

The effect of attractiveness of destinations on the mental image of sports tourists with the mediating role of perceived usefulness

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Abstract

This research was conducted in order to investigate the effect of attractiveness of destinations on the mental image of sports tourists with the mediating role of perceived usefulness. The current research is applied in terms of purpose and in terms of descriptive-surveillance type of structural equations. The statistical population of the research included all sports tourists who traveled to the northwestern provinces of the country (West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil) as a sports tourism destination in 2024, the criteria for their selection was participation in a sports event and activity that were evaluated at each location. Considering the unlimited population based on Morgan's table, the sample size of 383 people was selected using the available sampling method. Based on Morgan's table, the sample size of 383 people was selected using available stratified sampling. The data collection tools are standard questionnaires of attractiveness of tourist destinations (Das et al., 2007), mental image of tourists (Kim and Pardo, 2011) and perceived usefulness (Sad and Bali, 2005). Content validity and construct validity were confirmed by 10 sports management professors, while composite reliability, convergent validity and divergent validity of the instrument were also checked using factor analysis method. PLS v.3 and Spss v.22 software were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations has a positive and significant effect on the mental image of tourists. Also, perceived usefulness as a mediator can affect the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations and the mental image of tourists. Therefore, destinations that can provide a positive and attractive experience for tourists are likely to create a more positive mental image. This can ultimately lead to an increase in the number of visitors and further development of sports tourism in that destination.

Keywords: Attractiveness of sports tourism destinations, Mental image of tourists, Perceived instrumentality

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, sports tourism is known as one of the popular tourist destinations. The combination of two important elements of sports tourism, i.e. sports job and tourism experience, leads to the increase of people's desire to travel and take a break from everyday life (Zhao and Agivah, 2023). This type of tourism attracts people to the environment where sports activities are performed, and at the same time, it also improves their mental image. A combination of tourism and sports (sports tourism) can be a suitable topic to improve the attractiveness of tourist destinations (Banchuri and Masoudi, 2023).

Places that have a variety of sports activities and are associated with beautiful nature can create more satisfaction and pleasure in tourists. Improving the attractiveness of tourist destinations in the field of sports and wellness can effectively lead to the formation of a favorable mental image in tourists (Molvi and Hamidi, 1400).

On the other hand, the concept of perceived usefulness and the degree of popularity of a tourist destination among other tourists can influence the decision of tourists to visit a destination, as a result, more tourists will be willing to visit this destination (Gio et al., 2022).

In the meantime, the north-west of the country can be attractive for climbing enthusiasts due to favorable geographical conditions such as the presence of mountains and a large number of mountain peaks. The northwest of the country has the ability to host a huge number of mountaineers, hunters, cyclists,

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deserters, boaters, nature walkers and skiers and host native and local games. However, by examining the backgrounds and research done inside and outside the country, it can be seen that most of the research done on the topic of improving the attractiveness of tourist destinations, mainly focused on accessibility, amenities and infrastructure, scenery and local community, and by Other researches about the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations are limited. Therefore, the relationships that will be investigated in this research have received little attention, and this research seeks to fill this scientific gap. Therefore, this research can help the planners of this area to provide the necessary ground for the development of sports tourism in different cities.

2. Methodology

This research has an applied purpose and a descriptive-surveillance type of structural equations. The statistical population of the research included all sports tourists who traveled to the northwestern provinces of the country (West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil) as a sports tourist destination. Considering the unlimited population based on Morgan's table, the sample size is 383 people. The data collection tools are standard questionnaires, therefore, to measure the variables of the research, three questionnaires were used: attractiveness of tourist destinations (Das et al., 2007), mental image of tourists (Kim and Pardo, 2011) and perceived usefulness (Sad and Bali,2005) was used. Some of the questionnaires were distributed electronically among the tourists who had traveled to the northwest of the country, and another part of the questionnaires was distributed among the spectators with the cooperation of the supervisor and the cooperation of the university directorate. The 6,000-person volleyball stadium in Urmia was distributed and collected by hand. Finally, the data was analyzed using PLS and Spss software.

3. Data analyze

If the t-statistic value is above 1.96 at the 95% confidence level, the desired hypothesis can be confirmed, but if it is smaller, the desired hypothesis will be rejected. Also, if the hypothesis is confirmed, if the value of the numerical path coefficient is positive, it indicates a positive and direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

No.	The path of hypotheses	β	PVALUE	T-VALUE	status
1	The attractiveness of sports tourism destinations → mental image of tourists	0.340	0.000	7.488	✓
2	The attractiveness of sports tourism destinations → Perceived usefulness	0.270	0.000	5.430	✓
3	Perceived usefulness → mental image of tourists	0.282	0.000	5.953	✓
4	The attractiveness of sports tourism destinations → Perceived usefulness → mental image of tourists	0.076	0.000	3.835	✓

4. CONCLUSION

According to the results of this research, it can be said that the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations can have a direct effect on the mental image of tourists. Destinations that can provide tourists with a positive and attractive experience are likely to create a more positive mental image. This can ultimately lead to an increase in the number of visitors and further development of sports tourism in that destination. The first effect that the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations has on the mental image of tourists is the increase in excitement and unique experiences. . In addition, sports tourists often participate in sports-related training and competitions. This participation in sports activities and competitions can lead them to close experiences with famous professors and coaches, professional players, as well as being with other people with a common interest in sports. These experiences and connections can strengthen the tourist's mental image about the sports community and the sports destination. Paying attention to the attractiveness of sports tourism destinations in northwest Iran with beautiful natural landscapes, diverse culture and sports facilities can increase tourism and economic development in these areas. Because the mountainous and forest areas of West and East Azerbaijan can be suitable places for nature sports such as mountain climbing, mountain biking and walking. According

to the results of the research, if tourists perceive that visiting these areas as a sports tourism destination has significant benefits for them, this can create a more positive mental image of that destination and, as a result, increase the probability of returning to that destination. This usefulness can include new experiences, increasing knowledge and sports skills, enjoyment and entertainment, or even improving physical and mental health.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors of the article consider it necessary to thank and appreciate all the people who accompanied the researchers in conducting the research.

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