

Developing a Model of Mass Media Functions for Controlling Corruption in Iranian Sport

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ABSTRACT

This study developed and empirically assessed a context-sensitive model explaining how mass media can contribute to controlling corruption in Iranian sport. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was used. In the qualitative phase, academic experts, sport managers, media professionals, and specialists in sport media and management with at least five years of relevant experience were selected purposively and interviewed until conceptual saturation. Twenty-two experts participated; complete demographic information was available for 17 participants. Interview data were analyzed through a grounded-theory-informed procedure using open, axial, and selective coding to construct a six-part paradigm model. In the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed five-point Likert questionnaire was reviewed by 10 sport and media specialists, and the reported measurement and structural outputs were examined using SPSS and SmartPLS. The qualitative findings identified six causal conditions, five contextual conditions, five intervening conditions, one central phenomenon, seven strategies, and six outcomes. All reported indicator loadings exceeded .40. Standardized loadings ranged from .430 to .899, with t values from 4.608 to 43.158. The structural model displayed t values from 6.675 to 27.681, supporting statistical significance of the specified paths. The findings indicate that media-based corruption control extends beyond disclosure and depends on journalist protection, access to information, ethical education, independent integrity institutions, systematic monitoring, competent sport management, and supportive governmental infrastructure. The model provides an applied framework for sport federations, clubs, public authorities, and media organizations seeking to strengthen transparency and accountability in Iranian sport.

Keywords: mass media; corruption control; sport governance; transparency; Iranian sport; PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

Corruption in sport is a multidimensional governance problem that can appear as bribery, embezzlement, favoritism, conflicts of interest, manipulation of competitions, opaque procurement, misuse of public resources, and improper influence over appointments or commercial rights. Its effects extend beyond the immediate

financial loss. Corruption weakens competitive fairness, damages the legitimacy of sport organizations, reduces public trust, discourages participation, and can divert investment away from athlete development and public-interest programs. The global scale of the problem has led international bodies to treat sport integrity as a distinct policy field rather than as a narrow disciplinary matter. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([United Nations](#)

Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021) emphasizes that corruption risks occur across the sport ecosystem, including event bidding, procurement, athlete transfer systems, betting markets, sponsorship, and the internal governance of federations and clubs. The Council of Europe's Macolin Convention similarly frames manipulation in sport as a problem requiring prevention, information exchange, regulation, and coordinated action among public authorities, sport organizations, betting operators, and law-enforcement bodies (Council of Europe, 2014).

Mass media occupy a distinctive position in this integrity system. Television, radio, newspapers, news agencies, investigative websites, and social-media platforms can reduce information asymmetry between sport organizations and the public. They can reveal misconduct, make complex financial and administrative issues understandable, preserve public attention after an initial scandal, and create reputational and political costs for noncompliance. Media can also support prevention by explaining rules, conflicts of interest, reporting channels, and the consequences of corrupt conduct. In this sense, the media function both as a watchdog and as an institution of civic education. However, media exposure alone does not guarantee accountability. Its effect depends on journalistic independence, access to reliable information, legal and occupational protection, professional expertise, and the willingness of sport and governmental institutions to respond to disclosed evidence. Numerato (2009) argues that the relationship between sport media and corruption is structurally ambivalent because journalists may expose wrongdoing while also depending on sport organizations for access, content, and professional opportunities (Numerato, 2009).

Several theoretical approaches explain why media matter. Principal-agent theory identifies corruption risks when officials or representatives possess information and discretion that cannot be fully observed by the organizations or publics they are expected to serve. In sport, this problem is intensified by concentrated decision-making, closed electoral systems, complex commercial contracts, and weak external scrutiny. Mason et al. (2006) applied this logic to the International Olympic Committee and showed how limited monitoring and diffuse accountability can create opportunities for improper conduct (Mason et al., 2006). Media scrutiny can partially reduce these information gaps by making decisions visible and by enabling stakeholders to compare official claims with documentary evidence. Corruption may also spread

through organizational and social contagion: individuals are more likely to normalize misconduct when they perceive it as common, tolerated, or rewarded (Lee & Guven, 2013). Consistent media attention can work in the opposite direction by making ethical expectations public and by demonstrating that misconduct carries consequences.

Research on Iranian sport has identified a combination of economic, organizational, political, legal, and sociocultural drivers. Goudarzi et al. (2011) reported that perceived administrative corruption in Iranian sport organizations was related to institutional conditions and the effectiveness of control mechanisms (Goudarzi et al., 2011). Najafi Kalvari et al. (2012), in a study of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, highlighted the role of cultural and administrative factors (Najafi Kalvari et al., 2012). Mansouri et al. (2019) identified lack of transparency and weaknesses in rules and regulations among the principal indicators of financial corruption in national sport organizations (Mansouri et al., 2019). Mahmoudi et al. (2018) found that legal gaps, financial incentives, ineffective media performance, weak decision-making bodies, unclear transfer procedures, overlapping responsibilities, and limited anti-corruption commitment were important contextual or intervening conditions in Iranian football (Mahmoudi et al., 2018). Ghorbani et al. (2019) likewise described political, structural, economic, and sociocultural factors and proposed legal reform, information technology, knowledge development, and social responsibility as components of corruption management (Ghorbani et al., 2019). Dehghan Banadaki et al. (2019) further reported a significant relationship between political relations, administrative corruption, and the outsourcing of municipal sport facilities (Dehghan Banadaki et al., 2019).

Although these studies clarify important causes and remedies, the specific functions through which mass media can be integrated into a comprehensive corruption-control model remain insufficiently organized. Much of the literature treats media as one item within a longer list of control mechanisms. That approach does not show how media-related conditions, institutional barriers, strategies, and outcomes connect to one another. It also risks reducing media activity to episodic disclosure while overlooking cultural education, professional capacity, institutional monitoring, and the need for safe working conditions for journalists. International research similarly shows that sport corruption is sustained by governance arrangements, not merely by individual moral failure (Brooks et al., 2013;

Maennig, 2005). A useful model must therefore connect media work to the organizational and policy environment in which it operates.

The present study addressed this gap by developing a context-sensitive model of mass media functions in controlling corruption in Iranian sport and then assessing its measurement and structural relationships. The study asked three questions: (1) What causal, contextual, and intervening conditions shape the role of mass media in controlling corruption in Iranian sport? (2) What strategies should media and sport institutions adopt? and (3) What cultural, managerial, and economic outcomes are expected when these strategies are implemented?

2. Methods and Materials

Research design. The study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. Qualitative inquiry was conducted first to identify concepts and relationships grounded in the experiences of media and sport experts. The resulting categories were then translated into questionnaire indicators for quantitative assessment. This sequence was selected because the research problem required both contextual interpretation and empirical examination. The study adopted a pragmatic orientation and aimed to produce an actionable framework for sport policy and media practice.

Qualitative participants and sampling. Participants were selected purposively from university faculty members in sport management and media management, sport-media managers, federation and board-level media administrators, journalists, and experienced sport-media specialists. Eligibility required at least five years of relevant professional experience and familiarity with organizational corruption or integrity issues in sport. Interviews continued until additional interviews no longer generated substantively new categories. Twenty-two experts were interviewed. Complete demographic records were available for 17 participants and are presented in Table 1. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout data collection and reporting.

Data collection and qualitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews addressed forms of corruption observed in sport, the capacities and limitations of media, institutional responses to disclosure, cultural and educational functions, and feasible policy strategies. Interviews were recorded,

transcribed, and organized in MAXQDA. A grounded-theory-informed analytic procedure was used. Open coding identified meaningful statements and initial concepts; axial coding connected related concepts into broader categories; and selective coding organized the categories around the central phenomenon of mass media functions in corruption control. The final paradigm model comprised causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, the central phenomenon, strategies, and outcomes.

Instrument development and content validity. Questionnaire items were derived from the qualitative categories and relevant sport-governance literature. A five-point Likert response format was used. Ten specialists in sport and media reviewed the items for relevance, clarity, and representativeness, providing evidence of content validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported to exceed .80 for all dimensions, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for exploratory model assessment. The final quantitative sample size was not recoverable from the archived study records; this limitation is considered when interpreting the quantitative findings.

Quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated in SPSS, and the measurement and structural models were examined with SmartPLS. The available outputs included indicator loadings, standardized outer loadings, and t statistics. Indicators with loadings above .40 were retained in this exploratory assessment (Hair et al., 2022). The reported t statistics were interpreted as evidence of statistical significance when they exceeded 1.96 under a two-tailed 5% criterion. Because structural path coefficients and confidence intervals were not available, t statistics were not used to infer the direction or magnitude of structural relationships.

3. Findings and Results

Participant profile. Table 1 presents complete demographic information for 17 of the 22 qualitative participants. Most participants were men, although three women were represented. The documented group combined academic and executive experience and included specialists in sport management, media management, media, business administration, physical education, and sport sciences. This diversity supported integration of journalistic, managerial, and sport-policy perspectives.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the qualitative participants

Participant	Professional role	Age	Education	Gender	Field/specialization	Activity domain	
						Executive	Academic
P1	University professor	43	PhD	Female	Sport management	*	*
P2	University professor	45	PhD	Male	Sport management	*	*
P3	University professor	38	PhD	Male	Sport management	*	
P4	University professor	49	PhD	Male	Sport management	*	*
P5	University professor	41	PhD	Female	Sport management	*	
P6	University professor	50	PhD	Male	Media management	*	
P7	University professor	46	PhD	Male	Media management	*	
P8	Sport-media manager	36	PhD student	Male	Sport media management	*	
P9	Sport-media manager	54	Master's	Male	MBA	*	*
P10	Sport-media manager	30	PhD student	Male	Sport media management	*	
P11	Sport-media manager (boards)	52	Master's	Male	Media	*	*
P12	Sport-media manager	38	Master's	Female	Management	*	*
P13	Expert sport-media specialist	35	Master's	Male	Media	*	
P14	Expert sport-media specialist	50	PhD	Male	Media	*	*
P15	Expert sport-media specialist	37	Master's	Male	Media	*	
P16	Expert sport-media specialist	52	Master's	Male	Media	*	
P17	Expert sport-media specialist	44	Master's	Male	Physical education and sport sciences	*	

Qualitative model. The coding process produced a six-domain paradigm model: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, the central phenomenon, strategies, and outcomes. The central phenomenon was defined as the functions of mass media in controlling corruption in Iranian sport. Six causal conditions described capacities that enable media to perform this role: diversification and expansion of scientific actions, improvement of managerial and supportive skills, creation of a safe environment for media professionals, facilitation of cultural development through media, identification of cultural manifestations in sport, and review and improvement of cultural programs. Five contextual conditions described the broader environment: development and promotion of sport, availability of cognitive-social foundations, modeling and development of media programs, revenue-generating infrastructures in sport, and the cultural role of national radio and television.

Five intervening conditions represented barriers that could weaken implementation: informational and cultural

barriers, managerial and technological barriers, institutional, structural, and executive barriers, specialized marketing barriers, and political barriers. Seven strategies were identified: training and employing cultural specialists in sport; educating players about corruption; strengthening ethical education; establishing independent anti-corruption institutions; media monitoring of corruption; developing governmental cultural processes and actions; and creating the necessary governmental foundations. Six qualitative outcomes were associated with successful implementation: cultural transformation in sport, entry of specialized personnel, improved performance of sport managers, improvement in the quantitative and qualitative level of sport culture, dissemination of cultural values and attitudes, and economic prosperity in sport. Because the tabulated quantitative outputs do not reproduce every qualitative outcome, qualitative and quantitative findings are interpreted as complementary rather than identical representations of the model.

Figure 1

Paradigm model of mass media functions in controlling corruption in Iranian sport

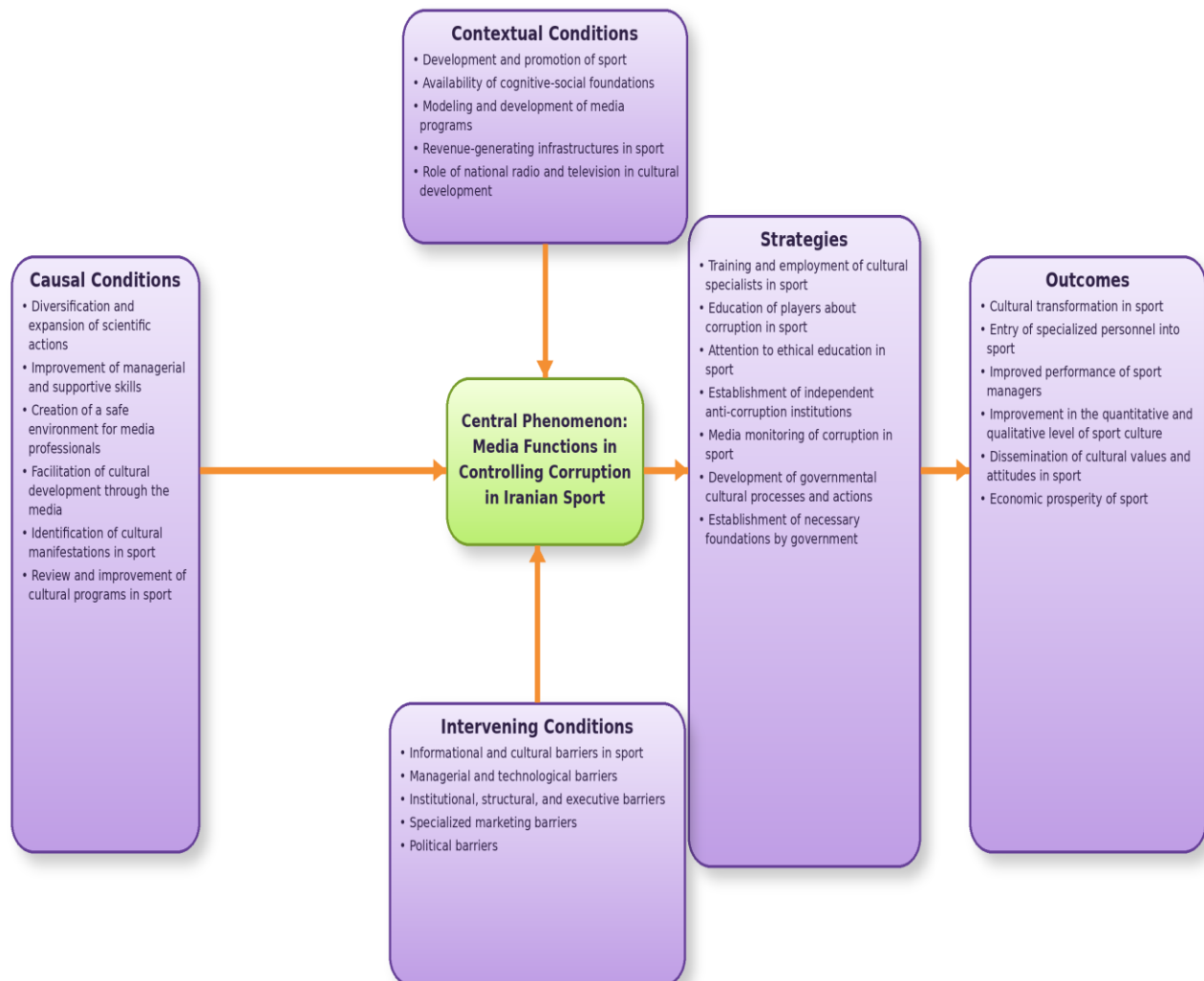


Table 2 reports the first set of factor loadings available for the model indicators. Every reported value exceeded the study's .40 retention criterion. Among the contextual conditions, development and promotion of sport had the highest loading (.825713). Within the causal conditions, facilitation of cultural development through media (.794324) and identification of cultural manifestations in sport (.766140) were the strongest indicators. The intervening-conditions block produced some of the largest values: informational and cultural barriers loaded at .885083, managerial and technological barriers at .884320, and specialized marketing barriers at .853074. These values indicate that the media-control framework is strongly associated with the information environment, managerial

and technological capacity, and the institutional organization of sport. Within the strategy domain, training and employing cultural specialists in sport had a loading of .833475, player education concerning corruption loaded at .797640, and establishment of necessary governmental foundations loaded at .765140. Within the outcomes domain, entry of specialized personnel into sport had the largest reported loading (.778372), followed by dissemination of cultural values and attitudes (.738593). The values in Table 2 differ from the standardized outer loadings reported in Table 3 and are therefore presented as a separate set of model estimates rather than treated as numerically equivalent results.

Table 2

Factor loadings of the reported model indicators

Indicator	Causal conditions	Contextual conditions	Intervening conditions	Strategies	Outcomes	Central phenomenon
Development and promotion of sport		0.825713				
Availability of cognitive-social foundations		0.678426				
Modeling and development of media programs		0.678372				
Revenue-generating infrastructures in sport		0.619322				
Role of national radio and television in cultural development		0.693543				
Diversification and expansion of scientific actions	0.694425					
Improvement of managerial and supportive skills	0.615864					
Creation of a safe environment for media professionals	0.686121					
Facilitation of cultural development through the media	0.794324					
Identification of cultural manifestations in sport	0.766140					
Review and improvement of cultural programs in sport	0.645181					
Informational and cultural barriers in sport			0.885083			
Managerial and technological barriers			0.884320			
Institutional, structural, and executive barriers			0.780734			
Specialized marketing barriers			0.853074			
Political barriers			0.787562			
Training and employment of cultural specialists in sport				0.833475		
Education of players about corruption in sport				0.797640		
Attention to ethical education in sport				0.686423		
Establishment of independent anti-corruption institutions				0.625883		
Media monitoring of corruption in sport				0.667641		
Development of governmental cultural processes and actions				0.751372		
Establishment of necessary foundations by government				0.765140		
Training and employment of cultural specialists in sport					0.692791	
Cultural transformation in sport					0.664421	
Entry of specialized personnel into sport					0.778372	
Improved performance of sport managers					0.619322	
Improvement in the quantitative and qualitative level of sport culture					0.693543	
Dissemination of cultural values and attitudes in national sport					0.738593	

PLS measurement assessment. Table 3 reports standardized outer loadings and their t statistics. Standardized loadings ranged from .430 to .899, and all reported t statistics exceeded 1.96. The lowest standardized loading was observed for attention to ethical education in sport ($\beta = .430$, $t = 4.608$); its retention should be interpreted in light of its conceptual relevance and the exploratory nature of the model. The strongest strategy indicator was establishment of independent anti-corruption institutions ($\beta = .899$, $t = 9.527$). Among intervening

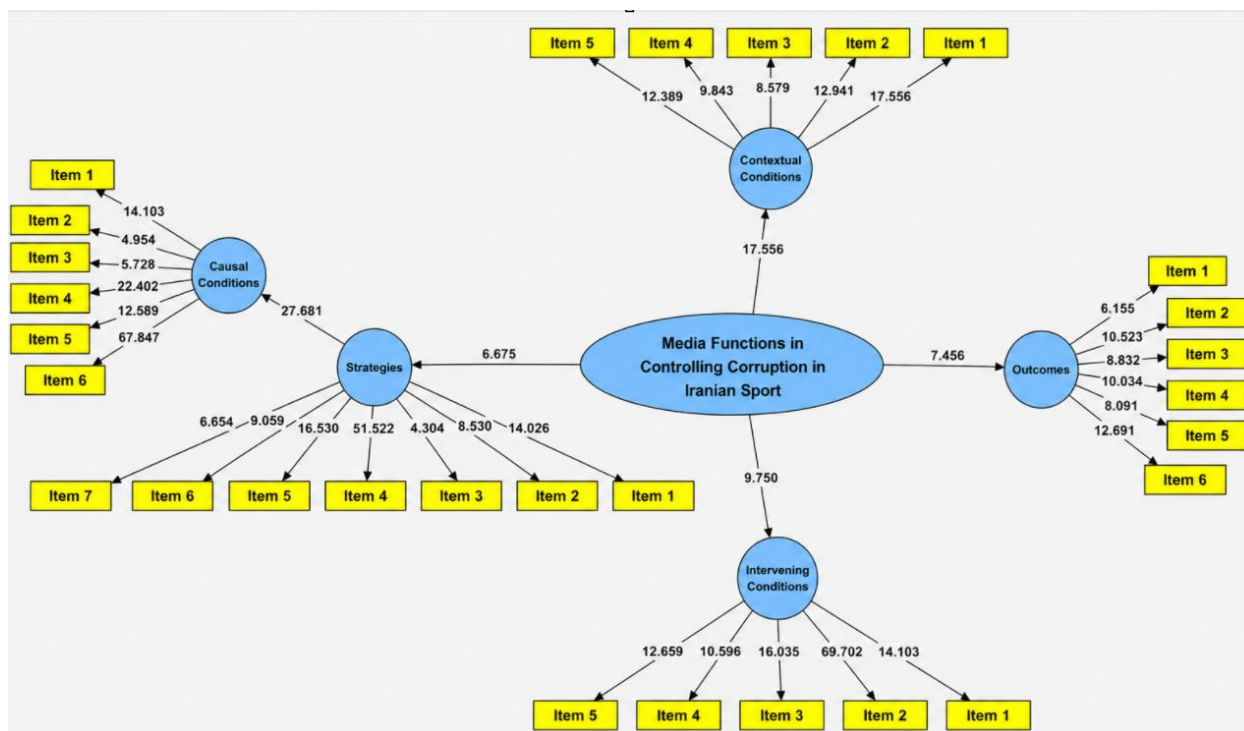
conditions, managerial and technological barriers had a loading of .862 and the largest t statistic (43.158). Among outcomes, dissemination of cultural values and attitudes in national sport had the highest standardized loading ($\beta = .870$, $t = 7.838$), while cultural transformation in sport also performed strongly ($\beta = .844$, $t = 18.872$). These findings support the statistical relevance of the reported indicators but do not, by themselves, establish complete construct validity.

Table 3
Measurement model assessment using partial least squares

Construct	Path	Indicator	Standardized loading (β)	t value
Contextual conditions	←	Development and promotion of sport	0.754	20.572
Contextual conditions	←	Availability of cognitive-social foundations	0.691	13.522
Contextual conditions	←	Modeling and development of media programs	0.688	9.157
Contextual conditions	←	Revenue-generating infrastructures in sport	0.669	8.303
Contextual conditions	←	Role of national radio and television in cultural development	0.718	11.063
Causal conditions	←	Diversification and expansion of scientific actions	0.596	5.801
Causal conditions	←	Improvement of managerial and supportive skills	0.722	12.817
Causal conditions	←	Creation of a safe environment for media professionals	0.742	10.239
Causal conditions	←	Facilitation of cultural development through the media	0.714	10.525
Causal conditions	←	Identification of cultural manifestations in sport	0.679	6.622
Causal conditions	←	Review and improvement of cultural programs in sport	0.750	13.619
Intervening conditions	←	Informational and cultural barriers in sport	0.734	11.999
Intervening conditions	←	Managerial and technological barriers	0.862	43.158
Intervening conditions	←	Institutional, structural, and executive barriers	0.787	15.724
Intervening conditions	←	Specialized marketing barriers	0.744	10.772
Intervening conditions	←	Political barriers	0.770	11.970
Strategies	←	Training and employment of cultural specialists in sport	0.734	14.033
Strategies	←	Education of players about corruption in sport	0.640	9.735
Strategies	←	Attention to ethical education in sport	0.430	4.608
Strategies	←	Establishment of independent anti-corruption institutions	0.899	9.527
Strategies	←	Media monitoring of corruption in sport	0.692	15.378
Strategies	←	Development of governmental cultural processes and actions	0.662	9.919
Strategies	←	Establishment of necessary foundations by government	0.503	6.315
Outcomes	←	Training and employment of cultural specialists in sport	0.687	9.259
Outcomes	←	Cultural transformation in sport	0.844	18.872
Outcomes	←	Entry of specialized personnel into sport	0.553	6.070
Outcomes	←	Improved performance of sport managers	0.792	23.346
Outcomes	←	Improvement in the quantitative and qualitative level of sport culture	0.746	13.326
Outcomes	←	Dissemination of cultural values and attitudes in national sport	0.870	7.838

Figure 2

Structural model t values



Structural model. Figure 2 displays the t statistics reported for the specified structural paths. The values range from 6.675 to 27.681 and all exceed the conventional critical value of 1.96, indicating that the corresponding paths are statistically significant at the 5% level under a two-tailed test. However, t statistics do not indicate the direction or practical magnitude of an association. Accordingly, the figure supports statistical significance of the model paths, whereas interpretation of positive or negative effects would require the corresponding standardized path coefficients. The operational actions listed below synthesize the interview-derived recommendations and should not be interpreted as separately tested causal effects.

4. Discussion

The study's principal contribution is to position mass media as part of a broader sport-integrity system rather than as a stand-alone channel for scandal reporting. The model indicates that disclosure is only one function. Media can also contribute through cultural development, ethical education, agenda setting, monitoring, professional specialization, and sustained public explanation. This broader interpretation is consistent with Numerato's (2009)

argument that media influence depends on the social and organizational relations surrounding sport journalism (Numerato, 2009). A journalist may identify misconduct but remain unable to publish or pursue it when access is controlled, information is unavailable, or professional retaliation is likely. The causal condition concerning a safe environment for media professionals is therefore a necessary component of credible scrutiny.

The prominence of intervening barriers is one of the clearest patterns in the reported loadings. Informational and cultural barriers and managerial and technological barriers produced the largest values in Table 2, while managerial and technological barriers generated the largest t statistic in Table 3. This pattern suggests that corruption control can fail even when media organizations are willing to act. Without reliable records, digital contract systems, searchable financial data, trained editors, and mechanisms for verifying allegations, reporting may remain episodic or vulnerable to error. Institutional and political barriers can further limit follow-up after disclosure. These findings are consistent with Iranian research identifying unclear processes, overlapping responsibilities, weak rules, and limited anti-corruption commitment as important contributors to corruption in football and sport

organizations (Mahmoudi et al., 2018; Mansouri et al., 2019).

The strategy domain combines preventive and enforcement-oriented measures. Player education and ethical instruction address normalization of misconduct before violations occur. Media monitoring and financial transparency can increase the likelihood that misconduct is detected. Independent anti-corruption institutions provide a destination for evidence and reduce the risk that complaints are handled exclusively by actors whose decisions are under review. The high outer loading for independent institutions indicates that this indicator is strongly associated with the strategy construct; it should not be interpreted as proof of a causal effect. International approaches similarly emphasize coordination among sport bodies, government, regulators, law enforcement, and information providers rather than reliance on a single organization (Council of Europe, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021).

The proposed model also places cultural specialists and professional expertise at the center of implementation. Corruption is not controlled only by adding formal rules; rules must be understood, communicated, and embedded in everyday practice. Lee and Guven (2013) showed that cultural values and contagion effects can shape willingness to engage in corruption (Lee & Guven, 2013). Repeated public communication can make conflicts of interest, favoritism, and opaque decision-making less socially acceptable. Conversely, sensational or politically selective coverage can weaken trust. Media organizations therefore need journalists with knowledge of sport governance, finance, law, data analysis, and research methods, while sport organizations need communication staff who understand transparency obligations and do not treat all critical reporting as reputational hostility.

The qualitative outcomes identified by participants were mainly cultural and managerial and also included economic prosperity. This interpretation is plausible because trust, predictable regulation, and transparent contracting can improve the environment for sponsorship, investment, and audience engagement. Corruption can redirect resources toward rent-seeking and reduce productive investment (Dreher et al., 2007; Tanzi, 1998). In sport, reputational damage may also reduce sponsor confidence and public willingness to support clubs or federations. Economic improvement should therefore be understood as a potential downstream consequence of better governance, specialized

management, and a stronger sport culture rather than as an effect demonstrated directly by the reported loading tables.

For policy, the findings support five priorities. First, sport federations and leagues should publish standardized information on budgets, procurement, disciplinary decisions, transfers, agent relationships, sponsorship contracts, and conflicts of interest. Second, journalists should receive lawful access to information and protection against retaliation, while allegations should be handled through evidence-based editorial procedures. Third, independent integrity units should have clear jurisdiction, secure reporting channels, investigative competence, and requirements to publish anonymized outcomes. Fourth, ethics and anti-corruption education should be integrated into athlete development, coaching certification, and management training. Fifth, media monitoring should be continuous and data-informed rather than activated only after major scandals. These measures would convert transparency from a temporary response into an organizational routine.

Several limitations should be recognized. The study was conducted within the institutional and cultural setting of Iranian sport, so the relative importance of the categories may differ in other contexts. The qualitative sample was purposive, and complete demographic records were available for 17 of the 22 interviewees. The archived study records did not include the final quantitative sample size, complete reliability and validity statistics, structural path coefficients, confidence intervals, or explanatory and predictive indices. Consequently, the quantitative findings should be interpreted as an exploratory assessment of the reported indicators and path significance rather than as a complete validation of the model. The analysis also relied on expert perceptions and cross-sectional data, which cannot establish long-term causal effects. Future research should test the model with fully documented samples across federations, clubs, athletes, journalists, and fans and should examine whether changes in transparency and media independence predict measurable reductions in governance violations over time.

5. Conclusion

Mass media can contribute to controlling corruption in Iranian sport when their work is supported by institutional transparency, professional capacity, legal and occupational security, ethical education, and independent mechanisms for investigation and enforcement. The proposed and

empirically assessed model organizes these requirements into causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, a central media function, seven strategies, and six qualitative outcomes. The reported indicator loadings support retention of the measured items, and the structural t statistics indicate statistical significance of the specified paths. Nevertheless, the direction and magnitude of structural effects require the corresponding path coefficients. The practical implication is that exposing misconduct is necessary but insufficient: media reporting must be connected to reliable information systems, competent sport managers, protected journalists, independent integrity institutions, and sustained cultural education. When these components operate together, media can strengthen accountability, sport culture, managerial performance, public trust, and the institutional credibility of sport organizations.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

Declaration

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used solely to support English-language editing, organization, and stylistic refinement of the manuscript. No artificial intelligence tool was used to collect, generate, modify, or analyze the research data. The authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and take full responsibility for its accuracy, integrity, interpretations, and conclusions.

Transparency Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Interview transcripts are not publicly available because they may contain potentially identifiable or sensitive professional information.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study involved adult professional participants and no clinical intervention. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained before data collection, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The authors confirm that the study procedures complied with the ethical requirements applicable at Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University.

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