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Original Article (Quantified)

Investigating the Effective Factors on the Development of Digital Entrepreneurship and the Establishment of Sports Startups in Iran

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify the factors affecting the development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of sports startups in Iran. The research method is descriptive-survey and based on the structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population of the study consisted of university professors and experts in the field of sports entrepreneurship and startups. The sample size was estimated and selected based on the sufficient number for modeling in PLS software to be 10 to 20 times the number of variables with the most questions (development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of startups, 12 questions). Of these, 167 questionnaires were fully answered and entered the analysis process. Scientific and executive experts were consulted to assess content validity. Then, composite reliability and construct validity were examined and confirmed in the final stage using PLS software. The results showed that required technology and innovation (0.74), conducting research and development (0.40), obtaining the required capital (0.81), government support and laws and regulations (0.45), marketing and customer acquisition (0.55), and networking and strategic partnerships (0.63) have a significant effect on the development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of startups. The research findings indicate that the launch of startups is based on several key factors; the connection of these factors shows that success in digital businesses requires the creation of an effective ecosystem in which a culture of innovation and the provision of necessary support exist, and also the ongoing and reciprocal processes between these components help entrepreneurs to succeed sustainably in today's competitive and complex environment.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Digital entrepreneurship, as one of the most dynamic economic sectors in the present era, has provided countless opportunities for value creation and transformation in various industries by utilizing modern information and communication technologies. In Iran, despite significant potential in the field of young and educated human resources, the penetration rate of the Internet and smartphones, as well as the growing interest in sports and physical activities, the field of digital sports entrepreneurship is still in its early stages of development (Mandalizadeh et al., 2023). Launching digital sports startups can significantly help solve many of the challenges in the country's sports ecosystem, including limited access to facilities and infrastructure, a shortage of expert coaches, a lack of comprehensive sports management systems, and the need to create more effective communication between activists in this field (Golara et al., 2025).

The main issue of this research is how to develop digital entrepreneurship and successfully launch sports startups in Iran. This involves an in-depth and multifaceted examination of key factors influencing this process. These factors can include technological infrastructure (access to high-speed internet and digital platforms), supportive government policies and regulations (laws related to online businesses, financial and credit support, and licensing facilitation), access to capital (including venture capitalists, accelerators, and investment funds), training and skills development (training in digital entrepreneurship and the skills necessary to develop sports products and services), a culture of entrepreneurship and risk-taking in society, and market potential and consumer needs in the field of sports.

Despite significant potential such as a young and educated workforce, high internet and smartphone penetration, and the growing interest of society in sports; the field of digital sports entrepreneurship in Iran is still in its early stages of development. This situation leads to the loss of many opportunities for innovation, job creation, and improving the quality of sports services in the country. However, achieving this goal requires identifying and carefully examining the factors affecting the development of this type of entrepreneurship, as well as the obstacles to the launch and growth of digital sports startups in the context of Iranian society. Digital sports startups can solve challenges such as limited access to sports facilities and infrastructure, a shortage of expert coaches, the lack of comprehensive sports management systems, and the need to create more effective communication between activists in this field. However, to achieve this goal, it is necessary to accurately and comprehensively identify the factors affecting the development of this type of entrepreneurship and the launch and growth of digital sports startups in the context of Iranian society. Therefore, the researcher in this study seeks to find out: what are the factors affecting the development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of sports startups in Iran?

Theoretical Framework

Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship, as an emerging paradigm in the global economy, goes beyond the mere use of digital tools and is rooted in fundamental changes in the way value is created, delivered, and created in the business environment. This concept is based on various theories, including Schumpeter's entrepreneurship theory (innovation and creative destruction), resource and capability theory, and network theory (Ratten & Thompson, 2020).

Digital Entrepreneurship in Sports

Digital entrepreneurship in sports means the use of digital technologies to create, develop, and deliver new sports products and services (Ratten & Thompson, 2020).

Sports Startups

Sports startups are a combination of entrepreneurial principles, technological innovation, and the specific needs of the sports ecosystem. These phenomena can be examined from the perspective of various theories.

Alomar & Alatawi. (2025) in a study titled *Assessing the Challenges of Metaverse-Based Digital Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia* showed that three challenges, namely market fragmentation, technical complexity, and revenue generation and monetization models, were highlighted in the findings as the main influencing factors in the cause group, while the remaining five challenges; infrastructure and connectivity, social and ethical considerations, user acceptance and interaction, privacy and security, and intellectual property protection were classified in the disabled group and were significantly affected by the challenges in the cause group.

Zeynalov & Dođantan. (2025) conducted a study titled *The Effect of Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurship Education on Digital Entrepreneurship Intention with the Mediating Role of Personal Innovation*. The statistical sample of this study consisted of active undergraduate and associate students enrolled in the tourism programs of Anadolu University Open Education System. A total of 382 valid questionnaires were received from the students. The reliability and validity of the model were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses. The results show that digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, and personal innovation are important factors in increasing the entrepreneurial intention of tourism students.

Research Methodology

This research is "applicable" in terms of its purpose, "descriptive-survey" in terms of its data collection method, and is based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population of the research consists of university professors and experts in the field of sports entrepreneurship and startups. A sufficient number of statistical samples were selected and surveyed in a purposeful and accessible manner to test the model (167 people). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test the naturalness of the data. Based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, considering that the significance level of all variables is less than 0.05, the assumption of normality of all variables is rejected at a 95% confidence level and therefore all variables are non-normal; As a result, the confirmation of the relationships between variables and factors is done through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling technique using Smart PLS3 software, which is a variance-based path modeling technique and allows the examination of theory and measures simultaneously. This method is used in cases where the model is complex or the sample size is small or the distribution of variables is not normal.

Research findings

The DENP method (a combination of DEMTEL and the Analytic Network Process (ANP)) was used to prioritize the effective factors. The results showed that membership, faith, altruism, work conscience, organizational commitment, chivalry, respect and honor, civic virtue, conscientiousness, and performance feedback are in the first to tenth priority, respectively.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the factors affecting the development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of sports startups in Iran. The results of this study are

consistent with the results of Yarahmadi et al. (2021), Goodarzi et al. (2023), Mohammadi et al. (2023), Alomar & Alatawi (2025), Dabbous et al. (2023), Pirjamadi et al. (2022), Ratten (2021), Ramzaninezhad et al. (2019), Negahdari et al. (2019), Nazemian Ardekani et al. (2023), and Zhou & Cen (2024). In general, it can be said that the development of digital entrepreneurship and the launch of startups is based on several key factors. These factors include technology and innovation, research and development, fundraising, government support and regulatory frameworks, marketing strategies, and effective networking relationships. The combination of these factors shows that success in digital businesses requires the creation of an effective ecosystem in which there is a culture of innovation and the provision of necessary support. The ongoing and reciprocal processes between these components help entrepreneurs to succeed sustainably in today's competitive and complex environment.

Considering the results of this research, the following suggestions are made:

- The government and responsible institutions should strengthen digital and information technology infrastructure so that entrepreneurs can optimize their processes using modern tools.
- Allocating financial resources and facilities to researchers and innovators to develop new products and services in order to create new markets and improve quality can have a significant impact.
- Setting up venture capital funds and facilitating access to capital through government and private programs can help early-stage entrepreneurs.