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The Effect of Commercialization on Revenue Generation with the Mediating Role of Marketing Strategies in the Sports Complexes of Tehran Municipality

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of commercialization on revenue generation with the mediating role of marketing strategies in the sports complexes of Tehran Municipality. The research method was correlational with a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. The statistical population consisted of managers, employees, experts, and customers of the Tehran Municipality Sports Organization. Considering the unlimited population size, a sample of 384 participants was selected. The data collection instruments included the Revenue Generation Questionnaire by Rafiei (2021), the Commercialization Questionnaire by Mansourpour (2014), and Porter's (2008) Marketing Strategies Questionnaire. The reliability coefficients of the questionnaires, calculated using Cronbach's alpha test, were found to be at an acceptable level for all instruments, indicating the stability of the measurement tools. Measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) were used to describe the research variables. For examining composite reliability indices, Cronbach's alpha, convergent and discriminant validity, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling, SPSS software version 23 and PLS software version 2 were used. The model fit index was reported as GOF = 0.70. The results indicated that commercialization affects revenue generation through the mediating role of marketing strategies in the sports complexes of Tehran Municipality.

Keywords: commercialization, revenue generation, marketing strategies

Introduction

In recent years, the commercialization of sports organizations has become a critical driver for revenue generation and strategic growth, particularly for municipal sports complexes operating in highly competitive urban markets. As public institutions seek to reduce dependency on governmental funding and diversify income streams, the emphasis on developing sustainable, market-oriented strategies has intensified. In this context, commercialization is understood not merely as the transformation of sports services into marketable commodities but as the systematic integration of marketing strategies, strategic governance, and innovation to create competitive advantage and achieve financial sustainability [1-3]. Sports entities, including municipal sports complexes, are increasingly compelled to adopt approaches traditionally associated with private sector enterprises, balancing public service mandates with the pursuit of profitability [4, 5].

The theoretical underpinnings of commercialization in sports align with broader corporate governance and performance frameworks that highlight the role of strategic decision-making and leadership capabilities in enhancing organizational outcomes [6]. For municipal sports organizations, such as those under Tehran Municipality, commercialization is not only a means of financial stability but also a mechanism for improving service quality, expanding user engagement, and fostering

community development [7, 8]. However, the shift towards commercialization introduces a dual challenge: ensuring that revenue generation efforts do not compromise the public value orientation of these institutions, and adapting competitive marketing strategies to a public sector setting [9, 10].

Marketing strategy plays an integral mediating role in translating commercialization efforts into tangible financial outcomes. The application of structured marketing plans, as suggested in sports marketing literature, has proven effective in aligning organizational capabilities with market opportunities [11, 12]. Within this framework, municipal sports complexes must integrate a range of strategic dimensions, including market segmentation, brand positioning, pricing strategies, and customer relationship management [4, 5]. The use of relationship marketing in sports contexts has been shown to improve customer retention, foster loyalty, and create repeat revenue streams, which are crucial for financial sustainability [13, 14].

Empirical evidence underscores that competitive advantage in sports organizations often emerges from the effective implementation of targeted marketing strategies [3, 15]. In particular, sports facilities that adopt diversified promotional activities, digital marketing channels, and customer-centric service models tend to outperform those relying solely on traditional methods [16, 17]. Digital transformation has become a central pillar in this process, enabling more precise audience targeting, real-time engagement, and the optimization of pricing and service delivery [10, 18]. These capabilities are critical for municipal sports complexes that often operate under budgetary constraints and face increasing competition from private sector providers [9, 19].

The intersection between commercialization and marketing strategy is further complicated by the unique governance structures of public sector sports organizations. While commercialization in professional sports clubs has been extensively studied [8, 20], municipal sports facilities must navigate distinct regulatory environments, political oversight, and community expectations [21, 22]. This requires a strategic orientation that balances revenue imperatives with equitable service provision. In this regard, governance quality, top management capabilities, and stakeholder engagement emerge as significant determinants of commercialization success [6, 9].

From a strategic management perspective, marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a central element in organizational positioning within the sports market [4, 11]. The integration of marketing strategies into the commercialization process involves identifying target segments, customizing offerings to meet user needs, and leveraging both traditional and digital channels to enhance brand equity [5, 18]. In municipal sports complexes, customer-oriented strategies have been found to mediate the relationship between commercialization initiatives and revenue generation outcomes, suggesting that without an effective marketing framework, commercialization efforts may yield suboptimal financial returns [13, 14].

In the broader literature, several models have been proposed for structuring commercialization strategies in sports, many of which emphasize the role of external market analysis, competitor benchmarking, and innovation [7, 15]. These models often stress the importance of understanding local market dynamics, including demographic trends, disposable income levels, and cultural attitudes towards sports participation [20, 22]. For Tehran Municipality sports complexes, aligning commercialization and marketing strategies with these contextual factors is vital to achieving long-term sustainability and community impact [1, 8].

Furthermore, research has highlighted the potential risks associated with poorly executed commercialization, such as alienating core user groups, eroding public trust, and prioritizing profit over access [2, 21]. Mitigating these risks requires adopting a balanced approach that safeguards the public service mission while maximizing commercial opportunities [9, 10].

In this regard, strategic risk management frameworks, as discussed in public sector performance literature, provide valuable insights into anticipating, assessing, and addressing the uncertainties inherent in commercialization processes [6, 9].

The role of digitalization cannot be overstated in the current commercialization landscape. The use of e-commerce principles, dynamic pricing, and online community-building through social media platforms such as TikTok has opened new avenues for sports marketing [5, 18]. These tools enable municipal sports complexes to engage with younger demographics, diversify their service offerings, and build stronger brand identities [14, 17]. Importantly, the success of such digital strategies depends on organizational readiness, technological infrastructure, and the ability to integrate digital tools into existing marketing and service delivery systems [10, 19].

The academic discourse also draws attention to the socio-cultural dimensions of sports commercialization. In contexts like Iran, commercialization intersects with cultural values, community priorities, and social development objectives [1, 7]. The effectiveness of marketing strategies is therefore contingent on their cultural relevance, inclusivity, and alignment with public policy goals [15, 22]. This alignment is particularly important for municipal sports organizations, where legitimacy and public support are critical to sustaining operations [8, 20].

Existing studies have consistently demonstrated that revenue generation in sports organizations is significantly influenced by the strategic coherence between commercialization initiatives and marketing strategies [3, 11]. Theories of marketing management reinforce this by positioning marketing not as an ancillary function but as the core driver of competitive positioning and financial performance [2, 4]. This perspective underscores the necessity for municipal sports complexes to develop integrated, evidence-based marketing plans that directly support commercialization goals [13, 14].

Given the increasing fiscal pressures on public institutions and the growing competition from private sector sports facilities, the imperative for effective commercialization and marketing integration is stronger than ever [6, 9]. By adopting a strategic approach that leverages governance structures, managerial competencies, market intelligence, and technological tools, municipal sports complexes can achieve both financial sustainability and public service excellence [16, 19]. This study builds upon the existing body of literature to explore the specific relationship between commercialization and revenue generation in Tehran Municipality sports complexes, with a particular focus on the mediating role of marketing strategies. Through this lens, it aims to contribute both to the academic discourse on sports management and to the practical advancement of sustainable financial models for municipal sports organizations.

Methods and Materials

The research method was correlational with a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach and, in terms of purpose, was applied in nature and conducted as a field study. The statistical population consisted of managers, employees, experts, and customers of the Tehran Municipality Sports Organization. Based on the information obtained from the Tehran Municipality Sports Organization, 54 sports complexes were operating in Tehran. Considering the unlimited size of the population, a sample of 384 individuals was selected.

The data collection instruments included the Revenue Generation Questionnaire developed by Rafiei (2021), comprising 25 items across six components: customer orientation (5 items), competitor orientation (5 items), human resources coordination (3 items), equipment (4 items), welfare facilities (5 items), and preference (3 items). To measure commercialization, the Commercialization Questionnaire developed by Mansourpour (2014) with 43 items in five

components was used: socio-cultural (8 items: 1–8), economic (9 items: 9–17), managerial (8 items: 18–25), political-legal (9 items: 26–34), and promotional-technological (9 items: 35–43). The standard Porter's (2008) Marketing Strategies Questionnaire with 36 items in five dimensions was also used: buyers (items 1–7), suppliers (items 8–15), substitute products (items 15–17), potential new entrants (items 18–28), and competitors (items 29–36).

The reliability coefficients of the questionnaires, calculated using Cronbach's alpha test, were found to be at an acceptable level for all instruments, indicating the stability of the measurement tools. Measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) were used to describe the research variables. To examine composite reliability indices, Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, confirmatory factor analysis, and SEM, SPSS software version 23 and PLS software version 2 were employed.

Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that out of a total of 384 individuals, 200 (52.1%) were female and 184 (47.9%) were male. Regarding marital status, 150 participants (39.1%) were single, while 234 participants (60.9%) were married. In terms of educational attainment, 66 participants (17.2%) held a high school diploma, 60 (15.6%) had an associate degree, 172 (44.8%) held a bachelor's degree, 74 (19.3%) had a master's degree, and 12 (3.1%) possessed a doctoral degree. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 67 years, with a mean age of 30.23 years and a standard deviation of 10.07 years.

To assess reliability and evaluate the internal consistency of the model's variables, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used. According to George and Mallery (2016), values above 0.70 for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are acceptable. Based on the results shown in Table 3, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were all above 0.70. Therefore, the reliability and internal consistency of the research variables were confirmed.

Table 1.

Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Component	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Significance Level (p)
Commercialization	0.90	0.93	0.73	0.001
Marketing Strategies	0.90	0.92	0.72	0.001
Revenue Generation	0.91	0.93	0.69	0.001

To assess discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was used. According to this method, the square root of AVE for each latent variable should be greater than its highest correlation with any other latent variable.

Table 2.

Discriminant Validity Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Component	1	2	3
Commercialization	0.85		
Marketing Strategies	0.63	0.84	
Revenue Generation	0.71	0.70	0.83

Unlike measurement models, which focus on the relationships between latent and observed variables, structural model analysis examines the relationships among latent variables themselves. The evaluation of the structural model included t-values, the coefficient of determination (R^2), and the Stone–Geisser Q^2 criterion for predictive relevance. For structural model fit, t-values were used, with values greater than 1.96 indicating a significant relationship between constructs at the 95% confidence level.

R^2 Coefficient: This coefficient indicates the proportion of variance in the endogenous variable explained by the exogenous variable(s). Values range from 0 to 1, with thresholds for weak (0.19), moderate (0.33), and strong (0.67) suggested (Stevens, 2012).

Q^2 Criterion: For an endogenous construct, Q^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate weak, moderate, and strong predictive power, respectively. The Q^2 values obtained were 0.16 for marketing strategies and 0.19 for revenue generation.

To assess the overall model fit, the GOF index was used, with thresholds for weak (0.01), moderate (0.25), and strong (0.36) suggested by Wetzels et al. (2010).

Table 3.

Communalities, R^2 , and GOF for the Research Model

Variable	Communalities	R^2
Commercialization	0.72	–
Marketing Strategies	0.90	0.39
Revenue Generation	0.91	0.61
GOF	0.64	

The GOF value of 0.64 indicates a strong model fit.

Table 4.

Path Coefficients and T-values for the Structural Model

Structural Path	Path Coefficient	T-value	Test Result
Commercialization → Revenue Generation	0.44	4.55	Confirmed
Marketing Strategies → Revenue Generation	0.43	4.72	Confirmed

To determine the indirect effect through the mediating variable, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) statistic was used, which is calculated as:

$$VAF = (A \times B) / ((A \times B) + C)$$

$$VAF = (0.63 \times 0.43) / ((0.63 \times 0.43) + 0.44) = 0.70$$

This means that 70% of the total effect of commercialization on revenue generation is explained through the mediating variable of marketing strategies.

Figure 1.

Model with T-Values

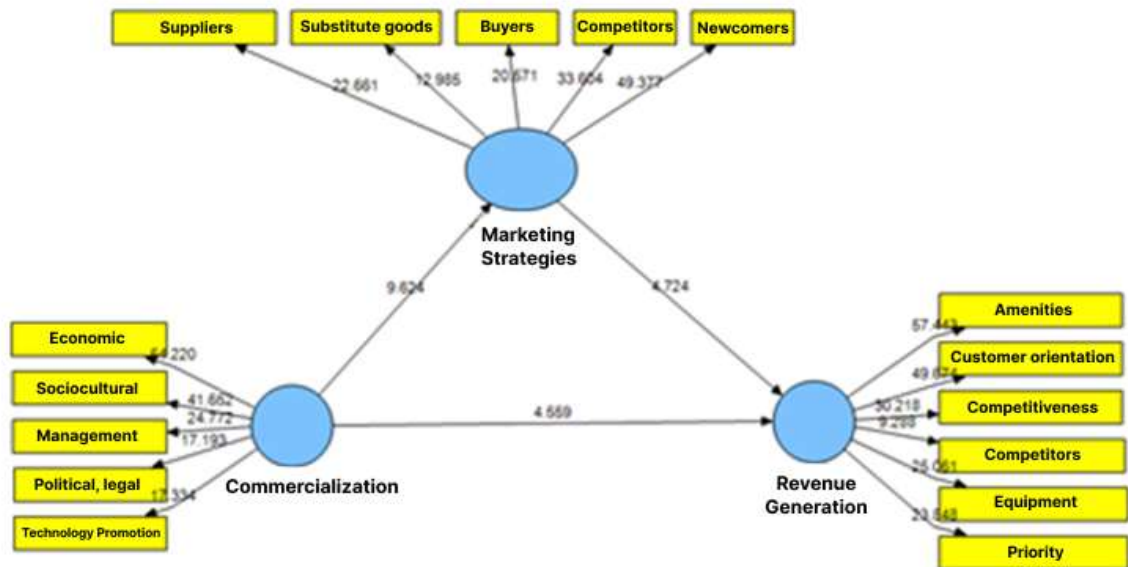
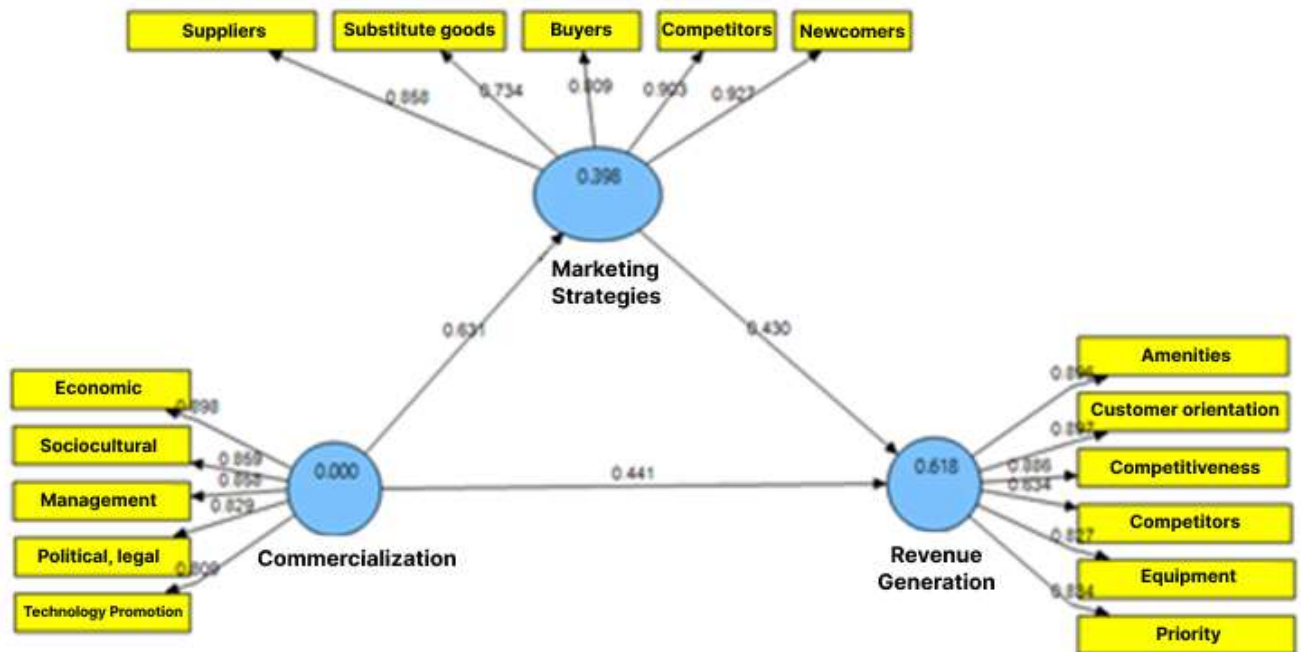


Figure 2.

Model with Beta Values



Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study demonstrated that commercialization exerts a significant positive effect on revenue generation in the sports complexes of Tehran Municipality, and that this relationship is mediated substantially by marketing

strategies. Specifically, the path analysis indicated that commercialization had both a direct effect on revenue generation and an indirect effect through marketing strategies, with the mediation accounting for approximately 70% of the total effect. This finding underscores the central role of marketing in translating commercial initiatives into measurable financial outcomes in public-sector sports facilities. Such results are consistent with the view that commercialization, when integrated with structured and targeted marketing strategies, becomes a primary driver of financial sustainability in sports organizations [1-3].

The direct effect of commercialization on revenue generation aligns with earlier findings that emphasize the role of developing market-oriented services, optimizing operational efficiency, and introducing innovative programs as means to increase income streams [7, 8, 20]. In municipal sports complexes, commercialization often involves diversifying service offerings beyond traditional sports activities, introducing tiered pricing structures, and leveraging facility spaces for multipurpose use. These measures resonate with the strategic approaches identified in professional sports club management, where similar initiatives have led to sustainable revenue growth [4, 11]. The significant coefficient in the present study suggests that these principles are transferable to public-sector sports facilities when adapted to their governance and community contexts.

The mediating role of marketing strategies found here is particularly noteworthy. The findings suggest that commercialization alone is insufficient to fully realize revenue potential without effective marketing strategy implementation. Marketing strategies such as targeted promotions, customer relationship management, and leveraging digital channels enable sports complexes to reach specific demographic segments, strengthen brand recognition, and build loyalty [5, 13, 14]. This is consistent with the growing body of literature that emphasizes the synergy between commercialization and marketing, where marketing provides the communicative and relational mechanisms necessary to transform commercial offerings into sustained patronage [15, 22].

Moreover, the strength of the mediation effect supports the notion that marketing strategies are not peripheral but rather integral to the commercialization-revenue nexus. This reflects observations from previous research in both public and private sector sports organizations, where the absence of a marketing framework often resulted in underperformance despite strong commercial assets [2, 3]. The study by [16] reinforces this by showing that strategic orientation—when coupled with data-driven business intelligence—significantly improves sustainable performance outcomes. Similarly, [17] found that integrating strategic human resource management with marketing initiatives can enhance organizational resilience, a factor particularly relevant to sports complexes operating under variable public funding conditions.

The emphasis on digital transformation in the literature also aligns with the findings of the present study. Digital marketing tools, social media engagement, and online booking and payment systems are now essential components of successful sports facility marketing [5, 14, 18]. In the context of Tehran Municipality's sports complexes, these technologies offer opportunities for precise targeting, streamlined service delivery, and enhanced customer experience, all of which can reinforce the commercial viability of the facilities [10, 19]. This finding is also supported by [6] and [9], who argue that the effectiveness of commercialization strategies is strongly tied to governance quality and management capabilities in implementing innovative operational practices.

An important implication of these results is the need to balance the commercial orientation of municipal sports facilities with their public service mission. The literature cautions against overly aggressive commercialization that might alienate

lower-income user groups or reduce access to community-based programs [1, 21]. This is a particularly salient concern in public-sector settings, where facilities must simultaneously meet revenue targets and uphold principles of equity and inclusivity [15, 22]. The results of this study, therefore, reinforce the importance of strategic marketing that not only promotes high-value services but also ensures accessibility for diverse community segments.

The observed significance of marketing strategies as a mediator also connects to the strategic planning literature, which stresses the need for market segmentation, positioning, and differentiation in competitive environments [4, 11, 13]. Municipal sports complexes can differentiate themselves by emphasizing unique selling propositions, such as specialized training programs, community engagement initiatives, or partnerships with schools and local organizations. The current findings, showing a positive and substantial indirect effect, suggest that such differentiation—when embedded within a broader marketing plan—can amplify the revenue impact of commercialization measures.

Furthermore, the study's findings correspond with research indicating that revenue models in sports must be context-specific and responsive to local socio-cultural conditions [7, 8, 20]. For Tehran, where sports participation rates, cultural preferences, and economic factors vary across districts, localized marketing campaigns and service adaptations are essential. The positive impact of commercialization in this setting may be partly attributed to the ability of facility managers to tailor services and promotions to the needs of their immediate communities [15, 22].

The literature also supports the idea that commercialization success in public-sector sports is linked to the organization's capacity for strategic risk management [6, 9]. Given that municipal facilities operate in dynamic environments with fluctuating demand, political influences, and budget constraints, the integration of risk assessment and mitigation into commercial and marketing plans is crucial. The high GOF value (0.64) reported in this study suggests that the model captures these complex interdependencies effectively, providing a robust framework for understanding how commercialization and marketing interact to drive revenue generation.

In summary, the findings of this study are consistent with and extend previous research in the fields of sports management, marketing, and public administration. They confirm that commercialization, supported by strong marketing strategies, can significantly enhance revenue generation in municipal sports complexes. Moreover, they highlight that marketing strategies function as a critical bridge between commercial initiatives and financial outcomes, reinforcing the need for integrated planning that considers governance quality, technological adoption, market orientation, and social responsibility [2-4, 13, 14].

While the findings provide valuable insights into the interplay between commercialization, marketing strategies, and revenue generation, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was limited to sports complexes under Tehran Municipality, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other urban or rural contexts with different governance structures and market conditions. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers regarding commercialization and marketing practices. Third, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality, as the observed relationships capture a single point in time rather than longitudinal changes. Finally, the study did not account for potential moderating variables such as facility size, service diversity, or competitive density, which could influence the strength and nature of the relationships observed.

Future studies could expand the scope to include municipal sports facilities in other regions or countries, enabling cross-cultural comparisons and broader generalizability. Longitudinal research designs would help capture changes in commercialization effectiveness and marketing strategy impact over time, providing a dynamic understanding of these

processes. Additionally, incorporating moderating variables such as technological readiness, staff competencies, and community engagement levels could yield a more nuanced model. Further investigation into the role of digital transformation, including artificial intelligence-driven marketing analytics and personalized customer experiences, would also provide valuable insights for optimizing commercialization outcomes in sports contexts.

In practical terms, municipal sports managers should prioritize the integration of marketing strategies into all commercialization initiatives, ensuring that revenue goals are supported by targeted, evidence-based promotional efforts. Embracing digital tools, such as social media platforms, online booking systems, and data analytics, can enhance customer targeting and engagement. Furthermore, maintaining a balance between profitability and accessibility is essential to preserving the public value mission of municipal sports complexes. Strategic partnerships with community organizations, schools, and local businesses can further diversify revenue streams while strengthening community ties, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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