



## Identifying the Prosperity Initiatives for Sports SMEs in Iran

Mahmoud Goodarzi<sup>1</sup> | Mohammad Hosein Ghorbani<sup>2</sup> | Ahmad Mahmoudi<sup>3</sup> |  
Saman Mehri<sup>4</sup>

1. Professor of Sport Management, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

Email: [mgoodarz@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mgoodarz@ut.ac.ir)

2. Ph.D. of Sport Management, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: [mohammad.ghorbani@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mohammad.ghorbani@ut.ac.ir)

3. Corresponding author, Assistant Professor of Sport Management, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: [ah.mahmoudi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:ah.mahmoudi@ut.ac.ir)

4. Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

Email: [saman.mehri@ut.ac.ir](mailto:saman.mehri@ut.ac.ir)

### ARTICLE INFO

**Article type:**  
*Original article*

**Article history:**

Received: 12 July, 2023

Received in revised form: 8  
August, 2023

Accepted: 10 August, 2023

Published online: 16  
February, 2024

**Keywords:**

Business support  
Entrepreneurship  
Sports SMEs  
Sports industry

### ABSTRACT

Small and medium industries are considered as the critical platforms for entrepreneurship growth. Examining and identifying initiatives for developing small and medium-sized sports businesses in Iran can greatly contribute to the progress of this field. Therefore, this research aims to identify the initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses in Iran. This study is a qualitative and exploratory research. The participants included faculty members in sports management, marketing, and managers and other sports experts interviewed through a purposeful sampling approach. To collect data, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted and finally theoretical saturation was achieved with 25 interviews. To analyze the data, the thematic analysis method was used. The results show that the initiatives for developing small and medium-sized sports businesses in Iran consist of five main categories, including “economic measures, communication-information initiatives, practical training, support structure, and internal organizational policies”. Finally, according to the initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses, it might be necessary to implement the necessary measures and appropriate programs in this field to deal with the situation efficiently.

## Introduction

It is argued that small and medium businesses are the core of any country's economy (Rezaei et al., 2015). Small and medium-sized businesses have attracted the attention of many countries and economic activists due to their nature, such as employment generation, unemployment rate reduction,

**How to Cite:** Goodarzi, M., Ghorbani, M. H., Mahmoudi, A., & Mehri, S. (2024). Identifying the Prosperity Initiatives for Sports SMEs in Iran. *Journal of New Studies in Sport Management*, 5(1), 1005-1018. doi: 10.22103/jnssm.2023.22164.1221



social impact, social cohesion, poverty reduction, increasing competitive advantage, national and regional development (Ginting et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2017; Rezaei et al., 2015). Many governments pay great attention to the mobility and activity of small and medium businesses. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that in recent years, the sports industry has been of the economic fields in which small and medium businesses have experienced relatively rapid growth. In other words, one of the fields that plays an increasingly important role in the economy of many countries is sports. The operation of sports businesses in England is estimated to be around 4.4 billion euros, which shows the importance of sports (Berrett et al., 1993).

Recent research showed that the demand related to sports activities was 700 million dollars annually (Kozechian et al., 2014). In such a way sports-related activities directly and indirectly supported more than 10,000 jobs in the local economy; Additionally, research has shown that in 2008, retail sales and business activities related to sports had sales of \$249 million. This amount of income in these businesses shows their high position in the country economy (Kozechian et al., 2014). According to studies conducted in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, India and Turkey, more than 70% of industrial units are small and medium-sized units while they play an essential role in the national economy, so that more than 50 % of national exports, 37% of the added value of the industrial sector and 57% of industrial workers belong to small and medium industrial units in these countries (Nashi Far et al., 2010).

One of the important consequences of the development of sports at micro and macro levels is the advent of many businesses in the field of sports. Management and planning, new technologies, sports services and advertisements, manufacturing of sports equipment, public and elite sports are among the desired fields for sports entrepreneurship (Foroghi-pour et al., 2007). Hence, sports entrepreneurs need a suitable platform to show their capabilities, and that's why small and medium industries are known as the crucial platform for the discovery, growth and development of entrepreneurs. For this reason, industrialized countries, entrepreneurial managers generally do not look for the large companies; Rather, they work in a place where they can easily implement their ideas and plans, and then, they try to start their work by building small workshops (Ahmadpour Dariani & Moghimi, 2021).

Salouneh et al., (2021) said that, in any business, it is important to have a market growth strategy and to adopt strategies for business prosperity in the time frames of the business life cycle. A market growth strategy is the method a company uses to achieve its goals for growth. Different companies follow different growth strategies and management practices, some of them prefer to remain small and some of them continue to operate with the aim of continuous growth and international operations. Even if a business has started successfully, growth should never be out of sight. Therefore, every businessman who wants to increase his wealth needs business growth (Salouneh et al., 2021).

The importance of small and medium businesses and its positive effects have been discussed a lot in various sources (Bui, 2009; Kessler, 2007). These businesses not only create new jobs but also prepare employees to acquire valuable skills and work experiences (Bui, 2009). These cases show the importance of the prosperity of small and medium businesses, but in developed countries such as Iran, there is no model and structured solutions for the prosperity of small and medium businesses (Attarian, 2007). Countries can be successful in business development that have defined and structured strategies for their businesses (Khatami Firouzabadi et al., 2018). One of the influential factors in progress in other countries is the analysis of business conditions and providing solutions for managing challenges and developing businesses in different fields (Davari et al., 2018).

Stating the activity importance of small and medium enterprises by researchers and politicians has caused this issue to be investigated from various economic, geographical, industrial, demographic, psychological and social, cultural and institutional factors (Arando et al., 2009). In recent decades and in most countries, these companies have become the main source of job creation, creativity and technology (Acs & Audretsch, 1989). In developing countries, small and medium-sized enterprises are responsible for employment and the main factor in reducing poverty, also, they supply manufactured products and even provide service activities on a wider level. Such companies account for more than 55% of GDP and more than 65% of total employment in high-income countries (Attarian, 2007). The competitiveness of small industries is higher due to the low price of its products

compared to similar products of large industries due to the possibility of producing diverse products, low cost of research and development, advertising and marketing (Pachava, 2018).

But reports show that about 20% of small and medium-sized businesses fail in the first year, and about 50% of companies in last 5 years; This is because of the challenges and obstacles they face (United States Census Bureau, 2021). One of the important issues of business development can be rules and regulations. In their research, Nobakht et al. (2015) concluded that there is a significant relationship between legality and the success of sports equipment and supplies businesses. It seems that a factor such as law and regulations creates advantages for businesses, and for this reason, from the point of view of business managers, it is important and effective in the success of small and medium sports businesses.

Company managers define legality as a platform for their success (Moe & Mikalsen, 2020). In this regard, the government regulations should be directed to the direction that obeying them will cause a competitive advantage and companies will touch their interests in applying the regulations and applying the law. In this regard, the support of the government in the macro dimension such as political, economic, social and cultural approaches and in the micro dimension such as taxes, corporate subsidies, cheap facilities and business strengthening policies is significant in the success of businesses. In the meantime, due to the general weakness of the sports industry in countries, especially Iran, sports companies need serious attention and support from the government. Therefore, it is expected that sports businesses, while developing a business plan, will learn about access to capital and information, marketing, new technologies, entrepreneurial skills and business network development, and receive government support (Nobakht et al., 2015).

Government regulations should be set in such a way that compliance with them will provide a competitive advantage and companies can pursue their interests in applying the regulations and applying the law. Regarding the relationship between access to capital and information and success, it seems that the unpredictable conditions in the Iranian market have moderated the trust of managers towards these valuable resources, and many managers have stated that the conditions of the Iranian market are unpredictable; also, past information cannot be trusted. Moreover, the economic nature and atmosphere of the country may diminish the role of these factors in the success of the sports business. Although information plays an important role in business success, the ability to use it depends on the business manager. In the current situation, the country's information infrastructure is not suitable for entrepreneurs (Mazloomi et al., 2016).

Research for the prosperity of small and medium businesses in other countries refers to things like improving legal factors such as employment, taxation, training and formalization (Ribeiro-Soriano & Galindo-Martín, 2012). On the other hand, Iran is one of the countries that is facing various challenges in the development of small and medium businesses due to specific environmental conditions and issues such as rising inflation, lack of proper participation of the private sector and low productivity (Davari et al., 2018). In the field of sports, due to the increasing unemployment of graduates of physical education and sports sciences and the general interest of the Iranian society in sports, the development of small and medium sports businesses has become an important issue (Ashouri et al., 2018). Sports in a country also mainly relies on small and medium businesses, which can allow many citizens to participate in sports activities of their choice and enjoy sports and physical activities on a daily basis (Sohili et al., 2019). The sports industry and its businesses need careful examination due to the importance they can have in society and industry. There is no comprehensive approach in this field and the gap of coherent research in this field is completely felt (Ghorbani et al., 2022).

Some sports businesses lost their sales market under the influence of the Corona virus pandemic and the reduction of social interactions. So that the fear of getting infected with Corona in sports environments caused a large percentage of people to stop attending sports spaces, especially clubs, and the business in this area was accompanied by a sharp decline. Meanwhile, many activists in this field have become absolute stay-at-home coaches; Trainers who do not have facilities such as insurance and other privileges. Some managers of sports businesses, who have to provide millions of dollars per month to the owners as rent, chose to leave instead of staying due to these conditions of closure and decrease in customers (Soheili et al., 2021). In addition to serious damage to sports, which is related to public health, this process can also cause recession, closure and bankruptcy of sports businesses. In order to overcome such difficult economic conditions, Iran's sports industry requires



the cooperation of all its sectors and the society, which requires initiatives that have a scientific basis (Goudarzi, 2023). In this regard, Webb (2021) states that there is still no specific initiative for the continuation of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Barcelona et al. (2015) believe that in order to reduce the damages, sports businesses should adopt a procedure or system that minimizes the damages caused by a crisis and enables their survival. These steps can be implemented in the form of a specific plan, which is generally known as an emergency plan.

In another study, Lee (2021) conducted a study on sports retailers. In this research, it was reported that marketers should try to find out what sports customers are looking for. They know that one way to increase the willingness of customers to buy their products is to explore the specific things that customers look for and enjoy in sports. Finally, this study states that more marketers should apply sport psychology concepts to understand consumer purchase intentions in specific retail stores. In the research of Ahmadi et al. (2020), it was reported that three dimensions called “structural, contextual, and social and support” dimension are the framework for controlling and compensating financial losses in the sports industry. The research of Bararzadeh, et al. (2019) showed that resources, equipment, orientation and organizational vision, background conditions, application of knowledge, communication in the organization, speed of response, group participation in the organization, use of technology and administrative automation and the use of information management systems as causal conditions, while employees' characteristics, management skills and organizational structure as intervention conditions has an effect on managers' behavior in benefiting from knowledge management in sports businesses. Brakhas et al. (2021) conducted a research in the field of “business management during the crisis: factors, challenges and strategies in the sports industry”. The results indicated three levels, including contextual-environmental, structural-capability and process-functional levels, whose sub-group variables are sequentially related to each other. Hakem (2019) noted that social networks have an effect on the performance of sports business. The results of Soheili et al. (2021) confirmed a model in 7 main factors including “systemic approach, compensatory strategy, e-government, non-governmental organizations, crisis management policy, crisis governance and media support”. The results of Menne et al.'s (2022) research show that human resource capacity and business diversity affect the financial performance of small and medium-sized companies. In another research, the results of Ahonen (2022) showed that the challenges in sports companies can be related to the lack of entrepreneurship due to professionalization, business growth, social entrepreneurship and internationalization. The results of Yorke (2023) showed that small and medium businesses and sports organizations operate in increasingly challenging environments, which have increased due to Covid-19, and they need innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to overcome it. The results of Fenton et al. (2023) showed that social networks can increase entrepreneurship in small and medium-sized sports companies and provide tools and guidance for entrepreneurs. Also, this issue makes small and medium companies understand consumer interactions better.

Today, limited research has been conducted on the development of small and medium businesses in Iran, and specific solutions have not been provided in this field. Based on the observation of researchers, comprehensive and codified solutions have not been provided in the field of small and medium sports businesses. This is despite the fact that sports is one of the most promising fields in the entrepreneurship sector of countries, especially Iran (Foroghi-pour et al., 2019). Therefore, according to the different conditions of small and medium-sized sports businesses, there would be necessary to develop a structured plan and solutions for the prosperity of small and medium-sized businesses.

It is not just that there is such a broad interest in sports that justifies sports business management as a separate field of study. Rather, the issue is that sports products or services enjoy unique features and the sports market is the cultural and collective assets of the society that pursues the sports and cultural goals that are considered as the mission of the clubs. For example, football is more than just a business. Football clubs promote sports success and gradually act as commercial businesses, and the different cultural and sporting missions they have make them different from ordinary businesses. (Hassan, 2018).

The owners of small and medium sports businesses and all relevant organizations and managers need specific initiatives and strategies for proper growth and prosperity, so that they can manage

various challenges and issues when they arise. Achieving various business goals is based on having specific plans and initiatives so that the business can thrive in various activities and pursue sustainable economic and social development. Based on what has been said and according to the investigations, there is a research gap in the field of providing initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses. Therefore, researchers are looking for answers to this main question i.e. what are the initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses in Iran?

## **Methodology**

This study is an applied research. This research is based on the strategy of a qualitative research and is analytical and exploratory. In this research, thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. The community of participants was formed by all the experts in the field of marketing and sports economics, in two scientific and executive groups. These people include faculty members of sports management, marketing, and also the managers and sports experts.

The number of participants was 25 people. The sampling method in this section was purposeful, and the interviews were continued until the theoretical saturation stage. The interviews were conducted through a combination of audio and video interviews through social and face-to-face spaces. The interviews lasted between 25-50 minutes and the average duration of the interviews was 30 minutes.

After taking the interviews, the raw data were studied and reread in several stages to be coded for the first time. After that, it was started to extract the main categories and possible sub-categories, and the codes that had more semantic affinity with each other were placed in one category. After several stages of revision, the classification and naming of the main and subcategories was ensured.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the necessary checks including acceptability, transferability and verifiability have been carried out. Then to increase acceptability, review methods were used by the participants. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the necessary checks such as acceptability, transferability and confirmability have been carried out (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The codes extracted in the findings for the development of small and medium-sized sports businesses were evaluated in the review by real participants and represented the issues that can accelerate the development of businesses. In the review, the experts acknowledged that the cases identified in most sports businesses and different environments can be generalized. In addition to this, the research path was also logical in obtaining the findings in the review of experts, and the path of open codes towards core codes and the main concept was clear and unambiguous. Finally, the actions taken by the researcher were understandable and verifiable for the experts. Also, using the re-coding method, 20% of the interviews and documents were coded by another researcher from the team, and with the help of Scott's formula, the agreement coefficient was calculated as 81%. Considering that this reliability rate is more than 60%, the reliability of coding is confirmed and acceptable. to analyze the data, an inductive approach was used in thematic analysis, based on the six-step model of Braun & Clarke (2006).

Based on this method, there are six steps including 1. getting to know raw data; 2. extracting primary codes; 3. searching for main themes; 4. revising themes; 5. defining and naming themes; and 6. interpreting themes based on the main question. After taking the interviews, using the open coding method, the main and subcategories of the initiatives for the development of small and medium sports businesses in Iran were coded and categorized. Finally, it's worth mentioning that MAXQDA 2022 software was used to do the final analysis.

## **Results**

The demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1. The results of descriptive statistics show that most of the participants in the research are male (72%). Also, most of the participants are in the age group of 41 to 50 years (44%). The education level of most of the research participants is doctoral (56%) and finally, most of the participants are managers in sports business (32%).

**Table 1.** Demographic of participants

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	% Frequency
Gender	Male	18	72%
	Female	7	28%
Age	To 30 years 20	2	8%
	To 40 years 31	8	32%
	To 50 years 41	11	44%
	Over 50	4	16%
Education	B.A.	3	12%
	M.A	8	32%
	P.H.D	14	56%
Expertise	University professor	7	28%
	Business manager	8	32%
	Marketing expert	3	12%
	Active in the sports industry	7	28%

After conducting 25 interviews, and analyzing the interviews, the results were coded and categorized. After summarizing, consolidating and integrating the codes that were semantically and conceptually in common, a total of 105 (open codes) effective initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses in Iran were identified, and these factors were identified in 15 core codes and 5 main concepts were categorized as described in the table below.

**Table 2.** Effective initiatives for the prosperity of SMEs

Main theme	Subtheme	Open codes
		Synchronization of businesses with the economy of the country and region
	Improving the economic structure	Increasing the degree of the country Open economy
		Macroeconomic reforms of the country
		Increasing interest in the stock market among people
		Transparency of prices in the country
	Inflation management	Controlling the exchange rate fluctuations in the country
		Inflation management
		Reforming the tax system ruling the country
		the country's economic stability
		Managing the economic conditions of the sports market
		Creating a platform for attracting foreign investment
Economic measures	Facilitating investment	Promoting investment for the development of sports businesses
		Access to capital for the development of sports businesses
		Increasing the quality of the investment space for sports businesses
		Increasing government investments for business development
		Appropriate financing for sports businesses

<b>Communication- information initiatives</b>	Improving the interaction and communication atmosphere	Creating communication opportunities for business investment
		Providing financing consulting services to sports businesses
		Providing credit guarantees for sports businesses
		Coordination of support activities for organizations supporting sports businesses
		Appropriate communication structure between human resources of sports businesses
		Appropriate cooperation between the government and private sector businesses
		Facilitating cross-border trade for sports businesses
		Effective presentation of small and medium sports businesses in national and international circles
		Constructive interaction of businesses with advanced scientific and industrial centers globally
		Sports science faculties becoming more active in the field of entrepreneurship
		Proper communication between faculties of sports sciences and industry
		Strengthening the cooperation of scientific, educational, research and industrial sports centers of the country
		Open cooperation and exchange of information between different sports businesses
		Appropriate information about the new policies of the government in businesses area
		Creating the possibility of businesses learning from each other
	Creating a computer database for business cooperation	
	Information technologies for information exchange at intra-organizational and inter-organizational level	
	Availability of necessary data and information	
	Increasing data analysis skills in businesses	
	Specialized and advanced analytical consultations to businesses	
	Development of information analysis skills	Counseling to businesses to analyze business opportunities
		Improving the ability of research and development
		Supporting the applied research and development in the units
		developing technology through the participation of universities and research institutes
		Increasing business assessment capabilities
		Increasing the skill of identifying the main competitors
	Educational development	Educational programs for employment in sports
Consulting service centers for sports businesses		
Establishing sports commercial unions		
Providing educational experiences in the field of sports businesses		
Preparing the training facilities for sports businesses		
Educating the sports business development		
publications about the success of sports entrepreneurs		
Holding meetings with the presence of sports business managers		
Holding sports entrepreneurship seminars		
Holding various entrepreneurship training events		
Practical training	Holding educational events	
	Holding a conference and presenting new ideas	
	Holding entrepreneurship and business idea competitions	
	Preventing unbalanced and unfair public-private competition	



<b>Supportive structure</b>	Create a healthy environment	Creating a competitive environment in the sports market and industry
		Reducing corruption in the sports industry
		Preventing low-quality sports products to be imported
		Preventing the smuggling of sports products into the country
	Financial support for businesses	Development of government support policies in the field of sports businesses
		Long-term loans with reasonable interest
		Bank loans to support business
		Cooperation of banks in providing financial resources and granting facilities
		Giving awards to the best businesses
		Creating a specialized sports business accelerator
		Amending and revising the laws related to establishing a business
		Facilitating licensing for sports businesses
		Removing obstacles for new business creators
		Creating suitable environments for business growth from a legal point of view
	Creating a supportive environment	Creating a suitable environment for the development of entrepreneurship
		Amendment of copyright and intellectual property laws
		Amendment of trade and commercial laws and regulations protecting the resources of sports businesses
		Facilitating success conditions for sports businesses
		Assistance to sports businesses in crises and special economic conditions
		Establishing an organization for the development of sports businesses
Effective marketing	Designing a sports business development plan	
	Entering regulation to support the development of sports products and services	
	strong advertising and marketing in sports businesses	
	Designing a successful marketing plan by sports businesses	
	different marketing-advertising campaigns by sports businesses	
	The ability of sports businesses to identify new markets	
	a suitable distribution and supply channel	
	Consultation and cooperation with experts to develop marketing skills	
	Entering the area of international marketing	
	The skill of sports businesses in managing fluctuations in supply and demand	
<b>Internal policies</b>	Improving infrastructure and resources	Smart opportunism of sports businesses
		Responding to the new customers' needs in sports
		Appropriate quality of sports products and services
		The ability to produce quality sports products and services
		Improving management and quality control of sports business
	Work space improvement	Improving the quality of sports business infrastructure
		Designing a system for surveying sports business customers
		Developing responsibility and commitment of people involved in sports business
		Developing human resources capabilities and skills of sports business
		Availability of skilled human resources for sports business



Improving the electronics capability	Creating favorable working conditions to increase the morale of sports business employees
	Flexibility of work environment in sports business
	Improving employment and working conditions in sports businesses
	Activating sports businesses in social networks
	Creating electronic capabilities and electronic marketing in sports businesses
	Involving sports businesses in international e-commerce
	Amending the e-commerce law to fully cover the activities of sports businesses in cyberspace
	Keeping businesses up-to-date with social media changes
	Developing virtual technological capacities and innovation of sports businesses

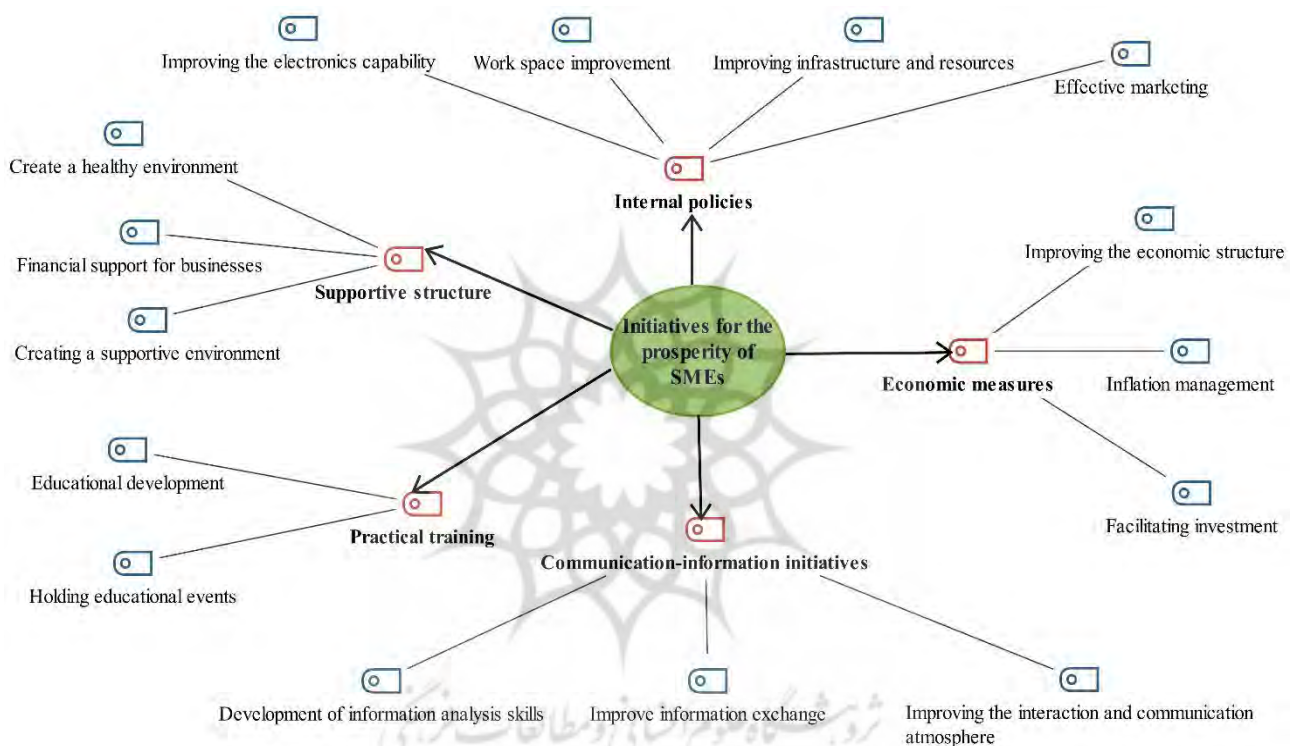


Figure 1. Effective initiatives for the prosperity of SMEs

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the initiatives for the prosperity of small and medium sports businesses in Iran were identified. The first main concept was called economic measures, which included three core codes consisting of improving the economic structure, managing inflation, and facilitating investment. Mazloomi et al. (2016) in their research state that Iran's market conditions are unpredictable and past information cannot be trusted. The economic nature and atmosphere of the country can also reduce the probability of sports business success; Therefore, there would be needed to improve the economic structure. Nobakht et al. (2015) consider the reasonable taxes, corporate subsidies, facilities and business promotion policies to be effective in the success of businesses. The believe every business needs a suitable economic structure for growth in the first step, because there needs to be a balance between cost and income. In addition, capital return and its rate are important issues for the prosperity of a business. In this sector, creating economic stability in the country, controlling exchange rate fluctuations, adjusting and reforming the tax system, and price transparency are important issues.

In sports areas, these issues are more important because sport is tied to innovation and new services. This innovation occurs when there is a proper economic structure and it is possible for businesses to take risks. For example, sportswear market is known not only as a sports market but also as a fashion market. It is necessary to provide up-to-date changes in this area in line with the needs of the audience. Another important issue is that sports are still not considered as a profitable industry. For this reason, no priority is given to investing in the development of sports businesses and increasing the quality of the investment space for sports businesses. In his research, Webb (2021) talks about the lack of initiatives for the success of small and medium sports businesses. Barcelona et al. (2015) believe that to survive sports businesses, goals need to be implemented in the form of a specific program. Sports businesses should have a suitable and transparent business plan to attract capital. The needs and expectations of the business should be compiled and the reasons for the possibility of achieving the goals and the plans to achieve the goals should be stated. Venture capitalists, crowdfunding, angel investors and accelerators will be encouraged to invest by seeing an attractive idea and business plan. Acquiring the hosting of prestigious international events in popular disciplines can also be effective in attracting foreign investors for sports businesses.

The second main concept was called information-communication initiatives, which included three core codes named improving the space of interaction and communication, improving information exchange, and developing information analysis skills. In their research, Isensee et al. (2020) state that in order to cultivate proper communication in business, it would be necessary to pay attention to organizational culture. Strategic orientation, internal capabilities, management and attitudes are crucial in developing organizational culture. Mahdavi et al. (2018) believe that business and its managers need to provide a suitable space for intra-organizational and inter-organizational communication.

Zain and Ng (2006) to develop international business communication believe that initial credibility, the possibility of access to additional relationships and established channels, help to reduce costs and reduce risk in the internationalization of business. In this way, sports businesses need to have proper communication with their stakeholders within their activity area. In this section, they need to pay attention to their target market and monitor the activities of their competitors to make the best decision for their business by gathering the right information. Categorizing customers and providing appropriate services to them is one of the actions that must be done. Hence, the availability of necessary data and information helps to improve the ability of research and development and the possibility of developing technology with the participation of universities and research institutes.

The third main concept was called practical education, which included two core codes called educational development and holding educational events. Scientific and practical content is one of the things mentioned in the research of Rezaei et al. (2022). According to Ranjith & Kulkarni (2018), adjusting trainings to the real needs of society is one of the important issues in the way of business improvement. Putro et al. (2022) believe that training in businesses can be in the field of internal social capital, such as cultivating the right attitudes and norms, or in the field of external social capital, such as negotiation skills with business stakeholders. By holding educational meetings and events, it can help a lot in developing the sports businesses. Holding sports entrepreneurship seminars, building consultative service centers for sports businesses and providing educational experiences in the field of sports businesses can be useful in this field. Sports entrepreneurship can be taught to students of physical education and sports science as one of the courses. Of course, the usefulness of the entrepreneurship training course lies in its practicality, which is currently not provided. Publishing and journals about the success of sports entrepreneurs and producing appropriate media content is very useful in the development of sports businesses.

The media's acceptability and penetration rate can play an important role in promoting entrepreneurship, developing the attitude, knowledge and skills of people interested in sports entrepreneurship. Holding various events in the sports industry allows businesses to communicate more with the people interested in their field of activity. In these events, it is possible to effectively introduce small and medium sports businesses in national and international circles. Also, the proper connection between sports science faculties and industry, strengthening the cooperation of scientific, educational, research and industrial sports centers of the country, proper cooperation between the

government and private sector businesses, making sports science faculties more active in the field of entrepreneurship are all some of the things that can be effective in this area.

The fourth main concept was called supportive structure, which included three core codes consisting of creating a healthy environment, financial support for businesses, and creating a supportive environment. In their research, Nobakht et al. (2015) state that a factor such as law and regulations creates advantages for businesses, and for this reason, it is important and effective in the success of small and medium-sized sports businesses. Pulka et al.'s research results (2021) show that government support for businesses directly affects the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. There is no suitable environment for the competition of sports businesses in the country. Because many of the governmental sports businesses, are not fully private and take advantage of benefits behind the curtain. This makes it very difficult for private businesses to compete. Many people and different groups use economic rent to import some goods that cause problems for the production of sports businesses inside the country. Preventing the low-quality sports products to be imported and preventing the smuggling of sports products into the country can be helpful in this regard.

In their research, Qamber Ali et al. (2014) state that if the government provides financial support to entrepreneurs, the progress of activities will be done more quickly and many existing obstacles in the way of entrepreneurs will be removed. The development of sports businesses requires the support of the government and the formulation of laws and regulations to support sports businesses. In this context, it can be useful to formulate regulations for federations, boards and sports clubs to purchase sports items and goods in their own region. Creating a suitable platform for the establishment of sports manufacturers in the country's large sports complexes in order to facilitate the distribution and consumption of domestically produced goods and products and to prevent excessive import of foreign sports goods that are similar to domestic production among other things that can be effective in this field. Of course, just drafting the law is not enough, and the more important issue is the necessary and sufficient attention and effort to monitor the implementation of the existing laws. The lack of a systematic attitude regarding various support tools and the lack of a headquarters institution to monitor the process and the result of the support provided are among the fundamental flaws of this way of legislation in supporting businesses. Eliminating cumbersome rules for sports business activities, providing long-term loans with suitable interest for businesses, and facilitating bank credits are other things that need attention for the prosperity of sports businesses.

The fifth main concept was named intra-organizational policies, which included four core codes of effective marketing, improving infrastructure and resources, improving work space, and promoting electronic capabilities. In his research, Lee (2021) states that marketing needs to be based on customer demand. Marketers should strive to find out what sports consumers are looking for. On the other hand, in recent years, digital marketing and social network marketing is a strategy that can help improve small businesses to be survived (Wamba and Carter, 2014). Many small business owners do not consider social media marketing when developing digital marketing strategies (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). While a prominent presence in the digital world is very important to increase the online market share in businesses (Shiver, 2022). Producing high-quality content, creating organic traffic, holding various marketing-advertising campaigns by sports businesses can be very helpful in the development of sports business. Involving the sports businesses in international e-commerce and keeping businesses up-to-date with changes in social networks are other things that can be effective in the prosperity of sports business. Competency of employees, adjustability, compatibility, connection, speed, segmentation, facilities and innovation of technology are among the main axes of development of information technology infrastructure in sports complexes (Jalilvand et al., 2021).

Brarzadeh et al. (2018) showed that resources, equipment, orientation and organizational vision can be effective in the success of businesses. In the research of Sadeghi Arani and Alidoost Qahfarkhi (1400), mixed marketing management, process management, organizational resource management and management of strategic actions are important management factors that are mentioned for sports businesses. Mazloomi et al. (2016) state that the current country's information infrastructure is not suitable for entrepreneurs and there is a need to improve this infrastructure.

The development of communication, technology, human and financial resources are factors that help improve the business environment. When the sports business does not have access to the



infrastructure, it usually cannot provide the new needs of customers. Because, it needs a proper technological and financial infrastructure. For example, consider the sports business that acts as an intermediary between producers and consumers of sports. When a new and necessary feature in the online user experience is created, the business also needs to be equipped with this feature. It is said that a business can be successful if it has the ability to take a billion loan to develop its capabilities or at least enjoys high-quality human resources that can design the desired service for customers. However, infrastructure development will be more effective if it is based on market demands and feedback.

## Acknowledgments

The current research is indebted to the cooperation of experts in the field of marketing and sports economics, sports management professors and experts in the sports industry, who provided considerable help in completing the interviews. The researchers sincerely appreciate and thank this cooperation. This research work has been done under the support of the Presidential Science and Technology Vice Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The researchers are grateful for the financial support of the Presidential Science and Technology Vice Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran in conducting this research.

## References

- Acs, Z. J., & Audretsch, D. B. (1989). Births and firm size. *Southern Economic Journal*, 467-475.
- Ahmadi, M., Esfahani Nia, A., Nodehi, M., & Ahmadi, M. (2020). Develop a framework for controlling and compensating for financial losses in the sports industry (Case study: Coronavirus outbreak in Iran). *Contemporary Studies On Sport Management*, 10(20), 97-110.
- Ahmadpour Dariani, M., & Moghimi, S. M. (2021). *Fundamentals of entrepreneurship*. Fardish Publishing, Tehran.
- Arando, S., Peña, I., & Verheul, I. (2009). Market entry of firms with different legal forms: an empirical test of the influence of institutional factors. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 5, 77-95.
- Ashouri, T., Dosti, M., Razavi, S. M. H., & Hoseini, A. (2022). Strategies for developing sports entrepreneurship opportunities at the macro level. *Public Policy In Administration*, 12(4), 125-142.
- Attarian, A. (2007). Improving the export competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (EMES). *Commercial Surveys*, 11(27), 105-110.
- Bararzadeh, H., Razavi, S. M. H., Sajjadi, S. N., Amirnejad, S., & Mohammadi, N. (2019). An Analysis of the Factors Affecting Managers' Behavior to use Knowledge Management in Sporting Businesses. *Organizational Behavior Management in Sport Studies*, 6(2), 11-24.
- Barcelona, R. J., Wells, M. S., & Arthur-Banning, S. (2015). *Recreational sport: Program design, delivery, and management*. Human Kinetics.
- Berrett, T., Burton, T. L., & Slack, T. (1993). Quality products, quality service: Factors leading to entrepreneurial success in the sport and leisure industry. *Leisure Studies*, 12(2), 93-106.
- Brakhas, H., Boroumand, M. R., Dastoom, S., & Bozorgpour, B. (2021). Business Management in Crisis Period: Factors, Challenges and Strategies (Study of the sports industry in record conditions caused by Coronavirus). *Sport Management Studies*, 13(66), 297-326.
- Bui, C. T. (2009). *Discovering the factors for organizational success: An investigation of learning organization attributes within minority-owned small businesses in New England*, Capella University.
- Davari, A., Ramezanpor Nargesi, G., Afrasiabi, R., & Davari, E. (2018). Effect of entrepreneurship and business environment policies on entrepreneurship development. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, 11(2), 321-339.
- Foroghi-pour, H., Mozafari, S. A., Ashraf Ganjavi, F. (2007). Evaluating and introducing the most important entrepreneurial priorities in sports from the point of view of the country's sports practitioners. *Research in Sports Sciences*, 5(16), 55-68.
- Ghorbani, M. H., Keshgar, S., Honari, H., & Shabani, G. (2022). Identifying Affecting factors development of applied science Faculty of physical education and sports by Meta syntheses approach. *Applied Research in Sport Management*, 11(2), 13-39.



- Ginting, S., Mei, P., Fitriana, N., & Muda, I. (2019). Analysis of Boiler Operation Workload in Salted Fish Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering.
- Goodarzi, M. (2023). *Identifying the factors affecting the prosperity of small and medium-sized sports businesses in Iran and providing solutions*, Presidential Science and Technology Vice Presidency.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.
- Hakem, E. (2019). *The effect of social networks on the business performance of sports clubs with the mediating role of entrepreneurial awareness and knowledge acquisition*, Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences. Tabriz University.
- Hassan, D. (2018). *Managing sport business: an introduction*. Routledge.
- Hassan, S., Nadzim, S. Z. A., & Shiratuddin, N. (2015). Strategic use of social media for small business based on the AIDA model. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 172, 262-269.
- Isensee, C., Teuteberg, F., Griese, K.-M., & Topi, C. (2020). The relationship between organizational culture, sustainability, and digitalization in SMEs: A systematic review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 275, 122944.
- Jalilvand, J., Sharifian, E., & Ghahreman Tabrizi, K. (2021). Tree Model of Information Technology Infrastructure Development in Sport Organizations from Physical Education and Sport Expertise's Point of View. *Sport Physiology & Management Investigations*, 12(4), 97-113.
- Kessler, A. (2007). Success factors for new businesses in Austria and the Czech Republic. *Entrepreneurship and regional development*, 19(5), 381-403.
- Khatami Firouzabadi, S. M. A., Asgarimehr, M., & Mortaz Hejri, F. (2018). Electronic Business Development Strategies in the Context of Facilitating and Improving Business Environment. *Economics Research*, 18(68), 253-290.
- Kozechian, H., Ehsani, M., Azimzadeh, S., Kordnaeij, A., & Pitts, B. (2014). A model for small and medium-sized sport enterprises start-up. *Sport Management and Development*, 3(1), 51-68.
- Lee, J.-H. (2021). Effect of sports psychology on enhancing consumer purchase intention for retailers of sports shops: Literature content analysis. *Journal of Distribution Science*, 19(4), 5-13.
- Mahdavi, S. S., Aqili, S. V., Hashemzahi, N., & Farhangi, A. (2018). The Role of Communication Skills of Managers in Business Development with Emphasis on Customer Orientation. *Journal of Iranian Social Development Studies*, 10(2), 127-152.
- Mazloomi Soveini, F., Jaber, A., & Khazaei Pool, J. (2016). Designing a model to investigate the effect of creativity and to share tacit and explicit knowledge on performance of sport organizations based on BSC approach. *Sport Management Journal*, 7(6), 847-864.
- Nashi Far, V., Saadat, M. R., Abbasi, Z. (2010). Identifying regional capabilities of small and medium enterprises (case study of selected provinces). *Commercial Surveys*, 8(42), 60-72.
- Nobakht, F., Ehsani, M., Koozehchian, H., & Amiri, M. (2015). Effective Success Factors of Small and Medium Enterprise in Sports in Iran. *Strategic Studies on Youth and Sports*, 14(28), 25-37.
- Pachava, V. (2018). Innovation and Competitiveness—Small and Medium Enterprises in India. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 1(4), 115-119.
- Pulka, B. M., Ramli, A., & Mohamad, A. (2021). Entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial network, government business support and SMEs performance. The moderating role of the external environment. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 28(4), 586-618.
- Putro, H. P. N., Rusmaniah, R., Mutiani, M., Abbas, E. W., Jumriani, J., & Ilhami, M. R. (2022). Social Capital of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Kampung Purun for Improving Entrepreneurship Education. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(2), 1669-1680.
- Qamber Ali, Rizvan., Agahi, H., Ali Beigi, A. H., & Zarafshani, K. (2014). Necessary support for the development of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Studies in Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Agricultural Development*, 1(2), 75-90.
- Ranjith, P., & Kulkarni, S. (2018). students perception and satisfaction about teaching learning process of a business school in the city of Mumbai. *Indian journal of applied research*, 8(4), 22-24.
- Rezaei, G., Kaviyani, E., Eslampanah, M., & laei, S. (2022). Studying the Factors Affecting the Development of Business Schools. *Sport Sciences Quarterly*, 14(45), 231-250.
- Rezaei, R., Mangli, N., Safa, L. (2015). Examining the concept and dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing and its impact on small and medium businesses. *Journal of Studies in Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Agricultural Development*, 2(2), 1-16.
- Ribeiro-Soriano, D., & Galindo-Martín, M.-Á. (2012). Government policies to support entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(9-10), 861-864.

- Sadeqi arani, Z., Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, E., & Ahmadzadeh, N. (2021). A structural-interpretive model of key success factors sports SMEs. *Contemporary Studies On Sport Management*.
- Salouneh, S., Saketi, P., & Purmahdi, K. (2021). Designing a Growth Pattern for Small and Medium Businesses of Iranian Women (Case Study of Selected Provinces). *Women and Family Studies*, 13(50), 23-48.
- Shiver III, J. F. (2022). *Examination of Digital Marketing and Consumer Behavior Related to Independent Insurance and Financial Services Professionals*, Trident University International.
- Singh, R. K., Koul, S., & Kumar, P. (2017). Analyzing the interaction of factors for flexibility in supply chains. *Journal of Modelling in Management*, 12(4), 671-689.
- Soheili, B., Babaei, M., & Khodayari, A. (2021). participatory governance of Coronavirus crisis management in Small and Medium Sports Business. *Organizational Behavior Management in Sport Studies*, 7(4), 11-27.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Current Population Survey*. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>
- Wamba, S. F., & Carter, L. (2016). Social media tools adoption and use by SMEs: An empirical study. In *Social media and Networking: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications*. IGI Global.
- Webb, T. (2021). The future of officiating: Analysing the impact of COVID-19 on referees in world football. *Soccer & Society*, 22(1-2), 12-18.
- Zain, M., & Ng, S. I. (2006). The impacts of network relationships on SMEs' internationalization process. *Thunderbird international business review*, 48(2), 183-205.

