# The Model of Digital Sports Diplomacy and National Branding of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Qualitative Analysis Based on Grounded Theory

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Today, sport has transcended its physical and competitive dimensions and has become a powerful instrument for fostering international interactions. This study aims to develop a model of digital sports diplomacy and national branding of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Method:** In terms of research strategy, this study is qualitative with an inductive approach and is considered fundamental research in terms of purpose. It was conducted using grounded theory based on the Strauss and Corbin (1997) approach. The participants consisted of 13 managers and experts knowledgeable in the field of digital sports diplomacy and national branding, selected through purposive and theoretical sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews.

**Results:** The findings revealed that digital platforms and social media serve as effective tools for enhancing digital sports diplomacy and conveying cultural and diplomatic messages. The results also indicated that alongside the numerous opportunities provided by digital sports diplomacy, certain challenges also exist.

**Conclusion:** Overall, the study demonstrated that digital sports diplomacy can serve as an effective tool for strengthening Iran's national brand. These tools particularly through athletes and celebrities as national symbols can significantly enhance Iran's global image. Strengthening digital infrastructure, ensuring effective management, the strategic removal of social media filtering restrictions, and training specialized human resources in this field are among the key recommendations of this study.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Digital Sports Diplomacy, Internet, National Branding.

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## Introduction

In today's world, sports diplomacy has emerged as one of the most important diplomatic tools, playing an effective role in strengthening international relations and advancing national interests. As a global arena, sport has evolved beyond its physical and competitive aspects into a powerful instrument in political, cultural, and social interactions. This capacity has become increasingly significant in a global environment where countries compete and interact to exert influence across various domains (Wong et al., 2023).

Through international sporting events, countries are able to communicate diplomatic and cultural messages to other nations and utilize athletes as cultural ambassadors to present a positive and attractive image of their national identity. This process contributes to improving international relations and, particularly for countries facing political and economic challenges, creates opportunities for soft power influence and strengthening global standing (Lemke & Hagber, 2020).

In this context, technological advancements and the emergence of digital platforms and social media have introduced new dimensions. These digital tools enable rapid and effective communication with global audiences, allowing countries to directly transmit their messages to millions worldwide. By utilizing platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, countries can actively participate in global conversations and enhance their international image (Lemke & Hagber, 2020).

Diplomacy has not remained separate from this transformation, leading to the emergence of the concept of "digital diplomacy," which now plays a significant role in international interactions (Korte, 2021). When digital diplomacy is combined with the unique capacities of sport, the concept of "digital sports diplomacy" emerges a modern model for effective engagement with global audiences (Bojola, 2020). This form of diplomacy facilitates direct and rapid communication among policymakers, athletes, institutions, and the public, offering new capabilities for managing diplomatic crises and promoting transparency (Fattahi et al., 2022).

Digital diplomacy has become an integral part of foreign policy and national branding strategies in many countries. Particularly in countries like Iran, which face challenges in international relations and domestic policy contexts, it offers new opportunities to improve global image.

One of the key objectives of this modern diplomacy is strengthening national branding. National branding refers to the set of characteristics, values, and identities that a country communicates to foreign audiences through its policies, actions, and diplomatic messages (Khademzadeh et al., 2018). This national brand shapes global perceptions and directly influences a country's international standing.

National branding encompasses not only cultural and social identity but also impacts tourism attraction, foreign investment, trade relations, and economic development (Dinnie, 2008). In this process, digital diplomacy provides innovative technological opportunities to promote national branding globally. Through digital media, countries can effectively communicate political and cultural messages, attract foreign audiences, strengthen cultural interactions, and potentially draw international investments and resources.

Countries increasingly strive to build a positive and powerful global image—a process conceptualized as "nation branding" (Jank et al., 2020). To attract investment, boost tourism, expand exports, and promote culture, countries must cultivate a favorable mental image among global audiences (Brendan et al., 2017; He et al., 2020). Nation branding serves this purpose, and sport especially in its digital and media-

driven form plays a key role in achieving it (Melin & Rainisto, 2009; Dinnie, 2008; Anholt, 2016).

Recent studies indicate that digitalization and modern media in sports diplomacy not only enhance countries' international image but also strengthen intercultural dialogue and raise public awareness of political and social issues (Jeong et al., 2024).

In recent years, digital sports diplomacy has gained particular importance in countries such as Iran, which face political and economic challenges. Given its regional and global position, Iran can leverage digital sports diplomacy as a tool to strengthen its international image. Prominent Iranian athletes and international sporting events can serve as effective instruments for national branding and diplomatic engagement, presenting a positive and compelling image of Iran globally (Abbaspour et al., 2024).

However, significant gaps remain in Iran's sports diplomacy framework. One major challenge is the absence of a unified and clear strategy. Iran also faces difficulties in utilizing digital capacities due to weak digital infrastructure, internet restrictions, and misalignment between domestic policies and international needs. Furthermore, insufficient specialized training and underutilization of digital platforms have reduced the effectiveness of sports diplomacy initiatives.

Currently, the national brand of the Islamic Republic of Iran faces less favorable perceptions globally, particularly in Western countries. Despite sporting and cultural achievements, Iran's national brand remains insufficiently recognized and is often portrayed negatively in media narratives. This situation necessitates redefining and strengthening Iran's national brand through digital sports diplomacy.

To examine the relationship between digital sports diplomacy and national branding, this study employs two key theoretical frameworks: Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and Simon Anholt's Nation Branding Model.

Nye's (2004) soft power theory emphasizes that countries can influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or economic pressure. From this perspective, sport especially in the form of sports diplomacy is a significant soft power tool because it fosters closeness among nations, creates positive narratives, and highlights cultural identity.

Anholt's (2007) nation branding framework posits that a nation's brand is the mental image held by foreign publics, shaped by exports, culture, people, governance, tourism, and investment. Nation branding is not merely a slogan but the outcome of real performance and international engagement. Digital sports diplomacy can effectively showcase national achievements, cultural identity, and social values on a global stage, thereby enhancing national brand perception (Dinnie, 2016).

The integration of these two frameworks enables a more precise analysis of how emerging technologies, social media, and sports narratives contribute to contemporary diplomacy. It also demonstrates how countries like Iran can design digital sports diplomacy strategies to strengthen international image, generate social and cultural capital, and secure a distinctive position in global nation branding competition.

Given existing gaps such as weak digital infrastructure and the absence of a unified strategy this research seeks to answer the following question:

What model can be proposed for digital sports diplomacy and its impact on the national branding of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

## Materials and Methods

The present study employed a qualitative research strategy with an inductive approach. In

terms of purpose, it is classified as fundamental research, and due to the limited depth of existing knowledge on the topic, it is exploratory in nature. Using grounded theory based on the Strauss and Corbin (1997) approach, this study sought to develop and present a model of digital sports diplomacy and national branding for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The research population consisted of managers, experts, and specialists active in the fields of digital sports diplomacy and national branding, or those possessing practical experience and specialized knowledge in these areas. Sampling was conducted purposefully; the researchers intentionally selected individuals who met the research objectives and possessed professional experience, managerial positions, or academic expertise in sports diplomacy, international relations, national branding, or communication technologies required for participation in the interviews.

As the study progressed, theoretical sampling was also employed. In theoretical sampling, the researcher simultaneously collected, coded, and analyzed the data during the interview process. Based on the emerging data and with the aim of improving the final model, additional participants were selected and interviewed. Ultimately, 13 individuals were interviewed, and theoretical saturation was achieved. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

Data were analyzed using the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1997) within grounded theory methodology. Accordingly, the data were examined through three coding stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The final model was then constructed based on causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening factors, strategies/interactions, the core phenomenon, and outcomes. MAXQDA software was used for data analysis.

The demographic characteristics of the interview participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table1- Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

| Symbol | Gender | Occupation | Education | Field of Study | Experience in the Field (Years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | Male | University Faculty Member | PhD | Sport Management | 20 |
| P2 | Female | Vice President of a Sports Federation | Medical Doctor (MD) | Medicine | 8 |
| P3 | Male | International Affairs Officer, Ministry of Sports | PhD | Microbiology | 5 |
| P4 | Male | Lecturer, University of California | PhD | Media Management | 12 |
| P5 | Male | University Faculty Member | PhD | Sport Management | 7 |
| P6 | Male | Secretary of a Sports Federation | PhD | Management and Planning | 5 |
| P7 | Male | University Faculty Member | PhD | Sport Management | 15 |
| P8 | Male | University Faculty Member | PhD | Management and Planning | 20 |
| P9 | Male | Former President of the Football Federation | Master’s Degree | International Business | 3 |
| P10 | Male | Secretary General of an | PhD | Sport | 5 |

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| | | International Sports Federation | | Management | |
| P11 | Male | Former Board Member, International Sports Journalists Association (Toronto) | Bachelor's Degree | Journalism | 5 |
| P12 | Male | International Relations Expert and Translator, International Olympic Committee | Master's Degree | Translation Studies | 8 |
| P13 | Male | University Faculty Member | PhD | Physiology | 16 |

## Results

In this section, the results obtained from the interviews were analyzed and examined. During the open coding process, which was carried out after transcribing the interview texts, the data were carefully analyzed and coded in detail. A large number of codes were initially extracted from the interview transcripts; however, after systematic review and refinement of the data, new codes were identified and the final codes were selected. The concepts derived from the interviews were categorized based on their similarities and relationships with other themes. In addition, identifying the categories, describing them, and constructing the open coding table were among the other stages of this research. In this section, the main objective was to extract the key points and issues that were most emphasized by the interviewees. A sample of the open coding results obtained from the interviews is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2- Sample code extraction from interview in the open coding stage**

| Open Code | Interview Text | Participant |
|---|---|---|
| P5 | The reality is that digital diplomacy is a very important tool for establishing international communication. These interactions occur through various digital platforms, which help eliminate distances and enable people from different parts of the world from athletes to artists to communicate with one another. When it comes to sports diplomacy, these interactions can significantly improve relations between countries. Sports diplomacy itself provides a suitable platform for reducing tensions and strengthening relations, but when this platform is combined with digital diplomacy, it can become even more influential. However, it is also important to refer to the role of traditional diplomacy, because if the groundwork and prior relations already exist, digital diplomacy can function much more effectively. At the same time, digital diplomacy can be seen as a double-edged sword. If it is not used properly, it can damage a country's national brand. For example, negative and extreme reactions that some individuals express in cyberspace can create a negative image of a country. This is particularly important when celebrity's express opinions in this space, as their behavior can significantly influence a country's credibility. These reactions do not only have domestic consequences; | The Role of Digital Diplomacy in International Relations<br><br>Sports Diplomacy and Its Impact on Relations Between Countries<br><br>Digital Diplomacy as a Double-Edged Sword |

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| | they can also shape global judgments about a country. Therefore, digital sports diplomacy can greatly contribute to strengthening a country's national brand, but this contribution depends on how this space is used and what kinds of behaviors are demonstrated. | |

Based on the first stage of coding, namely open coding of the interviews conducted with key informants, a total of 208 open codes were initially identified. After removing duplicate codes and conducting the final categorization, 106 open codes were ultimately extracted, which are presented in the tables that follow.

Axial coding represents the second stage of data coding. In this stage, the researcher groups the codes obtained from open coding into similar categories, and related phenomena are classified together. At this stage, using MAXQDA software and after integrating and categorizing the generated codes within each axial category, the selective codes including causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening factors, strategies, and outcomes were extracted.

In the section on identifying causal conditions, the coded output table generated by the software is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 – Casual Factors for the Lack of Promotion of Iran's National Brand Through Digital Sports Diplomacy**

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Ciding |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of access to high-speed internet | Weak Digital Infrastructure | Casual Factors |
| Under development of software infrastructures | | |
| Limited access to digital tools | | |
| Weak cybersecurity | | |
| Lack of coordination in the development of digital infrastructure among organizations | | |
| Absence of a documented strategy for digital diplomacy | Lack of Appropriate Policies in Digital Diplomacy | |
| Lack of integrated policies across different sectors | | |
| Lack of transparency in digital diplomacy objectives | | |
| Weak monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation | | |
| Lack of long-term planning for the development of digital diplomacy | | |
| Legal complexities in international cooperation | Legal Challenges in Aligning Regulations | |
| Incompatibility of domestic laws with international standards | | |
| Legal restrictions in interaction with foreign institutions | | |
| Lack of clear regulations for the use of cyberspace in diplomacy | | |
| Legal challenges related to data protection | | |
| Lack of awareness of digital tools and online platforms | Presence of Non-Specialist Managers in Sports | |
| Insufficient managerial skills in the field of digital diplomacy | | |
| Lack of connection with information technology specialists | | |
| Inability to analyze digital data and information | | |
| Weakness in designing and implementing digital strategies | | |

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| in sports | | |
| Failure to utilize social media for international communications | Inefficient Use of Digital Platforms in Sports Diplomacy | |
| Lack of attention to producing content suitable for global audiences | | |
| Limitations in digital advertising and branding in sports | | |
| Weakness in creating joint platforms for sports interactions | | |
| Lack of use of emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality in sports diplomacy | | |
| Lack of synergy among ministries and organizations | Weak Coordination and Cooperation Among Institutions Related to Sports Diplomacy | |
| Organizational disagreements in determining priorities | | |
| Absence of cooperation agreements among different institutions | | |
| Weak international interactions due to differences in approaches | | |
| Lack of coordinated structures in the management of sports diplomacy | | |

Then, the contextual factors that provide the conditions for the emergence of the phenomenon, along with the actions and strategies associated with these factors, were examined. By classifying and consolidating the related open codes, these factors were identified under axial and selective categories, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 - Contextual Factors in Promotion of Iran's National Brand Through Digital Sports Diplomacy**

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Ciding |
|---|---|---|
| Problems in accessing international platforms | Challenges of filtering and digital restrictions | Intervening Factors |
| Reduced freedom of expression in the digital space | | |
| Legal restrictions on the use of certain platforms | | |
| Difficulty establishing global communications due to filtering | | |
| The role of celebrities in shifting audience perceptions | Impact of celebrities' behavior on social media | |
| The impact of celebrities on building or damaging the national image | | |
| Lack of attention to the negative consequences of celebrities' posts and comments | | |
| Celebrities' lack of awareness regarding social responsibilities in cyberspace | | |
| Increased digital competition with other countries | International competition in digital sports diplomacy | |
| Focus on the digital strategies of rival countries | | |
| Inability to compete with global sports brands | | |
| Reduced effectiveness of the national brand due to global digital competition | | |
| Inability to adapt quickly to new technologies | Rapid technological changes | |
| Lack of up-to-date infrastructure for using modern technologies | | |
| Differences in the pace of technology adoption among countries | | |

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| Financial challenges in updating digital tools | | |
| Cultural limitations in accepting digital media | Distrust of the digital space | |
| Lack of trust in foreign digital sources | | |
| Concerns about privacy violations in cyberspace | | |
| Resistance to adopting digital technologies for cultural or political reasons | | |

The strategies for enhancing the national brand of the Islamic Republic of Iran through sports diplomacy have been identified and coded in this section, as presented in Table 6. These strategies constitute a significant part of the present study.

**Table 5 –Strategies for the Promotion of Iran's National Brand Through Digital Sports Diplomacy**

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Ciding |
|---|---|---|
| Strengthening international relations through sporting events | Hosting international sporting events | Strategies |
| Using international events to showcase the country's capacities | | |
| Organizing global sports competitions with the participation of international athletes | | |
| Extensive media coverage to introduce Iran's national brand at the global level | | |
| Promoting the national brand through advertising and supporting prominent athletes | Utilizing athletes and sports celebrities | |
| Using athletes' fame to attract global audiences | | |
| Involving celebrities in sports events and international activities | | |
| Strengthening Iran's positive image by supporting successful athletes in international arenas | | |
| Developing a comprehensive media strategy for digital sports diplomacy | Developing a media strategy for sports diplomacy | |
| Using social media and digital platforms to introduce the national brand | | |
| Creating engaging digital content tailored to global audiences | | |
| Participating in the production of television and digital programs related to sports | | |
| Creating educational programs for managers and experts in the field of sports diplomacy | Education and training of specialized human resources in the field of sports | |
| Developing specialized courses for digital skills in sports | | |
| Training athletes to use digital media effectively | | |
| Organizing workshops to strengthen communication skills in sports diplomacy | | |

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| Using sporting events to introduce Iranian culture and values | Strengthening Iran’s national brand through sports diplomacy | |
| Developing advertising campaigns to strengthen the national brand in the digital space | | |
| Creating international interactions to introduce Iran’s capabilities in the field of sports | | |
| Using sports as a tool to strengthen international relations and the national brand | | |
| Establishing cooperation agreements with international sports federations | Cooperation with international institutions and sports organizations | |
| Joining international sports organizations to strengthen Iran’s presence | | |
| Cooperating in joint sports and cultural projects with other countries | | |
| Using international opportunities to strengthen Iran’s image at the global level | | |

At this stage, the consequences of enhancing the national brand of the Islamic Republic of Iran through sports diplomacy were also identified, coded, and explained, as detailed in Table 6.

**Table 6 – Consequences of Promotion of Iran's National Brand Through Digital Sports Diplomacy**

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Ciding |
|---|---|---|
| Strengthening national identity | Improving the national brand and image at the global level | Consequences |
| Gaining recognition in the international arena | | |
| Enhancing political and cultural status | | |
| Influencing international relations | | |
| Increasing public awareness of the national brand | Increasing public awareness through sports branding | |
| Promoting cultural and social values | | |
| Improving the level of education in sports and culture | | |
| Strengthening the sense of social cohesion | | |
| Expanding cultural and social relations | Enhancing the country’s soft power | |
| Increasing cultural influence in the region and the world | | |
| Attracting international support on various issues | | |
| Creating diplomatic and cultural opportunities | | |
| Attracting foreign investment | Creating economic and social opportunities through digital sports diplomacy | |
| Creating employment in various sectors | | |
| Developing industries related to sports and media | | |
| Strengthening sports and economic tourism | | |
| Expanding international sports networks | Developing international participation and sports cooperation | |
| Enhancing joint cooperation with other countries | | |
| Strengthening the country’s sports capacities | | |
| Influencing global decision-making in the field of sports | | |

Finally, based on the results obtained from the open, axial, and selective coding processes, 26 axial codes were identified across the various categories and organized according to their thematic relationships. The final model of the study is presented in the figure below.

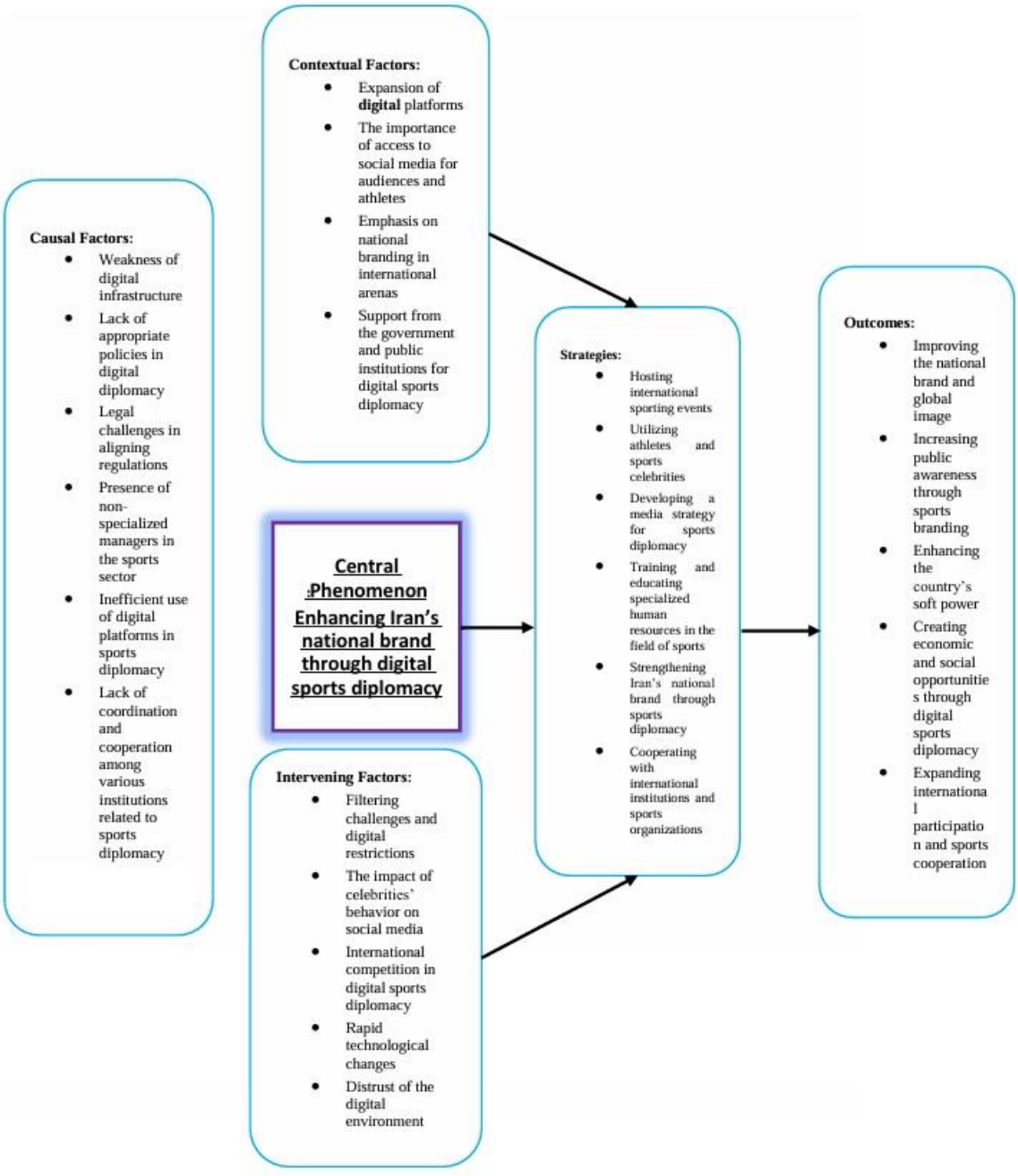


**Figure 1 - The Final Model for Enhancing Iran's National Brand Through Digital Sports Diplomacy**

This model clearly demonstrates that digital sports diplomacy plays a fundamental role in enhancing Iran's national brand and can be recognized as a key instrument for elevating the country's position at the global level. Considering the structure and various

components of this model, it first highlights that factors such as weak digital infrastructure and the absence of clear policies in this field have been identified as major obstacles to leveraging the potential of digital sports diplomacy. These issues may negatively affect the coordination and effectiveness of the country's digital diplomatic actions. Therefore, strengthening infrastructure and formulating coherent and integrated policies are essential for establishing effective global communication.

On the other hand, contextual factors such as the expansion of digital platforms and the importance of access to social media provide unparalleled opportunities for building international relationships and interactions. These underlying factors can create the necessary foundation for Iran's national branding and help shape a positive image of the country in global public opinion. In this regard, recognizing the significance of social networks and ensuring access to them for athletes and audiences can play a vital role in attracting global attention to Iran's sporting and cultural achievements.

Furthermore, the model identifies intervening factors such as filtering challenges, digital restrictions, and the impact of celebrities' behavior on social media. These barriers may hinder the achievement of digital sports diplomacy objectives. However, the strategic and effective use of celebrities and athletes can significantly strengthen the country's national brand. If these obstacles are addressed, they may create new opportunities for Iran at the international level.

Another important element of this model is the set of specific strategies designed to enhance the national brand. These strategies include not only the use of athletes and celebrities as cultural and sports ambassadors but also the hosting of international sporting events as one of the primary tools for strengthening national branding. Such events can serve as opportunities to introduce Iran and its culture to the world and, through the use of media and digital strategies, disseminate positive messages and images of the country globally.

Finally, the outcomes of this model indicate that digital sports diplomacy can contribute not only to improving Iran's national brand and global image but also to strengthening the country's soft power and generating new economic and social opportunities. The development of international partnerships and sports cooperation represents another significant achievement of this approach, fostering stronger global relations and collaboration across various fields. Overall, the model suggests that if Iran effectively leverages digital sports diplomacy, it can enhance its global standing and substantially reinforce its national brand.

## Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of developing a model of digital sports diplomacy and national branding for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this section, the findings are interpreted in light of the theoretical literature and previous studies in order to clarify their conceptual position within the academic framework. In addition, recommendations are proposed for more effective utilization of the results.

Digital sports diplomacy holds significant potential for enhancing Iran's national brand; however, in practice, it faces various obstacles. One of the most important barriers identified in this research is weak digital infrastructure, which directly affects the country's ability to establish effective digital communication with the global community. This limitation has prevented Iran from fully utilizing digital platforms to strengthen its sports and diplomatic relations. The findings in this regard are consistent with the results of Adesina (2017) and Hosseini et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of media in advancing

Iran's sports diplomacy. Similarly, Sefati et al. (2023) highlighted the role of digital platforms in strengthening sports diplomacy and international interactions, demonstrating that Iran still requires progress in the development and effective use of these platforms.

Moreover, the absence of coherent and documented policies in the field of digital diplomacy, legal challenges in international interactions, and weak coordination among institutions responsible for sports have hindered the optimal use of digital sports diplomacy. These findings align with the study of Hassanpour Ghadi and Doosti (2021), who emphasized the lack of a specific and appropriate policymaking model in the field of sports diplomacy in Iran.

The study also indicates that although Iran possesses substantial sports capacities, the absence of integrated and coherent strategies to utilize these capacities for national branding is one of the main reasons for the underutilization of digital sports diplomacy. In this context, the effective use of athletes and sports celebrities can contribute to strengthening Iran's national image in the digital sphere. Particularly on social media platforms, which have become powerful tools for global communication, Iranian athletes can serve as cultural and sports ambassadors of the country. On the other hand, challenges such as filtering and digital restrictions, which limit open access to international platforms, constitute significant barriers to enhancing Iran's national brand through digital sports diplomacy.

This research places considerable emphasis on hosting international sporting events and using them as instruments for strengthening the national brand. Organizing such events can not only introduce Iran as a credible host country at the global level but also provide opportunities to raise global awareness of the country's sporting and cultural achievements. Furthermore, developing appropriate media strategies for sports diplomacy and training specialized human resources in this field are among the key strategies that can facilitate the achievement of diplomatic objectives. These findings are also consistent with the study of Peymanfar et al. (2021), who demonstrated that sports diplomacy for development requires a focus on macro-level branding strategies, credibility enhancement, global engagement, and capacity building.

In addition, the findings show that the use of prominent athletes, sporting successes, and the hosting of sports events function as effective tools for national branding. These results are in line with the studies of Suveland (2020) and Sabzi et al. (2020), which highlighted the role of athletes as cultural ambassadors and their impact on national branding. Their research indicates that distinguished athletes can project a positive image of their country internationally. Governments, by utilizing digital spaces, have advanced sports diplomacy in line with their international objectives, making it a significant influencing factor. As noted by Khademzadeh et al. (2018), Iran has not yet fully capitalized on its national branding capacities. These findings suggest that more comprehensive planning and investment are required to effectively leverage these tools.

In conclusion, it appears that to fully exploit the capacities of digital sports diplomacy, Iran needs to strengthen its digital infrastructure, formulate clear and coordinated policies in this field, and establish effective international interactions. At the same time, the optimal use of celebrities, the organization of international sporting events, and attention to cultural and social considerations in digital spaces can significantly enhance Iran's national brand. Overall, digital sports diplomacy can serve as an effective instrument for improving Iran's global standing, provided that existing obstacles are addressed and opportunities are utilized strategically and intelligently.

## Conclusion

In this regard, it is recommended that the Islamic Republic of Iran adopt comprehensive and systematic measures in both digital and sports domains to enhance its national brand through digital sports diplomacy. The first step involves strengthening the country's digital infrastructure. Insufficient development of technological and digital infrastructure has been identified as a major factor limiting the optimal use of digital platforms in sports diplomacy. Therefore, improving access to high-speed internet and establishing specialized digital sports platforms can provide a suitable foundation for international engagement.

In addition, formulating appropriate digital diplomacy policies and aligning them with international regulations is another essential measure. This step is particularly necessary for fostering more effective communication with international institutions and improving the country's global reputation. Furthermore, the strategic use of celebrities and athletes on social media and other digital platforms can play a crucial role in Iran's national branding. The influence of these individuals in shaping a positive image of Iran and strengthening diplomatic relations can be considered a key factor in enhancing the country's national brand.

Among the other practical recommendations of this study is the promotion of cultural and social interactions with other countries and the attraction of international support across various domains. Moreover, hosting international sporting events and global competitions in Iran can create valuable opportunities to showcase the country's sporting and cultural capabilities. Ultimately, such initiatives can increase global awareness of Iran and contribute to improving its international standing.

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