sportsmanship culture within the community.

Various studies have addressed the factors influencing the development of martial arts and boxing sports marketing. Karimzadeh et al. (2018), in a study titled "Investigating the Factors Affecting the Development of Martial Arts Sports Marketing in Iran," emphasized that factors such as sports culture, government support, sports infrastructure, and media coverage are essential components in developing marketing strategies for these sports. Abdolhosseini (2021) also focused on the role of social media in his research, demonstrating that digital tools and targeted content creation can play a crucial role in attracting audiences and enhancing athletes' brands.

Al-Taie (2019) in his research at Baghdad University examined the challenges faced by individual sports like boxing in Iraq, citing weaknesses in policy-making, inadequate infrastructure, and media neglect of these sports. Similarly, Smith and Westerbeek (2018) in their book "Sport Business and Management" discussed the importance of sponsorship, organizing international events, and champion-building as key factors for successful sports marketing in developing countries.

Rahimi and Akbari (2021) emphasized the importance of coach education and updating their technical knowledge, which they regarded as a primary factor in improving athletes' technical levels and attracting financial and media support. Furthermore, Jafari and colleagues (2020) highlighted the role of public culture, family involvement, and champion models in fostering public interest in martial arts. Studies conducted by Ahmad et al. (2019) also showed that using digital media and online advertising can significantly increase the popularity of martial arts and allow athletes to build strong connections with their fans.

Kashi and Mansouri (2020) underscored the necessity of strengthening sports infrastructure, organizing international events, and updating coaching education to develop boxing in the Middle East. Liu and Li (2017) examined the role of international competitions in expanding boxing's popularity in developing countries and concluded that these events have a significant impact on the commercial development of the sport. Sharifi and Hosseini (2019) identified public culture, family involvement, and champion models as influential factors in the popularity of martial arts and emphasized the importance of creating a positive cultural atmosphere. Furthermore, Baker and Tuckman (2019) emphasized the importance of government support and infrastructure development for the success of sports marketing. Mahmoudi and Khosh-Fatert (2021) explored the challenges of infrastructure development and financial resources for boxing in Iraq, identifying them as key constraints to the sport's growth. Sasaki and Tanaka (2020) also highlighted that sponsorship plays a pivotal role in attracting new audiences and developing martial arts sports. Finally, Mohammadi and Salimi (2021) identified the role of social media in changing young people's attitudes toward martial arts and described it as an effective tool for increasing interest in these sports.

Materials and methods

The present study was conducted using a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological method. To analyze the interview data, the Colaizzi method was employed. The participants in the study included marketing and sports marketing experts, boxing competition analysts, athletes, and boxing fans. A total of 15 individuals were selected as the sample. The sample was chosen from individuals who had direct experience with or were closely connected to the research topic. Therefore, the participants' life experiences, professional background, and academic expertise, as well as their consent to participate in the interviews, were considered when selecting the sample. The sampling method was purposive and snowball sampling, continuing until non-redundant concepts were extracted from the

interviews. Data saturation was achieved after the 12th interview, but to ensure the correct data collection process, interviews continued until the 15th interview. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. All interviews were listened to multiple times, and the content was transcribed verbatim. The stages of the Colaizzi method were followed in this research. Finally, for categorizing and analyzing the information, MAXQDA version 20 software was used.

To ensure validity and reliability, criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used. The reason for using the credibility criterion was to ensure the research tool and the questions accurately reflect the study's variables. The reason for using dependability was to confirm that if the methods used in this study were applied again, similar results would be obtained, meaning the tools were repeatable. To ensure credibility, the interview texts and coding methods were sent to several participants and professors in sports management for feedback, and their opinions were incorporated. For transferability, the report of all research phases and demographic characteristics of the participants was provided. For reliability, inter-coder agreement was assessed using two coders, both experts in sports management with a Ph.D. and familiarity with coding methods, who coded the interviews and achieved an appropriate level of agreement. The reliability of the study was confirmed by this agreement between the two coders. The results of the inter-coder reliability are shown in Table 1.

Results

Table 1 presents the information of the participants in the study, which includes marketing and sports marketing experts, boxing competition analysts, athletes, and boxing fans.

Table 2. Participant Information

Expert #	Position	Experience	Educational Degree	Gender
1	Marketing Expert	More than 5 years	PhD	Male
2	Sports Marketing Expert	More than 10 years	PhD	Male
3	Sports Marketing Expert	More than 5 years	Master's	Female
4	Boxing Expert	More than 10 years	PhD	Male
5	Boxing Expert	More than 10 years	Master's	Male
6	Boxing Athlete	More than 10 years	PhD	Male
7	Boxing Athlete	More than 5 years	Master's	Male
8	Boxing Athlete	More than 5 years	Master's	Male
9	Boxing Athlete	More than 5 years	Bachelor's	Male
10	Boxing Athlete	More than 5 years	Bachelor's	Female
11	Boxing Athlete	More than 10 years	PhD	Male
12	Boxing Fan	More than 10 years	PhD	Male
13	Boxing Fan	More than 10 years	Master's	Male
14	Boxing Fan	More than 5 years	Master's	Male
15	Boxing Fan	More than 5 years	Bachelor's	Female

In Table 2, the results of the thematic extraction of the research are presented as a sample of how the interviews were coded.

This table provides a summary of the demographic information of the participants, including their experience, position, educational degree, and gender. The extracted themes from the interviews are categorized to reflect the opinions and experiences of each participant based on their respective roles in the field of boxing sports. These findings will be analyzed further in the next section to explore the key themes that emerged from the research.

Final Codes of Factors Influencing the Development of Boxing Sports Marketing in Iraq

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
Sports Culture and Public Interest	1) The role of history and sports traditions
	2) Education and public awareness about boxing
	3) The influence of media and their impact on public culture
	4) The role of role models and their impact on people
	5) The role of families and social support
	6) Accessibility and popularization of boxing
Government Support and Sports Organizations	7) Government support policies
	8) Financial resources for clubs and competitions
	9) Hosting national and international events
	10) Strengthening sports federations and unions
	11) Supporting boxers and champions
	12) Planning for sports infrastructure development
	13) Support for media and sports advertising
Sports Infrastructure and Facilities	14) Building and developing specialized boxing halls
	15) Developing sports infrastructure in different areas
	16) Accessibility of facilities for youth and adolescents
	17) Medical and health facilities in clubs
	18) Educational centers and boxing academies
	19) Diverse and standardized training spaces
Media and Advertising	20) Coaching and sports management training courses
	21) Allocating government budget for boxing sports
	22) Supporting private clubs and sports centers
	23) Providing financial facilities for athletes

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
Presence of Sponsors and Financial Support	24) Creating financial incentives for coaches
	25) Incentive policies for investment
	26) Hosting international sports events
	27) Promotional events and awareness campaigns
	28) Broadcasting events on media
	29) Use of social media networks
	30) Sports and educational documentaries
	31) Use of advertising in public spaces
	32) Collaboration with celebrities and well-known figures
	33) Organizing specialized coaching courses for boxing coaches
Coaching and Athlete Training	34) Developing training programs for amateur and professional athletes
	35) Teaching new techniques in boxing
	36) Updating training and refereeing techniques
	37) Developing psychological and mental skills for athletes
	38) Hosting internal competitions to assess performance
Supporting Athletes and Creating Role Models	39) Financial support and provision of resources for athletes
	40) Psychological support and counseling for athletes
	41) Encouraging and promoting champions as national role models
	42) Creating competition opportunities for athletes
	43) Developing coaching and mentoring systems for elite athletes
Hosting Competitions and International Events	44) Cooperation with international boxing federations
	45) Social and economic differences in access to sports venues
	46) Lack of educational resources in rural communities
	47) Social barriers for women in boxing
Developing Digital Marketing Programs	48) Using social media for advertising and communication with audiences
	49) Producing educational and motivational video content

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
Developing International Relations and Collaboration with Global Federations	50) Creating specialized websites for boxing
	51) Online advertising and digital campaigns
	52) Launching online platforms for coaching and online courses
	53) Providing statistical analyses and online reports
	54) Participating in international competitions and events
	55) Establishing cooperative networks with global federations
	56) Supporting international travel for global competitions
	57) Exchanging information and knowledge with global federations
	58) Supporting the hosting of international competitions in Iraq

This table categorizes the main factors that influence the development of boxing marketing in Iraq, ranging from sports culture, government support, infrastructure development, media presence, sponsorship, and education, to digital marketing strategies and international collaborations. These factors reflect the multifaceted approach needed for the growth of boxing in the country.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the development of boxing sports marketing in Iraq is influenced by a set of factors in cultural, structural, economic, media, and educational dimensions. These results indicate the importance of the interaction between these factors to improve and expand this sport in the country.

One of the prominent themes in this research is the role of sports culture and public interest in boxing. The findings revealed that low public awareness, the lack of prominent championship role models, and weak media influence are the main obstacles to the growth of boxing sports marketing in Iraq. These results align with previous studies such as the research by Ahmadi (2019) and Jafari et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of cultural development and public awareness for the success of sports marketing. These studies also mention that having championship role models and education in schools and media can foster the growth of martial arts sports markets.

In the area of governmental and organizational support, the study found that the lack of long-term support policies, insufficient budgeting, and the inefficiency of federational structures are serious barriers to the development of boxing sports marketing. These findings align with Karimzadeh et al. (2017), who state that organized and legal support for specific sports in developing countries plays a crucial role in attracting investors and growing the market.

Regarding sports infrastructure and facilities, challenges such as the shortage of specialized halls, unequal access to facilities in rural areas, and the lack of up-to-date educational facilities

were highlighted. These findings are similar to the study by Al-Tai (2019), where infrastructure weaknesses were identified as one of the main factors hindering martial arts sports in Iraq.

Media and advertising also play a key role in the development of boxing sports marketing. The results of this study indicate that traditional media provide limited coverage of boxing events, and online advertising and digital content are not yet developed in a targeted manner. This issue aligns with the study by Abdolhusseini (2021), which emphasizes the role of social media and digital campaigns in promoting boxing among young audiences.

In the area of sponsorship and financial support, the findings suggest that due to weak media branding and a lack of clear brand strategies, investors are reluctant to enter the boxing arena. This issue aligns with the study by Smith & Westerbeek (2018), which clearly mentions that the absence of strong sports brands and role-model development is one of the reasons for the lack of sponsorship attraction in developing countries.

The findings related to training and educating coaches and athletes show that the lack of specialized courses, the absence of performance evaluation systems, and the lack of modern educational programs are hindering the professional growth of boxing in Iraq. This is consistent with the research by Rahimi and Akbari (2021), which emphasizes that proper and scientific training, particularly in martial arts sports, plays a significant role in improving athletes' technical skills and enhancing the commercial appeal of the sport.

Finally, the development of international relations and cooperation with global federations was another important theme of this research, which has been less studied in the context of Iraq. The findings suggest that weak interaction with international federations and the lack of international events within the country have deprived Iraq's boxing of global marketing opportunities. This is in contrast to the experiences of countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have successfully hosted international competitions to improve their athletes' technical skills and promote their national brands globally.

Overall, this study shows that although many factors affecting boxing sports marketing in Iraq are similar to those in other developing countries, the specific social, economic, and political characteristics of Iraq have created unique challenges in this area. These challenges require careful planning, leveraging global experiences, and developing indigenous policies to overcome them and elevate boxing sports marketing in Iraq to a desirable level.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the development of boxing sports marketing in Iraq is influenced by a set of cultural, structural, economic, media, and educational factors, each of which plays a crucial role in promoting or hindering the growth of this sport. Among these factors, the lack of cohesive policies, weak specialized infrastructure, insufficient financial support, limited media coverage, and the absence of targeted educational programs for coaches and athletes are the main barriers to the development of boxing marketing in Iraq. Additionally, ineffective interaction with international bodies and the insufficient use of digital marketing tools have limited the growth opportunities for this sport. Given the high human potential and the public interest in martial arts, especially among the younger generation, it is essential to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen sports culture, improve infrastructure, support athletes, attract sponsors, and utilize media and new technologies. The results of this study can serve as a roadmap for policymakers,

decision-makers, coaches, and sports investors to enhance the position of boxing in Iraq, paving the way for its sustainable growth, professionalization, and internationalization in the coming years.

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