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Designing a New Business Model in the Sport Tourism Industry of Iraq

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Abstract

The purpose of present study was to design a new business model in the sports tourism industry of Iraq. Method: This descriptive–survey research was carried out in an exploratory–applicative manner in terms of its purpose; Sampling was done using the snowball method. Also, Strauss and Corbin were used for data analysis. Findings: Based on the results of the research, the model of new businesses in the sports tourism industry of Iraq has been identified in the form of the following 5 dimensions: effective factors (12 central codes), contextual factors (10 central codes), intervening factors (10 central codes), solutions (45 central codes), and consequences (44 central codes). Conclusion: Therefore, it is suggested to identify the best practices that can be used in new businesses in the sports tourism industry by reviewing the history and heritage of Iraqi sports, awareness of the dominant culture in the society, and the development of sports infrastructure.

1. Introduction

Today, economic growth and innovation are at the heart of how we solve societal challenges and unleash the potential of sectors around the globe. Of these, the tourism industry is distinguished as an active sector with the potential to create cultural exchange, economic activity, and employment. In this wider scenario, sports tourism appears as a rising and vibrant niche, a junction of sports-fanaticism and travelling and discovering. In the context of increasing social demand for health, wellness, leisure, the developed sports and tourism is one of the few unique areas for development.(Allah et al., 2025)

Iraq has an opportunity to cash in on sporting culture — a significant draw for international visitors — thanks to its relatively diverse population with a long cultural history and strong institutions developing interest in international sport. But industry is still fragile in Iraq, because of the underdevelopment of its infrastructure, limited entrepreneurship support, and the absence of business models that are context-specific. Filling these gaps necessitates a structured method for forging creative frameworks that are attuned to Iraq's socio-economic context and capitalizing on its distinctive cultural and historical characteristics.(Mal Allah et al., 2025)

This study is to develop a new model of business model for sports tourism in Iraq — the identified key success factors, challenges and opportunities for sustainable growth. Looking at these factors the research tries to find an answer that would cast a shadow on the contribution of creating their own ecological kingdom of sports tourism that would originate in Iraq that would blend economic flair with regional influence and attractiveness to global eyes. This quest is becoming even more relevant as Iraq seeks to diversify its economy and access new pathways to national growth and prosperity.

Research Problems

What are the key challenges and barriers hindering the growth of sports tourism startups in Iraq?

How can sports tourism contribute to economic development, employment creation, and cultural exchange in Iraq?

What factors are critical for designing a sustainable and innovative business model in the Iraqi sports tourism industry?

What role do government policies, infrastructure, and societal attitudes play in the development of sports tourism in Iraq?

Research Objectives

1. To design and validate a comprehensive business model tailored to the sports tourism industry in Iraq.
2. To identify key factors influencing the development and sustainability of sports tourism startups in Iraq.
3. To analyze the socio-economic and cultural impacts of implementing innovative business models within the sports tourism sector.
4. To propose actionable strategies for integrating sports tourism with broader economic and cultural development initiatives in Iraq.

Research Hypotheses

A customized business model will create a growing and sustainable sports tourism startups in Iraq.

The development of infrastructure, cultural heritage and government support are key elements of the success of businesses in the field of sports tourism.

Entrepreneurship innovation positively contributes to the economic and cultural effects of the sport tourism sphere.

Sports tourism becomes a great vehicle for the acceleration of global exchange and community integration opportunities when integrated into wider economic and social development strategies with Iraq.

Research Terms

- **Sports Tourism:** The tourism industry is experiencing rapid growth in sub-sectors such as sports & tourism, where people across the globe travel for reasons such as sports events, sports recreational activities, or sports attractions.
- **Entrepreneurship**– Refers to the process of discovering a new business complimented by constant innovation, a unique product and/or service, etc., to offer them in the market, mostly under a high level of uncertainty/risk.
- **Business Model:** A conceptual policy that describes how an organization generates, provides, and monetize value. Sports

tourism comes down to quality identification, strategy, and resource allocation to ensure sustainable and profitable businesses are developed.

- **Economic Diversification:** As sports tourism stimulates economic activity in various related sectors, it can contribute to reducing reliance on a single sector or resource and thus diversify the economy of Iraq and promote sustainable economic growth.
- **Sustainability:** Sports tourism has to maintain a delicate balance between the surface growth and the preservation of cultural and environmental factors to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- **Culture Sharing:** Sports tourism promotes mutual sharing of culture and practices as it shares a common interest between different communities.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive-survey research; was carried out in an exploratory-applicative manner in terms of its purpose and the data collection was done through field-library methods. Strauss and Corbin was used for data analysis.

The research community was comprised of university professors specializing in the fields of sports science, marketing, entrepreneurship and tourism in Iraq, marketers active in the field of sports, officials and managers of sports startups and tourism tours in Iraq. The selection of the number of experts in this section is according to the nature of the subject, until the maximum information can be reached as the end point or theoretical saturation. Finally, the number of 12 people who were determined and interviewed through the snowball technique, theoretical saturation was achieved.

In order to conduct the interview, general research questions were proposed in the field of main topics, including causal factors, contextual factors, interveners, and strategies (practical strategies). According to the process of interviews and the selection of new cases, the questions were asked in a more detailed and precise manner. Prior to the interview, the researcher made necessary arrangements with the interviewees over the phone to determine a suitable time for the work. At the time of the interview, the

important points, ambiguous or needing more explanation, were noted by the researcher and clarified by the interviewee; this work also helped to encourage the interviewees psychologically. After conducting the interviews, the answers were sent to the interviewee via email to confirm their accuracy. Finally, the data were used for the final analysis.

In connection with the validity of the research, three criteria of acceptability, transferability, verifiability and reliability were examined and confirmed in the present study; For this purpose, to validate the available sources, the interview text, the extracted codes were sent to some participants in the research and their opinions were used. In order to transfer the results, through documentation for other researchers, demographic report, sample experience and research environment report were used. In order to make the results reliable, the percentage of agreement between two coders was used and the percentage of agreement was reported as 86% according to the table below.

$$\text{Reliability percentage} = \frac{2 \times \text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

Table 1. The results of the reliability of two coders.

Interview w Number s	Total Codes Numbe r	Agreement s Number	Disagreement s Number	Reliability Percentag e
4	25	11	4	88%
9	17	7	4	82.35%
13	14	6	3	85.71%
Total	56	24	11	85.71%

Results

Description of the characteristics of the interviewees: The personal characteristics of the interviewees are described in table 2:

Table 2. Personal characteristics of the interviewees.

Reference	Sex	Age	Post	Activity Field	
				Academic	Executive
P1			University professor (Sports management)	*	
P2	Female	43		*	*
P3	Male	45		*	*

Reference	Sex	Age	Post	Activity Field	
				Academic	Executive
P4	Male	38	University professor (Marketing)	*	*
P5	Male	49	University professor (Tourism)	*	*
P6	Female	36			*
P7	Male	40	Sports entrepreneur		*
P8	Female	41		*	*
P9	Male	50			*
P10	Male	46	Active marketer in sports field		*
P11	Male	36		*	*
P12	Male	34	Sports startup managers	*	*
P13	Male	30			*
P14	Male	52	Tourism management	*	*

After all the data were coded in a manner of open and central; It is time to categorize them. In this way, based on the results of open and central coding, the number of 502 open codes and the number of 113 central codes were categorized in the design of new business models in the sports tourism industry of Iraq; In this part of the codings, due to the large number of contents, the report of the central coding of the second stage and selective coding has been discussed (Table 3).

Table 3. Central coding of the second level and selective level.

Selective level	Central coding of the second level
Effective factors	Economic factors
	Political factors
	Social and cultural factors
	Infrastructure
	Market demand
	Competitive landscape
	Technological factors
	Environmental factors
	Legal factors
	Education and skill level

Selective level	Central coding of the second level
Contextual factors	Crisis preparedness
	Historical context
	Cultural Heritage
	Colonial legacy
	Reconstruction after the war
	Education system
	Social values
	Media and communication
	Urbanization trends
	Demographic changes
	History of tourism
Intervening factors	External environmental factors
	Regulatory and legal factors
	Infrastructural factors and accessibility
	Cultural and social factors
	Financial and economic factors
	Marketing and branding factors
	Operational and managerial factors
	Global and diplomatic factors
	Health and safety factors
	Educational factors
Strategies	Security measures
	Supporting political stability
	Infrastructure development
	Economic cooperation
	Legal compliance
	Cultural integration
	Market training
	Skill development programs
	Environmental sustainability
	Technology integration
	Health and safety protocols
	Preparedness for natural disasters
	Diversity of financial resources

Selective level	Central coding of the second level
	Strengthening tourism infrastructure
	Effective crisis management
	International cooperation
	brand building
	Social coordination initiatives
	Reducing barriers to entry
	Innovation and unique offers
	Efficient transportation solutions
	Strategic marketing campaigns
	Cultural sensitivity training
	Positive perception campaigns
	Ethical methods
	Simple administrative procedures
	Tourist safety measures
	Continuing education programs
	Efficient transportation networks
	Advanced access
	Reduce dependence on seasonality
	Various sports offers
	Protection of intellectual property
	Consistent quality standards
	Residence development
	Training programs for industry professionals
	Improving the international image
	Effective collaboration platforms
	Data-driven decision making
	Minimize political interference
	Advanced air communication
	Authentic cultural experiences
	Community interaction programs
	Efficient hosting of sports events
	Economic Growth
Consequences	cultural exchange
	Infrastructure development

Selective level	Central coding of the second level
	International recognition
	Community empowerment
	Social and cultural revival
	Variety of tourism offers
	Global cooperation
	Increasing brand value
	Training and skill development
	Environmental Protection
	Promoting health and well-being
	Technological advances
	Intercultural understanding
	International sports diplomacy
	Innovation ecosystem
	Supporting sports tourism
	Tourism research and development
	Public and private partnerships
	Entrepreneurial support
	Standardization of the tourism industry
	Inclusive employment methods
	Promotion of digital literacy
	Inclusive tourism methods
	Innovative event management
	Presence in social media
	Cooperation with educational institutions
	Supporting local sports
	Adventure tourism investment
	International event hosting standards
	Transparency in tourism regulations
	Cooperation with health and health industries
	Cultural sensitivity in marketing
	Participation of local stakeholders
	Coherent tourism policies

Selective level	Central coding of the second level
	Disaster preparedness initiatives
	Networking opportunities for startups
	Tour guide training programs
	Educational programs related to sports
	Waste management in tourism areas
	Promote local products for tourists
	Cultural exchange measures
	Accessibility for elderly tourists
	Sustainable event management methods

Based on the results of the analysis of qualitative data obtained from the interview, the model of new businesses in the sports tourism industry of Iraq has been identified in the form of 5 dimensions: Effective factors (12 central codes), contextual factors (10 central codes), intervening factors (10 central codes), solutions (45 central codes) and consequences (44 central codes). In figure.1, the paradigm model of new businesses in the sports tourism industry of Iraq can be seen with the interconnectedness of its structure and processes, including causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences.

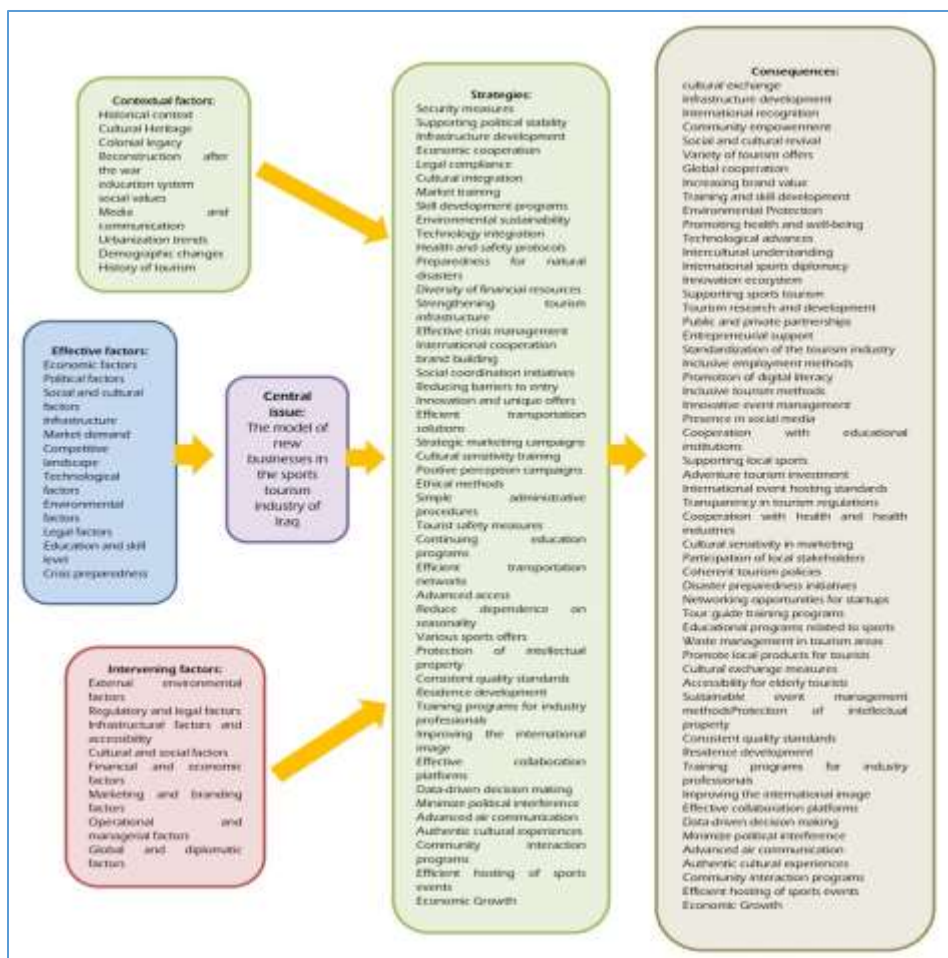


Figure 1. The model of new businesses in the sports tourism industry of Iraq.

Discussion

The main purpose of this research is to design a new business model in the sports tourism industry of Iraq. The qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the interview showed that the model of the new businesses in the sports tourism industry in Iraq consists of the following five dimensions: effective factors (12 central codes), contextual factors (10 central codes), intervening factors (10 central codes), solutions (45 central codes), and consequences (44 central codes). The results of the research are in line with the findings of

(Sarlab et al., 2023), (Bahadori Kavijani, 2022), (Daryaei et al., 2022), (Allah Alipour & Zanganeh, 2023), (Esfandyari et al., 2022), (Parvaz & Eydi, 2023), (Pittz et al., 2020), (Dastgerdi et al., 2022), (Hammerschmidt et al., 2024), and (Westman et al., 2023). According to the results of their research, (Sarlab et al., 2023) showed that social factors, belief factors, and financial and income factors as causal factors; management factors, facilities and equipment, the amount of knowledge, and cultural factors as background conditions, financial issues, social issues, cultural issues, motivating factors and inhibiting factors were identified as intervening conditions. Also, cultural, managerial and economic strategies were identified as strategic factors and increasing vitality, increasing health, economic development and social development as outcomes. Also, (Esfandyari et al., 2022) showed in a research that it is possible to improve the tourism industry through accurate and appropriate planning and policy and with full compliance with health guidelines and with the supervision and coordination of relevant devices and the use of new technologies. According to the results of their study, (Daryaei et al., 2022) also help to promote and develop new business models related to tourism. Private companies operating in the tourism sector can also implement innovative strategies to enhance their market share and foster business growth in even the most remote regions of the country, using the suggested solutions. Through adopting supportive policies, reducing business barriers through intellectual property protections, developing the required infrastructure, and preparing a bill to the legislator, government decision makers can help to increase the level of income and develop the tourism ecosystem in the country. (Westman et al., 2023), in a study, show that sustainable entrepreneurs face significant limitations in exerting individual influence over mass markets because they face social forces that create resistance to change. However, SMEs can act jointly to shape transformation processes. We propose three mechanisms of institutional co-evolution that underlie these partnerships: network learning, collective norming, and collaborative advocacy. Furthermore (Hammerschmidt et al., 2024) argue that entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity are important drivers of change,

innovation, and employment in sport and that sport entrepreneurship is an emerging but organized stream of business research. According to the results of their research, (Parvaz & Eydi, 2023) assert that sports business practitioners and activists can facilitate the development of this emerging phenomenon in the sports field, while also acknowledging the challenges and issues associated with forming sports start-ups. Also (Pellegrini et al., 2020) concluded in a research that investments related to sports, environmental factors, educational approaches and community development can have a positive effect on community development.

With respect to the effective factors, it can be claimed that the success and sustainability of new ventures in the field of sports tourism in Iraq are affected by the aforementioned economic, political, social, cultural, infrastructure, market demand, competitive, technological, environmental, legal, educational and skill levels and collaboration and partnership factors. This means that the opportunities and challenges of developing and operating sports tourism businesses, will be dissimilar according to these factors in Iraq. Economic factors consist of GDP growth, levels of disposable income, employment and currency stability. They influence the demand for and the supply of sports tourism products and services, and also the profitability and competitiveness of sports tourism businesses. For instance — the GDP growth rate is a positive signal of the economy and henceforth greater potential for domestic and international tourism demand. An increase in disposable income means more money in peoples pocket and more money that can be spent in leisure activities such as sports tourism. An increase in employment means people have money to spend, leading to more free movement. Stable currency rate: No exchange rate fluctuations for prices and costs of sports tourism business

Speaking about contextual factors, it must be noted that appealing to different demographic clusters, Iraq is home to a very colourful cultural and natural heritage that can target various types of tourists. But, the social cohesion, governance and infrastructure challenges read mandates and must be met by broad-based cooperation and participation. To exploit the skills, assets, and contacts of local businesses, state institutions, and international organizations, new

entrepreneurs in Iraq's sports tourism industry need to formally collaborate within public-private partnerships. For example, they should partner with local communities and enterprise in producing tourism products and services to ensure authenticity, that respect and enrich the local culture and environment. They also need to cooperate with government agencies and international organizations to tap into funding, training, and technical assistance that will enhance their capabilities and competitiveness. Lastly, the historical importance of sports in Iraq and the legacy of sport events in this country is significant contextual factors of the context affecting the new business model of Iraq's sports tourism sector. All these factors have positive and negative relations in developing and performing, positively and negatively effecting on the development and performance of sports tourism businesses, stakeholders-even tourism communities as well. Thus, it is imperative for new ventures involved in sports tourism in Iraq to identify and respond to these factors when planning their strategies and managing their operations.

On account of intervening factors it should be clarified that intervening factors are variables affective the correlation between independent and dependent variables in a research model. For example, the sports tourism industry of Iraq is an independent variable, and new businesses that they come up with it are a dependent variable. Iraq, which has a potential for establishing sports tourism that can help the country economically, socially and culturally, can also attract domestic or international tourists interested in sports activities, events, or facilities. Yet, this massive potential suffers from many challenges and barriers that impede its growth and competitiveness in the global market.

The independent variables mentioned in the question are the external and internal factors affecting the performance of new businesses and more specifically in the Iraqi sports tourism sector and success. These can be favourable or unfavourable factors but it is really location specific for every business. The external environmental factors are political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors that, outside the Iraqi sports tourism industry, affect it.

Iraq sports tourism: A potential section to its economic and social development, In accordance with that, finally, with regards to the strategies and solutions, nevertheless, an array of obstacles, inadequacies and political instability, security threats and lack of infrastructure poses a series of challenges to the industry. Relevant solutions must be developed to face these challenges and generate business models to attract and satisfy sports tourists. A key strategy is to protect sports tourists and sports events. By having strict security measures like screening, surveillance, and protection in coordination with local authorities and international organizations. Also by promoting political stability along with the peace process in country; the security situation can be improved and the atmosphere of violence and terrorism swaying on the thin thread may be kept at bay. A second strategy is to build out the infrastructure and facilities needed for the sports tourism sector. It encompasses the enhancement of transport, communication, lodging and entertainment amenities, also the construction and upkeep of sports facilities and extremities.

By addressing the consequences as follows, coherent tourism policies have the potential to contribute to the overall destiny of the sport tourism industry in Iraq and to achieve stability and efficiency in the policy process. This means coherent tourism policies to ensure that tourism as a whole, including sports-related tourism, can develop with the right perspective and new businesses can run in a stable legal environment. Special plans for disaster preparedness are imperative for ensuring the safety of tourists and athletes involved into sports tourism. For new businesses, safety measures should be prioritized to minimize risks and ensure protection for visitors. For the new players in the industry, networking events will allow tools for collaboration, the sharing of knowledge, and increase the number of contacts within the sport tourism business.(Atiya & Moseekh, 2023)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. The sports tourism industry in Iraq holds significant potential for economic growth and cultural exchange but faces structural and infrastructural challenges.

2. The proposed business model encompasses five key dimensions—effective factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, solutions, and consequences—which are critical for fostering innovation and sustainability in sports tourism businesses.
3. A focus on heritage, societal culture, and infrastructure development is pivotal for the success of sports tourism startups.
4. Startups in this sector can have a profound impact by promoting community empowerment, creating jobs, and contributing to the global perception of Iraq as a sports tourism destination.

Recommendations

1. Encourage government agencies to provide incentives for sports tourism startups, including financial aid, tax benefits, and streamlined bureaucratic processes.
2. Invest in modernizing sports facilities, transport networks, and accommodation services to attract international sports tourists.
3. Establish specialized training programs for tour guides and other stakeholders to enhance the quality of sports tourism services.
4. Launch international campaigns to showcase Iraq's sports heritage and unique tourism opportunities, emphasizing safety and cultural richness.
5. Foster collaboration among entrepreneurs, academic researchers, and industry stakeholders to identify innovative solutions for challenges in the sports tourism sector.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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