

Developing a Model of the Role of Social Networks in Women's Participation in Leisure Activities and Public Sports with Emphasis on the Role of Social Adjustment

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ABSTRACT

Sport, as a social and cultural phenomenon, has been profoundly influenced by communication media. Media and sport maintain an extensive symbiotic relationship within society that deeply affects both domains. In this regard, the present study aimed to develop a model of the role of social networks in women's participation in leisure activities and public sports with an emphasis on the role of social adjustment. In terms of purpose, the study was applied research, and in terms of implementation method, it employed a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all women participating in public sports activities in the city of Kermanshah, from whom 279 participants were selected through random sampling based on the Cochran formula. Data collection was conducted using the standardized Sharkey Physical Activity Questionnaire (Sharkey, 1979), the questionnaire on the role of social media in promoting public sports developed by Eidi et al. (Eidi et al., 2014), and the Social Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Sohrabi et al. (Sohrabi et al., 2011). The validity of the instruments was evaluated and confirmed based on expert opinions, and the reliability of the questionnaires was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods through structural equation modeling with the aid of SmartPLS software. According to the findings, social networks had a significant effect on women's participation in leisure activities and public sports ($\beta = 0.356$, $T = 3.637$), social networks had a significant effect on women's social adjustment ($\beta = 0.608$, $T = 10.048$), and social adjustment had a significant effect on women's participation in leisure activities and public sports ($\beta = 0.500$, $T = 5.943$). Furthermore, the results of the Sobel test indicated that social networks had a significant indirect effect on women's participation through the mediating role of social adjustment ($T = 12.053$) in leisure activities and public sports. The findings indicated that social networks can function as effective tools for increasing participation in public and leisure sports and for enhancing women's social adjustment. Therefore, it is recommended that these platforms, through presenting realistic role models, providing social support, and offering psychological education, contribute to improving women's quality of life and professional performance.

Keywords: social networks, sports participation, leisure time, public sports, social adjustment.

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Introduction

In contemporary societies, sport is no longer regarded merely as a physical activity or a means of entertainment; rather, it is recognized as a multidimensional social, cultural, educational, and health-oriented phenomenon that significantly contributes to improving quality of life and promoting social

cohesion. Public sport and leisure-time physical activities are among the most important dimensions of modern lifestyles that directly influence physical health, mental well-being, social interaction, and social adjustment. Women's participation in public sport, in particular, has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers because women's active involvement in physical and recreational activities contributes not only to individual well-being but also to family stability and social development. Research has demonstrated that regular engagement in physical activity improves emotional balance, reduces anxiety and stress, enhances self-esteem, and promotes social functioning (1, 2). Furthermore, participation in leisure-time sport activities plays a substantial role in strengthening interpersonal relationships, increasing social belonging, and facilitating psychological adaptation in different social environments (3, 4). From a sociological perspective, sport also acts as a mechanism for social integration and social capital formation by creating opportunities for interaction, communication, and collective identity among individuals (5). Despite these benefits, women's participation in sport and leisure activities in many developing societies continues to face structural, cultural, and media-related barriers that reduce their level of engagement and visibility in public sport contexts (6, 7). Consequently, identifying the factors that encourage or inhibit women's participation in leisure and public sports has become an important scientific and practical issue in sport management and social psychology research.

One of the most influential contemporary factors shaping behavioral patterns and social participation is the expansion of social networks and digital media platforms. The rapid development of social networking technologies has transformed patterns of communication, information dissemination, and social interaction across societies. Social networks have become powerful tools for shaping attitudes, values, lifestyles, and behavioral intentions related to health and sport participation. Through visual representation, online communities, peer interaction, and motivational content, these platforms can substantially influence women's perceptions of sport participation and leisure activities (8, 9). Research has shown that social media communities provide emotional support, social encouragement, role modeling, and access to health-related information that can motivate individuals to engage in physical activity (8). In addition, digital platforms facilitate the visibility of female athletes and women's sport achievements, thereby reducing gender stereotypes and increasing women's confidence regarding participation in physical activity (10, 11). The growing influence of social networks on women's sport participation is also evident in media studies emphasizing the role of communication technologies in promoting sports culture among women (12). In the Iranian context, researchers have similarly emphasized the role of media representation and social networks in influencing women's engagement in public sports and shaping social attitudes toward female athletic participation (13, 14). The emergence of online sport communities has therefore altered traditional pathways of sport participation by enabling women to access information, social support, and motivational environments beyond conventional institutional settings.

The role of social networks extends beyond information dissemination and entertainment because these platforms actively shape psychological and social processes associated with adjustment and identity formation. Social adjustment refers to an individual's ability to establish balanced interpersonal relationships, fulfill social roles, and adapt effectively to social expectations and environmental demands. It is considered one of the most important indicators of psychosocial well-being and social functioning (15). Individuals with higher social adjustment typically demonstrate greater social participation, emotional

stability, interpersonal competence, and adaptability in educational, occupational, and family environments (16). In this regard, participation in sport and physical activity has repeatedly been identified as a significant contributor to social adjustment and psychosocial development. Physical activity creates opportunities for social interaction, teamwork, communication, and self-expression, which collectively strengthen social competence and adaptive functioning (3, 17). Furthermore, recent evidence indicates that social and emotional competencies as well as self-esteem mediate the relationship between physical exercise and social adaptability among university students (3, 4). These findings suggest that social participation through sport can strengthen individuals' capacity to adapt to changing social conditions and interpersonal challenges. In educational and developmental contexts, social adjustment has also been associated with family attachment styles, parenting practices, and social support systems (16, 18). Therefore, examining the relationship between social networks, social adjustment, and women's sport participation can provide a deeper understanding of the psychosocial mechanisms underlying public sport engagement.

Another important issue in the literature concerns the relationship between media exposure and the promotion of gender equality in sport participation. Historically, women's sports have received less media coverage compared to men's sports, which has negatively affected women's visibility, public support, and opportunities for participation (7, 14). However, the development of digital and social media platforms has partially reduced this imbalance by enabling women athletes and sport organizations to independently produce and disseminate content. Studies have shown that increased exposure to women's sports through social and digital media can challenge traditional gender stereotypes and foster more positive perceptions regarding women's athletic capabilities (10). Moreover, media representation of female athletes contributes to the formation of social identity and role modeling processes that motivate women and girls to engage in sport activities (11). Comparative studies on sport fandom and gender behavior have also indicated that identification with women's sport teams and athletes can positively influence participation motives and social engagement among female audiences (19). Social networks additionally allow women to share experiences, communicate with peers, and participate in virtual sport communities that strengthen social belonging and social influence mechanisms (9). These developments have important implications for understanding how online communication environments contribute to the enhancement of women's leisure-time physical activity and psychosocial adjustment.

From a behavioral and motivational perspective, women's participation in leisure and public sports is influenced by a broad range of personal, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Research on women's physical activity has identified motivational determinants such as health improvement, social interaction, body image, enjoyment, stress reduction, and social support as important predictors of sport participation (20). During periods of social crisis and isolation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, physical activity was also found to play a protective role in reducing anxiety and maintaining emotional well-being (2). Personality characteristics and social environments similarly influence individuals' willingness to engage in leisure-time physical activity (21). In organizational and social psychology research, interpersonal competencies and political skills have also been linked to adaptive social behaviors and citizenship behaviors within social systems (22). These findings collectively suggest that women's participation in sport is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both psychological characteristics and broader social structures. In addition, strategic and managerial studies in the field of sport development have emphasized the need for innovative

communication and marketing approaches for increasing women's engagement in athletic activities (23). Social media marketing and digital communication strategies are increasingly regarded as essential tools for developing women's sport participation because they provide accessible, low-cost, and interactive environments for public engagement (24, 25). Researchers have also emphasized the importance of leisure quality and sport-oriented recreational environments in improving women's quality of life and social participation (26). Consequently, social networks may serve not only as communication platforms but also as psychosocial environments that influence women's adjustment, motivation, and participation in public sports.

Although numerous studies have investigated women's sport participation, media representation, social support, and physical activity, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining the integrated relationship among social networks, social adjustment, and women's participation in leisure and public sports within a structural model framework. Existing studies have generally focused on isolated dimensions of media influence or physical activity without simultaneously considering the mediating psychological and social mechanisms that explain how social networks affect participation behaviors. Moreover, cultural and social conditions in Iranian society create unique challenges and opportunities regarding women's access to public sport spaces, media representation, and social participation (6, 27). Understanding the mediating role of social adjustment may therefore provide valuable insight into the pathways through which social networks influence women's engagement in public and leisure sports. Such knowledge can assist policymakers, sport managers, psychologists, and media professionals in designing interventions and communication strategies that promote women's physical activity, psychosocial well-being, and social integration. Given the increasing influence of digital communication technologies on social behavior and lifestyle patterns, investigating the psychosocial consequences of social network usage in the domain of women's sport participation has become a critical scientific necessity. Therefore, the present study aimed to develop a model of the role of social networks in women's participation in leisure activities and public sports with emphasis on the mediating role of social adjustment.

Methods and Materials

In terms of purpose, the present study was applied research, and in terms of implementation method, it employed a descriptive-survey design based on the structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population consisted of all women participating in public sports activities in the city of Kermanshah, which was considered an unlimited population, and who had reported participation in certain sports activities. Given the unlimited nature of the statistical population, the research sample was selected using cluster sampling based on the geographical distribution of four regions (central, northern, southern, and western areas). Accordingly, 279 participants were randomly selected based on the Cochran formula. The sample selection procedure was conducted in such a way that locations for public sports and sports halls where women were likely to engage in physical activity were first identified by female students majoring in sports sciences, after which the questionnaires were distributed among the participants.

In the present study, standardized questionnaires were used for data collection: (1) the standardized Physical Activity Questionnaire developed by Sharkey (Sharkey, 1979), consisting of four items related to duration of activity, number of exercise sessions, exercise intensity, and duration of each session; (2) the

questionnaire on the role of social media in promoting public sports developed by Eidi et al. (Eidi et al., 2014), consisting of 26 items across four dimensions including information dissemination (6 items), educational function (7 items), culture-building (6 items), and social participation (7 items); and (3) the Social Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Sohrabi et al. (Sohrabi et al., 2011), consisting of 15 items across five components including personal, social, academic, occupational, and family adjustment. All questionnaires were designed based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” (1) to “very high” (5). Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical methods through structural equation modeling with the assistance of SmartPLS software.

Findings and Results

The mean and standard deviation of each research variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Research Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Networks	3.36	0.985
Women’s Participation	3.45	1.521
Social Adjustment	3.23	1.362

Based on Table 1, women’s participation had the highest mean, whereas social adjustment had the lowest mean.

To examine the assumption of normality for the study variables, the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used for each variable separately. The results indicated that the assumption of normality could be rejected for all variables ($p < .05$). The results of this test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Assessing Normality

Variables	Test Statistic	Significance Level
Social Networks	0.263	0.023
Women’s Participation	0.189	0.025
Social Adjustment	0.203	0.012

According to Table 2, none of the variables satisfied the normality assumption. Therefore, PLS software could appropriately be used for data analysis.

The Fornell–Larcker criterion for convergent validity requires the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to exceed 0.50. This indicates that a latent variable can explain, on average, more than half of the variance of its indicators. As shown in Table 3, the AVE values for all latent variables exceeded 0.50. Therefore, the convergent validity of the measurement models was considered satisfactory.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values for Research Variables

Variables	Validity (AVE)
Social Networks	0.523
Women’s Participation	0.562
Social Adjustment	0.584

In the present study, two criteria, namely Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficient, were used to determine questionnaire reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all variables exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. Unlike Cronbach’s alpha, which implicitly assumes equal weights for all indicators, composite reliability relies on the actual factor loadings of each

construct and therefore provides a more accurate measure of reliability. Composite reliability values should exceed 0.70 to indicate internal consistency of the construct. The complete reliability results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Research Variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Social Networks	0.865	0.852
Women's Participation	0.863	0.842
Social Adjustment	0.905	0.853

Table 5. Assessment of Discriminant Validity of the Research Model

Variables	1	2	3
1. Social Networks	0.125		
2. Women's Participation	0.809	0.830	
3. Social Adjustment	0.814	0.729	0.732

Table 5 presents the discriminant validity assessment of the research model. Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs. This validity was assessed at both the indicator and latent variable levels. At the indicator level, discriminant validity was evaluated using cross-loadings, whereby the loading of each indicator on its corresponding construct should exceed its loadings on other constructs. At the latent variable level, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was used. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for each latent variable should be greater than the highest correlation between that construct and other constructs in the model. In the present study, the square roots of AVE values located on the diagonal of the matrix were greater than the inter-construct correlations presented below the diagonal. The logic underlying this criterion is that a construct should share more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs. The results in Table 5 indicate that all variables demonstrated acceptable discriminant validity.

In this section, the research hypotheses were tested using the results of the structural model analysis. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze and evaluate the model of the present study. Structural equation modeling is a statistical approach for examining linear relationships between latent (unobserved) variables and manifest (observed) variables. In other words, structural equation modeling is a powerful statistical technique that simultaneously combines the measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis) and the structural model (regression or path analysis) within a single statistical framework. Through these techniques, researchers can reject hypothetical structures (models) or confirm their fit with empirical data. In the present study, version 3.2.8 of SmartPLS software was used to analyze the conceptual model.

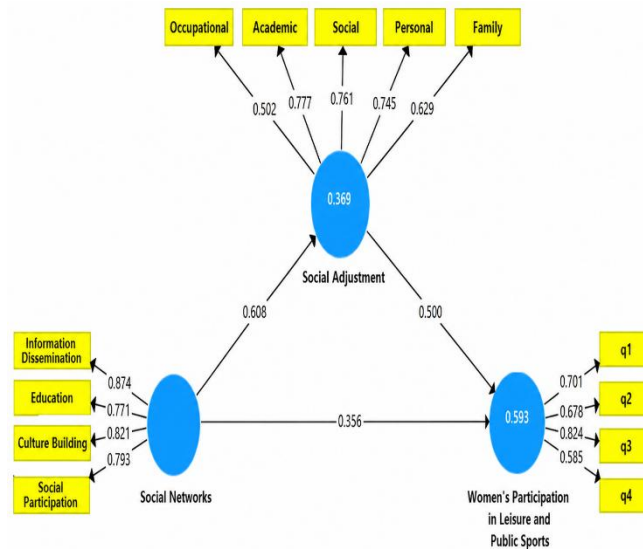


Figure 1. Final structural model of the research based on the conceptual model with significance levels of path coefficients.

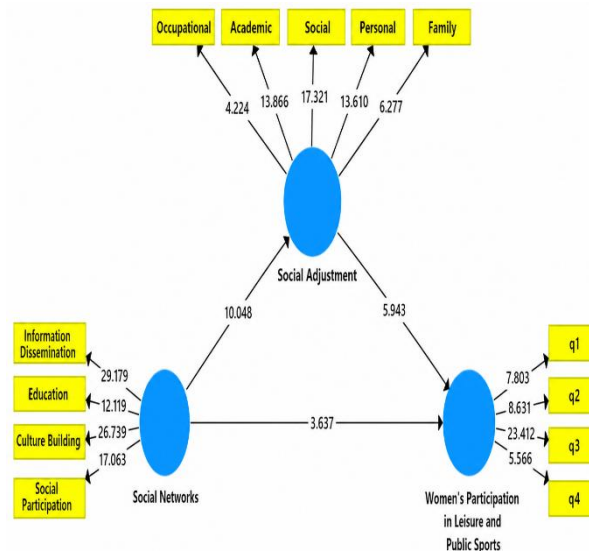


Figure 2. Final structural model of the research based on the conceptual model with critical values (t-statistics).

Table 6. Results of Collinearity Indices

Variables	Collinearity Indices (VIF)
Social Networks	1.635
Women's Participation	1.541
Social Adjustment	1.854

In the inner model section, the relationships among the latent variables were analyzed. The first criterion for evaluating the inner model was the absence of multicollinearity among variables, which was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). VIF values greater than 5 indicate multicollinearity among variables. As shown in Table 6, the condition of non-collinearity was satisfied for all variables.

Table 7. Results of Collinearity Indices, Direct Effects, and Effect Sizes in the Inner Research Model

Hypotheses	β	α	$Z\alpha/2$	CR (T-value)
Social Networks → Women's Participation	0.356	0.05	1.96	3.637
Social Networks → Social Adjustment	0.608	0.05	1.96	10.048
Social Adjustment → Women's Participation	0.500	0.05	1.96	5.943

The second criterion for evaluating the inner model consisted of the path coefficients. Their significance was examined using the bootstrapping procedure. The coefficients, corresponding T-statistics, significance levels, and confidence intervals for direct effects are presented in Table 7. Based on these findings, social networks significantly affected women's participation ($\beta = 0.356$, $T = 3.637$), social networks significantly affected social adjustment ($\beta = 0.608$, $T = 10.048$), and social adjustment significantly affected women's participation ($\beta = 0.500$, $T = 5.943$). Furthermore, the results of the Sobel test demonstrated that social networks significantly affected women's participation through the mediating role of social adjustment ($T = 12.053$).

The Sobel test was used to examine the mediating role of variables. Since the obtained Z-value was 12.053, which exceeded 1.96, the mediating role of social adjustment in the relationship between social networks and women's participation was confirmed.

The R^2 criterion is used to connect the measurement and structural components in structural equation modeling and indicates the effect of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable. This criterion is calculated only for endogenous constructs of the model, whereas its value for exogenous constructs is zero. Chin identified the values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 as weak, moderate, and strong levels of R^2 , respectively. The data obtained from the field study were analyzed using PLS-SMART software, and the results presented in Table 8 indicate strong R^2 values for the investigated variables.

Table 8. R^2 Values

Variables	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)
Social Networks	—
Women's Participation	—
Social Adjustment	0.452

Based on Table 8, the R^2 values demonstrated desirable model fit.

In PLS models, two models are tested: the outer model, which is equivalent to the measurement model, and the inner model, which is similar to the structural model in other software packages such as LISREL and AMOS. The outer (measurement) model specifies the relationships between latent variables and their observed indicators. The communality index, which assesses the fit of the measurement model for a latent variable block, is used to evaluate this model. The inner (structural) model specifies the relationships among latent variables, and the redundancy index (Stone–Geisser Q^2 coefficient), which predicts the indicators of endogenous latent variables (R^2), is used to assess the structural model. Henseler et al. (Henseler et al., 2009) identified the values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as weak, moderate, and strong predictive relevance, respectively. If the Q^2 value for an endogenous construct is close to 0.02, the model demonstrates weak predictive power regarding the indicators of that construct, whereas a value close to 0.35 indicates strong predictive power. In general, if both the communality and redundancy indices are positive, the structural model demonstrates acceptable quality. As shown in Table 9, both indices were positive. Furthermore, the

R² values, which indicate the model's ability to explain the constructs, confirmed satisfactory performance of the model according to the aforementioned criteria.

Table 9. Model Fit

Variables	Communality Values	Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	Redundancy (Red)
Social Networks	0.425	—	—
Women's Participation	0.418	0.593	0.248
Social Adjustment	0.465	0.369	0.172

The third criterion for evaluating the model involved calculating the Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index in partial least squares modeling. Unlike covariance-based structural equation modeling methods, the PLS approach does not provide a single comprehensive fit index for overall model assessment. The GOF index simultaneously considers both the measurement and structural models and serves as an indicator of the model's overall performance. The value of this index ranges between 0 and 1. Tenenhaus et al. identified the values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, moderate, and strong GOF values, respectively. This index is calculated manually using the average R² and the average communality values according to the following formula:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Average Communality} \times \bar{R}^2}$$

This index represents the square root of the product of the average communality values and the average coefficient of determination.

Table 10. Communality Values

Variables	Communality Values	Coefficient of Determination (R ²)
Social Networks	0.425	—
Women's Participation	0.418	0.593
Social Adjustment	0.465	0.369

$$GOF = \sqrt{(0.452)(0.405)} = 0.458$$

The GOF index obtained for the present model was 0.458, indicating the overall desirability and strong fit of the model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a model explaining the role of social networks in women's participation in leisure activities and public sports with emphasis on the mediating role of social adjustment. The findings demonstrated that social networks had a significant positive effect on women's participation in leisure and public sports. In addition, social networks significantly influenced women's social adjustment, and social adjustment also exerted a significant positive effect on women's participation in public and leisure sports. Furthermore, the mediating analysis revealed that social adjustment played a significant intermediary role in the relationship between social networks and women's participation in leisure and public sports. These findings collectively indicate that social networks not only directly encourage women's engagement in physical and recreational activities but also indirectly enhance participation by strengthening adaptive social functioning and psychosocial compatibility. The results highlight the multidimensional role of digital communication environments in shaping women's behavioral, psychological, and social engagement with sport and recreational activities.

The significant relationship between social networks and women's participation in leisure and public sports can be interpreted within the framework of social influence theory and media-based behavioral motivation. Social networking platforms create interactive communication environments where individuals are exposed to motivational messages, health information, exercise content, and role models associated with active lifestyles. Through repeated exposure to sport-related content and virtual communities, women may develop stronger attitudes toward physical activity and perceive sport participation as socially desirable and psychologically rewarding. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing the influential role of social media in promoting women's sports culture and increasing public engagement with sport activities (12, 13). Similarly, Brown and Williams reported that social support and social influence processes within fitness-related social media communities significantly encourage users' exercise behaviors and long-term participation in physical activity (8). Braumüller also demonstrated that interaction within online social networks can positively affect young adults' perceptions of sports participation and leisure activities (9). The findings of the present study further align with research suggesting that social media platforms facilitate communication, accessibility, and visibility for women in sport contexts, thereby reducing traditional barriers to participation (14, 24). In many societies, women's participation in public sports has historically been constrained by cultural stereotypes, limited media representation, and insufficient social support. Social networks partially address these challenges by creating decentralized communication spaces where women can observe successful female athletes, share personal experiences, and receive emotional reinforcement from online communities.

Another important finding of the present study was the significant positive effect of social networks on women's social adjustment. This result suggests that social networking environments may contribute to strengthening interpersonal communication, social belonging, emotional support, and adaptive social functioning among women. Social adjustment reflects an individual's capacity to establish effective social relationships, manage interpersonal expectations, and adapt successfully to social environments. Participation in online communities and social communication platforms may enhance these adaptive capacities by increasing opportunities for interaction, self-expression, and social connectedness. This finding is compatible with studies emphasizing the psychosocial importance of communication environments and social support systems in strengthening social adjustment (15, 16). Research has shown that individuals who experience stronger social interaction and perceived support demonstrate higher levels of emotional stability, self-confidence, and social competence (18). Furthermore, digital communication environments provide opportunities for individuals to receive validation, encouragement, and social recognition, which collectively contribute to greater psychosocial adaptation. The findings may also be explained through social learning theory, according to which individuals learn adaptive social behaviors by observing and interacting with others within social environments. Social networks enable women to observe behavioral models related to healthy lifestyles, communication patterns, and social participation, thereby strengthening adaptive functioning and social integration.

The significant effect of social adjustment on women's participation in leisure and public sports constitutes another important finding of the present study. Women with higher levels of social adjustment may possess greater self-confidence, interpersonal competence, emotional balance, and social belonging, all of which facilitate active participation in group-based leisure and sport activities. Individuals who are

socially adjusted typically experience fewer social anxieties and communication barriers and therefore engage more comfortably in collective physical activities and recreational environments. This result is consistent with studies demonstrating that psychosocial adjustment and emotional competencies are closely associated with participation in physical and recreational activities (3, 17). Liu et al. found that physical exercise positively affects social adaptability through emotional competency and self-esteem mechanisms (3). Likewise, Zhou et al. reported that self-esteem and peer attachment mediate the relationship between physical exercise and social adaptation among university students (4). These studies collectively suggest that participation in physical activity and social adjustment mutually reinforce one another through reciprocal psychosocial processes. Women who possess greater social adaptability may perceive public sports environments as more supportive, socially rewarding, and psychologically safe, thereby increasing their willingness to engage in leisure-time physical activity.

The mediating role of social adjustment in the relationship between social networks and women's participation in public and leisure sports represents one of the most significant contributions of the present study. This finding indicates that social networks influence women's participation not only through direct informational and motivational mechanisms but also indirectly through improving psychosocial adaptation and social functioning. In other words, social networks may strengthen women's confidence in social interaction, improve communication skills, increase social support perceptions, and reduce psychological barriers to participation, all of which contribute to greater engagement in sport activities. This finding supports the broader literature emphasizing the interrelationship between communication technologies, social support, and psychosocial well-being (8, 27). Social media environments provide women with opportunities to form supportive networks, exchange experiences, and normalize participation in physical activity, thereby enhancing social adjustment and increasing behavioral participation. Moreover, exposure to women athletes and sport-related content through digital media can reduce internalized gender stereotypes and strengthen women's social identity regarding sport participation (10, 11). Vezzali et al. demonstrated that exposure to women's sport media contributes to counter-stereotypical perceptions and promotes gender equality attitudes in sport contexts (10). Such processes may indirectly improve women's social adjustment by increasing social acceptance, empowerment, and self-worth.

The present findings can additionally be interpreted from the perspective of sport sociology and leisure studies. Public sport participation is not solely determined by individual motivation but is also shaped by cultural narratives, media structures, and social environments. Media representation significantly influences public perceptions regarding the legitimacy and desirability of women's participation in sport activities (7). In societies where women's sports receive limited visibility, participation opportunities may remain constrained due to social stereotypes and reduced institutional support. However, digital social networks allow women to bypass some of these traditional limitations by creating independent channels for communication, representation, and collective participation. This interpretation is consistent with findings emphasizing the strategic role of media coverage and communication policies in the development of women's sports (13, 14). Furthermore, the increasing integration of digital technologies into everyday lifestyles has transformed leisure behaviors and health-related decision-making processes. Researchers have noted that social networks can influence body image perceptions, exercise motivation, and attitudes toward health-

related behaviors (28). Through continuous exposure to sport-oriented content, women may internalize healthier lifestyle patterns and become more motivated to participate in physical and recreational activities.

The results of the present study also align with contemporary theories regarding leisure quality and psychosocial well-being. Participation in leisure and public sports contributes to stress reduction, emotional recovery, and psychological resilience, especially among women facing occupational, family, or social pressures (20, 26). During periods of social isolation and crisis, physical activity has been identified as a protective factor against anxiety and emotional distress (2). Therefore, social networks may indirectly improve mental health and social adjustment by encouraging active lifestyles and providing emotionally supportive environments. Moreover, women who participate in online sport communities may experience stronger social belonging and identity reinforcement, which contribute to higher psychosocial adaptation and social participation. Research in organizational and social psychology similarly indicates that adaptive interpersonal competencies and communication skills facilitate positive social behaviors and collective participation (22). The role of personality and motivational characteristics in physical activity participation has also been emphasized in previous studies (21). Consequently, the relationship among social networks, social adjustment, and sport participation should be understood as a complex interaction between psychological, social, cultural, and communication-related factors.

Another important implication of the present findings concerns the strategic development of women's sports and recreational programs. Modern sport management increasingly relies on digital communication technologies and social media marketing to increase public participation and engagement (23). The findings of the present study suggest that social networks can serve as cost-effective and accessible tools for promoting women's participation in public sports. Digital campaigns highlighting successful female athletes, accessible exercise programs, and supportive online communities may substantially improve women's engagement in physical activity. Furthermore, the strategic use of media platforms can strengthen public awareness regarding the psychosocial and health benefits of women's participation in leisure sports. Research on women's sport development has emphasized the importance of long-term strategic planning, media support, and institutional cooperation in enhancing women's athletic participation (6). The findings of the present study provide empirical support for integrating social media strategies into public sport development programs and women's health promotion initiatives.

The findings also emphasize the importance of understanding women's participation in sport from a multidimensional and interdisciplinary perspective. Participation in leisure and public sports cannot be fully explained solely by physical or environmental factors; rather, psychological adjustment, social interaction, communication environments, and cultural representations all contribute to shaping behavioral outcomes. The interaction between social media exposure and social adjustment demonstrates that communication technologies influence not only information access but also emotional and social functioning. This broader interpretation aligns with contemporary perspectives in sport psychology, media studies, and social psychology that emphasize the interconnected nature of communication, identity, and behavioral participation. Therefore, interventions aimed at increasing women's participation in public sports should simultaneously address psychological support, social inclusion, digital engagement, and cultural representation in order to achieve sustainable behavioral change.

One limitation of the present study was its reliance on self-report questionnaires, which may have increased the likelihood of response bias and socially desirable responding. In addition, the study population was limited to women participating in public sports activities in the city of Kermanshah, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to women in other cultural and geographical contexts. The cross-sectional nature of the study also prevented the examination of causal relationships over time. Furthermore, the study did not investigate demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, educational level, marital status, or intensity of social media use, which may influence women's participation in leisure and public sports.

Future research is recommended to examine the longitudinal effects of social network usage on women's psychosocial adjustment and sport participation over extended periods of time. Researchers may also investigate the moderating role of demographic and cultural variables in the relationship between social networks and women's participation in public sports. Comparative studies between different age groups, social classes, and geographical regions could provide a deeper understanding of contextual influences on women's sport participation. Additionally, qualitative approaches may help explore women's lived experiences regarding social media engagement, social adjustment, and barriers to physical activity participation.

From a practical perspective, policymakers and sport managers should use social networks as strategic tools for increasing women's participation in leisure and public sports. Designing digital campaigns that highlight positive female role models, provide accessible educational content, and strengthen online social support systems may improve women's motivation for physical activity. Educational institutions and sport organizations should also develop programs aimed at enhancing women's social adjustment and psychosocial well-being through collective sport participation and community engagement. Furthermore, cooperation between media organizations, psychologists, and sport institutions may contribute to creating supportive social environments that encourage women's active participation in recreational and public sports activities.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

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

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