



Explaining the Model of Factors Affecting Sports Tourism Demand in Iraq

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Publisher: [University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran](#)

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DOI:[10.22034/sms.2024.142155.1411](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2024.142155.1411)

Received: 15.04.2024

Revised: 16.07.2024

Accepted: 27.07.2024

Available online: 21.03.2025

Keywords:

Tourism, Sports Tourism, Tourism Demand, Grounded Theory

ABSTRACT

Sports tourism is one of the key areas of economic and social development that can contribute to cultural transformation and the improvement of international interactions. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explain the model of factors influencing the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. The present research is applied in nature, employing a qualitative research method based on grounded theory with the Glaserian approach. The statistical population of the study consisted of professors and experts in sports management, tourism, and sports tourism, managers of tourism agencies, and Ph.D. researchers in sports management. The sample was selected from among the population members using purposive and snowball sampling methods. To gather the necessary information for the research, document study and interviews were employed, and the interviews for this study were conducted from September to December 2023. The research tool was semi-structured interviews with 15 experts, which continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The validity of the research was confirmed by relevant experts, and the reliability was achieved through the intra-subject agreement method, reaching 74%. The results of the study showed that economic dynamism, tourism management, sports events, social and cultural transformation, tourism challenges and opportunities, economic, managerial, political, social, and cultural functions, information technology, and environmental factors were the 11 key categories influencing the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. In this regard, attention to the factors influencing the demand for sports tourism in Iraq and effective management of these factors can help increase the number of sports tourists and contribute to the sustainable development of this industry in the country. Accordingly, the present study introduces a comprehensive model of the factors influencing the demand for sports tourism in Iraq, and the implementation of these strategies can contribute to Iraq's economic and social growth, positioning the country as a model for sustainable sports tourism development in the region.

How to Cite This Article:

Khodadadi, M. R., Badri Azarin, Y., & Al-Jabr, M. W. M. (2025). Explaining the Model of Factors Affecting Sports Tourism Demand in Iraq. *Journal of Sport Marketing Studies*, 6 (3): 106-126. [10.22034/sms.2024.142155.1411](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2024.142155.1411).

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the development of tourism plays an important role in reducing unemployment, expanding business activities, boosting economic prosperity, enhancing social welfare, and improving the quality of life and overall well-being of people (Alidoust Ghahfaraki et al, 2025). Today, tourism plays a fundamental role in national economies, and worldwide, one out of every ten jobs is related to the tourism sector (Narangajavana et al, 2018). According to the twenty-year national outlook plan for the year (2025–2026), Iran is expected to attract at least 1.5% of the world's tourists. In other words, the number of international tourists visiting Iran in 1404 should reach approximately 20 million per year (Shahbazi et al, 2019).

Within the tourism portfolio, sports tourism is an integral component of the industry, possessing one of the most visible economic contributions and high-value products. On a global scale, it has emerged as one of the key tourism-related economic sectors (Giango et al, 2022). Sports tourism is a combination of sport and tourism, and sport itself can be categorized into watching sporting events, participating in sports activities, and engaging in cultural sport experiences (Libin & Yaohan, 2022).

Sports tourism is a form of tourism activity in which individuals participate in or watch sports, taking sport as the core content of their travel experience (Jimenez et al, 2020). Among these, sporting events are considered one of the most important types of tourism, attracting large numbers of people who travel to various destinations each year to watch them (Shahbazi et al, 2025).

Sports tournaments held with the participation of various national teams are among the events capable of attracting tourists. Consequently, many countries invest heavily in this type of tourism, effectively harnessing its benefits and utilizing it as an important source for improving economic, social, and political conditions, as well as increasing employment and developing urban infrastructure

(Panahi & Adami, 2016). In a broad sense, sports tourism encompasses the entire set of relationships among various physical entertainments, physical training, sporting competitions, sports rehabilitation, and cultural sport-exchange activities carried out by tourists at tourism destinations, sports tourism enterprises, and within the community (Mohammad Arif & Du, 2019).

Sports tourism involves a recreational trip in which individuals temporarily leave their place of residence to participate in physical sporting activities, attend events, or visit attractions (Gibson, 2017). Tourism is considered a service industry whose products cannot be stored for future use (Giango et al, 2022).

Many tourism industries integrate sports to promote local culture, facilitate economic development, and attract customers. An example of sports tourism activities is sports tours (Smith, 2018). Sports tours are offered to groups of enthusiasts who organize trips to tour destinations. Depending on accessibility, location, and nature, sports tourism tours can be conducted individually or in an organized manner, with the characteristics of sports tourism (such as the number of visits) being highlighted according to seasonal conditions (Higham & Vada, 2024).

Sports tourism has gradually gained importance in large cities and countries, while smaller towns have established specialized sports tourism agencies. The popularity of sporting events can be attributed to the fact that, depending on their scale, they provide significant benefits to host communities at the state, county, city, or municipal level (Cardoso & Silva, 2018). The economic benefits of sports tourism generally stem from attracting spending tourists and investors participating in specific projects. It is usually accompanied by the creation of new job opportunities for residents, generation of essential

income sources, and the development of business opportunities locally (Jimenez et al, 2020).

Moreover, tourism can serve as a platform for urban renewal, as well as the growth and development of new services. On the other hand, communities can benefit from hosting sporting events by enhancing visibility and developing their image (Giango et al, 2022). Enhancing the image of a community provides a desirable means of promoting it as a destination. Consequently, the development of sports tourism, similar to other types of tourism, can influence the norms, moral values, and social fabric of that community (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2020).

The future development of sports tourism refers to initiatives launched by local governments, tourists, sports enthusiasts, and other organizations that promote sports tourism (Shahbazi et al, 2025). Such initiatives are typically associated with the collaborative efforts of sporting event organizers, the tourism sector, and other relevant stakeholders. However, information regarding residents' perceptions, their views on the impact of tourism activities, and their support for industry development can significantly inform the design of tourism programs and policies (Dickson et al, 2021).

The term "tourism demand" is defined as the quantity of tourism industry products that consumers are willing and able to purchase during a given period under a set of fixed conditions (Park et al, 2021). Demand refers to the set of actions through which buyers, considering full individual and social freedom, can purchase and obtain the goods and services they desire and need by paying for them (Safarzade & Asghari, 2019).

Demand is a continuous flow that can increase or decrease depending on the economic conditions of society. In other words, demand is never halted; rather, it varies according to the economic situation in different periods. Thus, by examining the prevailing political, economic, and social conditions in a society, the volume and level of demand can be determined as a forecast (Rahnama et al, 2022). Various factors and variables influence tourism

demand. Economists believe that tourism demand may be affected by different variables, such as cultural, social, and geographical factors in the destination country (Kuralbayev & Ibid, 2017).

In addition to these variables, other economic factors, such as the income level of the origin country, cost of living, prices of substitute or complementary goods, and exchange rates, can influence the demand of tourists for a destination country (Farhadi & Imani, 2022). Tourism demand includes the goods and services that consumers require at the moment of consumption and is directly dependent on per capita income and people's interest in international tourism (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2020). According to Carneiro et al. (2016), the growth of the tourism industry is inherently a political activity, resulting in a constant conflict between various factors and interests. Therefore, governments often exert significant influence on the direction and extent of tourism development through public sector organizations. Tourism operates according to the principle of supply and demand. The supply and demand model is essentially designed for a competitive market in which no single buyer or seller can significantly affect prices, and prices are determined accordingly (Alvarez Diaz et al, 2020).

The quantity produced by producers and the quantity demanded by consumers depend on the market price of the product. According to the law of supply, holding other factors constant, the quantity supplied depends on the price: higher prices lead to greater supply, while lower prices result in reduced supply. According to the law of demand, holding other factors constant, demand decreases at higher prices and increases at lower prices (Safarzade & Asghari, 2019). On the supply side, specialization has grown significantly, and travel companies have increasingly turned to outsourcing to reduce labor costs within the organization. On the demand side, tourists seek new and diverse experiences beyond their daily lives, making marketing particularly important, to the extent that the success of the supply sector depends on the performance of the marketing function. As tourists' interests and

preferences expand and the variety of tourism types increases, the survival of travel companies and agencies is closely linked to the performance of marketers in identifying tourism demand ([Shayan et al, 2022](#)).

Identifying the factors influencing tourism demand for any destination has always been of interest to researchers and destination managers. For managers, recognizing these factors is crucial for selecting target markets and addressing tourists' needs and desires, as destinations with different characteristics attract different groups of tourists ([Alvarez Diaz et al, 2020](#)). The choice of a destination by tourists depends, on one hand, on their needs and desires, and on the other hand, on the various characteristics of that destination. Tourism destinations, as products of the tourism industry, possess multifaceted features, and the differing nature of these characteristics leads to varied perspectives among tourists. In terms of market nature, there are competitive destinations that offer shopping and recreational attractions, with coastal tourism destinations often fitting into this category. Conversely, there are cultural–historical destinations, which benefit from unique assets such as distinctive cultural sites or heritage resources that are unmatched elsewhere, providing visitors with a unique and special experience ([Afifi et al, 2022](#)). Tourism demand is often addressed as a spatiotemporal series forecasting issue. Spatiotemporal forecasting comprehensively considers both the spatial and temporal information of tourism demand and is regarded as the most reasonable forecasting model. A spatiotemporal forecasting model can predict tourism demand for multiple regions within a specified framework, as spatial information is aggregated in this model to provide accurate tourism demand predictions across the entire area ([Zhou et al, 2023](#)).

Nowadays, factors such as tourism- and travel-related laws and regulations, transportation infrastructure, price competitiveness, and cultural and natural resources play an effective role in tourism development ([Park et al, 2021](#)). In general,

the factors influencing tourism are divided into three categories: 1. Demand-side variables: These include the economic, social, and natural variables of the origin region that affect tourists' preferences and motivations, such as individual travel motivations, local culture and traditions, income distribution, leisure activities, and geographical conditions. 2. Supply-side variables: These refer to the economic, social, and natural variables of the destination region that influence tourists' preferences and motivations for visiting, such as real income levels of the population, foreign investment, level of information and communication technology development, transportation infrastructure, competition and service quality, and economic regulations of the host country. 3. Interaction factors: Interaction variables are those that link two countries, such as exchange rates, travel duration, travel costs, and regional promotion efforts ([Rahnama et al, 2022](#)).

Tourism demand theory can be defined based on the consumer behavior of a specific region for a group of countries or a particular area ([Giango et al, 2022](#)). Tourism demand can be analyzed in terms of specific types of tourism products, such as sports tourism, or particular components of sports tourism products, such as accommodation and transportation ([Vatsa, 2020](#)). The tourism demand function represents the relationship between tourism and its influencing factors. The variables affecting tourism demand depend on the purpose of the visit. Tourism trips can occur for various reasons, such as vacations, business and work travel, visiting friends and relatives, or sports-related trips. To define and measure tourism demand, the number of tourists must be determined in order to specify the relevant variables ([Rahnama et al, 2022](#)).

Governments at all levels have a strong interest in developing the tourism industry in many destinations, under the assumption that it can drive economic growth and alleviate poverty. While the positive impacts of tourism are widely recognized, the development of sports tourism can also have

negative effects on tourism destinations, including their communities. To ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in the development process, understanding best practices in sports tourism development is crucial (Cho et al, 2019). Sports tourism offers numerous benefits for cities, including economic, social, and cultural advantages from hosting games and sporting events. Clearly, these benefits are generated within the cities, leading to significant quantitative and qualitative changes (Gibson et al, 2011). Sports tourism is considered a clean industry that plays an important role as a driving force in the development of other industries. The events and interactions arising from people's participation in a tourism event—whether to play or watch sporting events—form the core of sports tourism (Shahbazi et al, 2019).

Afifi et al. (2022), in a study entitled "Identifying the Factors Affecting Tourism Demand in Tehran," concluded that tourism services, welfare and promotional services, cultural and religious services, educational services, and economic services are the main factors influencing tourism demand in Tehran. Accordingly, to enhance tourism demand, actions such as strengthening cultural and educational infrastructure through agreements between the Tourism Organization and universities, recruiting faculty members to support the development of the Tourism Organization's educational infrastructure, and providing tourism services free of charge to attract tourists should be implemented. Safarzade and Asghari, (2019), in a study entitled "Factors Affecting Tourism Demand in Middle Eastern Countries," concluded that tourism plays a significant role in national economies and is recognized as a driving force for economic growth. The study's results indicated that factors such as exchange rates, per capita income,

economic freedom, and geographical distance have a significant impact on the tourism demand of a destination country.

Park et al. (2021), in a study entitled "Forecasting Tourism Demand Using Online News Data," concluded that incorporating news data significantly improves the forecasting performance of tourism destinations, tourism infrastructure, and tourism competitiveness. Accordingly, tourism demand forecasting becomes more accurate and effective with the assistance of news media. Zhou et al. (2023), in a study entitled "A Spatiotemporal Learning Framework for Tourism Demand Forecasting," concluded that spatiotemporal series forecasting can predict tourism demand more accurately, as spatial information is specified and precise tourism demand forecasts are provided across the entire region. Therefore, accurate tourism demand forecasting can enhance tourism experiences and enable smart tourism.

The distinction between the current study and previous research can be described as follows: the specific political and security conditions in Iraq and their impact on sports tourism represent key issues that have received limited attention in prior studies. Additionally, sports tourism infrastructure in Iraq, compared to many other countries, is still developing and requires more detailed examination. Furthermore, Iraq's cultural and historical values serve as a unique attraction for sports tourists, particularly given the country's rich history and heritage, which is emphasized in this study on sports tourism demand. The need for targeted marketing and management strategies to attract sports tourists to Iraq, considering the country's unique economic and social conditions, is another aspect that distinguishes this research.

2. Methodology

The present study is a qualitative research conducted using the grounded theory approach, specifically the Glaserian method. In terms of purpose, it is applied research, and data collection was carried out in the field. Regarding ontology and

epistemology, the study is based on a realist and objective ontological perspective. From this viewpoint, it is assumed that phenomena related to sports tourism in Iraq, including demand and its influencing factors, exist independently of the

researcher's perceptions and beliefs. In other words, this research examines the external and objective realities in this field and seeks to explain them without being influenced by personal biases or beliefs. From an epistemological perspective, the present study follows an interpretive approach. This approach holds that human knowledge and understanding are obtained through interaction with experts and research participants, as well as through qualitative analysis. Accordingly, in this study, data were collected via semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable and experienced individuals and were then interpreted based on qualitative and grounded theory analyses. Knowledge in this research is developed gradually through dynamic interactions between the researcher and the participants.

The statistical population of the study included professors and experts in sports management, professors and specialists in tourism and sports tourism, managers of tourism agencies, and doctoral researchers in sports management. The sample was selected from the population using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data were collected through document review and interviews, with the interviews conducted between October and December 2023. Each interview lasted on average between 30 and 70 minutes. The research instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews with 15 experts, continuing until theoretical saturation was reached. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with the selected participants, coordinated and scheduled in advance. After each interview, the discussions were fully transcribed on paper, and initial coding of the data was conducted to extract preliminary concepts. Upon completing all interviews, a more in-depth review of the theoretical foundations and previous research was carried out, allowing for the integration of past concepts, the researcher's experiences, and expert opinions to progress to the subsequent stages of data analysis. In this study, 15

interviews were conducted. From the ninth interview onwards, repetition in the information received was observed, and by the thirteenth interview, the data were fully repetitive, reaching theoretical saturation. However, to ensure thoroughness, interviews continued up to the fifteenth participant.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings and to enhance the accuracy of data analysis, the researcher addressed four equivalents in qualitative research—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—within the grounded theory strategy. To ensure dependability, after initial data coding by the researcher, a recoding process was conducted to assess the level of agreement between codings. Additionally, to establish credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research codes, the researcher employed a tactic known as member checking, in which a version of the codes and model was provided to three professors involved in the study. Their suggestions were reviewed and applied as needed, and the model was finalized and confirmed through consensus. Accordingly, to assess the reliability of the study using the intra-subject agreement method (test-retest reliability), several interviews were selected as samples and each was recoded after a short, defined time interval. The codes identified in the two time intervals for each interview were then compared, and the stability index for the study was calculated based on the agreements and disagreements observed between the two coding stages. In each interview, codes that were consistent across the two time intervals were marked as agreements, while inconsistent codes were marked as disagreements. Subsequently, the researcher, together with a research colleague, coded three interviews, and the intra-subject agreement percentage, which serves as an indicator of analytical reliability, was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Intra - subject agreement percentage} = \frac{2 \times \text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100$$

Table 1. Percentage of Reliability through the Re-coding Method

Interview Title	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of Disagreements	Intra-subject agreement percentage
P _A	30	11	5	73%
P _B	25	9	3	72%
P _C	18	7	2	78%
Total	73	27	10	74%

As shown in Table 1, the total number of codes recorded by both the researcher and the research colleague was 73, with 27 codes in agreement and 10 codes in disagreement. The reliability between

the two coders, calculated using the formula mentioned above, was 74%, which exceeds the 60% threshold. Therefore, the reliability of the coding is confirmed.

Table 2. Research Method Based on the Research Onion Model

Research Philosophy	Interpretive
Research Approach	Deductive
Research Strategy	Applied
Research Sampling	Qualitative
Research Timeframe	Cross-sectional
Data Collection and Analysis Method	Interviews – Grounded Theory using Glaserian Approach
Criteria for Selecting Research Sample	Experts and specialists in the relevant field
Interview Timeframe	October to December 2023
Interview Duration	30 to 70 minutes
Interview Questions	What is meant by sports tourism?
	What factors influence sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What factors contribute to the formation of sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What factors facilitate or disrupt sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What are the challenges and obstacles to sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What strategies and solutions exist for sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What are the consequences of sports tourism demand in Iraq?
	What factors can improve and develop sports tourism demand in Iraq?

3. Findings of the Research

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the research sample in the present study:

Table 3. Frequency of Respondents Based on the Participation of the Research Sample

Academic Rank	Frequency	Percentage
Professors of Sports Management	5	33.33
Professors and Specialists in Tourism and Sports Tourism	5	33.33
Managers of Tourism Agencies	3	20
Doctoral Researchers in Sports Management	2	13.34
Total	15	100

In the present study, from approximately 640 statements transcribed from interviews, literature, and relevant documents, around 310 key points were extracted after removing irrelevant data. At

this stage, the 310 key points were organized into 151 propositions, 25 categories, and 11 focused codes. The results of these findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Focused Coding

Focused Code	Concepts	Propositions	Frequency
Economic Dynamics	Marketing Research	Costs related to travel, accommodation, and tickets for sporting events	5
		Identifying the needs and preferences of sports tourists	8
		Utilizing positive theories and experiences to attract new tourists	6
		Capacity of popular sports disciplines to attract tourism audiences	4
		Improving accessibility and transportation facilities	10
		Providing accurate maps and information to tourists	7
	Tourism Profitability	Improving transportation facilities and access to sports venues	7
		Quality of sports infrastructure, such as stadiums, sports halls, and training facilities	6
		Organizing cultural, artistic, and sports events	6
		Appropriate methods for timely purchase and distribution of goods and services	2
		Financing of events and sports tourism infrastructure	5
		Strategic planning and smart advertising to attract more tourists and economically leverage these events	4
		Offering diverse tourism packages and unique experiences to attract and retain tourists interested in recreational sports	5
		Utilizing modern technologies and digital platforms to attract tourists and better manage resources	7
		Creating a strong and reputable brand for tourism destinations to gain tourists' trust and interest	3
		Determining the stages and details of various sports event destinations	2
		Creating and organizing appropriate routes for visitors	4
		Developing tourism strategies through sports entrepreneurship centers	3
		Establishing a clear framework for effective collaboration among tourism institutions	6
		Reviewing, optimizing, and improving the financial system and monitoring the expenses of organizations related to tourism	2
		Strengthening and updating regulations and guidelines for sports tourism	5
		Revising and enhancing policymaking and planning processes for sports tourism destinations	4
		Utilizing skilled personnel in sports sciences familiar with sports tourism concepts	6
		Leveraging traditional and indigenous sports as unique tourism attractions	5
Tourism Management	Tourism Destination Planning	Emphasizing the preservation of the environment and natural resources to attract tourists	6
		Raising public awareness about the benefits of sports tourism and its employment opportunities	7
		Supportive policies and programs to facilitate sports tourism	6
		Providing necessary facilities and infrastructure to attract tourists	5
	Sustainable Tourism Development	Emphasizing the preservation of the environment and natural resources to attract tourists	6
		Raising public awareness about the benefits of sports tourism and its employment opportunities	7
		Supportive policies and programs to facilitate sports tourism	6
		Providing necessary facilities and infrastructure to attract tourists	5

Sporting Events		Offering high-quality services at events and sports destinations	3
		Exchanging experiences and resources with other countries for better development	5
		Offering various sports and events to attract diverse audiences	4
		Utilizing appropriate technologies and designs to reduce environmental pollution in sports venues	7
	Sporting Summit	Creating a platform to invite tourists and showcase sports attractions	6
		Organizing international scientific conferences in the field of tourism	8
		Inviting travel agencies from different countries to participate in exhibitions and introduce their services to tourists	5
		Presenting sports tourism attractions alongside hosting sports events	12
	Sporting Competitions	Developing sports event tourism related to winter sports, traditional and indigenous sports, etc	8
		Cooperating with global sports organizations and federations to host prestigious competitions	7
		Organizing mountain biking, motorcycling competitions, and other similar events	5
		Existence of a general public culture regarding sports tourism in society	5
	Cultural Institutionalization	Promoting proper use of sports facilities and complexes	6
		Accurate presentation of local culture and sports through media	2
		Institutionalizing respect and friendship within sports complexes	3
		Individuals' willingness to participate in sports activities and related experiences	5
Social and Cultural Transformation	Formation of Motivations and Sense of Belonging	Strengthening community feeling and sense of belonging among sports tourism enthusiasts	3
		Creating attractive visual and video content of sports experiences to capture the attention and interest of tourism audiences	4
		Opportunities for building relationships and friendships among sports enthusiasts	6
		Cultural and historical values associated with sports destinations	5
		Recalling pleasant memories from participation in sports events	4
		Identifying and aligning the local community with cultural and sports identity	2
		Paying attention to the diversity of tastes and interests of sports tourists	3
		Insecurity and political instability	7
		Sanctions and economic restrictions affecting access to tourism resources and services	6
		Weaknesses in transportation, accommodation, and healthcare infrastructure	8
Tourism Challenges and Opportunities	Tourism Challenges	Negative impacts of climate change on natural attractions and tourism activities	7
		Negative media portrayals	5
		Promoting indigenous and local sports to create unique opportunities for tourists	4
		Attracting tourists with unique cultural and historical attractions	6
	Tourism Opportunities		

Economic Functions	Advertising and Marketing	Utilizing modern technologies to enhance tourist experiences and facilitate tourism services	9
		Strengthening opportunities for collaboration with countries and international organizations to attract investment and tourism expertise	7
		Hosting sports events alongside cultural festivals	12
		Using social media and international advertising to raise awareness and attract tourists	6
		Offering special proposals, such as sports travel packages and group discounts	7
		Utilizing demographic data and customer interests for precise targeting in advertising	3
		Attracting and retaining entrepreneurs and investors to build training camps	5
		Promoting unique and special sports experiences, such as international events, local competitions, or specific sports activities	9
		Analyzing competitors' advertising methods and developing unique strategies to differentiate from other tourism destinations	8
	Growth and Employment Generation	Encouraging investment in sectors related to sports tourism	4
		Supporting startups and new businesses in sports tourism to create new employment opportunities	8
		Job creation resulting from hosting and organizing international competitions and events, such as the Olympics or World Cup	10
		Offering various sports activities, including water sports, mountaineering, cycling, and winter sports	9
		Collaborating with hotels, restaurants, and other sectors of the tourism industry	6
		Establishing sports facilities such as stadiums, arenas, and training centers	5
		Organizing regular and diverse sports events throughout the year to attract tourists and create employment opportunities in various fields	9
	Process Planning and Guidance	Designing and implementing comprehensive and long-term strategies for the development of sports tourism	5
		Developing effective marketing strategies to introduce Iraq's unique attractions and features to international and domestic tourists	6
		Designing and communicating a framework for task allocation among organizations involved in sports tourism	4
		Planning and managing events and coordinating with suppliers, local authorities, and participants in sports events	3
		Organizing and hosting national and international sports competitions to attract tourists and enhance the country's visibility as a sports destination	5
		Identifying challenges and effectively utilizing opportunities to improve sports tourism strategies and programs	6
		Conducting ongoing research and evaluations of tourism organization programs to assess the current market situation	7
Managerial Functions	Human Resource Management	Employing skilled and trained personnel for organizing and managing events	8

Political Functions	Optimizing the use of financial, human, and physical resources to ensure efficiency and service quality	4
	Designing and implementing crisis management strategies to address unforeseen challenges at tourism destinations	3
	Monitoring the quality of services provided to sports tourists	6
	Conducting surveys to improve service delivery to tourists	5
	Implementing incentive and motivational programs to engage community groups in sports tourism activities	2
Education and Research	Establishing specialized programs in sports tourism at universities and educational institutions in Iraq	5
	Providing training courses and professional development programs for staff, managers, guides, and sports tourism experts	3
Brand Management	Conducting research and comparative studies to benchmark successful countries in sports tourism	6
	Organizing conferences, lectures, and scientific seminars on sports tourism	7
Establishing and Strengthening International Relations	Translating and authoring books related to sports tourism	4
	Supporting the creation and strengthening of a reputable brand for sports tourism destinations	5
Government Policies	Adhering to principles of sustainable and responsible tourism in collaboration with agencies and tourism organizations	6
	Introducing and enhancing the brand image of sports tourism destinations	8
Political Functions	Creating a strong brand for Iraq's sports tourism and promoting it to global markets	7
	Collaborating with local institutions, sports organizations, and international companies to develop and promote sports tourism	5
Government Policies	Fostering cooperation among government, private sector, and civil society for sports tourism development	3
	Hosting international sports events, such as world championships or the Olympics	10
Political Functions	Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with media, local authorities, government bodies, and international organizations	6
	Communicating and consulting with leading countries' sports tourism institutions	7
Government Policies	Establishing connections and cooperation with international sports federations and organizations to attract major events and create new opportunities	4
	Developing and implementing supportive government policies to encourage investment in the sports tourism sector	6
Government Policies	Providing financial and non-financial incentives in the field of sports event tourism	8
	Considering laws and regulations related to tourism and recreational activities and their impact on sports tourism activities	7
Government Policies	Improving public transportation networks and establishing adequate tourism infrastructure	10

Social and Cultural Functions		Utilizing domestic resources and optimizing costs for the development of sports tourism infrastructure and facilities	7
		Ensuring investment security in sports tourism through existing guarantee and support funds	4
		Preventing negative global perceptions of Iraq's tourism by hosting and organizing sports events	9
	Social Acceptance	Friendly behavior and social acceptance from the host community influencing the willingness to participate in sports events	4
		Creating participation opportunities for the local community in activities related to sports events	7
		Establishing and promoting sports facilities with sustainable design to gain social trust and better acceptance from the local community	5
		Improving general well-being and creating opportunities to enhance social vitality and liveliness	8
		Encouraging the public to increase spending on sports tourism within household budgets	6
	Socialization and Tourism Transformation	Supporting and promoting local and community-based sports events to develop a sports tourism culture	6
		Engaging with the local community and respecting local cultures and traditions in designing and implementing sports tourism projects	8
		Striving to improve the public image of Iraq as a safe and attractive destination for sports tourists through positive marketing campaigns and showcasing sports achievements	3
		Promoting a culture of hospitality and providing high-quality services to sports tourists to create positive and memorable experiences	7
		Fostering a culture of sustainability among all stakeholders in sports tourism, including tourists, organizations, and local communities	5
Information Technology Functions	Development of Communication Networks	Establishing communication networks and collaborative partnerships between government and sports organizations to enhance the quality of sports event tourism services	6
		Engaging and cooperating with internet, mobile, and other communication technology providers	7
		Utilizing social media, websites, and applications to establish direct communication with target audiences	8
		Implementing intelligent management systems in sports organizations	11
		Applying modern technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence to enhance sports tourism experiences	10
		Strengthening hardware infrastructure and specialized software in the field of tourism	9
		Providing digital services such as free Wi-Fi in sports venues	7
	Use of Technology	Creating and distributing educational and entertaining content about events and sports tourism attractions	6

Environmental Functions	Strengthening Green Management	Providing suitable methods for booking accommodations, visiting venues, and purchasing sports tourism products and services	7
		Leveraging knowledge-based companies in the field of sports tourism	5
		Using dedicated websites, mobile applications, and electronic publications to provide up-to-date information, event schedules, and sports news to tourists	6
		Applying advanced technologies in sports events, including online registration systems, digital surveys, and time management tools	7
		Integrating and storing sports tourism information for easy access	5
		Raising awareness among sports tourists about travel agencies and service offices	4
		Utilizing social media, blogs, and online platforms to promote sports tourism destinations and provide useful information to tourists	7
		Developing and enforcing environmental regulations and policies aimed at minimizing the negative environmental impacts of sports-related activities	8
		Providing the required energy for lighting, cooling, and heating sports facilities through clean energy sources such as solar and wind power	9
	Climatic and Environmental Conditions	Implementing intelligent systems to manage resources efficiently and reduce energy and water wastage in sports facilities	6
		Promoting the use of public transportation, cycling, and walking instead of private vehicles to decrease greenhouse gas emissions	5
		Reducing the consumption of plastic products and encouraging the use of sustainable alternatives	3
		Publishing periodic reports on achievements and ongoing challenges related to green management practices	4
		Designing and constructing sports facilities with consideration of local climatic conditions and optimal utilization of natural resources	6
		Protecting and preserving local ecosystems surrounding sports facilities, including proper management of water and soil resources	3
		Preventing the destruction of natural habitats and supporting the conservation of plant and animal species	2
		Preparing for emergency management in cases of sudden weather changes and natural disasters during sporting events	3
		Planning for climate change adaptation and managing its impacts on sports tourism and related infrastructure	5
	Environmental Sustainability	Utilizing modern technologies such as renewable energy systems (solar, wind) and energy-efficient innovations	3
		Designing sports facilities based on green architectural principles to ensure sustainability and optimized energy consumption	4
		Developing green infrastructure such as bicycle parking areas and pedestrian pathways around sports venues	7

Promoting awareness among athletes and tourists regarding sustainable and environmentally responsible behaviors for the protection of natural resources	2
Collaborating with international organizations and leveraging global experience and expertise in sustainable tourism	6
Implementing effective recycling and waste-management programs in sports facilities to reduce environmental impacts and enhance sustainability	5

The model developed in the present study indicates that the sustainability of sports tourism results from the structural interaction among managerial, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technological factors. It further suggests that by strengthening the demand for sports

tourism and implementing scientific destination management, sustainable development in this sector can be effectively achieved. The following diagram illustrates the paradigmatic model of the present research:

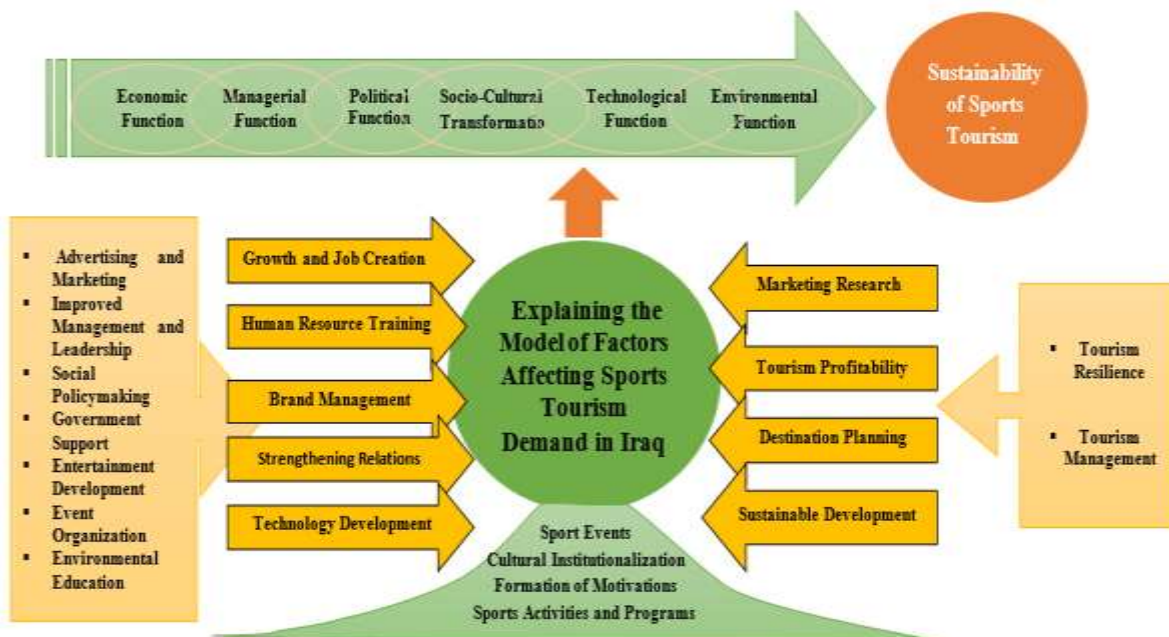


Figure 1. The Paradigmatic Model of the Study

4. Discussion and conclusion

The sports tourism industry is regarded as one of the primary sources of income in many societies and is now recognized as a vital tool for the advancement of various countries. By establishing a strong link between cultural and social values, sports tourism increases tourism demand and enhances the performance of both sectors. As a result, it contributes to sustainable economic and social development and promotes higher levels of interaction among tourists (Libin & Yaohan, 2022).

Economic dynamism is a fundamental factor that plays a significant role in sports tourism demand in Iraq. In this regard, sports tourism is not only recognized as an important recreational activity but also regarded as a vital economic engine. Although conditions vary across different regions of the world, the tourism industry has consistently played a key role in improving economic conditions and has the potential to transform socioeconomic structures (Gibson, 2017). Investment in infrastructure related to sports

tourism—such as stadiums, sports facilities, hotels, and service centers—is highly significant. These investments serve as essential foundations for attracting tourists and meeting their needs (Giango et al, 2022). The share of the sports tourism industry in the financial market also reflects its significant role in economic growth and profitability for investors. Attracting investors to organize tourism tours and establish training camps is particularly important, as these activities not only generate substantial added value but also create employment opportunities and contribute to economic development in various regions (Cardoso & Silva, 2018).

Tourism management refers to the process of planning, organizing, and controlling tourism activities with the aim of optimizing tourists' experiences while simultaneously preserving and developing natural, cultural, and economic resources (Shahbazi et al, 2025). Effective tourism management requires attention to destination planning and sustainable development factors. Precise destination planning is considered one of the fundamental pillars of tourism management. This planning involves analyzing tourists' needs and preferences, evaluating infrastructure, and identifying natural and cultural resources that can serve as tourism attractions. On the other hand, sustainable tourism development refers to meeting the needs of tourists without harming natural and cultural resources for future generations. This approach not only helps preserve the environment but also strengthens local communities and creates sustainable employment opportunities (Vatsa, 2020).

In this context, the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, and local communities, becomes evident. Participatory planning and incorporating the perspectives and experiences of local communities can enhance the quality of tourists' experiences while also contributing to resource conservation. Such collaboration can lead to the development of effective strategies that benefit both tourists and

local communities. Moreover, educating and raising awareness among all stakeholders, including tourism industry staff and tourists, plays a crucial role in improving service quality and reducing negative environmental impacts. The use of modern technologies, such as destination management systems and analytical tools, can further optimize processes and increase efficiency in tourism management.

Sporting events are considered key factors influencing sports tourism demand in Iraq. Organizing exhibitions related to sports tourism and inviting tourists can significantly contribute to the growth of this industry. Additionally, holding international scientific conferences in the field of tourism and inviting travel agencies from target countries can create opportunities for international collaboration, knowledge transfer, and the adoption of new experiences, thereby enhancing the standards of the sports tourism industry. These initiatives help strengthen the sports tourism sector and improve the overall experience for tourists. Furthermore, organizing traditional and local sports competitions with tourist participation can aid in preserving and promoting Iraq's local culture and traditions. Such activities can attract tourists interested in experiencing local culture and history, contributing to the development of cultural tourism in the country. For instance, cultural and sports events can foster interaction between tourists and local communities, supporting the preservation of regional cultural identity and traditions (Smith, 2018).

Social and cultural transformation is a key factor in the development of sports tourism, playing a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors toward this type of tourism. Institutionalizing a culture of sports tourism within the community—characterized by a generally positive public perception of this phenomenon—is one of the most important prerequisites for success in this field. In particular, promoting a culture of proper use of sports facilities and complexes is essential; it not only enhances the sports experience

but also contributes to the protection of resources and infrastructure ([Giango et al, 2022](#)).

Proper introduction of local culture and sports through media can significantly contribute to strengthening local identity and attracting tourists. By providing accurate and engaging information, media can effectively showcase local cultures and capture the attention of audiences. In this context, institutionalizing values such as respect and friendship within sports facilities creates a safe and friendly environment for social interactions and enhances social and cultural participation in sporting events. The formation of motivations and a sense of belonging is another dimension of social and cultural transformation, which helps strengthen social bonds among individuals. People's willingness to participate in sports activities and related experiences not only increases engagement in sporting events but also reinforces the sense of community and belonging among sports tourism enthusiasts. Creating appealing visual content and evoking pleasant memories from participation in sports events plays a key role in attracting tourists and encouraging their participation in sporting activities. Moreover, the cultural and historical values associated with sports tourism destinations, as well as the diversity of tourist preferences, must be considered. By recognizing and aligning the local community with its cultural and sports identity, unique experiences for tourists can be facilitated ([Alvarez Diaz et al, 2020](#)).

Tourism, as one of the key economic industries, faces specific challenges and opportunities in every country. Insecurity and political instability, economic sanctions and restrictions, as well as weaknesses in transportation infrastructure, limit access to tourism resources and services, which can reduce tourists' willingness to travel to Iraq. At the same time, promoting indigenous and local sports and creating unique attractions can facilitate tourist attraction. Hosting sporting events alongside cultural festivals can provide tourists with engaging and diverse experiences while contributing to the development of local identity. Furthermore,

attracting tourists through unique cultural and historical attractions presents an opportunity to introduce Iraq's rich history and culture to the world. The use of modern technologies to enhance the tourist experience and facilitate services—especially in the post-COVID era—can improve service quality and increase tourist satisfaction.

The results of the study indicated that political factors play a significant role in sports tourism demand in Iraq. Sporting events require a safe and secure environment; therefore, ensuring security and stability can increase the demand for participation in these events and make Iraq an attractive destination for sports tourists. To gain tourists' trust, establishing security infrastructure and ensuring safety at sporting events is essential. Entry and residence regulations for tourists also influence demand; facilitating visa processes can contribute to the growth of sports tourism demand. Conversely, unnecessary strictness may hinder the entry of tourists. Moreover, implementing supportive policies for the development of sports infrastructure and the promotion of national sports can contribute to the growth of the sports tourism industry and create a favorable environment for hosting major sporting events.

According to the findings of [Zolghadr et al. \(2022\)](#), [Libin & Yaohan \(2022\)](#) and [Yang et al. \(2014\)](#), political stability and security directly influence tourists' trust. Tourists generally seek destinations where they feel safe and politically stable. In countries with political instability or security issues, tourists' willingness to participate in sporting events decreases. Improving security conditions and ensuring political stability can enhance tourists' trust and consequently increase the demand for sports tourism ([Zolghadr et al, 2022](#)). If Iraq can ensure the necessary political stability and security, it can be recognized as a host for these events and, consequently, attract more sports tourists. The positive experience of sports tourists is directly linked to the host country's security and political conditions. When tourists are in a safe and stable environment, they are likely to

have a pleasant and worry-free experience, which can lead to increased demand for future trips. Conversely, security issues and political instability can create negative experiences for tourists, resulting in decreased demand and lower rates of return visits. Therefore, to develop and strengthen sports tourism in Iraq, special attention must be given to maintaining political stability and creating a secure environment. Effective measures in this area can help attract more tourists and enhance the country's sports tourism industry.

The research findings indicated that economic factors play a significant role in the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. Economic factors are recognized as one of the key components influencing sports tourism demand in the country. These factors directly and indirectly affect sports tourists' decision-making and their choice to travel to Iraq. Travel-related costs, including airfare, accommodation, and expenses associated with attending sports events, are among the most influential factors on sports tourism demand. In Iraq, reducing these costs can contribute to attracting a greater number of sports tourists. Offering special discounts, creating bundled packages for tickets and accommodations, and providing financial support are among the strategies that can reduce travel costs and enhance the attractiveness of visiting Iraq. These measures can lead to an increase in the number of sports tourists and strengthen Iraq's position as a sports tourism destination.

Additionally, the individual economic status of tourists plays a decisive role in their decision-making regarding travel to Iraq. When the economic situation of tourists improves, they are more likely to participate in sporting events and travel to Iraq. Therefore, the host country should provide favorable economic conditions for tourists to enhance the attraction of sports tourists. This includes offering high-quality and cost-effective services, facilitating access to events, and providing suitable accommodations and transportation facilities. Fluctuations in exchange rates can also have a significant impact on the demand for sports

tourism. When exchange rates are favorable for tourists, travel costs to Iraq decrease, and the willingness to attend sporting events increases. Therefore, monitoring currency fluctuations and offering competitive rates can help attract tourists. Additionally, financial costs related to money transfers, insurance, and taxes should be considered to prevent potential financial burdens for tourists.

Emphasis on securing resources and investment in this industry arises from multiple perspectives. Investment in sports tourism-related infrastructure, such as stadiums, sports facilities, hotels, and service centers, is highly important. These investments serve as essential foundations for attracting tourists and meeting their needs. The findings of this part of the study are consistent with the results of research by [Zhou et al. \(2023\)](#), [Lee and Jan, \(2019\)](#), and [Rahnema et al. \(2022\)](#). The findings of [Lee and Jan, \(2019\)](#) indicated that the share of the sports tourism industry in the financial market highlights its significant role in economic growth and profitability for investors. Overall, attracting investors to organize tourism tours and establish training camps is particularly important, as these activities not only generate substantial added value but also create employment opportunities and foster economic development in various regions ([Zhou et al, 2023](#)).

Managerial factors are considered one of the fundamental components influencing the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. Efficient management and proper organization of sporting events—including appropriate scheduling, precise planning, and flawless execution—can contribute to providing a positive and memorable experience for tourists, encouraging them to recommend the experience to others. For instance, careful planning and effective coordination in organizing competitions can help minimize potential problems and dissatisfaction among tourists. Proper management of sports infrastructure and facilities is a key factor in attracting sports tourists. High-quality infrastructure, modern amenities, and easy access to these facilities can provide tourists with a positive and memorable experience, thereby increasing

demand. The findings of this section of the study are consistent with the results of research by [Javan & Naimabadi \(2022\)](#), [Park et al. \(2021\)](#), [Mohammad Arif, Du \(2019\)](#) and [Cho et al. \(2019\)](#).

The results of the present study, consistent with the findings of related research, indicated that providing appropriate services to customers and participants of sports events plays a significant role in tourist satisfaction. These services include offering welfare facilities, support, and complaint management. High-quality services that address tourists' needs can enhance customer satisfaction and, consequently, increase demand. For instance, providing after-sales services, responding to complaints, and offering necessary assistance to tourists can strengthen their positive experiences and encourage them to share these experiences with others. Designing a survey management system to evaluate the status of sports services provided to tourists is a key tool for enhancing the sports tourism experience. This system can effectively collect tourists' feedback and assessments regarding the quality of services received. By analyzing this feedback, the strengths and weaknesses of sports services can be identified, enabling service improvement and quality enhancement. Moreover, the system can help identify tourists' needs and expectations, providing valuable information for future planning by managers. By utilizing the results from survey management, managers can take necessary actions to improve services, increase customer satisfaction, and consequently attract more sports tourists to various destinations. Additionally, survey results can foster healthy competition among sports service providers, as each provider strives to attract positive feedback from tourists by offering superior services.

The results of the study indicated that socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. Positive experiences shared by friends, family, or social groups can motivate individuals to participate in sports events. If people observe through social networks or reference groups that others have had a

positive experience attending sports events in Iraq, they are more likely to be encouraged to undertake similar trips themselves. The findings of this section of the study are consistent with the results of research conducted by [Wanyonyi et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Hinch & Ito, \(2018\)](#). The findings of the present study, in line with previous research, showed that positive attitudes, respect for religious values, the social influence of reference groups, and prior social experiences all play a significant role in attracting and retaining sports tourists. Paying attention to these factors and creating positive cultural and social experiences can help increase the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. Adequate focus on sports tourism can also lead to the development of cultural and social infrastructure, including museums, libraries, theaters, and other cultural spaces. The positive attitude and hospitality of the host community have a considerable impact on sports tourism demand. Friendly interactions and the acceptance of tourists by local people can provide a memorable and enjoyable experience. Such positive attitudes can strengthen relationships between tourists and the local community and increase the likelihood of tourists returning. For example, providing high-quality hospitality services and engaging positively with tourists can create unforgettable experiences and encourage them to share their experiences with others. Furthermore, the religious values and beliefs in Iraqi society can influence sports tourism demand. If sports events align with the values and beliefs of the local community, they can become more attractive to tourists and enhance trust, satisfaction, and overall engagement.

The findings of the study indicated that environmental factors play a significant role in sports tourism demand in Iraq. With its diverse natural landscapes, including deserts, mountains, and rivers, Iraq can be positioned as an attractive destination for sports tourism. Improving and preserving the quality of the environment in these areas can enhance tourist attraction and provide them with a positive and memorable experience.

The environmental impact of sports events also affects tourists' willingness to participate in these activities. If events are organized in a way that minimizes negative effects on the environment, tourists' likelihood of participation is likely to increase (Higham & Vada, 2024). Environmental sustainability and the preservation of natural resources for the future can be a crucial factor in attracting sports tourists. Sports events organized in an environmentally sustainable manner can lead to the attraction of a greater number of tourists (Alidoust Ghahfaraki et al, 2025).

For example, the use of green technologies, waste reduction, and the implementation of recycling programs can help minimize negative environmental impacts and enhance tourist satisfaction (Li et al, 2022). The findings of this section of the study are consistent with the results of Higham & Vada (2024), Li et al. (2022), Javan & Naimabadi (2022), and Khodadadi et al. (2024). The present research also aligns with previous studies, indicating that strong environmental policies in the management of sports events can play a significant role in attracting tourists. Tourists prefer to participate in events where organizers pay attention to environmental issues and utilize sustainable resources. Implementing environmental policies, such as restrictions on plastic usage and promoting renewable resources, can build tourist trust and encourage their participation in sports events.

The research findings indicated that information technology factors play a significant role in the demand for sports tourism in Iraq. Tourists seek accurate and up-to-date information regarding sports events, travel planning, and related services. Providing comprehensive and reliable information through websites, mobile applications, and social media can help attract more tourists. When tourists can easily access this information and interact with others via digital platforms, they are more likely to participate in sports events in Iraq. The results of this section of the study are consistent with the findings of Lee & Jan, (2019), Park et al. (2021), and Shahbazi et al. (2019). The findings of the present study, consistent with previous research,

showed that information technology provides extensive tools for information search, which is a key component in the tourism decision-making process. IT not only reduces the risks associated with this sector but also enhances the quality of the tourism experience. Revenue opportunities arising from economic advancements in information technology allow individuals to improve their quality of life and health through sports tourism. Successful promotional campaigns and engaging content, including videos, images, and articles related to sports events, can encourage people to participate in these events. Additionally, the use of digital platforms, social media, and local and international media for timely and accurate promotion and information dissemination can increase tourists' willingness to participate in sports events and travel to Iraq.

Sports tourism plays a fundamental role in enhancing international interactions, creating employment opportunities, and improving the quality of life in host communities. It not only fosters mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among nations but also serves as a bridge for cultural and economic exchange (Park et al, 2021). In other words, sports tourism, by facilitating cultural interactions and knowledge exchange, contributes to raising global awareness and education and lays the groundwork for the development of an active and sustainable sports community. In this context, attention to the factors influencing sports tourism demand in Iraq and the effective management of these factors can help increase the number of sports tourists and promote sustainable development of this industry in the country. Improving political stability, enhancing economic infrastructure, strengthening the management of sports events, promoting cultural and social coordination, preserving the environment, and leveraging information technology are among the measures that can make Iraq an attractive destination for sports tourists. By implementing these strategies, Iraq can not only advance its economic and social growth but also be



recognized as a regional model for sustainable sports tourism development.

5. Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

6. Financing

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The article has no financial sponsor or research funding, nor is it derived from a research project.

7. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the staff of the Journal of Sports Marketing Studies and the esteemed referees who provided valuable feedback to improve the article.

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