

**The factors attracting tourists toward athletic events  
(Case study of tourists visiting Iranian national football teams  
competitions)**

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**Abstract**

**Aim:** there are some factors impacting on the intention of tourists to attend in an athletic event and their choice process. Every country, city, and athletic event offers products and services to attract tourists and every tourist can choose one of different destinations or events. This research was conducted with the aim to study the factors attracting tourists toward athletic events. **Methodology:** the present research was conducted using descriptive- survey method in the field form. The sample size consisted of 319 individuals ( $n=319$ ) of tourists visiting Iranian national football teams competitions. In order to gather data, the Wimbledon questionnaire was employed. Its validity was confirmed by ten professors of Gilan University and ten tourism experts (it was previously determined to be %86 using Cronbachs Alpha technique). Research findings were analyzed at a significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) employing binominal distribution test. **Findings:** research findings indicated that factors of advocate motivation, and the destination and novelty are very important in attracting the tourists, while the factors of self- evolutionism was not considered as an effective one the presence of tourists in athletic events. **Conclusion and discussion:** research results showed the factors of advocate motivation, the destination and novelty play an important role in the presence of tourists in our sport events, while the factor of self-evolutionism is not so important in this case. Thus, it is suggested that the motivations of tourists visiting our athletic events should be carefully studied and identified and considered in the planning in order to attract more tourists toward our sport events.

**Keywords:** *athletic tourism, attracting factors, athletic event, tourist.*

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### **Introduction**

Nowadays sport is one of important productive industries of the world by which many people are occupied. It is also one of the commonest factors for motivation of tourists. It is a combination of two industries of tourism and sport. In other words, sport is one of the important activities of tourists during their travel. Tourism and travelling can be associated with different types of sports (1). The development of recreational trips related to sports and the popularity of the active life style have caused people to become interested in sports even when they are travelling. That is why different countries compete for getting the hosting of Olympic Games and championship competitions. In different sport fields, our country, Iran, also has a great capacity of taking the advantage of athletic tourism. Sports and tourism can help the development of each other in several ways. As Weed and Bull (2004) say, the tourism industry can help the development of local sport facilities or it can provide an opportunity for the society to provide them, or else such an opportunity will never be provided (14). Also, tourism can be more useful than sports because many athletic activities can happen during the tours and vacations. Therefore it is evident that further collaboration will be better for both parties to take the advantage of the mutual benefits. Recent there has been a remarkable development in the tourism of athletic events, because during the past years there wasn't any specific opportunity for tourists, while at present such opportunities are becoming wider, as a reason for the presence of tourists in athletic events (12).

The industry of tourism is based on destination. Tourism events are often planned based on the motivation of travelling as well as improving of the industry, identification of factors encouraging the presence in athletic events, better understanding of the market and services of attractions that lead to fascination. People who are in charge of marketing of tourism events and destinations can increase the appeal of their products by means of a series of suggestion to attract more potential visitors. Junek and Binney (2005), and Coghlan and Williams (2001) found that presence in an event and visiting a destination is of then motivated by an inclination to complete a number of motivations (8, 3). A series of motivations can be efficient to provide different motives of visitors as well to increase their

presence in events. This strategy is based on the idea that more motivations can be toward a specific motive, therefore a number of diverse attractions are used for the range of the motives of tourists (6).

At present one of the concerns of marketers and the planner of sport events, is to increase the degree of visitor's interest by identifying reasons and factors impacting on their presence. There are different factors that influence on the inclination of visitors to attend a certain athletic event. Every country, city and athletic event offer different, several products and services to absorb more visitors. Therefore every tourist has the opportunity to choose from among different destinations and events. However it seems that regarding the country or city of origin and destination, their characteristics and culture, and the level of competitions, and the degree of their importance, the factors of visitor attraction can be different (10). A lot of studies have been conducted about athletic events, their responses, organization of the events and the like, while little attention has been paid to the role of visitors and tourists. Therefore, regarding that any planning should be conducted to attract visitors according to fulfillment of their different needs, the identification of factors impacting on their presence in events is of great importance.

Ottevanger and et al (2007) introduced the most important factors leading to the presence of visitors in the Wimbeldone tennis competitions according to the importance and priority in this way: "advocate motivation, entertainment, destination (the event host), peace, experience, sociability, freedom, novelty, and self-improvement" (12). Researcher such as East gate and funk (2005), Crompton (1979), Gitelson and Kerstetter(1990), Loker and Perdue (1992), and Cha, Mc Cleary and Usal(1995) found that visitors seek for certain enthusiasms such as freedom, excitement, knowledge, sociability, respect and status, adventure, peace, novelty, and discovery. Research shows that presence in sports and tourism is not motivated by only a certain stimulus, because it is most probable that a lot of factors impact on the decision making to travel or visit athletic event tourism, especially when competitions are to be performed in regional places. Conversely, most of research has been conducted about famous events such as the Olympic Games and world cup. Therefore, the expansion of tourism of athletic events can lead to the

increase of the existing knowledge on this field and providing a new partnership among organizations in charge of tourism and also their wider connection with the planners of athletic events to create a better understanding of the matter.

**Methodology:**

The present research was conducted employing descriptive – survey technique in the field form. The researcher explains the attracting factors of visitors to athletic events from the view point of participating tourists. The Statistical population of this research consisted of all tourists (visitors) who had come to watch the world cup competition of our national football team (south Africa 2010) that was held in Azadi stadium, (the competitions were held between Iran and west Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Iran and the United Arab emirates). Of course only those visitors were participated as the research population who spent at least 24 hours of their time watching the matches of that they could be considered as athletic visitors according to the relative existing definition.

The sample size consisted of 319 individuals (n=319) who were randomly selected. Meanwhile, all of them were male. The wimbledon questionnaire was used to gather research data. That questionnaire was used for the first time by Ottevanger in 2007 during Wimbledon tennis competitions in order to investigate the motives for the presence of visitors in athletic events. The initial questionnaire consisted of two parts of demographic characteristics and the attracting factors of visitors to events. After translating by researcher, the questionnaires were tested for validity by ten professors of Guilan University and ten tourism experts. The validity was confirmed after some slight changes. The reliability of the questionnaires also was calculated employing Cronbachs alpha method. Then they were distributed among visitors. The gathered data was analyzed. In order to explain data, the technique of descriptive statistic was employed while the factors attracting visitors to athletic competitions were studied through using binominal distribution non-parametric test at the  $p < 0.05$  level of meaningfulness after examining the naturalist of data distribution using Kalmogorov–Smiranov Test. statistical operations were conducted employing Spss/16 software.

**Findings**

The findings of this research show that most of respondents were in age range of 15-25 (60. 2), and 64. 9 percent of them were not married. More than 50 percent of them had a high school diploma while only 5 percent of them had the degree of higher than bachelor of art. The incomes of most of visitors were within two groups of without any income (30. 9) and less than 300000 toman (32. 6) as listed in table (1).

**Table (1). Demographic characteristics of the research sample**

Distribution according to age	Frequency	percentage
15-25	192	60. 2
25-35	81	25. 4
35-95	22	6. 9
Above 95	24	7. 5
Total	319	100
Distribution according to marital status		
Single	207	64. 9
Married	112	35. 1
Total	319	100
Distribution according to degree of education		
Lower than a high school diploma	56	17. 5
High school diploma	163	51. 1
Associate of arts degree	37	11. 6
Bachelor of art	47	14. 8
Higher than bachelor	16	5
Total	319	100
Distribution according to monthly income		
Without any income	97	30. 4
Under 300 thousand toman	104	32. 6
300 to 400 thousand toman	62	19. 5
400 to 700 thousand toman	32	10
Above 700 thousand toman	24	7. 5
Total	319	100

Source: Research Findings

Also, the research hypotheses were tested at the  $p < 0. 05$  level of meaningfulness. In order to test hypotheses the nonparametric binominal distribution was used and the results were listed in table (2).

**Table (2). The statistical results related to attracting factors**

Title	Class	N	Observed Prop	Test prop	Sig(2. tailed)	
novelty	Group1	Effective	74	0. 23	0. 5	0. 001
	Group2	Non-effective	245	0. 77		
	Total		319	1		
Advocative motivations	Group1	Effective	295	0. 92	0. 5	0. 001
	Group2	Non-effective	24	0. 08		
	Total		319	1		
Self-evolutionism	Group1	Effective	221	0. 69	0. 5	0. 001
	Group2	Non-effective	98	0. 31		
	Total		319	1		
Distination	Group1	Effective	279	0. 87	0. 5	0. 001
	Group2	Non-effective	40	0. 13		
	Total		319	1		

Source: Research Findings

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The important aim of this research was to study the factors attracting visitors to athletic events from the view point of tourists visiting the football competitions. Research results showed that ad vocative motivations, destination, and novelty are effective and important factors in this relation while self-evolutionism was not considered as an effective factor.

Research results also indicated that from the view point of attendants in competitions the most important factor of attendance in athletic events is the ad vocative motivations. Kim and Chalip (2004) believe that ad vocative motivations are among very important factors for athletic events tourists to attend a competition. This idea is in agreement with the results of their research saying that supporting the national team members is of the Highest importance among other variables(9). Hong et. al. (2005) studied the motivations of Japanese baseball supporters in the main league of base3ball. they found three primary motives in Japanese spectators, namely, public interest in baseball, interest in players, and the high quality of competitions(7). Therefore, as the research results show, the tourists watching athletic events seek to fulfill their own needs, including fascination of games, watching Clup teams playing and national's players, and the attractiveness of the games, by attending the matches. Thus, it is clear that advocate motivations are the most factors impacting on the degree of presence of tourist to watch a competition, because in this way they respond to their own requirements.

Getting familiar with attractions, culture, people, beauties and visible athletic and non-athletic places existing in the host country (destination) is also among important and effective factors which respondents mentioned. They usually have some additional reasons for their presence in another city or country. For example they like to get information about the host countries or cities culture and other places. This is in agreement with the study conducted by Nogowa (1996) and Gibson (2006). They suggested that when tourists spend their money and their time to attend a competition, they also intend to get information on the host country and its culture (11, 5). Breibath (2006) conducted a study about motives and interests of supporters of football to travel abroad in new Zealand and concluded that the

fascinations existing in the destination and the athletic event is one of their reasons for spending their money and time to travel to another country(2). The attractiveness of the athletic event, athletic places, culture, and people in the destination is the determine factor to encourage tourists toward stadiums. It can lead to a remarkable increase in the number of visitors. That is why the hosting of great athletic events is directly related to the economy and the tourism industry of the host country or city, and countries often try to have investment on their infrastructures and visible places, as well as. And have advertisements about their cultural and historical sites.

Another factor effective on the number of visitors of athletic competitions is novelty. Novelty is the need some people feel to do Philip et al. (2005) and Eastgate and Funk (2005), (13, 14). Also Ottevanger et al. (2007) found in their research that watchers of athletic competitions say that their presence in the events is something like a dream. They also suggested that the factor of novelty is specifically linked to respect and status factors. (12).

The only factor that was considered as non-effective, was self-evolutionism. In theoretical bases self-evolutionism means that the visitor likes to learn new things when he or she is on vacation (15). But most respondents said that the organizers of events had no specific program so that they could learn about the destination, the host of events, players, etc., Ottevanger et. al. (2007) found in their research that visitors mention learning about the history and traditions of the event as a reason for their presence in it, while in our country there is nothing new in the events performed.

It is important to note that a single factor rarely can be the only reason for a person to travel. However a number of reasons for travelling can have superiority upon others. Many people decide to travel, for a combination of reasons, where a factor becomes stronger than others. In addition, Robinson and Gemmon (2009) believed that factors cannot act independently, but they often act in combination. On the other hand, it was found that athletic tourism is an ideal target market and in order to maximize the profits of event host, the responsible tourism organizations so that they can give new information to the visitors in a proper way to encourage them to attend the athletic events. To achieve this, the event organizers should focus on the

marketing of the events to experience the excitement of the athletic competitions. An important case for sport marketers is to identify the factors impacting on the behavior of visitors, because the income from their presence in the events can be an important resource for the professional sports. If the factors impacting on the consumption behavior of visitor are identified, sport marketers can develop more effective strategies for their target market. also the persons in charge of marketing for athletic events can attract a great number of tourism appeals of the hosting city, offering services and facilities, proper and cheap settlement etc. thus, as athletic tourism is one of important income-making ways, it is suggested that the persons in charge of tourism organizations should have a good interaction with sports federations so that more athletic events take place during the period that the event coordinators give proper information to the visitors on the events, their appeals, the destination and the visible sites in it as well as to identify the factors that encourage visitors to attend the sport events.

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