

Investigating the Relationship Between Demographic Characteristics of the Sports Competition Participants and Their Interest to Further Travel to the Destination

M.A. Hemmati Nezhad, E. Malek Akhlagh, M. Mottaghi Talab, T. Afshar Nezhad, S.O. Mirkazemi

Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Guilan University, Guilan, Iran

Abstract: Sports games convened in various parts of the country are main factors that attract tourists' attentions. To increase visitors' interest in sports games by distinguishing effective factors of their attendance is one of the challenges of sports event organizers and marketers. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics of the sports competition participants and their interest to further travel to the destination. To achieve this objective, 180 sportsmen (active participants) and 44 coaches and supervisors (inactive participants) from exotic sports teams dispatched to the sports games hosted by Guilan province were selected as the sample of the study. For data gathering, the researcher-made questionnaire (the reliability had already been calculated as 0.86 by Cronbach's alpha) was used. Data were analyzed by Spearman coefficient of correlation and the chi-square test at $P \leq 0.05$. Findings of the study showed no significant relationship between the interest of respondents to further travel to the destination and some of their demographic characteristics such as income level, educational degree, job, marital status and the distance between their residence and the destination ($P \geq 0.05$). This relationship was significant only in the case of active participants' ages ($p=0.017$). Finally, it is concluded that other factors such as stimulation and the specific situation of the destination with regard to tourism attractions have influenced the relationship.

Key words: Active sports tourism • Demographic characteristics • Destination • Push factors

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and travel industry is the biggest and the most varied industry in the world. Most of the countries know this dynamic industry as the source of income, job creation, private sector growth and infrastructure development. Sport is one of the most convenient factors to motivate tourists, and sports tourism is created by the combination of sports industry and tourism industry. Increasing growth and the prevalence of recreational sports-related travels and the prevalence of active lifestyle have caused people to become interested in sports even during the travel, that's why various cities all around the world compete to achieve the Olympic Games and world champions hosting right in various sporting fields. Our country can take a lot of advantage in this respect because of its high capacity. Jennings (1998), in his study, found Iran as one of the first 10 countries of the world in respect to potential tourism attractions [1]. Active sports tourism is a kind of sports tourism which consists of traveling for the purpose of participating in sports competitions and includes the participants of the

competitions that are divided into two groups of active participants (sportsmen) and inactive participants (instructors, coaches, supervisors, guides, etc.) [2].

This kind of sports tourism, separated from its other benefits, is important as it causes the participants to revisit the destination or recommend it to their friends and relatives. Currently, one of the challenges of sports event organizers and marketers is to increase visitors' interest in sports games by distinguishing effective factors of their attendance. Determination of the level of people's tendency to inbound or outbound tourism and their attendance in sports events is very complicated and pull factors, push factors and constraints have special influence on their decisions [3, 4]. The results of a number of studies have shown that characteristics of the sports event, security and safe restrictions and financial restrictions have determinant influence on willingness or unwillingness of potential participants and their attendance [3]. However, these factors seem to be different in regard to the origin and the destination countries, their characteristics and culture as well as event demographic characteristics [4]. Results of the studies

about the participation in sports events and travel behavior show that demographic characteristics of the probable participants of sports events should be considered when we are going to predict the probability of their attendance and presence. Different factors such as motivation, age, income, personality, expenses, distance and the risk level may be effective when choosing a destination that affects tourists' motivation and their choice of destination for the recreation [3-7]. For instance, it is found that people with higher educational level have more tendencies towards travel. Furthermore, the results of a number of studies have shown that the job or social position, owning a car and demographic factors such as age, sex, etc., affect the attendance or participation of tourists in public sport activities [8]. About the distance of residence, Jackson and Scott (1999) state that even a very attractive event may be not enough for motivating people to travel to visit it; especially when the visit requires traveling through a long distance [9]. Zhang *et al.* (2001) state that motivation is an insufficient base to understand the nature of participation in the sports events. They found that demographic characteristics of spectators such as age, sex and education increase the predictability of the level of participation in that sports event which is achieved by the motivation dimensions [10]. A number of researchers claim that some variables are considered in order to estimate the satisfaction during the travel including sex, awareness of tourism resources, tourism expenses, income and different inclinations of people [11]. Zhang *et al.* (1996) found that income would improve the prediction of the participants' frequency in that sports event [12]. White and Wilson (1999) implied that income has a separate influence on the level of participation rather than educations and other factors [10]. Delpy (1998) reported that on the average, the number of educated sports tourists within the age range of 18-44 is great in USA [2]. The results of other studies also showed that sports tourists are 18-44 years old. The push factors combine with motivations and their resultant effect determines whether or not an individual is inclined to travel and if inclined, which destination will be chosen?.

In regard to the anonymity of the effective factors in attracting tourists to Iran and particularly to Guilan, planning and marketing in order to attract tourists in general and sports tourists in particular is very difficult. Despite the large amount of money spent by the Physical Education Organization, National Olympic Committee, federations and other related organizations in order to convene sports events, the anonymity of the effective

factors leads to inability to benefit much from this situation. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics of the participants of sports competitions in Guilan province in order to help planners and organizers of domestic sports events to plan for tourists' attraction.

MATERIALS AND METHDOS

The population of this study included all the sportsmen, coaches and supervisors of exotic sports teams dispatched to country sport matches hosted by Guilan province dated 22.11.2006 to 20.6.2007. This population included 250 sportsmen and 60 male coaches and supervisors. Because the size of the population was small, the questionnaire was distributed to the whole population among which the questionnaires of 180 sportsmen and of 44 coaches were used in the analysis.

Measurement Instruments:In order to be aware of the comments of sportsmen and coworkers (supervisors, coaches, etc.) about their interest to further travel to Guilan province, the researcher-made questionnaire was used in this study. For making the questionnaire, first the information were achieved from the existent resources and after the determination of the whole characteristics related to sports tourism, a number of recent and valuable studies were used as paradigm and were combined to make the questionnaire. This questionnaire was given to 30 experts of sports management, sports managers and the professors of Physical Education and Sports Sciences Faculty, professors of Human Sciences Faculty and the managers of tourism and travel agencies of Guilan province to investigate and review its admissibility. The original questionnaire contained two parts: the first part was related to demographic characteristics including 9 questions, and the second part was related to the tourism development themes. This part contained questions about marital status, job, sporting field, the distance of residence to the Guilan province centre, recent educational degree and the monthly income.

In the questions related to tourism development themes, respondents were asked to determine the number of times they have traveled to Guilan (first time to more than 4 times), their interest to further travel to Guilan (never to very much), their views about the tourism attractions of Guilan province (very good, good, moderate, bad, very bad) and their interest to bring their relatives and friends in their further travels to Guilan if facilities are available. In the next question, the

respondents determined their expectations from the tourism operators (good accommodation at a suitable price, moderate accommodation at a low price, providing suitable food services, providing going and returning facilities from/to Guilan, providing tours related to the current attractions inside the province and the city, providing suitable transportation facilities in the city and the province for watching matches and other sports events, providing the tickets of matches and other programs related to matches and sports events. In the last part, the respondents were asked whether they agree that the operators of sports teams undertake the technical affairs of preparatory camps, preparatory and official matches only, and leave all the affairs concerning sportsmen movements, accommodation, providing food services and arranging extracurricular tours to the tourism operators. Then, they were asked to state the jurisdiction limits of the dispatching organization in regard to leaving these affairs to travel agencies and the success level of authorities accordingly. In the last question, the probable reasons of the disagreement of the sports teams' dispatching organizations were examined. These reasons were collected earlier in the study's literature review and interviews with authorities and included: 1- discordance because of the separateness of these affairs from technical problems 2- not trusting to tourism organizations for doing these affairs efficiently 3- lack of the sufficient bylaws and legal regulations 4- creating double expenses resulting from leaving these affairs 5- lack of experienced tourism experts and necessary facilities in tourism organizations 6- going a number of the coworkers of the sport teams' dispatching organizations out of job.

To rate the five-choices questions related to sports tourism development themes which was different in regard to the types of questions, Likert five-rated rating system was used. To investigate the objectives, the averages of questions' concessions were used. The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated based on Cronbach's alpha by the researcher. After the correction and adjustment, the questionnaire was given to 10 percent of the research population in an experimental study. For this purpose, the questionnaire was distributed among 20 exotic sportsmen and coaches who had come to Guilan in order to participate in the sports games. The questionnaire's ultimate reliability was calculated at 0.05 (0.86).

Data Collection: For data gathering, after getting permission from the Physical Education Faculty of Guilan province for performing the research, the researcher went

to the Guilan Province's general administration of physical education, Guilan University's Physical Education Administration and the Azad University of Rasht and received the calendar of the sports matches hosted by Guilan province dated 1/9/1385 to 20/6/2007 from the related authorities. Then, on the specified dates, the specified places were referred to and after the explanation about the objectives, the questionnaire was distributed among the respondents. After collecting all the questionnaires, their information was inserted in the SPSS statistical software (version 11.5) to be analyzed.

Data Analysis: The information derived from the questionnaires was classified in tables and graphs, using statistical descriptive methods (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation). The study's hypotheses were analyzed by Spearman coefficient of correlation and chi-square test. Study's objectives were investigated at $P \leq 0.05$. SPSS software (ver.13) was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Findings of the study show that 45.5% of the inactive participants (coworkers) and 7.8% of active participants are married. The active participants' average age is 20-23 years old while the youngest is 17 years old and the oldest is 48 years old. Their average age is 22.17 ± 4.08 . The average age of inactive participants is 36.6 ± 12.6 while most of them are 23-44 years old. The educational degree of most respondents is diploma and technician (40.9%), while more than 36% are in two groups of B.A and higher. Most inactive participants have governmental jobs (50%) while most active participants are university students (82.2%). Monthly income of more than half of the inactive participants is less than 2000000 Rials and near 35% have no income while only 16.7% of sportsmen earn more than 2000000 Rials monthly and more than 61% have no income. Thus, there is a great difference in the income level between active and inactive participants. The sports field of the most respondents is futsal and the number of karate kas was more than wrestlers.

The contrary was the problem of inactive participants. The distance between the most respondents' residences and Guilan province's centre was more than 300 kilometres (62.2% active participants and 16.3% inactive participants), and the distance between the residences of 22% of inactive participants and

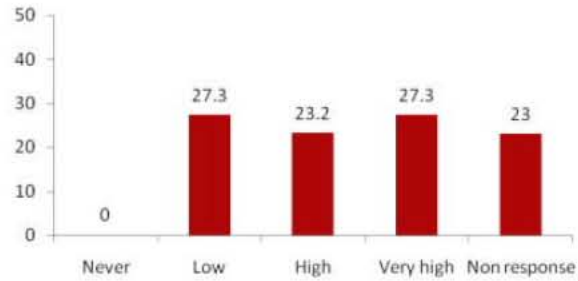


Fig 1: Active participants' interest to re-travel to Guilan province

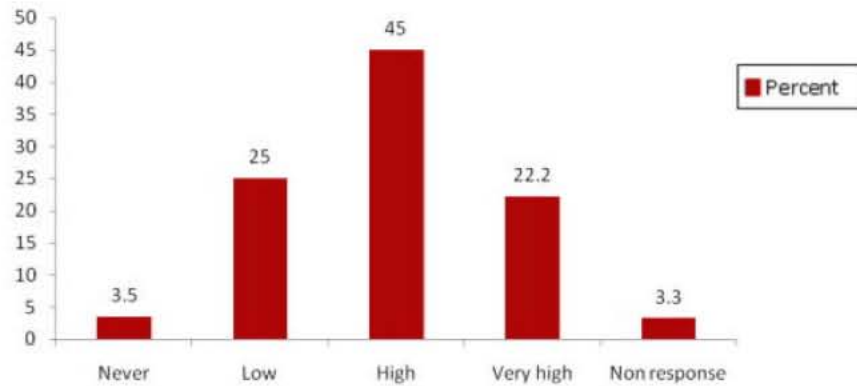


Fig 2: Inactive participants' interest to re-travel to Guilan province

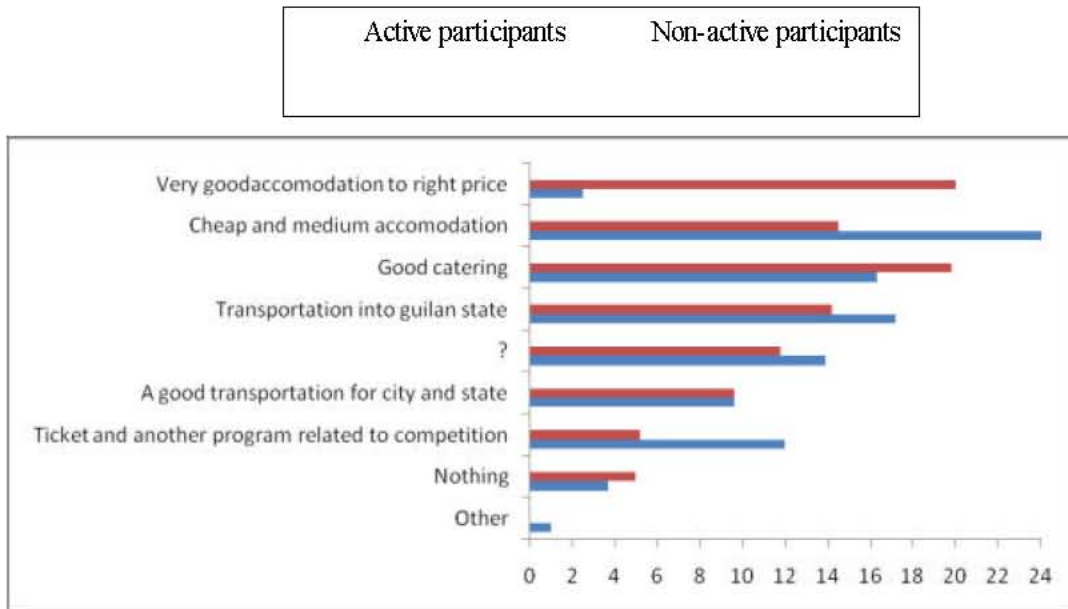


Fig 3: Subjects' expectations from traveling authorities to re-travel to Guilan province

25% of sportsmen was more than 700 kilometres. Most of the respondents have travelled to Guilan three times or more. It was the first travel of only 18.2% of inactive participants and 25% of active participants. Most of the active participants (55%) were

futsal players and next participants were karate players (25%) and 13.9% of wrestlers included respondents. Inactive participants were also mostly involved in futsal activities while 38.7% in wrestling and 6.8% in karate.

Table 1: The relationship between demographic characteristics of subjects and their level of interest to re-travel to Guilan province

The relationship between demographics and characteristics of subjects and their level of interest to re-travel to Guilan province		Chi-results		
		Sig.	DF	Chi square
Income	Inactive participants	0.369	2	1.992
	Active participants	0.070	3	7.073
Education level	Inactive participants	0.709	2	0.688
	Active participants	0.187	3	4.796
Career	Inactive participants	0.696	2	0.724
	Active participants	0.417	3	2.839
Distance between living place and Guilan	Inactive participants	0.144	6	9.569
	Active participants	0.857	12	7.016
Single or Married	Inactive participants	0.908	2	0.193
	Active participants	0.851	3	0.793

Table 2: The relationship between age and interest to re-travel to Guilan

Variable name	Group	Indexes	Interest to re-travel to Guilan
	Inactive participants	Correlation	0.012
		Sig.(2-Tailed)	0.945
		N	38.000
	Active participants	Correlation	0.185
		Sig.(2-Tailed)	*0.017
		N	167.000

Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

As it is obvious in Figures 1 and 2, most of the respondents selected “much” option in respect to their interest to further travel to Guilan province (43.2% inactive participants and 45% active participants); it indicates the relatively high interest of respondents to travel to this province. In this case, any of inactive participants selected “never” option while 4.5% of the active participants expressed that they would never travel to this province again.

The results of the study also showed that the sportsmen have evaluated the attractions of this province as being “good” and “moderate” (76%) and only a small per cent have evaluated the attraction of this province as being “poor” (3.9%). Likewise, most of the inactive participants have selected options “good” and “very good” in this respect (more than 70%). It shows that they have more favourable view about Guilan province in regard to tourism attractions. Furthermore, most of them have selected the option “to some extent” in respect to the interest of their relatives to travel to Guilan province (43.2%). While no respondents have selected “No” option, these results indicate the relative interest of respondents’ friends and relatives to travel to Guilan together with them during the match days from respondents’ viewpoints. This interest was slightly lower for the active participants. Most of them have selected options “to some extent” and “No” in this respect (approximately 40%) which

show their low interest to travel to Guilan province for this purpose.

Figure 3 indicates the expectations of active and inactive participants from the tourism authorities. Most of the inactive participants considered “moderate and cheap accommodation, providing going and returning facilities to/from Guilan province and providing suitable food services” as the most important expectations from the tourism authorities. Likewise, active participants have selected “very good accommodation at a suitable price and providing suitable food services” in this respect. After that “moderate and cheap accommodation and providing going and returning facilities to/from Guilan province” are the most important expectations of the sportsmen.

The findings of this study showed that most of the respondents agree with leaving the non-technical affairs such as sportsmen movements, accommodation, providing food services, arranging extracurricular tours and programs to tourism organizations but their views about the agreement of the authorities in respect to leaving the non-technical affairs to tourism agencies are not so positive. They believe that the most important reason is double expenses leaving these affairs will cause and the inability of dispatching organizations to afford. In addition, other reasons include the lack of suitable legal bylaws and regulations and discordance resulting from the separateness of these affairs from technical affairs.

Based on the information of Table 1, in respect to chi-square and degree of freedom of all cases, because the observed significance levels were bigger than 0.05, there is no significant relationship between any of the demographic characteristics in Table 1 and the interest to further travel to Guilan province ($P \geq 0.05$). Only in respect to the income level of sportsmen, this relationship was near the significant level ($P=0.07$).

As indicated in Table 2, in regard to the coefficients of correlations and the observed significance level, there is no significant relationship between the age of inactive participants and their interest to further travel to this province ($P=0.945$), but in respect to active participants, this relationship is significant ($P=0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate no relationship between the interests of respondents to travel to Guilan province and some of their demographic factors such as income level, educational degree, job, marital status, and the distance between the residence and the Guilan province's centre that was an unexpected result. It was predicted that people with higher income, education and social position would be more inclined to further travel to this province but this study did not confirm it, although this relationship was near to the significance level in some cases especially in respect to the relationship between the income level and the sportsmen's interest to further travel. However, various studies in this regard have found contradictory results and many theories have been suggested to explain this problem. They indicate that various factors such as motivation, age, income, personality, expenses, distance and risk level may affect the choice of a destination effective in the motivations and choices of tourists under the classifications of 3 factors including pull factors, push factors and constraints [3-7]. While motivations is the most determinant factor in regard to travel and destination, there are also other push factors related to the country of origin which affect the tourists' travel and their attendance in an event. In other words, age, sex, education, income, culture and the political and social situation of the country of origin are the factors which have a special effect on the tourists' behaviour. The results of some studies have shown that sports tourists are more educated and are more active than the other tourists [5, 8, 12-15].

Some researchers reported that most of the sports tourists are healthy and financially secure and are satisfied with the playing situations they had in their life. Their number is relatively large and they are mostly educated males. Attle (1996) in a study, investigated single male sports tourists with the average age of 18-27 who were employed full time and had finished their 4-year period of university education [16]. For example, it was found that by increasing the individual's education, the inclination to travel will increase as well. Likewise, it is proved that job or social position, owning a car and demographic factors such as age, sex, etc. will affect the attendance of tourists in public sports activities [17].

Social class and life style are also effective factors in tourists' behaviour. Delpy (1998) expressed that according to the recreation and entertainment society, the average number of university educated sport tourists between 18 and 44 years old is relatively large and their average income is more than 40,000 dollars annually. It may be accepted publicly that sports tourism is extensively peculiar to men and educated individuals [2]. Studies indicate that push factors combine with motivations and their resultant effect determines whether or not an individual would be inclined to travel and if inclined, which destination would be selected by him/her.

In respect to the distance of residence, Jackson and Scott (1999) state that even a very attractive event may not be enough for motivating people to travel to visit it; especially when the visit requires traveling through a long distance. Thus, distinguishing the limits perform a vital role in forming and determining how to spend the leisure time [19]. Zhang *et al.* (2001) found that demographic factors of the spectators such as age, sex, and education would increase the predictability of the level of participation in that sports event. This level is achieved by motivation dimensions [10].

Some researchers express that some variables including sex, awareness of tourism resources, tourism expenses, income and various inclinations are considered in determination of the satisfaction. They declared that while planning for travel, consumers can evaluate at least 4 factors simultaneously [11]. Conveniently, it is expressed that income will also determine the probability of the participation in a sports event. Zhang *et al.* (1996) found that income would improve the prediction of the participation in that event [12]. White and Wilson (1999) showed that income had a separate influence on the level of participation in sports matches rather than education

and other factors [19]. Results of other researchers also show that tourists' participation in a sports event is a function of their income. Likewise, some researchers indicated that sports tourists are inclined to estimate their travel expenses less than the real amounts [20]. Travel behavior is also supposed predictable by demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and education. Thus, results of the studies about the participation in sports events and travel behavior show that demographic characteristics of the probable participants in sports events should be considered when we are going to predict the probability of their attendance and presence. Mayo *et al.* (1981) declared that cultural and social classes have a great influence on individuals' behavior while traveling on holidays [21]. However, Stebbins (1988) found that when tourists are determining their goals, qualitative factors such as beautiful sceneries, residence quality and different cultures are more important than the expenses [17].

Income is also important as a constraint. Financial constraints cause people to feel that if they travel, the travel expenses, accommodation and ticket will put them into troubles [3].

Although the results of most studies indicate that demographic factors of the participants are effective for their travel motivation and their choice of destination, the interaction of these factors are less considered. Furthermore, the especial relationship between each factor and cultural and economical situation of different societies; especially our country should not be neglected. For instance, probably, there is a direct relationship between individuals' job, income, education level and social position and these factors have direct effects on each other. On the other hand, results achieved by the relationship among these factors in active tourists, are less considered especially in regard to the respondents of this study (one of these respondents' main goals was participating in the competitions). Therefore, the generalization of this relationship to all the aspects of tourism and all tourists is not without difficulties.

In the analysis of this study results, even the sports fields should be considered. Chalip (1998) found that it is possible to use various sports and sceneries to predict interests and inclination to travel [22]. The respondents of this study included wrestlers, karate kas and soccer players. It seems that there is not much relationship between the income of participants of these sports fields and their participation because on the one hand, these

fields are among public sports fields in our country and the participation in these fields does not require much facility and on the other hand, because these fields are full of contacts. People with higher financial and social levels show more tendency towards social and recreational sports, health and leisure such as skiing, swimming, cycling, tennis, etc. and the skills of active sports participants are effective in this regard. In respect to ski, Richard (1999) found that professional ski players focus on the ski-related characteristics such as snow quality and the shape of earth, despite the novice players who focus on the expenses and subsidy [23].

The results of this study in regard to the relationship between the age and the interest to further travel to Guilan indicated the positive relationship among sportsmen while such a relationship was not found among inactive participants. These results are in contrary to the results of Gibson *et al.* (1992). They found a negative relationship between the age and choosing the active sports tourism [24]. However, Rudman (1986) and McPherson found that the negative relationship between the age and sports tourism is not very important [25, 26]. Delpy (1998) reported that on average, the number of educated sports tourists in the age range of 18-44 is large in the USA [9]. One of the theories indicated in many studies is the theory of travel pattern and life cycle. Based on this theory, single individuals have limited financial ability, less shopping and much recreation. At the beginning of the marriage, financial situation is excellent and shopping is much. After that, there are 3 stages of full nest within which the ability to travel increases gradually. Then, there are 2 stages of empty nest within which the travel decreases according to the income and financial situation. Finally, there are 2 stages of being leaved alone in which the purchase power is high and there is the probability of traveling in groups with the high attention to sanity and social security problems. This theory shows that paying attention to factors of age, income and marital status only, is not enough in respect to explaining the travel motivation and the choice of destination, but these issues should be considered simultaneously and in interaction with each other. Bojanic (1995) used the plan of geographic classification and the concept of travel pattern in the family life cycle in order to study the customers from the families interested in sports tourism destinations (ski). He found that family skiing market for these destinations had the same conditions in the cases where ski players were married and had come there with their children at the ages of less than 45.

According to statistics, these places have not attracted a large population from outer regions [27].

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicated that active and inactive participants of sports competitions have high interest to further travel to the destination separate from their characteristics such as income level, educational degree, job, marital status and the distance of their residence to the destination. However, it is necessary to give the participants the posters, photos and advertising bulletins of the Guilan historical, natural, religious, cultural, sports attractions and handicrafts extensively during the days of competitions. The removal of the worries expressed by the respondents such as accommodation state, the inter-provincial and intra-provincial transportation system and feeding are also effective to re-attract tourists. It is suggested to arrange tours with the cooperation of tourism agencies during the match days and to give the winners of the match tourism bonuses as well as prizes of Guilan.

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