

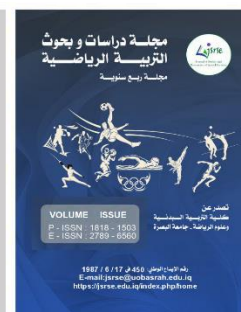
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Enhancing Professional Women's Sports Marketing in Iraq: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored ways to enhance professional women's sports marketing in Iraq amid cultural, social, and structural challenges. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through 20 semi-structured interviews with federation managers, coaches, national team players, sports journalists, and marketing experts selected via purposive and snowball sampling. Analysis based on Van Manen's method identified key barriers, including traditional attitudes, inadequate infrastructure, weak media coverage, and limited financial support. Despite these challenges, opportunities emerged such as increased sponsorship potential, expanded use of digital media, and gradually changing public perceptions toward women's sports. The study highlights strategic priorities for development, including improving sports infrastructure, strengthening media engagement, enhancing women's managerial capacities, and attracting financial investment. These findings underscore the need for integrated, sustainable strategies to promote professional women's sports marketing in Iraq.

Introduction

Today, sport is not only recognized as a physical and social activity but also as a dynamic and profitable industry with remarkable potential to address some of the economic, cultural, and social challenges of societies. The increasing role of sport in the global economy and its interaction with other industries have led various countries to invest significantly in this sector. In this context, sports marketing has gained a prominent position as an effective tool in the development of the sports industry. Various studies show that organizing sports events using modern and scientific marketing methods can establish an effective link between sports and other industries and play a key role in economic growth (Camilleri, 2018). Sports marketing not only attracts foreign financial resources but also, through extensive advertising and media interactions, provides numerous economic, political, cultural, and social benefits for stakeholders (Birami et al., 2019).

Sports marketing is a complex process through which communication among sporting events, audiences, sponsors, related businesses, and other relevant groups is established, creating opportunities for achieving common goals on a broad scale (da Silva et al., 2020). Given the volatile and rapidly changing competitive environment, only organizations that utilize targeted and flexible marketing strategies can survive (Khademi et al., 2017)(Mohammed et al., 2025). In today's constantly evolving economic and social environments, sports organizations must capitalize on market opportunities and be prepared to face upcoming challenges through strategic planning. This requires institutionalizing sports marketing within the managerial and operational structures of organizations in a way that continuously contributes to the growth and sustainability of the sports industry (Kotler et al., 2015)(Muhammad & Nazzal, 2024). The 21st century is characterized by intense competition, emerging markets, technological transformations, and environmental uncertainties. In such circumstances, success is reserved for organizations that embrace opportunities and plan for the future (Porter, 1985). Therefore, attention to sports marketing is not merely an option but an inevitable necessity for the sustainable development of the sports industry in modern societies.

Women's sports have deep roots in the traditions and local games of societies. With the beginning of the modern Olympic Games, new opportunities arose for women to participate in official and international sports (Andam et al., 2016)(Abd Aulah, 2021). These developments

doubled the necessity of establishing international sports structures and organizations to provide platforms for women's participation. Nevertheless, the development and expansion of women's sports require adequate financial resources and effective planning in the field of marketing. Various studies have indicated that the marketing challenges in women's sports are similar to those in other sectors of sports in the country, with a more pronounced shortage of resources, weakness in attracting sponsors, and structural planning issues (Fatehi et al., 2017; Sa'adatifard et al., 2021)(Muhammad & Nazzal, 2025). One of the main barriers is the poor television coverage of women's sports competitions, which reduces public attention and, consequently, financial support (Eydi et al., 2019).

Moreover, the absence of clear programs, lack of precise targeting, absence of a coherent sports calendar, delayed efforts to attract sponsors, and lack of convincing arguments to persuade sponsors are among the key obstacles in this field. Also, the appointment of non-specialized managers and executives has reduced the effectiveness of marketing activities. Therefore, appreciation and effective communication with sponsors, along with the institutionalization of professional marketing, must be prioritized in women's sports policies. Finally, the inadequate allocation of funds to women's sports remains one of the most significant structural barriers to growth in this area. The development of women's sports is not possible without sustainable financial resources and the application of scientific and professional marketing.

There has always been a significant gap between men's and women's sports (Zakeri et al., 2015)(Aldewan & Abed Malih, 2005). It should be noted that providing appropriate conditions for women's social activities allows their capabilities and talents to be better revealed (Fatehi et al., 2017). On the other hand, broadcasting women's championships and their rapid media coverage help to build their reputation and identity. However, due to the weak role of sponsors in women's sports, female athletes have not been able to achieve validation similar to men, and continuing this trend may lead to women withdrawing from competitions, retiring from professional sports, or even seeking asylum in other countries (Khatibi et al., 2020). The growing trend of women's sports and investments made by countries in this sector to attract considerable benefits, along with the critical role of the sports industry in economic development, underscore the need for a well-defined plan to ensure the sustainable and continuous presence of women in sports through scientific and principled marketing management (Monzami et al., 2011)(Malih & Abbas, 2024). However, this management, in

addition to requiring individual and specialized characteristics, can be influenced by various factors affecting women's participation in sports. These include the differences in the number and type of specialists required across provinces, varying government budgets allocated to different regions, and the unique characteristics of each area (Ajarlou et al., 2020). Therefore, new actions must be taken to uncover more talents and invest in the women's sports sector, especially marketing. One of the key routes to the advancement of a country's sports sector is the participation of girls and women and the provision of conditions for their regular involvement (Morodov, 2022). Compared to professional men's sports, women's sports have a shorter history (Chen, 2015). This has created the perception that women are largely absent in the sports scene, which downplays their efforts and marginalizes their participation (Farrell, 2021).

Although marketing dates back to the 20th century, its history in Iraq is much shorter and likely does not exceed fifty years (Ali, 2019). Despite the importance and value attributed to sports marketing in Iraq's sports organizations, there has been no specific and regular plan for marketing professional women's sports. However, this does not imply that no economic activity occurs in Iraqi women's sports; rather, it indicates that the sector is not yet fully professional. Therefore, there is no competitive drive for higher revenues, and it is not economically prioritized. Nevertheless, various non-professional and non-scientific methods have been used to generate income in women's sports in Iraq, and teams have partially offset their costs through such means. Official practices include buying and selling players and coaches (transfers), advertising on clothing and sports equipment, and advertising within sports venues. However, several critical areas have been neglected, such as broadcasting rights, establishing fan associations, club memberships, and financial sponsorships. It is important to note that female athletes, alongside male counterparts, have achieved significant honors. Women's participation in sports and the popularity of women's sports have dramatically increased in the 20th century, especially in the past quarter-century, indicating a shift in modern societies' perspectives on gender equality (Wadera, 2018).

In Iraq, women's participation in sports and international competitions has been slow due to prevailing religious and cultural norms. However, Iraqi women have still achieved numerous international successes alongside men. These accomplishments indicate the growing progress of women's sports in Iraq. Unfortunately, despite these rising achievements, Iraq has not been

able to utilize this potential effectively to establish a successful marketing cycle in women's sports. Part of this shortcoming may stem from the lack of professional mechanisms in women's sports marketing. Thus, the goal of this study is to promote the marketing of professional women's sports in Iraq.

Although the importance of marketing in the development of various organizations has always been practically and empirically emphasized, this issue is often overlooked in sports, particularly in the domain of professional women's sports. Moreover, according to conducted reviews, there has been no comprehensive and significant research on women's sports marketing in Iraq. If any studies have been done, they have only briefly and superficially addressed the issue. Therefore, this research aims to identify administrative factors affecting the development of professional women's sports marketing in Iraq. The objective of this study is to enable relevant authorities to identify influential administrative factors using the results of this and other related research and to implement precise planning to optimally utilize existing marketing capacities. Ultimately, this approach is expected to enhance the status of professional women's sports in Iraq and harness the economic and social benefits of sports marketing.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What factors can influence the process of developing professional women's sports marketing in Iraq?
2. What role does each of these factors play in the promotion of professional women's sports marketing in Iraq?

In recent decades, professional women's sports marketing has emerged as a growing area of interest for researchers and policymakers in sports science. Studies in this field have examined the impact of cultural, economic, managerial, and social factors on the development and enhancement of women's sports marketing. These studies have offered various models and strategies, addressing both challenges and opportunities. In line with the current research titled *"Enhancing Professional Women's Sports Marketing in Iraq: A Phenomenological Approach,"* the following section reviews prior studies related to women's sports marketing to provide a comprehensive perspective on the subject. Salamat et al. (2022), in a study aimed at designing a development model for women's sports marketing in Iran, found that the research population

consisted of sports experts and scholars, and three-stage coding was used for data analysis. The findings indicated that causal factors such as cultural and economic significance, contextual factors such as support and implementation, and intervening variables like informational and infrastructural limitations had significant influence.

The results of these codings can be seen in Table 1.

Table 3-1. Inter-coder reliability

Inter-coder reliability (percentage)	Number of disagreements	Number of agreements	Total number of codes	Interview number	Row
86%/67	6	13	30	P4	1
%85/71	9	15	35	P9	2
71%/43	4	10	28	P14	3
%81/72	19	38	93	Total	

According to Table 3-2, the inter-coder reliability using the aforementioned formula was 81%, which is higher than 60%, and the reliability of the codings is confirmed.

Research Findings

The findings in this section are presented in two parts: the presentation of the results of the interviews and the coding of the interviews.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the samples

Variable	Components	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Total
Gender	Female	13	65%	20
Gender	Male	7	35%	20
Age	25-35	3	15%	20
Age	36-45	6	30%	20
Age	46-55	4	20%	20
Age	56 and above	7	35%	20
Education	Associate's Degree and Below	3	15%	20
Education	Bachelor's Degree	8	40%	20
Education	Master's Degree	5	25%	20

Education	Doctorate	4	20%	20
Field of Study	Physical Education and Sports Sciences	12	60%	20
Field of Study	Non-Physical Education and Sports Sciences	8	40%	20
Position/Job	Senior Managers of Sports Federations	1	5%	20
Position/Job	Professional Coaches of Women's Teams	3	15%	20
Position/Job	University Professors and Faculty Members	2	10%	20
Position/Job	National Women's Team Players	3	15%	20
Position/Job	Sports Journalists	2	10%	20
Position/Job	Sports Experts	1	5%	20
Position/Job	Female Sports Veterans	2	10%	20
Position/Job	Managers of Women's Sports Clubs	3	15%	20
Position/Job	Sports Marketers	1	6.6%	20
Position/Job	Researchers with at least 4 Articles in This Field	2	10%	20
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	4	20%	20
Work Experience	5-15 years	11	55%	20
Work Experience	More than 15 years	5	25%	20

Table 2. Results of the analysis of the experiences of research participants based on quotes, concepts, themes, and themes

Participant Code	Quotes (Examples)	Sub-themes or Minor Themes	Main Themes or Major Themes
P-1	We need to strengthen the sports infrastructure for women to compete at a professional level.	The importance of securing sustainable financial resources for the development of professional women's sports.	Focus on creating conditions that lead to increased public attention, financial support, and cultural promotion for professional women's sports.
	Sponsors often show no interest in investing in women's sports, which is one of our biggest obstacles.	Increasing media coverage to attract public attention to women's sports.	
	The media should cover women's sports events more to raise public awareness.	Barriers stemming from traditional attitudes toward women's sports.	
	Changing society's perception of women's sports is a long process that requires education.	The necessity of improving infrastructure and sports facilities for women.	
	Training facilities for women are far more limited than for men.	The importance of training and developing managerial and athletic skills for women.	
	Having female managers in federations can help develop women's sports.		
	Participating in international competitions boosts our players' confidence and enhances their experience.		
P-2	We don't have enough budget to provide uniforms and equipment for our players.	Training professional coaches, doctors, and specialists for women's sports.	Long-term planning for the comprehensive strengthening of professional women's sports.

	Families often do not support their daughters in pursuing sports professionally.	Optimizing the use of online platforms to promote women's sports.	
	Organizing competitions with enthusiastic spectators can help attract sponsors.	Focus on facilitating players' access to sports facilities.	
	Women's sports need more regular and structured competitions.	Attracting private-sector investors to support women's sports.	
	The public is unaware of the successes of Iraqi women's sports.		
	Social pressures negatively affect players.		
	We need more female coaches with professional expertise.		
P-3	Our players lack sufficient experience in international competitions.	Providing psychological counseling and health improvement programs.	Focus on securing sustainable funding through sponsors, advertising, and public contributions.
	We don't have a proper advertising strategy to promote women's teams.	Implementing educational programs in schools and universities to foster a culture of women's sports.	
	Players face transportation issues getting to training locations.	Highlighting successful female athletes for inspiration.	
	We don't even have a dedicated sports doctor for women's teams.	Organizing more leagues and competitions to enhance competitiveness.	
	We need a clear roadmap for women's sports.	Demonstrating the positive social impacts of sports.	
	Our domestic competitions are limited and sporadic.		

P-4	It's unclear where the budgets are allocated.	Facilitating women's teams' participation in international competitions.	Changing societal attitudes toward women's sports and elevating them to a professional and international level.
	Starting support from schools can create the next generation of athletes.	Ensuring proper use of financial resources.	
	If we give young girls opportunities, the future of women's sports will be bright.	Using coaches as ambassadors for women's sports.	
	If the media supports us, we can attract more attention.	Implementing creative and engaging campaigns to attract audiences.	
		Gaining public support for the advancement of women's sports.	
P-5	Women's sports need scientific research and reliable data.	Developing theoretical and practical knowledge for marketing women's sports.	Emphasizing the role of universities and research in promoting the marketing of women's sports.
	We should steer students toward specialized marketing for women's sports.	Training students and professionals in sports marketing.	
	Without economic support, any marketing strategy will fail.	The impact of traditional attitudes and related challenges on the development of women's sports.	
	Universities can strengthen this field by offering sports marketing courses.	Collaboration between universities, federations, and the private sector.	
	The lack of public awareness about the benefits of women's sports is a major obstacle.	Using digital tools to enhance marketing.	
	We should showcase the successes of Iraqi female athletes.		

P-6	Traditional attitudes remain the main barrier to developing women's sports.	Leveraging the media to improve the image of women's sports.	Creating coordination among universities, federations, and the private sector for the sustainable development of women's sports.
	Universities and federations must collaborate to advance women's sports.	Highlighting successful female athletes as inspirational figures.	
	The education system should support women's sports from primary levels.	The need for a comprehensive roadmap for marketing women's sports.	
	Without a clear roadmap, marketing women's sports will not succeed.		
	Digital technologies can significantly impact audience engagement.		
P-7	We don't even have access to standard balls for training.	Issues related to sports fields, equipment, and training facilities.	Focus on securing financial resources and improving sports infrastructure.
	Many families still don't allow their daughters to pursue sports professionally.	Increasing financial support from sponsors and federations.	
	Many still believe women's sports are unnecessary.	The negative impact of traditional attitudes on professional women's sports.	
	Some of us have to pay training expenses out of pocket.	The need for coaches with up-to-date knowledge and international experience.	
	Our matches aren't broadcast on TV or even social media.	The necessity of participating in more international competitions to strengthen players.	
	No reputable brand is willing to sponsor our team.	The importance of establishing a cohesive league structure for	

		national-level competition.	
P-8	Domestic women's competitions are very scattered and limited.	Providing counseling services and reducing psychological pressure.	Efforts to change societal views on women's sports.
	Harsh conditions lead many players to retire early from professional sports.	Developing sustainable strategies for the advancement of women's sports.	
	There's no strategy for players' futures.	The need for broader media coverage of competitions and players.	
	We need coaches with international experience.	Providing counseling services and reducing psychological pressure.	
	Our international matches are very few and limited.		
P-9	We are often judged for choosing professional sports.	Efforts to create equal opportunities for women and men in sports.	Enhancing competitive opportunities and increasing global presence.
	Our training still follows outdated and ineffective methods.	Promoting a culture of support for women's sports in society.	
	We don't even have proper training grounds for consistent practice.	Providing medical and physiotherapy services for players.	
	Many competitions lack professional doctors or physiotherapists.	Updating training methods and using technology in coaching.	
	Seeing the success of other women gives us hope.		
	Federations should pay more attention to our needs.		
P-10	Few journalists cover women's competitions because there's no specific audience.	Encouraging journalists to provide broader coverage of competitions.	Emphasizing the increase in quality and quantity of media coverage for women's sports.
	Editors prioritize men's sports in news coverage.	Showcasing female athletes' achievements in the media.	

	Many success stories of female athletes don't reach the public.	Training specialized journalists in women's sports.	
	Sponsors don't design proper advertisements for women's sports.	Creating systems to provide accurate and comprehensive information about women's teams.	
	Sometimes even basic information about women's teams and competitions is unavailable.		
	We lack the tools and facilities to cover women's competitions.		
P-11	TV and print interviews with female athletes are rare.	Using social media for promoting women's sports.	Creating educational opportunities and strengthening infrastructure needed for professional media coverage of women's sports.
	Digital platforms can help fill this gap.	Fostering closer collaboration to facilitate media coverage.	
	Many think women's sports are just entertainment, not professional.	Providing necessary facilities for professional media coverage of women's sports.	
	We need trained journalists in this field.	Using media to change society's perception of women's sports.	
	Women's sports yield lower financial returns, so they're less prioritized.		
P-12	Women's sports need structured marketing programs.	Combining financial resources from public and private sectors for marketing development.	Focus on creating a professional marketing system for Iraqi women's sports, utilizing domestic resources and global experiences.

	Private companies still don't see women's sports as a marketing opportunity.	Cultural initiatives to improve society's view of women's sports.	
	The media doesn't pay enough attention to the potential of women's sports.	Increasing media participation in advertising and marketing women's sports.	
	Traditional attitudes have hindered the growth of women's sports.	Developing long-term strategies for marketing professional women's sports.	
	Global experiences in marketing women's sports can help Iraq.	Leveraging successful international experiences in marketing women's sports.	
	Iraqi women's sports have the potential to attract new audiences.		
	We are far behind in advertising and branding women's sports.		
P-13	We must show the new generation the past successes of women's sports.	Preserving and promoting past achievements in women's sports.	Utilizing the knowledge and achievements of pioneers in planning and cultural development.
	Our experiences aren't used to advance women's sports.	Using pioneers as inspirational figures.	
	Pioneers can be role models for the youth.	Strengthening the bond between pioneers and young players.	
	If we had enough financial support in our time, women's sports would have progressed much sooner.	Addressing past shortcomings in infrastructure and financial support.	
	Past successes should serve as a foundation for future development.		
	Women's sports have always been victims of instability in planning.		

P-14	Cultural change should start with families.	Educating families to support women's sports.	Involving pioneers in decision-making and promoting sports values.
	Strong connections between pioneers and the new generation can have a positive impact.	Active participation of pioneers in managerial decision-making.	
	In the past, there was no proper infrastructure for women's sports.	Creating a roadmap for sustainable development of women's sports.	
	More opportunities should be provided for the new generation.	Ensuring fair opportunities for new-generation athletes.	
	Pioneers can play a more effective role in federation management.		
P-15	Clubs cannot function well without financial support.	Securing financial resources to strengthen women's sports clubs.	Securing financial resources and establishing standard infrastructure.
	Marketing in women's sports requires a different strategy.	Creating standard facilities for training and competitions.	
	Sponsors prefer supporting men's sports.	Structuring and strengthening regular and competitive leagues.	
	Women's sports have no place in the media.	Using social media and digital tools for advertising.	
	Clubs need better fields and equipment for training.		
	The lack of a regular league reduces competitiveness.		
	The public still shows no interest in women's competitions.		
P-16	New talents must be better identified and supported.	Strengthening club relationships with local and national media.	Strengthening marketing and media coverage.
	Club management is still not done professionally.	Identifying and nurturing talented players at a young age.	

	Some families still oppose their daughters joining clubs.	Training professional management in women's sports.	
	Without coordination with federations, we cannot progress.	Synergy between clubs and federations.	
	We must use innovative advertising methods to attract attention.		
P-17	The government should allocate more resources to women's clubs.	Focusing on building a positive image of women's sports in society.	Training managers and leveraging global experiences.
	Using digital media can be effective.	Gaining family and societal support for greater female participation in sports.	
	Players need a supportive environment for training.	Learning from successful global models in marketing women's sports.	
	Specialized coaches can elevate the level of play.	Attracting private-sector investors to support clubs.	
	Participating in international competitions can help clubs grow.	Changing traditional attitudes through sports successes.	
		Increasing participation in international competitions and gaining experience.	
P-18	We lack precise data on the audience for women's sports to design strategies.	Collecting accurate data on audiences and fans of women's sports.	Focusing on data-driven approaches, branding, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to elevate the status of professional women's sports in Iraq.
	Brands still don't see women's sports as an effective marketing tool.	Building a strong identity for Iraqi professional women's sports.	
	We don't know how to effectively advertise products related to women's sports.	Leveraging social media and online marketing.	

	We should use digital platforms more to engage audiences.	Designing campaigns aligned with Iraqi cultural values and needs.	
	Compelling stories about female athletes can attract more audiences.	Establishing stronger connections between marketers, clubs, and sports federations.	
	Marketing campaigns should pay more attention to local culture.		
	Weak communication between marketers and clubs hinders progress.		
P-19	There hasn't been enough research on Iraqi women's sports.	Focusing on creating databases for marketing women's sports.	Emphasizing the role of scientific research in shaping marketing policies.
	Comprehensive statistical data on women's participation in sports is unavailable.	Analyzing how culture impacts the marketing of women's sports.	
	Research should directly inform policies and programs.	Practical application of research findings in marketing planning.	
	Local cultures significantly influence the marketing of women's sports.	Examining the media's role in raising public awareness and gaining support.	
	Developing the sports economy can aid in marketing women's sports.		
	Marketing Iraqi women's sports lacks long-term planning.		
P-20	Various stakeholders must align to develop women's sports.	Identifying the economic benefits of developing women's sports.	Focusing on collecting accurate data and using media to elevate the status of professional women's sports.
	Studying successful international examples can be inspiring.	Leveraging successful examples from other countries to develop strategies.	

	Research in women's sports needs more support.	Securing resources to strengthen local research.	
	The media's role in marketing women's sports is not fully recognized.	Designing marketing strategies based on long-term visions.	
	Public awareness about the importance of women's sports must increase.		

Table (2) presents an analysis of the participants' experiences and opinions in the study, revolving around various aspects related to the development and advancement of women's sports in Iraq. Participants clearly highlight fundamental challenges in financial, infrastructural, media coverage, and social attitude domains. Overall, the analysis reveals that women's sports in Iraq face serious obstacles, including budget shortages, limited facilities, and insufficient media coverage.

Many participants emphasize the need for fundamental changes in societal attitudes toward women's sports and stress the importance of education and cultural awareness starting from families and schools to support female athletes. The main themes of this analysis include securing sustainable financial resources, strengthening sports infrastructure, increasing media coverage and advertising, and developing long-term strategies for the growth of women's sports.

Participants particularly highlight the necessity of attracting sponsors, leveraging digital media and social networks, and increasing participation in international competitions as key factors in advancing women's sports. Additionally, the need for developing managerial knowledge and skills, enhanced collaboration between federations, clubs, and the private sector, and learning from global experiences in women's sports marketing are other prominent themes in this research.

In conclusion, the progress of women's sports in Iraq requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, focusing on strengthening infrastructure, shifting societal attitudes, and utilizing modern media and technology.

Table 3. Sub-themes and main themes extracted from the interviews

Sub-themes	Main Themes
Budget and financial support shortage	Sustainable development of professional women's sports marketing in Iraq
Role of media	
Cultural and social challenges	
Infrastructure and facilities	
Education and empowerment	
Shortage of specialized human resources	
Use of social media	
Transportation and infrastructure problems	
Need for private sponsor participation	Long-term planning for comprehensive strengthening of women's professional sports.
Focus on players' physical and mental health	
Strengthening educational programs	
Promoting successful role models	
Increasing domestic competition	
Promoting social values of women's sports	Attracting financial resources and public support
Communicating with the global community	
Increasing budget management transparency	
Role of coaches in marketing	
Focusing on marketing innovation	
Use of community participation	Enhancing the status of women's sports in Iraq
Role of academic research	
Importance of specialized training	
Cultural and social challenges Need for inter-agency cooperation	
Strengthening technical and technological infrastructure	
Role of media and advertising	
Successful role models and their impact	
Strategic planning	
Lack of proper infrastructure	Collaboration among various institutions for sustainable changes
Inadequate financial support	
Social and cultural challenges	
Role of professional coaches	

Increasing international experience	
Creating regular domestic leagues	Improving infrastructure and financial conditions for women's sports
Psychological and social support	
Importance of long-term planning	
Media and advertising	
Promoting successful role models	
Changing social and cultural attitudes	Developing competitions and international experience
Creating equal conditions	
Raising public awareness	
Strengthening sports health and fitness	
Developing modern education programs	
Developing competitions and international experience	The key role of media in enhancing women's sports marketing
Increasing media presence in women's competitions	
Promoting success stories	
Training journalists	
Improving access to team information	Enhancing the role of social media
Interaction between journalists and federations	
Addressing infrastructure challenges	
Changing cultural attitudes through media	Developing education and media tools for journalists
Developing research and media tools for journalists	
Need for private and public investment	
Changing cultural attitudes	Developing the marketing infrastructure for women's sports, relying on investment, cultural change, and international interactions
Strengthening the role of media	
Strategic planning	
International interactions and knowledge transfer	
Leveraging the experiences of veterans to develop women's sports	
Strengthening family-centered cultural change	
Impact of veterans in policymaking	

Importance of education and long-term planning	
Creating equal opportunities	Strengthening the involvement of veterans in sports management and cultural change
Financial support and sustainable investment	
Developing club infrastructure and equipment	
Creating professional women's leagues	
Promoting digital marketing	Sustainable development of infrastructure and financial support for women's sports clubs
Increasing interaction with the media	
Attention to young talents	
Creating training programs for club managers	
Strengthening inter-club and federation cooperation	Creating a comprehensive marketing and media network to promote women's sports
Branding women's sports	
Interaction with local communities	
Using international experiences	
Encouraging private sponsors' involvement	
Cultural impact through sports	
Increasing international competitiveness	Empowering clubs through professional management and international interaction
Data analysis and market research	
Promoting branding of women's sports	
Using digital marketing tools	
Adapting marketing strategies to local culture	
Strengthening multilateral cooperation	Creating a comprehensive, culture-centered marketing strategy for the development of women's sports in Iraq
Need for accurate data collection	
Impact of culture and social values	
Research connection with sports policy-making	Research and policy-making connections for women's sports marketing
Role of media in promoting women's sports	
Economic analysis of women's sports marketing	
Comparative global studies	
Supporting researchers and producing local knowledge	

Creating long-term marketing programs	Developing research and media infrastructure for women's sports marketing
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Table 3 shows a set of sub-themes and main themes extracted from interviews with various participants. These themes generally focus on the various necessities for the sustainable development of professional women's sports marketing in Iraq. The most important main themes include attracting financial resources and public support, strengthening sports and educational infrastructure, changing social and cultural attitudes, and creating long-term strategic planning. These issues are related to sub-themes such as budget shortages, transportation problems, cultural challenges, the need for inter-sector cooperation, and the importance of using media and modern technologies in the development of women's sports. Considering these themes, it is observed that for advancing women's sports in Iraq, multilateral actions must be taken, including strengthening infrastructure, increasing financial support, promoting a culture of support for women's sports in society, and utilizing media and digital marketing. Additionally, collaboration between federations, clubs, and the private sector to attract sponsors and secure financial resources is essential. On the other hand, improving the social, cultural, and psychological conditions for female athletes, as well as enhancing training and empowerment for managers and coaches, are also key aspects of developing women's sports in Iraq.

Analysis of codes extracted from the table of contents

Conceptual Category	Related Codes	Extracted Theme
Financial Resources and Support	Budget shortage and financial support, insufficient financial support, need for private and public investment	Need for sustainable financial support
Media and Advertising	Role of media, use of social media, enhancing the role of social media, development of journalist training	Strengthening the role of media in promoting women's sports
Infrastructure and Facilities	Infrastructure and facilities, transportation problems, lack of proper infrastructure, development of club infrastructure	Need for improvement in sports infrastructure
Education and Empowerment	Education and empowerment, importance of specialized training, development of modern education	Increasing the capacity of human resources
Social-Cultural Challenges	Cultural and social challenges, changing cultural attitudes, strengthening family-centered cultural change	Need for cultural change for women's sports

Interactions and Policy-making	Role of academic research, connection between research and policy-making, supporting researchers	Need for research-based policy-making
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Discussion and Conclusion

This research focused on enhancing professional women's sports marketing in Iraq: A phenomenological approach. The study utilized a phenomenological approach and semi-structured interviews with 20 activists in the women's sports field. The aim of this study was to identify existing opportunities and obstacles and provide effective strategies for the development of women's sports in Iraq. Currently, professional sports are experiencing significant global growth, especially in women's sports, which has seen increased attention in recent years. Many countries have contributed to the development of this field by creating appropriate infrastructures and attracting large investments through media contracts and financial sponsorships. Effective marketing in women's sports not only helps attract an audience and increase revenue but also plays a crucial role in enhancing the social status of women's sports. Among these, media broadcasting rights are considered one of the main pillars of sports marketing and can significantly contribute to the success of professional women's sports. In Iraq, despite the high potential of female athletes, the lack of a comprehensive marketing system and challenges related to media broadcasting rights have led many women's sports to fail to achieve their rightful status. This has led to reduced motivation among athletes and a lack of effective sponsorships.

The analysis of main and sub-themes reveals both challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of women's professional sports marketing in Iraq. In the following, the sub-themes are discussed in detail, along with their connection to the main theme. One of the most significant obstacles to the development of women's professional sports marketing in Iraq is the lack of financial resources and sustainable financial support. Many clubs and sports organizations are unable to cover the initial costs for marketing, advertising, and improving the quality of women's professional sports. This has led to reduced motivation for investment in this area. Similar studies in this field also show that securing financial resources is one of the key pillars for sustainable development in professional sports (Smith et al., 2020). Every national sports federation is the main body responsible for advancing a sport and achieving organizational and federational goals through that sport. One of the essentials for every sports federation to perform its duties, implement programs, and achieve its objectives is the

availability of appropriate financial resources. This highlights marketing as one of the key methods in determining financial resources. In many federations, the allocated budget from the Ministry of Sports is insufficient for the federation's programs, and some federations are required to generate income and become self-sufficient in financing (Honarvar et al., 2003). Najafzadeh et al. (2012), in a study on women's sports marketing in West Azerbaijan, identified 11 key factors, including financial support, product management and processes, media, public relations, motivation, and spectator expectations, as the most important factors affecting the development of this area.

Media plays a fundamental role in promoting and advertising women's sports, as well as attracting public and financial support. Unfortunately, in Iraq, media coverage of women's sports is insufficient, and this shortage has led to reduced public awareness and neglect of women's sports. Previous studies have shown that media can increase public interest in this field by reflecting the achievements of female athletes (Bruce, 2016). Al-Jabouri et al. (2020), in a study on the impact of social media on university students in Iraq, concluded that academic goals are achieved more rapidly through media and advertising. Ditmore et al. (2014), in a study on sports marketing and new media, found that advertising and sports media play a role in marketing development and economic prosperity, and marketing research and the marketing mix have a significant role in the management of marketing quality.

Women's sports in traditional societies, including Iraq, face significant cultural and social barriers. These barriers include conservative attitudes toward gender roles, social limitations on women's activities in public spaces, and the lack of successful female sports role models. Many families limit women's participation in professional sports due to cultural values and concerns about social judgment. Additionally, the insufficient attention to the development of sports infrastructure for women, the lack of safe and appropriate recreational and sports facilities, and the shortage of equal opportunities for accessing sports facilities are other important barriers. Research has shown that awareness and empowerment programs for women can play a key role in overcoming these barriers. These programs should focus on enhancing women's roles in sports, changing societal views on women's participation in sports activities, and promoting gender equality values. For example, media programs that showcase the successes of female athletes can be motivational and create more positive attitudes toward women's participation in sports (Leg et al., 2024). Furthermore, investing in the education and

empowerment of young girls through sports workshops, educational programs in schools, and social activities can help develop women's sports. The experiences of countries that have been successful in this area show that the collaboration of the government, non-governmental organizations, and media is essential in these programs.

Adequate sports infrastructure is one of the essential prerequisites for developing professional women's sports, and its shortage significantly impacts the growth of this field. In Iraq, the lack of standardized sports facilities and limited access to suitable sports clubs and fields are among the main obstacles. These problems not only prevent the attraction of new talents but also negatively impact the quality of training and the preparation of professional athletes. Sports infrastructure includes facilities such as stadiums, training halls, sports fields, and standard equipment, which directly affect the creation of equal opportunities for both men and women in sports. Research has shown that access to these facilities increases women's participation in sports and boosts their motivation to pursue a professional sports career (Hwang, 2023). Additionally, having suitable infrastructure can help with the marketing of women's sports. For example, holding professional competitions in standard sports facilities can create opportunities for financial support and sponsorships. In Iraq, many sports facilities fall short of international standards, particularly in rural areas and small cities, where girls and women often cannot participate in sports activities due to the lack of proper facilities. Moreover, the lack of women-only sports clubs or safe training spaces is another significant barrier.

Suggested solutions include:

1. Investment in infrastructure: The government and the private sector should invest in the development of sports infrastructure, especially in underdeveloped areas. The creation of multi-purpose sports fields and women-only clubs could increase their participation.
2. Development of public programs: Encouraging schools and universities to expand sports activities for girls and provide the necessary facilities could have a positive impact.

3. Collaboration with international organizations: Leveraging the support and experiences of global organizations like the IOC and FIFA in developing sports infrastructure could help improve conditions.

Sports infrastructure development, as a key component in enhancing women's professional sports, should be prioritized by Iraqi policymakers. This not only helps the growth of women's sports but also plays a vital role in changing cultural and social attitudes and advancing sustainable marketing in this area.

Training and empowering female athletes, coaches, and sports managers is one of the key elements in the growth and sustainable development of women's sports. In Iraq, the lack of cohesive training programs, skill development courses, and empowerment workshops has led to significant limitations in the advancement of women's sports. These limitations include reduced competitive ability in national and international arenas, weak professional management, and insufficient awareness of marketing principles and investment attraction in sports. Education is one of the powerful tools to overcome structural and social barriers in women's sports. Studies have shown that effective education can increase athletes' confidence, improve coaches' skills, and enhance decision-making by sports managers (Hancock et al., 2013). These changes not only enhance individual performance but also contribute to team success and the overall development of women's sports.

The challenges in Iraq include:

- Lack of training programs: In many parts of Iraq, there are no formal training programs for coaches, athletes, and women's managers. The absence of such programs leads to weakness in implementing technical, tactical, and managerial principles.
- Limited access to educational resources: The lack of specialized educational resources, such as textbooks, online courses, and in-person workshops, is another major challenge.
- Cultural barriers: Traditional attitudes in Iraqi society often prevent women from participating in sports training programs. These cultural barriers are particularly evident in rural and underprivileged areas.

The results of this study indicate that the sustainable development of women's professional sports marketing in Iraq requires attention to several key aspects. First, the lack of financial

resources and economic support needs to be addressed. Attracting private and public investors, along with offering tax incentives for companies, could help mitigate this challenge. Second, the role of media must be emphasized. Creating advertising platforms and providing broader coverage of women's sports achievements can attract public attention and improve societal views on this field. Moreover, changing cultural and social perspectives through educational and awareness programs is essential. This change in attitude can pave the way for increased women's participation and strengthen the position of women's sports in society. Finally, improving sports infrastructure and establishing regular training programs to empower women in various areas of professional sports, including coaching and management, is fundamental to developing this field.

Professional women's sports in Iraq faces a range of challenges and opportunities that require comprehensive examination and solutions for achieving sustainable progress. One of the main issues is the shortage of skilled human resources. The lack of skilled coaches and sports managers for women, especially in underdeveloped areas, has slowed progress. To address this challenge, it is essential to design training programs for the development of sports professionals. Additionally, collaboration with international sports organizations can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and new experiences. The most important factor for success in any field, including professional women's sports, is the existence of efficient and capable human resources—individuals who are satisfied with participating in sports activities and are fully focused on improving performance and playing an effective role in the success of teams and sports organizations. Today, sports managers and decision-makers are aware that the main success factor in developing professional women's sports is not only physical infrastructure and facilities but also having skilled, trained, and motivated human resources.

In Iraq, the shortage of skilled human resources is one of the major challenges in women's sports. Having professional coaches, experienced managers, and motivated athletes is a prerequisite for sustainable growth in this area. Furthermore, efficient human resources must have specialized training and the necessary skills to compete at national and international levels. As human resources can easily move from.

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