

University Sports As A Tool For Diversifying The Funding Sources Of Saudi Universities: A Qualitative Study From An Economic Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores how graduate students in Saudi Arabia perceive the role of university sports in supporting the financial sustainability of higher education. It examines whether university sports could become a productive sector that helps diversify universities' income sources. Using a qualitative approach, the study involved 41 male and female postgraduate students from one Saudi university. The results showed that the current state of university sports does not match the progress seen in higher education. Sports competitions often suffer from weak audience attendance, poor management, and limited marketing, which turn them into a financial burden rather than a source of income. Participants also pointed out several challenges in promoting university sports, such as the lack of sponsorships, minimal investment, and the absence of television coverage. Despite these challenges, students believe that university sports have strong potential to become a key part of university funding if managed with modern economic and institutional strategies. They suggested several initiatives, including improving sports marketing and media coverage, attracting corporate sponsorships, and creating partnerships between universities and both public and private sectors. Such measures could strengthen the link between education and the economy, turning university sports into a sustainable and profitable activity that aligns with Saudi Vision 2030.

Keywords: university sports, educational funding, sports marketing, higher education in Saudi Arabia, university competitions.

INTRODUCTION

In Saudi Arabia, higher education started in 1949 (1369 AH) when the first higher education institution in the Kingdom, the first in the Gulf region, was founded, the College of Sharia in Makkah. The college initially was attached to the Directorate of Education which was subsequently the Ministry of Education. It was incorporated in 1972 to King Abdulaziz University, and it was incorporated in Umm Al-Qura University in 1981. The initial graduate took place in 1952 and comprised of just 14 male students. Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Faleh was the best student, and was then followed by Sheikh Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Jubair who became a Minister of Justice and Chairman of the Shura Council (Al-Salman, 1999).

Higher education grew very fast following this initial start. Some new colleges were established in the early 1950s, including the Teachers college in Makkah (1952), the College of Sharia in Riyadh (1953) and the College of Arabic Language (1954). Next, there was the establishment of King Saud University in 1957 the first university in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 1972: 2003: 1983). This was the beginning of a great educational movement in the Kingdom with universities increasing rapidly and the government still sending students to foreign countries to further their studies.

In 2021, there are 27 state universities and the total number of students is more than 1.2 million, and females can constitute approximately 54 percent of this amount (Ministry of Education, 2021). It also had 15 privately owned universities and approximately 23 privately owned higher institutions. In 2021, Imam uhammad bin Saud Islamic University, which has over 139,000 students including 59,000 women, was the largest university. King Abdulaziz University was ranked second with more than 124,000 students, with the women students being more than the male students, and lastly was King Faisal University with more than 112000 students, comprising approximately 41000 women students. King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences,

in its turn, was the smallest public university with approximately 11,266 students in 2021 (6,098 female, 5,168 male).

Sports in Saudi Arabian universities are very old as well. It is recorded that sport competitions among the students of the university started as early as the 60s and despite the advancement in the 80s, they did not take place regularly. The Saudi Universities Sports Federation (SUSF) was the official organization to organize, run, and oversee university sports in the Kingdom. This move was used to enhance better sports activities in universities and to influence more students to participate in sports.

Problem Statement

In Saudi Arabia, a majority of the public universities continue to largely rely on government funding to finance their academic, research and community-based programs. This overdependence on the state has also emerged to be one of the primary problems that have jeopardized the financial sustainability of universities particularly due to the recent economic developments at the local and global levels.

The government has emphasized on the need to diversify volumes of funds and enhance financial efficiency of institutions of higher learning as part of Saudi Vision 2030. This is why there is a need to seek new innovative sources of funds that can enable universities to gain more financial autonomy and lessen their reliance on governmental funds. In this scenario, university sports will be a viable chance. They might be a productive branch of the economy that ensures generation of income and marketing value to Saudi universities. In Universities, there is good sports infrastructure, vast facilities and human resources with potential to be harnessed in sports marketing, sponsorship, broadcasting right and hosting championships.

Nonetheless, university sports are not well-developed and ineffective in their present form. They are usually regarded as extracurricular or recreational activity, yet not as a financial asset. This fact is the subject of a significant question: How to make athletics in the universities a viable means of financial support to universities, enhance economic efficiency and increase their contribution to the service of society?

Research Question

So, what is the situation with university sports in Saudi higher education, and how can they, as viewed by postgraduates, be transformed into a source of revenues and make universities financially stable?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study is explained by the fact that it discusses one of the most contemporary and essential issues the transformation of university sports into a stable economic division that helps the Saudi higher education institutions to be funded. Since the vast majority of Saudi universities have nearly sole dependence on direct government funding and do not have additional sources of income, there is a pressing necessity to diversify the income sources in accordance with the Saudi Vision 2030, which also aims to enhance financial sustainability and enable universities to use their resources effectively.

The research is also a knowledge gap in both the Saudi and Arabic literature since university sports are yet to be adequately addressed as an economic and investment instrument, which can create new financial sources to universities- analogous to successful practices in the United States, United Kingdom, and other established economies.

It is also valuable in its own way, as it addresses the problem through the lens of the postgraduate students, who can be considered an analytically conscious and aware part of the population and can evaluate the existing situation, see the ways of developing it, and propose practical solutions to mobilize the economic potential of sports in the university.

Further, there is a robust practical aspect of the study because it includes a qualitative diversification that is grounded on actual voices of the academic world. That renders its findings very useful to the policy makers who would want to establish national policies to establish university sports as a self-financing mechanism of universities. It also endorses the initiatives of the Ministry of Education and the Saudi Universities Sports Federation to make the university

sports an economic activity to improve the image of the university, community-building and the overall quality of campus life.

Thus, the study not only brings a theoretical contribution to the field of knowledge and increases the scholarly knowledge in the matter but also practically it provides a roadmap that can guide decision-makers in advancing university sports to being a relatively productive institutional practice rather than a confined recreational activity.

Previous Studies

Al-Otaibi (2018) developed an article entitled *The Experiences of Some Developed Countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and Australia) in Financing Higher Education and Ways to Benefit by Them*. The research was based on the objectives of investigating the financial basis of higher education in these nations and determining the strategies that can be implemented in Saudi Arabia. Al-Otaibi employed a comparative descriptive-analytical method in reviewing the literature and documents available and discovered that financing experiences in the countries were diversified and more than one source of funds were used as the main source and not the subsidiary source as many Arab and developing nations do. The paper has found out that Saudi Arabia can borrow such experiences to diversify and finance its sources of higher education. It also implied that the Saudi setting, especially in the domain of endowments (waqf) is favorable to such models, but with more institutional independence and reduced bureaucratic centralization.

Relying on these results, Al-Otaibi suggested the following measures, such as:

By borrowing the experience of the developed countries in order to diversify the sources of university financing.

Promoting institutions, businesses and individuals to finance education.

Streamlining bureaucracy to bring in investment and participation of the private sector in higher education.

The recommendations go hand in hand with the goals of the current study that aims to find creative solutions, including university sports, to enhance financial sustainability in Saudi universities.

The article by Al-Shudaifi (2018) is called *Proposed Alternatives to Financing Higher Education in Saudi Arabia in Light of the Experiences of Some Developed Countries*. In order to assist Saudi institutions to meet their increasing financial and developmental needs, the research proposed alternative ways of financing higher education in Saudi Arabia through the analysis of the system employed in the United States, Germany, and Japan. The research adopted the descriptive analytical approach, and the findings were that government funding has been the primary source of higher education financing in Saudi Arabia, which is then followed by small individual, loan and local or external sources. The researcher proposed a number of solutions to sustainable financing that take in consideration the social, educational, and religious environment of Saudi Arabia and these are the development of human and financial resources, business incubators support, growth of research chairs, privatization of higher education, and program-needs alignment with the labor market. The main suggestions included: enlarging the fiscal and administrative freedom of the university in order to invest their resources, decreasing the financial load of the government, and partial privatization of higher education under the control of the government.

The article by Aqili and Al-Qahtani (2019) is a comparative study named *Higher and Vocational Education and Its Financing in Germany and Saudi Arabia*. It looked at the structure, research funding and vocational systems of education in the two countries to realize the similarities and differences and suggest ways through which it can be improved. The researchers in their comparative approach using George Bereday discovered that Saudi higher education is nearly fully dependent on government funding with poor connections in technical education, research and labor market requirements. Conversely, the German model has been able to bring together research, vocational training and industrial partners. The research suggested that Saudi universities should consider the idea of the productive university, a concept that puts an emphasis on applied research, community services, as well as, income generating consulting services. The other recommendations used involved cooperation education programs, establishment of

consulting centers and business incubators, and the integration of vocational and technical institutions into universities to comply with the vision 2030 and demands in labor markets.

The article by Mahrous and Al-Sulami (2019) is called Proposed Alternatives for Diversifying the Funding Sources of Higher Education in Arab Countries in light of the Vision 2030 in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This research sought to find out the primary sources of funds of institutions of higher learning around the world and examine how the visions of both Egypt and Saudi have suggested to open them up. Through the descriptive method of analysis, the researchers discovered that non-governmental economic sectors, public-private partnerships, family contributions, endowments (waqf), the student grants and loans and the self-financing programs remain the most promising sources, as well as the necessity to rationalize spending and preserve the educational quality.

The study by Aqeel and Al-Issa (2019) is called Governance of Funding Diversification and Improving Financial Efficiency in the University Education Sector: Lessons about the European Experience. The research aimed at soliciting the experiences of European universities on the ways of improving financial efficiency and diversification of funding. It examined performance-based funding, university mergers and excellence funding with the use of a documentary descriptive approach. It suggested that Saudi universities needed to have increased financial autonomy to control their own endowments, charge postgraduates and international students' tuition fees, and use their revenues openly in a culture of accountability and governance.

In his publication, Bashar (2023) P. 375, the author of the work is referred to as the mechanisms of financing public universities in Saudi Arabia in Light of the similar U.S. models. The paper has compared the mechanisms of funding between the Saudi and American public universities and has pointed out fundamental disparities in the two funding systems. Through a comparative research design, it examined eight top American universities that are publicly funded and discovered that university in America have a wide range of revenue sources such as tuition fees, endowment, research grants, as well as sports revenues. The research gave a number of suggestions on how the Saudi universities can lower their reliance on the governmental funds and implement a multi-source funding strategy.

Salama (2024) examined The Reality of Marketing University Sports Activities and Competitions in the view of Student Affairs Staff in Bahraini Universities. The study was conducted to learn the perspectives of the staff regarding the objectives, approaches and obstacles of sports marketing at higher education. According to 150 respondents, the research discovered that marketing of university sports in Bahrain is low, and few effective marketing strategies are applied and institutional support is low.

This area was later expanded by Bashar (2025) in his study which he called University Sports in the United States: Economic Impact and Lessons to be applied in Saudi Arabia. The study focused on the economic aspect of higher education institutions that have athletics programs in the United States and found out that most universities in the U.S. make above 100 million dollars in annual earnings, with some making above 200 million in 2023. The primary sources of income were ticket sales, broadcasting rights, sponsorships, and alumni donation. The research study has determined that university sports are a large economic activity which enhances institutional standing and fiscal health. It also offered viable suggestions on how the American template can be used to build the Saudi university sports industry.

Lastly, Al-Babtain and Bashar (2025) provided comparative research of the revenue disparity between the university sports in Saudi Arabia and the United States in the context of Saudi Universities Sports Federation and NCAA model. The research discovered that Saudi university sports after over 15 years of its establishment continues to rely on government funding as opposed to the U.S. model which survives through media rights, and ticket sales, sponsorships, and donations. They applied a documentary comparative method to find significant lapses in the field of marketing, media exposure, and money autonomy. Among their suggestions, they proposed that the university sports be digitally broadcasted, creation of a national sponsorship and licensing model, the creation of sports endowment funds, improve media and sports engagement and the introduction of sports scholarships as a way of capturing the athletic talents.

The Previous Research Benefits of the Current Study

The present work is an extension of the past research findings as it further elaborates on the knowledge of sports economics and diversification of funding in universities. Although previous research was conducted on a similar topic: Bashar (2025), Salama (2024), and Al-Babtain and Bashar (2025) concentrated on marketing and revenue models in the university sports of other countries and comparing them with the Saudi or Bahraini setting, the current research is much more specific and narrow in scope. This paper will take a qualitative methodology approach, through in-depth interviewing of 41 postgraduate students; this will provide us with firsthand information on the actuality of the economic position of university sports in Saudi Arabia. It will offer an exclusive and field-based insight into the power of how university sports may become a financially viable and sustainable sector that helps institutions of higher learning and fits the Saudi Vision 2030 by focusing on the opinions of the participants.

Sample and Methodology of the study

A purposive sampling technique was used to choose the sample of the study, 41 male and female postgraduate students of one of the Saudi universities. The interviews were held over the internet through an online platform and recorded. The audio-recordings were transcribed into written texts. To achieve credibility and reliability of the qualitative data, peer review was used as a quality requirement considering the current controversy on the credibility of qualitative research.

The research design utilized in the study was qualitative research design because it is appropriate to the nature of the research, as it enables a deeper knowledge of the phenomena of the study using qualitative research tools like interviews. In addition, it employed the phenomenological approach (Phenomenology) and aimed at comprehending the human experience that the participants lived without any effort to generalize the findings (Al-Rashidi, 2018).

I analyzed it according to the Bingham (2023) model which consists of five stages connected with each other:

1. Codifying and sorting data of interviews and creating primary thematic codes.
2. Organizing and categorizing information.
3. Interpreting and examining the hidden meanings.
4. Explaining the information and finding out recurrent themes and patterns.
5. Providing the findings in a descriptive way to explain the experience under study.

The answers given by the participants indicated that university sports are not just about fun; instead, it is according to them a potent tool of improving the image of the university in the eyes of the people and other interested parties. Almost all respondents (except one) were in agreement that sports at universities indicate institutional vitality and identity construction and engagement with the community. According to students, students observed that in case university teams are professionally handled and have the appropriate media coverage, they can serve as a marketing front of the university just as major institutions of the world. The brand name of the university is strengthened by the presence of the team logos, colors, and athletic success of the university. Furthermore, hosting local tournaments or finding sponsors will increase social and economic credibility of the university, which will increase the level of trust of the populace in the strength of the university in administrative and resource management.

Symbolically, students have highlighted that sports improve the social capital of the university in terms of student-university relations, feeling of belongingness and encouraging community participation. As a result, sports turn into the channel of creating a favorable institutional image that goes beyond the campuses. The sole participant who dissented stated that university sports lacked the same cultural significance in Saudi society as they do in other places - an opinion that was the product of cultural difference and not cultural objection to the concept itself. However, this exception does not bring down the overall agreement that the university sports are one of the effective means of image-building and social presence. Responses of almost all the participants showed that they all believed that university sports can generate financial revenues to universities directly and indirectly. This comes across a high level of awareness among students of the necessity to invest in university sports in the framework of diversifying income one of the core policies of economic governance in the higher education institutions and in particular in the context of the national transition towards the non-oil economy. Some of the participants underlined that Saudi universities with their big facilities and human and media resources are in a good position to become multi-faceted economic and sports hubs, especially when they get

professional sports management paradigm where athletic activity is combined with marketing and financial profits.

Other respondents also reported that university sporting activities increase the marketing strength of the institution, which attracts sponsors and investors thus increasing the revenue streams. They further said that sports slowly augmented the symbolic and market value of the university and the result is an increase in student enrollment, which is a sustainable but indirect financial gain.

The Current Reality

Upon inquiring them on whether they attended sports events of their university only 10 of the 41 respondents indicated that they had attended a university sports event, with about 75 percent indicating that they had never attended a university sports event. These results underscore the fact that the attendance of the audience to university sports competitions is very small, which indicates a marked difference between theoretical and real interest in university sports. The answers to the questions (as to the causes of the absence of attendance) of 33 respondents revealed a complicated web of media, institutional, academic, and cultural issues that caused low attendance to the university sports events even when they are held. The insights of these students demonstrate four significant interconnected dimensions that interrelate to explain the tendencies of non-participation in sports activities of the university.

First: There is the problem of poor communication and sports marketing. Invisible to the natural audience: the event is practically invisible to the natural audience due to the absence of pre-event promotion, uncertainty about the schedules of the matches, inadequate media coverage, both traditional and digital. The participants reiterate that there was not enough promotion, there was no adequate advertising and there was no live broadcasting to ensure that the competitions receive a consistent publicity and ensure that the people form a habit of attending the competitions or follow up. The issue is not a one-channel phenomenon: it is a lack of an entire marketing ecosystem: a poor tournament image, no storytelling about teams and players, and no clear calls to action (ticket sales, links, early booking).

Second: Structural barriers to attendance seem to be time constraints and academic work. Students usually cite the heavy workload, homework pressure and time issues and the matches are a high opportunity cost and do not justify the same. The lack of incentives makes this hard because there are no marks in place of participation, no bonus points, and no material or symbolic attendance reward. Absence of institutional motivation leads to the substitution of real events by corresponding easy digital ones, such as online content and home entertainment, which diminish the demand in the face-to-face events.

Third: The unappealing nature of the sports product itself is also clear: the traditional contests, lack of variety in the number of sports available, poor intercollege competition and no related activities to make the overall experience complete (music, contests, prizes, entertainment zones). Students remark that the current version of the event does not provide a sufficient amount of experiential value to justify the effort and time, particularly when the venue location is remote or inaccessible. It is also mentioned that there are infrastructural gaps (indoor halls, proper facilities), which reduce the quality of the viewing and the overall quality of the “match moment.

Fourth: A second-level of explanatory factors emerges in institutional sponsorship weaknesses and lack of a good university culture of sports. The leadership in the university is not interested much, sports competitions are not built into the calendar of the academic activity, and little effort is made to support the school spirit and identity. Sports are not perceived as a means of creating an institutional devotion or university spirit, but as a peripheral activity. As a result, the symbolic incentives such as pride, belonging and inter-university competition die, and a general impression forms that going there does not count.

Challenges

Most of the interviewees noted that lack of professional leadership with an economic perspective is one of the greatest impediments to the growth of university sports. As they indicated, not all university leaders have the background or adequate awareness of sports as an investment resource and fail to pursue clear strategies in transforming sports activities into a productive sector. One interviewee remarked that the initial and the most significant obstacle is the selection of an effective leader with a clear vision who will receive the full support to lead the project whereas

another interviewee pointed to the problem of slow administrative procedures and inability of some officials to keep pace with economic changes as the limiting factor to investment opportunities. These facts demonstrate the necessity of qualified and visionary sports management that could control and invest sports resources based on comprehensive economic strategy in accordance with the Saudi Vision 2030 objectives of income diversification. The most repeated reason was sports infrastructure in the universities including poor maintenance, poor facilities and lack of modern facilities. According to one of the students, the absence of regular maintenance of facilities is one of the biggest impediments and another student mentioned the problem of finding the financial resources to plan, equip, maintain and run stadiums and indoor halls. Such a theme is indicative of the fact that students recognize that poor infrastructure is one of the main factors that impede the creation of a strong sports infrastructure that can draw audiences or investments and negatively impacts the overall performance of university athletics. Poor sponsorship, limited funding, and the absence of sports investment also became one of the most commonly mentioned problems. A common observation by many of the participants was that lack of financial assistance is a major challenge when it comes to the development of university sports. They cited the lack of commercial sponsorship and little desire to appeal to the individual sector investors. The phrases that were frequently used were: seeking sponsors, less funding available and strains in finding funds unless by attracting investors and sponsors by companies. According to the participants, universities must ensure that they have strategic partnership policies with both the economic and non-profit sphere to improve their financial sustainability. This theme explains why it is necessary to have an economic model of sports in the university that is grounded in integration of education, economy, and the private sector.

Some students also concurred that absence of sports media coverage in the university and poor marketing are some of the greatest hurdles to commercializing sports. One stated that there is no coverage of TV and media, community interaction, sponsorships, and advertising, which causes the lack of public interest, and another has said that it is hard to advertise the league. These remarks show how students have appreciated the value of sports marketing and university media as one of the most effective ways to sensitize the community, secure sponsors, and enrich the worth of the sports events. It appears that students understand how a good media coverage and advertising may lead to increased marketing and investment among university sports.

Another aspect noted by the participants was the poor attendance of sports events by the audience whether by the students or the university community at large. One of them commented that the absence of viewer attraction to the purchase of tickets is a significant problem, and another one stated that it is the lack of interest of students in sporting activities in the university, and the absence of motivation of young people. Other answers cited the overall lack of strength in the sports culture, and non-seriousness towards taking university sports seriously. This theme highlights that there is a need to popularize sports culture in universities through the media and awareness creation programs connecting sports with institutional identity in order to ensure that the fans base sustained sports events in the universities to generate revenue.

Some of the responses also showed that academic work, time constraints and low motivation make students less active in sporting activities. One of the respondents stated: "Time, there are no incentives to attend university teams, overcrowding and poor organization, and the other one stated: There is no reason why a student should enroll in a university team. This illustrates the necessity of financial and moral stimulating and granting time flexibility in order to attract more people. Relating the sport activities to rewards, bonus points, or volunteer hours could also contribute to the enhancement of the participation level and establishing the balance between the academic and extra-curricular engagement.

Transforming University Sports into a Source of Income for Higher Education Institutions in Saudi Arabia

Administrative bureaucracy was identified by some students as the other significant challenge to university sports development. They mentioned that it is the concept of bureaucracy and slow processes that hamper the progress, and others added that the restricted sports planning to the inner circle of the university depresses development. The second one mentioned by the participants is the lack of an official national umbrella that would promote sports in the universities. Such statements signify the relevance of having a single national set up or body

governing university sport activities to streamline procedures, to harmonize policies in order to encourage co-ordination between colleges and other sectors.

The non-inclusivity and non-diversity in sports within the university were brought into the limelight by several students who pointed out that the drive to cover sports activities is usually centered on football, leaving other groups of students, like those with disabilities or students who would want to engage in other sports, behind. One respondent said that, there are too many participation requirements that restrict inclusiveness and a limited number of facilities available to people with disabilities, whereas another respondent mentioned that there is no training and empowerment of the athletes in different sports. These perceptions show the necessity to make university sports programs more diverse and implement policies of inclusion participation that will guarantee equal contribution of all groups, which will contribute to fairness in sports and diversification of the fan base .Converting University Sports into a Higher Education Income Generating venture in Saudi Arabia.

Judging by the answers provided by participants on what they find as practical to change university sports into a financial institution, a consistent image is formed, that of understanding that students realize the fact that sports is not a standalone extracurricular activity, but a sustainable and investable entity with a foundation that is institutionally stable. The information provided by them can be combined into four interconnected themes, namely, ensuring the optimal utilization of sports assets and facilities, developing a marketing and media system that is able to generate commercial value, leveraging sponsorships and partnerships as a source of funding, and transforming university teams and tournaments into competitive sports products that would be able to drive a consistent and engaged audience.

Students start with a pragmatic premise namely the fact that what the universities already have in terms of stadiums, indoor halls, running tracks and other such facilities is untapped capital that can yield consistent stream of revenue should it be run under flexible investment framework. They suggest redesigning stadiums into training academies with paid subscriptions, leasing sports halls under shared management and contracting with professional fitness and facility organizations and creating university clubs, with low membership fees between students, faculty, and staff members. Such clubs may include monthly subscriptions, short term skill courses and specialized courses aimed at the campus community and the immediate local population. This vision transforms the university infrastructure into an investment asset as opposed to a cost center which is managed under the guidance of the dynamic pricing policies, the extended working hours, and the service mix balancing the educational impact with financial gain.

This direction is in line with the obvious understanding of the importance of sports marketing and media as the main source of demand. The participants insist on the necessity of a digital media strategy, which would allow involving social platforms and live broadcasting games. The quality of broadcasts and the audience coverage the better the sports product of the university is appealing to sponsors and advertisers. Other proposals also extend in line with this approach by proposing exclusive deals with television networks or online video streaming services to sell seasonal broadcasting rights to college competitions, with post and pre-match advertising packages. Moreover, the possibility to make early bookings and access to the streaming subscriptions at an affordable price would turn the media exposure into the symbolic visibility into the financial profit.

Of course, an increased visibility would result in larger sponsorship incomes. Therefore, participants put commercial sponsorships at the forefront of the suggested economic model. They believe in the possibility of establishing powerful visual identities of teams and tournaments, selling advertising spots, on stadiums, on scoreboards, on uniforms, and writing multi-level contracts of sponsors, primary sponsors of the main events, and secondary sponsors of side activities. This would be supplemented by a clever merchandising system - to sell merchandise and memorabilia bearing university and team logos via digital stores and in-campus shops in the course of events. This would make institutional affiliation stronger and make the university image a familiar commercial brand.

The vision does not focus on marketing and sponsorship but also on improving the sports product itself. Participants point out that it is important to form strong university teams particularly in popular sports like football and making them competitive projects that would attract national attention in the right regulatory environment. In the model, the universities

become talent incubators - developing athletes who can be sponsored by means of scholarships and connected with sponsorship deals and career development opportunities and get ready to compete on a higher level. This forms an economic circular system of self-promotion between talent discovery, media promotion and commercial marketing. The cycle is completed by paid-entry tournaments that are run within and between universities and individuals can enter, playing either on a corporate team or as an amateur at different registration charges. With interactive fan experiences added to these events through contests, instant prizes, side events, etc., more people would be willing to attend the events longer and spend more on average per fan.

Institutional partnerships are also another important sustainability factor. The participants indicate that it is necessary to organize work with the sports clubs, federations, media organizations and non-profit sectors and build a system of mutually beneficial interaction that will include training, developing facilities, TV rights, and sponsoring communities. This will involve putting up a special executive management office of the university sports with marketing, legal and financial professionals to negotiate contracts, establish product prices, deal with risks and periodically evaluate returns on investment. Regarding the demand side, the participants underline that as much importance as supply-side enhancement, sports culture and motivation have to be advertised. Sensitization efforts, online campaigns, monetary and ethical rewards to participants and spectators are necessary in developing a sustainable fan base, to serve the larger financial model.

Lastly, the participants emphasize that the organizational integration that leads to lower cost of transaction and faster revenue cycles is the key to the success of this transformation. A workable sports investment model will require an adaptive administration process, clear authorizations channels, and well-coordinated collaboration between the academic, administrative, financial, and legal departments, keeping within the national frames of reference related to sports in universities. At this point university sport transforms into a smaller economic system within the institution: the assets in operation are capitalized on, the competitive products are commodified, the various sources of revenues are handled, alliances are formed on the basis of value creation, and an organizational culture of loyalty and belonging becomes reinforced.

This is not just a student vision that outlines their dreams but a road map on how those dreams can be transformed into reality, how activity becomes industry, cost returns to cost and occasional events become a sustainable system.

Considering the qualitative results of all dimensions, it may be concluded that university sports is a prospective sector with good economic prospects as viewed by Saudi students. Nonetheless, the realization of this potential continues to experience a number of administrative, organizational, and media-related issues which mitigate its capacity to produce sustainable material and social delivery. The findings also suggest that students see university sports as a strategic way to diversify university sources of income, improve university reputation, and increase student and community involvement, however, only when sports can be handled professionally and based on effective marketing and investment policies.

Their almost unanimous opinion validates the fact that sports may accrue funds and increase incomes with the help of sponsorships, advertising, investments in facilities, paid tournaments, and sale of sports-related products of the university brand. On the other hand, poor sports leadership, inadequate funding, absence of investment vision, inadequate media coverage and advertisement, lack of incentive, and small attendance were some of the challenges that were found to be hindering the realization of the university sports as an effective economic resource by students. Additionally, the unwillingness to participate in competitions is largely associated with the lack of media advertising, lack of time in school, and the inability to complement the event with other entertainment options.

On the whole, the results indicate that students embrace the culture of integrating economics, management, media, and sports in their vision. They are convinced that institutional management is the key to the success of university sports as they are able to invest in infrastructure, form the partnerships in the private sector, activate the incentives and rewards, and associate sports with the institutional identity of the university. To sum up, university sports cannot be viewed as just an activity of students, but as a development and investment instrument that can add to university funding and their social and economic presence, when applied in the

framework of principles of good governance, efficiency and professional marketing, as a part of national vision, which is aimed at financial sustainability and improved quality of university life.

Recommendations

According to the synthesized results of this work, the next step would be that the university should shift the management of sports activities to the institutional and professional model that is managed by an independent administrative body to report to the higher governance of the university. This body is supposed to be strategic planner, marketer and sponsorship manager, and revenue developer. It must also revise the current rules to facilitate flexible contracting, public-private collaboration and transparent flow of finance that will ensure that all revenues are used back to development of the programs and infrastructure. The inclusion of sports into the strategic plan of the university, as a domain of resource creation and interaction with the communities, will change it into a non-complementary activity into an institutional activity with quantifiable financial and educational outcomes. Concerning finances, the university must be multi-faceted in where it sources its sports revenue by having multi facets such as commercial sponsorships, advertisements, broadcasting rights and participation fees. Meanwhile, the sports facilities are to be transformed into value-generating resources that are operated in accordance with the joint operating patterns with the private sector (training academies, skill programs, and paid workshops). This attempt needs to be supported by the establishment of a University Sports Support Fund which is appealing to corporations and non-profit making organizations to contribute. Moreover, the university can capitalize on its visual identity by manufacturing branded items and merchandise with team logos on them to increase its financial gains and also the institutional brand loyalty.

The university needs to establish a unified digital platform that announces schedules early, live-streams matches, and documents statistics and sports stories, while also building partnerships with television channels and digital platforms to sell broadcasting rights and design advertising packages before, during, and after matches. This should be complemented by innovative promotional campaigns on social media, led by trained students specialized in sports content creation and audience engagement, which would enhance the commercial value of the university's sports products and improve the university's ability to attract sponsors.

At the cultural and educational level, the attendance of students should be increased by means of the development of a strong sports culture which would make the athletic involvement to be related to the health, quality of life and identification with the institution. It is also suggested to create a system of material and symbolic rewards to the participants and the fans (participation points, certificates, small rewards). The match days ought to be crafted as the whole social affair, with side events, competitions, instant prizes. In the sport scene, differentiating the mix of games and making the competition more competitive among colleges will provide better identities to the teams and also make the events more thrilling. Sustainability lies in the establishment of a strategic partnership network with the sports clubs, federation, media houses and the nonprofit sector as a whole, establishing a mutual benefit in terms of training, equipment's, broadcasting rights and corporate social responsibility.

The application of national inter-university championships can be used to develop this system because it will be more competitive, improve the standards of organizations, and create more possibilities in sponsorship and media rights due to the expansion of the market. Regarding the research and development aspect, the study proposes that there should be a consistent economic measurement system to determine the expenditure and the return on investment in university sports. It should also benchmark with the international universities to draw the best practices and analyze the effect of sports on the institution reputation and attraction of the talented students. Moreover, the research recommends the creation of a national model of the sports investment at the university in accordance with the Vision 2030 goals, which is a flexible regulatory and financial model with a marketing framework accessible in all universities.

It is through this integrated vision that the sports can be seen as a value ecosystem at the university: the governance that is clear, assets that are well managed, media and marketing that create audiences, partnerships that widen markets and an internal culture that creates demand. The university can effectively transform the current scenario of managing activities to developing a sustainable sports business that builds up its finances and foster its academic and community reputation by measuring and investing returns therewith.

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