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Marketing Mix in Sport Tourism Context

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors affecting sport tourism marketing mix. The research method was descriptive – correlation and the statistical sample consisted of 265 sport tourists attended at Azadi stadium in Tehran for watching a football game between Esteghlal and Persepolis that were selected through clustering technique. The research instrument was a questionnaire developed by Shonk (2006). The face and content validity was approved by sport management experts and the reliability was verified by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.89$). The SPSS16 was used for description of variables, and LISREL software was used for conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The result showed that "product" had the most effect on sport tourism marketing mix. "Physical evidences" was the next important variable influencing sport tourism marketing mix. Moreover, "promotion", "people", "process", "price", and "place" had significant effects on sport tourism marketing mix. According to the results it can be concluded that according to sport tourists' view point, "product" and "physical evidences" had more importance. Product includes quality of sport contests and its' related components, and physical evidence refers to the quality of sport stadium and its' related factors. Also, other variables such as promotion, people, process, price and place had significant effect on the sport tourism marketing mix that should be taken in granted in sport tourism management context.

Introduction

Sport tourism is the most prevalent leisure time activity (Ritchie & Adair, 2004) and it has become a growing phenomenon in recent decades. Hence, many countries pay attention to research, planning, investment and marketing in this industry (Abbasi et al., 2011). Paying attention to marketing would lead to sport tourism development. Tourism marketing is a special issue (Ehsani et al., 2010) and it's considered as the most important factor in sport tourism development in Iran (Moein Fard, 2008). Marketing is an administrative process that includes planning activities, providing tourism products and attracting tourists (Ehsani et al., 2010). Kotler (1994) has delineated the marketing process in five

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steps: the first step is research (R), the second is segmentation, targeting and positioning (STP), the third step is marketing mix (MM), the fourth is implementation (I) and the last one is control (C). As the most important step in the marketing process, marketing mix is a mixture of marketing tools and techniques that

changes marketing concepts by implementing marketing mix.

The marketing mix is a fundamental theory in marketing that encourages the performance of desired behavior and helps achieve desired marketing objectives in the target market by controlling a combination of mix elements. Its conceptual roots are attributed to Neil Borden (1964), who describes the mix as the marketing procedures and policies that marketers rely on when devising marketing programs. Borden (1957) initially identified an extensive list of 12 controllable marketing elements (i.e., product planning, pricing, branding, channels of distribution, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, displays, servicing, physical handling, and fact finding and analysis) that, when properly managed, would produce desired results (e.g., customer buy - in, profitability). According to McCarthy's view, marketing mix consisted of 4 strategic components (4P). These components are product, price, place and promotion (Kouzechian et al., 2010). Each firm strives to build up a composition of four Ps, which can create highest level of consumer satisfaction and at the same time meet its organizational objectives. Thus, this mix is assembled keeping in mind the needs of target customers, and it varies from one organization to another depending upon its available resources and marketing objectives. Smith (2008) explains these four components of marketing mix as follows.

The word product as referring to a physical, manufactured item. For example, Wilson produces sport equipment. However, the term product can also refer to services, ideas and the benefits that a sport organization offers consumers. Many sport organizations offer a service, such as a form of physical activity, entertainment or an experience. There is often no physical product to take away, but a sport organization might offer some intangible benefits such as a lifestyle, a social group or even a belief system. The product can also include design, packaging and merchandise.

The price refers to the cost that a consumer must pay to receive a product or service. This is usually thought of as the literal cost in monetary terms. In order to develop a pricing strategy, it is important to consider pricing goals and match them to pricing techniques.

Place is concerned with where consumers access the sport product or service. It is another word for distribution. Place is therefore about the way a product is made available to consumers; how it gets from the place where it is produced to the place where the consumer buys and consumes it. For physical, concrete products, place is concerned with the practical issues of getting a product from producers to consumers, along with any other stops along the way such as wholesalers and retailers.

Promotion is about communicating with consumers, getting a message across to the marketplace. Promotion therefore includes advertising, sponsorship, signage, exhibitions, sales promotions, personal selling and publicity. A promotional strategy is a plan that aims to use the four main elements of the promotions mix for the best results. The promotions mix elements are: (1) advertising, (2) personal selling, (3) sales promotions and (4) public relations.

McCarthy's four Ps were designed with physical goods in mind, thus propelling Booms and Bitner (1981), who recognized the unique characteristics of services (e.g., intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability), to introduce three additional elements (or Ps) to supplement McCarthy's four Ps in the marketing mix - i.e., people, process, and physical evidence. Most often, marketers consider the marketing mixes of McCarthy, Booms, and Bitner, which were popularized by Philip Kotler in his textbook on the principles of marketing, as archetypes for marketing strategy planning and implementation - the former for the marketing of physical goods, and the latter for services marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

Because a sport service is consumed at the same time as it is produced, both staff and other consumers can influence perceptions of service quality. This is particularly true for "high contact" services like sporting competitions. In fact, the "staff" in these examples is actually part of the service (Booms & Bitner, 1981). Sport services should view consumers as people with a specific lifestyle and understand their wants and needs; they should not just see them as consumers with whom they undertake a simple

monetary transaction (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The quality and management of employees (and athletes) is therefore an important part of sport services marketing. Furthermore, in sport events other consumers are especially important elements to the service as they have a powerful impact on atmosphere. For example, in the sports industry, players, coaches, executives, and broadcasters connect fans to the brand and could therefore be considered marketing assets (Fetchko et al., 2019). This means that for sport organizations, the ways in which they allow consumers to interact with one another is a fundamental consideration of the service structure.

Ghadiri et al. (2020), conducted a study to investigate and determine the hierarchical levels of the factors affecting market retention in fitness centers. Sixteen factors identified were categorized as five levels using ISM. The results obtained showed manager communication and trainer's competencies at the lowest level of the market - retention model. Micmac analysis also found these factors to play the role of independent variables that affected the other variables directly or indirectly through the connective variables. Given the key role of frontline service providers in fitness centers, manager communication and the competencies and knowledge of trainer appear more effective than the physical environment and equipment in customer satisfaction.

The Physical evidence in integrated care represents the tangible component of the integrated care service offering. A variety of tangible aspects of integrated care can be evaluated by patients and stakeholders, ranging from the qualification of personnel and the quality of facilities at integrated care locations (e.g., clinics, hospitals, care centers) to documented evidence of good practices (e.g., awards, patient testimonies, brochures, media, publications, signage, websites). Integrated care (e.g., treatment) tends to be intangible, and thus patients and stakeholders often rely on physical evidence to evaluate integrated care providers and their service offering. Thus, physical evidence serves as a visual metaphor of what integrated care represents, the coordination of health and social care solutions that it facilitates, and the relationships among personnel, patients, and stakeholders (Lim, 2021).

According to Lim (2021) view, the Process in integrated care describes the operating and tracking procedures and systems by which integrated care providers deliver health and social care services (including follow - ups) effectively and efficiently. Timely tweaking and enhancing the processes in integrated care can help keep costs at a minimum and maximize monetary (e.g., profits for integrated care providers) and non - monetary (e.g., brand image, patient satisfaction and loyalty, word - of - mouth recommendations) returns. In other words, process is the means to achieve the goals of integrated care (e.g., bringing together health and social care providers to collectively deliver integrated care solutions in a cost - effective manner with high monetary and non - monetary returns). A key strength of the marketing mix is its large-scale endorsements for being a memorable and practical framework for marketing decision-making that has proved useful in business schools and industries over the years (Constantinides, 2006). More important, the marketing mix offers marketers a set of controllable variables to strategically position and communicate the promise of their corporate and product brands to actual and potential customers; satisfy the needs, wants, and demands of those customers; induce desired behavioral responses from those customers; and accomplish their established marketing objectives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

In event sport tourism product includes contest and its related factors such as the quality of players, quality of play and the quality of total quality of a sport event. Price refers to the cost of products and services such as the price of ticket and foods in stadium. Place refer to the accessibility of a sporting event and consisted of parking lots, airports, freeways and public transportation. Promotion is different type of advertisement and other promotion tools used to promote a sporting event. People refer to the interaction of a sport event. Physical evidence includes sport complex quality and factors relating to the quality of sport stadium and places where sporting events are held in them. Process refers to the actions of holding a sport event (Honarvar, 2009).

Different researches have been done about 7P in sport industry. It has been found the quality of contest itself is the most important element is sport tourism industry (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). In addition, the characteristic of the host city impact the tourist perceptions and positively is related to satisfaction and behavioral intentions of tourists (Zabkar et al., 2010). Also, it has been investigated some facilities such accessibility, parking and comfortable seats are variables affecting spectators

attending (Hall et al., 2010). In another study it has been suggested empathy and tangibles are the most important dimensions of service quality (Lee et al., 2011).

Abbasi et al. (2014) in an article entitled Marketing mix in Iran's sports tourism industry concluded that "sport events holding", "Tourism centers in tourism sites of Iran" concerning the product item; "infrastructures", "development of sport tourism services, facilities and equipment" concerning the place item; "applying mass media propaganda", "producing propaganda clips on sport tourism attractions concerning the promotion item; and "hospitalization costs", "prices offered by tourism agencies in competitive markets" concerning the price item have received the two top scores. Moreover, the findings show that promotion is the most important factor, followed by place, product and price, respectively.

Sareshkeh et al. (2016) conducted a study entitled Evaluating the Components of Marketing Mix (7Ps) of Iran's Volleyball Super League. The aim of this study is to evaluate the sport marketing mix and its seven elements (product, price, promotion, place, public relations, people, and physical evidence) in Iran's volleyball super league from the viewpoint of ministry of sport and volleyball federation managers in two conditions, namely existing and optimal. Based on the findings taken from the viewpoints of the staffs in the ministry of youth and sport up to general managers, and volleyball federation's officials up to the managers of the divisions, CEOs, leaders, coaches and academics, it has been found that in the existing condition, the component of product enjoyed the highest mean. Other components including price, physical evidence, public relations, promotion, and distribution had lower means (in order mentioned). In the optimal condition, the public relations variable had the highest mean, and other components had lower means. However, there was a statistically significant difference between the two existing and mix optimal conditions and their 7 components such that according to the rank means, the existing condition had a lower score compared to the optimal one. This means that in the existing condition, less attention has been paid to the mix elements.

Seifpanahi Shabani et al. (2018) investigated the role of sports marketing mix in generating revenue for football clubs. Their findings showed that the seven elements of product, promotion, physical evidence, processes, people, and protection have positive and significant effects on the revenue generation of football clubs. They also found that the current situation of marketing mix elements considered in Iranian football clubs has a significant difference with the importance of these elements and their effect on revenue generation for football clubs. Therefore, they recommended that club managers strive to choose an appropriate marketing mix.

Hasibi and Shojaei (2020) conducted a study on the Strategic Analysis of Sports Tourism Marketing Mix in Mazandaran with 7P's Approach. Their findings showed that the elements of sports tourism marketing mix in the province based on priority were significant. The element of price is the highest priority and the process or planning is the lowest priority. Other elements of the sport tourism marketing mix of the province are the priority, respectively: product or service, place, physical evidence, people and promotion.

The study by Alipour Nadinluie et al. (2020) aimed to propose a revenue model for hosting the sports events in Iran. 220 university professors, sports experts, staffs of sports federations, and management agents of international sporting events participated in this study. SPSS 22 and PLS software were applied for data analysis. The results showed that 12 factors including Sponsors, human resources, politics, governmental institutions, law, sport fields, scientific, security, government support, media, Facility development, and fans were the most important factors for revenue generation in hosting sports events.

Somnil et al. (2020) in a study examined the influence of the marketing mix on participating in the trail running event decision, in the aspect of sports tourism promotion. The samples were 296 participants in the Phu Kradueng Wake Up Run trail running event. It was found that participants in the trail running events had an opinion of the marketing mix in the highest level among 7 aspects. The order was sorted by the high to low average score, were the people, price, physical evidence and presentation, place, process, promotion, and product and service, respectively. Their results indicate that the person, price, physical evidence and presentation, and place were factors that influence the

marketing mix.

Different studies have been done in the field of sport tourism marketing mix and it has been declared that Product, Place, Promotion, Price, People, Physical evidence and Process are main aspects of sport tourism marketing mix. However, there is a need to research about details of sport tourism marketing mix and identifying factors affecting each aspect of it specially in different sport tourism events or destinations in Iran. Therefore, because of the importance of sport tourism marketing mix in the marketing process and shortage of comprehensive researches in this field, the purpose of this study is to investigate different factors affecting sport tourism marketing mix in a sport event in Iran.

Research Methodology

The research method was descriptive – correlation. Statistical sample consisted of 265 tourists attended to Tehran's Azadi stadium for watching a football game between Esteghlal and Persepolis which were selected by clustering technique. Questionnaire was distributed among 550 sport tourists came to Azadi stadium more than one time and 500 questionnaire had been returned. After putting aside incomplete questionnaires 265 questionnaires have been analyzed. The research instrument was a questionnaire developed by Shonk (2006). Questionnaire consisted demographic questions and 21 questions about different aspects of sport tourism marketing mix. The content and were approved by investigating opinions of sport management faculty members and the construct validity were approved by doing CFA of a pilot research data. The reliability was approved by Cronbach's alpha method ($\alpha=0.892$). The SPSS 19 software was used for descriptive statistics and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was done by LISREL 8.7 software.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed the average of respondents age was 23 years old. 72.8 percent of them were single and 27.2 percent were married. Other descriptive statistics is mentioned in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Percentages					
Job status	Clerk: 9.06 %	Labor: 23.77%	Student: 38.86 %	Business: 34.72%	Unemployed: 10.57 %	
Income (per month)	<100 \$: 24.53 %	100-200 \$: 27.17 %	200-300 \$: 19.25 %	300-400\$: 13.96 %	400 \$<: 15.09 %	
Education	<Diploma: 21.89 %	Diploma: 49.81 %	Technician: 15.47 %	Bachelor: 11.70 %	Master and more: 1.13 %	

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to investigate factors affecting sport tourism marketing mix (Figure 1).

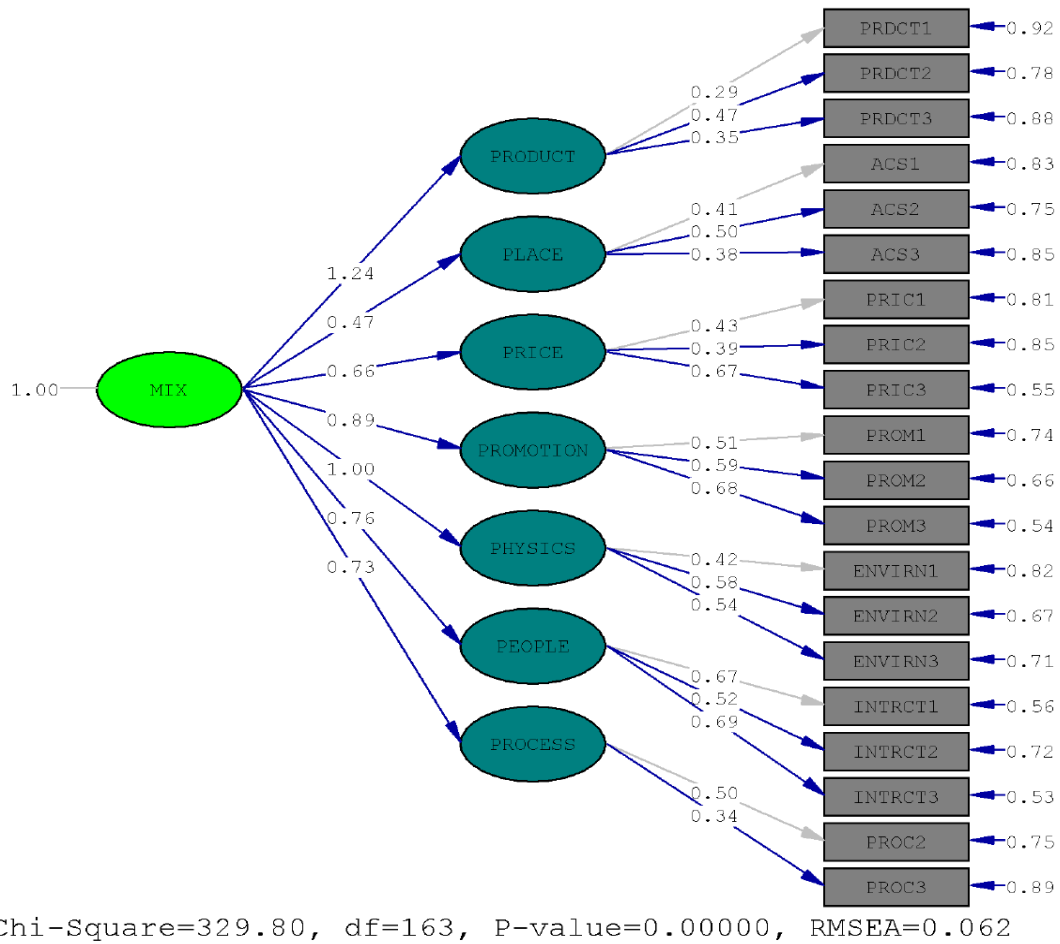


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of factors affecting sport tourism marketing mix in Iran

As it can be seen in Figure 1 “product” has the most effect (factor loading= 1.24) on sport tourism marketing mix. “Physical evidences” is the next important variable influencing sport tourism marketing mix (factor loading= 1). Also, “promotion” (factor loading= 0.89), “people” (factor loading= 0.76), “process” (factor loading= 0.73), “price” (factor loading= 0.66) and “place” (factor loading= 0.47) have significant effects on sport tourism marketing mix. Moreover, all of the fit indices are acceptable (Table 2).

Table 2. Fit indices

Fit indices	χ^2	Df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI
Amount	329.80	163	0/062	0/92	0/91

Discussion

Demographic features affect tourist’s expectations and their attending to the sporting events (Tikander, 2010). In this research because the participants were so young (23 years), it can be

concluded they were not so experienced and this item influences the sport tourism expectations. About 50 percents of the respondents had low income (lower than 200 \$ per month). In this regard Smith (2008) said as the level of income increase, the level of sporting attendance decrease (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). Also, about 50 percents of the respondents such as students and unemployed people didn't have independent income. The other interesting result is that the income of 15 percents of the sport tourists were more than 400 \$ and only 14 percent were settled in the hotels or motels.

The CFA analysis showed "product" is the most important factor in sport tourism marketing mix. It means the quality of a sporting event is very important for sport tourists. This result is due to the type of sport tourists in this study. They were part of event sport tourism and in this type of sport tourism the quality of contests and its related factors have more important. In this regard, Shonk (2006) reported contest quality is the most important factor affecting sport tourism service quality. The second important factor is "physical evidence". It means factors such as design and view of stadium, quality of seats, cleanness and beauty of environment, color of equipment, the quality of bathrooms, sound system, guidance signs and other factors relating to the tangible dimension of service quality have considerable effect on the sport venue quality. In this regard Greenwell et al. (2002) mentioned consumers' positive perception of physical environment of a sporting event has positive relationship to the attendance. Also, Hall et al. (2010) and Lee et al. (2011) have suggested the stadium seats have significant impact on the service quality. "Promotion" is the other factor affecting sport tourism marketing mix. It means having good advertisements and using suitable advertising ways is so important for promoting a sporting event. "People" is the other factor influencing sport tourism marketing mix. It is suggested personnel interaction is so important in sport tourism service quality because human interaction is one of the most important aspects of a sporting experience (Ko and Patore, 2004 & Alexandris et al., 2004). "Process" has significant relationship with sport tourism marketing mix. It means the actions of holding a sport event such as plan and time of a sport event, process of buying tickets, process of going to the sport venue, process of entering to the stadium and exiting from sport venue and the process of coming back to the home are so important for sport tourists. "Price" is the other factor affecting sport tourism marketing mix. It shows the price of goods and services in sporting events should be reasonable for sport tourists because different studies reported consumer satisfaction is influenced by the price of services (Khatibzadeh, 2012). The last factor affecting sport tourist marketing mix is "place". It means access quality is so important for sport tourists. This result confirms that if tourists can easily go to different places, they will experience a higher quality of visit (Shonk, 2006). In addition, venue access should be considered because convenient access to a sport venue reduces the time and cost of the sport tourists and create an enjoyable experience for them (Hinch & Higham, 2004). In this context Hall et al. (2010) said if spectators have satisfactory facilities such as accessibility and Parking will attend the event again. It can be concluded although some factors have high amount of factor loading, all factors have significant relationship with sport tourism marketing mix that should be noticed.

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