

Designing the Business Model Development of Iranian Wrestling Using the Grounded Theory Approach

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Accepted:

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the present study was to design the business model development framework for Iranian wrestling using the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory approach.

Methods: The present study was applied and exploratory qualitative in nature. The study population consisted of experts in sport business management, managers and officials of the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, wrestling club managers, and university faculty members. Participants were selected using snowball sampling, and data were collected through 25 semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding based on Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory.

Results: During the open coding stage, 150 initial codes were identified and organized into 20 axial categories, resulting in 15 selective categories within the Strauss and Corbin paradigm model. The main causal conditions included strategic leadership, innovation, human capital, financial resource development, and marketing. Good governance, infrastructure, stakeholder engagement, and wrestling culture emerged as the key contextual conditions, while economic fluctuations, financial constraints, and managerial changes were identified as the primary intervening conditions. The principal strategies comprised revenue diversification, private-sector partnerships, digital transformation, branding, and commercialization, leading to outcomes such as enhanced financial sustainability, reduced dependence on government funding, strengthened organizational performance, and an improved competitive position for Iranian wrestling.

Conclusion: the proposed model can serve as a practical framework for planning, policymaking, and the sustainable development of the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Keywords: Business Model Development, Iranian Wrestling, Grounded Theory, Strauss and Corbin, Wrestling Federation.

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Introduction

In the past decade, the business environment of organizations has undergone fundamental changes driven by globalization, digital transformation, the advancement of emerging technologies, intensified competition, and evolving stakeholder expectations. Under such circumstances, organizations can no longer rely solely on physical resources, financial capital, or traditional competitive advantages to sustain their performance. Instead, they must continuously redesign the logic through which they create, deliver, and capture value in response to environmental changes. Consequently, strategic management scholars argue that sustainable competitive advantage is increasingly dependent on an organization's ability to design, develop, and innovate its business model. A business model not only explains how value is created for customers but also defines how organizational resources, key activities, strategic partnerships, and revenue streams are configured. Therefore, it enables organizations to enhance their flexibility and resilience in dynamic and uncertain environments (Amit & Zott, 2001; Teece, 2010; Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011; Foss & Saebi, 2017). In response to these developments, the Business Model Canvas (BMC) has emerged as one of the most important tools for designing and analyzing business models. By integrating nine key building blocks—customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure—the Business Model Canvas provides a comprehensive representation of an organization's business logic. This framework enables managers to understand the interrelationships among different organizational components, identify opportunities for innovation, and develop new approaches to value creation. Recent studies indicate that the Business Model Canvas is no longer viewed merely as a descriptive tool; rather, it has evolved into a dynamic framework for the continuous redesign of business models in response to technological advancements, digital transformation, and changing market demands. Accordingly, new versions of the canvas have been proposed with a particular emphasis on digital technologies (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013). Alongside these developments, digital innovation, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, the Internet of Things, and digital platforms have fundamentally transformed the way organizations are managed. As a result, value creation is no longer confined to the delivery of products or services; rather, it is achieved through continuous stakeholder engagement, data-driven decision-making, the development of collaborative ecosystems, and the design of superior customer experiences. Recent studies suggest that organizations aligning their Business Model Canvas with emerging technologies are better positioned to generate new revenue streams, improve operational efficiency, strengthen customer relationships, and enhance their competitive advantage. Consequently, business model development has become one of the foremost strategic priorities for organizations operating in the digital economy. These transformations have also profoundly influenced the sport industry. Today, sport is no longer regarded merely as a competitive or social activity; instead, it has evolved into a global industry with substantial economic value, where clubs, federations, leagues, and other sport organizations compete to attract fans, investors, sponsors, and commercial partners. In such an environment, the success of sport organizations depends not only on athletic performance but also on their ability to design business models that address stakeholder needs, diversify revenue sources, leverage digital technologies, strengthen branding, foster innovation, and effectively manage customer relationships. Recent research in sport management further indicates that the future sustainability and competitiveness of sport organizations will largely depend on the development of flexible, innovative, and technology-driven business models and business model canvases (Teece, 2018). Alongside the transformation of the business environment, the sport industry has evolved from a purely social and cultural activity into one of the major sectors of the global economy. Today, sport organizations are expected not only to fulfill their technical and competitive missions but also to create economic value, enhance social capital, promote public health, strengthen their

brands, and respond effectively to stakeholder expectations. The growth of media broadcasting rights, the expansion of digital platforms, increased private-sector investment, advances in information technologies, and changing fan behavior have compelled sport federations to move beyond traditional management approaches and adopt innovative business models and business model canvases to achieve sustainable organizational performance and competitive advantage. Under these circumstances, the success of sport federations is no longer measured solely by winning medals or organizing sporting events; rather, it is increasingly determined by their ability to create value for stakeholders, develop strategic partnerships, manage resources effectively, and generate sustainable revenue streams (Bayle & Clausen, 2025; Chappelet, 2021; Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2019; Clausen et al., 2018). In this context, the Business Model Canvas among the key components of an organization. It enables managers to integrate and align value propositions, customer segments, key partnerships, key resources, key activities, channels, revenue streams, and cost structure within a coherent business model. Although the BMC was originally developed for commercial enterprises, recent studies have demonstrated that its application in sport organizations can stimulate innovation, enhance organizational flexibility, strengthen stakeholder engagement, diversify revenue streams, and improve organizational performance. Furthermore, researchers have argued that the Business Model Canvas should be adapted to the specific characteristics of each industry as well as to the institutional and cultural context of individual countries. Therefore, applying a generic business model framework without considering contextual factors is unlikely to adequately address the distinctive needs and challenges of sport organizations (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013; Teece, 2018; Foss & Saebi, 2017; Lis, 2022). On the other hand, digital transformation and the emergence of smart technologies, artificial intelligence, big data, social media, and digital communication platforms have fundamentally reshaped the traditional management of sport organizations. Today, a substantial proportion of value creation in sport organizations is achieved through digital engagement with fans, customer experience management, the provision of online services, data analytics, and the development of collaborative stakeholder networks. Recent studies indicate that sport organizations with digitally enabled business models are more successful in attracting sponsorships, increasing commercial revenues, strengthening their brands, and maintaining long-term engagement with fans. Conversely, organizations that fail to adapt to digital transformation are likely to encounter significant challenges in sustaining their competitive advantage and achieving long-term financial sustainability (Teece, 2018; Bayle & Clausen, 2025; Chen, 2024; France et al., 2024). A review of the sport management literature indicates that although considerable research has been conducted in recent years on governance, organizational performance, marketing, innovation, and sustainability in sport organizations, most studies have focused on professional sport clubs, sport leagues, major sporting events, or international sport federations. In contrast, studies addressing the development of business model frameworks for national sport federations, particularly those governing traditional and culturally significant sports such as wrestling, remain scarce. Moreover, the majority of existing business model frameworks have been developed within the context of developed countries and, due to differences in governance systems, economic structures, regulatory environments, organizational cultures, and the role of government in sport, cannot be directly generalized to the Iranian sport system. Therefore, developing a context-specific business model development framework for Iranian sport federations, particularly the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, represents both a significant scholarly gap and a practical necessity (Bayle & Clausen, 2025; Chappelet, 2021; Lis, 2022; Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). Recent research in sport management has increasingly recognized business model development as an important mechanism for organizational sustainability, financial resilience, stakeholder value creation, and long-term competitiveness. Gerke, Fehrer, Benson-Rea, and McCullough (2024) demonstrated that redesigning business models and strengthening stakeholder participation can enable sport organizations to generate economic, social, and environmental value. Similarly, Smith and

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Westerbeek (2020) emphasized the importance of aligning value propositions, revenue structures, stakeholder relationships, and governance mechanisms, while Adam and Bachmaier (2024) highlighted the role of financial governance and transparent decision-making in strengthening financial sustainability and stakeholder trust. Miragaia and Soares (2022) also emphasized business model innovation, inter-organizational collaboration, and digital technologies as important elements of sustainable sport organizations. Despite these contributions, the existing literature has several theoretical limitations. Much of the research on sport business models, particularly studies based on the Business Model Canvas (BMC), has focused on identifying and describing business model components such as value propositions, resources, activities, partnerships, customer relationships, and revenue streams. Although these frameworks are useful for mapping the structure of a business model, they provide limited explanation of why particular business model configurations emerge, under what conditions they develop, how stakeholders and environmental factors influence them, what strategies organizations adopt, and what consequences result from those strategies. Thus, existing approaches tend to explain what a business model consists of rather than how and why business model development occurs as a dynamic organizational process. This limitation is particularly important in sport organizations because their development is shaped by the interaction of economic, institutional, technological, social, and stakeholder-related factors. Existing business model frameworks have also been developed largely in the context of professional sport clubs, commercial sport enterprises, and developed sport markets. Consequently, they may not adequately explain business model development in sport organizations operating within different institutional and economic environments. This creates a theoretical need for an approach capable of generating an explanatory framework directly from empirical evidence rather than imposing predetermined business model components on the research setting. In this regard, the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin provides an appropriate methodological and theoretical basis for the present study. Unlike the BMC, which primarily provides a structural representation of business model components, grounded theory enables the researcher to identify and explain the relationships among causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. Therefore, grounded theory is necessary because the purpose of the present study is not merely to identify the components of a business model, but to explain the process through which business model development emerges, evolves, and produces organizational consequences. Through systematic coding and constant comparison, the proposed framework can reveal the mechanisms and relationships that may remain hidden within component-based models. The theoretical originality of the present study therefore lies in extending the component-based logic of existing BMC studies toward a dynamic, causal, process-oriented, and context-sensitive explanation of business model development. The proposed framework does not seek to replace the BMC; rather, it extends its explanatory scope by showing how business model components are shaped by organizational and environmental conditions, connected through stakeholder interactions and strategic responses, and ultimately associated with specific consequences. Accordingly, the central theoretical question shifts from “What are the components of a sport business model?” to “Under what conditions, through what mechanisms and strategies, and with what consequences does a sport organization develop a sustainable business model?”. This theoretical gap is particularly relevant to Iranian wrestling. Wrestling is one of Iran's most successful and culturally significant sports and has consistently contributed to the country's achievements in World Championships, Asian Games, and the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran faces challenges including substantial dependence on government funding, limited diversification of sustainable revenue sources, increasing costs of athlete preparation and international participation, underutilization of the commercial potential of the wrestling brand, limited private-sector engagement, insufficient adoption of emerging digital technologies, and the absence of an integrated framework for value creation and business development. These conditions indicate that sporting success alone cannot

guarantee organizational and financial sustainability and that the business logic of Iranian wrestling requires systematic development and transformation. Furthermore, the Iranian wrestling ecosystem involves interactions among the Wrestling Federation, government institutions, sponsors, private-sector organizations, athletes, coaches, fans, media, and international sport organizations. Therefore, business model development in this context is influenced by multiple interconnected conditions and cannot simply be explained through the predetermined components of an existing BMC framework. Developing an empirically grounded model is consequently necessary to capture the institutional, cultural, economic, managerial, and stakeholder-specific mechanisms shaping business development in Iranian wrestling. Accordingly, the present study addresses two interconnected gaps. Theoretically, it responds to the limited process-oriented explanation of how business model development emerges and evolves in sport organizations by extending existing component-based approaches through a grounded, causal-process framework. Empirically, it addresses the limited evidence concerning business model development in Iranian wrestling and the absence of a contextually grounded framework reflecting the characteristics of Iranian sport. The study therefore seeks to develop a grounded business model framework for Iranian wrestling by identifying and integrating its causal conditions, central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. The resulting framework is expected to contribute to sport management theory by conceptualizing business model development as a dynamic organizational process rather than a static configuration of business model components. Practically, it can provide the Wrestling Federation with an evidence-based framework for strengthening governance, diversifying revenue streams, developing strategic partnerships, improving marketing and branding, utilizing digital technologies, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and creating sustainable economic and social value.

Materials and method

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and exploratory qualitative in nature. It was conducted using the systematic grounded theory approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The aim of the study was to develop a business model framework for Iranian wrestling based on the perspectives of experts and specialists in the field. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The study population consisted of experts in sport business management, managers and officials of the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, wrestling club managers, and university faculty members with relevant academic and professional experience. Participants were selected through purposive sampling combined with theoretical sampling, while the snowball sampling technique was employed to identify additional qualified participants. The inclusion criteria were having relevant academic or professional expertise in sport management and/or wrestling, relevant managerial or professional experience, familiarity with the organizational and economic structure of Iranian wrestling, and willingness to participate in the study. A total of 25 experts and specialists participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes, with an average duration of 25 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at [the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, universities, participants' workplaces, or other relevant settings, depending on participants' availability and preferences. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent before the interviews. Sampling and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. After 25 interviews, no new concepts or categories emerged from the data. The interview transcripts were analyzed following the three-stage coding process of open, axial, and selective coding in accordance with the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory methodology. Ultimately, a paradigm model for the development of the Iranian wrestling business model was developed, comprising causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences.

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Table 1. Professional Background of the Interview Participants

Area of Expertise	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
University Faculty Members (Sport Management)	9	36
Managers and Officials of the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran	7	28
Wrestling Club Managers	5	20
Experts in Sport Business Management	4	16
Total	25	100

Table 1. presents the distribution of the study participants according to their areas of expertise. As shown, among the 25 participants, 9 (36%) were university faculty members specializing in sport management, 7 (28%) were managers and officials of the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 (20%) were wrestling club managers, and 4 (16%) were experts in sport business management. These participants were purposefully selected to ensure a combination of academic expertise and practical experience in sport management, sport business, and wrestling, thereby providing comprehensive and diverse perspectives on the research phenomenon. To assess the reliability of the interview coding, inter-coder agreement was employed. For this purpose, a Ph.D. candidate in Sport Management was invited to participate as a second coder in the coding process. Three interview transcripts were randomly selected and independently coded by both coders. The coding results were then compared, and the level of agreement between the two coders is presented in Table 2. The percentage of inter-coder reliability was calculated using the following formula. This procedure enhanced the credibility and dependability of the coding process and ensured the consistency of the identified concepts and categories.

Table 2. Inter-Coder Reliability of the Interview Data

Interview	Total Number of Codes	Number of Agreements	Number of Disagreements	Inter-Coder Reliability (%)
Interview 1	42	38	4	90.48
Interview 2	39	35	4	89.74
Interview 3	44	40	4	90.91
Total	125	113	12	90.40

Results

To analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, the systematic grounded theory approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was employed. In the first stage, following the complete transcription of the 25 interviews, open coding was conducted. Each interview transcript was examined line by line to identify meaningful statements, concepts, and ideas related to the research phenomenon. Each relevant statement was assigned an initial code that reflected its underlying meaning. The codes were continuously compared across interviews to identify similarities and differences in their meanings. Similar or conceptually related codes were then consolidated, while distinct codes were retained separately. For example, statements concerning the development of private-sector partnerships, attraction of industrial investment, and sponsorship opportunities were initially coded separately and subsequently compared based on their conceptual similarity. This process enabled the researchers to move from participants' statements to more abstract concepts while remaining grounded in the original interview data. Through this iterative process of identification, comparison, refinement, and consolidation, 150 initial open codes were generated from the 25 interviews. These open codes were subsequently used as the basis for the

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axial coding stage.

Table 3. Final Open Codes

Creating Sustainable Value for Iranian Wrestling	Development of Specialized Wrestling Infrastructure	Development of the National Wrestling Brand of Iran
Enhancing the Economic Value of Wrestling	Standardization of Wrestling Training Centers	Strengthening the Cultural Identity of Wrestling
Strengthening the Competitive Advantage of Iranian Wrestling	Equipping Training Facilities with Modern Equipment	Enhancing the Attractiveness of Wrestling Competitions
Enhancing the Position of Wrestling in the Sport Economy	Development of Regional Talent Identification Centers	Professionalization of the Wrestling League
Diversifying the Services of the Wrestling Federation	Establishment of Elite Wrestling Performance Centers	Improving the Quality of Competition Organization
Development of Specialized Educational Services	Development of Wrestling Research and Scientific Centers	Regular Organization of National Competitions
Providing Technical Consulting Services to Wrestling Clubs	Application of Research Findings in Decision-Making	Hosting International Wrestling Events
Establishment of a Comprehensive Athlete Service System	Establishment of an Athlete Information Database	Expanding Provincial Participation in Competitions
Enhancing Athlete Satisfaction	Implementation of a Wrestling Information Management System	Establishment of a Comprehensive Talent Identification System
Enhancing Coach Satisfaction	Continuous Monitoring of Athlete Performance	Identification of Talent at the Grassroots Level
Enhancing Referee Satisfaction	Application of Artificial Intelligence in Match Analysis	Supporting Elite Wrestling Talents
Increasing Fan Satisfaction	Digitalization of the Federation's Management Processes	Development of Wrestling Schools
Strengthening Stakeholder Trust in the Federation	Implementation of Performance Registration and Evaluation Systems	Strengthening Wrestling Academies
Effective Stakeholder Relationship Management	Development of Online Wrestling Education Programs	Enhancing Coaches' Knowledge and Competencies
Promoting a Culture of Organizational Accountability	Enhancement of Sports Information Security	Empowering Wrestling Referees
Expanding the Social Responsibility of the Wrestling Federation	Development of a Strategic Plan for Wrestling Development	Development of Specialized Wrestling Education Programs
Promoting Community Participation in Wrestling	Formulation of an Economic Vision for Wrestling	Updating Coaches' Technical Knowledge
Promoting Ethical Values in Wrestling	Strengthening the Federation's Planning System	Application of Sport Sciences in Wrestling
Strengthening the Culture of Sportsmanship in Wrestling	Data-Driven Decision-Making	Utilization of Technology in Training Programs
Developing Wrestling in Underserved Regions	Implementation of a Performance Evaluation System	Performance Analysis of Wrestlers
Promoting Equity in Access to Wrestling Facilities	Enhancing Transparency in Management Processes	Retention of Elite National Wrestlers
Reducing Regional Disparities in Wrestling Infrastructure	Improving Managerial Accountability	Transfer of Knowledge and Experience from Veteran Wrestlers
Expanding Equal Opportunities for Talented Athletes	Strengthening Coordination between the Federation and Provincial Wrestling Boards	Strengthening Athletes' Motivation
Ensuring the Sustainability of Wrestling Development Resources	Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation System for Strategic Programs	Improving Service Quality for Athletes
Enhancing the Economic Resilience of Wrestling	Effective Management of Resources and Facilities	Development of the Elite Athlete Pathway in Wrestling
Development of a Performance Evaluation System for the Wrestling Federation	Strengthening Collaboration with the Ministry of Sport and Youth	Attracting Sponsorship for Wrestling Events

Continuous Monitoring of Wrestling Development Indicators	Enhancing Cooperation with the National Olympic Committee	Expanding Partnerships with the Private Sector
Development of Economic Performance Indicators for Wrestling	Expanding Collaboration with Provincial Wrestling Boards	Industrial Investment in Wrestling
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Development Programs	Collaboration with Universities for Wrestling Development	Development of Sponsorship Incentive Packages
Continuous Improvement of Management Processes	Collaboration with Sport Research Centers	Diversification of the Federation's Revenue Streams
Risk Management in Wrestling Events	Attracting Industrial Participation in Wrestling Development	Development of Revenue Generated from the Wrestling League
Forecasting Future Investment Opportunities	Expanding Cooperation with Sport Media Organizations	Commercial Exploitation of Wrestling Competitions
Strategic Foresight for the Development of Iranian Wrestling	Collaboration with the Private Sector in Organizing Competitions	Commercialization of the Iranian Wrestling Brand
Development of Long-Term Development Plans	Attracting Domestic Investors	Marketing of Wrestling Merchandise
Institutionalizing a Planning-Oriented Culture	Expanding International Cooperation	Development of Wrestlers' Personal Branding
Strengthening the Financial Sustainability of the Federation	Establishing Partnership Agreements with Leading International Wrestling Federations	Professional Marketing of Wrestling Competitions
Optimizing Financial Resource Management	Organizing Joint International Training Camps	Utilization of Digital Marketing
Strategic Allocation of Budgets to Development Programs	Inviting International Coaches and Experts	Development of Venue Advertising for Wrestling Events
Enhancing Organizational Resource Productivity	Sending Coaches to International Training Programs	Increasing Wrestling Coverage in Mass Media
Development of a Sustainable Financing System	Exchanging Managerial Experiences with Successful Countries	Production of Specialized Wrestling Content
Establishment of a National Network of Wrestling Clubs	Strengthening Sports Diplomacy in Wrestling	Expansion of Social Media Activities
Strengthening Synergy among Wrestling Stakeholders	Establishing a Communication Network among Veteran Wrestlers	Strengthening the Federation's Media Relations
Establishment of a Wrestling Innovation Ecosystem	Engaging Elite Wrestlers in Federation Decision-Making	Enhancing Fan Engagement
Expanding Cross-Sector Collaboration	Utilizing the Capacity of Sport Philanthropists	Establishment of Wrestling Fan Clubs
Aligning the Objectives of the Federation and Provincial Boards	Establishing an Advisory Council of Wrestling Experts	Increasing Family Participation in Wrestling Events
Enhancing Good Governance in Wrestling	Supporting Innovative Ideas in Wrestling	Improving the Spectator Experience at Competitions
Strengthening Transparency and Administrative Integrity	Development of Wrestling-Related Sport Startups	Development of Welfare Services in Wrestling Venues
Increasing Investor Confidence in Wrestling	Establishment of Innovation Centers in Wrestling	Implementation of Online Ticketing Systems
Creating a Sustainable Competitive Advantage for Iranian Wrestling	Promoting Entrepreneurship in the Wrestling Industry	Development of Online Sales of Wrestling Merchandise
Achieving the Sustainable Development of the Iranian Wrestling Business Model	Development of Innovative Services for Wrestling Stakeholders	Enhancement of Wrestling's Public Image

Selective coding represents the final stage of the grounded theory analysis, during which the core category is identified and systematically integrated with the other categories to construct a coherent theoretical framework. At this stage, the relationships among the categories derived from the open and axial coding processes are validated, refined, and further developed where necessary.

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Consequently, selective coding serves as the foundation for theory generation by linking the central phenomenon with the causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences within the paradigm model proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In the present study, the results of the selective coding process led to the development of the business model development framework for Iranian wrestling. The final selective categories and their relationships within the paradigm model are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Final Selective Categories

Row	Selective Category	Constituent Open Codes
1	Central Phenomenon: Business Model Development of Iranian Wrestling	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 20, 25, 33
2	Technical and Elite Development of Wrestling	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 54, 55, 116, 123
3	Talent Identification and Athlete Development	14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 79, 80, 88, 89
4	Human Capital Development	21, 23, 24, 108, 109, 120
5	Enhancement of Athlete Welfare and Motivation	26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 84, 94, 136, 140
6	Financial Resource Development and Investment	32, 33, 34, 35, 91, 102, 104, 148, 149
7	Economic Development and Commercialization of Wrestling	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 50
8	Wrestling Marketing and Branding	42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 112
9	Fan and Media Relationship Management	51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 120, 121, 122
10	Infrastructure and Facility Development	57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65
11	Digital Transformation and Technology	66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 126, 127, 129, 130
12	Strategic Leadership and Governance	76, 77, 78, 81, 82, 83, 92, 95, 141, 142
13	Organizational Collaboration and Networking	85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91
14	International Cooperation Development	96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 143, 144
15	Sport Innovation and Entrepreneurship	101, 105, 106, 107, 108, 114
16	Value Creation and Service Development	110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 142, 147
17	Stakeholder Management and Trust Building	2, 26, 27, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119
18	Cultural Development and Social Responsibility	8, 120, 121, 122, 123
19	Equity and Balanced Development of Wrestling	124, 125, 128, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 140
20	Economic Sustainability and Organizational Resilience	۱۵۰, ۱۴۹, ۱۴۸, ۱۴۶, ۱۴۵, ۱۰۳

Overall, 20 final categories were identified through the grounded theory analysis. These categories were integrated into the following paradigm model, which illustrates the business model development framework for Iranian wrestling.

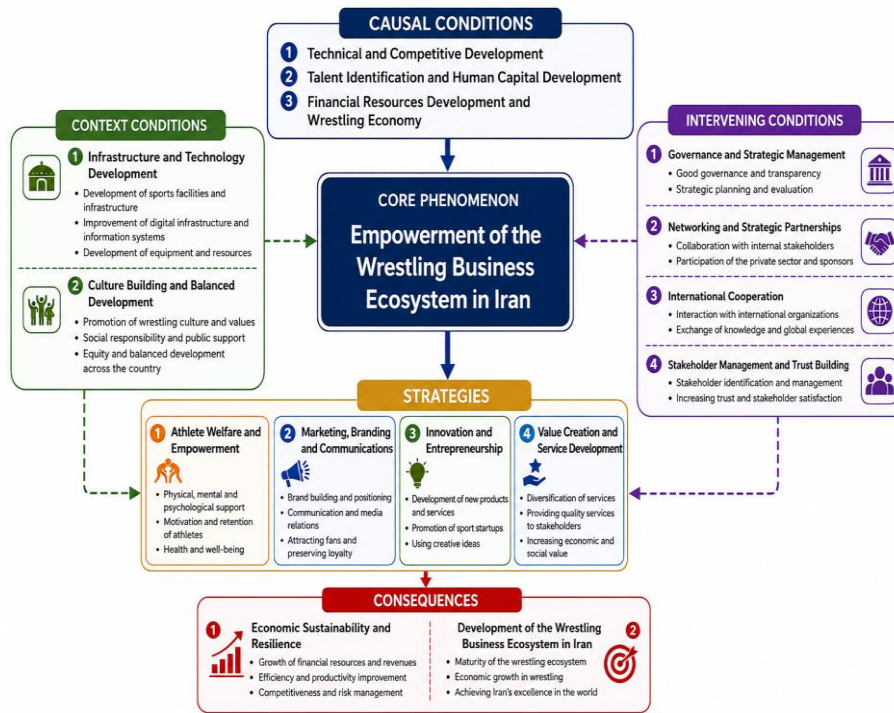


Figure 1. Paradigmatic Model of Wrestling Business Ecosystem Development in Iran Based on Strauss and Corbin

Discussion

The emergence of strategic leadership and management, innovation and entrepreneurship, financial resource development, marketing and branding, emerging technologies, and human capital development as causal conditions can be explained by the structural transition currently required in Iranian wrestling from a predominantly administrative model toward a more market-oriented and value-creating system. These conditions are theoretically interconnected: leadership determines the direction of organizational change, human capital provides the capacity to implement it, while innovation, technology, marketing, and financial resource development provide mechanisms through which organizational capabilities can be converted into new forms of value. Thus, their emergence as causal conditions suggests that business model development in Iranian wrestling is fundamentally a capability-reconfiguration process rather than simply a response to financial constraints. This interpretation is consistent with Dynamic Capabilities Theory proposed by Teece (2018), which emphasizes the reconfiguration of organizational resources in changing environments, and with Foss and Saebi (2017), who identify business model innovation as a process of organizational adaptation and transformation. The findings therefore extend these perspectives to the sport federation context by demonstrating that business model innovation requires the simultaneous development of managerial, human, technological, marketing, and financial capabilities. In contrast to the Business Model Canvas of Osterwalder and Pigneur (2013), which primarily explains the configuration of value creation, delivery, and capture, the present findings provide insight into the organizational capabilities that make such configuration possible. This interpretation also complements Zott, Amit, and Massa (2011), Bayle and Clausen (2025), and

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Chappelet (2021) by emphasizing that sustainable value creation in sport organizations depends on the transformation of internal capabilities rather than on isolated commercial activities.

The emergence of supportive policies and legal frameworks, sport governance, physical and digital infrastructure, the cultural and social status of wrestling, stakeholder participation, economic capacity, and private-sector collaboration as contextual conditions indicates that the development of a business model cannot be separated from the institutional environment in which the federation operates. These relationships can be explained by the fact that sport federations are embedded in regulatory, governmental, cultural, and stakeholder networks that directly influence their access to resources and their ability to commercialize activities. For example, even strong internal managerial capabilities may have limited effects when regulatory structures restrict private investment or when infrastructure is inadequate. Conversely, supportive governance and stakeholder networks can amplify the federation's capacity to transform its resources into economic and social value. This finding is consistent with Chappelet (2021), who argues that good governance and stakeholder coordination are prerequisites for sustainable sport development, and with Bayle and Clausen (2025), who emphasize the interaction between institutional environments, organizational resources, and collaborative networks. Lis (2022) similarly argues that business models in sport organizations must be aligned with institutional, cultural, and environmental characteristics, while Foss and Saebi (2017) and Teece (2018) emphasize the importance of contextual and organizational capacities for successful business model innovation. The theoretical contribution here is therefore the recognition of contextual embeddedness as an essential component of business model development in sport, suggesting that business model frameworks developed in conventional commercial organizations cannot be transferred directly to national sport federations without considering their institutional and cultural environment.

The identification of economic instability, financial constraints, regulatory and policy changes, international sanctions, managerial turnover, insufficient institutional coordination, governmental and private-sector support, and rapid technological change as intervening conditions indicates that the relationship between strategic intentions and business model outcomes is neither direct nor deterministic. These factors influence the extent to which the federation can convert its available resources and contextual opportunities into effective strategic action. In particular, uncertainty and resource constraints can reduce the federation's ability to make long-term investments, whereas managerial stability, technological readiness, and stakeholder support can increase its adaptive capacity. This finding can be interpreted through Teece's (2018) Dynamic Capabilities Theory, according to which organizations operating in uncertain environments require the ability to sense change, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources. It also supports Foss and Saebi (2017), who argue that business model innovation is contingent upon organizational and environmental conditions. Bayle and Clausen (2025) similarly demonstrate that sport federation performance is shaped by the interaction between internal resources and external institutional pressures. The present study extends these perspectives by showing that, within Iranian wrestling, intervening conditions function as mechanisms that determine the feasibility and effectiveness of business model implementation, rather than merely representing background environmental constraints. This distinction helps explain why the existence of appropriate strategies alone cannot guarantee successful business model transformation.

The emergence of revenue diversification, marketing and branding, private-sector partnerships, digital transformation, service innovation, human capital development, stakeholder relationship management, and good governance as strategic responses can be understood as a direct organizational response to the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions identified in the model. Their interconnected nature is particularly important. Revenue diversification requires commercial capabilities and private-sector relationships; these relationships depend partly on branding and stakeholder trust; and the effective delivery of new commercial and digital services requires appropriate human capital and technological capabilities. Consequently, the strategies identified in

the present study represent a coordinated system rather than a collection of independent managerial actions. This interpretation supports Osterwalder and Pigneur (2013), who emphasize continuous business model redesign, and Teece (2018), who argues that organizations must continually renew their business models in response to environmental change. It is also consistent with Foss and Saebi (2017), who identify business model innovation as a mechanism for organizational adaptation and performance improvement. Within sport management, Winand and Anagnostopoulos (2019) demonstrate the importance of organizational innovation and new service development, while Bayle and Clausen (2025) highlight revenue diversification, cross-sector collaboration, and professionalization as important drivers of sport federation development. The theoretical contribution of the present findings is that they conceptualize strategy implementation as a coordinated capability-building mechanism through which causal and contextual conditions are translated into business model innovation, thereby extending conventional approaches that treat strategic initiatives as separate components.

The emergence of financial sustainability, diversified revenues, a stronger national wrestling brand, increased private-sector participation, improved service quality, organizational innovation, stakeholder satisfaction, productivity, strengthened human capital, and competitive advantage as consequences indicates that business model development affects multiple dimensions of organizational value rather than financial performance alone. This relationship can be explained by the interconnected nature of the proposed model: when managerial capabilities, institutional conditions, and strategic responses operate coherently, they can simultaneously improve the federation's ability to acquire resources, create value for stakeholders, and enhance organizational performance. This interpretation is consistent with Osterwalder and Pigneur (2013), who conceptualize business models as mechanisms for creating, delivering, and capturing value, and with Teece (2018), who links business model renewal to organizational resilience and sustainable competitive advantage. Foss and Saebi (2017) similarly emphasize the performance implications of business model innovation, while Bayle and Clausen (2025) report that innovative business models can strengthen the financial, managerial, and organizational performance of sport federations. The theoretical contribution of the present study is therefore that it conceptualizes business model development in a national sport federation as a systemic value-creation process, in which financial outcomes represent only one dimension of a broader transformation involving organizational, social, sporting, and stakeholder value. Taken together, the paradigm model advances existing business model research by explaining not only the components of a sport business model, but also the causal mechanisms, contextual conditions, intervening factors, and strategic processes through which such a model can emerge and produce sustainable outcomes in the specific institutional context of Iranian wrestling.

Conclusion

The paradigm model developed in the present study demonstrates that business model development in Iranian wrestling is not a linear process driven by financial resources alone, but a systemic process resulting from the interaction of causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions, strategic responses, and organizational consequences. The originality of the proposed framework lies in integrating these dimensions into a context-specific, capability-driven model for a national sport federation, thereby moving beyond conventional business model frameworks that primarily focus on the configuration of value creation and value capture. The model theoretically contributes by explaining not only what components constitute a business model for Iranian wrestling, but also how and under what conditions these components can be developed and translated into sustainable organizational value. In particular, the integration of strategic leadership, innovation, human capital, marketing, technology, governance, stakeholder collaboration, and environmental constraints within a single grounded framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of business model transformation in a sport federation context. From a practical perspective, the proposed model provides a roadmap for transforming the Wrestling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran from

Commented [WU6]: Corrected according to the opinion of the esteemed referee.

a predominantly administrative orientation toward a more entrepreneurial, innovative, and value-oriented organization. Its practical contribution lies in connecting strategic initiatives such as revenue diversification, private-sector partnerships, commercialization, digital transformation, human capital development, and stakeholder management with the contextual and intervening conditions that may facilitate or constrain their implementation. Accordingly, the federation can use the model as a basis for long-term strategic planning, establishing a specialized business development unit, strengthening private-sector collaboration, commercializing tangible and intangible assets, enhancing managerial competencies, and implementing continuous performance monitoring. The Ministry of Sport and Youth can also use the framework to support investment facilitation, infrastructure development, financial policy reform, and stakeholder coordination. Overall, the proposed framework represents an original contribution by linking business model innovation with organizational capabilities, institutional context, and implementation mechanisms, providing both a theoretical explanation and a practical roadmap for the sustainable development and international competitiveness of Iranian wrestling.

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