



Identifying the Consequences of Applying New Technologies in Sport Tourism

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ABSTRACT

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Today, using new technologies is considered a vital factor in the sports tourism area. Tourist destinations try to use these technologies to create a competitive advantage to be a leader in this area. The use of these technologies brings lots of advantages. This research aims to identify the consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism. The research method is mixed with a sequential exploratory approach. In the first phase, the main indicators and components are identified using the online focus group research method, then in order to confirm them, a quantitative survey method was used. The data collection tools are semi-structured interviews collected from two focus groups including academic and executive participants related to the fields of sports management, sports tourism, and information technology. According to the research findings, 67 primary codes, 27 open codes, 13 axial codes, and 4 selective categories were extracted. In the quantitative phase of the research, all the values related to the components and indicators were confirmed. From the results of the present research, we can point out the benefits such as "smart health, smart sports tourism, green technologies, sustainable development (healthy and sustainable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.), smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations" that were found to be the main advantages of using new technologies in sports tourism.

Introduction

Sport constitutes an intangible product addressing a series of leisure necessities and expression tendencies (Vrondou, 2020). Sport along with tourism remains among the most intangible leisure experiences with amorphous characteristics and infinite borders for development (Vrondou, 2020).

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The sports industry is defined as a market where the products are directly related to sports, fitness, and leisure. The products of the sports industry include sports, goods, and material services related to sports and recreational activities and fitness, etc. (Sadeqi-Arani & Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, 2022). Sports tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon with national and international dimensions. In the last fifty years, this sector has been enjoying a constant movement to become a complex and global market (Bouchet & Sobry, 2019). Today, sports tourism is well-known as an employment-generating, income-generating, and influential industry with extensive and complex consequences and effects in the context of human societies. In some areas, this sector has doubled in importance by stunning leaps such as surpassing the revenues of the oil and automobile industries or its extraordinary impact on global peace and prevention (Doliskani & Atghia, 2021). Different forms of niche tourism like sports tourism are gradually gaining importance so that they can help a tourist destination to be customized from the norm (Achilleos et al., 2021). At the same time, related technologies aimed at supporting these events have emerged trying to facilitate efficient registration and participation processes for interested athletes (Rosandich, 2001). In this way, the development of technological products and services contributes to the development of tourism and the social and economic benefits associated with it (Achilleos et al., 2021). The introduction of technological advances in sport, tourism, and events promises to enable cost-efficiencies, engender new business opportunities, improve service delivery and enhance the end-user experience. Cutting-edge training methods, robots, artificial intelligence, augmented reality and, virtual meetings are only a few examples that paradigmatically transform the supply and demand sides of the sport, tourism, and events (Ziakas, 2023).

It is referred to as "soft sports tourism" when sports activities are the main reasons for travel, for example, hiking, canoeing, or caving. Moreover, here, travelers actively participate in sports activities (Kauppinen, 2019); in fact, from the viewpoint of theoretical literature, "soft sports tourism" is also referred to as "active sports tourism". A fair amount of research on the economic impact of sports events is devoted to global Mega Sport Events (MSEs), most of which refer to passive sports events (Taks, 2013). Moreover, (Gammon & Robinson, 2003) define a framework that categorizes 'hard sports tourism' as traveling to a mega or major sporting event where the tourists are, in most cases, passively involved in the event. Early theoretical foundations in this field considered advanced technologies as the most recent and up-to-date as follows: websites, online social media, mobile marketing, online display advertising, internet ads and videos, blogs, virtual reality, and smart searching motors (Keller, 2013). However, today, new technologies such as Mobile Friendly, Artificial Intelligence, Immersive Visual Experiences, the Internet of Things, and Big Data Analytics are the newest and most up-to-date technologies in sports tourism (Joseph, May 09, 2019). There are numerous web platforms promoting sports event tourism (i.e. "hard sports tourism") and offering registration for sports tours for sports fans mainly involving (passively) watching an event. For example, "SportsTraveler4" shows sports events such as NBA matches, Wimbledon matches, etc. (Achilleos et al., 2021). Additionally, there are sports tourism websites for specific sports events. For instance, Field Sports Travel6 only promotes and supports the sports of fishing, shooting, and cricket. Moreover, there are technology providers selling event management software platforms to the event organizers of specific sports (Achilleos et al., 2021). Additionally, today's travelers, due to their constant communication with the world and their family through GPS, SMS, email, or sites, their movements differ from previous trips and travelers (Bouchet & Sobry, 2019). Various authors have identified that active tourists use the Internet more actively than passive tourists for their travel purposes (i.e. recommending tourist destinations) (Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu, & Schuckert, 2020). In fact, data analysis revealed that more than 50% of active sports tourists (i.e., the main motivation for travel can be sport, culture, or, any other activity) use the Internet for travel purposes (Priporas, Vassiliadis, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2018). On the other hand, the authors have identified that only 24.7% of passive tourists use the Internet for travel purposes, while the rest prefer to use agencies. The authors discovered differences between passive and active tourists who use the Internet and online reservation systems, which is why they suggest the development of different reservation systems and web pages for tourist destinations (Valek & Axelsson, 2012).

Generally, Technology is no longer an auxiliary tool and the use of smart technology has become an inevitable requirement for industrial development (Hall et al., 2000). The adoption and implementation of smart technologies in tourist destinations and visitor attractions to enrich tourist

experiences and increase their satisfaction has become a new trend (Zhang, Sotiriadis, & Shen, 2022). The integration of tourism and new technologies is logical in this context. New technology helps tourism destinations improve the efficiency of tourism resource management, promote maximum use and sustainable development of tourism resources, and improve the quality of life of permanent residents and tourists (Shen, Sotiriadis, & Zhang, 2020); (Hernández-Méndez & Muñoz-Leiva, 2015). Also, by reviewing the theoretical literature in this field, it can be seen that there is a theoretical gap in the field of the consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism and it requires more research and attention. On the other hand, the number of research conducted in this field is very small while entering the information age, and it is necessary to solve this theoretical gap. In our country, most of the attention is directed towards other dimensions of tourism, and sports tourism is somewhat neglected. Our country is also among the countries that are not exempt from this rule and it is necessary to analyze and investigate the consequences of using new technologies in this type of tourism according to the domestic capacities that exist in the field of sports tourism. Also, the identification and application of these technologies will make tourist destinations to be considered sustainable destinations that gain benefits. Therefore, this research aims to identify the consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism, which will be investigated using a mixed method.

Methodology

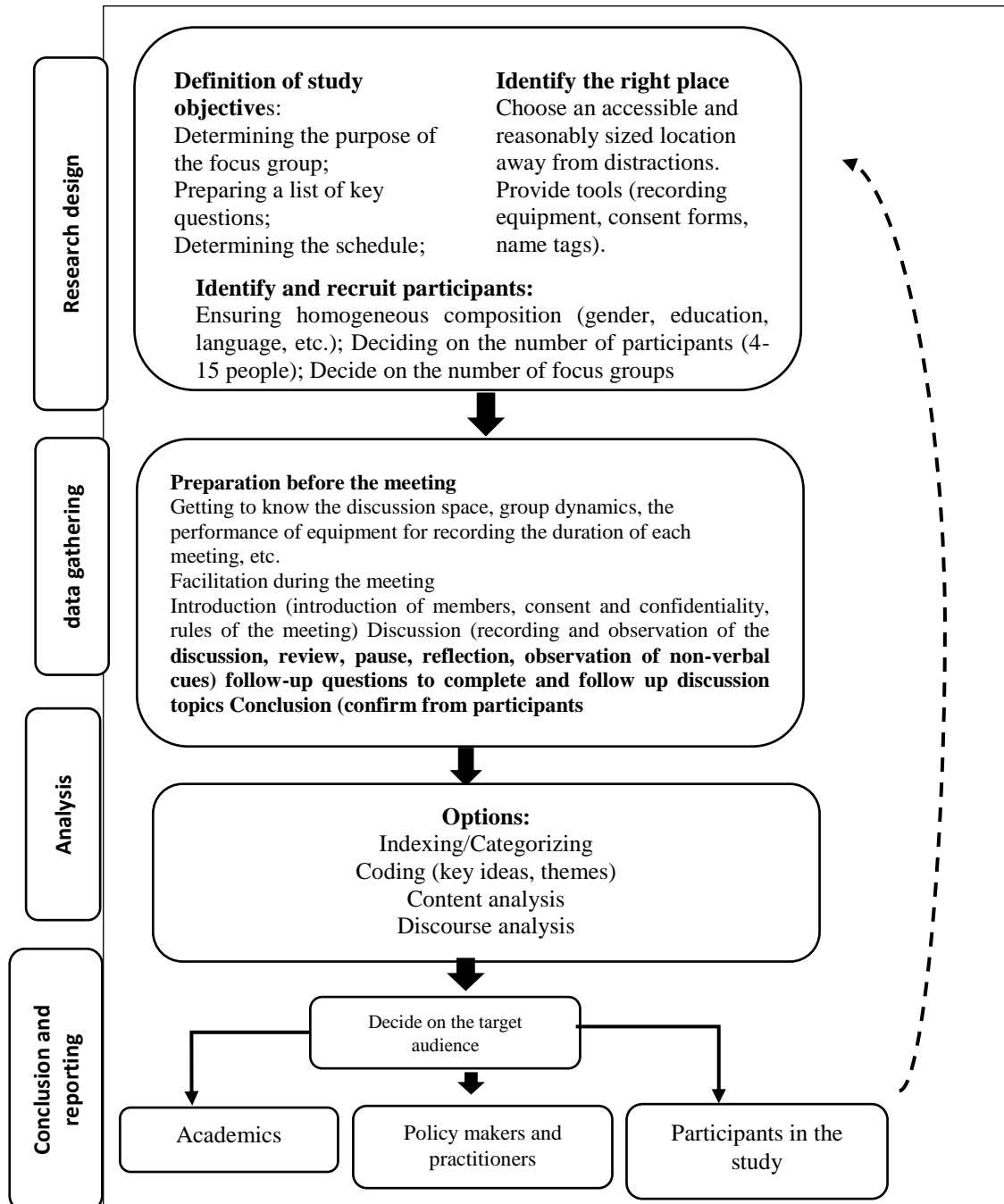
Clearly, after formulating and setting the research topic, the related research method should be selected and explained. Based on the essence of the data, the current research method is the mixed method, and from the viewpoint approach is exploratory. Given this, firstly, by using the qualitative method of "focus group", the benefits of using new technologies in sports tourism are extracted, then they are examined from the point of view of experts using the quantitative survey method to determine the validity and confirm the indicators. Then, using the statistical tests of mean and Standard Deviation of extracted components and mean and standard deviation of extracted indicators, the ranking and quantitative analysis of these components and indicators will be done.

Obviously, a focus group is an effective method to collect detailed information about a group of expert people in a specific area (Krueger, 2014). This method enjoys various approaches to gain data and information and it can even be used accompanied by other methods (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020). In this research, among the seven common types in this research method `_mixed_`, the online focus group has been chosen. Online focus group methods are originally not a different type of focus group discussion, but they are derived from the Internet as an adaptation of traditional methods. In an online environment, conference rooms, or other online tools are applied (O. Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). Here, in this research, due to the coronavirus pandemic, researchers used distance or online methods.

In this research, two categories of experts have been gathered in the focus group, and the data has been collected using semi-structured interviews in the period from October 2021 to July 2022. The first group includes 6 experts in the field of sports management and fields related to ICT in sports; the second one consists of 5 experts in sports tourism and related fields who enjoys executive and academic experience in this area. In the focus group method, the wide range of experience and professional expertise of the participants allows for lots of experiences and perspectives to be clearly understood, and deeply explored in a safe and open environment (Stephenson, Gergel, Keene, Rifkin, & Owen, 2020). These people were selected using the purposive sampling method. During the interviews - online interviews - raw data are independently extracted and initial reflections are discussed. An initial coding framework is then created. Through an inductive reasoning approach and the part-to-whole strategy, using the "three-element coding framework" which is common in qualitative methods, the process of coding and extracting themes begins and continues through an iterative process until work saturation is reached. Then, the initial thematic map obtained from the propositions obtained from the above interviews was utilized to create a logical model. This item was modified by the research team. As soon as the theoretical consensus was reached, it was observed that the themes and model accurately represented the desired data and information. The trustworthiness of the analysis was investigated using criteria developed by Nowell et al.'s method (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In this way, in order to check the reliability and the fitness

between the respondents' opinions and the codes extracted by the researchers, several experts in this specific domain made comments about the findings (extracted codes) and the researchers' initial interpretations, which can be considered a kind of referential adequacy.

Through the review process, some of the extracted codes were removed, and the process of categorizing the codes continued. These steps correspond to (Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998) four main steps shown in Figure 1. These steps include (1) research design, (2) data collection, (3) analysis, and (4) reporting of results (Morgan et al., 1998).



Source: Morgan et al. (1998)

In the second phase, i.e. the survey part of the research, the experts and specialists were also used, and by using the systematic sampling method, 38 of them, who were among the experts of universities, answered the questions of the questionnaire. As it was stated at the beginning of the study, the resulting model should be considered and approved by the experts in terms of mastery and validity. To do so, the initial model was sent to the experts using a questionnaire contained the components of the model, and then their scores were ranked in Table 2 based on importance and priority.

Results

First phase: online focus group qualitative method

In this part of the research, using the online focus group qualitative method, related components and indicators are extracted. The steps are as follows:

First Step: Research Design

This process begins with identifying the main purpose and determining the key objectives of the research. Based on the research objectives, a list of questions was prepared as a guide for each focus group discussion session. Next, research participants were identified, which is the most critical step according to scholars in this field because this technique is mainly based on group dynamics and synergistic relationships between participants to generate data. The group composition depends on the main purpose of the research. Since the subject area takes place in the fields of sports management and sports tourism, the experts were selected from these fields. It should be stated that to avoid "participant bias", the purposive sampling method was used. Then, using semi-structured interviews, primary propositions were extracted. The next step is to determine a suitable place for the discussion. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, online focus groups were used, and these meetings were held through one of the social networking software.

Second step: data collection

In this stage, the general content of the discussion is documented and finally, the data is completed. Verbal and non-verbal data rely on the behavior and actions of the focus group before, during, and after the discussion. The main elements of data collection during the focus group discussion include audio recording, note-taking, and participant observation. However, in this research, some participants didn't allow to disclose their names and record the session, thus the researchers preferred to just take notes and observe the participant. Given this, the period of data collection has become long and cross-sectional. Regardless of the number of focus group discussion sessions, it is important to consider the duration of the sessions. There is no specific rule regarding the duration of each interview meeting, but most scholars emphasize on 1 to 2 hours, which is determined based on the complexity of the subject, the number of questions, and the number of participants.

However, here, each session lasted about 1 hour. During the interviews, each of the raw data was extracted independently and the initial reflections were discussed. Then, an initial coding framework was created and themes were extracted until theoretical saturation was reached.

Third step: data analysis

The focus group method usually provides qualitative and observational data. Various qualitative analysis techniques can be used to analyze its data. Qualitative methods can be such as grounded theory, thematic analysis, ethnography, content analysis, etc. To code the data obtained in this research, the "three-element coding framework", which is common in the content analysis method, has been used. Thus, the first step is the initial coding, which includes generating multiple categories of codes without limiting the number of codes. In this step, the researcher lists emerging ideas draw diagrams, and identifies keywords frequently used by respondents as indicators of important themes. The second stage includes axial coding in which the researcher omits, combines, or divides the coding categories identified in the first step. Here, more attention should be paid to the recurring ideas and broader themes that connect the codes. This process can yield important results for comparison between focus groups, group dynamics, individual participants, or participant statements. In this step, 67 initial codes were extracted. Among them, 27 open codes, 13 axial codes, and 4 selective categories were categorized. In the third step, axial coding happens. By analyzing the axial codes, they are placed in the form of organized categories. At this stage, 13 axial codes were extracted. Then, to achieve the trustworthiness of the codes and create confidence, the researchers performed the intended analysis using the method of Nowell et al (Nowell et al., 2017). By reviewing the process, some of the extracted codes were removed, and the process of categorizing the codes continued in this way. Then, regarding the topic and essence of the research as well as the research process, the researchers can decide that the final themes would be based on "themes, discourse or illustrative quotations". In this

research, based on the existing themes, this classification was done so that finally 4 main categories (main components or themes) were extracted (Table 1).

The fourth stage: conclusion and presentation of the report

Once all the data have been analyzed, the researcher needs to consolidate the results into a coherent report for publication. Here, key decisions must be made so that the report fits the research aims. As mentioned before, although checking members allows the participants in the focus group discussion to check the accuracy and conformity with their experiences, the researchers also took measures regarding the reliability of the codes so that there would be no gaps or problems during the process. This category, which is a form of validation, increases the validity of the report or study and minimizes possible challenges and problems. In Table 1, the components and indicators of the consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism are listed.

Table 1. Components and indicators of the consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism

Components (Selective codes)	Concepts (Axial codes)	Indicators (Open codes)
Smart health	Up-to-date and well-equipped medical-sports facilities and infrastructure; Adopting new physiological approaches; Creating new health-oriented processes	Medical and health facilities; Adopting knowledge-based and physiological approaches; modern medical equipment; New sports tourism residences; Comprehensive intelligent health system; supporting facilities; New health services
Smart sports tourism	Fast and effective marketing; Applying management information systems; Applying new technologies of the hyper-information age (artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, etc.); Smart sports tourism cloud service	Smart sports tourism service platform; Real-time online interaction; Use of smart tools and devices; Using new and smart systems; Smartening of sports tourism infrastructure; Using new marketing mechanisms; Big data marketing
Sustainable development (healthy and sustainable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.)	Applying green technologies; Green and eco-friendly sports management; Creating green residences	Low-carbon goodwill; Low carbon management; Management of sustainable sports tourism; attention to the environment; Green economy; Green management; Protection of natural and environmental resources
Smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations	Creating integrated tourism services; Applying multimedia services; Automation of sports tourism services	Action plans and smart services; providing smart sports tourism services; sports tourism services; Social media and sports tourism; Smart destinations and accommodations; Provide up-to-date and smart services

As can be seen above, four main themes or components have been identified along with 13 related indicators, which will be explained in the next part of the article, that is, the discussion section.

The second phase: the quantitative survey method

At this phase, the extracted codes were transformed into a questionnaire and distributed among selected experts using a designed questionnaire and applying systematic sampling.

The results have been analyzed using SPSS software, then the related values have been listed in Tables 2 and 3. In this part, firstly, the importance, as well as the weight of each indicator, is determined. Secondly, the indicators of each factor are set. Thirdly, the importance coefficient and the average of the set of code factors are separated, which is presented here in the form of the below table. The indicators' validity was evaluated by 38 academic experts. Given that, according to the obtained values, all items have achieved the extent of "good" and "excellent".

Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation of extracted components

	Significance level	t	Degrees of freedom	standard deviation	Mean
Smart health	0.000	11.334	38	0.45890	4.67
Smart sports tourism	0.000	7.890	38	0.53245	4.0987
Sustainable development (healthy and sustainable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.)	0.000	6.256	38	0.56680	4.23
Smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations	0.001	7.113	38	0.40944	4.54

As can be seen above, the mean of extracted categories has acceptable values, which indicates the respondents' approval.

Table 3. The Mean and standard deviation of extracted indicators

	Indicators	X	SD		Indicators	X	SD
1	Up-to-date and well-equipped medical-sports facilities and infrastructure	4.8	0.467	8	Applying green technologies	4.20	0.661
2	Adopting new physiological approaches	5	0.445	9	Green and eco-friendly sports management	4.67	0.723
3	Creating new health-oriented processes	4.7	0.502	10	Creating green residences	4.45	0.641
4	Fast and effective marketing	4.76	0.521	11	Creating integrated tourism services	4.21	0.645
5	Using management information systems	4.05	0.522	12	Applying multimedia services	4.69	0.670
6	Using new technologies of the hyper-information age (artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, etc.)	4.22	0.601	13	Automation of sports tourism services	4.70	0.556
7	Smart sports tourism cloud service	5.68	0.569				

As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, i.e., the tables of mean and standard deviation and indicators, the mean of all indicators is greater than 4 and this shows the respondents' emphasis on indicators. In the following, we discuss, review, and provide practical suggestions. In Figure 2, the research pattern is drawn.

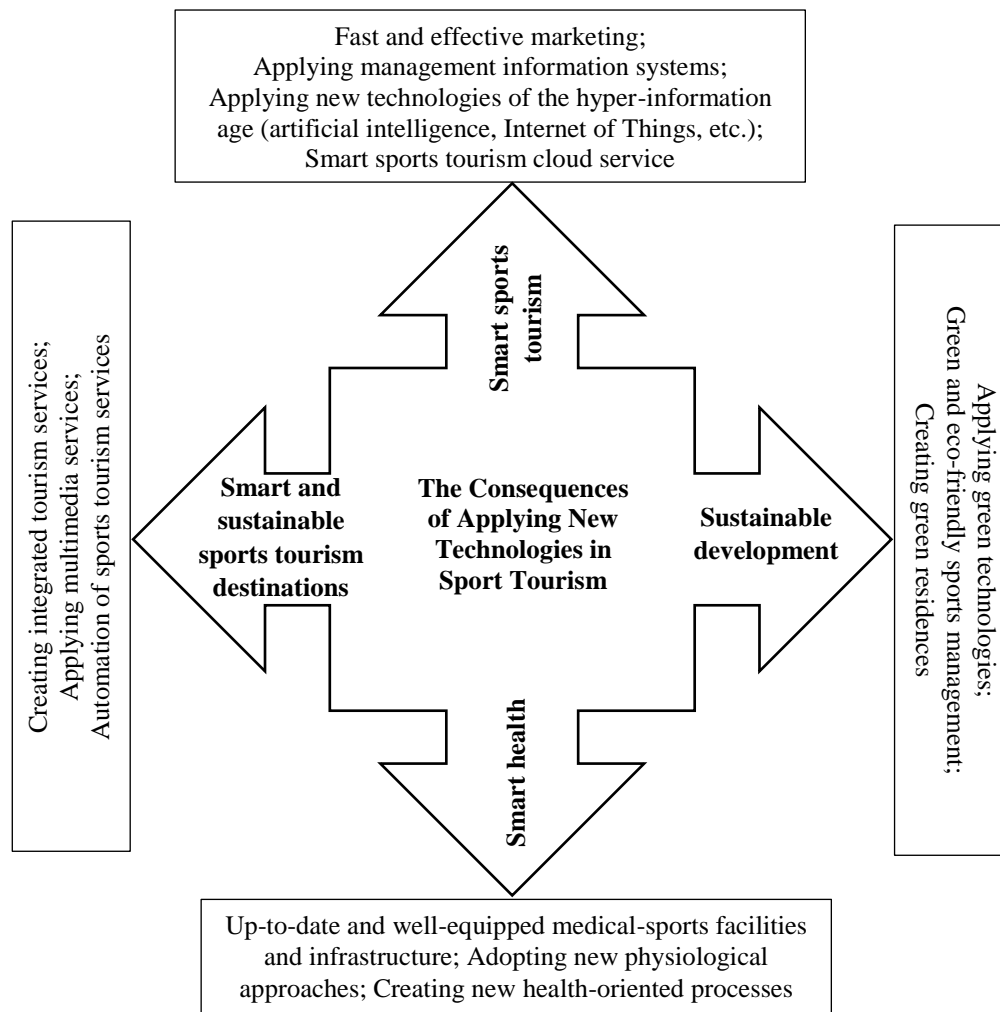


Figure 2. The research pattern

Discussion and Conclusion

Regarding the above findings, the four main components named Smart Health, Smart Sports Tourism, Sustainable Development (healthy and stable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.), Smart and Sustainable Sports Tourism Destinations are the main components of consequences of using new technologies in sports tourism. One of the important components of this field is called Smart Health. Up-to-date and well-equipped medical-sports facilities and infrastructure, adopting new physiological approaches, and creating new health-oriented processes are the main indicators of this field. New technologies can create smart health-oriented processes and mechanisms in the host society of sports tourism, which are vital categories in this field. The second component is called smart sports tourism which comprises fast and effective marketing, applying management information systems, using new technologies of the hyper-information age (artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, etc.), and smart sports tourism cloud service. Today, most countries have shown a tendency toward smart tourism and have implemented this category in all types of tourism. Sports tourism, which is one of the most critical types of tourism, can be "smart" provided that using such technologies. The third component is called sustainable development (healthy and sustainable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.). Using new technologies in sports tourism can be beneficial for the country as well as the host society. These technologies cause the least damage to the environment due to the use of optimal and renewable energy. Also, they can bring green residences by using green technologies and green and environment-oriented sports management. The fourth component is smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations. This component has the following indicators including creating integrated tourism services; Using multimedia services; Automation of sports tourism services. Applying items can bring smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations, which is one of the most crucial advantages of these new technologies.

As mentioned, this research mainly aimed at identifying the consequences of applying new technologies in sports tourism, which has been extracted the relevant components and indicators using the mixed method. Sports tourism is known as a fixed and non-fixed source of tourism in countries that greatly contributes to their economy, culture, etc. However, the consequences of applying new technologies in sports tourism have been less investigated in terms of theoretical literature. The greater number of research on active sports events focuses on the analysis and evaluation of the economic and social impact of such events, while in the era of meta-information, it seems more vital to investigate applying novel technologies. Given the findings, the four components called "smart health, smart sports tourism, sustainable development (healthy and sustainable environment, dynamic and healthy economy, etc.), smart and sustainable sports tourism destinations" are as the main components of the consequences in this area. Apparently, applying such technologies, even today can lead countries to achieve countless benefits. The results of the present research are consistent with the results of (Arenas, Goh, & Urueña, 2019), (Savić & Pavlović, 2018), (Tan, Lee, Lin, & Ooi, 2017), (Gretzel, 2011), (Michopoulou, Buhalis, Michailidis, & Ambrose, 2007), (Li, Hu, Huang, & Duan, 2017), (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). The development of the sports tourism industry, considering its advantages in terms of economy, business prosperity, employment, enhancing lifestyles, etc., can also be effective in reducing the existing difficulties provided that connecting with novel technologies. These technologies can bring benefits such as improving the quality of life, high speed and accuracy, creating green management in tourist areas, and using the best and most up-to-date facilities, which definitely are the main purposes of the greater body of countries. Given these, it is suggested that the main infrastructures for using such systems should be created first, then by detailed and codified planning, the relevant processes should be developed and implemented to achieve sustainable tourist destinations in the field of sports tourism while creating a competitive advantage. Also, it can be suggested to create smart sports tourism development plans so that they can be effective in other related areas considering the internal conditions and facilities.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

Ethical points have been observed.

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Authors' contribution

All authors have contributed to the design and implementation of this study.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest

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