

# The impact of psychological capital, psychological empowerment, and sports anxiety on the sports industry performance in Iraq Soccer Players

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## Abstract

The sports industry's performance in any nation relies on the performance of its players. The performance of soccer players in Iraq and the performance of the sports industry are declining. This study aims to examine the relationship between psychological capital, psychological empowerment, and sports anxiety in Iraqi soccer players. This study gathered quantitative data from Iraqi soccer players competing at the local, national, and international levels. This study employs partial least square – structural equation modeling to test its hypotheses. In addition, the purpose of this research is to enhance the performance of the sports industry in Iraq. This study revealed that psychological capital, psychological empowerment, and sports anxiety had a substantial impact on the success of the Iraqi sports business. This study introduced a new framework and substantially contributed to the corpus of knowledge. This study's theoretical and practical ramifications are equally noteworthy for enhancing the performance of the Iraqi sports business. This study's future directions would be useful for exploring future gaps in the literature.

**Keywords.** Psychological capital, psychological empowerment, sports anxiety, sports industry performance, soccer players

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary players compete in games on international forums (Iqbal et al., 2022). These international competitions substantially affect the athletes' performance (Owan et al., 2020). The players most likely to succeed internationally are self-motivated and fierce competitors (Abdulrab et al., 2017). Conversely, players who are not intrinsically motivated lack performance, and their future is doomed to failure (Lee, Kim, & Joon-Ho, 2013). Certainly, the players' physical performance is essential to their improved production, but physical performance alone is insufficient Benítez-Sillero et al. (2021). When competing in international forums, the psychological investment of players in their performance is also crucial (Kim & Moon, 2018). Iraqi soccer players suffer from anxiousness, which hinders their international performance (Asberi, 2016). Several attempts have been made to improve Iraq's sports performance (Nicholls et al., 2020). Still, the athletes lack the self-discipline and game intelligence to give them the best opportunity for improved performance (Al-Issawi & Al-Zubaidi, 2021). Consequently, this approach to enhancing the performance of soccer players in Iraq was not addressed in previous research (Lima et al., 2021).

Any player's psychological capital is his strategy for excelling in the game (Arisoy & Pepe, 2021). It depends on the players' self-efficacy, hope, and optimistic outlook (Pang et al., 2020). Indeed, players with these characteristics do better in their sports (Lai et al., 2020). On the other hand, sports anxiety relates to a player's dread of failing while attempting to enhance their gaming experience (Abdullah et al., 2016). Indeed, the advanced nations are encouraging their athletes not to be afraid of failure and to perform according to the game's requirements (Tranaeus et al., 2021). Similarly, the psychological empowerment of the players' self-control of their performance was essential (Bigharaz, Bagheri, & Saberi, 2016). The players who have reasonable self-control perform better than the others. The performance of the soccer sports sector in Iraq has not improved since the players cannot improve their play and are victims of negativity (Lee et al., 2013).

Massar, Kopplin, and Schelleman-Offermans (2021) argued that the psychological capital of the players is essential for their optimal performance since players with superior learning can enhance their performance. Asberi (2016) explained how soccer players should cultivate a good mentality while anticipating a successful performance. Bigharaz et al. (2016) concluded that the

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sports industry's performance is crucial for any game's success since players who perform poorly contribute less to the industry's performance. [Lai et al. \(2020\)](#) concluded that the players' psychological capital could be enhanced if external trainers inspire them to overcome their limitations and improve their performance. According to [Asberi \(2016\)](#), the trainers in Iraq failed to improve the players' comprehension and leering.

Indeed, the research of numerous eminent academics has made significant contributions to the literature ([Asberi, 2016](#); [Kim & Moon, 2018](#); [Massar et al., 2021](#)). However, there is a gap in the literature that this investigation must fill. This study's theoretical foundation is based on an unaddressed gap in the prior literature. This study aims to improve the performance of the sports industry in Iraq, with significant theoretical and practical ramifications. Consequently, the scope of this study is limited to a soccer game and the performance of players in Iraq. In addition, the theoretical framework of this study is prepared to provide substantial literature to the body of knowledge to improve the framework of sports industry performance by introducing new variables. In addition, the study has practical implications for enhancing the performance of Iraqi soccer players. In addition to the consequences, this study provides future research suggestions for this field of literature.

## 2. Literature Review

The characters are humans with their own emotions and sentiments ([Allahabadi, Gatto, & Pandya, 2022](#)). The players' attitudes are also influenced by their life circumstances ([Coutinho et al., 2022](#)). In recent times, sophisticated and developed nations have been attempting to innovate and digitally improve the players' performance ([Hamid & Assad, 2021](#)). Digitalization has also led to a reevaluation of the sports industry. The athletes' self-efficacy inspired them to perform better ([Seligman et al., 2022](#)). It is an inherent characteristic, yet it is contingent upon their performance and labor. Indeed, athletes in any country live a social life. Thus it is usual for their self-efficacy to be influenced by various factors ([Lee et al., 2013](#)). The players' self-esteem also has a significant role in their performance. American baseball players are motivated to enhance their performance through effective learning ([Simons & Bird, 2022](#)). These athletes are supplied with all facilities to avoid any performance-related complications. [Ramezani et al. \(2022\)](#) also stated that psychological capital affects players' performance because players work directly following their attitude and behavior. Fear of defeat is also a significant obstacle for the players

([Nower et al., 2018](#)). This anxiety has evolved in sports for a variety of causes. If the players are not well prepared for their performance, they will fear losing the game ([Yang, Dai, & Miao, 2021](#)). On the other side, the team's resources significantly impact the players' performance ([Chatpunyakul, Gulthawatvichai, & Gulthawatvichai, 2019](#)).

If players perceive not receiving adequate resources for their work, their performance will suffer ([Marzouki et al., 2022](#)). If the players are appropriately instructed for enhanced learning, their performance can be enhanced ([Hodges & Lohse, 2022](#)). As a result of a lack of performance-enhancing resources, sports anxiety is prevalent among athletes from developing nations ([Salcinovic et al., 2022](#)). Indeed, the fear of losing is vital for player performance, and external motivation can also enhance player performance ([Allahabadi et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, the players in Indonesia are impacted by the management's external assistance ([Coutinho et al., 2022](#)). If the management does not encourage the Indonesian squad's performance, the players worry about winning the game ([Seligman et al., 2022](#)). The players' self-control is important for their performance. The players with more self-control significantly impact the game's outcome ([Simons & Bird, 2022](#)). The players' self-control manifested in their improved working method ([Hamid & Assad, 2021](#)). For good performance, the players who improve their performance must have emotional intelligence. He can control his anxiety during the game, and his performance will be noteworthy ([Nower et al., 2018](#)). [Allahabadi et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasized the significance of psychological empowerment for international-level players who represent their country. Players aspire to represent the team at the international level, but they must exercise self-control to achieve a respectable performance at the international level ([Coutinho et al., 2022](#)). During the game, people's self-control is useful for sustaining performance and maintaining control over their emotions, feelings, and attitudes ([Lee et al., 2013](#)).

H1. Psychological capital has an impact on sports industry performance.

H2. Sports anxiety has an impact on sports industry performance.

H3. Psychological empowerment has an impact on sports industry performance.

As individuals, gamers experience experiences and emotions. The players' perspective is also influenced by their current life conditions ([Coutinho et al., 2022](#)). Presently, sophisticated and advanced nations are employing innovative and computerized methods to enhance the effectiveness of their players ([Seligman et al.,](#)

2022). The digital revolution has prompted a reevaluation of the sports industry. The participants' self-efficacy motivated them to do well (Lee et al., 2013). Although it is a trait that is innate, it also depends on how well they perform and work (Allahabadi et al., 2022).

Given that athletes from every nation have social lives, it is only natural that their personalities are shaped by various variables (Chatpunyakul et al., 2019). Athletes' sense of self-worth substantially affects their performance (Chatpunyakul et al., 2019). Californian professional athletes are motivated to learn more effectively and improve their performance. These athletes are given every possible advantage to prevent any circumstance from hindering their performance (Simons & Bird, 2022). Yang et al. (2021) concluded that athletes' performance is affected by their attitude and disposition since these qualities directly impact how well they play. Another significant challenge for the athletes is their fear of defeat. There are numerous explanations for why this fear has become so pervasive in sports (Hodges & Lohse, 2022). If the players have not adequately prepared for their performance, they will fear losing the game (Coutinho et al., 2022). On the other hand, a player's performance is significantly influenced by the team's financial resources (Coutinho et al., 2022).

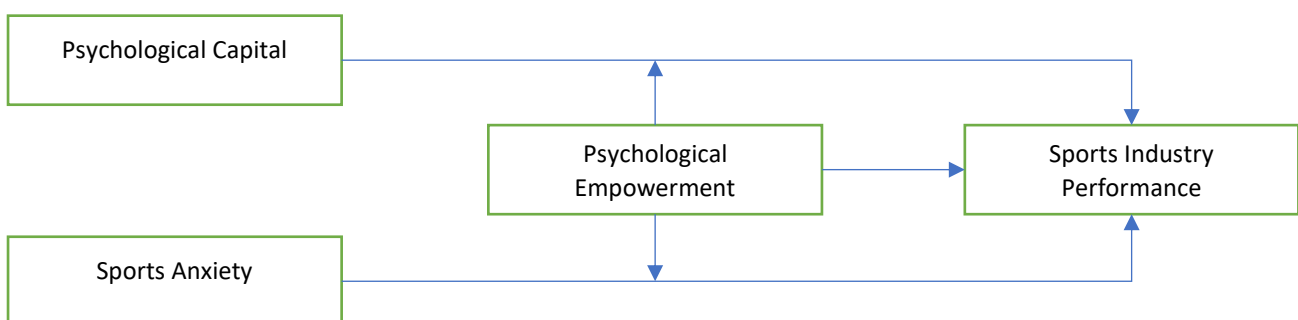
If the athletes believe they are not provided with the proper tools for the game, their performance will be subpar (Coutinho et al., 2022). If the players obtain the proper training instructions, their abilities can be enhanced (Lee et al., 2013). Athletes from impoverished nations frequently endure sports stress due to inadequate resources. Teams' performance is affected by their fear of defeat, and extrinsic incentives can also motivate teams to

perform better (Nower et al., 2018). Malaysian athletes are also affected by the leadership's external support (McGuckin et al., 2022). If the administration did not foster the success of the Malaysian team, the athletes' desire to win would become evident.

Similarly, Coutinho et al. (2022) reported that players must maintain emotional control during games. The capacity of the athletes to keep consciousness is crucial to their performance. Personality-driven players greatly impact the game's outcome (Marzouki et al., 2022). The improved management strategy of the athletes contributed to their identification. To the greatest extent, participants who are boosting their effectiveness require psychological maturity development to be assessed on their performance (Chatpunyakul et al., 2019). A player with mental fortitude can control his anxiousness while playing, and his accomplishment will be notable (Coutinho et al., 2022). Yang et al. (2021) stressed the need for self-motivated athlete assignments for international athletes representing their country. Each player's objective is to serve his or her team on the global stage, but to be successful, they must keep their individuality (Marzouki et al., 2022). McGuckin et al. (2022) found that psychological empowerment is vital for athletes since it enhances their international performance. In addition, the findings of Hamid and Assad (2021) underlined the psychological empowerment of the players for improved practice and game performance.

H4. Psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between psychological capital and sports industry performance.

H5. Psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between sports anxiety and sports industry performance.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Prepare Questionnaire

A Likert-scale questionnaire was constructed for this study to obtain quantitative information from the respondents. To examine the relationship between current study variables, the study has developed a measurement scale

commonly utilized in past research. In this regard, the study utilized the sports anxiety scale items developed by Smith et al. (2006). Likewise, the psychological capital scale elements were taken from Sapyaprapa, Tuicomepee, and Watakakosol (2013). In addition, the elements of the scale developed by Spreitzer (1995) are employed for psychological empowerment. Finally, the scale items

adapted by [Atalay, Anafarta, and Sarvan \(2013\)](#) are applied to the performance of the sports industry. After the requisite reliability and validity checks, these scale items are used for testing. Cronbach's alpha was examined to assess the reliability and validity of the scale items. Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.87 for the sports anxiety scale, 0.82 for the psychological capital scale, 0.97 for the psychological empowerment scale, and 0.93 for the sports industry performance scale. On the other hand, the reliability and validity of the items were also evaluated using factor loadings, and all of the adapted measuring items have factor loadings greater than the 0.70 thresholds proposed by [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#). To evaluate the hypotheses of this study with statistical data to produce empirical evidence in the research, the questionnaire items for this study have been adapted with care.

### 3.2 Data Collection Process

Iraqi athletes provided the information gathered for this study. Because this study studies the performance of soccer players in the sports sector, data collection is focused on soccer players. Indeed, the students are the most important stakeholders in the sports performance industry. These players were contacted by email because it is difficult to meet them in person. The managers of these players were contacted and asked to give the necessary information for this investigation. Only 450 national, domestic, and international players volunteered to contribute

information to this study. In this regard, the questionnaire for this study was emailed to them to request that they respond as soon as possible. The respondents were contacted to submit data, and their research-related questions were answered. However, only 309 questionnaires were returned because respondents were required to supply the information within two days. In this regard, these data are utilized to examine the relationship between variables in this study. In addition, Smart PLS 3 was used to determine the results with structural equation modeling, as this method is effective for determining the results.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Convergent Validity

The purpose of the validity test is to determine the validity of the study's measurement scale. The factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha were derived from the measurement model results in this study. In addition, the composite reliability (CR) and extracted average variance (AVE) values were obtained. For reliability and validity, [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#) suggested that the values of factor loadings should be more than 0.80 and 0.70, respectively. In this regard, the findings of this investigation demonstrated the reliability and validity of the study's measurement instruments. [Table 1](#) contains the scale items and validity data from the present investigation.

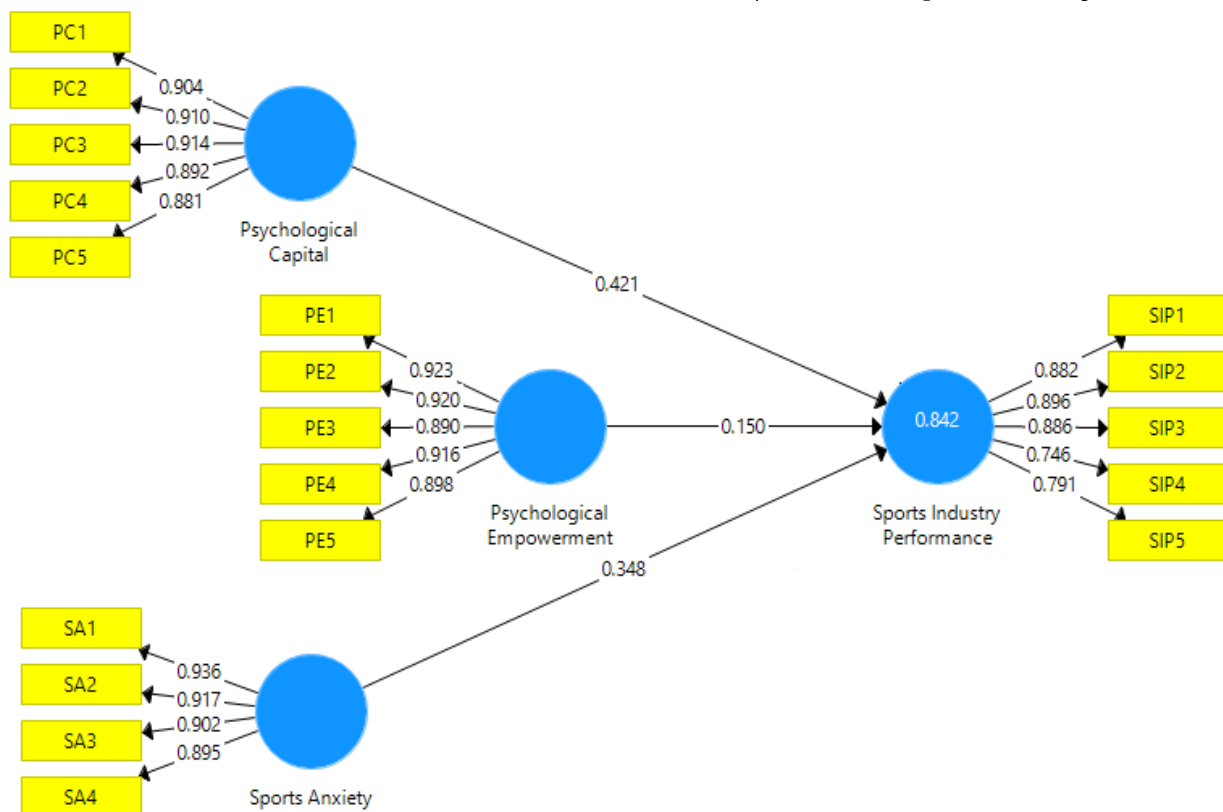


Figure 1. Measurement Model

**Table 1**

*Measurement Items and Validity*

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Psychological Capital	PC1 I feel confident in analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.	0.904	0.941	0.955	0.810
	PC2 I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future regarding work.	0.910			
	PC3 During the game, I always find that every problem has a solution.	0.914			
	PC4 At present, I am energetically pursuing my game goals.	0.892			
	PC5 I have several ways to accomplish the game goal.	0.881			
Psychological Empowerment	PE1 The work I do is very important to me.	0.923	0.948	0.960	0.827
	PE2 I am confident about my ability to do my game.	0.920			
	PE3 I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	0.890			
	PE4 I can decide on my own how to go about doing my game.	0.916			
	PE5 I have a great deal of control over what happens in my game.	0.898			
Sports Anxiety	SA1 It is hard to concentrate on the game.	0.936	0.933	0.952	0.833
	SA2 I worry that I will not play well.	0.917			
	SA3 It is hard for me to focus on what I am supposed to do.	0.902			
	SA4 I worry that I will let others down.	0.895			
Sports Industry Performance	SIP1 Our industry continually enlarges potential demand markets.	0.882	0.898	0.924	0.710
	SIP2 Our industry adopts innovative work designs.	0.896			
	SIP3 Our industry imports advanced programmable equipment.	0.886			
	SIP4 Our industry imports advanced automatic quality restriction equipment.	0.746			
	SIP5 Our industry adopts advanced real-time process control technology.	0.791			

**4.2 Discriminant Validity**

Similar to the validity and reliability test, the discriminant validity test is used to verify the study's reliability and validity. The current study has adopted the HTMT method of discriminant validity, and

according to [Gold, Malhotra, and Segars \(2001\)](#), discriminant validity values should be less than 0.90. The findings of discriminant validity were compared to the results of the structural model. The results of [Table 2](#) revealed the study's discriminant validity.

**Table 2**

*Discriminant Validity*

	Psychological Capital	Psychological Empowerment	Sports Anxiety	Sports Industry Performance
Psychological Capital				
Psychological Empowerment	0.811			
Sports Anxiety	0.783	0.764		
Sports Industry Performance	0.674	0.657	0.684	

**4.3 Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling**

The research findings highlighted that all the hypotheses of this study are significant. The partial least square – structural equation model is widely used in research to identify the relationship between variables (see [Figure 3](#)). Hypothesis one results disclosed a valid relationship

between psychological capital and sports industry performance ( $t = 4.524$  and  $p = 0$ ). Hypothesis two results disclosed a valid relationship between sports anxiety and sports industry performance ( $t = 3.883$  and  $p = 0$ ). Hypothesis three results disclosed a valid relationship between psychological empowerment and sports industry

performance ( $t = 5.357$  and  $p = 0$ ). Hypothesis four results disclosed a valid moderating role of psychological empowerment between psychological capital and sports industry performance ( $t = 7.222$  and  $p = 0$ ). Hypothesis five

results disclosed a valid moderating role of psychological empowerment between sports anxiety and sports industry performance ( $t = 5.548$  and  $p = 0$ ). The results are available in Table 3.

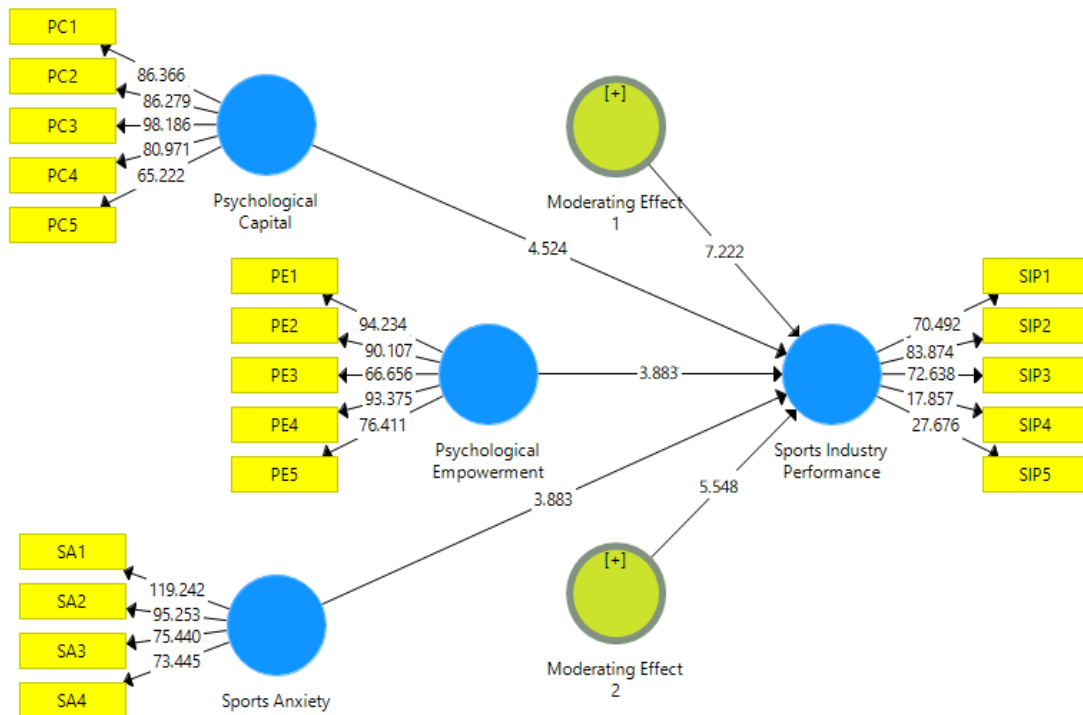


Figure 3. Structural Model

Regarding moderating hypothesis four, the findings indicate that psychological empowerment has a positive moderating effect on the link between psychological capital and sports sector

performance. Consequently, psychological empowerment enhances the connection between psychological capital and sports industry performance (see Figure 4).

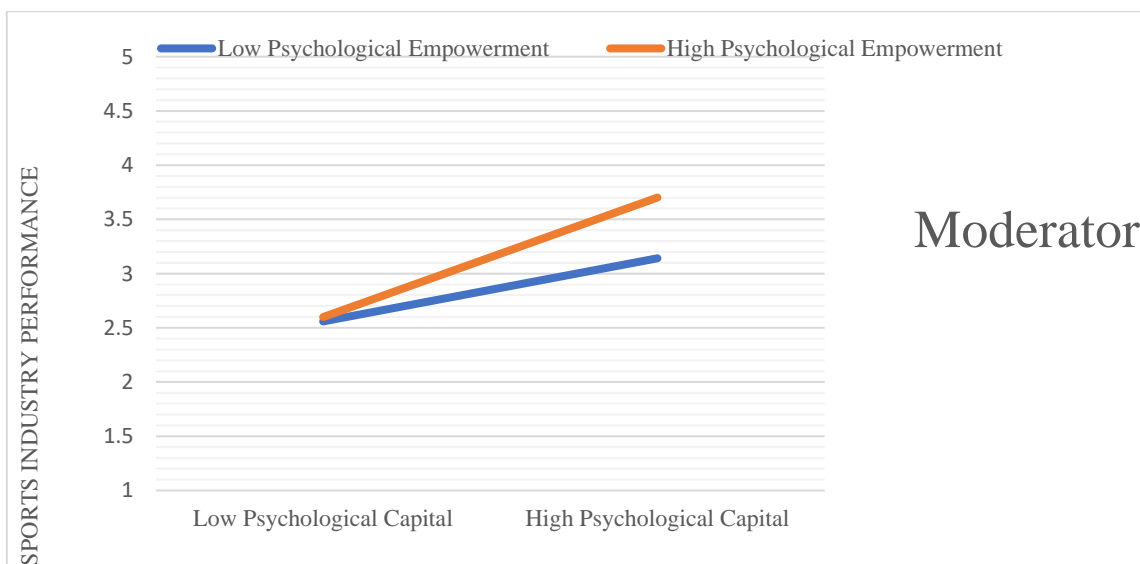


Figure 4. Moderation 1

Concerning moderating hypothesis five, the data indicate that psychological empowerment positively moderates the link between sports anxiety and sports industry

performance. Similarly, psychological strength improves the connection between sports anxiety and athletic performance (see Figure 5).

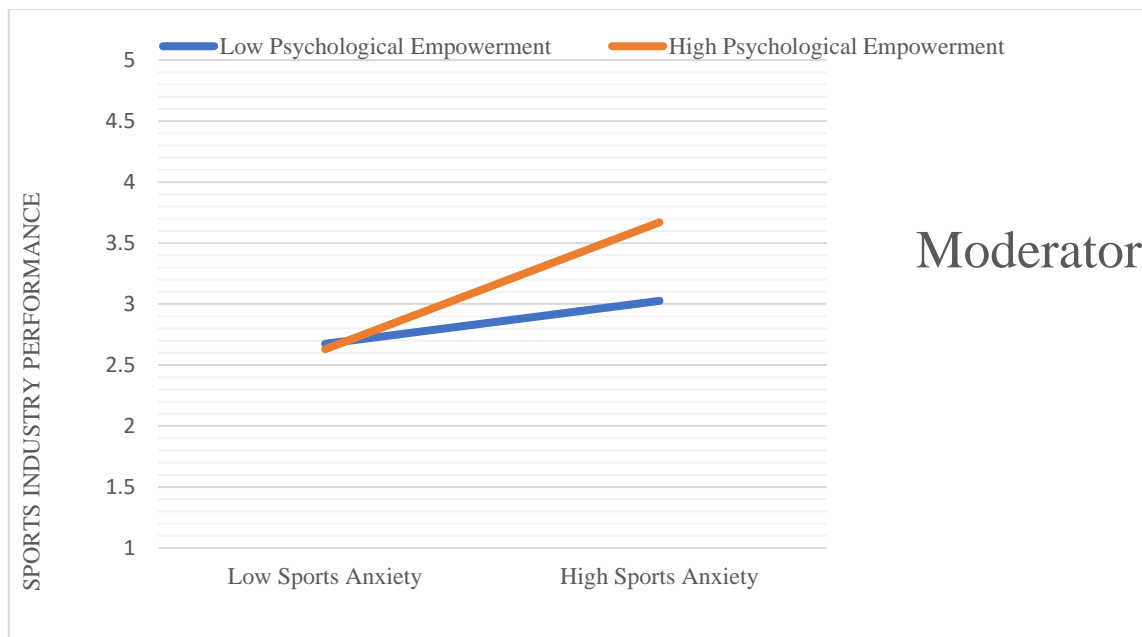


Figure 5. Moderation 2

Table 3

Hypotheses Results

Relationship	$\beta$	SD	t	p	Results
Psychological Capital -> Sports Industry Performance	0.421	0.093	4.524	0	Accepted
Sports Anxiety -> Sports Industry Performance	0.348	0.090	3.883	0	Accepted
Psychological Empowerment -> Sports Industry Performance	0.150	0.028	5.357	0	Accepted
Moderating Effect 1 -> Sports Industry Performance	0.130	0.018	7.222	0	Accepted
Moderating Effect 2 -> Sports Industry Performance	0.172	0.031	5.548	0	Accepted

### 5. Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, a structural equation model was utilized to determine the outcomes to assess hypotheses' acceptance or rejection. According to the first hypothesis's findings, psychological capital substantially affects the sports performance business. Hamid and Assad (2021) concluded that psychological capital is required for athletes to perform better. Lee et al. (2013) reported that players' performance could be enhanced if they are self-motivated. According to Simons and Bird (2022), athletes' performance contributes to improving the sports sector's performance. According to Yang et al. (2021), the sports industry can assist athletes willing to perform for the team. In contrast, Asberi (2016) defines psychological capital as the ability of team members to improve their performance. In this way, these study results are relevant to previous research findings.

The results of the second hypothesis are consistent with previous research examining the association between player performance and sports anxiety. The results of the third hypothesis indicated a significant association between sports anxiety and sports industry performance. Nicholls et

al. (2020) noted that individuals with average game performance are less appealing and less eager to participate in the game. Similarly, Hamid and Assad (2021) stated that the players' performance depends on their natural talent and that the performance of players with little ability to compete in the sport is less appealing. On the other side, Yang et al. (2021) stated that the sports concern of the athletes is a barrier to the country's development.

According to the third hypothesis's findings, psychological capital significantly impacts the performing sports industry. Behnam et al. (2020) stated that the psychological empowerment of players is vital for their enhanced performance in international sports. Chiu et al. (2022) suggested that players' performance might be boosted if they are self-motivated. According to Chiu et al. (2022), athlete performance helps the expansion of the sports industry. Al-Issawi and Al-Zubaidi (2021) determined that the performance of the athletes would improve if they were willing to work for the team. In this regard, Hamid and Assad (2021) emphasized that psychological empowerment refers to a player's ability to increase their contribution level in international games. This makes this study's findings relevant to those of prior investigations.

This study found that psychological empowerment moderates the link between psychological capital and performance in the sports business. Indeed, this study's findings are comparable to those of past studies. In this regard, [Chatpunyakul et al. \(2019\)](#) argued that the psychological empowerment of athletes is essential for their decent team performance. Similarly, [Nicholls et al. \(2020\)](#)'s findings emphasized the significance of psychological empowerment for players to achieve sportsmanship. According to [Hamid and Assad \(2021\)](#), players with great motivation and self-control can enhance the team's operation with superior performance.

In addition, the findings of this study indicated the strong moderating effect of psychological empowerment between sports anxiety and the sports performance industry. Intriguingly, the results of this study are comparable to those of previous research on the association between sports performance. [Nicholls et al. \(2020\)](#) found that players with great emotional control avoid nervousness and perform well in the team setting. Similarly, [Simons and Bird \(2022\)](#) concluded that psychological empowerment significantly impacts players' performance in any sport. In addition, [Lee et al. \(2013\)](#) found that players must have good self-control to increase their performance for enhanced learning. This study indicated that psychological empowerment, psychological capital, and sports anxiety play an important role in enhancing the performance of the Iraqi soccer sports industry.

## 6. Implications

Previous research in the literature examined the many viewpoints on sports industry performance. No study has addressed the importance of psychological capital, sports anxiety, and psychological empowerment in enhancing the performance of the Iraqi sports business. This research fills the void by introducing three key variables to the literature: psychological capital, sports anxiety, and psychological empowerment. The framework for the functioning of the sports industry is improved by the variables introduced in the literature. This study has demonstrated that psychological capital substantially affects the performance of the sports business.

Similarly, this study found that the impact of sports anxiety on the performance of the sports sector is excessively large. In addition, this study has demonstrated that psychological empowerment substantially affects sports industry performance. In addition, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge by introducing the moderating relationship. On the one hand, our study has demonstrated that the moderating effect of psychological

capital on sports industry performance is beneficial and increases this link. On the other hand, it has been underlined that the moderating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between sports anxiety and performance in the sports sector is beneficial and increases this association. Indeed, the theoretical framework of the current research is a significant contribution to the corpus of knowledge because it has expanded it.

This study's theoretical framework has signified various relationships. Therefore, this study has substantial practical implications for enhancing the performance of the Iraqi sports industry. This study stressed that for better players' training, the Iraqi government must offer them the best learning facilities, and they must not feel inferior or scared. In addition, this study revealed that the sports administration must prioritize the sustainable development of the sports business by improving the players' performance-related resources. In addition, the players should be motivated to improve their performance since this would help them create a better mindset for future games.

On the other hand, teamwork between motivational speakers and the sports board should be promoted because external inspiration can enhance the intrinsic motivation of the athletes. Therefore, this external motivation should be utilized positively to enhance self-efficacy, the desire to win, and self-esteem. Similarly, these measurements are essential for minimizing negative thinking, such as defeat anxiety. In this way, these variables are crucial for improving soccer players' performance in Iraq to enhance the sports business's performance.

## 7. Future Directions

Although the theoretical framework of this study is prepared to offer substantial literature to the body of knowledge to improve the framework of sports industry performance with the aid of the new variables introduced in this study, the framework is not yet complete. In this sense, the new research has practical significance for enhancing the performance of Iraqi soccer players. In addition to implications, this study provides future research recommendations based on the study's shortcomings in this area of literature. This study's limitation is the collection of cross-sectional data for determining the outcomes. Therefore, future studies must emphasize longitudinal data to provide more information regarding employees' psychological empowerment and performance.

Similarly, the scope of this study is restricted to the influence of psychological capital, psychological



empowerment, and sports anxiety in the performance of the sports sector. However, the literature study revealed that other elements also influence the performance and marketing of sports. Therefore, the function of intrinsic motivation and external coaching for players'

performance in the sports sector must be the focus of academic research. Lastly, this study is limited to soccer players, but future research should evaluate the conclusions using data from players of other sports, not only soccer.

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