

Market Segmentation of Sport Tourism in Iran for Foreign Tourists Regarding Culture and Modeling of Target Market

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Abstract: The Purpose of this study was market segmenting of sport tourism in Iran for foreign tourists according to culture and modeling of target market. To do so, a questionnaire was distributed among 710 participants from 53 countries attending in Fajr International Sport Events in 2010-11. The results showed that Anglo, Latin European and East European, Arab, South Asian and Confucius (Asian) and Central Asian Cultures had the most interest in the sport events (97%). Also, four factors including attractions related to mountain and snow, water sports, sport events, and desert were selected as models of sport tourism target market in Iran. The results of exploratory analysis revealed that these four factors determined and predicted 62% of Iran sport tourism target market.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is accounted as one of the paramount income producing industries in the economy of each country. Sport tourism, in recent decades, is regarded as a new form of tourism (17). The interaction between tourism and sport has provided a new kind of tourism which has become a complete novel structure to fill the leisure time of people with physical and mental liveliness (3). The role of tourism as a new source for making job, earning money, receiving more taxes, attracting foreign currency, and improving social sub-structures which cause the improvement and development of other facets has been confirmed in many studies (15). Based on the tourism authorities, at the end of the 20th century and the turn of the 21th century, a tourism revolution whose waves will affect many aspects will occur in far distances around the world (13). Today, sport has influenced the societies in such a way that it is called as one of the most current factors in provoking the tourists. The notion of sport as one of the tourist attractors is not new, but the basics of the theoretical sport attractions have been the focus of attention. Sport like other attracting factors is one of the tourism attractions, but it has its own exclusive features. Sport has the ability to attract a great number of tourists and acts as an attracting factor in tourism to target cities or countries (21).

Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as the travel from home to the target place to participate in one of the competitive sport activities to fill their leisure time, to watch sport activities, or to take part in sport attractions' activities (9). Sport tourism is a business of several billion dollars which has the fastest growth in the world with 4.5 trillion dollars, and it has been turned out to a strategic issue due to its significant role from the economic and political perspective (6).

Yusof and et al. (2009) denoted, in an investigation of tourism events in a small scale in Malaysia, that holding sport events in this country causes the attraction of many sport tourists and money. The noticeable sport events include Grandprix formula I, the general international competitions, Asian southeast events, and the final badminton competition of Thomas cup (24). The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) reported that the earned income of holding the world cup competition in 2010 in Turkey has been around 200 million euro that is 30,000 tourists had been present in these events (7).

Sport events have a prominent role in attracting tourists. Hosting them turned out to be a strategy among target marketing activists to improve host social picture and differentiate their tourism products. Sport events can bring noticeable economic benefits for the host (2). The investigation of tourism

literature indicates that the selection of the target is one of the important issues in the tourism management (12).

Each host presents a variety of services to attract the tourists and the tourist has the opportunity to select from a series of collections (4). By the increase of the tourists' information about the tourist destinations, new selections will be provided and novel chances to get unique business experiences will be achieved (18). However, tourism marketing due to specific characteristics of the products has a complex duty (19). Tourism products include all the attractions, facilities and services or tourists' visits during their stay in the target country and also each event which occurs for the tourists during their stay or each experience that they receive (5). Therefore, regarding the complexity of the tourism products and variation in preferences and requirement, the effectiveness of tourism marketing requires the identification of clear target markets (11). Dowswell (1997) expresses that market segmentation is one of the methods of identification of tourism and prediction of the customer behavior (8). Market segmentation is predicted through the hypothesis that each market includes from groups or sections with different wants or necessities. In tourism studies, market segmentation is accounted as a very beneficial tool (16, 20).

Shonk (2007) accounted the quality of services as an important feature in tourism. He believes that the quality of competitions by themselves is related to the quality of services in sport tourism (23). Fajr international sport events are held since 1982 in Iran as the biggest sport event in the country. During competitions, a great number of countries in sport teams including athletes, coaches, supervisors, reporters, families, and accompanying boards as sport tourists arrive the country. To hold these competitions, a huge investment is done. To accommodate, transport, and provide facilities and the like, vast expenses are allocated. Considering this investment, from the tourism perspective, it can be regarded as a tourism event or attraction, leave alone its sport facets and results. It seems that, during the past 30 years of holding these competitions, we have not been able to achieve a good output of the tourism viewpoint. Iran, having a special geographical position and climate and historical tourism attractions, which are provoking sources for tourism systems, is potentially located in a high position to hold different sport events. According to International Organization of Tourism, Iran, possessing ancient historical attractions and also natural resources, is ranked in the tenth and fifth position throughout the world, respectively (1).

Therefore, all the activities of programming, providing tourism products and attracting tourists need marketing activities and operations. So by suitable marketing for holding Fajr international events as a sport competition and a chance, we can act in such a way that not only will the number of foreign participants with different nationalities increases, but also identify the target markets for Iran sport tourists by investigating and identifying the sport tourists' point of view in these competitions so that we can provide the chance of attracting sport tourists during the competitions and even the year. As a result, the present study tries to divide tourist market in Iran for the foreigners based on culture and to present a target market model compatible to sport tourists focusing on Fajr competitions.

2. Methodology

It was a cross-sectional descriptive-analytical study. The population was sports tourists participating in international Fajr competitions including athletes, coaches, supervisors, referees, doctors, reporters, family members, and boards from 53 countries who competed in nine sport branches consisting of table tennis, badminton, cycling, fencing, freestyle and Greco Roman wrestling, chess, track and field, and taekwondo in different cities. The questionnaires were distributed among all the participants in a five months period. Out of 710 distributed questionnaires, 475 valid questionnaires were gathered.

3. Instruments

To conduct this study, a researcher-made questionnaire was developed through investigating the conducted previous studies and resources and also interviewing with experts in sport and tourism management. It was a five-scale Likert questionnaire including 53 items which were designed in three sections. The first section was developed to gather demographic information; the second one was about the most important sport and natural tourism attractions of Iran including 30 items in several subcategories. The attractions were as following: a) Mounting and caving b) Winter sports c) Outdoor and hillside walking d) Flying e) Shore and water sports f) Hunting g) Sport events and competitions, and finally h) Desert and salt desert sports. The third section including 23 items was about substructures and accommodations of the target country. For each group of the samples, a separate questionnaire was developed and it was translated into five languages of English, Russian, Arabic, French, and German. To determine the content validity of the questionnaire, a number of 12 experts meticulously read and gave their insightful recommendations to improve it. Then,

in order to estimate its reliability, the first version of questionnaire was delivered to a sample of 20. The estimated Cronbach alpha was 93%.

4. Data analysis

To analyze the obtained data, the descriptive and interpretive statistical techniques were used in two separate sections. At the descriptive level, some descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were applied. At the interpretive level, affirmative factor analysis was used. The questionnaire was evaluated using CFI, RMSEA, X² and its items and subscales were evaluated using Lisrel 8.80. Finally, the target market modeling of sport tourism in Iran was presented, running SPSS Software Ver. 16.

5. Results

The analysis of demographic information indicated that the average age of participants was 28.14 out of whom 89.5 were males and 10.5 females. From the marital status point, 71.1 percent were single and 27.4 percent were married, and 1.5 percent was divorced. Educationally, 33.5 percent

were at B.A. level and higher and 13.4 percent were A.D. and 53.1 were diploma and lower. Religiously, 51.8 percent were Muslims and 34.1 percent were Christian and 14.1 percent belonged to other religions. All in all, 74.5 percent of participants were athletes participated in these international events. Furthermore, 72.4 percent of the participants were Asian, 24.2 were European, 1.3 percent was American, 1.3 percent was from Australia and finally 0.8 percent was African. Table 1 shows the number of participants in different events.

As the table 1 depicts, track and field has the highest number of participants (n= 133), and table tennis the lowest (n= 22).

The findings of Table 2 indicate that, in market segmentations of sport tourism in Iran, Anglo and Latin European and East European, Arab, South Asian and Confucius (Asian) and Central Asian cultures were mostly interested in sport events such as shore and water sports (Mean= 95.18), outdoor sports (Mean- 94.54), desert and salt desert (89.05), mountain climbing (Mean=85.78), winter sports (Mean=85.44), and flying attractions (Mean= 79.6) in order of importance.

Table 1. Frequency of the participants based on the sport type

SPORT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
TABLE TENNIS	22	4.6
CHESS	27	5.7
GRECO- ROMAN WRESTLING	33	6.9
CYCLING	35	7.4
FENCING	44	9.3
FREE-STYLE WRESTLING	45	9.5
BADMINTON	51	10.7
TAEKWONDO	85	17.9
TRACK AND FILED	133	28
TOTAL	475	100

Table 2. Mean of sport tourism attractions of Iran for tourists

Sports Attractions Culture	Mountain Climbing and Caving	Winter sports	Outdoor Sports and Hillside Walking	Flying Attractions	Shore and Water Sport	Hunting	Sport Events	Desert and Salt Desert
1. Anglo	94.5	77.5	100	88.9	100	94.4	100	94.5
2. Latin Europe	81.2	90.6	84.3	81.2	93.8	87.6	100	78.1
3. Eastern Europe	72	74.6	92.4	67.6	90.9	76.5	90.9	83.6
4. Arab	95	95.7	97.2	87.8	96.5	91.5	98.5	91.3
5. Southern Asia	96	94.8	98.6	87	98.6	96.2	100	96.1
6. Confucius	97.1	97.2	97.2	71.4	97	100	97.1	94.3
7. Central Asia	64.7	67.4	92.1	73.3	89.5	74.3	97.1	85.5
Mean	85.78	85.44	94.54	79.6	95.18	88.64	97.65	89.05

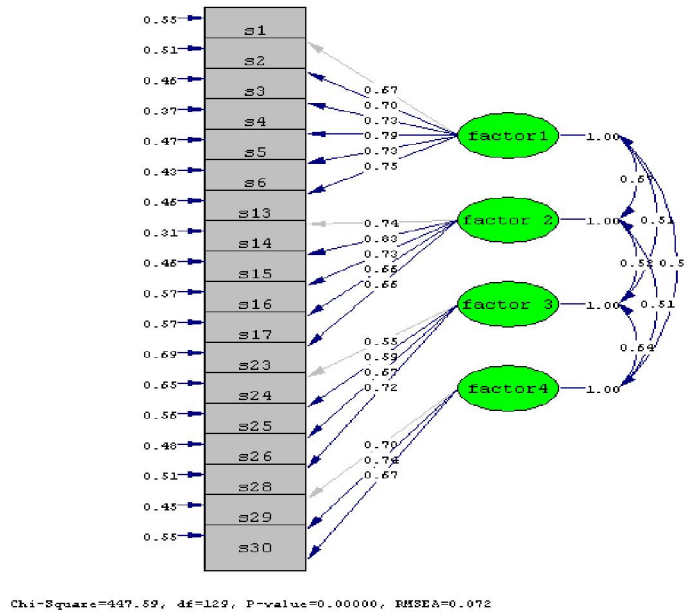


Figure 1. The sport tourism target market for foreign tourists

In designing and presenting sport target market model in Iran using exploratory factor analysis, the main factors, Chi square=447.59, CFI=0.97, RMSEA=0.072, confirmed that the exploratory model has an acceptable fit, and the final exploratory model determined four factors as sport tourism target market of Iran for foreign tourists, including the first factor which consists of items 1 to 6 of the questionnaire titled as mountain attractions. The total amount of this factor which is placed in the first place is 6.87. The second factor including items 13 to 17 as water sports by 1.87 is placed in the second place and the third factor, items 23 to 26 of the questionnaire, is sport events and competitions with 1.42, and finally the fourth factor, the items 28 to 30 of the questionnaire with 1.19 is the desert attractions. The findings indicate that generally these factors in the exploratory model determine and predict 62.95 percent of sport tourism target market in Iran.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study about segmentation of sport tourism market of Iran based on the culture indicates that the amount of the interest of sport tourists with different cultures varies (Table 2) in such a way that sport tourists with Anglo, Latin Europe, Eastern Europe, Arab, South Asia, Confuciu, and Central Asia cultures are interested in three attractions of sport events, water sports and outdoor

sports orderly. It seems that this amount of interest can predict the behaviors and needs of the tourists and also identify target markets for them. Holding important sport events such as Olympic Games, Football World Cup, the annual French cycling (tour de France), Wimbledon Cup in England, USA Basketball League and Fajr international events are important sport events that attract many audiences (6).

Gupta and et al. (2002) believe that cultural branches give us noticeable information about social varieties. It is a method for categorizing intercultural similarities and differences. The researchers use the following vectors to categorize different countries into the same branches including 1) geographical distances and great migrations, 2) ethnic group centers, and 3) religious and lingual similarities (10).

Mohsin (2005) and Kim and Petrick (2005) believe that sport events whether at limited or widespread level can cause the attraction of active participants and fans, and tourists; it is also led to the increase of the media focus and the positive reflection for the residents (18, 14).

These events include regular seasonal sport events in a sport complex like football, rugby, ice hockey, or adventurous events and desert sports like desert ski or cycling (24). It seems that the presence of foreign sport tourists with a variety of cultures from through all the world in international Fajr

competitions indicates their great interest to participate in these events, and in the case of developing more political relations with different countries, more participations in these events will happen. Funk and Bruun (2006) state that the political relations between the target country and target market is another factor affecting in the choice of target market and cause to make a positive attitude from the target country among the tourists. The target picture has a significant role in creating a good feeling of tourists to the target country and also their tendency to visit it (8).

Regarding the presence of a great number of sport tourists with different Asian cultures, it seems that the distance is also one of the important criteria in selecting the target country that can be influential in developing international tourism and target markets. Gupta, Hanges, and Dorfman (2002) think that geographical distances and political relations can be key elements in determining the target market (10). Prayag and Ryan (2010) in their investigation about the determining factors in the attraction of the target site concluded that nationality and culture have an influential effect on the passengers (20). The findings of our study show that sport tourists with different cultures prioritized water and shore sports as their second case which means among different sport attractions in Iran, those which are related to water sports such as sea sides, rivers in both North and South of Iran specifically in two fantastic Islands of Kish and Qeshm in Persian Gulf, Chabahar, Bandar Abbas, and Bushehr have the potentiality of holding these sports during a year. A variety of sports like swimming, canoeing, water skiing, diving, surfing, and etc. can be the focus of attention by sport tourists with different cultural backgrounds which by itself needs special attention.

Zhang and Marcussen (2007), in their study of the tourists' motivations, have stated some features like nature and seashores, historical and cultural heritages as some of criteria to attract tourists (25). It seems that European sport tourists who have less sunny days in their own country be interested in visiting and staying in such attractive environments like Oman sea sides and Persian Gulf in Iran.

Schneider and et al. (2005), in their study of market segmentation of adventure tourism have found that mountain attractions (Mean=1.65; SD=0.728) are the most important activities of the sport tourists' interests. He continued that market segmentation is the heart of the modern marketing. Traditionally, the target market segmentation has been divided based on the population, geography, and psychology elements (22). In relation to designing and presenting a model of the sport tourism market in Iran, generally, among the different sport attractions,

from the sport tourists' view point in this study, mountain, water, desert, and caving sports are respectively determined as the tourism target markets of Iran in which mountain is in agreement with the findings of Schneider and et al. (2005). These four factors in the developed model by 62.95 percent of the target market have been predicted as the foreign sport tourism attraction in Iran.

Different tourism productions can attract different tourists and groups based on their features, behaviors and visiting patterns (22); therefore, the recognition of the features of Iran target sport tourism market is essential to reach the goals. To do so, it is suggested that, in order to develop the sport tourism in Iran, more endeavor be taken to involve the target markets in cooperating in international sport events. On the other hand, since Iran tourism productions as the target market has varieties of attractions, the tourists can be attracted. So it is recommended that, by focusing on the foreign sport tourists' views and interests, and suitable advertisement and information about Iran sport tourism market, providing convenient transportation systems, social stability, medical services and convenient accommodations and warm welcoming, and the enthusiastic presence in gyms and stadiums, and also holding the competitions in different cities with a number of tourism potentialities, authorities can improve the sport tourism industry in Iran.

In general, through prediction of the programs compatible to different tendencies, and necessary investments, we should fulfill their expectations in Iran. In this way, we can provide the opportunity of exploiting its economic, cultural, social and political advantages.

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