

Designing A System Dynamics Pattern of Marketing in Sports Tourism Destinations; A Qualitative Research

Received: 2022-02-20

Accepted: 2022-06-18

Vol. 4, No.3. Summer .2023, 1-16

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Abstract

Purpose: Destination marketing is now a pillar of the growth and sustainability of tourism destinations to ensure the growth and economic development of destinations in an increasingly globalized and competitive market for tourists. The purpose of the present study was to design a pattern for marketing sports tourism destinations in Ardabil province.

Methods: This study was applied research. Thus, this research was conducted using a qualitative approach. The statistical population of this study consisted of sports management experts, tourism and economy experts, managers of the cultural heritage & tourism department, managers of the Sport & Youth department, provincial government managers, municipality managers, parliament members & tourism agencies managers of Ardabil province. A mix of some theoretical sampling methods was utilized to select the samples of this study, unstructured qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data in our study. Theoretical saturation was obtained following 21 interviews. data analysis was conducted systematically by using the thematic analysis method in Nvivo 12 Plus software.

Results: 61 codes were identified after analyzing data which were classified into 7 main classes (Informing and advertising, Tourism packages, Destination brand, Motivation and encouragement, Destination Image, and Destination Endorsements) based on their importance. Finally, the Pattern of the dynamic system of marketing sport tourism destinations was drawn with Vensim PLE.

Conclusion: The results of the present study provide the politicians and planners of this province with adequate approaches to approaches to accelerate the development of tourism destinations economically in Ardabil Province.

Keywords: Sport Tourism, Tourism Destinations, Destination Marketing, system dynamic.

Introduction

Today, the tourism industry has been identified as one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world (Sandelin & Fiechtner, 2020; 11). Many countries have looked to tourism as a means of earning export revenue, creating jobs, promoting economic diversification and enhancing the performance of the service sector. (Ravinthirakumaran et al., 2019; 249), confronting the 21st-century machine life (Bagheri et al., 2018; 417), confronting problems such as unemployment, limited foreign exchange resources, and a single-product economy (sharbati, 2015; 2), GDP growth, increasing job opportunities, income and improving standards of living (Ma et al., 2020; 2), Etc. Given the importance and role of tourism in development, today most countries, especially countries that have this advantage in terms of location, use it in their national and regional development programs and thus accelerate their national development process (Javid, 2020; 5). Sports tourism is one of the most important areas of tourism that can lead to development as a huge source of income in different situations. Sports tourism connects two separate but increasingly important areas of socio-economic development: one of the largest economic sectors in the world (tourism) and one of the most globally influential activities (sports events and activities) (Uvinha et al., 2018;181). Each of these industries has developed rapidly, become a global phenomenon, and played a major role in the development of most of the world's economies (Zouni et al., 2020; 2). For this reason, this form of tourism, in particular, has received international attention and participation because of the organization of mega-events as strategic for place branding with sports as a channel of public diplomacy (Uvinha et al., 2018;181).

Most aspects of tourism occur in tourism destinations; Because of this, the World Tourism Organization has suggested that the destination be used as "the fundamental units of analysis in

tourism" (Martins et al., 2021;1). Tourism destinations refer to a place where tourists tend to spend their time outdoors. This geographical unit visited by tourists can be an independent center such as a beach resort or a ski slope, a village or a city, a region or an island or a country (Javid, 2020;86). The tourism destination has components such as accommodation, access, infrastructure and superstructures, tourist attractions, and various facilities. Because of having many varied components, the destination needs an efficient and effective system to increase its efficiency to function in a coordinated and integrated manner to achieve its goals and increase tourist satisfaction (Juvan & Ovsenik, 2008; 35). Efforts to effectively manage destinations to increase quality and efficiency, and especially to satisfy tourists to create a favorable mental image, has become a vital goal for officials and employees of tourism destinations, which can be implemented through various tools. One of the effective ways to achieve this is by marketing tourism destinations.

Tourism marketing is the oldest type of destination management activity that is known as a set of different methods to promote destination sales (Pourjahan, 2011; 7). Destination marketing is considered the main pillar of future growth and sustainability of tourism destinations, ensures the economic growth and development of destinations in a competitive and growing global market (Pike & Page, 2014; 202), and plays a decisive role in how to achieve success and goals in the short term and medium term for tourism destinations (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2020; 2). Therefore, identifying the effective components in the marketing of tourism destinations is of great importance. Determining the key components influencing tourism destination marketing to improve destination management is so important that it is expressed in the general model of destination competitiveness (model proposed by Crouch and Ritchie, 1998) as well as the interconnected model by Doyer and Kim (2001)

has become one of the main dimensions of tourism destination management (Pourjahan, 2011; 29). The growth of competition in the tourism market has caused those in charge of tourism destinations in recent years to pay special attention to the development and application of marketing methods to attract more tourists (Torkestani et al., 2019; 30). However, the large number of actors in tourism destinations that share public infrastructure, as well as the scattered and complex nature of the tourism industry, make destination marketing management difficult and necessitate significant cooperation and coordination in destination marketing (Khalilzadeh & Wang, 2018; 14). Since most of the products of the tourism industry are services, they are different from the marketing of goods due to their characteristics such as invisibility, intangibility, inseparability, unpossessability, non-storability, and also seasonality (Javid, 2020; 86).

One of the characteristics of the tourism industry is that its products are intangible, so if their products are not sold within a day, they cannot be stored in one room for the coming months, for example, if hotel rooms, plane tickets, or festival tickets are not sold within a specific day, their economic value will be exactly zero (Corluka, 2019; 33). In addition, because travelers are not able to evaluate (touch or feel, etc.) tourism products and services before the trip, information is the only thing they have when planning a trip. Tourists also tend to use the principle of minimum effort to obtain useful information easily and as soon as possible (Önder et al., 2020; 1). Therefore, marketing is essential for businesses for tourism destinations (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2020; 1). Today, there are new methods for providing information and marketing destinations. One of the easiest ways to retrieve travel information is to go to tourist destination pages on the Internet (Önder et al., 2020; 1). Also, most consumers tend to rely on people's advice before deciding to travel. When choosing a tourist destination, tourists trust peer advice and user-generated content more than

traditional advertising. This has made online influencer marketing an important strategic tool for destination marketers (Javits, 2019; 13). So, the change like traditional marketing and the use of new methods for destination marketing is for sure. Therefore, destination management should pay great attention to new forms of marketing and use them in its marketing strategies to achieve the target population and ensure the presence of tourists in host communities.

Ardabil province is one of the destinations of tourism and sports tourism in Iran, because of its mountainous location and high altitude, favorable climate, potential and many capacities in various types of sports tourism, including hosting national and international events, winter sports tourism, adventure tourism, hunting tourism, indigenous and local sports tourism, tourism tours and sports camps, ecotourism and nature tourism. Studies and expert opinions show that Ardabil province, despite having rich potential and unique natural gifts of tourism, has not yet been able to use these capacities and achieve much success in attracting sports tourists. To improve the status of the tourism system in each destination, its marketing plays an essential role in ensuring the presence of a sufficient number of tourists in the region, especially during the tourism downturn. For this reason, determining the basic components of marketing in this regard is a powerful factor for success in destination management. With such components, it is possible to provide key strategies for the destinations to attract and satisfy tourists, ensure sustainable development, and gain and maintain a strong position in the tourism market. In addition, looking at the research, clearly despite the importance of destination marketing and the strong correlation between destination marketing and destination development, limited studies have examined this issue. In most of these studies, the existing methods are mainly based on the application of one or more structural relationships of recognizable variables and quantitative patterns. Since with such methods, it is difficult to

consider all the factors affecting tourism marketing and study their effects, and the various factors affecting it are not limited to quantitatively recognizable variables, to understand the effects precisely and logically, one must look comprehensively and adopt a systemic perspective to examine the various dimensions of this issue. On the other hand, the system dynamics methodology has considerable flexibility and can support both purely qualitative and strong quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis provides the necessary knowledge about different relationships and their possible effects, while quantitative analysis is based on the simulation and construction of different scenarios. Therefore, the present study will present a dynamic model for marketing sports tourism destinations by using the system dynamics approach.

Materials and Methods

This work was applied research based on its purpose, hence qualitative content analysis did. Participants were specialists in sports management, tourism, and economics, managers of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and Sports and Youth, governors, managers of municipalities, members of parliament, and managers of tourism agencies in Ardabil province, in this study. To select the research samples, a combination of snowball sampling, important political figures, critical cases, criterion, and theoretical sampling was used. A code was assigned to each interviewee. The table below shows the details of the statistical sample of participants.

Table 1. Details of the interview participants

Row	Interview code	Gender	Education	Field of activity		Duration of interview
				Executive	Academic	
1	U01	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management	✓	✓	01:28:03
2	U02	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management	✓		00:24:38
3	U03	Man	Ph.D. in Economics	✓	✓	00:50:45
4	U04	Man	Ph.D. in Tourism	✓	✓	00:36:14
5	U05	Man	Master of Tourism	✓		01:14:11
6	U06	Man	Ph.D. student in Sports Management	✓		01:26:40
7	U07	Female	Ph.D. in Sports Management		✓	00:41:53
8	U08	Man	Master of Management	✓		00:57:41
9	U09	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management	✓		00:33:48
10	U10	Man	Ph.D. in Economics		✓	00:30:44
11	U11	Man	Ph.D. in Tourism		✓	00:46:53
12	U12	Man	Ph.D. in Management	✓	✓	00:20:44
13	U13	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management	✓	✓	01:25:32
14	U14	Man	Ph.D. in Economics		✓	00:25:41
15	U15	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management		✓	01:08:07
16	U16	Man	Ph.D. in Tourism	✓	✓	00:42:01
17	U17	Female	Master of Sports Management	✓		00:20:50
18	U18	Man	Ph.D. in Sports Management		✓	01:22:49
19	U19	Man	Ph.D. in Tourism	✓	✓	00:32:03

20	U20	Man	Ph.D. in Economics	✓	✓	00:56:32
21	U21	Man	Ph.D. student in Sports Management	✓	✓	01:06:10

* In addition to the interview, some of the interviewees provided notes on the subject to the researchers.

** Some interviewees were not allowed to record the full interview.

*** For this research, ethical protocols and charters in qualitative research such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, consequences, and the role of the researcher in the research design are discussed and tried to be observed as much as possible.

In this study, unstructured qualitative interviews were used to collect information. Although in the interviews, experts were asked to provide their views on the subject of research in general and the most important components affecting the marketing of sports tourism destinations in the province, to guide the interviews, some of the questions raised in the interviews were as follows: 1. What are the most important challenges and factors hindering the marketing of sports tourism destinations in the province and how can they be solved? 2. In your opinion, what should we consider in identifying the potential and capacities of sports tourism in this province? 3. In your opinion, how can we design suitable and attractive sports tourism packages for tourism destinations? 4. What factors can play the most important role in the formation of the destination image? 5. As you mentioned, tourists are our customers and, according to the principle of marketing, we must keep them satisfied so that they come to this destination again. How do you think we can encourage tourists to come to this destination again? 6. In what event or activities related to sports tourism can we present ourselves as a brand? Which sports tourism-related activity in the province has the potential to become a brand? Does branding in sports tourists of Ardabil province affect the development of sports tourism in the

province? 7. With what incentives can we attract more sports tourists to the province? And other questions like that. After 21 interviews, the codes reached theoretical saturation. For this research, ethical protocols and charters in qualitative research such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, consequences, and the role of the researcher in the research design are proposed and tried to be observed as much as possible. To record data, some interviews were audio-recorded, where the interviewees were allowed, and others were recorded by the researcher. In some cases, experts took notes on the research and provided them to the researcher. After each interview, the collected data were entered into Nvivo 12 Plus software and encoded for analysis. Clark & Brunn's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyze the text of the interviews. To achieve the validity and reliability of this study, also using qualitative validation methods such as acceptability, consistency, determination, transferability, etc., the findings were provided to three interviewees and were evaluated by them. In the second stage of the research, the system dynamics approach was used to provide a model. In a way, using the system dynamics tool and through Vensim software, significant relationships were identified between the effective variables in the marketing of sports tourism destinations, and with the revelation of the effective factors, a model for establishing the marketing of sports tourism destinations was presented.

Results

In the text of the interviews, 292 items were coded (total number of references). The process of identifying the codes was reciprocal. In other words, first, by studying the literature on the subject, the basic concepts and the whole of the marketing model of sports tourism destinations were extracted. Then, by conducting interviews

and introducing new and more detailed concepts, we referred to the literature again to search for the equivalent of the discussions raised in the interviews in the literature. With this process, 61 codes were finally identified. It should be noted that in the text of the interviews, some of the codes had several frequencies that

are shown in the software in the form of references. Because of the large volume of data, not all of them have been included, and only an example of how to extract one of the primary codes from verbal propositions has been indicated in the form of Table 2.

Table 2. Example of a code definition

Code	Interview text
Countering the propaganda of the world's powerful media against Iran	Thoughts about Iran abroad are negative thoughts. Iran and the region are not fully known in the world (U02).
	We have heavy propaganda against Iran on an international scale. In this propaganda, Iran is shown as a place of insecurity. No matter how much we advertise, it is difficult for a foreign tourist to enter Iran with these conditions (U05).
	One of the biggest reasons for the lack of development of tourism destinations is that there is an attack on Iran on an international scale and many countries have declared Iran as an insecure country Tourists who are going to Iran are afraid to travel to Iran. However, according to studies, more than 90% of tourists entering Iran left with satisfaction and considered Iran a safe country. But the powerful media of the world, which is in the hands of the developed countries, is doing its job and has some kind of propaganda about Iran, and this is a big obstacle in the way of our international tourism (U10).

The table of final codes extracted from the interviews and the categories extracted from the concepts along with the number of codes and their references are shown in Table 3. As it is

known, by performing the content analysis process, in these steps, 61 final codes are classified into 7 main categories.

Table 3. Effective Factors in marketing sports tourism destinations

Main themes	Final codes	Code frequency	Reference
Informing and advertising	Allocating more time to provincial and national media to introduce the potential and tourism activities of the province	10	13
	Providing e-tourism services (virtual tours, hotel reservations, ticket purchases, etc.)	2	3
	Using the Internet and new media and social networks for tourism advertising	15	21
	Accurate and appropriate notice about tourism programs and events	5	5
	oral and word-of-mouth advertising	2	2
	Interacting with foreign media and signing memoranda of understanding with neighboring countries and television and satellite networks to promote sports tourism attractions	5	5
	Providing a portal and a platform for sports tourism in the province	3	5
	Prepare teasers and clips in different languages to introduce the tourism capabilities of the destinations	5	7
	Preparing and broadcasting programs and films focusing on sports tourism	5	8
	Preparing and distributing maps, brochures, posters, and booklets to introduce the province's special attractions to sports tourists	2	2
	Attending international travel and tourism exhibitions	2	6
	Launching comprehensive databases and websites for sports tourism attractions and events	6	9
	Lack of organized activity in social networks	2	3
	Introducing the destination by a specialized institution	4	7
	Countering the propaganda of the world's powerful media against Iran	6	7
Tourism pack	Existence of private television networks	1	1
	Providing sports and health tourism packages	1	2
	Holding attractive tours according to the local culture, tractor tours, horse riding, and horse-drawn carriage tours	3	3

	Ring tourism package	2	3
	Winter tourism package (skiing, hydrotherapy, jet skiing)	1	1
	Sports tourism packages designed for the elderly, staff, university students, and students	1	1
	A combination of history, nature, and sports tourism	4	5
	Incorporating events into tourism packages	2	2
	Sports camps	2	2
Destination brand	Defining a specific brand for sports tourism	4	5
	Daghchlar Bayrami (Climbers' Festival)	1	2
	Investing in one or two fields in which the province has great potential	2	3
	Indigenous, local, and nomadic sports	3	6
	Recreational and entertainment sports	1	2
	Equipped with winter sports and ski slope	1	3
	Adventure sports	3	5
	Summer Sport area	2	2
Motivation and encouragement	Using dynamic pricing according to the different characteristics of people in the community	1	1
	Holding a free camp to introduce the facilities and conditions of the destination	2	2
	Lottery or advertising contest	1	1
	Reducing the cost of expenses related to sports tourism activities	2	2
	Promotional gifts with brands and slogans or the most important sport's attraction in the province	1	1
	Identifying the Motivation of sports tourists	3	3
	Using new marketing methods	1	2
Management and manpower	Creating challenges in social networks to participate in and visit sports tourism attractions or share sports events in the province	1	1
	Highlighting new and exciting items in the area	1	1
	Allocating appropriate credit and budget for advertising and marketing	1	2
	Developing a sports tourism marketing strategy	2	2
	Forming a specialized committee consisting of people and organizations in charge of advertising	1	1
	Identifying and categorizing target markets according to the proximity of religious, political, and ethnic issues and...	5	8
	Existence of policies and programs for advertising and marketing	1	1
Destination Image	Quality of infrastructure	3	3
	Defining tourist routes	4	5
	Variety of programs	2	3
	The spirit of hospitality	4	4
	The quality of service	9	13
	Existence of security in destinations	2	4
	The charm and quality of a sporting event	3	3
	Proper interaction of the host community	1	1
	Status of prices and travel expenses	1	2
	Mental Perceptions and Experiences of the Destination	1	1
	Satisfying tourists	3	3
Destination Endorsements	Using famous and popular artistic and sports figures in advertising the attractions of the province	3	3
	Using tourism influencers to promote the province's attractions	4	4
	Selecting a famous sports figure as the ambassador of sports tourism in the province	1	1

According to the qualitative findings and taking into account the main categories obtained in this study, the factors affecting the marketing of

sports tourism destinations were designed. Figure 1 shows the factors affecting the marketing of sports tourism destinations.



Figure 1. Effective Factors in marketing sports tourism destinations

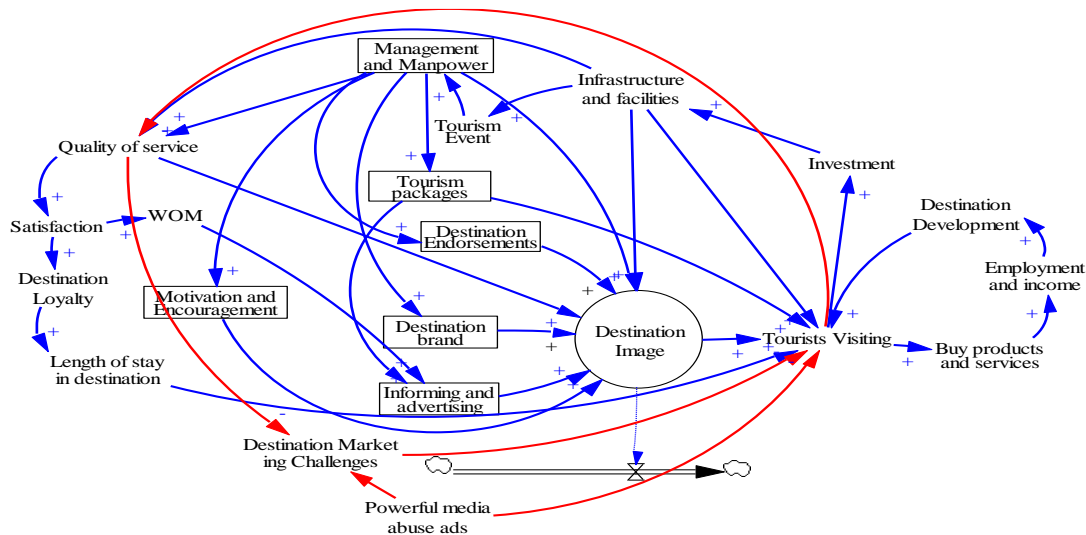


Figure 2. Qualitative System Dynamics Model Marketing of sports tourism destinations

According to Figure 2, by investing in tourism destinations, infrastructures will develop. If there is a proper infrastructure, tourism will increase, as described in the infrastructure subsystem itself. On the other hand, the existence of infrastructure leads to an increase in the number of sports tourism events. If the existing tourism infrastructure and events at the destination increase, the management of the destinations of the tourism packages will be better designed, and, consequently, more publicity and notice will be provided in this regard. With the increase in advertisements and

information, tourists' awareness of the attractions and potential of the destination increase. As a result, more tourists are attracted to the destination. On the other hand, destination marketing management can improve the validation and image of the destination using marketing tools such as brand definition. The more positive the image of the destination, the more tourists will be and remain loyal to the destination. On the other hand, satisfaction with the travel experience not only motivates people to travel to a tourist destination again but also leads to satisfied tourists encouraging others to

travel to that place. Positive tourist experience of services and products can lead to repeating travel and a satisfied tourist by sharing travel experiences with friends and relatives can lead to attracting potential tourists. On the other hand, the advice of previous tourists can be a more reliable source of information for potential tourists. But in the negative cycle, the existence of marketing and advertising challenges such as the propaganda of the world's powerful media against Iran, the lack of policies and programs for advertising and marketing, the lack of organized activity on social networks, etc., destroy the destination image, which also reduces the number of sports tourists to the desired destinations. Another negative cycle that can occur in a tourism destination marketing system is the lack of investment in the development of destination infrastructure. Lack and weakness in tourism infrastructure reduce the quality of service and service, and this leads to dissatisfaction among tourists and causes negative advertising, consequently destroying the brand and image of the destination and reducing the number of tourists. Finally, another negative cycle that may occur in developed destinations is when the number of tourists in a destination exceeds the capacity of that destination. Increasing the number of tourists reduces the quality of services, there is dissatisfaction in the host community. In any case, it will reduce the number of tourists in the destinations.

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to determine the effective factors and provide a comprehensive model for marketing sports tourism destinations in Ardabil province. Data analysis identified 61 unique codes related to the marketing of sports tourism destinations. According to their importance and frequency, they were classified into 7 main categories, which included information and advertising factors, tourism packages, branding definition, motivation and encouragement, management and manpower,

destination image, and destination validation.

One of the influential components of the marketing of sports tourism destinations in this research was information and advertising. One of the reasons that persuade travelers to travel to a particular destination is advertising. Also, only a place can attract tourists if it is known and tourists are aware of the existence of such a place, its unique features and special attractions, and the type of facilities available in it, and ensure the convenience of providing enough welfare facilities during the trip to that place. Without advertising and media awareness, tourist attractions, no matter how attractive and worthy of tourism, will not be very successful in this industry due to the lack of awareness of travelers and tourists about their existence (Javid & Asadi, 2018; 32). Islami et al. (2016) in a study considered advertising and information as the most important factors in attracting tourists from other countries (Eslami et al., 2016; 6). One of the issues that was highly emphasized in advertising and information was the use of the Internet and new media and social networks for advertising tourism destinations. People obtain travel information from various sources, but the Internet has certainly become one of the main sources of information collection, and one of the easiest ways to retrieve travel information is to refer to tourist destination pages on the Internet (Önder et al., 2020; 1). Recent research has shown that one of the main currents that have had a significant impact on the tourism system has been the presence of social media in marketing services for tourism services (Mohammadi, 2017; 76)

Today, a considerable percentage of people are active on the Internet and social networks. According to statistics, the total number of active Internet users is 4.54 billion and the total number of active users of social networks worldwide is approximately 3.88 billion (Statista, 2020; 1). And almost 90% of Internet users rely on web information as part of their travel process information (Cox et al., 2009;

746). Media and social networks can influence the attraction of domestic and foreign tourists to various destinations by influencing behavioral variables (meshkini et al., 2018; 54). For this reason, social media is commonly used by destination marketing organizations and other tourism and hospitality organizations for destination marketing (Önder et al., 2020; 12). One of the importance of the Internet and new media in tourism is to facilitate the process of collecting information (Önder et al., 2016). Tourists today can access various sources of information, they can also produce their content and share their opinions and experiences of traveling to different places (Alaei et al., 2019; 176). Tourism content shared through social media plays an influential role in persuading or dissuading potential tourists from choosing specific tourism destinations (meshkini et al., 2018; 54). Therefore, social networks have significant potential in determining the success or failure of tourism policies. These networks provide facilities to tourists who, before implementing the decision to travel to specific points, virtually and through Web tools enter the desired location and by studying and viewing textual, audio, and video information, find the possibility of travel and the advantages and disadvantages of this trip and easily decide on this trip.

The necessity of paying attention to the role of the Internet and new media in the findings of researchers such as Chang et al. (2017) and Javid et al. (2013) can also be seen. Chang et al. (2017) believe that in general, destination management organizations are responsible for producing and disseminating a positive image of the destination for tourists, and because of the popularity of social media, they are used by these destination management organizations in information communications for tourism destinations (Cheng et al., 2017; 416). In this regard, Javid et al. (2013) in a study have stated that the most important role of the Internet and new media in sports tourism marketing is the appropriate and faster use of various information

and advertising resources by tourists (Javid et al., 2013; 43). For this advertisement and information to be done effectively and to make the most of Ardabil sports tourism destinations, this advertisement must be done by an institution specializing in marketing and advertising. In addition, the focus on attracting tourists from neighboring countries has significant achievements in attracting tourists, because according to global reports, almost all countries in the world attract the most tourists from neighboring countries and countries of their regions.

Another influential factor in the marketing of tourism destinations was tourism packages. Tourism is a social activity, business and one of the most important economic sectors in the world, whose products are sold in the form of tourism packages in a pre-planned combination and at a comprehensive price (Hasangholipour Yasoori & Bagheri, 2017; 1). A tourism package is the elements of travel, including accommodation, transportation, food, sightseeing, etc., which is offered by a travel planning company for an individual or group of tourists in the form of a travel package. In this regard, Code U05 stated that "the capacity of sports tourism and tourism should be used simultaneously in the design of travel packages. For example, sports tourism activities can be offered with health tourism packages or with historical and rural tourism activities, etc. at the same time in a travel package. In this regard, another expert acknowledged that "to visit again and keep the tourist loyal to the destination, tourism alternatives should be increased and attractive packages should be provided" (U13).

Various researchers have stated that the purpose of preparing sports tourism packages is to attract tourists; In this regard, Liu et al. (2011) believe that the proposed travel packages can best increase the quality of service for customers in various fields (Liu et al., 2011; 407). Ehsani et al. (2010) also stated that sports tourism packages, as one of the most important marketing

outcomes, both increase accommodation time and the quality of tourists' visits and reduce travel costs. (Ehsani et al., 2010; 5) One of the suggested factors for providing attractive packages was offering a combination of health and sports tourism. Considering that most of the incoming tourists travel to this province for medical purposes such as hydrotherapy, we can use this potential to design integrated packages of health and sports tourism such as mountaineering and nature tourism, etc. Health and medical tourism are the sectors that have a lot to do with sports tourism activities and have expanded in recent years, given that medical tourists in addition to significant treatment costs at the destination often have to stay longer at the destination, they provide the possibility of earning more money. Another important code in the tourism packages section was to hold attractive tours according to the local culture of the region, tractor tours, horse riding, horse-drawn carriage tours, and so on. Ardabil province is mostly famous for its traditional and agricultural activities. Because most of the trips in the world are done to get acquainted with the culture and people of the host community, providing packages of sports activities and events in the form of local culture is very welcome. Therefore, sports events should be directed in this way and more indigenous and traditional sports and activities should be held. Using the historical capacity of the province and the history of the Safavids and defining the sports activities related to those days can be very welcome. At the same time, using the activities of states and tribes and the traditional culture of most villages in the province in the form of tourism packages will encourage tourists to buy such packages.

One of the packages that may be very attractive is the design and definition of tourism packages for different groups. Today, different ages and strata of society each pursue their own goals and activities. Young people with high energy are mostly looking for exciting and adventurous activities to have an outlet for their energy, and

adults and the elderly are generally looking for peace and health. Designing packages for each group will receive a great reception from the tourists in the destinations of the province. Code U05 stated in this regard: "In designing tourism packages, we can focus on different age groups. Like the elderly and retirees who come to this province for health and recreation." Research forecasts suggest that the number of people over the age of 60 in the world is increasing, to the point that they will make up 25% of the world's population by 2050 (aslani afrashteh et al., 2019; 2). According to this estimate, it can be inferred that the percentage of elderly tourists who occupy a significant part of the tourism market is increasing. As a result, marketers' attitudes toward the elderly have changed in recent years. Many marketers and businesses are abandoning the old stereotypes about this segment of consumers as inactive and focusing more on this segment of the market. The rapid increase in the number of older people creates many opportunities for economic activity, including the tourism industry, and because older people have more free time at retirement age, they have more savings and fewer financial commitments, as well as their professional activities and family responsibilities, have decreased. For this reason, tourism decision-makers today pay serious attention to the target market of senior tourists.

To develop a destination, we must use the capacity of different types of tourism. Especially the types of tourism that have many customers today. Ecotourism and cultural tourism are parts of the tourism sectors that are proliferating today. Therefore, to develop goals, we need to use all available capacities and potentials. "Sports activities should not be the only focus," said one expert. For the development of the province, cultural, artistic, historical, natural, and other activities should be used in tourism packages. For example, holding an event with traditional rituals and local music will be more welcome than a formal sporting event" (U15). Creating a variety of packages and attractions can create the desire and motivation to travel in

the tourist, including things like holding an event and festival that increases visits during the recession. Expanding cultural attractions and increasing their visits by tourists can also be a tool to diversify tourism products in off-peak seasons. It is a fact that cultural tourism is a part of tourism with growing demand and a way to reduce seasonality in tourist destinations. Products and services peripheral to the main purpose of the trips will significantly help to diversify and increase the diversity of tourist experiences.

Therefore, product diversification is considered a solution to improve the pattern of visits to the tourist destination. Another factor influencing tourism packages is the inclusion of sporting events in travel packages. Hosting and holding sporting events for tourists, especially sports fans, provides a range of enjoyable and memorable experiences (Jeong et al., 2019; 1). For this reason, destinations use sporting events as a marketing tool to stimulate tourism and strengthen the destination brand (Zouni et al., 2020; 3). Following this, Yu et al. (2020) also believe that tourism marketers should use sporting events in tourism packages. This is because this strategy can lead to more sustainability and cost for tourists (Yoo et al., 2020; 1). Research has shown that hosting sporting events can be beneficial to tourism destinations by exposing and enhancing the image of the destination (Getz & Page, 2016; 593). Events can also be useful to tourism destinations by creating opportunities to generate tourism-based revenue from people affiliated with the event or from overseas spectators who have traveled to see the event (Pouder et al., 2018;185).

Another factor affecting the marketing of sports tourism destinations in this study was branding and defining a specific brand for sports tourism destinations in Ardabil province. An interviewee had said in this regard; "A specialized program for tourism advertising should be on the agenda to achieve a world-famous brand and

international systems as soon as possible. Defining a brand such as a creative sports city, adventure area, Dagchlar Bayrami, the country's sports summer, etc." (U05). Code U15 also stated in this regard; "It must be determined which sports tourism activity in the province has a competitive advantage and has the potential to become a sports tourism brand." To introduce tourism destinations better and more effectively, they introduce themselves as a unique brand so that tourists can easily distinguish their products from the competitors in the market. According to Anhelt (2006), the brand of a place is a showcase for it. In general, destination management organizations were responsible for branding destinations to attract tourists (Najjarzadeh et al., 2019;140). Tourism destination branding is one of the relatively emerging strategies for attracting tourists. This strategy is considered an effective tool for marketing tourist destinations today due to its identity and personality (Hemati & Zahrani, 2014; 182). In this regard, Talebi et al. (2017) have considered the selection of a strong tourism brand as a factor in the development of tourism destinations (Talebi et al., 2017; 110). Morgan et al. (2002) also regard branding as the most powerful marketing tool available to contemporary destination marketers considering increasing equity, substitution, and product competitiveness.

Motivational factors and incentive schemes were other effective tools in marketing tourism destinations. In this regard, the interviewees presented incentive schemes such as different pricing according to the different characteristics of the community, holding a free camp to introduce the facilities and conditions of the destination, a lottery or advertising contest, and promotional gifts with the most prominent brands and slogans. They suggested the province sports attraction. An expert in this field stated; "Destinations should offer promotional gifts such as T-shirts, hats, stickers, and flags with their slogans and logos. These promotional elements can be made available to tourists free

of charge during events” (U19). Adding short-term value to an extra product (such as a free overnight stay) or additional services (such as entertainment, themed events, gifts, etc.) are useful strategies to stimulate tourism demand, especially in off-peak seasons. In the case of hotels, this increases the length of stay of the tourist and increases the occupancy rate during the months of the recession.

Another factor influencing the success of marketing sports tourism destinations was management and manpower. The success of a marketing business depends on the performance of the organization's human resources. In this regard, Harritz and Franzides (2018) in a study stated that tourism destination managers are responsible for directing efforts to develop tourism as an economic activity. Within this role, destination managers have a responsibility to identify market segments with high growth potential as well as to plan, monitor, and evaluate the results of tourism development efforts (Hritz & Franzidis, 2018; 164). Developing a marketing strategy for sports tourism destinations was one of the factors identified in this regard. Strategic planning is the cornerstone of destination policy, planning, and development. In this regard, Malchoseksi and Keralova (2014) in a study entitled ‘Strengthening the destination marketing strategy’ have examined how the lack of a tourism marketing strategy may lead to a decrease in the number of domestic and foreign visitors to the destination. In this research, determining the principles of marketing strategy development and its role in destination competition have been discussed (Királová & Malachovský, 2014; 91). In terms of destination development, Jeung et al. (2019) also suggested that destination marketing organizations should strive to develop marketing and tourism marketing strategies and attract potential tourists to visit the destination (Jeung et al., 2019;1).

Another influential factor in the marketing of tourist destinations was the image of the

destination. Customers evaluate the quality of services by comparing the services provided with the level of their expectations, and understanding the expectations of customers is a prerequisite to providing superior quality services. The tourist compares the actual performance of the service with his expectations and is satisfied if his expectations are met or the service exceeds his expectations (Cossío Silva et al., 2019; 71). A tourist destination must offer quality goods and services, which in itself is a guarantee of customer satisfaction. Because the more diverse and quality the supply, the higher the income from tourism, assuming there is demand. The supply of diverse and high-quality products increases the costs of each tourist in the destination and attracts tourists who have higher financial capacity and want to buy better services (Caber & Albayrak, 2018; 18). A review of new concepts related to quality shows that good quality has no meaning other than fulfilling the needs and desires of the customer. In other words, the product is quality when it meets the wishes and needs of the customer (Saberifar, 2018; 76).

The last component influencing the marketing of sports tourism destinations in this study was the destination validation done by famous athletes and artists and tourism influencers. Influencer marketing (or effective marketing) is a branch of marketing that focuses on specific people in the community (or specific style). This type of marketing identifies the people who influence potential buyers and directs marketing activities toward these influencers. The use of influencers in the tourism marketing process is known as "influencer marketing" in the tourism industry (Eqtesad, 2019). An expert in this field stated; "To understand the intentions of managers better, coaches, officials, and athletes who work at the national and international levels and are aware of the province's capabilities, they can bring their teams to the province for a training camp.

For example, Mr. Daei, due to his knowledge of

the area and the available facilities, generally organizes football training camps in this area (U08). The interviewees of U12 and U19 codes also mentioned the use of famous and popular artistic and sports figures in advertisements, attractions, the introduction of destinations, and tours of the province as factors in the development of tourism in this province. In today's modern society, athletes have become famous in the mass media. Many of them participate in a wide range of media and advertising campaigns that may have little to do with sports. Their level of popularity and reputation has led to multi-million-dollar contracts with companies. Therefore, the use of sports and art figures or tourism influencers can help develop destinations by increasing tourist attraction.

Conclusion

Nowadays highly competitive environment where tourism destinations are in close competition with each other, creativity, innovation, and the use of new marketing strategies, especially in low-season, are essential for the survival of tourism destinations and especially for increasing the sustainability of destinations. Therefore, to increase the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations and strengthen its economic indicators, destination marketing management should seek to attract more sports tourists by applying new marketing methods and investing in competitive advantages, and creating a unique brand for the destination. In addition, the destinations should improve their image by examining the effective elements in the return of tourists, such as providing quality services and keeping them loyal to the destination by satisfying sports tourists.

Acknowledgment

This research has been done in a comprehensive method to present a systematic cycle for sports tourism management. So, the defects of this research would be clear, because of the newest

methodology and its results. The research team appreciates the journal and reviewers for helping to improve the quality of this work.

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