

Investigating the Factors Affecting the Growth and Development of Iranian Sport Startups in the Post-Corona Era

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Abstract

Purpose: The startups are usually based on risky ideas whose business model is not clear and their target market is also assumed. Startups play an important role in creating new jobs, innovation, flexibility, and economic growth. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the factors affecting the growth and development of Iran sport startups in the post-corona era.

Method: This study was qualitative research based on thematic analysis. The study is exploratory research and is considered qualitative. The research data were collected through purposeful sampling and based on deep semi-structured interviews with experts in this field. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. In order to analyze the conducted interviews, they were reviewed one by one and coded. Acceptability and transferability were used for the validity of the research. The test-retest reliability method was used to measure reliability in this research.

Results: The results of the coding of the interviews showed that the factors affecting the growth and development of Iranian sport startups in the post-corona era include five components: entrepreneurial management of human resources, insurance and facilitation services, acceleration of technological innovations, startup policy in the sport industry, and financial funding.

Conclusion: We can witness the development of the sport industry if special attention is paid to the factors influencing the development of sports startups in the country in the post-corona era and proper planning is done. The findings will help entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the sport startup ecosystem.

Keywords: Startup, Sport, Growth and development, Post-corona.

Introduction

The economy of a country, especially developing countries such as Iran, flourishes by moving toward new technologies and making changes in the composition of products and services in the field of startup activities (Pirjamadi et al., 2021). A startup is a company or a temporary organization that is launched in order to find a solution for a scalable and repeatable business; In other words, a startup is an event created to launch new companies and companies to search for scalable and profitable business models (Taghavi Rafsanjani, Hakakzadeh & Manochehrinejad, 2021). A startup is defined as a human institution that is created to create a new product or service under conditions of great uncertainty (Pellegrini, Rialti & Marzi, 2020). A new or innovative company or startup is a company or business that is usually created recently and as a result of entrepreneurship, has rapid growth, and is formed in the direction of producing an innovative and sustainable solution to meet a need in the market (Taghavi Rafsanjani, Hakakzadeh & Manochehrinejad, 2021). These companies are usually based on risky ideas whose business model is not clear and their target market is also assumed. Startup companies can be created in any field, but they are often referred to as companies that grow rapidly and operate in the field of technology (Mansourifar, 2017). Startups play an important role in creating new jobs, innovation, flexibility, and economic growth (Kim, Song & an, 2016). Startups in large and developed economies have the advantage of accessing a large market of domestic consumers as well as developed capital and stock markets (Shahbazi et al., 2022). These advantages enable start-up businesses to test their product or service commercialization activities more easily, receive quick feedback from customers, and thus adapt their strategies more quickly (Salehian et al., 2022).

There are different types of startups and so far

no specific framework has been provided for their division. Startups are divided based on their field of activity or based on their business model. How to properly categorize startups depends on the goal and expectations of people from startups (Canu, 2019). Chang and Lee (2013) and Ko et al., (2019) classified startups into three categories: youth startups, investment startups, and student startups. Youth startups are founded by people under the age of 60, and venture-backed startups are funded by technology support funds or start from research and development in colleges and government research labs. Student startups are a type of start-up business formed by university students and mostly based on technology. In order to enter the field of student startups in the university environment, students need to increase their knowledge and skills in a practical way in the faculty environment. In this regard, universities have made efforts since 2010, such as the establishment of business growth centers, and science and technology parks in the form of entrepreneurship development plans in Iran's universities (KARAD) in order to solve the economic and technological problems of students, but field experiences and conducted research show that It shows that universities could not create the spirit of innovation, dynamism, and value creation widely in the student community by solving problems and identifying entrepreneurial opportunities (Movahedi, Shirkhani & Talebi, 2017). Mirzazadeh, Keshtidar and Rahmanpour (2022) in research entitled "Identification and prioritization of factors affecting the growth of sports science students' startups in the country" showed that the founder's individual factors, the faculty's educational environment, university economy, technology, and communication, facilities, and social culture are in priority are located Sargolzaei, Razavi and Amirnejad (2022) in research entitled "Designing a model for establishing the holographic concept in sports startups" concluded that holographic variables

in sports startups have a direct positive and significant effect on organizational entrepreneurship with an improvisational approach; That is, by increasing the variables of human factors, facilitators, behavioral factors and environmental factors, the variable of organizational entrepreneurship with the improvisation approach also increases. Zielsk and Held (2020) in a research entitled "Using agile methods in logistics startups: an exploratory multiple case study" showed how logistics startups use agile methods to deal with a high level of market uncertainty and showed how the application They also stated that future research should deepen these findings by further analyzing logistics startups and employees with different, non-managerial roles. Souza (2019) in research entitled "A framework for identifying, selecting and collaborating with startups and open innovation" concluded that there are major differences between large companies and startups and the role of structure in solving these differences is very important. Analyzing the structure of factors such as the foundations of relationships, strategy, and knowledge collaboration are also important. Ratten (2021) concludes that today the existence and development of sports startups for communities is mandatory because one of the most important challenges of the current societies is the issue of employment and health of the general public, in which the role of sports activities becomes more visible; therefore, giving importance to sports startups should be prioritized in management programs. Gozalzadeh, Dana and Afshari (2022) in Their research titled "Identification of factors affecting the growth of knowledge-based companies in the field of sports" reached the conclusion that the organizational and marketing factors with a level above the average are favorable conditions, but the economic, technological and human factors are below the average From the level of criterion 3, they are in unfavorable conditions in knowledge-based companies. Shahbazi et al.

(2022), in research, entitled "Investigation of effective factors in the development of sports start-ups related to physical activity and health" concluded that there are achievements and career opportunities in a huge number of situations, events, and sports environments. Sports, by creating demand for sports services and goods and creating attraction for communities, provide the necessary ground for the development of sports startups, and sports startups create sports businesses in the production of sports equipment and supplies, as well as providing sports medicine services in the field of health. The general public helps. Salehian et al. (2022) in research entitled "Presenting the development model of sports startups in Iran" showed that each of the components of innovative nature, market knowledge, organizational, technological, environmental, team management, individual and human factors, respectively, are effective factors on development. Sports startups are effective in Iran. Talebi et al. (2021) in a research titled model design and prioritization of factors affecting the formation of sports startups showed that the final model includes four managerial, commercial, environmental, and technical factors. Sports play an important role in the health of society and participation in sports and recreation leads to improving health, reducing the level of crime, creating employment, and encouraging positive behavior; Therefore, due to the popularity of sports, entrepreneurial and innovative sports policies are considered an important tool for many policymakers, companies and other institutions (Shahbazi, Jalali Farahani & Khabiri, 2018). In many countries of the world, sport is considered one of the influential factors in the social, economic, and even international fields, and therefore it can institutionalize and promote policies such as entrepreneurship and job creation through it in this field, provided that The foundations and contexts in the society are provided and obstacles and problems are removed so that it can be successful as a

powerful tool to achieve economic, social and sustainable development (Taghavi Rafsanjani, Hakakzadeh & Manochehrinedjad, 2022). Startups are a priority in every country, and governments also seriously pursue startup growth policies (Frederiksen & Brim, 2017).

Considering the many fields that exist to create employment, it is better to pay more attention to the development of sports startups because they are a very important factor in economic and social development. If special attention is paid to the effective factors in the development of sports startups and proper planning is done for it, we can witness the development of sports businesses and the economic development of the sports industry in general. Therefore, in order to model successful countries and to develop sports infrastructure, it is necessary to make a double effort to achieve the development of sports businesses with regular management and comprehensive planning in all economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions. In recent years, the coronavirus epidemic has reduced the calendar of the sports industry with the economic recession in revenue to the extent of 61 billion dollars (Heidari et al., 2022). COVID-19 has affected all dimensions of the sports industry ecosystem. All parts of the supply chain and value of the sports industry are affected, from the athletes, teams, and leagues to the media that cover the games to the brands and sponsors that support and promote them (Heidari et al., 2022). While the sports industry represents one of the most entrepreneurial economic sectors of the global economy, the COVID-19 virus disease has a significant impact on its ability to continue competing (Parnell et al., 2020). The effects of the outbreak of COVID-19 on the sports industry have severely affected the economy and sports businesses. Now that the virus has subsided in Iran, this research aims to identify the factors influencing the growth and development of sports startups in the post-corona era.

The COVID-19 crisis is unlike other crises due to its health-related impact that has caused changes in individual behavior and business activity and therefore can be referred to as a pandemic (Ratten et al. 2021). These prior pandemics were mostly confined to specific geographic regions and did not involve global repercussions like the current COVID-19 pandemic has had on the global economy. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to surpass other crises affecting the sport industry due to it being a health pandemic that then resulted in economic and social turmoil. The COVID-19 presents an opportunity but also an obligation to reinvent the field of sport entrepreneurship by taking a transformational perspective (Ratten, 2020). Due to the ongoing nature of COVID-19, the future is uncertain so a careful consideration and critical assessment of new research trends is required. This will contribute to the existing literature on sport entrepreneurship that views entrepreneurship as a change agent by broadening the conversation to incorporate crisis management approaches (Ratten, 2018). Thus, a paradigm shift is needed at this time in order to incorporate more sport entrepreneurial ecosystem research that discusses the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will help advance sport entrepreneurship research as a whole by taking a more progressive and societal point of view. To achieve this aim, this paper reviews the effects of COVID-19 on sport startups and challenges existing research assumptions that were made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic occurring. A number of suggestions are then made with the goal of building a transformative sport entrepreneurship research agenda that embeds a COVID-19 perspective.

Materials and Methods

This research was exploratory and was done qualitatively (thematic analysis). The population of this study consisted of experts aware of the phenomenon under study. Sampling was done purposefully with a

snowball approach and semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. Based on the analysis of 16 interviews with study participants, 5 main themes and 34 sub-themes were identified. The participants of this research were professors of sports management and entrepreneurship and business experts in sports. The participants of the research had records of teaching courses related to business and entrepreneurship at the university, and there were also people who started a startup in the field of sports. In this research, interviews were conducted with 16 people, and from the 10th interview onwards, repetition was observed in the received information, and from the 14th interview onwards, the data was completely repetitive and reached theoretical saturation; but to be sure, the interviews continued until the 16th person. The interviews were mostly conducted at the participants'

workplaces, and 5 cases were conducted by telephone due to a lack of opportunity for face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes. Also, the coding process was done after the completion of each interview so that the researcher could be present in the next interview with more and better information. Acceptability and transferability were used for the validity of the research. The test-retest reliability method was used to measure reliability in this research. To calculate the reliability of the retest, a few interviews were selected as samples from among the conducted interviews, and each of them was recorded in a short and specific time interval; Then, the specified codes were compared in two-time intervals for each of the interviews, and the stability index was calculated for that research through the number of agreements and disagreements in the two stages of coding.

Table 1. Reliability percentage through recoding method

Row	Marker	Codes	Agreements	Lack of agreements	Test-retest reliability
1	PA	15	11	4	73%
2	PB	12	9	3	75%
3	PC	9	6	3	67%
Total		36	26	10	72%

As shown in table 2, the total number of codes registered by both people (researcher and collaborator) is equal to 72%, the total number of agreements between these codes is 26, and the total number of non-agreements between these codes is 10. The reliability between two coders using the mentioned formula is 72%. Therefore, the reliability of coding is confirmed.

Results

In the thematic analysis, repeated re-reading of the data and reading the results of the

conducted interviews, coding of the research process was done. The results of coding the interviews showed that the effective components in the growth and development of sports startups have five components: efficient human resources, facilitating the conditions for the development of startups, new and updated technologies, financial funding, and the government component. The themes of the components affecting the growth and development of sport startups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. An example of coding and main themes

Codes (Concepts)	Sub-themes	Axial theme
Strengthening active human resources in the field of sport businesses, especially the Internet sector	Entrepreneurial management of human	The growth and development
Cultivation of sport experts		

Holding sport business courses	resources	of sports startups in the post-corona era
Entrepreneurial education for physical education students		
Having high social and emotional intelligence		
Having an ideational, creative and forward-looking spirit		
Feeling the need to succeed and willingness to take risks		
Situational awareness and opportunism		
Risky decision making skills	Insurance and facilitation services	
Providing guarantee and insurance services to startups		
Providing land and building purchase facilities		
Social support of sport startups founders		
Governmental and legal support for sport startups	Acceleration of technological innovations	
Providing consulting services for the development of production and sales		
Support of Information Technology Institute		
Access to new and innovative technologies		
Use of information technology to speed up work processes		
Using the potential of social networks		
Entering the field of sports computer games	Startup policy in the sport industry	
Innovation in the business environment		
Government legal support for the development of online sport startups		
Providing long-term plans in the field of sport businesses		
Supporting the localization of imported sports products and technologies		
Modifying the structure of sport industry development		
Requiring sports organizations to develop and implement effective strategies	Financial funding	
Introduction and appointment of capable and innovative managers		
Attracting capital and sponsors		
Promotion of products offered to the market		
Entering domestic and foreign markets		
Co-creation with target customers		
Focus on competitive advantage		
Increasing and facilitating financial investment		
Marketing services for private investors		
Providing low interest loans and adequate allowances		

Discussion

In today's competitive and complex world, the creation and development of start-up companies and new businesses play a very important and fundamental role in the growth, development, and industrialization of countries' economies, especially in the era after the spread of Covid-19, paying attention to sports businesses and startups which were severely damaged during the outbreak of this virus is more important. Today, due to the global trend towards the knowledge-based economy, the field has been prepared for the activity of more and more start-up companies. Paying attention to the

issue of a knowledge-based economy, especially in the sports industry, is also more important. The sports industry in the world as well as in our country is evolving and developing, and this development provides the basis for the creation and operation of start-up companies. Considering the importance of creating new sports companies for the development of the sports industry, the purpose of this research was to identify the effective factors in the development of these companies. The results of the research showed that the factors affecting the growth and sports startups of the country in the post-corona era include 5

dimensions of efficient and trained human resources, facilitating the conditions for the development of startups, new and updated technologies, providing financial budget, and the government component. The results of this research are consistent with the findings of Shahbazi et al. (2022) and Salehian et al. (2022), who showed that proper management of sports startups is one of the most important factors in the development of sports startups in Iran.

In today's fast-changing business environment, businesses are constantly looking for new opportunities, so they can benefit from adopting an entrepreneurial mindset. For this purpose, they innovate more and more, take risks in developing their product and market type, and improve their performance by anticipating demand and developing new products or services. Therefore, in the post-corona era, proper planning should be done by sports managers in order to revive and develop and grow sports businesses. The results of the research showed that the components related to the government are effective in the growth of sports startups in the country in the post-corona era, this result is consistent with the findings of Jafari and Foroughi Nemat Elahi (2020), Talebi et al. (2019) and Keiyhan et al. (2021). The results of the research showed that the components related to the government are effective in the growth of sports startups in the country in the post-corona era, this result is consistent with the findings of Jafari and Foroughi Nemat Elahi (2020), Talebi et al. (2019) and Keiyhan et al. (2021). The basic support of the government and the country's sports management is very important for the development of sports businesses, so it can be said that the government must plan for the creation and development of sports businesses and startups by presenting basic strategies and plans, it can create the basis for the emergence of new and competitive startups. Successful managers are those who use creative and young consultants, one of the problems of sports in the

country is that sports managers do not value young forces (Rahimizadeh et al., 2018). Successful managers are those who use creative and young consultants, one of the problems of sports in the country is that sports managers do not value young forces (Rahimizadeh et al., 2018). It is also suggested to use capable, creative, knowledgeable, and innovative managers in sports organizations and federations to achieve the desired goal, these managers can provide new and attractive ideas and strategies for the development of new sports businesses, and considering that These managers have more risk-taking power than traditional and old sports managers, so they will be more successful for the development and success of sports businesses and the continuation of the sports industry. The government should investigate the damage caused to the sports industry during the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus in a principled and appropriate manner and provide appropriate support for the continuation of the activities of the affected sports businesses as well as the emergence of new sports startups. Efficient manpower was one of the other influential components in the development of Iranian sport startups in the post-corona era, this result was in line with the findings of Shahbazi et al., (2022). Cultivating active human resources and expertise in the field of sports business is one of the requirements for the development of this type of business. There should be necessary and basic training for the development of entrepreneurship skills of physical education students in universities and higher education institutions so that the employment of physical education graduates in businesses related to physical education in the country can be witnessed. Gholami et al., (2016) concluded in their research that the training of human resources and the provision of suitable educational services to them is one of the effective factors in the formation of small and medium enterprises in the country's sport industry, therefore, attention should be paid to

human resources and how to properly train them. Funding was another influential component in the development of sports startups in the country in the post-corona era. Academic research projects with topics related to the launch and development of sports businesses and sports startups should receive basic support, especially from the financial aspect. Also, the funds of the private sector that are interested in investing in the field of sports businesses should be used to the maximum in order to witness the development of sports businesses in the country. Also, providing low-interest loans and appropriate grants to new startups is another suggestion that can be made to the country's managers for the development of sports businesses. Shahbazi, Jalali Farahani, and Khabiri (2019) in their research entitled Modeling factors influencing the financing of startups (new businesses) concluded that economic and financial factors are one of the most important factors in the development of startups in the country; Therefore, it is suggested that sports managers help sports startups financially, such as by allocating low-interest loans, in order to attract financial sponsors. Facilitating the conditions for the development of startups was another influential component in the development of sports startups in the country, this result was in line with the findings of Gholami et al., (2016) and Pellegrini et al., (2020). Gholami et al., (2016) in their research entitled "Evaluation of factors affecting the formation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the country's sports industry" reached the conclusion that facilitating factors are one of the effective factors in the creation of this type of sports business in the country. Today, there are strict and troublesome laws in the field of creating different businesses in the country, which should be revised with careful planning in order to facilitate the process of registration and creation of various startups, especially sports startups. Also, necessary facilities and facilities should be provided for graduates of physical

education and other fields of study.

Conclusion

During the past few years, the sport industry has faced many and varied damages and challenges with the emergence of the Covid-19 virus, which caused the destruction of a large number of sports businesses, but we can safely say that businesses that They had creative and innovative ideas in different dimensions of business and had efficient and knowledgeable management and human resources. Give. Now, after the subsidence of this virus in the country, the sports management of the country and the government should design new and innovative decisions and plans according to the post-Corona conditions and provide them to the community of the sports industry and other industries in order to witness the economic development and relaunch of the business. And the work was lost. Meanwhile, sports startups can play a very vital and important role in the direction of faster growth of the sports industry, which also requires the support of the government, the cultivation of efficient and knowledgeable human resources, and the provision of financial support for them. The results of the research for the post-corona era and the era when the complex and difficult conditions of the spread of the coronavirus have largely been rejected show that human resources should have higher knowledge and better efficiency and skills than in the past in order to be better prepared in case of other crises. To have to deal with it. Also, in this era, new and updated technologies that are being developed in the world should be used appropriately because the sports industry needs these technologies to compensate for its backwardness due to the spread of Corona. The government should also facilitate the mechanisms and rules for the creation and development of sports startups compared to before the outbreak of Corona and during the outbreak.

Sport-tech startups are increasingly

transforming the sport industry by leveraging technologies to deliver value to all stakeholders. There is a need to identify the critical success factors to address the high mortality among these firms. The present research identifies the factors under five broad themes: Entrepreneurial management of human resources, Insurance and facilitation services, Acceleration of technological innovations, Startup policy in the sport industry, and financial funding. The findings will help entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the sport startup ecosystem.

Theoretical achievements of the research:

- The results of the research showed that providing financial budget for sports startups is very important, so there should be a proper planning in order to finance sports startups.
- New and up-to-date technologies that are developing day by day in the world should be used for the development of sports startups.
- The government has a special place in the development of sports startups, the government can help the development of startups with proper planning and providing support packages as well as applying appropriate laws.
- Research limitations:
 - It was not possible to access all the experts who are active in the field of sports business in the country, so the researcher had to conduct the research in a specific area and the city of Tehran and select the participants from this sector.
- Suggestions for researchers:
 - It is suggested that future researchers examine each of the research components, including efficient human resources, government support, financial funding, facilitating the development of startups and new and updated technology separately, so that deeper and more comprehensive results can be obtained.
- It is suggested that future researchers examine the model resulting from the qualitative research in this research quantitatively and modeled in a wider sports community.

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