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ANALYSIS OF INNOVATIVE MARKETING IN SPORTS TOURISM AND IDENTIFICATION OF OBSTACLES TO ITS IMPROVEMENT (CASE STUDY: IRAN)

How to cite [jak cytować]: Kiani, M.S., & Nazari, L. (2024). Analysis of innovative marketing in sports tourism and identification of obstacles to its improvement (Case study: Iran). *Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe*, 7(3), 133–151.

Analiza innowacyjnego marketingu w turystyce sportowej oraz określenie przeszkód uniemożliwiających jego doskonalenie (na przykładzie Iranu)

Streszczenie

Na całym świecie turystyka sportowa efektywnie przyczynia się do szybkiego rozwoju i dobrej koniunktury rynku turystycznego, a bycie gospodarzem zawodów sportowych odgrywa tutaj ważną rolę. Turystyce sportowej w Iranie nie poświęcano do tej pory zbyt wiele uwagi ze względu na brak wystarczającej wiedzy, braki w zarządzaniu, udokumentowanych i konkretnych strategiach, co przyczyniło się do utraty wielu niepowtarzalnych okazji na tym polu. Z tego względu celem niniejszego badania jest analiza innowacyjnego marketingu w turystyce sportowej oraz określenie przeszkód uniemożliwiających jego doskonalenie w Iranie. W celu uzyskania odpowiedniej podbudowy teoretycznej, w badaniach wykorzystano metodę jakościową oraz wywiady pogłębione, stanowiące formę analizy treści, przeprowadzone z 25 znakomitymi profesorami zarządzania sportem, przedsiębiorczości, turystyki specjalistycznej oraz przedsiębiorcami specjalizującymi się w turystyce sportowej. Wyniki badań pokazują, że głównymi czynnikami stojącymi na przeszkodzie rozwojowi turystyki sportowej w Iranie są te związane z polityką, prawem, zasobami ludzkimi, socjologią i kulturą, zdrowiem, informacją i komunikacją. Powyższe czynniki uniemożliwiają zastosowanie innowacyjnego marketingu sportowego w Iranie. Osoby odpowiedzialne za zatrudnienie, przedsiębiorczość, turystykę i sport winny wziąć pod uwagę te wyzwania w swym krótko- i długoterminowym planowaniu i kształtowaniu strategii działalności, tak aby wnieść istotny wkład w rozwój turystyki sportowej.

Słowa kluczowe: sport, zarządzanie, Iran, turystyka, marketing.

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Abstract

All over the world, sports tourism is one of the effective factors in the rapid growth and prosperity of the tourism market, and hosting sports competitions plays an important role in the prosperity of the tourism market. Sports tourism in Iran has been neglected due to the lack of sufficient knowledge, management and documented and specific strategies, and as a result, many unique opportunities in this field have been lost. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze innovative marketing in sports tourism and identify obstacles to its improvement in Iran. Qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews, constituting the form of content analysis, were conducted with 25 prominent professors of sports management, entrepreneurship, and expert tourism, as well as entrepreneurs in the field of sports tourism until reaching theoretical saturation. According to the findings of the research, among the main factors that hinder sports tourism in Iran are political and legal factors, human resources, social, cultural factors, health factors, political and legal factors, informational and communication ones. All the aforesaid factors hinder the progress of innovative sports marketing in Iran. Those in charge of employment and entrepreneurship, tourism and sports in their short-term and long-term planning and policy-making should take into account these challenges and contribute to the development of sports tourism.

Keywords: sport, management, Iran, tourism, marketing.

Introduction

Innovation, risk-taking, pioneering and opportunity-seeking are similar characteristics of sports tourism and entrepreneurship that seek to strengthen economic and regional development. Schumpeter is the first researcher who discovered that successful entrepreneurs discover opportunities with their creativity that others do not pay attention to (Fadda, 2020). According to economists, entrepreneurship is a mechanism that enables the optimal allocation of resources by using future opportunities along with risk. Entrepreneurship plays an important role in economic growth by contributing to the creation of new jobs, development of competition and innovations. It has a company, country and world level. Theoretical works and empirical studies emphasize that entrepreneurial activities of individuals are the key driver of entrepreneurial development, therefore, entrepreneurship has been considered as an important mechanism in achieving economic growth (Mandalizadeh, Ehsani & Honari, 2017). Sports tourism in line with its activities and creating value for society and profit for organizational stakeholders is forced to identify new opportunities (Antoncic & Prodan, 2017). Chun-Chu, Cheng-Shen and Chin-Huang (2018) believe that sports tourism is an entrepreneurial process and the entrepreneurial approach in sports tourism can provide a mechanism to withstand economic crises (Elyasi et al, 2019). Entrepreneurship can provide grounds for economic prosperity, change and lifestyle for all sections of society by discovering and expanding job opportunities related to sports (Rahimi et al., 2020). The three important approaches to entrepreneurship are wealth creation, technology development

and job creation. Nowadays, the trend of spending free time with attention to sports is expanding and this approach can be useful in creating new sports jobs. In fact, sports play an important role in production and employment (Zia & Totifar Tehran pur, 2019). The state of Iran's economic variables such as gross national product, per capita income, gross investment, etc. in the last three decades shows the heavy dependence of Iran's economy on oil revenues. It is valid to diversify the sources of economic growth and foreign exchange earnings, as well as create new job opportunities in the country of developing other industries (Zamani, 2014).

Today, tourist destinations in the field of sports tourism have taken important steps to attract tourists and increase the credibility of sports tourism. For example, sports tourism departments have taken various steps in the direction of green behaviors and the emergence of such behaviors on the part of tourists (Singh, Dash & Vashko, 2016).

Nowadays, most of the attention in the field of sports tourism is directed towards its new areas. One of the most prominent of these fields is the discussion of "going green". In addition to paying attention to cultural-social, political, environmental factors and the economic effects of tourism on various sports destinations, sports tourism can also consider its effects on the natural environment and take an intelligent approach to protect tourism resources through sustainable use (Demirel, 2015). Various authors argue that improving the "green" image of organizations and organizations that provide sports tourism facilities to their consumers leads to improving the competitiveness of areas that provide sports tourism and facilitating the environmental responsibility of companies in the direction of sustainable development (Demirel, 2015).

The emergence of green behaviors on the part of sports tourists is one of the solutions and measures that, in addition to the environment, will also have positive effects on a given tourist destination or its host community (Derman, 2019). Destinations providing sports tourism can benefit by encouraging and even forcing tourism suppliers to develop green measures and strategies. As a result, the occurrence of green behaviors on the part of tourists will be a basic and justifying factor (Demirel, 2015). One of the major issues in this field is to investigate and analyze the role of sports tourism and its effective factors in order to promote tourists' green behaviors. On the other hand, with the advancement of technology and changes, there is a need to pay more attention to promoting peaceful behaviors for the environment. Iran is a four-season and tourist-friendly country, and in its various regions, sports tourism is one of the most important tourist-attracting factors. On the other hand, the country has an ancient history of sports and sports of friendship, therefore, in addition to domestic tourists, tourists from different countries also visit it every year.

Knowing that the developments in this area are changing day by day, and the demands and needs of tourists increase over time, it is not possible to imagine a bright future for a specific area based on past trends. The patterns of entrepreneurship in sports tourism have undergone changes compared to the past and it is expected that these changes will increase exponentially with the introduction of information technology. Finally, recognizing the challenges of the advancement of this field, it is high time we started planning. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to identify the challenges facing the development of entrepreneurial sports tourism businesses in Iran, despite the importance of entrepreneurship directed at creating and developing sports tourism and as a result, sports businesses in a scientific and practical manner. It has been emphasized that this issue has always been neglected in the economic environment or sports businesses of the country. Therefore, the results obtained in this field can be interesting and fruitful.

The hypotheses in this research are as follows:

- H1.** Problems such as financing, resource management, and lack of access to appropriate equipment can create obstacles for the development of sports tourism businesses.
- H2.** Policies and development specific to sports tourism can have an important impact on the development of related businesses.
- H3.** Social and cultural changes can play an important role in people's attitude towards entrepreneurship.
- H4.** Technology and media can have an important impact on information spreading and developing sports tourism businesses.
- H5.** Due to the lack of specialized human resources in the field of sports tourism, this field has not developed as it should have.
- H6.** An incorrect image of Iran on international forums, the existence of a security view on the tourism category in the country, disturbing laws and regulations and the weak foundation of the tourism industry can create obstacles for the development of sports tourism businesses.
- H7.** The lack of proper health and medical facilities can create obstacles for the development of sports tourism businesses.

In the end, it is expected that cultural, social and economic factors are among the challenges facing the development of entrepreneurial sports tourism businesses in Iran, and in this research, solutions are presented for the development of entrepreneurship and sports business as well as creating new jobs in Iranian society.

Methodology

This study is a type of qualitative research. The purpose of this research is to analyze innovative marketing in sports tourism in Iran and to identify obstacles

to its progress. It is based on Glaser's (1992) emergence approach (Glaser, 1992). This work was performed by conducting Glaser-type qualitative research, whose method is exploratory. This research uses the analysis and review of available professional literature and an exploratory interview to identify the challenges facing the development of entrepreneurial sports tourism businesses, with the help of content analysis method (coding analysis unit, categories and registration unit). The research charges participating in the field interview include prominent professors in the field of sports management, entrepreneurship and tourism, as well as entrepreneurs in the field of sports tourism, who were selected for qualitative interviews in the research topic (25 interviews with 25 people, continued until theoretical saturation).

In order to conduct in-depth interviews, purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used. To check validity of this research, the research findings were presented to the participants, the text of the theory was studied by them and their views were applied. In the end, this research has been studied and reviewed by the professors, and some things have been stated to modify or change the final theory.

In this research, according to the views of Johnson (1997) and Patton (2002) on three methods of pluralism, pluralism in the method (retesting the work method), pluralism in the researcher (reliability test between identifiers) and participatory pluralism (using new interviewees to test the reliability of the model) have been used to confirm the validity of the research (Johnson, 1997; Patton, 2002). Pluralism in the participant means that if the research process and the research agreement are completely repeated for a group of new people with similar characteristics, similar results should be obtained. In the research, the interview agreement and data analysis were used in full for three new interviewees. To calculate the open validity percentage of the research test between the new interviewees, the identified identifiers of the two tests were compared. In each of the research sections (main research and validation research), identifiers that are similar in two time intervals are identified as "agreement" and non-similar identifiers are identified as "disagreement".

Table 1
Reliability calculation of research test (pluralism in interview)

Retest reliability (percentage)	Number of disagreements	Number of agreements	The total number of identifiers (codes)
94.2	5	41	87

Table 1 shows that the total number of codes in the two phases of the research is 87, the number of agreements between codes is 41, and the number of disagreements is 5. Using formula 1, the validity percentage of the pluralism

method in the interviewee is 94.2%. Considering the fact that this reliability rate is more than 60%, the interviewees have good credibility and the method of selecting the interviewees is also confirmed.

Kvale (1996) believes that to calculate the reliability of the test among the interviews, several interviews are selected as samples and each of them is identified twice in a short and specific time interval. Then, the identified identifiers are compared in two time intervals for each of the interviews (Kvale, 1996). The retesting method is used to evaluate the stability of the researcher's identification. In each of the interviews, identifiers that are similar in two time intervals are defined as "agreement" and non-similar identifiers as "lack of agreement".

In the method of pluralism in the research, in order to calculate the retest reliability of the interviews, three interviews were selected and each of them was coded twice in a 15-day interval by the researcher. The coding results are shown in table 2.

Table 2
Calculation of retest reliability (pluralism in the method)

Row	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Retest reliability (percentage)
1	46	21	4	91.3
2	52	24	4	92.3
3	38	18	2	94.7
Total	136	63	10	92.6

As can be seen in Table 2, the total number of codes in two time intervals of 15 days equals 136, the number of agreement codes between codes in these two times equals 63, and the number of non-agreements in these two time intervals equals 10. The open reliability of the interview test in the method of pluralism in the method using the mentioned formula is 92.6%, which is much higher than 60%, and the reliability of coding is confirmed.

Moreover, for the method of pluralism in the researcher, to calculate the reliability of the interview with the intra-subject agreement method of two coders, one of the sports management doctoral students was asked to participate in the research as a coder. The necessary trainings and methods for coding were presented to him, and then 3 interviews were coded by both the researcher and the person in question, and the percentage of agreement between the coders is shown in table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, the total number of codes registered by the researcher and colleagues is 165, the number of agreements between codes is 68, and the number of disagreements is 29. Using the mentioned formula, the reli-

ability between the coders for the interviews of this research equals 82.4%. Considering that it is above 60%, the reliability of coding is confirmed.

Table 3
Reliability calculation between two identifiers (coders)

Row	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Retest reliability (percentage)
1	61	25	11	82
2	55	22	11	80
3	49	21	7	85.7
Total	165	68	29	82.4

Three stages of open, central and selective coding were applied using MaxQD Pro version software.

Research findings

Demographic analysis

Table 4
Demographic characteristics of research charges

	Age				Education			Charge groups		Gender	
	Less than 20 years	21–40 years	41 to 60 years	Over 61 years old	Di- ploma and sub-di- ploma	BA de- gree	MA and PhD	Univer- sity profes- sors	Tour- ism entre- pre- neurs	Fe- male	Male
Abun- dance	0	10	10	5	0	0	25	14	11	5	20
Per- cent	0	40	40	20	0	0	100	56	44	20	80

The results of the descriptive part related to the demographic characteristics of the research showed that 40% of the participants were 21 to 40 years old, 40% were 41 to 60 years old, and 20% were older than 61. It was also found that 100% of the research charges were holders of MA and PhD degrees. 56% of the participants were university professors and 44% were entrepreneurs in the field of sports tourism. 20% of them were women and 80% were men.

First step: open coding

In the present study, data was collected from interviews. The interviewees were posed the questions in a general and open manner. After each interview, the researcher proceeded to analysis and open coding. At first, primary codes were identified, and then, while removing codes similar to each other, conceptual codes were identified. Finally, after examining and classifying conceptual codes, categories were identified. In total, 41 concepts and 7 categories were identified. The following table shows a part of one of the interviews and its relationship with the concepts obtained from the research.

Table 5

Part of the interview and conceptual codes obtained from the primary codes related to this part of the interview

The text of the interview	Conceptual codes obtained from primary codes related to this part of the interview
<p>There are many obstacles that innovators have to face in the field of sports tourism. One of the most important of these cases is the fear of not returning capital after investment. Innovators are worried that their investment will not be accompanied by profitability. The people of the region do not welcome this type of innovation and do not achieve their goals at all. On the other hand, among the obstacles they encounter we can mention security issues. Some areas of the country are still not very safe to visit. Innovators who intend to work in the field of organizing sports events are worried about not being able to find the human resources they need, i.e. talented and experienced employees.</p>	<p>Fear of no return on investment Investment Profitability Welcoming the people of the region Failure to achieve the goals of innovators Security issues Security of the country's regions Human resources Finding talented manpower Experienced manpower State barriers Cumbersome rules Paperwork Parallel organizations Long-term reviews Socio-cultural factors</p>

Second step: Axial coding

At this stage, the codes identified in the previous stage along with their categories were arranged round seven core codes of security, health, socio-cultural factors, human resources, political and legal factors, information and communication, economic factors (Table 6).

Finally, after many investigations and consultation with several sports management professors, the number of 41 concepts and 7 categories were identified.

Table 6
Axial coding

Row	Main article	concepts
1	Security	Ensuring the safety of sports tourists
2		Providing financial security for sports tourists
3		Negative advertisements regarding Iran's security for sports tourists
4		The challenge of natural disasters and natural insecurities (such as floods and earthquakes)
5	Health	Lack of fresh and healthy drinking water in all regions of Iran
6		Existence of infectious diseases such as Covid-19
7		Lack of equipped medical centers in all regions of Iran
8		Weak waste disposal culture in Iran
9		Weak culture of separating dry and wet waste
10		The presence of garbage in nature and roads
11	Socio-cultural factors	Cultural and religious differences in the regions of Iran
12		Encouraging participation in sports tourism events by media and education
13		Unpleasant behavior of fans and spectators during sports events
14		The presence of violence in athletes and fans
15		Society not accustomed to filling its free time with sports activities
16		Lack of well-developed entrepreneurial culture and acceptance of innovations
17		The people of the region do not welcome innovators of sports tourism
18	Human resources	Lack of innovative specialists in various fields of sports tourism
19		Lack of up-to-date knowledge of active human resources in sports tourism
20		Educational centers (such as universities) do not sufficiently train innovators in the field of sports tourism
21		Low motivation of talented innovative forces to work in sports tourism
22	Political and legal factors	Existence of bureaucracy and time-consuming administrative procedures
23		Low level of legal literacy of innovators
24		Corruption and existing discrimination
25		Tax problems
26		Multiplicity of organizations and their parallel work
27	Information and communication	Lack of interactive network between innovators
28		Poor communication between innovators and the government
29		Poor coverage of sports tourism innovators regarding their products

Table 6
Axial coding (cont.)

Row	Main article	concepts
30	Information and communication	Insufficient communication between sports tourism innovators and media (virtual and traditional)
31		Absence of a comprehensive information system regarding sports tourism innovators
32		Absence of a comprehensive system regarding the areas of activity of sports tourism innovators
33		Poor recognition of innovators towards sports tourism businesses
34		Weakness in marketing sports tourism products (goods and services).
35	Economic factors	Undesirable competitive market strategies
36		Finance and budget problems impacting sports tourism innovators
37		The existence of economic obstacles facing Iran
38		Existence of inflation and embargo
39		Expensive equipment needed by sports tourists
40		Fear of no return on investment
41		Non-cooperation of banks to grant low interest loans

Third step: Selective coding

Because the purpose of the current research was only to identify obstacles, therefore determining the relationship between categories is not one of the goals of the present research. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

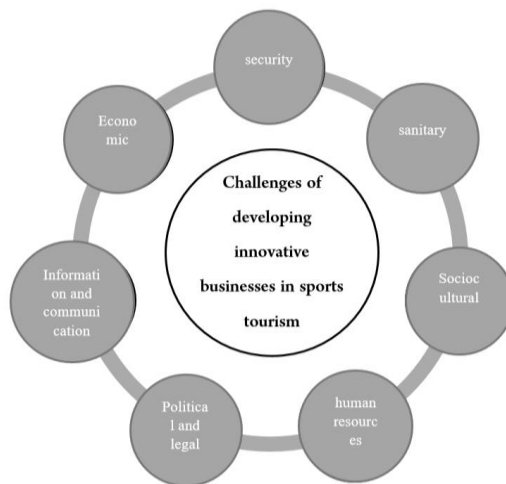


Figure 1
Conceptual model of innovative marketing analysis in sports tourism and identification of obstacles hindering its progress

Discussion and conclusion

Sports tourism in Iran, like many tourism sectors, is neglected, despite the fact that this country has the capacity to hold a wide range of sports events due to its size and also having different weather conditions throughout the year and in a fixed period of the year. For example, in the winter season, you can experience skiing in the western and northwestern highlands of Iran and at the same time you can also organize sports contests related to the desert in the desert areas. The best conditions for receiving tourists who are keen on water sports are at the coast where they can enjoy the sea, sand and sun. Considering Iran's limitations in holding international tournaments due to Sharia standards and also the lack of adequate and modern facilities, this part of sports tourism in Iran cannot be emphasized, although these limitations can be eliminated with proper management and planned investment.

The current research was conducted with the aim of analyzing innovative marketing in sports tourism and identifying the obstacles to its progress. The results of the research indicated that 41 concepts and 7 categories are among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. Among the identified factors, we can refer to security and health, socio-cultural factors, human resources, political and legal factors, information and communication and economic factors. Based on the results of the research, security factors are among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. The results of this research are in line with the research results of Rahimi and Khabiri (2020), Connell, Page and Meyer (2015), Mikulic et al. (2017), Mirehie and Gibson (2020).

These aforementioned results are also in line with the results of Lee, Chen, and Wu (2022), Stankova (2022) and Sun (2022). In this regard, it can be said that development and security complement each other. Obviously, sustainable security depends on sustainable development, and sustainable development guarantees security. Nowadays, anything that does not have a scientific definition and is not governed by logical rules fails or gets stagnant. This is also true in the tourism industry and its security aspect. For example, for security regarding transportation, residences, hotels and attractions, it is necessary for the trustees and tourism organizations to cooperate with each other for the development of tourism. On the other hand, when a tourist does not have a suitable place to stay, they will not return to that place. However, these days security is considered as the most important and fundamental principle in the development of tourism development strategy in the world. There is a defined relationship between tourism, stability, development and security, because the development of tourism infrastructure is largely related to other current and construction activities of a region, supporting security factors, laws and regulations as well as

information. The coordination of related organizations and the expansion of transportation are dependent on tourism affairs, and any occurrence of insecurity and the use of violence at different levels will cause irreparable damage to this industry.

Based on the results of the research, health factors are also among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. This result is consistent with the results of Utami et al. (2022), Rosmiyanti, Sutjiatmi and Azzahra (2022) and Zhang et al. (2020). Health aspects of tourism areas are among the important issues that are of serious concern to tourists from different regions and can affect the choice of a tourism route and a tourist destination. Therefore, paying attention to clean environment, maintaining pristine areas, as well as paying special attention to environmental issues can lead to attendance and re-attendance in tourism places. Apart from the aforesaid points, in addition to the need for management measures, Iran also needs efficient information coverage and public education, which should be given serious concern by managers and officials of tourism areas. On the other hand, after the corona epidemic in the country and the world, health issues have become more pressing and it is currently one of the most important factors that tourists pay attention to. Therefore, it is very important to follow health protocols in accommodation and tourism places.

Based on the results of the research, socio-cultural factors are among the obstacles to the development of innovative sports tourism businesses in Iran. Based on the results of the research, cultural strategies and information coverage can contribute to the development of innovation in the sports tourism industry. Cultural contexts play a decisive role in the development of human resources, and culture, including values, beliefs and norms, can play an important role in people's tendency to innovate. The development of innovative culture can create the platform for people to use entrepreneurial opportunities and increase the visibility of opportunities in the field of entrepreneurship and make people's innovative talents flourish. The development of innovative culture can lead to the development of innovation in the sports industry, especially among sports science experts. Moreover, good communication strategies can facilitate the development of innovation in the sports tourism industry.

Information can increase the community's awareness of tourism opportunities and increase its willingness to visit sports tourism places. People's desire and their increasing presence in sports tourism places can attract the attention of entrepreneurs and provide the basis for investment and creation of new businesses.

Based on the results of the research, human resources are among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. In line with the results of the research, human power can contribute to the development of innovation in the sports tourism industry. Undoubtedly, the most im-

portant component of sustainable growth and development is expert and committed human resources that has been the factor of progress and excellence of societies and is considered as their most important asset. Training and guiding talents in the direction of developing knowledge and innovation can lead to sustainable development and growth of businesses, especially in the sports industry. Guiding sports science experts to create businesses in the sports tourism area can also ensure a stable development in this field.

Based on the results of the research, political and legal factors are among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. In general, law and legislation are important factors in attracting or repelling entrepreneurs. Complex and ambiguous laws and a large number of legislative authorities and successive changes in laws can cause confusion for entrepreneurs and make their plans for the future ambiguous. As a result, that may keep them away from the innovation process and unfortunately make them enter undesirable areas such as brokering. At the same time, increasing organizational cooperation and improving the level of coordination can reduce legal obstacles faced by entrepreneurs, reduce the time required to obtain licenses, provide grounds for encouraging entrepreneurs to comply with legal regulations and standards, reducing law evasion. Therefore, paying attention to reducing cumbersome laws and providing facilitating laws and incentives for the development of innovative marketing can provide the basis for improving the business conditions in this field.

Based on the results of the research, information and communication factors are among the challenges for the development of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. Basically, tourists need valid and reliable information about the desired destination to choose theirs. They get the information they need in different ways, including mass media, such as television, radio, satellite, internet, tourist booklets and magazines, international tourism organizations, tourist agencies in foreign countries, as well as tourists who have already visited certain tourist destinations and have had the real experience of traveling there. However, the unprecedented growth of the tourism industry in the past few years and competition at the global level going hand in hand with the quality of information available in the social media force tourist destinations to face new challenges and look for more effective information strategies. The need for an effective and efficient information strategy is one of the basic challenges that arises as a result of this dynamic and evolving situation. In order to promote a given destination successfully in the target market, it must distinguish itself from its competitors in a favorable and appropriate way and find a place in the minds of its customers. The key element of the positioning process is managing perception as well as creating an attractive and distinctive image of the destination. In this context, the development of information and communication fac-

tors in the field of new information and communication technologies and special attention to virtual space can be important and worthy of attention.

Based on the results of the research, economic factors are among the obstacles to the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran. This result is consistent with the results of Shi and Yang (2022), Zhang, Li and Guo (2022) and Bhattarai and Karmacharya (2022). It can be said that economic factors are factors that determine the business environment and willingness to innovate. If a favorable and stable economic environment is created, more capable and talented people will be attracted to innovative opportunities, whereas in fluctuating conditions, peace and concentration will be lost and no one will have the motivation to work and start a new business.

However, in general, the progress of innovative marketing of sports tourism in Iran requires the use of certain capacities within sports. These capacities include environmental capacities surrounding sports, people entering the field of sports innovation and the ruling environment of entrepreneurs. Several researches have investigated the dimensions of innovative capacities in various ways. From their point of view, these dimensions include the existence of sports tourism and entrepreneurship capacities, the capacity of holding sports events, the capacity of women's participation in the field of sports entrepreneurship, etc. In fact, these capacities cover sports tourism to a large extent. Thus, with this introduction and interpretation, this research seeks to examine the existing capacities in the sports tourism industry and, in the next step, to examine the existing conditions for using the capacities available in this industry. These are suggestions for improving innovative sports tourism businesses. If these suggestions are implemented, it will be definitely beneficial to the development of innovation in sports tourism. The aforementioned suggestions include holding innovation training classes for athletes, physical education graduates and those interested in this field, fostering their innovation skills, familiarizing them with tourism-related businesses, offering low-interest loans and long-term repayment so that new businesses can be launched in this area, improving the physical infrastructure so that athletes, students of physical education and those interested in this field who create a business do not have any problems, cooperation of relevant organizations and bodies to facilitate the process of creating business in this field, holding training classes and familiarizing their participants with the environmental capacities that exist in sports, creating necessary platforms for training sports innovators, encouraging them to actively participate in projects, sports innovation related to tourism, encouraging governmental and non-governmental organizations to support innovative activities in tourism, attracting funds and investors to sports tourism through incentives and tax discounts, increasing the awareness of athletes and society about the potential of this area. It is also suggested that in future research, the relationship between

the economic development of the sports industry and the use of innovative capacities which benefit organizations and private companies should be shown.

To sum up, in general, sports tourism is one of the solutions for the development of innovation and business initiative. It can create new jobs in the society, reduce the ominous phenomenon of unemployment, and contribute to prosperity and economic prosperity. In this regard, the development of financial incentives and simplification of laws can have a great and worthy effect and enhance the development of sports tourism.

Research limitations

1. Access to sufficient data: There may be limitations in access to quantitative and qualitative data related to entrepreneurial sports tourism businesses in Iran.
2. Time Limits: There may be time limits in accessing information and resources needed for research.
3. Lack of financial resources: To carry out extensive and comprehensive research in this area, significant financial resources are required and this may be a limitation.
4. Location limitations: Research may be limited to specific locations and access to the desired locations for research purposes may be difficult.
5. Restrictions related to participation: In some cases, it may be difficult for some persons or institutions to participate in research.
6. Legal restrictions: Laws and regulations may prevent access to some information and conducting some research.
7. Language limitations: Translation and interpretation of documents and resources in other languages may create limitations
8. Limitations of data collection: Collecting field data and interviewing individuals and entrepreneurs may be associated with challenges.
9. Sampling limitations: Sampling from the community of sports tourism entrepreneurs may have its limitations.
10. Consumer limitations: The existence of limitations and problems in aggregating the views and expectations of consumers may also cause limitations in sports tourism research.

Application of research

The country of Iran has a great potential in the field of sports tourism due to holding ancient and attractive competitions. Iran's four-season nature can facil-

itate hosting many sports events and attract tourists. Officials and policymakers can improve the situation of sports tourism in Iran. If the conditions of the country are adjusted in terms of culture and values, the way for sports tourism is open. The Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization and the National Olympic Committee play an important role in this field. Tourism can have a cultural, social and economic impact on the income and growth of countries. This method is also considered as one of the most important sources of employment and income. Nowadays, sports events are very popular and attract a lot of attention of the public and athletes. One of the effects of sports tourism is that tourists can get to know the host country. This familiarizes them with different aspects of this country's culture and its tourist attractions. Also, tourists can get to know the host country better and exchange cultural experiences. In addition, the combination of sports, tourism and sustainable development has provided a new concept and structure to leisure time activities. From this point of view, sports tourism can play an effective role in promoting vitality and improving the health of communities. Also, advanced countries invest in sports and support sports activities seriously and continuously. Paying attention to people's vitality, especially the workforce, leads to an increase in efficiency and a significant reduction in the amount of crime and delinquency.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Analysis of innovative marketing in sports tourism and identification of obstacles to its improvement (Case study: Iran)*.

FUNDING

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Analysis of innovative marketing in sports tourism and identification of obstacles to its improvement (Case study: Iran)*.

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