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Sport tourism marketing by Ecotourism resources and unnatural attractions

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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim of present study is the role of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attraction in marketing of sport tourists to Iran. The method of research is descriptive - survey. Research instrument was researcher made questionnaire which was distributed among 23 active individuals of sport tourists in a pilot study and its reliability was obtained 0.85 by Cronbakh Alpha coefficient. The statistical population of the research was composed of 141 active sport tourists (players, coaches, supervisors and the others) who have traveled to Iran from different countries in the form of sport teams for performing formal and friendly games. The sampling method was convenience sampling. In inferential analysis of research data, single variable t and F in significant level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ were used. **Results:** The research findings showed that ecotourism resources (mountain, desert, coast and sea, ski tracks and etc), presenting financial rewards and valuable rewards for games and competitions, architecture and traditional places, buying souvenirs and handicraft products of the host country are respectively prioritized. **Conclusion:** According to obtained information, it was cleared that the role ecotourism resources (natural attractions) in marketing of sport tourist to Iran is more important than unnatural attractions.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, tourist industry is considered as one of the most important resources for earning and by strong transferring of the purchase of industrial and urban areas to the points were are less developed, makes balanced among these areas and transform the face of regional and local business with regard to their credit [9]. Sport tourism is a joyful traveling which encourages the people with motivation to participate in physical activities, watch the physical activity or enjoy the sport attractions, travel and temporarily being away from their living place [3]. Sport tourism includes traveling in order to participate in a sporting ceremony in the form of passive (watching sporting happenings and sporting museums and etc) or active (Ski, Golf and...) [8]. Ecotourism (nature tourism) includes sea, mountains and mountain slopes, ski tracks, coasts, cave traveling, rock travelling and etc. it should be considered that developing this branch of sporting resources in Iran isn't faced with social, moral and religious limitations of other urban tourism branches and on the other hand, it is specified by world tourism organization of next century in urban tourism of ecotourism era and in this type of sporting tourism resources in towns, it is sometimes possible that the place of these resources (such as mountains, desert, sea and coasts, ski tracks and etc) be located out of town limit, but it is certain that serving these places is performed through surrounding cities and the earned income from this kind of sporting tourism is directly and indirectly injected to cities [4]. Availability of God-given natural attractions in an area or a country can also influence on attracting sporting tourist, for example, having high mountains, vast seas, snow covered areas, clamorous rivers, deserts, sand dunes and salt desert and other factors are undeniable in attraction of sporting tourism. There are countries where there are no such natural attractions, but in order to attract sporting tourism act to provide artificial attractions, for example some countries have performed to build artificial ski tracks and it is interesting for tourists to ski on artificial snow which is made by new technology in a warm area and in an appropriate and covered space. Constructing huge swimming pool and artificial waves are among these executions which has attracted the boating adventurers of clamorous waters. Establishment of facilities and sporting tourism infrastructures in the country has itself led to attraction of sporting tourism [7].

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Chalip and Green (2001), in studies conducted on Sydney Olympics games 2000 suggested that restaurants, cafes and recreational and natural spaces can arrange social gatherings in related to sport and the likes before and after event happening. China attracts many tourists due to its traditional sport, that is, Kong Foe as well as corresponding natural and historical spaces [2]. Braze (2002) in an analysis about the factors influencing on presence and participation of tourists in public sporting activities, mentioned to “the cost for traveling to destination”, “the cost of using facilities for body activities” and “geographical factors” as the factors which, if possible, can lead to attraction of tourists for participating in public sporting activities. He has addressed the tourism attractions for visitor tourists from public sporting happenings in this way: participating in public sport activities, walking for experiencing the suburb, promenade in nature environment, running, biking, driving, swimming, surfing, diving and other water recreations, water parks, tennis, golf, sporting activities for disabled, sport festivals and field (desert) adventures [1]. Kozak (2002), in his study, turned to compare tourist’s motives with respect to their nationalities and their regarded destination. He found that residing facilities, climate, price levels, geographical place of destination and availability of sea and seaside were the most important reasons which English tourists have addressed for going to Turkey and Malta. The most important reasons of German tourists for choosing Malta were: climate, availability of sea and seaside, duration of flight, price levels and geographical location of destination. Even though, German tourists who had chosen Turkey for tourism addressed their reasons as climate, availability of sea and seaside, price levels, culture, people and views and perspectives, respectively[5].

Honarvar (2004) has considered the most important factor of attracting sport tourists to international happenings from tourism manager perspectives as “the existence of landscapes and interesting places in host country” and expressed the availability to sea, seaside and commonality of favorite spots (natural attractions) and the existence of landscapes, views and interesting places in host countries as the factors attracting the tourists [11]. Mahmoudi Yekta(2008), in his study called “determining the attracting and preventing factors of active sporting tourists traveling to Iran” states the natural and unnatural attractions as one of the important factors in attraction of sporting tourists[10]. SardiMahakan (2001) in a study, turned to investigate the marketing role in tourism industry of Mashhad from the point of view of tourism agency managers of this town. He concluded that in related to tourism productions, pilgrimage centers, historical places and ancient buildings, the status of residential facilities and people and authorities behaviors are considered important from tourists’ point of view [6]. In most conducted studies on attracting factors, the important role of natural and unnatural attractions is somewhat mentioned. With respect to the general objective of the research which is the role of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attractions in marketing of sporting tourists, it is tried to answer to the two following questions:

1. Do ecotourism resources (natural attractions) including (mountains, deserts, seaside, sea and ski tracks and etc) and unnatural attractions including (ancient building and architecture, presenting financial rewards and valuable prizes for matches and games, buying souvenirs and handicraft products of the host country) have important role in marketing of sporting tourists to Iran? How is the role of stated questions in this component based on their priorities?
2. Is there any difference among the point of views of active sporting tourists in related to ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attractions based on the responsibility in the team?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research is descriptive - survey. The statistical population is composed of 141 active sporting tourists (players, coaches, supervisors and the others) from Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Greece, Sweden, Canada, Jordan, Kuwait and India, who traveled to Iran in the form of sporting teams in the first 6 months of the year in order to do friendly and formal matches. The sampling method is available sampling. In order to determine the samples, we performed to take the sporting calendar of different federations and found the plans of federations in which we were witnessing the presence of sporting tourists in terms of certain time and place thereby we could access to samples. The instrument for data collection was two parts researcher made questionnaire with regard to the parsimony doctrine (time and cost saving). The first part included individual features and the second part was composed of questions related to factors attracting the natural and unnatural attractions. Reliability of the questionnaire in a directory study including 23 people of sporting tourists was obtained 0.85 by Cronbakh Alpha method. With respect to the variability of the tourists’ nationality (samples), the questions and items of the questionnaire were translated to many different languages which included English, German, French, Russian, Armenian and Arabic. Analyzing the research data was performed in two inferential and descriptive levels. In descriptive analysis, Frequency, average, standard deviation and in deductive analysis, single variable t and F were applied. Considered areas were Tehran (badminton), urmia (Taekwondo), Tabriz (basketball), Isfahan (karate), Qazvin (handball and ping pong), Mashhad (field running), Qom (wrestling) and Kish (seaside volleyball) where the matches were held in.

Result:**1. The survey of first question:**

Do the ecotourism resources (natural attraction) and unnatural attraction tourism have important role in the willingness of sent sporting tourists to Iran? How is the role of stated questions in this component based on their priorities?

Table 1: the results of single variable t test, comparing the average of factors active sport tourists marketing factors with middle level (m=3)

variables	Mean level	Average	Standard deviation	t	Significant level (p≤0.05)
Unnatural attractions	3	3.72	0.90	3.42	0.001
ecotourism resources (natural attractions)	3	3.21	0.91	3.11	0.001

The resulted average from deductive analysis of t test in the significant level of $\alpha=0.05$ was higher than mean level of (3), so it can be mentioned that both factors were effective in marketing of sporting tourists. But the influence of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) of the host country (mountains, deserts, sea, ski tracks and ...) was more than unnatural attractions.

Table 2: The values of weighted average of sample group in proportion to the questions related to the marketing of sport tourists

The questions related to the ecotourism resources (natural attractions)		Weighted average
1	The ecotourism resources of the host country (mountains, deserts, seaside, sea, ski tracks and...)	3.86
The question related to unnatural attraction components		
2	Ancient places and architecture of the host country	3.23
3	Buying souvenirs and handicraft products	3.16
4	Presenting financial rewards and valuable prizes for games and matches	3.04

According to the results of the above table, on the questions related to ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attraction components had the highest weighted average with respect to the priority.

2. The survey of second question:

Is there any difference among the points of view of active sporting tourists in related to ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attractions based on the responsibility in the team?

Table 3: The values of average and standard deviation from the point of view of sporting tourists

Attracting factors	Player		Coach		Supervisor		Doctor and the others	
	Average	S.D	Average	S.D	Average	S.D	Average	S.D
ecotourism resources (natural attractions)	10.39	3.27	11.38	1.32	11.12	3.40	10	1.77
Unnatural attractions	8.43	3.16	10.11	2.21	9.88	3.11	9.43	1.05

According to table (3), the result about ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attraction components showed that the average of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) in all groups was higher than unnatural attractions. The average of supervisors' group and team coaches was higher than the other groups.

Table 4: The results of F test: comparing the average of sporting tourists' point of view based on the responsibility in the team

Responsibility in the team	Attracting factors	The total squares (roots)	Average of squares	F	α
	Ecotourism resources (natural attractions)	17.20	5.71	0.56	0.61
	Unnatural attraction	15.82	5.11	0.58	0.69

Based on the table (4), according to the results of observed F in the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ there is a difference between the points of view of sporting tourists based on the responsibility in the team in related to the mentioned components, but this difference is not significant.

Discussion and conclusion:

The findings about the first questions showed that the obtained average, based on sporting tourists' opinions is higher than the mean level in relation to ecotourism resources (natural attraction) and unnatural attraction factor. So, in their opinion, the ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attractions of a country can be one of the attracting factors and marketing for celebrating games and creating willingness and eagerness in athletes in order to travel to that country due to creation of happiness and diversity as well as creating the enjoying time for the tourists. The items studied in this regard were: the ecotourism resources of the host country (mountains, desert, seaside, sea and ski tracks and etc) which were the preference for the tourists. That is the Presenting of financial rewards and valuable prizes for games and matches and ancient places and

architecture of the host country which have been confirmed by the tourists of sample group. The existence of ancient buildings shows the ancient history of the host country and can represent useful historical information to the tourists and they can also find the possible historical link with their own country, so, in addition to propagation of the culture of the host country, showing the ancient and historical places can lead to national and cultural link among the countries. Specifying the financial rewards and valuable and competent prizes for games and matches has also important role in attraction of the tourists.

The existence of special souvenirs and handicrafts of the host country was also among the factors which can attract sporting tourists. Handicrafts is usually welcomed by tourists since it can remind the tourists (buyers) of the game memories and traveling to countries, so, diversity of the handicrafts and souvenir products as well as considering their quality beside protection of memories for the athletes can result in interest and willingness to further travelling as well as propagating the culture of the host country.

The influence of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attraction factors on the tourists' willingness in the studies of MahmoudiYekta (2008), Honarvar (2004), SardiMahakan (2001), Braze (2002), Chalip and Green (2001) were also acknowledged and mentioned studies reported it as an attracting factor for the tourists which is compatible with the findings of the present study.

The findings on the influence of ecotourism resources (natural attraction) and unnatural attractions from sporting tourist's point of view, based on the responsibility in the team showed that no significant difference was observable among the opinions of the players, supervisors, coaches, doctors and the others in this regard and they have reached consensus in this field. Therefore, players, coaches, supervisors, doctors and the other people of the foreign participants in the games believe that both ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attractions can influence on marketing of the sporting tourists, however the influence of ecotourism resources (natural attractions) is more than the unnatural ones. If these factors are strengthened, we can witness the strong presence of the sporting tourists. Investigation of the average of these four groups shows that the average of supervisor groups and coaches of the team was higher than the other groups in relation to ecotourism resources (natural attractions) and unnatural attraction factors.

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