Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates*

Arash Dousti,[1] Reza Saboonchi,[2] Zohreh Sabzi[3]

1. PhD in Sports Management, Borujard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Borujard, Iran. (arash.dousti@yahoo.com)   0000-0002-4534-0194
2. Associate Professor of Physical Education, Borujard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Borujard, Iran (Corresponding Author). (r.saboonchi@iaub.ac.ir)   0000-0001-8514-6583
3. PhD in Sports Management, Borujard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Borujard, Iran. (zohreh_sabzi@yahoo.com)   0000-0001-5567-9434

Abstract

The main goal of the research was to Identification of strategic elements of sports diplomacy based on soft power in expanding Iran's international relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In the first step, by examining the theoretical foundations and research literature, a questionnaire related to the foundation's data theory was designed in order to extract the components of the strategic model of sports diplomacy in facilitating Iran's international relations with the countries of Qatar and the UAE, and information was collected by conducting 16 interviews with experts in this industry. In order to test the model, the community of experts active in the sports industry was used. The following categories of Media policy, Sports cultural diplomacy; Sports economic and commercial diplomacy; Sports public diplomacy; Sports platform diplomacy; Sports political diplomacy and Strategic sports diplomacy were used to design the model. For testing the relationships, Spearman's correlation test method, structural equation model and regression were performed on the data. Results indicate that economic diplomacy, strategic diplomacy and political diplomacy constitute the basis of the model.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Sports Diplomacy, Strategic Diplomacy, Political Diplomacy, Qatar, United Arab Emirate (UAE)

---

1. Introduction

In recent years, convergence and cooperation among countries and governments at regional and global levels have been increasing despite wars and conflicts in some parts of the world. Considering that sports and sporting events inherently seek peace and friendship, the impact of sports on peaceful relations between countries has become more significant than ever before. Therefore, the geopolitics of sports, through analyzing power relations, politics, and geography with a focus on sports and sporting events, can provide a better strategic approach for achieving cooperation and convergence. The strategic importance and the presence of energy resources in the Gulf region have turned this region into one of the most important areas of the world. Sports competitions are also influenced by these conflicts (Raeissadat et al., 2022). Sports diplomacy has been used to understand the interactions within a wide range of settings of traditional modes of communication, negotiation, and representation at different sites. The diversity of fields in this particular subject highlights the use of the term "sports diplomacy" in considering national governments, international sports federations, clubs, private organizations, and the role of individual athletes in certain diplomatic contexts (Postlethwaite et al., 2022).

Many countries increasingly use sports to improve their international reputation. By hosting a sports events or achieving a high level of sports performance, governments can attempt to influence the general foreign perception of their country. Traditionally, such commitments were made in sporting environments. However, sports, considered a soft power asset, can also enhance states' progress during non-sports events (Garamvölgyi et al., 2022). Therefore, the link between diplomacy

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

319

and sports is an effective solution. Together they can provide a clearer and more effective horizon for achieving international diplomatic success (Chehabi, 2004). Among the important regions surrounding Iran in Southwest Asia, the Persian Gulf region holds vital significance for Iran's development, security, and national interests, and it should be at the forefront of Iran's foreign policy. The reason is that the Persian Gulf is Iran's main gateway to the free world, energy export, importation of goods, energy security, and connection to Southeast and East Asia. On the other hand, active involvement in the security and political issues of the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Arab world gives Iran a high degree of leverage in regional affairs and relations with major powers (Barzegar, 1388/2009).

1. 1. Statement of the Problem

Entering the 21st century, sports have become an essential part of a country's public diplomacy (Abdi et al., 2019). "Soft power" is a term often used to describe the way in which countries seek to increase their geopolitical influence by attracting and appealing to others instead of relying on military force or economic threats. Sports events, as part of soft power, showcase the values, culture, and image of a host country, attracting attention from investors and tourists (Næss, 2023). In recent years, sports have been considered as one of the main pillars of public diplomacy; they serves as a peaceful tools for international affairs, allowing countries to strengthen global relationships. In public policy, sports provide a valuable opportunity for people of mutual culture to interact and also create a peaceful and stable relationship among nations

Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, various tensions arose

between Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region and Iran, and many of these tensions have spilled over into sports competitions (Raeissadat et al., 2022). According to the strategy of Qatar's National Sports Sector (Søyland & Moriconi, 2011), there are three reasons for achieving sporting success in Qatar: 1) development as a healthy nation, 2) improvement of international relations, and 3) becoming a global sports hub. Academic literature also emphasizes factors such as gaining global credibility, achieving national unity, and improving infrastructure in the country (Reiche, 2019). In terms of fan base and participation, sports in Qatar revolve around football. Additionally, there are fans of athletics, basketball, handball, camel racing, horse riding, cricket, and swimming. Qatar's sports sector has made significant progress in recent years, evidenced by its championships, medal achievements, hosting major sporting events, and the establishment of advanced and well-equipped sports camps (Polvandeh & Rostami, 1401 [2022 A.D.]).

Along the same lines, the United Arab Emirates aims to establish itself as a sports hub in the region by heavily investing in the sports sector. The Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix, the Dubai World Cup in horse racing, the Dubai Tennis Championships, and the Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup are examples of sports events used in the public diplomacy of the UAE (Ajam, 1388 [2009 A.D.]). One of the most important characteristics of public diplomacy is its broad reach and impact in the international arena. In this regard, the UAE has defined its target audience for public diplomacy in various layers. The countries of the Persian Gulf region are considered the most important target community for the UAE's public diplomacy efforts. Language, culture, religion, and shared historical background are the most significant reasons that contribute to the UAE's stronger presence in this particular domain of public diplomacy (Søyland & Moriconi, 2011).

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

321

Considering the existence of converging links between the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, and the UAE, it appears that convergence and solidarity among these countries should increase day by day. The position and role of these three countries in regional and international decision-making necessitate an examination of the deep converging links between them. Given that the countries of the Persian Gulf region are at the center of attention for regional and transregional countries, understanding the dynamics of Qatar and the UAE is significant (Monazami, 1402 [2023 A.D.]).

Sports diplomacy has been used to comprehend interactions in a wide range of traditional settings of interaction, negotiation, and representation in various sites. The diversity of fields in this particular subject emphasizes the use of the term "sports diplomacy" to consider governments, international sports federations, clubs, or private organizations and the role of individual athletes in certain diplomatic situations (Postlethwaite et al., 2022). Among the important regions surrounding Iran in Southwest Asia, the Persian Gulf region holds vital importance for Iran's development, security, and national interests and should be at the forefront of Iran's foreign policy. The reason is that the Persian Gulf is Iran's main gateway to the free world, energy export, importation of goods, energy security, and connection to Southeast and East Asia.

On the other hand, active involvement in the security and political issues of the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Arab world gives Iran a high degree of leverage in regional affairs and relations with major powers (Barzegar, 1388 [2009 A.D.]). Sports and sporting activities, which are part of the social and cultural fabric of countries, have now transcended physical activity or a form of

recreation and have taken on various social, cultural, economic, environmental, political, and international functions. In today's world of international diplomacy, to promote domestic economic growth and counter isolationist policies, attention to both formal and informal relationships is necessary, and the role of sports, as an effective tool in developing international relations is emphasized. Therefore, this potential must be redefined and utilized in the structure of Iran's public diplomacy for the development of international relations and communications (Sabbaghian, 1394 [2016 A.D.]).

1. 2. The Significance of the Study

Considering the significance of sports in international relations, its position and role in society, as well as in the development of international relations, along with the limited qualitative research in sports and international relations, there is a need for research in this area. Furthermore, there have been few studies examining sports within the framework of Iran's policies. This highlights the importance and applicability of research in this field. Therefore, this research endeavors to identify the diplomatic dimensions and capacities of sports in Iran, and utilize this platform as a tool to initiate and strengthen diplomatic relations with Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region, particularly Qatar and the UAE.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the democratic governments in the world, which has consistently faced unjust accusations and sanctions in the years following the revolution, can use this lever to improve and enhance its international image, alongside other functions of sports such as branding and international prestige achievements, introducing itself as a peace-

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

323

loving and anti-racist country, combating poverty and disease, celebrating cultural interaction and exchange, preventing and reducing political isolation and sanctions, encouraging economic development such as improving sports tourism, increasing support for sports and its promotion, and enhancing national identity, pride, and cohesion. The question addressed in this research consists of the nature of sports diplomacy, and the research aims to explore the role of sports diplomacy in improving Iran's relations with Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, particularly Qatar and the UAE. It seeks to first extract the components of Iran's sports diplomacy and then examine the role of these components in enhancing international relations between these countries.

One of the reasons for the tensions between Iran and Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, especially the United Arab Emirates, is the issue of Iranian islands and the UAE's claim of ownership over these islands. Another issue that has had a significant impact on sports relations between Iran and these countries is the replacement of the term "Persian Gulf" with "Arabian Gulf" by Arab countries. Due to the aforementioned differences, some believe that Iran feels alienated from Arab countries in terms of ethnicity, politics, and religion, and the security, legitimacy, and participation crisis in the Arab world deepens the political-cultural gap. On the other hand, Arab countries consider Iran as an uncertain neighbor and sometimes as an enemy (Barzegar, 1388 [2009 A.D.]). The Persian Gulf region is believed to be one of the most important strategic regions of the world due to its location in the world's energy oval and the fact that its peripheral countries possess approximately 60% of the world's oil reserves. Among the commonalities of the Persian Gulf countries, apart from oil and gas reserves, is the ethnic unity of the people of this region. Apart from

Arabs, Iranian peoples such as Bushharis, Abbasids, Laris, and Baluchs also live in the Arab countries of the region, including Qatar. Furthermore, the countries of the region have the same climate due to their location in the dry belt.

In the late 20th and the early 21st century, the countries on the southern border; more precisely the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have seen increasing growth at the level of development in economy, tourism, sports, and politics, and have managed to reduce their economic dependence on oil exports to a certain extent. The other important events that can confirm the strong role of the Persian Gulf countries at the global level in sports include the hosting of the 2022 Football World Cup in Qatar, the hosting of the 1996 Asian Nations Cup in the UAE, the hosting of the 2011 Asian Nations Cup and the 2006 Doha Asian Games in Qatar, as well as the presence of world sports teams, including prominent European club teams for winter camps due to the suitability of the weather in the region in the winter season (Raeissadat et al., 2022). Therefore, the current research attempts to identify the diplomatic dimensions and capacities of Iran's sports through soft power and use this platform as a tool to start and strengthen diplomatic relations with the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, especially Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

2. Literature Review

Previous research by Saboonchi and Asgarabadi (1402 [2023 A.D.]) indicates that cultural, media, economic, and public diplomacy play a pivotal role in shaping sports diplomacy, particularly concerning Iran's relations with Persian Gulf countries. Strategies such as leveraging regional non-governmental

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

325

organizations, collaborating with national diplomatic entities, creating joint media ventures with other nations, enhancing economic partnerships with entrepreneurs from Gulf countries, and establishing a collaboration framework between the Ministries of Sports and Youth Affairs and Foreign Affairs have been identified as the most impactful. Consequently, forming a committee comprising responsible bodies from the sports and diplomatic sectors to organize sports events within the Persian Gulf region for promoting messages of peace and friendship is recommended.

In their study titled "Designing a Model of Influential Factors on the Development of Communications between Iranian Sports Federations and Persian Gulf Countries", Azizian Kohan and Zare Abdansari (1402 [2023 A.D.]) suggest that various sports federations can augment their human resources through positive engagements with sports federations of other nations. The research identifies 71 primary themes, categorized into 11 main subjects, encompassing aspects such as media content, behavioral norms, infrastructure development, managerial strategies, political dimensions, security aspects, sports interactions, international solidarity, sports communications, national credibility, and educational experiences. As a practical step, senior managers within Iran's sports federations are encouraged to incorporate these identified concepts to strengthen sporting relations with other countries.

Abdi et al. (2022) conducted a research entitled "Identification of conceivable diplomatic outcomes of sports diplomacy initiatives". After performing two rounds of fuzzy Delphi, the results were classified into two categories: overt/specific outcomes and implicit/general outcomes. The analysis of the data proved that the consequences of "intercultural communication", "mutual

understanding", "trust building", "national branding", "country's reputation", "attractiveness" and "co-option" were the clearest possible results of sports diplomacy initiatives carried out by the ministries of foreign affairs of countries and related agencies. In addition, "Sports Industry Development", "Sports Tourism Development" and "Socio-Economic Development" were the most possible outcomes of implicit/public efforts of sports diplomacy initiatives carried out by sports federations, private sector, non-governmental organizations and other institutions outside the official framework.

Garamvölgyi and Dóczi (2021) conducted a research entitled "Sport as a tool for public diplomacy in Hungary". They concluded that by realizing sports in public diplomacy, Hungary has become a pioneering country in Central and Eastern Europe. The Hungarian government's sports diplomacy has not slowed down with the Covid-19 pandemic, and the country continues to focus on investing heavily in attracting and organizing international sports competitions and hosting the Summer Olympic Games in Budapest - which is the ultimate objective of the current government's sports diplomacy strategy.

Santos (2021) conducted a research entitled "The interplay of soft power and hard power in sports diplomacy: a conceptual framework". He mentioned that the concepts of soft power, sharp power and sports diplomacy have been operationalized and are the basis of the analytical framework that was constructed as the result of his study, which can support future developments. In addition to indicating avenues for further research, the conclusion summarizes the ways in which sports diplomacy has integrated actors, tactics, and tools, as well as soft and hard power sources, that shape their interactions in sports diplomacy. Garamvölgyi et al. (2022) also

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

327

conducted a research titled "Designing the role of public sports in public diplomacy" and concluded that sports interventions based on public sports strengthen relationships between people and contribute to socio-economic development among groups. Grassroots sport also helps governments by understanding elitism through public diplomacy.

Rofe and Postlethwaite (2021) conducted a research titled "Scholarship and Sports Diplomacy: The Cases of Japan and Britain". This study points to the range of actors involved, focusing on organizing committees, and assesses the effectiveness of sport diplomacy at a range of levels that go beyond a focus on the government. It makes use of documents from international sporting events, global media archives and public and private commentaries from the UK and Japan. This study mentions three key issues: 1) Olympic dominant discourse: dominance and shifting trends between the hosting of the Olympic Games and other events. 2) Western dominant discourse: the difference between Japan and the UK in showing distinct 'Eastern' and 'Western' sports diplomacy approaches. 3) Discourse governing the state: the role of knowledge exchange and elite networks that go beyond the state and involve a range of different actors such as the organizing committees.

Lee (2020) conducted a research entitled "Sports Diplomacy at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang". He concluded that the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang was arguably one of the most political major sporting events ever. After almost two years of heightened political tensions, improving relations between North and South Korea became a real objective. This sports competition was a diplomatic place for Koreans to talk. Therefore, the PyeongChang Winter Olympics was a classic example of the

intersection between global politics and a global sporting event. This chapter investigates the relationship between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at three different levels of the Winter Olympics: (1) the bid for the event; (2) preparation for the Olympics; and (3) the games. The political shift from resentment to reconciliation between North and South Korea was the remarkable diplomatic story of the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang. Typically, it is a global political situation that affects the nature of international sport. However, in PyeongChang, a sports competition triggered political change.

Dixon et al. (2019) in a research entitled "Examination of the structure and initial process of sports diplomacy" maintain that sports and sports events play a significant role in strengthening and developing diplomatic relations between countries, as well as creating peace. In addition, in their research entitled "Sports cooperation between the two Koreas and the excessive role of sports diplomacy in South Korea", Min and Choi (2019) discuss the fact that the use of sports as a diplomatic tool between North and South Korea has been expanding since the early 1960s. After that, sports exchanges between the two Koreas have been more like a social factor for political partnership.

Abdi et al. (2019) conducted a research entitled "Modeling the implementation of soft power in sports diplomacy". In this research, they classified the sources of sports diplomacy in three categories: sports events, sports human capital, and sports producers and products. The means of transforming sports diplomacy resources into diplomatic results were identified as the correlation of official and sports diplomacy, competent cultural ambassadors, high performance and mass media coverage. The

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

329

results of sports diplomacy efforts were classified into two groups: overt/specific consequences and implicit/general consequences. The main achievement of sports diplomacy plans and initiatives is to create peace by reducing/eliminating tension between hostile states/nations and developing peace between friendly states/nations.

Martynenko et al. (2019) conducted a study entitled "Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Impact on China-US Relations" and maintained that sports is a global phenomenon which, in the modern world, has the greatest potential and opportunity for political influence. History reveals many instances of the ways in which various countries have made use of this tool to achieve their goals. "Ping-Pong Diplomacy" confirms this fact with great success in US-China relations. Tahzibi (1400/2021) in his research titled "Reviewing the role and influence of sports diplomacy in international relations" concluded that sports diplomacy is a subdivision of public diplomacy, in which public diplomacy functions under the rules of sports policy-making in the direction of sharing norms among nations, which at the same time, facilitates cooperation, strengthens intercultural understanding and removes the dust of alienation or separation between individuals and governments.

Hassanpourghadi and Dousti (1400 [2021 A.D.]) in their research titled "the position of sports diplomacy in Iran's foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution of 1979" concluded that the country's sports diplomacy fails to follow a specific trend and pattern. However, whatever happens following the revolution, governments, regardless of their political positions, have resorted to using this diplomacy more in accordance with their goals. Agakhani et al. (1400 [2021 A.D.]) conducted a research entitled "Designing a model of football diplomacy and international

relations in Iran from the perspective of experts". The purpose of this research was to design a model of the role of football in diplomacy and gaining international status in Iran. The study concluded that football diplomacy is influential in the eight subjects of political development, cultural development, media development, peace and friendship development, economic development, tourism development, development of unity and national identity and gaining international status. Abdi et al. (2022) conducted a study titled "Designing a model of exercising soft power through sports diplomacy", in which the sources of sports diplomacy were classified into three groups, including sports events, sports human capital, and sports producers. Proficient transformation strategies, including coherence between official and sports diplomacy, capable cultural ambassadors, high performance and extensive media coverage were identified and the outcomes of sports diplomacy were categorized into two groups: explicit/ specific outcomes and implicit/general outcomes. The chief expected outcome was the implementation of sports diplomacy initiatives, the creation of peace through the reduction/elimination of tension between hostile governments/nations and the development of peace between friendly governments/nations.

Polvandeh and Rostami (1401 [2022 A.D.]), in their research entitled "Measuring the relationship between sports diplomacy and the international prestige of countries" which was a case study of hosting Qatar for the 2022 World Cup, concluded that in addition to military or political powers, there are other less expensive ways through which countries can achieve their goals. Qatar is one of the countries that is using this type of diplomacy to achieve its regional and international goals despite its special geographical location. Accordingly, the main question of the current study is how sports

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

331

diplomacy affects Qatar's international prestige. Adopting the descriptive analytical method, it was found that Qatar has managed to guarantee itself a serious role and ultimately increase its international prestige and credibility through sports diplomacy, obtaining the right to host the World Cup in 2022 and consequently, turning into an important regional player, obtaining an important opportunity for public diplomacy and soft power, engagement on peace and security, and attracting public opinion. Mohammadi Azizabadi and Beheshti (1399 [2020 A.D.]) in a research entitled "Political sociology of sports: the effect of sports and professional athletes on political life" concluded that sports is considered a new social-political tool, which has an impact on the political scene. Furthermore, using this phenomenon, social forces has managed to achieve considerable political power compared to the past.

3. Research Method

Since the current study attempts to identify the strategic elements of sports diplomacy based on soft power in expanding Iran's international relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, in terms of the fundamental goal and in terms of the result, it is an exploratory research that is performed using a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) approach. Due to the novelty of the research topic, lack of knowledge and the urge to develop this subject in Iran, lack of theory and answers to the research questions, the research method in the qualitative section of the study is grounded theory, which is an inductive of arriving at the whole from the parts. The grounded theory was originally developed and discussed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 985-1000, in Myers, 2013, p. 296). They

defined it as "the discovery of theories based on data systematically collected and analyzed in social research". In accordance with the research method in the qualitative part, the purpose sampling method was adopted, and to collect quality and reliable information, the selected samples were full of information to provide a reliable picture of the studied phenomenon. In qualitative research, the number of samples is determined by the theoretical saturation criterion, that is, when the researcher finds out that conducting more interviews fails to provide him with more data and leads only to repeating previous information, he can end the data collection (Nazarian et al., 1398 [2019 A.D.]).

The method of collecting information in the qualitative section was to conduct an in-depth interview. To collect qualitative and real information, a total of 16 expert professors were interviewed. From the interview number 15, repetition was observed, but for a greater amount of certainty, 16 interviews were conducted. Since one main question and six sub-questions were considered in this research, the interview questions were formulated in line with the answers. During the interviews, in addition to taking notes and audio recording, exploratory questions were also asked according to the conditions of the interview and the answers of the interviewees.

The 16 experts in sports management and political science have sufficient knowledge and mastery in sports diplomacy with postgraduate education in this field and more than 15 years of work experience in research. They were 40 to 60 years old and were also used in the qualitative part, i.e. the first part of the research. Interviews were conducted and the initial codes of the research were extracted from them; then the initial components of the research were conducted using data-based theory and axial coding,

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

333

and the interviews continued until saturation. In addition, experts were used in the interpretive structural modeling; a questionnaire designed to examine the relationships was handed to them and they determined the cause-and-effect relationships between the components. Strauss and Corbin's (2011) method was used for data analysis. By constantly comparing data, writing interviews, field notes and recorded cases, and conceptualizing, interpreting and theorizing, the researcher obtained the main essence of the obtained data. Prior to each interview, the previous interview was coded and analyzed. For this, the open coding stage was selected and performed. The researcher looked for the main variable and the process in the data. Repeated review of the emerging data, codes and classes, notes and diagrams written during the data analysis contributed to writing the main story so that the researcher identified the main variable of the study. Afterwards, by the opinion of experts, the conceptual model of the research was designed using the interpretive structural modeling method.

3. 1. Interpretive Structural Modeling

In Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM), which is an interactive process, a series of different and related elements are structured in a comprehensive systematic model, which states whether there are relationships between elements or not (Azar et al., 1395 [2012 A.D.]). This method includes the following seven steps in order: identifying the variables related to the problem; forming the structural self-interaction matrix; creating the initial access matrix; creating the final access matrix; segmentation of the surface; the initial and final interpretive structural model; Analysis of penetration power and degree of dependence (MICMAC chart).

4. Research Findings

Following the conduction and implementation of the interviews, the transcriptions of the interviews was entered into the qualitative data analysis software MaxquQDA for analysis and open coding. Then the researcher went to the next interviews. Open coding is an analytical process by which concepts are identified and their characteristics and dimensions are discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2011). Next, each interview's text was studied intermittently and its main sentences were extracted and recorded as text codes according to the participant or indicative codes (the researcher's interpretation of the statements). Then, the codes that were conceptually similar to each other were grouped. The obtained open codes number was equal to 80. Since the coding was done on the axis of a category and the categories are linked to each other at the level of features and dimensions, the next step was axial coding, which is the process of relating categories to subcategories. At this stage, the primary codes and categories that were created in open coding and were related to each other, were placed around a common axis. At this stage, the codes should be compared continuously. Then each class is compared with other classes to guarantee that the classes are distinct from each other. Then, by focusing on the conditions that lead to the desired phenomenon, the contexts in which the phenomenon occurred and the strategies that were used to control the phenomenon, selective coding and the main variable were determined. A summary of the open, central and selective coding of the research data is presented in the table below. Table 1 presents the central coding paradigm of the qualitative process model of the current study and it will be followed by an explanation of the components of the qualitative research model.

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

335

Table 1. Coding (Open, Central and Selective) of Research Data

Categories	Concepts	Open codes
Media policy (sports media diplomacy)	Media needs assessment	A more detailed and extensive grasp of the sports needs in Persian Gulf region; audience awareness and adequate familiarity with the audience's taste before attempting to create content; Founding new sports media associations in the region; Using works of art and effective sports documentaries.
	Media interactions	Two-sided interaction between the Ministry of Sports and Youth with media organizations; producing joint sports works through cooperation with other nearby countries; Using different domestic and regional capacities to build joint programs
	Media content	Benefiting Iran's rich history and civilization in sports activities ; Using entertainment in sports channels to attract the audience; joint programs based on existing relative advantages with the region; Content production based on religious and cultural affinities of the region
Sports cultural diplomacy	Value requirements	Showing Iran's developments in sports and transferring it to neighboring countries; Accreditation in international forums to establish communication; Promoting responsibility culture in sports relations.
	Intercultural communication	Activating sports elites capacities based on Islamic beliefs; Making use of the capacity of athletes sent to competitions in neighboring countries; Using non-governmental organizations in the region; Strengthening sports communities and scientific exchange with regional countries; sports business relations and tourism; relations between cultural, educational and sports institutions to develop communication; Intellectual and social connection among people of neighboring countries
	Cultural branding	Iran's sports branding in accordance with correct concepts and intellectual foundations; Branding focused on the identity, mentality and dignity of Iranian sports; Sports branding based on showing Iranian feelings and perceptions.
	Cultural peace	Reduction in regional inter-racial in the region and maintaining international cohesion; strengthening interactions between the people of the region and the mentioned countries ; Reducing stereotypes, political tensions and ideological conflicts between countries using sports diplomacy

Categories	Concepts	Open codes
Sports economic and commercial diplomacy	Economic Development	Focusing on the capacities of the sports economy in the target community; development of non-governmental and private organizations activities; Using the capacity of communication technologies for the development of the international sports economy; Development and modernization of governments with the contribution of regional investments
	International Marketing	Business and sports marketing development and commercial relations with other countries; boosting people's ability to analyze international marketing communications; Removing barriers to marketing the development of countries using sports
Diplomacy as a platform for sports	Teaching and learning	Correction of executive regulations of sports institutions; Teaching and reinforcing public diplomacy concepts using sports; Introducing public diplomacy through sports in a non-governmental manner
	Interior improvement	Taking off governmental laws that stand in way of the realization of sports diplomacy; coordination between the country's policies and public policies; Efforts to create a unified viewpoint among sports managers on sports role in establishing relations with other countries; Development of coalitions of non-governmental organizations in international sports.
	Goals supporting networking	Regulating the cooperation document between the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; holding think-tank sessions between related ministries; More interaction of sports organizations with the country's official diplomacy sector
	Information technologies	Development in communication with other regional countries; upgrading information systems among international communities; expansion of virtual communication systems; The occurrence of the information revolution in the new era; The emergence of new technologies using communication infrastructure; The existence and development of online networks to establish communication with other countries; The existence of advanced communication means
Sports public diplomacy	General understanding and insight	Awareness of the influence of individuals on international developments; Reduction of worldwide violence using sports; Accountability to the public to create attractive sports programs; Emergence of issues of transnational nature sports

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

337

Categories	Concepts	Open codes
	International motives	Encouraging policy transparency culture in international sports relations; Public honesty of governments in explaining communication goals; Improving the culture of accountability in front of sports goals and programs; Participation of people in decisions related to regional communication
Sports political diplomacy	Strengthening diplomatic and political relations	Building up Iran's political and sports authority to reinforce relations with regional countries; Adopting expert and committed diplomats in Persian Gulf countries; specialization of diplomats' activities in sports economy; Training diplomats in sports marketing; Saving the country's sports diplomatic positions at the regional level; Policy-making synergy in international sports diplomacy initiatives (Sports Raison); Leveling political relations with neighbor countries.
	Focus on commonalities	Highlighting the commonalities of Iran and the Persian Gulf; Promotion of rich Islamic culture using sports; Common symbolization and visualization at the regional level; Focus on regional shared religious and political ideologies
	Stable political peace in the region (political peace)	Refining foreign relations and increasing understanding among governments; Respecting national identity and territorial integrity of regional countries; Creating a suitable environment for making peace-based political decisions in the region; Adopting neighborhood policy and mutual respect towards neighboring countries.
Strategic sports diplomacy	Strategic planning	Defining short-term and long-term sports goals to initiate communication; Constructing strategic plans to upgrade public diplomacy through sports; Planning for economic cooperation in sports with the contribution of regional entrepreneurs
	Ideological development in the region	Defense of oppressed and underprivileged groups in deprived areas; Holding sports competitions with shared memories; Development of Islamic values among neighboring countries.

Source: Authors

In the current study, following the determination of the main categories and using the interpretive structural modeling method, a strategic model of sports diplomacy was designed in the development of Iran's relations with the Arab countries of Qatar

and the UAE (Persian Gulf region). The steps of the interpretive structural modeling method are as follows:

The first step is identifying the variables related to the problem. For understanding the sports diplomacy phenomenon in the development of Iran's relations with the Arab countries of Qatar and the UAE, the grounded theory method was used to extract the components of sports diplomacy in the development of the aforementioned relation. The results are presented in Table 1. The second step consisted of forming the structural self-interaction matrix. In Table 2, the structural self-interaction matrix is composed of sports diplomacy components in the development of Iran's relations with the Arab countries of Qatar and the UAE, and compares them using four modes of conceptual relations.

Table 2. Structural Self-Interaction Matrix of Sports Diplomacy Categories

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Strategic sports diplomacy	X	X	X	X	V	V	V
2	Sports economic and commercial diplomacy	X	X	X	X	V	V	V
3	Sports political diplomacy	X	X	X	V	V	V	V
4	Diplomacy as a platform for sports	X	X	A	X	V	V	V
5	Sports cultural diplomacy	A	A	A	X	X	X	V
6	Media policy (sports media diplomacy)	A	A	A	X	X	X	V
7	Sports public diplomacy	A	A	A	A	A	A	X

Source: Warfield, 2005, p. 71

The third and fourth steps include creating the primary relationships matrix.

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

339

Table 2.1. The Final Access Matrix of Sports Diplomacy Categories

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Penetration coefficient
1	Strategic sports diplomacy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
2	Sports economic and commercial diplomacy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
3	Sports political diplomacy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
4	Diplomacy as a platform for sports	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	6
5	Sports cultural diplomacy	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
6	Media policy (sports media diplomacy)	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
7	Sports public diplomacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
The degree of dependence		4	4	3	6	6	6	7	37

Source: Authors

Following the determination of this variable or variables, they will be removed from the table and form table 2.1. with the rest of the remaining variables. In table 2.2., as in the first one, we specify the second level variable and continue this work until the level of all variables is determined.

Table 2.2. Variables Levels Determination Table

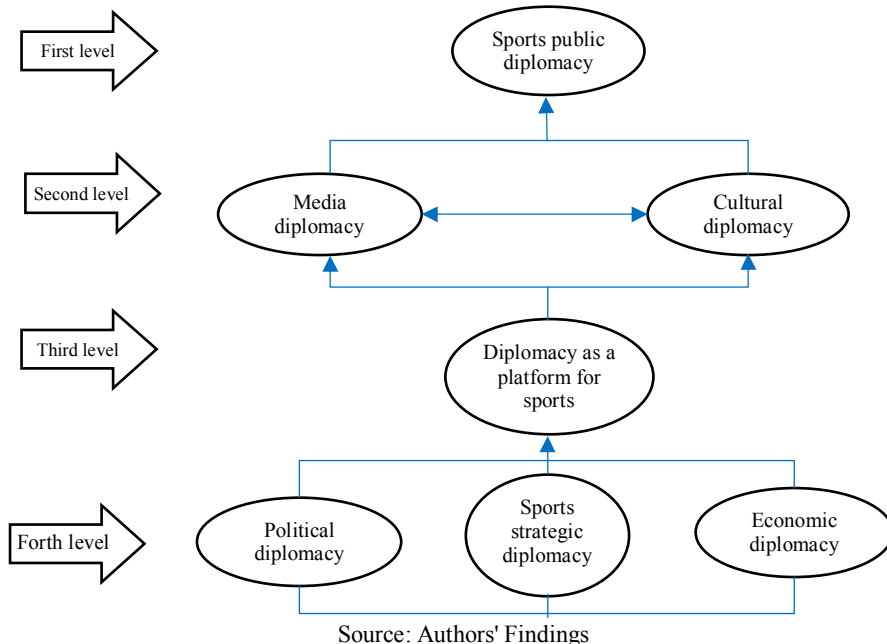| Dimensions	Achievement group	Prerequisite group	shared elements	Rating
1	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	4-3-2-1	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	Fourth level
2	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	4-3-2-1	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	Fourth level
3	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	4-3-2-1	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	Fourth level
4	7-6-5-4-2-1	3-2-1	7-6-5-4-2-1	The third level
5	7-6-5-4	6-5-4-3-2-1	7-6-5-4	Second level
6	7-6-5-4	6-5-4-3-2-1	7-6-5-4	Second level
7	7	7-6-5-4-3-2-1	7	First level

Source: Authors' Findings

Step five includes leveling the variables. After determining these variables, we remove them from the table and form the next table

with the rest of the remaining variables. In Table 2, as in Table 1, we specify the second level variable and we continue this work until the level of all variables is determined.

The sixth step is model drawing. Following the determination of the relationships and level of the variables, they can be drawn in a model form. For this, first, the variables are adjusted according to their level from bottom to top. In the current model Figure 1, the variables were placed in four levels. Sports is placed at the highest level of the public diplomacy model, which accepts the highest effect (coefficient of dependence). Economic, strategic and political diplomacy are placed at the lowest level, which acts as the model's base, and the model starts from this and leads to other variables. There are other components in the next levels, shown in the figure below.

Figure 1. An Extractive Model from the Interpretive Structural Modeling Process

Source: Authors' Findings

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
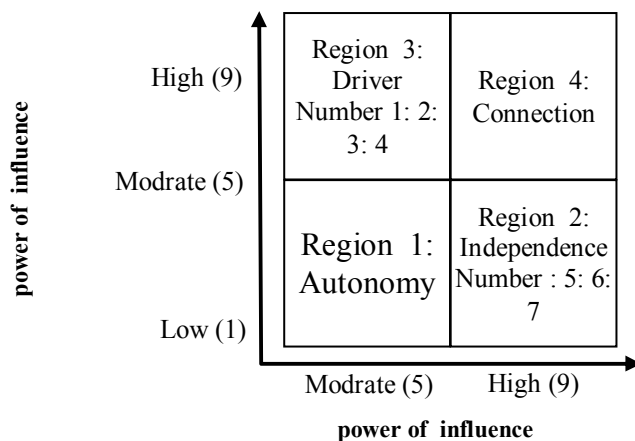Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

341

The seventh step was the analysis of penetration power and degree of dependence (MICMAC chart).On the basis of the power of dependence and influence of variables, a coordinate system may be defined and classified into four equal sections. In the current research, a group of variables were included in the stimulus subgroup. These variables have high penetration power and low dependence power. In the next category, there are dependent variables, which result from the product development process and have proven to be less likely to become the basis of other variables. All the results are presented in figure 1 and table 3.

Table 3. The Degree of Power of Influence and Dependence of Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Penetration power	7	7	7	6	4	4	1
The power of dependence	4	4	4	3	6	6	7

Source: Authors

Figure 2. Diagram of Power of Influence and Dependence

Source: Authors

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at identifying the strategic elements of sports diplomacy based on soft power in expanding Iran's international relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates**.** It delved into seven dimensions, comprising media policy (sports media diplomacy), cultural sports diplomacy, economic and commercial sports diplomacy, public sports diplomacy, infrastructure-building sports diplomacy, political sports diplomacy, and strategic sports diplomacy, structured across four tiers. At the apex, the model emphasized public sports diplomacy, showcasing the highest impact (coefficient of dependence). Positioned at the base, the streams of economic, strategic, and political diplomacy were foundational, initiating and steering other variables within the model. The interwoven nature of economic, strategic, and political components of sports diplomacy within the country notably influences the infrastructure-building aspect of diplomacy. Iranian researchers employing scientific methodologies and analytical approaches underscore that counteracting threats requires tools: firstly, identifying the threat; secondly, creating the necessary foundation for managing these threats; and thirdly, establishing infrastructure to convert threats into opportunities. Prioritizing neutralizing adversaries' strategies through sports diplomacy emerges as a pivotal focal point.

Regarding the findings of this research, it's evident that economic diplomacy forms the cornerstone of the designed model, complemented by strategic and political diplomacy as its foundational elements. Furthermore, the strong and positive correlation between this aspect and infrastructure-building diplomacy highlights its influential role in shaping infrastructural diplomacy. Thus, it is recommended to target specific economic

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

343

investments in sports diplomacy, engaging in regional and international sports events across various disciplines. This strategic move aims to counter negative propaganda against Iran and combat fearmongering perpetuated by foreign politicians through media channels. Aligning sports and cultural policies with sports diplomacy mechanisms can effectively drive economic growth and bolster countries' gross domestic product. The emphasis laid in the second phase of the Islamic Revolution's statement underscores the imperative need for a knowledge-based framework in sports policymaking, akin to any societal or strategic subject. The second aspect, the political diplomacy model, facilitates the emergence of infrastructure-building diplomacy. This highlights the critical interplay between sports, politics, culture, and society, essential in establishing the foundations for social rationality, political stability, and public governance. The synergy between sports and politics necessitates a specific form of societal acceptance, providing the requisite groundwork for achieving objectives like public satisfaction, social stability, and political equilibrium.

The third aspect, strategic diplomacy within the model, leads to the emergence of infrastructure-building diplomacy. It is proposed that strengthening Iran's position requires employing cooperative mechanisms and effectively managing potential threats. Infrastructure-building diplomacy, an intermediate aspect in the model, wields influence on the cultural component. The essence of sports, characterized by its competitive and courageous nature, can serve as a catalyst for imparting sports norms within cultural, societal, and political realms.

An effective strategic approach in diplomatic engagement involves fostering interaction with the global community, propelling the advancement of sports diplomacy. A long-term

strategic solution lies in the exchange of coaches and athletes, fostering increased interactions between nations, which, given our nation's enhanced engagements with Persian Gulf neighboring countries, can prove highly beneficial. Coaches, athletes, and sports managers not only represent their countries, but also wield significant influence in political arenas.

The framework of media diplomacy paves the way for the emergence of public sports diplomacy. Consequently, it is recommended that the sports industry, within the scope of global communications, addresses issues related to sports federations through professional, trans-identity, super-structural, and evolving aspects. For our nation to forge international connections, it needs to elucidate its ideology. This transparency will significantly influence public opinions. Harnessing sports for our political advancement is crucial, as it portrays a positive image for our nation, given that sports function as a tool for fostering peace and healthy competition. Sports diplomacy serves as a stabilizing force both locally and globally, striving for a well-balanced outcome. The interconnectedness of sports, politics, culture, and society plays a pivotal role in establishing the necessary foundation for social coherence, political stability, and the management of public spaces. The following resolutions may prove beneficial in reshaping and consolidating the country's political image in the global arena:

1. Setting up an initiative to promote sports diplomacy within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and establishing a specialized think tank for leveraging our nation's sports for soft power utilization and influencing regional public opinion.

2. Endeavoring to host significant global, continental, and regional competitions while projecting a unique image of our

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

345

country, Iran, and capitalizing on the soft power inherent in sports.

3. Showcasing Iranian champions and relying on their ethical values and chivalrous conduct in sports to fortify the soft media influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the sports community and among the populace.

The findings of this research are consistent with Javadi Arjmand's study (1394 [2015 A.D.]). This study, under the framework of soft power, delves into the conceptual and operational aspects of public diplomacy, specifically analyzing Iran's perspective on the opportunities and challenges in this domain with its southern neighbors. It highlights the absence of a defined stance within Iran's current foreign policy concerning the concept and function of public diplomacy, largely due to the absence of a comprehensive political-security doctrine for the Persian Gulf region and the ambiguity surrounding public diplomacy in Iran's foreign policy towards neighboring nations.

Iran's strategic endeavors in public and cultural diplomacy, shaping cultural policies, become pivotal in its interactions across diverse sectors with various nations. Azizian Kohan and Abdansari's work (1402 [2023 A.D.]) emphasizes the significant role of cultural values in global societal cohesion. Essentially, cultural diplomacy employs cultural tools to safeguard national interests. In the realm of strategic sports planning, the findings resonate with those of Qaderi et al. (1400 [2021 A.D.]) as well as Sabzi et al. (1400 [2019 A.D.]). This alignment underscores the importance of fostering peace, friendship, and international interaction to enhance diplomatic sports relations. According to Azizian Kohan et al. (1402 [2023 A.D.]), increased sportsmanship among athletes, coaches, and spectators at sporting events can

defuse potential tensions, positively impacting relations between Iranian sports federations and Persian Gulf countries, consequently fostering the growth of human resources within sports organizations. Furthermore, this research aligns with Monazami's (1402 [2023 A.D.]) study, reflecting the current trend in Persian Gulf countries, leveraging sports as a powerful tool to amplify political, social, economic, cultural interactions, and even branding.

This study encountered constraints, including limited access to industry experts due to their scarcity and busy schedules, as well as the challenging circumstances posed by the concurrent COVID-19 crisis, which made conducting face-to-face interviews difficult. It primarily focused on identifying the strategic elements of sports diplomacy based on soft power in expanding Iran's international relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Future research should adopt a broader approach, encompassing the entire Middle East region and considering the cultural inclinations of other Middle Eastern nations. Conducting interviews with all countries within the statistical population in subsequent studies could enrich the analysis by integrating the viewpoints and ideas of the countries under investigation.

References

Abdi, K., Fullerton, J., Deheshti, M., Kavand, R., Monibi, H., & Talebpour, M. (2022). Identifying the Conceivable Diplomatic Outcomes of Sport Diplomacy Initiatives. *International Area Studies Review*, *25*(4), 322-337. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/ 10.1177/22338659221120973

Abdi, K., Talebpour, M., Fullerton, J., Ranjkesh, M. J., & Nooghabi, H. J. (2019). Identifying Sports Diplomacy Resources as Soft Power

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

347

Tools. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *15*(3), 147-155. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00115-9.Ajam, M. (1388 [2009 A.D.]). Xalij-e fārs, nāmi be qedmat-e tārix [Persian Gulf, A Name as Old as History]. Events and Analyzes, 233, 39-44. https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20101222111829-9.ajam.pdf

Agakhani, A., Ahmadi, S., & Rezaei, A. (1400 [2021 A. D.]). Tarāhi-ye model-e diplomāsi-ye fotbāl va ravābet-e bein-ol melali dar irān az didgāh-e sāhebnazarān [Designing a Model of Football Diplomacy and International Relations in Iran from the Perspective of Experts]. *Contemporary Studies in Sports Management*, *11*(22), 129-139. https://smms.basu.ac.ir/article_4416_ca2fe5c964a835dbadb3acd115 52c2f8.pdf.

Azar, A., Khosravani, F., & Jalali, R. (1395 [2012 A. D.]). *Tahqiq dar amaliat-e narm (ruikard hā-ye sāxtārdehi-ye masa'le)* [Research in Soft Operations, Structuring Approaches]. Industrial Management Institute.

Azizian Kohan, N., & Zare Abdansari, M. (1402 [2023 A. D]). Tarāhi-ye model-e avāmel-e moasser bar tose′-ye ertebātāt-e federāsion hā-ye varzeši-ye irān va kešvar hā-ye hāšiye xalije fārs [Designing a Model of Influencing Factors on Development of Communication between Sports Federations in Iran and the Persian Gulf Countries]. *Human Resource Management in Sports*, *10*(2), 367-385. https://shm.shahroodut.ac.ir/article_2847_287117b58868f4ce6b076d 247747e03b.pdf

Barzegar, K. (1388 [2009 A. D.]). Mantaqe garāie dar siāsat-e xāreji-ye irān [Regionalism in Iran's Foreign Policy]. *Central Eurasian Studies*, *2*(5), 23-40. https://jcep.ut.ac.ir/article_21150_1417f48 fa525f4904096a9679c144510.pdf

Chehabi, H. E. (2004). Sports Diplomacy between the United States and Iran. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *12*(1), 89-106. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290108406190

Dixon, M. A., Anderson, A. J., Baker, R. E., Baker, P. H., & Esherick, C. (2019). Management in Sport for Development: Examining the Structure and Processes of a Sport Diplomacy Initiative. https://oa.mg/work/10.1504/ijsmm.2019.099787

Garamvölgyi, B., Bardocz-Bencsik, M., & Dóczi, T. (2022). Mapping the Role of Grassroots Sport in Public Diplomacy. *Sport in Society*, *25*(5), 889-907. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1807955.

Garamvölgyi, B., & Dóczi, T. (2021). Sport As a Tool for Public Diplomacy in Hungary. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*, *90*(1), 39-49. https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2021-0012.

Hassanpourghadi, R., & Dousti, M. (1400 [2021 A.D.]). Jāygāh-e diplomāsi-ye varzeši dar dar siyāsat-e xāreji-ye irān pas az enqelāb-e eslāmi-ye 1357 [The Position of Sports Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy after the Islamic Revolution in 1979]. *Sport Management Journal*, *13*(2), 581-616. https://doi.org/10.22059/jsm.2020.256946.2273

Javadi Arjamand, M. J. (1394 [2015 A. D.]). Diplomāci-ye omumi va farhangi jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye irān dar ravabet ba kešvar hā-ye hoze-ye xalij-e fārs [Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Relations with the Countries of the Persian Gulf]. *Islamic Revolution Studies; A Quarterly Scientific Research Journal*, *12*(41), 9-28. https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20170315095206-9668-177.pdf

Lee, J. W. (2020). Sport Diplomacy at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang: The Relations between North and South Korea. In F. Hong, & Z. Lu (Eds.), *Handbook of Sport in Asia* (pp. 227-237). Routledge.

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in
Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

349

Martynenko, S. E., Trusova, A. A., & Cherniaev, M. S. (2019). Ping-
Pong Diplomacy: Impact on the Establishment of Sino-US
Relations. *Vestnik rudn. International Relations*, *19*(1), 139-
147. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2019-19-1-139-147

Min, D., & Choi, Y. (2019). Sport Cooperation in Divided Korea: An
Overstated Role of Sport Diplomacy in South Korea. *Sport in
Society*, *22*(8), 1382-1395. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.
1536120

Mohammadi Azizabadi, M., & Beheshti, S. S. (1399 [2020 A. D.]).
Jāme′e šenāsi-ye siāsi-ye varzeš: ta′sir-e varzeš va varzeškārān herfei
bar zendegi-ye siāsi [Sport Political Sociology: The Impact of Sports
and Professional Athletes on Political Life]. *Iranian Political
Research*, *7*(23), 142-174. https://se.qom.iau.ir/article_671824_
1e1afda5c93d339ce56ad2d8e79b0ea0.pdf

Monazami, A. H. (1402 [2023 A.D.]). Varzeš, tashilgar-e ravābet-e
siyāsi/kāheš-dahande-ye tanehā-ye irān va arabestān [Sport, a
Facilitator in Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations to Reduse Tensions]. Iran
National Science Foundation. https://insf.org/fa/news/355

Myers, M. D. (2013). Qualitative Research in Business & Management.
Heidarzadeh, Kambiz, Merikhnejad Asl, Ali, Tehran: ELM
Publication. SAGE Publications. UR - https://books.google.com/
books?id=fEIaDjIiF7IC.

Næss, H. E. (2023). A Figurational Approach to Soft Power and Sport
Events. The Case of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Frontiers in
Sports and Active Living, Sports Act. Living 5:1142878.
https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2023.1142878.

Nazarian, M., Vazifeh Dust, H., Heidarzadeh, K., & Hamdi, K. (1398
[2019 A. D.]). Erāe′-ye olguye raftār-e zed-e masraf dar bāzār-e irān
bā ruikard-e nazariye-ye dāde bonyād [Providing of a Model for

Anti-Consumption Behavior in the Iranian Market: A Grounded Theory Approach]. *Consumer Behavior Studies Journal*, *6*(2), 333-352. https://journals.uok.ac.ir/article_61188_d9e99f4b489170e53711790edfd840d6.pdf.

Polvandeh, H., & Rostami, F. (1401 [2022 A. D.]). Sanješ-e ertebāt beine diplomāsi-ye varzeši va perestig-e bein-ol melali-ye kešvarha; motāle'e-ye moredi mizbāni-ye Qatar barā-ye jām-e jahāni-ye fotbāl 2022 [Analizing the Relationship between Sports Diplomacy and the International Prestige of Countries; A case Study of Qatar Hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup]. *International Journal of Organization*, *5*(2), 345-369. https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/1655713210-article-6.pdf.

Postlethwaite, V., Jenkin, C., & Sherry, E. (2022). Sport Diplomacy: An Integrative Review. *Sport Management Review*, *26*(3), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054.

Qaderi, M., Sepehrnia, R., Salehiamiri, S. R., & Rezaie, A. (1400 [2021 A. D.]). Tarāhi-ye olgu-ye diplomāsi-ye farhangi jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye irān dar varzeš bā ta'kid bar hoze-ye siāsi va varzeši [Designing a Model of Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sport, Focus on Sport and Politics Fields]. *Organizational Behavior Management in Sport Studies*, *8*(29), 49-61. https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/1649491098-10545-1400-281.pdf.

Raeissadat, S. M. T., Mottaghi, A., Sajjadi, S. N., & Rabiei, H. (2022) The Geopolitics of Sport and Diplomacy of Neighborhood Relations in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar (Case study: Iran and the Persian Gulf Arab States). *Geopolitics Quarterly*, *17*(4), 334-352. https://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/1813374

Reiche, D., & Sorek, T. (2019). *Sport, Politics, and Society in the Middle East*. OXFORD University Press.

Identification of Strategic Elements of Sports Diplomacy based on Soft Power in Expanding Iran's International Relations with Qatar and the Unites Arab Emirates

351

Rofe, J. S., & Postlethwaite, V. (2021). Scholarship and Sports Diplomacy: the Cases of Japan and the United Kingdom. *Diplomatica*, *3*(2), 363-385. https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/35595/3/%5B25891774%20-%20Diplomatica%5D%20Scholarship%20and%20Sports%20Diplomacy_%20the%20Cases%20of%20Japan%20and%20the%20United%20Kingdom.pdf.

Sabbaghian, A. (1394 [2016 A. D.]). Diplomāsi-ye varzeši [Sports Diplomacy]. Journal of Culture-Communication Studies, 16(31), 132-151. https://www.jccs.ir/article_12599_75c9f2f7e9380acca945e71011b6cfdf.pdf?lang=en.

Saboonchi, R., & Hosseni Asgarabadi, M. (1402 [2023 A. D.]). Diplomāsi-ye varzeš dar toseʹe-ye ravābet-e bein-ol melal irān ba kešvar ha-ye hoze-ye xalij-e fārs [Sports Diplomacy in the Development of Iran's International Relations with the Countries of the Persian Gulf. *Strategic Studies on Youth and Sports*, https://doi.org/10.22034/ssys.2023.2736.2979.

Sabzi, Z., Shariati Feizabadi, M., & Saboonchi, R. (1400 [2019 A. D.]). Naqše diplomāsi-ye varzeš dar toseʹe-ye ravābet bā kešvar ha-ye qarbi [Role of Sport Diplomacy in Development of Relations with Western Countries]. Sport Physiology and Management Investigations, *13*(3).9-27. https://www.sportrc.ir/article_138419_0d5b47651d4247defec3aad7d66902d4.pdf

Santos, N. A. S. F. (2021). The Interplay of Soft Power and Sharp Power in Sport Diplomacy: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2021.1952092.

Søyland, H. S., & Moriconi, M. (2011). Qatar's Multi-Actors Sports Strategy: Diplomacy, Critics and Legitimisation. *International Area Studies Review*, *25*(4), 354-374. https://doi.org/10.1177/22338659221120065.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (2011). *Statistical Methods, Grounded Theory. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Social Sciences Publisher: Sage Publications.

Tahzibi, K. A. (1400 [2021 A. D.]). Barrasi-ye naqš va taʹsir-e diplomāsi-ye varzeši dar ravābet-e bein-ol melal [Examining the Role and Influence of Sports Diplomacy in International Relations]. *International Journal of Nations Research*. 69, 25-46. http://ensani.ir/file/download/article/1641014124-10056-69-3.pdf.

Warfield, J. (2005). Developing Interconnection Matrices in Structural Modeling. IEEE Transactions on Systems. *Man and Cybernetics*, *4*(1), 81-67. https://doi.org/10.1109/TSMC.1974.5408524.