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Presenting a Paradigmatic Model of Network Marketing for Selling Sports Products

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to present a paradigmatic model of network marketing for selling sports products. This qualitative research had an exploratory nature and is considered an applied type of study. The statistical population of the research included experts and marketers active in sports network marketing, managers and heads of marketing committees, manufacturing companies producing sports products, sports sponsors, and sports marketing professors. The sampling method was purposive and snowball, which reached theoretical saturation after conducting 17 in-depth interviews. For data analysis in the qualitative section, open, axial, and selective coding were used. Based on the results of the qualitative data analysis obtained from the interviews, the paradigmatic model was presented in the form of six dimensions, including causal conditions (2 categories), contextual conditions (3 categories), intervening conditions (3 categories), central phenomenon (1 category), strategies (3 categories), and consequences (3 categories). Accordingly, the causal conditions consisted of (economic and managerial situation), the contextual conditions included (banking facilities, socio-cultural, and legal-regulatory aspects), the intervening conditions included (political, capital market information, and government), the strategies consisted of (economic, managerial-institutional, and empowerment), and the consequences included (community health development, sports development, and employment development). Therefore, it is suggested that the research findings be considered as a guideline for network marketing activities of sports products.

Keywords: Network marketing, Sports products, Model

Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, marketing practices have undergone a profound transformation due to digitalization, globalization, and the evolution of consumer behavior. One of the most notable developments in this domain is the emergence of network marketing, particularly in industries characterized by rapid consumption and community-based engagement, such as the sports industry. Network marketing, with its emphasis on building communities, expanding brand visibility, and fostering interpersonal relationships, provides a unique platform for promoting sports products and services [1]. The integration of such models into the sports industry has become increasingly relevant as sports products represent not only functional consumption but also cultural, social, and lifestyle-driven values.

The relevance of network marketing in sports is best understood against the backdrop of global and regional marketing transformations. In markets such as China, rapid technological integration and the rise of social commerce platforms have shaped the dynamics of consumer decision-making and marketing strategy [2]. In India, consumer behavior studies highlight the importance of brand association and consumer perceptions in driving purchasing decisions for sports products [3]. Similarly, in global contexts, major corporations such as Nike and Adidas have strategically utilized platforms like TikTok to engage consumers through creative content, thereby reinforcing the role of network-based marketing approaches [4]. These

global experiences underline the necessity of adopting network marketing strategies in sports markets across different contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, network marketing aligns with concepts of relationship marketing and consumer engagement. Scholars have noted that the impact of network marketing in sports extends beyond sales; it contributes to community-building, brand loyalty, and sustainable consumer engagement [5]. In the Iranian context, for example, barriers such as regulatory challenges and socio-cultural obstacles have been identified, yet solutions emphasize the potential of network marketing to revitalize sports industries through adaptive strategies [6]. This highlights the dual role of network marketing in both overcoming systemic challenges and offering opportunities for innovative growth.

Sports marketing has long been recognized as a powerful driver of organizational promotion, consumer loyalty, and brand recognition [7]. Research in the Nigerian context demonstrated that sports marketing strategies significantly influenced organizational outcomes, illustrating the generalizable value of sports marketing beyond Western or Asian settings. Furthermore, historical analyses indicate that the evolution of sports product marketing has followed broader digital marketing trends, moving from traditional retail-based approaches to online and network-based strategies [8, 9]. Such transformations underscore the importance of integrating network marketing models in addressing modern consumer expectations.

The increasing role of social media platforms in shaping consumer interaction with sports brands has also been widely documented. Social media has enabled consumer brand-related activities (COBRAs), which are now recognized as essential for online brand engagement [10]. Such platforms also allow influencers to leverage credibility and message value to build consumer trust in branded content [11]. This influencer-based dynamic is central to sports network marketing, where authenticity and community engagement often matter more than traditional advertising. Moreover, the psychological implications of social media consumption, including impacts on user mental health and well-being, have further complicated the network marketing landscape [12]. Thus, while social media and network marketing create opportunities, they also demand ethical considerations in sports marketing strategies.

The rise of big data has fundamentally changed the way network marketing is implemented in sports. Analytical approaches have been increasingly applied to refine strategies and enhance personalization. Big data analysis has been used to improve sports product network marketing strategies, helping firms to predict consumer behavior and adjust their promotional efforts accordingly [13, 14]. Furthermore, studies on digital marketing strategies in sports emphasize the role of data-driven insights in improving brand positioning and consumer targeting [15]. These advancements suggest that the future of network marketing in sports will rely heavily on leveraging technological tools to enhance decision-making and consumer interaction.

Nevertheless, the development of sustainable network marketing models in sports is not without challenges. Issues such as business continuity and resilience in the face of disruptions have been highlighted in broader business model research [16]. Similarly, network marketing in sports has to account for volatility in consumer behavior, regulatory environments, and market conditions. For instance, comparative studies have shown that sports goods network marketing requires strategies that align with local advantages and address logistical concerns [17, 18]. In China, the competitive advantage framework for sports goods marketing underlines the importance of context-specific strategies to ensure sustainability [19].

In terms of brand building, network marketing is instrumental in enhancing the image and reach of sports brands. Studies on brand image promotion through network marketing demonstrate that branding efforts in sports are most effective when aligned with consumer identity and community engagement [20]. Iranian research also highlights how network marketing can support the promotion and maintenance of foreign sports brands, underscoring its role in both domestic and international contexts [21]. As sports brands increasingly operate in globalized markets, the integration of network marketing with brand identity strategies has become essential.

Moreover, the consumer's intention to engage in online sports goods purchasing has been widely studied. Research has demonstrated the importance of consumption intention models in predicting consumer behavior in online sports marketing contexts [22]. Other studies on consumer online shopping behavior for sports products reveal that virtual networks and e-commerce stores are now primary venues for purchase decisions [23]. These findings suggest that network marketing strategies must align with evolving patterns of consumer intention and online shopping preferences.

Practical applications of network marketing in sports demonstrate its capacity to integrate traditional and digital strategies. For example, research on the strategic use of social media based on the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) highlights how small businesses effectively utilize network-driven approaches to attract and retain customers [24]. This model remains particularly relevant for sports enterprises, where consumer engagement often involves emotional and aspirational elements. Likewise, comparative analyses of network marketing strategies in different cultural contexts show that localized adaptations are key to effectiveness [2].

The theoretical underpinnings of network marketing in sports also connect to broader issues of resilience and adaptability. Scholars emphasize the importance of designing business models capable of responding to contingencies [16]. Similarly, empirical studies show that online sports marketing requires innovative strategies to navigate political, economic, and technological uncertainties [6]. This dual emphasis on resilience and innovation ensures that network marketing in sports is not only growth-oriented but also sustainable in dynamic environments.

Global comparisons further reveal the significance of network marketing strategies in shaping competitive advantage. For instance, analyses of sports goods enterprises in China emphasize the importance of developing online marketing activities as a means of survival and growth [9]. Similarly, discussions on network marketing in the Middle East and Southeast Asia underline the role of cultural, legal, and organizational contexts in shaping outcomes [1]. Such cross-regional insights reinforce the universality of network marketing principles while underscoring the necessity of contextual sensitivity.

In summary, the literature underscores that network marketing in sports is a multifaceted domain influenced by technological, cultural, economic, and organizational dynamics. It operates at the intersection of consumer engagement, community-building, and brand promotion, while also addressing systemic challenges such as regulatory barriers, resilience needs, and ethical considerations. The increasing integration of big data, social media, and influencer strategies reflects an ongoing transformation in how sports products are marketed and consumed. By situating network marketing within both global and local contexts, this study aims to provide a paradigmatic model that accounts for causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, as well as strategies and consequences, in the network marketing of sports products.

Methods and Materials

The method employed in the present study was qualitative, and in terms of purpose, it was a developmental study. To construct the conceptual model of the research, the grounded theory approach was applied. The statistical population of the research consisted of experts and elites in the sports marketing industry of the country, managers and heads of marketing committees, managers of manufacturing companies producing sports products, sports sponsors, and university faculty members in the fields of sports marketing and economics. These individuals possessed both scientific and practical expertise in the economics and marketing of sports products. From this group, until theoretical saturation regarding the research topic was achieved, a total of 17 individuals were selected for interviews and to obtain the necessary information related to the subject of study, using a completely non-random and purposive sampling method.

Considering that the grounded theory method was used and interviews were conducted for data collection, the research sample was selected using the snowball sampling method. Initially, the researcher reviewed studies related to the current research topic, namely network marketing of sports product sales, and identified the main and influential components. The data collection tool consisted of qualitative, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews with experts. Since semi-structured interviews were used instead of structured interviews in this study, the interview protocol included predetermined open-ended questions, which allowed the interviewer to assess and clarify issues during the interview process.

For conducting the interviews, general research questions were designed around the main themes, including causal factors, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, and strategies (practical strategies). According to the progression of the interviews and the selection of new participants, the questions were posed in a more detailed and precise manner. Before conducting the interviews, necessary coordination was made with the interviewees via telephone to select a suitable time. During the interviews, participants' conversations were fully recorded with their prior consent, and important, ambiguous, or elaboration-requiring points were also noted by the researcher. This process also helped, from a psychological perspective, to encourage the participants.

Throughout the interview sessions, care was taken not to impose the interviewer's opinions on the participants, in order to avoid influencing their responses. Depending on the level of engagement and knowledge of the interviewee regarding the subject, each interview lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed manually with the assistance of a research aide. After transcription, the responses were emailed back to the interviewees for validation and confirmation of accuracy. Ultimately, the data were used for final analysis.

To ensure the validity of the interview protocol, feedback from 8 experts was utilized. Additionally, three individuals who did not participate in the interviews were simultaneously consulted for assistance in data analysis and interpretation. For assessing credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research, the criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability were employed, all of which were carefully observed in this study. In the present research, the test-retest reliability was calculated to be 0.90, confirming the dependability and acceptability of the coding process.

The stages of data analysis were conducted through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, based on the Strauss and Corbin method.

Findings and Results

The research findings were based on the analysis of interviews conducted with experts who had both scientific and practical expertise in the field of the present study. The analysis was performed using Strauss and Corbin's method in three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding through the grounded theory approach. The findings obtained from qualitative interviews for designing the network marketing model in selling sports products, at the coding stages, included 145 open codes, 73 concepts, and 16 categories within the dimensions of the paradigmatic model. The results are comprehensively presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Concepts and Categories Related to the Network Marketing Model in Selling Sports Products

Axis	Categories	Concepts
Causal Conditions	Economic Situation	Lack of economic stability in the country regarding investment in the network marketing industry; Absence of cost–benefit logic in financial support for network marketing in the private sector; Government monopolistic intervention in financial support in network marketing; Negative economic growth along with severe inflation in the country; Daily increase of inflation in the country; Lack of transparency in the financial system of network marketing in the country; Development of new methods for selling sports services and products online; No need for budget and initial capital in network marketing.
	Managerial	Lack of managerial policies to ensure investor security in online marketing; Government competition with the private sector in financial support of the sports industry; Lack of use of managers with commercial and marketing expertise in sports; Lack of strategic and operational marketing plans at various levels of sports; Multiplicity and lack of transparency of laws and regulations; Development of new methods for enhancing network marketing of sports products; Ensuring network marketing security; Limited target-setting and reduced policymaking in the field of e-commerce.
Contextual Conditions	Banking Facilities	Mismatch between loan amounts and investors' needs; Inconsistency between loan interest rates and returns on investment; Short loan repayment periods; Long duration from loan approval to payment.
	Socio-Cultural	Lack of equal attention by people to different sports through network marketing; Reluctance toward outsourcing sports; Resistance of managers to reducing government control due to their dependency on the public sector; Weak role of social media in supporting events and sports marketing; Government reluctance toward commercialization of sports in all dimensions.
	Legal and Regulatory	Weak economic security in sponsorship; Restrictive laws and regulations for private sector investment; Lack of trust in the sustainability of government policies supporting network marketing; Weakness in tax laws for promoting investment in network marketing.
Intervening Conditions	Political	Allocation of digital investment and marketing in the country to influential individuals; Sports investments being affected by political issues; Government use of sports as a political tool; Political restrictions on assigning virtual marketing to the private sector.
	Capital Market Information	Insufficient managerial understanding of the importance of investment; Lack of financial and economic transparency; Lack of adequate knowledge in the investment domain.
	Government	Weak decision-making by affiliated institutions; Low trust in private sector managers; Lack of a strong supervisory system for controlling privatization-related matters; Bureaucracy; Marginal perspective of officials toward digital marketing in sports; Lack of strategic planning for the commercialization of sports.
Strategies	Economic	Establishing economic security; Serious fight against financial corruption; Implementation of transparent economic policies; Full tax exemption for sports; Guaranteeing investment security; Reducing strict auditing requirements for loans (such as multiple guarantors, high interest rates, economic feasibility reports); Providing low-interest loans with longer repayment periods.
	Managerial–Institutional	Establishment of an investment commission in digital space within the Ministry of Sports and Youth; Creation of an institution responsible for privatization in sports with coherent and systematic programs; Reducing government control through structural reforms; Transferring profitable sectors to privatization.
	Capacity Empowerment	Designing specialized organizations with clear organizational charts for privatization processes in sports; Conscious expansion of the private sector in digital marketing; Promoting a correct mindset regarding privatization in digital marketing.
Consequences	Development of Product Quality	Improvement in the quality of sports products and services; Introduction of various sports brands; Increase in the number of sports product manufacturers; Enhanced consumer satisfaction; Improved public relations through network marketing; Provision of suitable platforms for increased sales of sports products and services; Provision of products and services aligned with consumer demands.
	Employment Development	Creation of businesses in sports and other sectors; Creation of diverse job opportunities for society; Increased attraction of investors in sports development; Growth of investment in sports products and services production; Use of different pricing strategies to boost sales.
	Brand Development	Branding of sports products and services; Use of modern technologies in producing sports products and services; Increased job creation; Reduced costs of sports products and services due to the elimination of intermediaries; Offering special packages to active and loyal consumers.

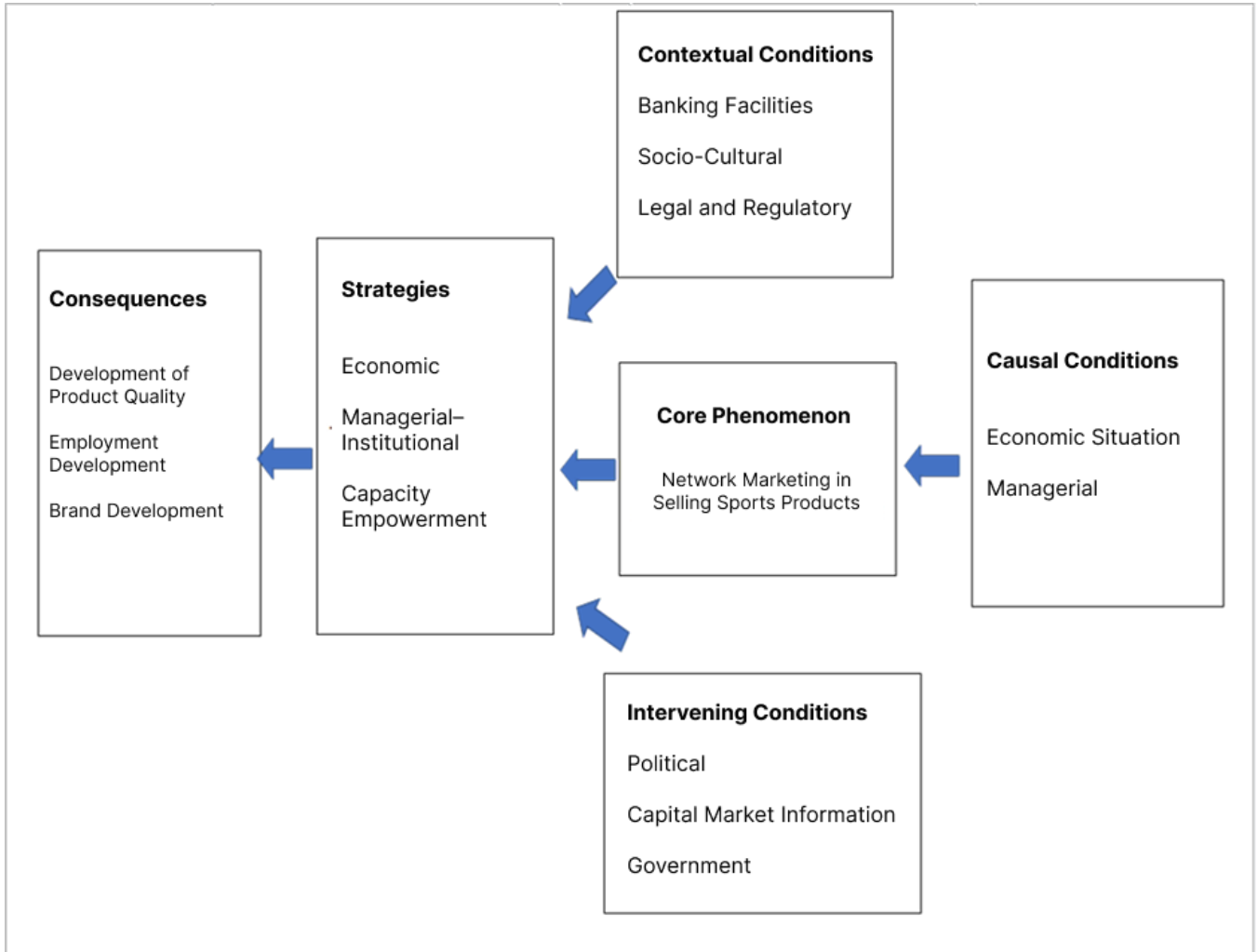
As observed in Table 1, the categories of economic and managerial situation, comprising 16 concepts, were identified as causal factors in designing the network marketing model for selling sports products. Moreover, 13 concepts were categorized under three contextual conditions: banking facilities, socio-cultural, and legal-regulatory. The intervening conditions included three categories: political, capital market information, and government. The strategies for sports product network marketing

were grouped into three categories: economic, managerial–institutional, and capacity empowerment. Finally, the consequences included three categories: community health development, sports development, and employment development, represented by 17 concepts.

Subsequently, the network marketing model for sports products is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Paradigmatic Model of Network Marketing for Sports Products



Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a paradigmatic model for network marketing in the sale of sports products. The qualitative findings revealed six interrelated dimensions comprising causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, central phenomenon, strategies, and consequences. This model provides a structured framework to understand how network marketing can be effectively applied to sports products, considering both enabling factors and barriers. The discussion of results highlights not only the internal dynamics of sports network marketing but also its alignment with previous research and global trends.

The results indicated that unstable economic conditions, inflation, lack of financial transparency, and the absence of strategic managerial policies constitute the most critical causal conditions for the effectiveness of network marketing in sports

products. Previous studies have similarly emphasized that economic instability undermines investor confidence and hinders sustainable marketing models [6]. In addition, managerial inefficiencies such as inadequate strategic planning and the absence of skilled leaders in sports marketing have been found to limit the industry's ability to attract investment [21].

These findings align with earlier research in China, which stressed that developing competitive online marketing activities for sports goods requires both stable macroeconomic environments and strong organizational strategies [9]. Similarly, the analysis of Chinese markets showed that managerial capabilities play a decisive role in shaping network marketing strategies [19]. The evidence here reinforces the claim that without coherent policies and skilled leadership, network marketing initiatives in sports cannot achieve desired scalability.

The study found that contextual conditions—namely banking facilities, socio-cultural acceptance, and regulatory frameworks—are central to the growth of sports network marketing. Limitations in access to financial services, mismatch between loan terms and investor needs, and bureaucratic delays were identified as significant obstacles. Similar conclusions were drawn in earlier works, where financial systems were shown to determine the accessibility of marketing opportunities for private stakeholders in sports [1].

Cultural resistance to sports commercialization was another challenge identified. Evidence from Iran highlights that societal attitudes toward sports marketing are often influenced by traditional norms and a lack of trust in private sector-driven sports ventures [6]. This resonates with broader findings that cultural and social acceptance plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer intentions in online sports product marketing [22]. Furthermore, studies from India confirm that consumer buying behavior toward branded sports products is shaped by both cultural context and perceptions of product authenticity [3].

Legal and regulatory issues, such as restrictive policies and weak economic security for sponsorship, also featured prominently in the results. Earlier work identified that resilience in business models requires supportive regulatory environments [16]. In the absence of clear policies, the continuity and scalability of sports network marketing remain constrained. This is particularly true in emerging economies where the lack of coherent taxation and privatization strategies reduces trust among investors [8].

The study revealed that political influences, insufficient financial transparency, and weak government decision-making are intervening conditions that moderate the effectiveness of network marketing in sports. These findings are consistent with previous studies noting that government interference, lack of oversight, and the politicization of sports often disrupt marketing initiatives [6].

In global contexts, political factors are widely recognized as mediators of marketing effectiveness. Research in China showed that political restrictions hinder the development of private sports marketing initiatives [2]. Similarly, in Nigeria, sports marketing strategies were found to be significantly shaped by local political and organizational conditions [7]. At the same time, information gaps—particularly insufficient knowledge of investment opportunities—echo earlier concerns that managers' limited awareness undermines the development of effective digital and network marketing strategies [15].

These findings demonstrate the importance of designing resilient strategies that account for political and governmental contingencies. Earlier business continuity frameworks stressed the need for adaptive strategies to maintain marketing effectiveness in the face of external shocks [16]. The results of this study confirm that political and informational conditions are critical intervening factors that cannot be ignored in the design of network marketing models.

The core phenomenon identified in the study was the application of network marketing for sports products, highlighting its potential to generate sustainable consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and employment opportunities. The results resonate strongly with prior works emphasizing that network marketing in sports is not solely about sales, but about community-building and long-term brand identity [5].

For instance, in Iran, studies demonstrated that network marketing plays a key role in promoting and maintaining foreign sports brands, thereby ensuring market sustainability [21]. Similarly, in China, sports brand strategies based on network marketing were found to enhance brand image and consumer identity [20]. These findings confirm that network marketing is a holistic approach that addresses multiple dimensions of brand and consumer relationships.

The strategies identified in this study included economic reforms, managerial-institutional adjustments, and capacity empowerment initiatives. Economic strategies, such as ensuring investment security, reducing financial corruption, and offering tax exemptions for sports businesses, were found essential. This aligns with earlier studies emphasizing the role of economic stability in advancing network marketing strategies [17].

Managerial-institutional strategies, including establishing commissions for digital sports marketing and creating privatization-focused organizations, also emerged as critical. Previous findings indicate that the absence of coherent institutional structures hampers the ability to design resilient marketing models [8]. Capacity empowerment strategies—such as promoting awareness of privatization and building specialized organizational structures—were also emphasized. Studies on influencer marketing show that empowering credible voices in online communities is central to building trust and consumer engagement [11]. Similarly, research highlights that equipping managers and organizations with big data capabilities is essential for improving sports marketing outcomes [13, 14].

These results confirm that sustainable network marketing requires integrated strategies combining economic reforms, managerial leadership, and community empowerment.

The study's findings showed that network marketing in sports leads to significant positive outcomes, including improved product quality, job creation, and brand development. These outcomes align with prior evidence that network marketing enhances consumer trust and satisfaction by offering products tailored to consumer needs [22]. Similarly, the use of social media and influencer marketing has been shown to improve brand recognition and consumer engagement [10, 11].

Employment creation emerged as another key consequence, which resonates with findings that sports marketing generates new business opportunities and fosters entrepreneurship [7]. Additionally, branding outcomes are consistent with earlier studies, where digital and network marketing were shown to enhance brand visibility and loyalty [20]. The use of social media platforms, particularly in strategies by Nike and Adidas, further underscores how network marketing enhances brand equity [4].

In essence, the results demonstrate that network marketing not only addresses immediate marketing needs but also generates broader societal benefits such as job creation and cultural engagement.

This study, while providing important insights, has certain limitations. First, its qualitative design, though useful for exploring deep insights, limits the generalizability of the findings across different cultural and economic contexts. The reliance on 17 expert interviews means that the perspectives captured may not fully represent the diversity of stakeholders in the sports industry. Second, the study was conducted in a specific socio-economic environment, which may differ significantly from other regions, making cross-country comparisons challenging. Third, the study primarily focused on the perspectives of

experts and did not include consumers directly, which limits understanding of consumer-side dynamics in network marketing of sports products. Finally, the fast-changing nature of digital technologies and platforms means that findings may evolve as new tools and methods of engagement emerge.

Future studies could benefit from adopting mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative insights with quantitative surveys to enhance generalizability. Cross-cultural comparative studies would also provide valuable insights into how contextual conditions, such as socio-cultural attitudes and regulatory frameworks, influence network marketing outcomes in sports. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of network marketing strategies over time would provide a clearer picture of sustainability and adaptability. Future research should also integrate consumer perspectives, particularly examining how trust, satisfaction, and cultural factors shape consumer engagement with sports network marketing. Finally, the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and metaverse-based marketing in sports network marketing warrants deeper investigation.

From a practical perspective, policymakers should prioritize creating enabling regulatory environments that support private sector engagement in sports marketing. Sports organizations should invest in managerial capacity-building and data-driven decision-making to optimize network marketing strategies. Financial institutions must design more flexible loan products aligned with the needs of sports entrepreneurs. At the organizational level, adopting big data analytics and influencer partnerships will be essential for building consumer trust and brand loyalty. Finally, sports businesses should emphasize consumer-centered approaches that not only increase sales but also contribute to broader social outcomes such as employment and community well-being.

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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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