



## The Role of Social Marketing in Sports Tourism Development in Tehran Province

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The goal of this study was to investigate the role of social marketing in the development of sports tourism in Tehran Province.

**Methodology:** The study is applied in terms of purpose, and it is descriptive correlational research in which 100 experts in the field of social marketing (professors of marketing), specialists in sports tourism (professors), authorities in sports tourism (professors and researchers of this field), as well as managers and experts of Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization were selected as the sample using available and selective sampling. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire taken from previous studies. The professors confirmed the face and content validity, with reliability confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.99.

**Findings:** Data were analyzed by SPSS21 and LISREL 8 software. The results showed seven components of social marketing. They include technology, government laws and policies, environment, economic status, safety and security in sports venues, use of ads and communication channels, all but the last item have a positive and significant effect on the development of sports tourism.

**Originality:** The results of this study showed that the investment of tourism organizations in social marketing factors is effective. The present study is one of the few comprehensive studies that have been conducted on credit and infrastructure investments in Iran concerning sports tourism.

### Keywords

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## 1. Introduction

Social marketing is a new field of marketing science in which managers seek social goals or public works by changing abnormal behaviours. In sport social marketing, it is attempted to adopt a new behaviour. For individuals and people, exercise and physical activity are virtue and should be considered in the household budget. Therefore, regular exercise is accepted as a desirable behaviour; potential actions such as the overuse of fast food or personal automobiles disappear. Social marketing is the application of business marketing techniques to analyze, design, implement, and evaluate the designated programs that voluntarily influence the behaviour of the target audience and improve personal and community wellbeing (Andreasen, 2012).

Social marketing uses marketing principles and techniques to change behaviour. It is a concept, process and application to understand who people are and what they want and then to organize the creation, communication and delivery of products and services to meet the wants and needs of society and to solve serious social problems (Serrat, 2017; Slade et al., 2017). Social marketing affects several economic components, including tourism. Zarei et al. (2016), in a study on the impact of social marketing on health tourism, found that the application of social marketing tools can create a positive belief in the destination of health tourism to invoke the desire for travelling for health purposes. One of the aspects of tourism is sports tourism. This industry has emerged from the combination of two sectors of tourism and sports (Adabi Firouzjah et al., 2009) and can generally divide into active and inactive sports tourism. In countries with an advanced industrial sector, the tourism industry complex, known as white exports, accounts for 4-6% of GDP, of which the share of sports tourism is 1-2%. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO), the number of tourists worldwide is growing at an average rate of 4.3% per year, which is projected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020. Therefore, the expenditures of tourists worldwide are growing by an average of 6.7% per year, which could amount to 2 trillion \$ up to 2020 (Adabi Firoozjah et al., 2009: 68 Quoted from WTO). This issue can be deliberated when we know that sports tourism has the highest growth rate among various dimensions of the tourism industry. Therefore, as a multidimensional phenomenon, sports tourism has found its place in human societies (Khodabakhshzade et al., 2020). Accordingly, many countries are trying to gain these benefits by investing heavily in this industry. For example, by investing in its tourism capabilities, Turkey earned 6 million \$ in 2007 by attracting 1,200 sports teams worldwide that often travel to Turkey for pre-tournament preparations (Richards, 2020).

In recent years, especially in undesirable conditions of the global economy, countries are paying more attention to the tourism industry and look at it as an alternative to their incomes (Javid et al., 2013). For Iran, whose economy relies heavily on revenues from crude oil exports, given that macroeconomic variables fluctuate sharply over time following global oil prices, as well as the country's young population and high unemployment rate, the development of sports tourism is of great importance (Elahi et al., 2021; Honarvar & Khatibzadeh, 2014; Memari et al., 2021).

## 2. Theoretical background

Today, sports tourism has recognized as an employment-generating, income-earning and influential industry with broad and complex consequences and effects in the context of human societies. The sector has gained double importance in some areas with astonishing leaps, such as surpassing oil and automobile industry revenues or its tremendous impact on world peace and prevention (UNWTO, 2021)<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, due to the objective benefits of sports tourism, many national and international sports institutions, including International Federations (IF<sup>2</sup>), National Olympic Committees<sup>3</sup>, Organizing Committees for Olympic Games<sup>4</sup>, United Nations Environment Program<sup>5</sup> and International Olympic Committees,<sup>6</sup> have been committed to the sustainable development of sport tourism at regional, national and global levels. However, sports tourism can be considered a new category from industry in Iran. After the inauguration of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization in early 2004, the sports tourism committee was established in this organization. A memorandum of understanding was signed between this organization and National Olympic Committee on sports tourism in August 2016 (Ramezani & Foroughi, 2009). The annual income of the developed countries in the world from sports tourism exceeds 20 billion dollars; however, despite being among the top five countries of the world in terms of biodiversity and natural attractions and generally being among the first two countries in the world in view of tourist attractions (Zarei et al., 2016), our country is not even among the top forty countries in the world concerning tourist reception (Karimi et al., 2020). Therefore, given the existence of these potentials and with full awareness of the various benefits of sports tourism, it seems that there have been no in-depth and practical studies in terms of credit and infrastructure investments in Iran.

The role of marketing components in the development of sports tourism has been investigated in several studies. Mirabadi et al. (2019) in a study examined the role and performance of media in the development of sports tourism and found that the media have had an overall poor performance in the development of sports tourism. Asadi et al. (2019) in their research designed a model for the development of sports tourism with AIDAR<sup>7</sup> advertising framework in various mass media and stated that from the perspective of research sample, "informative roles and "acting roles (purchasing)" have the highest and lowest ranks among the factors affecting the development of sports tourism with AIDAR advertising framework through the media, respectively. Javid et al. (2013) studied the role of the Internet and new media in marketing of sports tourism, and found that the promotion of attractions and tourism packages, more appropriate and faster use of information and advertising resources, the introduction of attractions to

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<sup>1</sup> The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations

<sup>2</sup> IFs

<sup>3</sup> NOCs

<sup>4</sup> OCOGs

<sup>5</sup> UNEP

<sup>6</sup> IOC

<sup>7</sup> Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action, Retention

sports tourists and the promotion of attractions are important indicators in the development of sports tourism. Liao and Nong (2021) in their research stated that the use of new technologies and high-speed Internet leads to the development of sports tourism. However, no study was found to investigate the impact of social marketing on the development of sports tourism.

Tehran province is a popular destination and one of the most important and long-standing sports tourism places among sports tourism destinations of Middle East. Considering the development of social marketing and its ability to influence people's perceptions and beliefs, it can be said that social marketing can greatly contribute to encouragement of tourists in choosing sports tourism sites of Tehran Province as a tourist destination.

Researchers have used different methods for the development of sports tourism, but in this study, it has been attempted to assess the role of social marketing and its elements in the development of sports tourism, especially sports tourism in Tehran Province in order to help the relevant tourism institutions of this province to formulate a program in this regard. New theories in the field of tourism show that sports-based tourism attractions have more economic, social and political advantages relative to other cultural attractions Ebrahimzadeh et al. (2011). Therefore, many countries in the world are striving to strengthen their sports tourism industry because this industry can play a prominent role as an economic generator with political, social, cultural and environmental impact on different communities (Liao & Nong, 2021).

The vast territory of Iran has a coloured and exceptional nature that includes unique mountains, beaches, lakes, forests and deserts, ranking fifth in the world in terms of natural attractions. Mountaineering, beach and water sports, public winter sports, hunting and desert tourism are among the most important potential natural sports attractions of Iran (Parto et al., 2020). Unfortunately, Iran's tourism industry has not found its true place, and Tehran Province is no exception. Therefore, a realistic leadership and application based on social marketing is necessary to be able to effectively use sports tourism in tourist sites of Tehran Province for the growth and development of sports and tourism in the country and the region by providing suitable conditions and space for tourism.

The following analytical model, which is taken from research conducted in the two fields of social marketing and sports tourism, is the basis for designing the main and secondary research questions, and the present research tool has been designed and implemented based on the following model.

### 3. Methodology

The present study is applied research and the scientific method of it is descriptive-correlation. The statistical population of the present research includes experts in the field of social marketing (professors of marketing), sports tourism (professors of sports tourism), as well as managers and experts of Cultural Heritage Organization who are responsible for tourism development in general and sports tourism in particular in Tehran.

Due to the lack of accurate information on the Number of familiar specialists and experts in this field, the following unlimited sampling formula was used:

In this formula:

n= Number of samples under study

Z= Value of the normal variable of the unit corresponding to confidence level ( $\alpha-1$ )

P= Estimation of variable attribute ratio in society

q = Estimation of failure ratio of a variable trait in the community or (1-p)

d = Permissible error rate

Considering 95% confidence level and the assumption of normal distribution, the t value is equal to 1.96 and due to the unknown variance of the population, p is equal to 0.5 and thereby q equals 0.5. The permissible error rate (d) is assumed to be 0.1. Thus, the sample size required for this study is roughly as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p (q)}{d^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 (0.5)}{0.1^2}$$

Therefore, in this section, our sample consisted of 96 subjects. Due to the possibility of loss of research samples, 120 questionnaires were distributed, of which 100 were returned correctly and analyzed.

The available and selective sampling was used in this study due to its research method. The face validity of research questionnaire was confirmed after translation, retranslation and adjustment with prevailing culture in the country by obtaining the opinions and applying the desired corrections from eight professors of sports management who had the necessary expertise in the field of sports tourism. A questionnaire consisting of 37 questions was designed to evaluate the content validity using the panel method. After designing the questionnaire, to ensure its completeness and eliminate possible deficiencies, a pilot study was conducted. For this purpose, a sample of 35 subjects was selected before the main test, a questionnaire was distributed among them and its reliability calculated using SPSS software. However, with the changes made in questions after applying the necessary corrections in the questions, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of final questions was calculated to be 0.885. The obtained coefficient indicates that the questionnaire has the necessary reliability or in other words the required reliability, while the value of this coefficient for each of the dimensions and components is as described in [Table 2](#).

Considering the fact that the minimum reliability coefficient for research questionnaires is equal to 0.7, it is observed that the obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient is higher than this value and is thus suitable. Afterward, with general distribution of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all questionnaires that were fully completed and reviewed was calculated to be 0.991. To answer the questions and test the research model, SPSS software version 24 and LISREL were used.

## **4. Results**

Description of the demographic features of research samples showed that the highest frequency was related to doctoral degree, which accounted for 59 subjects (59%). Also,

the lowest Number was related to bachelor's degree, which included four subjects. Out of 100 statistical samples, 57 were male (57%) and 43 female (43%). The 42-49 and <26-33 age group had the highest and lowest prevalence, respectively.

According to Hair et al. (2012), skewness and kurtosis were used to determine the normality of data. The results showed that the skewness and kurtosis is between -3 and 3 and between -5 and 5, respectively. Therefore, the data have normal distribution and the use of covariance-based software is justified.

The measurement model of research variables was subsequently implemented and it was found that the critical ratio of all cases is significant (critical ratio must be between -1.96 and 1.96 with  $p < 0.050$  significance level). Also, in all critical ratios of items, the value of critical ratio is  $> 2.58$ , so it is significant at 99% level. Therefore, in general, because it is significant in all items, no question is omitted. Besides, in the standard mode, all factor loads were  $> 0.5$  (the strictest mode). Therefore, in the standard mode, no item was deleted.

To examine the research model, which includes the independent variable of social marketing [with dimensions of technology, government laws and policies, environment (environmental health), economic status, establishing safety and security in sports venues, use of ads and communication channels, external rewards and incentives) and the dependent variable of the development of sports tourism (with the dimensions of attractiveness of tourist destinations, attractiveness of the tourism environment), the suitability and good fit must be ensured before confirming the structural relationships. In the research model, the ratio of chi-square to degree of freedom is 15.06, which is  $> 5$ . Moreover, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is equal to 0.061 and  $< 0.08$ . In addition, comparative fitness index (CFI=0.95), goodness of fit index (GFI=0.89), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI 0.85), incremental fitness index (IFI=0.94), normalized fitness index (NFI=0.92) and non-normalized fitness index (NNFI=0.91) are all  $> 0.85$ , so the model fits well and is approved.

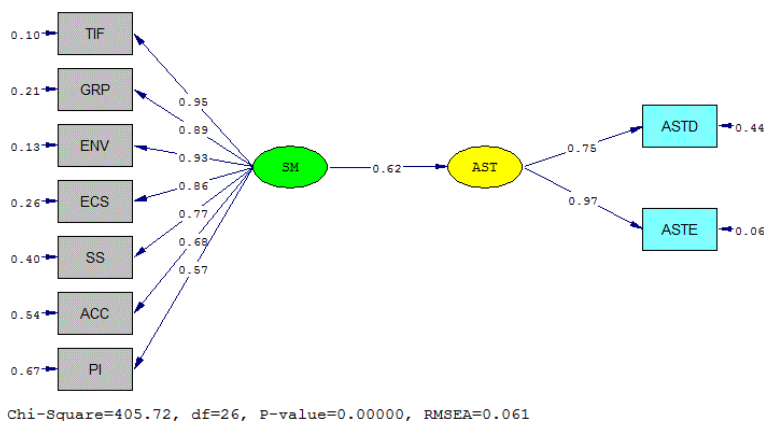
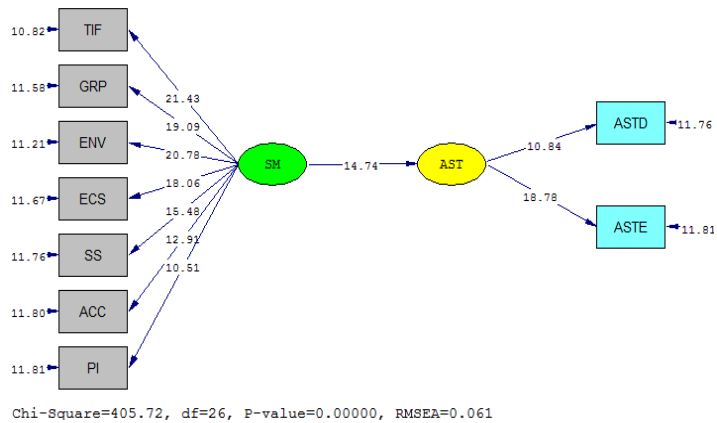


Figure 1. Model in standard estimation mode.



**Figure 2.** Model in significance coefficients mode (t-statistic).

Figures 1 and 2 show the results of structural relationships between the variables of research model. This model examines the role of social marketing in the development of sports tourism. According to the path coefficient of 0.62 and t-value of 14.74 at detection level of 0.05, this relationship was confirmed (because the t-statistic is out of -96.1 to 96.1 range). Furthermore, considering the positive sign of path coefficient, it can be stated that the relationship is positive.

Figure 3 shows the final research model. In this Figure, the standard coefficients obtained from structural equation modelling are also shown. These coefficients indicate the effect of each of the components and the independent variable on the dependent variable.

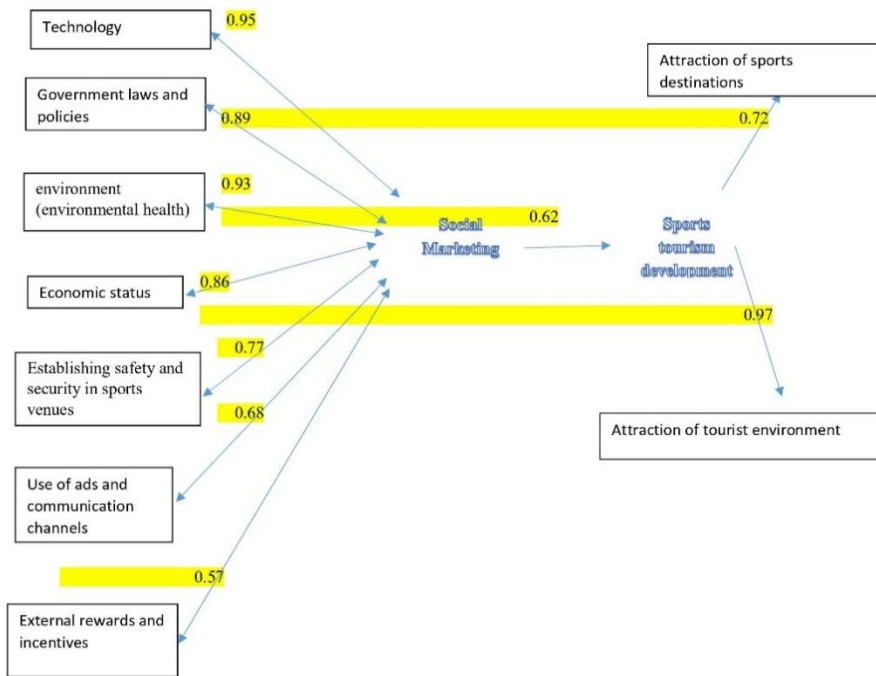


Figure 3. Standard estimation model based on double correlation of conceptual model.

Table 1. Components and indicators of the research model along with their corresponding sources.

Dimension	Component	Support sources	Indicates
Social Marketing	Technology	Saberi et al. (2019)	Addiction to computer games in people Technology Popularity of media and social networks in individuals
	Government laws and policies	Saberi et al. (2019)	Consistent policies in the development of sports tourism in the country Management instability Lack of a written and comprehensive plan for implementation
	Environment (environmental health)	Ajdary et al. (2015) Saberi et al. (2019)	Undesired weather conditions Air pollution Noise caused by vehicles
	The economic situation	Naghavi (2016) Kim et al. (2015) Zarei et al. (2016) Saberi et al. (2019)	Excessive preoccupation of people (right to punishment)
	Establishing safety and security in sports venues	Saberi et al. (2019)	Inadequate economic situation in society Inadequate economic problems in society
	Use of ads and communication channels	Kim et al. (2015) Zarei et al. (2016)	Approval of places used in terms of safety and security Security and tranquility of places for activities The cleanliness of the place
	Use of external rewards and incentives	Javid et al. (2013) Malek Akhlagh et al. (2016) Zarei et al. (2016) Saberi et al. (2019)	Proper use of sports personalities and athletes by IRIB in their films and programs Encouraging films and documentaries that are in line with the development of sports and physical activity The advertising message must be at specific and appropriate times



Dimension	Component	Support sources	Indicates
Development of sports tourism	Development of sports tourism	Malek Akhlagh et al. (2016) Saber et al. (2019)	Presenting evaluation cards to encourage people according to the material benefits given to them Providing benefits for people with a high level of participation Providing benefits for those with good health
		Zebardast et al. (2020)	Introducing and having a global reputation as a tourist destination Acquisition of hosting sports events in tourist destinations Cheap tourist destination for service Existence of quality and desirable infrastructure for tourist destinations Clean and hygienic tourist destination Diversity of the tourist destination to create a new experience Considering seasonal sports tourism destinations Information about the destination of sports tourism to raise the level of people's aspirations Marketing of international tourist tours
			Beautiful attractions and landscapes Various resorts and entertainments Favourable and pleasant weather Security and reliability of tourist places Quiet place for tourists to have fun and spend their free time Hospitality of the staff of sports tourism destinations Modern and advanced sports camps and destinations for tourists

**Table 2.** The specifications of questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of research.

	Dimension	Indicator	Relevant measures (questions)	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
1	Social marketing	Technology	Question 1 to 3	0.770
2		Government laws and policies	Question 4 and 5	0.721
3		Environment (environmental health)	Question 6 to 8	0.901
4		The economic situation	Question 9 to 11	0.778
5		Establishing safety and security in sports venues	Question 12 to 14	0.832
6		Use of ads and communication channels	Question 15 to 17	0.933
12		Use of external rewards and incentives	Question 18 to 20	0.928
14	Attracting sports tourists	Attracting tourist destinations	Question 21 to 29	0.868
15		Attracting the tourism environment	Question 30 to 36	0.740

## 5. Managerial implications

This question was analyzed using statistical methods and structural equation modelling. As shown in [Figure 3](#), the social marketing factors affecting the development of sports tourism include technology, government rules and policies, environment (environmental health), economic status, safety and security in sports venues, the use of ads and communication channels with path coefficient of 0.62 and t-value of 14.74. The t value for this parameter (according to the rule of 5% error in rejection area of zero hypothesis for values outside -1.96 to 1.96 range for each model parameter) is calculated  $>1.96$ . Therefore, it can be stated that in response to the main research question, the role of social marketing is confirmed with 95% confidence; in other words, social marketing has a statistically significant role (relationship) in the development of sports tourism and the type of relationship between the two variables is positive and significant considering the positive path coefficient. Therefore, at 95% confidence level, one can expect that concomitant with the improvement in social marketing, the likelihood of developing sports tourism in a positive direction increases, and any weaknesses and shortcomings in the field of social marketing hinder the development of sports tourism.

The value of this coefficient (0.62) shows that in tourism sites of Tehran Province, social marketing has an important role in the development of sports tourism and that strong and supportive social marketing can lead to flourishing of sports tourism.

The phenomenon of sports tourism has received special attention as a strategy for economic development of societies. In this regard, sports tourism sites of Tehran Province as one of the most important provinces with tourism attractions have been addressed. Also, considering the income derived from holding sporting events, the marketing element can be a common factor of sports marketing with other marketing types such as commercial or educational marketing. The results of the main question confirm that social marketing is an effective factor in the development of sports tourism in sports tourism sites of Tehran Province; therefore, tourism managers in these areas can create conditions for enjoyment and attraction of tourists and eventually develop the sports tourism industry by providing social marketing factors and removing the barriers.

According to the final model that was tested in sports tourism sites of Tehran Province ([Figure 3](#)), it was found that social marketing overshadows the development of tourism in these sites directly and with higher than average effect (62%). Among the components of social marketing, the following factors had the highest impact respectively: technology (95%), environmental health (93%), government laws and policies (89%), economic status (86%), safety and security in sports venues (77%), the use of ads and communication channels (68%), external awards and incentives (57%). Among these factors, the technology is the most important in social marketing. Social marketing in technological debate can use technological tools and take steps to somehow change the undesirable behaviour of a person into desired behaviour, and emails, text messages, social networks, websites, Instagram and so forth are among the technological approaches used for this purpose. According to statistics obtained from

the official news agencies of the country<sup>1</sup> and more importantly from cyber police website<sup>2</sup>, nearly 40 million users of social networks are Iranian. In a majority of these channels, there are channels and groups to encourage and change people's behaviour toward specific activities (including sports tourism), and perhaps this technology is the most important factor in social marketing in the present study.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

Overall, the results of this study show that the investment of tourism organizations on social marketing factors is valuable because the following measures can affect the desire for tourism and its consideration:

- The issue of social marketing can be deliberated as a strategy for the development of sports tourism as a comprehensive approach that has been regarded in this way for the first time
- It can be stated that the conceptual model of the present study is a complete and comprehensive tool to implement social marketing for the development of sports tourism. Such a model has not been used with this research approach.
- Given that social marketing is a marketing philosophy to solve social problems, this approach can be used as a method and strategy for the development of sports tourism.
- Based on the obtained conceptual model, tourism development officials in sports tourism sites of Tehran Province are advised to first identify the effective causal conditions of this phenomenon to use the social marketing for the development of tourists and apply the right strategies accordingly.
- Considering the fact that there are several problems and obstacles for the implementation of any strategy, we recommend that the authorities cooperate properly in the development of sports tourism in all cases except for the factors beyond their control. Given that sports tourism in Iran is not the responsibility of an organization, clear and transparent cooperation can be highly effective in attracting tourists.
- Regarding the fact that many dimensions were identified in the field of strategies and appropriate indicators, it is suggested that these strategies should be considered with a social marketing approach not pursuing financial benefits for planning and implementation of strategies. Instead, great attention should be paid to social interests so that these strategies can be executed empirically on a small scale.
- Since advertisements and communication channels were in the second priority in terms of path coefficient, it is suggested to use prominent people in the study areas for this purpose. These celebrities can be prominent athletes, actors or veterans, or approved groups such as family, social brands and clubs.
- Considering that technology and environment had the third and fourth priority in

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<sup>1</sup> Including Mashregh, Tasnim and Tabnak

<sup>2</sup> [www.cyberpolice.ir](http://www.cyberpolice.ir)

terms of path coefficient, respectively, it is suggested that the spaces used for tourism in sports tourism sites should be attractive, uniform and use natural spaces to take advantage of advances and internet technologies to attract tourists, and the existence of beautiful sports spaces, parks, clean and tidy spaces (in terms of pollution), as well as entertainment with a variety of colours has a great impact in behaviour, mood, tranquillity, positive and negative emotions of individuals, vitality and power of society.

- In environmental health category, it is suggested to choose the right time to hold sports competitions in order to attract tourists. Sports tourism managers can boost the tourism industry by selecting the appropriate time depending on the geographical and climatic conditions.
- To create a safe place for tourists, the government and law enforcement forces must provide the necessary infrastructure for tourism development, especially security for tourists. Meanwhile, the performance of sports organizations and managers in establishing and developing security has a significant role in the security perceived by sports tourists.

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## نقش بازاریابی اجتماعی در توسعه گردشگری ورزشی استان تهران

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### کلیدواژه

بازاریابی  
محیط گردشگری  
مقصد گردشگری  
ورزش

### نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

### چکیده

**هدف:** پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی نقش بازاریابی اجتماعی در توسعه گردشگری ورزشی استان تهران انجام شد.

**روش:** مطالعه حاضر از نظر هدف کاربردی، از نظر شیوه جمع‌آوری داده‌ها توصیفی از نوع همبستگی بوده که ۱۰۰ نفر از صاحب‌نظران در زمینه بازاریابی اجتماعی، صاحب‌نظران در زمینه گردشگری ورزشی و مدیران و کارشناسان سازمان میراث فرهنگی به شیوه نمونه‌گیری در دسترس و انتخابی، برای شرکت در این مطالعه انتخاب شدند. ابزار جمع‌آوری داده‌ها، پرسشنامه محقق ساخته برگرفته از پژوهش‌های انجام شده بود که روایی ظاهری و محتوایی آن توسط خبرگان و پایایی آن با استفاده از ضریب آلفای کرونباخ برابر ۰/۹۹ مورد تأیید قرار گرفت.

**یافته‌ها:** داده‌ها توسط نرم‌افزار SPSS ۲۱ و LISREL ۸ تجزیه و تحلیل شدند. نتایج نشان داد که از ۷ مؤلفه بازاریابی اجتماعی به استثنای استفاده از جوایز و مشوق‌های بیرونی، سایر مؤلفه‌ها (تکنولوژی، قوانین و خط‌مشی‌های دولتی، محیط، وضعیت اقتصادی، برقراری ایمنی و امنیت در اماکن ورزشی، استفاده از تبلیغات و کانال‌های ارتباطی)، در توسعه گردشگری ورزشی تأثیر مثبت و معناداری دارد.

**اصالت و ابتکار مقاله:** نتایج این مطالعه نشان داد که سرمایه‌گذاری سازمان‌های گردشگری بر بازاریابی اجتماعی موثر است. تحقیق حاضر، جزو معدود مطالعات جامعی است که درباره سرمایه‌گذاری‌های اعتباری و زیربنایی در ایران در ارتباط با گردشگری ورزشی انجام شده است.

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