

# Investigating the factors affecting the brand equity of sports tourism destination brand (Case study of Bandar Abbas city in Iran)

Mohammad Varnaseri <sup>1\*</sup>

*1. Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran*

\* Corresponding author: Mohammad Varnaseri  
Email: alimoradiiii217@gmail.com

**Abstract**— bandar Abbas city is a suitable platform for sports tourism, especially in the cold seasons of the year, as well as water sports due to its geographical location and natural features; but so far it has not been successful in this regard. Having a successful sports tourism brand can be very effective in increasing the competitive advantage of the destination, attracting sports tourists and thus increasing revenues from the sports tourism industry, economic prosperity and preventing migration of residents. By examining the brand equity, the nature of the destination can be identified and a general framework can be provided to the managers and marketing professionals of that destination that can measure the effectiveness of the brand of that destination. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting the special value of the brand of sports tourism destination in Bandar Abbas city. The statistical population of the study included all sports tourists (sports and sports science events) from October to March 2019 in Bandar Abbas city. The sample size was 108 people who were selected by convenience sampling method. The data collection tool was a questionnaire and the data obtained through structural equations and partial least squares method were analyzed using SPSS and smart pls software. Findings from the study show that brand awareness, brand image and perceived quality have a positive and significant effect on brand equity and brand image, perceived value and brand equity have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. Brand awareness has the greatest impact on brand equity and brand equity has the greatest impact on brand loyalty but perceived quality has not had a significant effect on brand loyalty.

**Keywords**— brand equity, sports tourism, tourism destination, brand loyalty, Chabahar

## Introduction

Tourism in tourism destinations has a positive impact on the economic development of the country, especially currency, employment rate, taxes, etc. (1). On the other hand, sport is one of the important

activities of tourists during tourism and tourism and travel are associated with different types of sports. A tourist is a person who travels to a city or country outside his / her place of residence for a period of at least one day and not more than one year, and his / her goal is not to work and earn money in that city or country (2). Also, a sports tourist is a temporary visitor who stays at the venue for at least 24 hours and her main purpose is to participate in a sporting event, but at the same time, there may be secondary attractions (2). Sports tourism is one of the growing fields of tourism (3).

With increasing competition and the emergence of phenomena such as global markets, the domestic industries of each country in order to remain in this field must increase their competitive advantages. One of the strategic tools that lead to commitment and repetition of consumption, increase economic value for shareholders and expand the range of economic activities beyond geographical boundaries, is the brand equity (4). Brand equity is at the core of the concept of brand management and has been viewed from different perspectives. According to Keller (1993), brand equity is the distinctive effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to marketing and strengthens customers' purchasing preferences and intentions (5). Brand equity provides a tool for measuring the effectiveness of past marketing efforts, evaluating the success of current brand positioning, and predicting future brand performance (6). Because destinations are places that people choose to stay and travel for a specific experience based on an understanding of a particular feature of the attraction, it is possible to create a brand for them by using planning methods, so that tourists, when choosing between a destination that has become a brand and its competitors, prefer a branded destination because of the better position the brand has in mind. Thus, today, mere attention to hard infrastructure has disappeared and a significant focus on soft infrastructure, urban planning such as designing a good mental image or building a brand for the city is being formed (7).

In recent years, most research has measured the brand equity of the tourism brand based on the Acker method. Aaker defines brand equity based on the following 5 dimensions:

- 1- Brand loyalty: The attitude and behavior of the visitor towards a specific destination brand, which shows the unique preference of that destination and the recommendation of that destination to others to visit.
- 2- Brand Awareness: Refers to consumer awareness and destination reminders.
- 3- Perceived quality: This refers to the quality of goods and services provided to tourists, the level and degree of satisfaction in the minds of consumers and their feelings.
- 4- Brand Association: The position of the destination brand in the minds of tourists, including that they deal with the destination brand, the characteristics of the goods and services produced by the destination, their function and level, the relationship of products with consumer interests.
- 5- Other items include brand assets (other priorities, patterns, the company's relationship with its competitors, etc). Aaker states that from a marketing perspective, brand equity is the same as brand equity of consumer-based (8, 9).

In Qaemi (2012) study in Qeshm Island, the aim was to identify the factors affecting the equity of the destination brand and provide a model for its perceived value. The study sample was 308 tourists who had traveled to Qeshm Island. In this study, four dimensions of Acker brand equity were examined with the

letters of brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived quality. According to the findings, all variables directly affected the brand equity, among which, the brand image had the most and the perceived quality of the brand had the least effect on Qeshm destination's value (10). Assessing brand equity, especially in service industries such as sports tourism, is one of the key aspects of destination management. Of course, it is important to note that the complex characteristics of a tourist destination can be a major challenge in determining the branding for that destination. Maybe that's why few studies have been done on the brand of tourism destinations. The first step in creating brand equity is to create awareness in the mind of the consumer. Awareness is only related to the destination brand. Brand awareness plays a key role in choosing a destination. Before seeing any destination, tourists identify the available destination brands in their minds through a set of awareness. In general, the set of knowledge leads to the creation of evaluations that help to select the destination brand (11). There is extensive research on the destination brand image. Nevertheless, there is a deep gap between destination brand research and reliable and global criteria of destination brand image from the point of view of tourists. Berley and Martin (2004) used extensive literature to determine the categories and features used to define a destination brand image. They showed that there are nine categories of destination brand image features, including culture, history and art (e.g. museum), social and natural environment, economic and political factors (e.g. safety), natural resources (e.g. beaches), General infrastructure (for example, airport), tourism infrastructure (for example, hotel and restaurant), leisure and recreation of tourists, and finally the atmosphere of the place (for example, relaxation). Nevertheless, achieving a comprehensive scale of the destination image is difficult. The construction of such a scale depends on the purpose of the assessment as well as the destination attractions (12).

Perceived quality means consumer judgment about the preference and advantage of a product. Assessing the quality of services provided by a destination directly depends on the options and characteristics that a destination has to offer to tourists. In addition, because the destinations have a set of general characteristics and a series of more specific characteristics, it is difficult to establish a general and comprehensive scale to measure the perceived quality of the destination (12). Also, perceived value is considered as a kind of trade consisting of benefits and costs received (12).

Zhang et al. (2014) defined the intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to friends and relatives as loyalty to the brand of the tourist destination. Studies show that the perceived quality of services and destination image play an important role in decision making, destination selection and evaluation of tourists' future travel (13). Some consider brand loyalty to be the ultimate goal of brand equity. Brand loyalty may increase under the influence of other dimensions of brand equity or may be created independently of other dimensions; That is, loyalty, in addition to being affected by other dimensions of brand equity, also affects them.

According to the research literature, in this study, the brand equity approach from the consumer point of view has been considered as a criterion for valuing brand equity. According to research results, the dimensions of brand equity include brand awareness, perceived quality and mental image and brand loyalty. In this study, the framework proposed by Acker (1991) is used to conceptualize the brand equity of a tourist destination. Of course, the relationships between variables have been adapted from research in this area. The model used in this research is selected based on the results of researchers' research and with the opinion of a group of experts (familiar with the destination brand and familiar with the needs of sports and the study area).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting the special value of the brand of sports tourism destination in Bandar Abbas city.

## Methodology

In terms of purpose and orientation of the applied type and in terms of strategy, the present study is among the quantitative and survey research. The statistical population of the study is the total number of sports tourists (both sports events and scientific sports events) visited Bandar Abbas city from October to March 2019. The sampling method was purposefully available and the sample size was 108 people. In this research, documents (libraries, articles, required books) and computer (Internet) have been used to collect information on the theoretical foundations of the research. Also, in order to collect data and information and to analyze them, a questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale has been used, which has been previously developed by Jafari et al. (1396) (16). According to the research model, 6 indicators were examined, which include brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality of the brand, perceived value of the brand, brand loyalty and brand equity. The questionnaire questions contained 41 questions and it was tried to make the questionnaire questions as understandable as possible. The data obtained through structural equations and partial least squares method were analyzed using SPSS and smart pls software.

## Results

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to analyze the internal structure of the questionnaire and discover the factors that make up each hidden structure or variable. The results of confirmatory factor analysis are summarized in Table 1. Some other indicators that exist in the final model and its values should be higher than a certain limit are Cronbach's alpha or CA (above 0.7), internal compatibility or CR (above 0.7) and the mean extraction variance Or AVE (above 0.5) (15) as shown in Table 1.

In the second step (path analysis), model fit and model fit indices were determined. However, to measure the fit of the model obtained by Smart PLS software, they use an indicator called Goodness Fit Index (GOF), but Hensler and Sarstad (2014) considered this indicator to be inefficient for assessing model fit. In this regard, the most valid indicator used to evaluate the fit of the model is the root of the standardized squared mean (SRMR), which experts believe should be below 0.08. The SRMR value in this study is 0.45, which indicates a good fit of the model. The results related to path coefficients along with the level of significance are reported in Table 2. The value of path coefficients is checked by P values (probability values). If the desired value is less than 0.05 the path and the path coefficient are significant, otherwise the path coefficient is not significant (16).

As can be seen brand awareness, brand image and perceived quality have a positive and significant effect on brand equity ( $P < 0.05$ ). As can be seen, perceived value, brand image and brand equity have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Table1. Factor loads of research structures

Variables	Structure	Factor load	CA	CR	AVE
Awareness	1 Hearing about destinations before	0.905	0.783	0.821	0.55
	2 Quick come to mind features	0.873			
	3 Know what you have seen and heard	0.800			
	4 Identify the destination with a specific brand	0.903			
the image	1 Beautiful and eye-catching nature	0.918	0.795	0.834	0.614
	2 Quiet environment	0.876			
	3 suitable environment for relaxation	0.554			
	4 Favorable weather	0.669			
	5 interesting local dishes	0.489			
	6 has fascinating historical attractions	0.467			
	7 has attractive cultural attractions	0.868			
	8 Kind and hospitable	0.674			
	9 lakes and mountains	0.871			
	10 unique handicrafts	0.521			
	11 perfect places for adventure	0.760			
	12 available sports and leisure facilities	0.579			
Perceived quality	1 Clean physical environment	0.613	0.855	0.893	0.65
	2 quality road and rail infrastructure	0.802			
	3 quality accommodation centers	0.543			
	4 Security of life	0.558			
	5 reasonable prices	0.427			
	6 Good service quality	0.621			
	7 Clean air	0.811			
	8 Appropriate information	0.589			
	9 Easy access	0.775			
	10 Attention to tourists	0.417			
Perceived value	1 is worth spending money on	0.886	0.850	0.95	0.74
	2 This journey is more of a torture than a holiday	0.818			
	3 is too far from home	0.783			
	4 I spend a lot of money due to the existence of various good facilities and services	0.743			
	5 This trip seems to be a good purchase	0.833			
	6 Compared to other areas, its choice makes sense	0.637			
	7 Given the prices, the costs are reasonable	0.904			
Loyalty	1 Select the destination again	0.905	0.754	0.811	0.711
	2 Introduce to others	0.914			
	3 Preference over similar purposes	0.912			
Brand equity	1 High level of service quality	0.767	0.822	0.881	0.605
	2 destinations with lovely cities	0.889			
	3 Spending to see it is a good deal (decision)	0.876			
	4 difficult imaginations in mind	0.852			
	5 trips to its new locations	0.937			

Table2. Results of path analysis to examine the interaction of variables

Confrontation of variables	Path coefficient $\beta$	t-value	p-value
The relationship between brand awareness and brand equity	0.244	4.49	0.001 *
The relationship between brand image and brand equity	0.2	3.11	0.003 *
The relationship between perceived quality and brand equity	0.218	4.01	0.001 *
The relationship between perceived quality and loyalty	0.17	1.01	0.67
The relationship between perceived value and loyalty	0.230	4.31	0.001 *
The relationship between brand image and loyalty	0.224	4.22	0.001 *
The relationship between brand equity and loyalty	0.259	5.13	0.001 *

\* Significant at the level of  $P \leq 0.05$

## Discussion

The results of this study show that the special value of Bandar Abbas brand as a sports tourism destination affected by brand awareness, brand image and perceived quality of the brand. The results show that awareness, the most impact and perceived quality have the least impact on the special value of Bandar Abbas sports tourism destination brand. This research is consistent with the results of Khoshkho and Ayoubi Yazdi (2010). They also concluded in their studies that awareness has the greatest impact on the brand equity of Kish Island (17). However, the results of this study are not in line with the results of Zarei et al. (2016). They reported that perceived quality has the greatest impact on brand equity (18).

Also, based on the present findings, loyalty is influenced by brand equity, perceived value and brand image, which equity has the most impact and perceived value has the least impact on loyalty. However, perceived quality does not affect brand loyalty. In Hemmati and Zahrani's research (2014), the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty was rejected (19). The results of Qaemi study (2012) also indicated that brand equity is the most effective factor affecting brand loyalty (10). As a result, the present study is in line with Hemmati and Zahrani (2014) and Qaemi (2012) studies.

According to the results of the questionnaire of this research, knowing about what is seen and heard has the least impact on the brand awareness of the destination. Therefore, it is necessary for the destination management to pay more attention to providing attractive advertisements that fit the tastes of sports tourists and to allocate more capital to them. Also, using cyberspace to facilitate access to information needed to travel to Bandar Abbas and inform sports tourists about things they may encounter during the visit can be effective.

In terms of destination image, interesting local cuisine and unique handicrafts had the least impact on the formation of the desired image. Therefore, by creating and reviving handicraft workshops as well as holding local food festivals, the role of the desired items in shaping the image of the destination can be more colorful.

In terms of perceived quality, attention to sports tourists, reasonable prices and quality accommodation centers have the least impact. The problem of lack of quality accommodation centers can be solved by building different accommodations in the form of hotels and guesthouses at reasonable prices and by constructing eco-lodges and even creating sports camps for sports tourists. Also, according to the potential of the region, by developing maritime tourism, while creating a unique experience for sports tourists, it can create jobs for local people.

In terms of brand equity, the high level of service quality has the least impact, which shows the weakness of Bandar Abbas in providing quality services to sports tourists. Therefore, it is necessary for city managers to try to improve and provide better services by formulating appropriate marketing programs and rational modeling of competitors' performance, which is more in line with the needs of sports tourists.

In terms of perceived value, these items, which make sense compared to other areas and I spend a lot of money on it due to the existence of various facilities and services, have the least impact. Therefore, the destination must identify its powerful attractions, seek the nature that makes these attractions different and attractive to sports tourists, and continuously promote this nature through all communication and marketing behavior. Over time, this process will help to build a lasting reputation based on brand values. In addition, the destination management organization should try to provide ancillary products and services to tourists due to the existence of strong competitors in the region. For example, it can add new products such as amusement parks, which can increase the attractiveness of the destination and create conditions for spending more money in the destination and the possibility of attracting new markets and loyalty to provide the destination.

This study examined the brand equity from the perspective of sports tourists. It is suggested that the opinion of the local community and experts be considered in future research. Considering the development of the brand concept of sports tourism destinations, it is suggested that the relationship between the brand equity of sports venues, hotels, restaurants, attractions and the equity of the destination brand be examined. Also, it seems that the growth stage of the sports tourism region affects the priority of each of the factors affecting the brand equity. It is suggested that the factors affecting the special value of the sports tourism destination brand be examined according to the development stages of the tourism region.

## Conclusion

It is concluded that brand awareness, brand image and perceived quality have a positive and significant effect on brand equity and brand image, perceived value and brand equity have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. Brand awareness has the greatest impact on brand equity and brand equity has the greatest impact on brand loyalty, but perceived quality does not have a significant direct effect on brand loyalty.

## References

1. Richards, G. (2013). Creativity and tourism in the city. *Current Issues in Tourism*,17(2): 1-26.
2. Mohsin, A. (2005). Tourist attitude and destination marketing. The case of Australia northern territory and Malaysia. *Tourism management*, 26: 732-733.
3. Chalip, L., Costa, C. (2006). Building sport event tourism into the destination brand: foundation for a general theory in H. Gibson (Ed), *sport tourism. concept and theories*, 86-105.
4. Iranzadeh, S., Ranjbar, A., Sadeghpour, N. (2012). Investigating the effect of marketing mix on brand equity. *Journal of Modern Marketing Research*, 2 (3): 155-172.
5. Amari, H., Zandedel, A. (1391). Assessing the mediating effect of brand image on the formation of brand equity. *Journal Beyond Management*, 5 (20): 59-78.
6. Liu, C.H.S., Chou, S.F. (2016). Tourism strategy development and facilitation of integrative processes among brand equity, marketing and motivation. *Tourism Management*, 54: 298-308.

7. Tabesh, S.S., Nemati Mehr, M. (1393). Explaining tourism brand strategies based on mental image. International Conference on Sustainable Development, Strategies and Challenges focusing on agriculture, natural resources, environment, Tabriz.
8. Aaker, D.A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California Management Review*, 38(3): 102-120.
9. Bianchi, C., Pike, S., Lings, I. (2014). Investigating attitudes towards three South American destinations in an emerging long haul market using a model of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). *Tourism Management*, 42: 215-223.
10. Qaemi, V. (2012). An empirical survey on perceived value from tourism destination based on brand equity model: A case study of Qeshm Island. *Management Science Letters*, 2(7): 2347-2354.
11. Kashif, M., Samsi, S.Z.M., Sarifuddin, S. (2015). Brand equity do Forte Lahore como uma marca de destino turístico. *RAE-Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 55(4): 432-443.
12. Bordea, A. (2014). Destination Brand Equity for European City Destinations. Master thesis, University of Southern Denmark.
13. Zhang, H., Fu, X., Cai, L.A., Lu, L. (2014). Destination image and tourist loyalty: A meta-analysis. *Tourism Management*, 40: 213-223.
14. Jafari, W., Najarzadeh, M., Kiani Faizabadi, Z. (2017). Investigating the Factors Affecting the Special Value of Tourism Destination Brand (Case Study: Savadkuh County). *Journal of Tourism Planning and Development*, 6 (20): 75-93.
15. Hair, J.F., Hult, G.T.M., Ringle, C.M., Sarstedt, M. (2016). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
16. Danaifard, H., Alwani, S.M., Azar, A. (1389). Quantitative research methodology in management: a comprehensive approach. Tehran, aristocratic, Saffar.
17. Imani Khoshkho, M.H., Ayoubi Yazdi, H. (1389). Factors affecting brand equity in Yazd tourism destination. *Quarterly Journal of Tourism Studies*, 13: 113-137.
18. Zarei, Q., Bashkooh Ajirloo, M., Mahmoudi Pachal, Zeinab. (2015). Investigating the effect of perceived quality of brand on brand equity of Sarein tourism destination. 2nd International Conference on Accounting, Management and Innovation in Business, Rasht, Lutheran University of California and Rasht Municipality.
19. Hemmati, Reza., Zahrani, Davood. (1393). Investigating the Factors Affecting the Satisfaction and Loyalty of Foreign Tourists to Isfahan as a Tourism Brand. *Quarterly Journal of Tourism Planning and Development*, 3 (10): 182-204.