

Development of a Model for the Obstacles to Marketing Adventure Sports Tourism in Iran

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DOI: [10.22034/sms.2025.142436.1421](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2025.142436.1421)

Received: 01.11.2024

Revised: 08.12.2024

Accepted: 13.02.2025

Available online: 22.12.2025

Keywords:

Sport Tourism, Marketing, Adventure, Barriers and Solutions, Thematic Analysis

ABSTRACT

The adventure sports tourism industry has witnessed significant growth in recent years. However, in Iran, it still faces considerable challenges. Consequently, the present study was conducted in 2023 with the aim of identifying Management and proposing strategies for the development of adventure sports tourism marketing in the country. This research adopted a qualitative approach and employed thematic analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 experts in adventure sports tourism marketing, including managers of tourism agencies, tour operators, tour guides, adventure sports trainers, and other specialists in the field. The data analysis revealed 169 initial codes, 35 sub-themes, and 14 main themes that identified barriers to the development of adventure sports tourism marketing in Iran. These barriers include poor service quality, an inefficient banking system, the novelty of adventure sports, a lack of information, insufficient investment and governmental support, cultural and religious constraints, inadequate advertising and marketing efforts, the absence of diverse tourism packages, and limited local community interest. The findings of the study highlighted that despite Iran's unique natural and geographical potential, significant obstacles in managerial, infrastructural, economic, and promotional domains hinder tourist attraction and limit income-generating opportunities. By comprehensively identifying these Management and proposing actionable strategies, this research represents a pioneering step in addressing the challenges of adventure sports tourism marketing in Iran. With a practical and localized approach, it lays the foundation for policymaking and sustainable development in this industry. The specialized examination of managerial, cultural, and economic obstacles, along with practical recommendations, constitutes the key innovation of this study.

How to Cite This Article:

Ghasempour, J., Pourkiani, M. & Ghorbani, M. H. (2025). Development of a Model for the Obstacles to Marketing Adventure Sports Tourism in Iran. *Sports Marketing Studies*, 6 (4), 27-47. doi: [10.22034/sms.2025.142436.1421](https://doi.org/10.22034/sms.2025.142436.1421)

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered one of the best ways to spend leisure time and plays a significant role in transforming the economic conditions worldwide (Taghvaei et al., 2022). As one of the main pillars of the global economy, tourism plays a key role in cultural exchanges between nations and holds a prominent position as the largest service industry in the world. Consequently, there is intense competition among countries to capture a larger share of this lucrative and international industry (Ghasempour et al., 2022). According to (Asheghi et al. (2022), sports tourism is an emerging star in the tourism world, combining two important industries into a highly popular destination for travelers. This emerging phenomenon has established its position in the domestic markets of both developed and developing countries, playing a key role in economic prosperity (Rheenen et al., 2024). Sports tourism refers to activities related to travel where individuals leave their place of residence to watch or participate in sporting events (both professional and recreational), engage in physical activities and exercise outside their usual residence, assist or support athletes in competitions, or participate in training activities (Schlemmer et al., 2020; Kalbekov & Turdumambetov, 2024; Karimi et al., 2020). Sports tourism is a new phenomenon in the modern era that establishes an inseparable connection between two exciting worlds—tourism and sports. Experts view these two fields as two wings of flight, dependent on one another, working together to foster each other's growth (Boonsirtomachai & Phonthanukitihaworn, 2019; Ritegie & Adair, 2002). The link between tourism and sports has created a new and complete structure for filling leisure time, which is accompanied by both physical and mental vitality (Costa, 2013 & Chalip).

Sports tourism, the highly profitable giant of the global industry, is recognized in many countries as the key to sustainable development. Planners and policymakers consider this industry to be the main

pillar of progress, playing a crucial role in the development of regions and, ultimately, in the prosperity and diversification of the national economy through careful planning, identification of opportunities and constraints (Darvishi et al., 2020; Jimenez-Garcia et al., 2020).

With the growth of societies, humans have been separated from natural and pristine environments and, as a result, seek opportunities for leisure through travel in nature (Zendehboudi et al., 2022). In search of excitement and thrill, people turn to activities that will elevate their adrenaline levels, and nature provides the perfect setting to satisfy this intense desire. Consequently, a new branch of tourism called "adventure sports tourism" has emerged (Kalbekov & Turdumambetov, 2024). Currently, adventure sports are gaining popularity due to their positive effects on individuals, such as boosting self-confidence, enhancing intrinsic motivation, fostering enjoyment in connecting with others, promoting independence, and incorporating elements of risk and adrenaline, which are characteristic of this type of tourism (Mackenzie et al., 2023).

Adventure sports tourism has evolved beyond being just an industry into a significant economic and social phenomenon worldwide. Many countries, with substantial investments, have recognized the effects and benefits of this type of tourism and use it as an essential source to improve their economic, social, and political status, increase employment and income, develop infrastructure, and enhance their reputation and brand (Faraji et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2017).

Research indicates that the global potential for adventure travelers is approximately 60 million people. Recently, the share of adventure travelers among all tourists worldwide has been around one percent (five million), with this figure growing at an annual rate of 20%. The growth rate of nature and adventure tourism is twice as fast as that of conventional tourism (Guliyev & Nuriyeva, 2017; Susilowati et al., 2024; Sonhani et al., 2021). It

should also be noted that international trips specifically for adventure sports tourism have seen a growth of approximately three hundred times over the past 25 years (Haghighat et al., 2022).

Numerous countries worldwide, recognizing the potential of adventure sports tourism, are developing their tourism destinations for activities such as mountain biking and skiing. This trend is growing at a remarkable pace, with the number of these countries increasing significantly compared to the past (Farndzidis, 2018 & Hritz). The diversity of approaches in planning for adventure sports and recreational activities in various countries reflects their different perspectives on this field. For example, Australia, by facilitating and popularizing adventure sports, is working to promote these activities among interested citizens (Kellett & Russell, 2009). New Zealand, a hub for adventure sports, also places a strong emphasis on adventure tourism. Accordingly, the city of Queenstown in New Zealand welcomes half a million adventure tourists annually (Torkildsen, 2012).

Despite Iran's tremendous potential in the field of recreational and adventure sports tourism, we have not witnessed significant growth and development in this area, nor a notable increase in tourist attraction in this sector. The lack of a clear vision and defined approach for the development of this type of tourism has hindered the flourishing of this potential industry in the country (Karimi et al., 2020). The primary objectives of attracting tourists include generating foreign currency, introducing foreign visitors to Iranian culture, and even creating employment opportunities (McCreary et al., 2024).

Although Iran boasts a highly diverse array of tourist attractions, it benefits only marginally from this lucrative industry, which indicates a lack of attention to the development of adventure sports tourism (Guliyev & Nuriyeva, 2017). Furthermore, in addition to the insufficient focus on this profitable industry, there are significant challenges and obstacles to the marketing of this type of

tourism. According to research (Zendehboodi et al., 2021; Boroujerdi et al., 2023; Majidi & Moharamzadeh, 2017; Potgieter et al., 2019), obstacles such as administrative and managerial issues, infrastructure and equipment, financial and economic challenges, security concerns, and information dissemination have been identified as key barriers to the development of adventure sports tourism. Based on studies (Komijani et al., 2022; Gaitanakis et al., 2019), weak policymaking is considered one of the most critical obstacles to the development of sports tourism tours. Additionally, Kimbu & Tichaawa (2018) concluded in their research that poor planning could create challenges in the development of tourism in Africa.

Abdi et al. (2021) examined the barriers to the development of water sports tourism in Iran. The results showed that infrastructure-related issues were the most significant obstacle to development. By addressing issues such as unregulated construction within coastal areas, the lack of differentiation between relaxation, boating, and swimming areas, as well as the insufficient equipment for lifeguards, the potential for water sports tourism development would be facilitated. Additionally, the organization of water sports and beach festivals and competitions emerged as new strategies to promote tourism. Furthermore, several studies, including those by Shonk & Chelladurai (2008), Romiti & Sarti (2016), and Faraji et al. (2023), have investigated the impact of infrastructure and service quality on attracting sports tourists.

In a study by Al-Makhadmah et al. (2021), the challenges facing sports tourism activities in Jordan were identified. The results indicated numerous challenges, including weak infrastructure and a lack of skilled personnel to assist tourists. Eslami et al. (2016) conducted research to identify and classify the barriers to sports tourism in Iran. The results showed that among the obstacles, infrastructure deficiencies ranked first, followed by the lack of activity by international companies in the sports tourism

sector and insufficient advertising and marketing efforts in other countries, which ranked second.

In a study by Zendehtoodi et al. (2021), the main barriers to the development of sports tourism in Khuzestan province were identified as managerial, infrastructural, cultural, and marketing issues. These barriers contribute to the lack of tourist inflow or the reduction in the number of sports tourists to the province. Moreover, several other studies, including those by Rohani et al. (2020), Sobhani et al. (2021), Haritz & Farandzidis (2018), and Guliyev & Nuriyeva (2017), indicate that cultural, infrastructural, and managerial factors are critical in attracting sports tourists (Sarlab et al., 2021).

The study examines the barriers to the development of sports tourism in East Azerbaijan Province and highlights that infrastructural, managerial, socio-cultural, technological, economic, and political limitations have significantly impacted the development of tourism in the region, leading to restricted tourist attraction. Iran is a four-season country with diverse potential for adventure sports. Water sports in the northern and southern regions, along the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, provide a good destination market for activities such as kayaking, surfing, and boating (Abdoli, 2022). Iran's unique

deserts in the central region make it an ideal destination for millions of tourists interested in professional and recreational sports such as safari driving, motorcycling, camel riding, zip-lining, sandboarding, and paragliding (Asheghi et al., 2022).

Researchers, by reviewing the research background, identify a gap in the existing studies. This gap is largely due to the lack of proper advertising and marketing, as well as the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism's strong focus on cultural tourism, which has resulted in insufficient attention to adventure sports. These adventure sports are rapidly developing and progressing in the contemporary world. It is often assumed that people who engage in these sports belong to affluent social classes; however, in recent years, individuals from various financial backgrounds have participated in these activities, creating a large market for various types of adventure sports. Therefore, these negative and inaccurate assumptions need to be removed from the narrative of adventure sports.

The researchers in this study aim to answer the following question: What are the barriers and solutions for the development of adventure sports tourism marketing to attract tourists in Iran?

2. Methodology

This study was conducted as a qualitative and exploratory research in response to gaps in the existing literature, utilizing the method of thematic analysis. The research is considered applied, aimed at identifying the barriers and providing solutions for the development of adventure sports tourism marketing in Iran. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that moves from discovering data and initial coding to achieving core codes, themes, and patterns. For analyzing the data obtained from the interviews, the six-stage model of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied. In the first step, the researcher familiarized themselves with the collected data by

repeatedly reviewing the qualitative data to search for meanings and patterns. This allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the data, with all interview data being studied multiple times to generate initial ideas.

In the second step, the process of initial coding of the raw data began. In this stage of coding, the primary research question served as a reference for extracting the codes. Participants in the interviews were selected through purposive sampling. Experts in adventure sports tourism marketing, including tourism agency managers, tour operators, tour guides, adventure sports coaches, and



knowledgeable individuals in the field, were chosen as participants.

Given the nature of the research and the method of thematic analysis, the criterion for selecting the sample size was theoretical saturation. Initial contact with the interviewees was made via phone calls, which included an invitation to collaborate, an explanation of the research goals, and general questions. The participants were also provided with information regarding audio recording and the process of the study.

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were used, all of which were digitally recorded. The

duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 50 minutes, with the average interview time estimated at 30 minutes. In total, 28 pages of transcriptions were obtained.

To assess the validity and reliability, criteria such as acceptability, transferability, confirmability, and re-test were used. Additionally, the triangulation technique was employed with the help of experts in the field. The method for calculating reliability between the codings performed by the researcher is as follows:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of } 2 \times \text{Agreements}}{\text{Total Number of Codes}} \times 100$$

Table 1. Coding retest reliability

Percentage of Reliability of retest	Number of agreement	Total number of codes	Interview title	Row
94%	6	14	P1	1
83%	8	17	P9	2
85%	6	16	P13	3
87%	20	47		Total

3. Research Findings

Seventy-five percent of the research population were male, with 40% holding a doctoral degree and 60% holding a master's degree. The

demographic characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table2. Demographic characteristics of research participants

ROW	Gender	Age	Level of education	Activity domain
1	Male	29	PhD	Tour Guide
2	Male	45	Master's Degree	Tour Operator
3	Female	41	PhD	Sports Management Professor
4	Male	38	Master's Degree	Coach
5	Male	55	PhD	Tourism Agency Manager
6	Male	45	Master's Degree	Tour Guide
7	Female	27	Master's Degree	Tour Guide
8	Male	48	PhD	Tourism Agency Manager
9	Male	37	Master's Degree	Coach
10	Female	33	Master's Degree	Tour Guide
11	Male	40	PhD	Tourism Agency Manager
12	Male	44	Master's Degree	Sports Management Professor
13	Male	40	Master's Degree	Coach
14	Female	52	PhD	Tour Operator
15	Male	39	Master's Degree	Tour Guide
16	Male	42	Master's Degree	Sports Management Professor

ROW	Gender	Age	Level of education	Activity domain
17	Female	38	Master's Degree	Tour Guide
18	Male	45	PhD	Tourism Agency Manager
19	Male	54	PhD	Tour Operator
20	Male	44	Master's Degree	Tour Guide

Table 3. Open Coding of Interviewee

Initial (Raw) Code Extraction	Interview Text
global fear and international events, natural resources, transportation, foreign tourists, diplomacy, safety and security of tourists, transportation infrastructure, roads, disproportionate banking system, cash, poor service quality, individual, family, information dissemination, diversity in tourism, proper management, purchasing power, luxury, marketing, tour costs, financial capabilities, rising prices of dollars and other currencies	The challenges facing adventure sports tourism in Iran arise from both internal and external factors. On one hand, global security concerns and negative perceptions of Iran impact the willingness of foreign tourists to participate in sports events and take advantage of the country's natural resources. On the other hand, challenges within the tourism infrastructure, such as inadequate facilities and the lack of a structured plan to attract adventure sports tourists, represent internal barriers to the industry. To address these issues, we can gradually overcome these challenges by strengthening sports diplomacy, improving tourism infrastructure, and organizing small-scale sports events in various regions of the country.
	In my view, one of the main obstacles to the development of adventure sports tourism is the serious concerns regarding the payment methods for services provided to foreign tourists. Essentially, due to the banking sanctions our country faces, tourists are forced to carry cash with them, which leads to numerous problems. Furthermore, the inadequate state of infrastructure, including roads and transportation, has reduced individuals' willingness to participate in group tours and has encouraged them to engage in adventure activities individually or with their families.
	Despite the high potential of adventure sports tourism, it seems that comprehensive and accurate information dissemination in this area has not been adequately carried out. The lack of sufficient information has posed challenges for tour operators in planning to incorporate this potential into tourism packages. It is important to note that the high cost of adventure sports tourism, due to increasing expenses and decreasing purchasing power, is one of the main challenges in the development of this type of tourism. Additionally, the general perception of these sports as luxury and expensive activities has hindered the attraction of a broader range of tourists. However, with proper management and the provision of diverse packages at different price points, services can be offered to all enthusiasts of this type of tourism.

After a thorough review and in-depth analysis of the data obtained from the interviews, initial coding was performed with a focus on the primary research question, resulting in the extraction of 169 codes. Following the coding of the data, in the third stage, the search for extracting potential main and sub-themes began. During this stage, the codes were examined, and those with greater semantic proximity were grouped into main codes. At this stage, the repetition of codes was not the sole criterion; rather, their relevance to the research question was of primary importance. Based on this, the main and sub-themes were extracted (Clark & Braun, 2013). The main themes (14 themes) extracted at this stage included service quality, the banking system, the novelty of sports, lack of sufficient information, insufficient attention to

open spaces, lack of investment and government support for tourism, cultural and religious factors, advertising, absence of diverse tourism packages, lack of interest from local people, skilled human resources, management, economic factors, failure to participate in international tourism exhibitions, and the negative image of Iran. In the fourth stage, after several rounds of review and obtaining feedback from experts, the accuracy of the categorization and naming of the main themes was confirmed. Subsequently, with careful and detailed revisions, the sub-themes related to each main theme were extracted. As part of the coding process, by re-examining the codes and aligning them with the main themes, 35 sub-themes were extracted from the data. In this stage, for each of the extracted main themes, a number of sub-themes

were extracted based on their semantic and conceptual proximity to the main theme. In the fifth stage, the

definition and review of the themes are presented in Table 4.

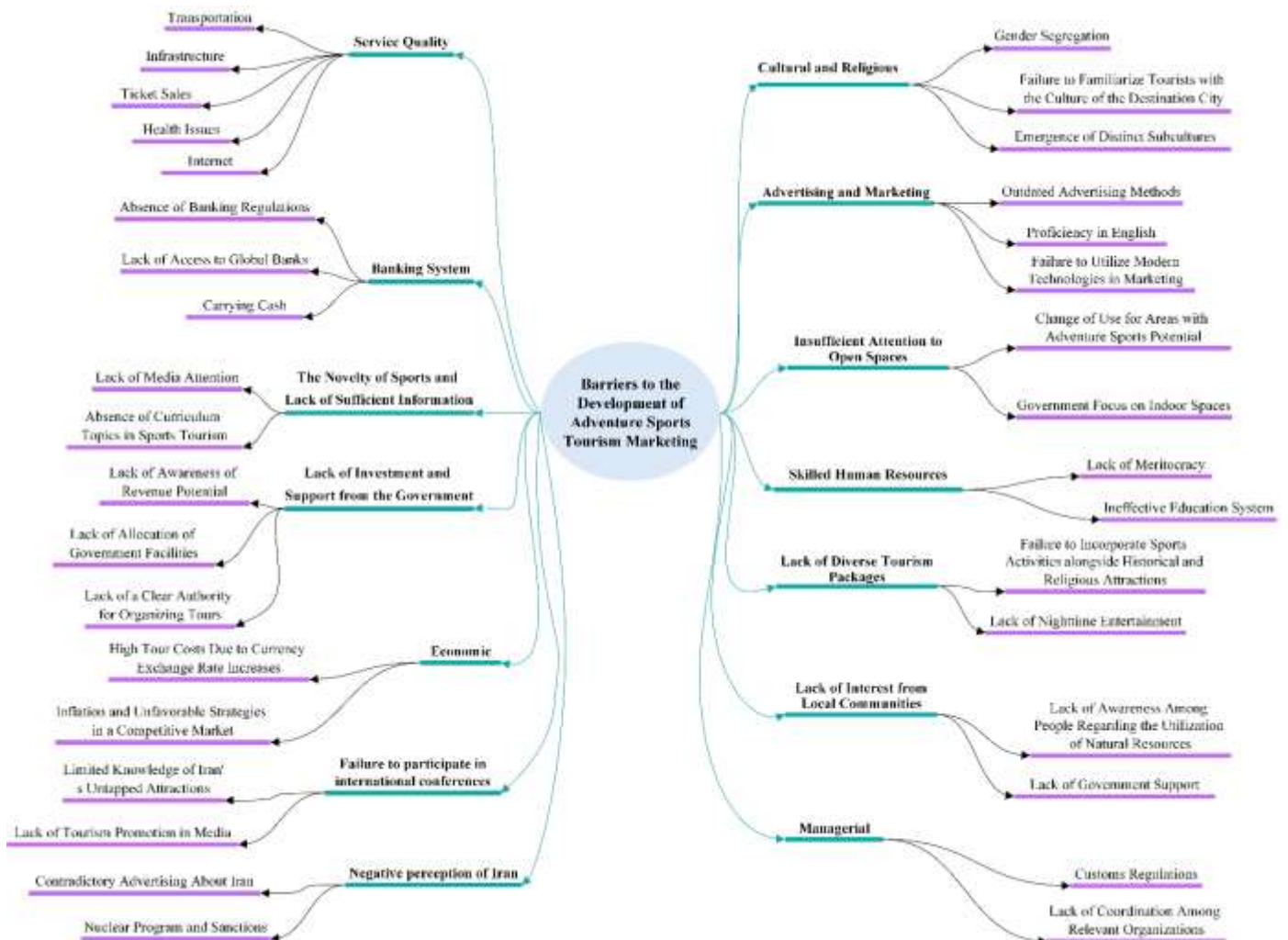


Table 4- Barriers to the development of adventure sports tourism marketing in Iran

Concept	Main Theme	Sub-theme
Service Quality	Transportation	Poor transportation quality, lack of transportation capacity, unsafe public transportation, outdated infrastructure, lack of air transport in certain regions, airport conditions, high transportation costs, road conditions, individual transportation, family transportation, road safety.
	Infrastructure	Conversion of hotels to other uses, inappropriate hotel reservation methods, lack or shortage of hotels near open spaces and attractions, cleanliness of venues and hotels, poor design quality of hotels and venues, failure to adhere to merit-based recruitment for specialists, low-quality accommodations, poor quality of materials used in accommodations, lack of facilities, safety.
	Ticket Sales	Lack of familiarity with regulations, outdated

		reservation websites, inability to purchase tickets online, high ticket prices, unclear ticket sales history, limited sales channels.
	Health Issues	Presence of waste in natural environments, failure to meet international standards in infrastructure, lack of trash bins, dirty restrooms, lack of cooperation from municipalities in waste collection.
	Internet	Limited access to cyberspace (filtering), signal reception issues, limitations on high-speed internet, lack of support for international SIM cards.
Banking System	Carrying Cash	Inadequate banking system, lack of cooperation from currency exchange offices, non-functioning Visa and MasterCard in Iran, inability to transfer money, and consequently, the need to carry cash.
	Lack of Access to Global Banks	International sanctions, banking arrears, and lack of trust from foreign banks.
	Absence of Banking Regulations	Extremely slow processing speed, complex and convoluted banking system, inability to distinguish between rial and toman, lack of cooperation from banks in providing low-interest loans.
The Novelty of Sports and Lack of Sufficient Information	Lack of Media Attention	Rapid growth at a high rate, public interest in participation, individual motivations, media coverage of adventure sports, and the public perception of these sports as luxury and exclusive.
	Absence of Curriculum Topics in Sports Tourism	Lack of awareness among students regarding the potential of adventure sports tourism, insufficient attention from educational authorities, and the absence of recreational programs in schools.
Insufficient Attention to Open Spaces	Government Focus on Indoor Spaces	Very limited basic facilities, extremely difficult access to pristine areas, health issues in open spaces, and focus on specific regions.
	Change of Use for Areas with Adventure Sports Potential	The unfamiliarity of some regions in the country, pollution, lack of well-equipped medical centers in all areas and near natural sites, presence of waste disposal residues, and a weak culture regarding the separation of wet and dry waste.
Lack of Investment and Support from the Government	Lack of Awareness of Revenue Potential	Fear of non-recovery of investment, lack of coordination among tourism managers, lack of awareness in the private sector, insufficient attention to the private sector and failure to involve it, absence of a comprehensive tourism law, and lack of a strategic tourism document.
	Lack of Allocation of Government Facilities	Absence of a foundational role for the public sector, lack of economic security, cumbersome government regulations, budget shortages, reliance on oil and gas revenues, and the government's cultural perspective.
	Lack of a Clear Authority for Organizing Tours	Lack of cooperation between the government and responsible organizations, existence of parallel organizations, conflicting and misaligned decisions made by various organizations, scattered information, and issues in obtaining permits for organizing tours.
Cultural and Religious	Gender Segregation	Failure to respect privacy, improper handling of tourists, traditional attitudes towards women, laws and regulations, and lack of targeted advertising

	Failure to Familiarize Tourists with the Culture of the Destination City	Lack of coordination for religious obligations, limited food diversity, misalignment of holidays in Iran with other countries, and the unavailability of services during certain months of the year.
	Emergence of Distinct Subcultures	Unhealthy social relationships, ethnic and linguistic prejudices.
Skilled Human Resources	Lack of Meritocracy	Lack of proficiency in English and other languages, presence of unqualified staff in centers, lack of expertise among tour guides, absence of a strategic plan for human resources in the tourism industry, low motivation to work in this field, declining service quality, and lack of trust from tourists.
	Ineffective Education System	Poor communication with tourists, lack of familiarity among tour guides with adventure sports tourism, outdated knowledge among human resources in sports tourism, and the failure of universities to train entrepreneurs and skilled personnel in this field.
Advertising and Marketing	Outdated Advertising Methods	Traditional advertising methods, failure to utilize modern technologies for advertising, highlighting adventure events in advertisements, copying advertisements from other countries, and lack of advertising in locations with attractions.
	Failure to Utilize Modern Technologies in Marketing	Lack of media attention to the growth potential and exploitation of pristine areas for adventure sports, absence of online advertising, and a lack of creativity and innovation.
	Proficiency in English	Exclusivity of advertising in Persian only, absence of tourism tours on social media platforms, difficulty in communication, and issues in establishing connections with foreign tourism agencies.
Lack of Diverse Tourism Packages	Lack of Nighttime Entertainment	Lack of variety in participation, failure to consider tourists' interests, and absence of nighttime programs
	Failure to Incorporate Sports Activities alongside Historical and Religious Attractions	Strong interest in winter sports, most tourism occurs in historical and religious cities, lack of structure and willingness to move beyond borders and limitations, and absence of combined recreational activities.
Lack of Interest from Local Communities	Lack of Awareness Among People Regarding the Utilization of Natural Resources	Community involvement in tourism, the facilitation of technology in participation, resistance to change, presence of traditional attitudes, and communication structures.
	Lack of Government Support	Respect for the norms of the host community, weak communication between local entrepreneurs and the government, the importance of adequate financial support, correcting perceptions among local populations, and lack of participation from the private sector.
Managerial	Customs Regulations	Disorder in operational procedures, unfamiliarity with the environment, cumbersome regulations, confiscation

		of personal belongings, payment of additional fees, lack of an online system for registering customs information, and long waiting times.
	Lack of Coordination Among Relevant Organizations	Inadequate planning, the presence of individuals lacking expertise within the tourism sector, insufficient attention from tour managers, lack of sound management practices, difficulties in obtaining visas, and the use of credit cards.
Economic	High Tour Costs Due to Currency Exchange Rate Increases	The presence of intermediaries, instability of prices in Iran, reduced purchasing power of tourists, and the short duration of trips.
	Inflation and Unfavorable Strategies in a Competitive Market	High tour costs, lack of banking facilities, the existence of international sanctions, and the high cost of adventure tourism equipment.
Failure to participate in international conferences	Limited Knowledge of Iran's Untapped Attractions	Global recognition of Iran, utilization of tools to expand attractions, and political relations.
	Lack of Tourism Promotion in Media	Inadequate planning for branding natural attractions, lack of networking, failure to utilize technology in advertising, and underutilization of existing capacities in cyberspace.
Negative perception of Iran	Contradictory Advertising About Iran	Dissemination of information regarding Iran's rich culture, contrasted with the hate-mongering of Iran's adversaries, lack of control over disruptive behaviors, insufficient awareness of Iran's geographical location, and inadequate advertising.
	Nuclear Program and Sanctions	Portraying Iran as a war-torn country, the impact of sanctions, regional conflicts, and the attribution of many contradictory characteristics to Iran.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Adventure sports, given their remarkable growth and the increasing public interest in them, are playing an increasingly prominent role in society. People participate in these sports for various motivations, including cognitive, psychological, biological, and social reasons (Almeida et al., 2013). In recent years, adventure sports have gained significant attention from the media and the market, experiencing considerable growth compared to traditional sports. According to experts such as Rinehart & Sydnor (2000), adventure sports can be considered alternative sports, offering both ideologically and practically a replacement for conventional sports and their associated values (Karimi et al., 2020).

Given the importance and remarkable growth of adventure sports, there are challenges to their development in Iran. The findings of this study

include a comprehensive model identifying the main challenges facing adventure sports tourism. Implementing strategies to address these challenges will serve as a framework for the development and improvement of adventure sports tourism in the country, which will have a significant impact on enhancing the sector.

The findings of the research indicate that the challenges faced by adventure sports tourism include factors such as service quality, banking system issues, managerial factors, novelty of the sports, lack of adequate information, insufficient attention to outdoor spaces, lack of investment and government support for tourists, cultural and ideological factors, advertising, the absence of diverse tourism packages, local residents' reluctance, the need for skilled human resources, economic factors, failure to participate in

international conferences, and the negative image of Iran. These can all be considered barriers to the development of adventure sports in Iran, which will be discussed in detail below.

One of the most significant obstacles to the development of adventure sports is the quality of services provided to adventure sports tourists. Service quality is a key factor directly related to attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. If the service quality fails to satisfy tourists, they will be disappointed. However, if these factors are properly addressed, tourists may overlook many shortcomings. Therefore, ensuring the provision of the best possible services for tourists is crucial in reducing obstacles to attracting and developing adventure sports tourism. In this regard, [Amini et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the barriers to the development of sports tourism, highlighting three factors: service quality, cultural barriers, and promotional issues as key obstacles to the development of sports tourism in Iran. Other studies, such as those by [Rostamkolae & Poursoltani \(2019\)](#), [Mirzazadeh & Abdolmaleki \(2016\)](#), and [Al-Makhadmah \(2021\)](#), have identified infrastructure issues as factors hindering the development of sports tourism.

The banking system is another barrier to the development of adventure sports tourism in Iran. Due to the sanctions on Iranian banks, foreign tourists face significant difficulties when transferring money. In their study, [Hosseini & Esfahani \(2015\)](#) concluded that one of the main motivations for tourists is the existence of a banking system aligned with international standards. In line with these findings, the research by [Zebardast et al. \(2021\)](#) showed that having a banking system compatible with the global financial system is essential for branding Iran's sports tourism destinations. Additionally, studies by [Nameghi et al. \(2023\)](#), [Fazaeil et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Majidi et al. \(2020\)](#), [asgharabadi\(2025\)](#) , also identified the banking system as a barrier to the development of sports tourism in Iran.

Managerial factors are another important obstacle to the development of adventure sports tourism in Iran. Managerial issues are critical and influential in attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. Furthermore, the management of tours and agencies can have a direct impact on tourism. In other words, any neglect in addressing this factor can not only harm the tourism agencies but also discourage tourists from visiting Iran

The findings of the present study align with the research of [Baharan et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Mostafaei et al. \(2021\)](#), which identified the impact of managerial barriers on tourism ([Farazyani et al., 2018](#)). In a study titled "Examining the Barriers to the Development of Sports Tourism in Kurdistan Province," the lack of proper planning and an information and communication system were identified as the top managerial challenges. Other barriers include the novelty of adventure sports and the lack of sufficient information among both the public and relevant authorities regarding this type of tourism. According to research findings, it can be concluded that adventure sports and adventure tourism can have a positive reciprocal effect on each other, provided that technology and advertising are utilized to raise awareness among the public and enthusiasts. Therefore, the novelty and increasing popularity of these sports and this type of tourism necessitate proper information dissemination and the use of modern technologies. As stated by [Immonen et al. \(2017\)](#), adventure sports are gaining popularity and surpassing traditional events, attracting a wide range of young people. The results of the present study are consistent with the research by [Zendehboodi et al. \(2022\)](#).

Another obstacle is the lack of attention to outdoor spaces with potential, which, given that Iran is a four-season country and endowed with many natural resources, has not been adequately utilized. Minimal attention to this issue hinders the development and attraction of sports tourism. To elaborate on the importance of outdoor spaces,

Veal & Piracha (2021) mentioned that outdoor spaces are five times more suitable for sports and recreation than indoor facilities. Similarly, Salkhori et al. (2019) concluded that the attractiveness and appeal of natural spaces are among the most important factors in attracting and engaging individuals in sports and recreational activities. The findings of this study are also in line with the results of Khajepour & Doosti (2017), Pomfret (2021).

According to the findings of the research, the lack of investment and government support for tourism is another potential barrier to the development of adventure sports tourism in Iran (Lajavardi et al., 2020). A study indicated that Iran's over-reliance on oil and gas is one of the main reasons for the lack of support for the tourism industry. Furthermore, the findings align with the research of Sobhani et al. (2021), Tabrizi et al. (2022), Jalilian et al. (2022), and Ahmadi & Abbasi (2021), Alidoust et al. (2023).

Cultural and ideological factors are also a challenge for the development of adventure sports tourism in Iran. Issues such as the violation of privacy, lack of coordination for religious obligations, unhealthy social relationships, and other factors may not be well-received due to the cultural norms of the country. In studies by Rohani et al. (2020), Koozehchian et al. (2011), Heydari et al. (2018), and Gharibzadeh et al. (2023), cultural barriers were identified as an obstacle to the development of sports tourism in Iran.

Based on the research, one of the current threats to the development of sports tourism, particularly adventure tourism, is the improper use of advertising and media coverage. Ultimately, advertising through media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television is of great importance from the perspective of tourists. The findings of this study are consistent with the research by Eisazadeh et al. (2021), King & Beeton (2006), and Herbold et al. (2020).

One of the new barriers facing the development of adventure sports tourism in our country is the lack of diverse tourism packages (Ehsani, 2010). In

a study titled "Determining Key Factors in the Quality of Tourism Packages," the availability of nighttime entertainment was identified as an important factor in sports tourism products and packages. The findings of this study are aligned with the research of Zarei et al. (2020), Kozak (2022), Neal et al. (2007), and Christou et al. (2022).

Another serious issue that requires significant attention is the lack of interest among local residents, which is influenced by many factors. A major aspect of this disinterest is the lack of proper advertising and understanding of the advantages of developing adventure sports tourism in pristine areas. In a study, Faraziani et al. (2018) examined the barriers to the development of sports tourism in Kurdistan Province and concluded that the lack of local interest is a significant obstacle to the development of sports tourism in the region. These findings are also consistent with the research of Costa & Chalip (2005) and Scott et al. (2017).

The lack of skilled human resources is another potential barrier to the development of adventure tourism. This factor is crucial in establishing initial contact with both domestic and foreign tourists and requires strong management (Alazaizeh et al., 2024). It was claimed that tour guides, through their knowledge and ability to resolve issues, can achieve tourist satisfaction. The findings of the present study are in line with the research of Surujlal (2016), Sobhani et al. (2021), and Maroudas et al. (2004).

Adventure sports tourism also faces significant economic challenges, which may prevent tourists from prioritizing Iran as a destination for adventure sports or from choosing other locations for such activities. Moreover, adventure sports are often perceived as requiring substantial financial resources, which makes them inaccessible for a large segment of society, thereby reducing interest in these activities. However, if costs were more reasonable, many enthusiasts of this type of tourism would be more inclined to participate in these sports. Economic challenges have also been highlighted in other studies (Susilowati et al.,

2024), Askarian & Jafari (2019), and Zbikowski & Soroka (2011), aligning with the findings of the present study.

Participation in international conferences is one of the barriers that should be given special attention in order to attract more tourists and increase global awareness of Iran's natural potential for adventure sports. The findings of this study align with the research of Karobi et al. (2016), Zohrevandian et al. (2024), Bazzanella et al. (2023), and Ehsani et al. (2012).

Many Western countries, through the creation of a negative image and anti-Iranian propaganda, seek to portray a negative image of Iran in international communities and attempt to divert many tourists. The eight-year imposed war and regional conflicts have greatly contributed to this situation (Mesbahi, 2011). According to one study, Iran is perceived as a pariah state in international communities, often due to its wars, nuclear programs, and the tradition of flag burning, despite its pristine environment, tourism capacity, and hospitable people. Moreover, Salehi & Hasanvand (2017) and Motaghi et al. (2017) have identified regional instability, the rise of extremism, and religious radicalism as factors contributing to insecurity, which will impact the tourism industry in any country. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Shabani et al. (2022) and Khodadadi (2016).

In discussing the identification of barriers and providing solutions for the development of adventure sports tourism marketing, it can be noted that this type of tourism has seen significant growth in recent years. However, due to the informal nature of these sports, there are no precise statistics on the number of participants. Reports indicate that one-third of the sales in the sports products market, amounting to 14 billion dollars, are related to adventure sports, which can serve as a benchmark for comparing these sports with others (Buckley et al., 2014). Numerous studies have been conducted, stating that, in addition to the continued growth of adventure sports, they will

also serve as an alternative to many conventional sports activities (Breivik, 2010; Ebert et al., 2024).

Despite the growing popularity of these sports among the general public in Iran, and the increasing attention given to them, adventure sports have not yet been able to capture a significant share of this highly profitable industry. Therefore, the fewer the barriers faced by tourists, the greater the attraction and interest they will have. In fact, this situation is similar to a cycle in which fewer obstacles lead to greater satisfaction, thereby attracting more tourists. Thus, it is essential for organizations, tour operators, travel agencies, and sports managers to recognize and address the barriers to the development of adventure sports tourism. By reducing these barriers and challenges, tourist satisfaction can be increased, and the benefits of this industry can be realized for the country.

To address these issues, recommendations for organizations and authorities responsible for adventure sports tourism include initially focusing on improving the quality of services, such as enhancing access to natural areas, developing infrastructure, and investing in accommodations and restaurants. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of service quality, including field visits and reviewing tourist feedback, can help identify and resolve tourists' challenges. In this regard, private sector involvement can be beneficial, and attracting investors can help deliver services of the highest quality.

The use of modern technologies, such as online reservation systems, the creation of guide applications, and mapping systems for areas with adventure sports potential, along with other recreational amenities, can contribute to the development of adventure sports tourism and attract more tourists to these types of trips. To address financial and banking issues, alternative payment methods, such as traveler's checks and bank transfers, can be used to facilitate payments by tourists. Additionally, the development of electronic payment infrastructure, such as

electronic wallets and secure online payment gateways, can provide foreign tourists with easy and hassle-free payment options.

Another solution could be the use of digital currencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum to bypass sanctions. Moreover, creating special bank accounts for foreign tourists and providing access to currency exchange services can help address this critical challenge. Increasing public awareness through mass media and advertising by relevant authorities can significantly aid in raising awareness about the potential of pristine areas for adventure sports and contribute to sustainable development in these regions, including rural and untouched areas. The responsible organizations can further enhance monitoring and control of tourist activities by establishing inspection patrols and deploying rescue teams in outdoor spaces.

Attracting government support and attention for adventure sports tourism requires collective effort and collaboration among the stakeholders involved. To garner this support, the economic, social, and cultural potentials of adventure sports tourism must be fully presented to the government by these stakeholders. Furthermore, governments must establish laws and regulations that support adventure tourism professionals in obtaining permits, conducting activities, and providing services to tourists.

To address the cultural and ideological challenges faced by foreign tourists in Iran, appropriate measures and strategies can be implemented. For instance, providing tourists with sufficient information about Iran's culture, customs, laws, and regulations through tourism websites, brochures, or educational programs is essential. In this context, tour guides play a crucial role, as they must assist foreign tourists in understanding the local culture, customs, and regulations. Additionally, creating suitable facilities, such as international restaurants, non-halal food stores, and mixed recreational and tourist sites, can help foreign tourists adhere to their beliefs and practices. Therefore, addressing cultural and ideological challenges can contribute

to the flourishing of the tourism industry in Iran, enhance cultural exchanges, and improve the country's international image.

One of the most significant obstacles to the development of adventure sports tourism in Iran is the limited advertising for this sector. A solution to this issue is to make full use of modern advertising tools, such as content marketing, digital marketing, and experiential marketing. These tools can assist in reaching target audiences, increasing the impact of advertisements, and attracting more tourists. Additionally, adventure sports tourism advertising should focus entirely on target markets, paying sufficient attention to the interests and preferences of tourists in different countries. Finally, advertising should be innovative and creative, and tourism agency managers should use the languages of target countries for promotional materials.

To diversify tourism packages, it is recommended to design and offer combined tourism packages that include adventure sports activities as well as other tourist attractions, such as visits to historical and natural sites. This approach would provide tourists with the opportunity to experience a more complete and memorable trip in Iran.

To address these challenges, continuous efforts must be made, and there should be ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the diversity and quality of adventure sports tourism packages. The lack of interest from local communities in promoting adventure sports tourism is largely due to improper advertising of the potential of this type of tourism in developing pristine and rural areas. It can be argued that with proper advertising and cultural awareness in areas with potential, local communities will also engage in marketing these resources. Therefore, educational programs, informational workshops, and promotional campaigns should be held to raise local awareness about the economic, social, and cultural benefits of adventure sports tourism. The government should also encourage local participation in the adventure sports tourism industry by providing financial

incentives, low-interest loans, tax exemptions, and other necessary support.

Regarding human resources, it should be noted that, in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology and the private sector, academic programs related to sports tourism should be established in universities and educational centers in Iran. These programs should include specialized courses in areas such as tourist guidance, rescue operations, environmental preservation, cross-cultural understanding, and sports activity management. Additionally, specialized training programs for working in the adventure sports tourism industry should be fully provided, including short-term and long-term courses, practical workshops, and coaching certifications.

As a result, a comprehensive and structured system for training and empowering human resources in the adventure sports tourism industry in Iran should be developed. This system should include curriculum planning, the establishment of educational standards, evaluation and monitoring of training programs, and the enhancement of skills in this field.

In terms of addressing managerial barriers, in addition to employing experienced and skilled personnel, collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Iranian Customs Organization, and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts is necessary. Customs regulations for the import and export of goods for foreign tourists should be facilitated, and sufficient information about these regulations should be provided to tourists through brochures, websites, and mobile applications. Finally, the customs procedures for foreign tourists should be simplified and expedited.

Regarding solutions for economic barriers, firstly, supporting the domestic production of adventure sports equipment should help improve the quality and reduce the cost of these products in Iran. Secondly, governments should not only reduce taxes and customs duties related to the import of adventure sports equipment but also

provide low-interest loans, in collaboration with banks, to help people purchase such equipment.

Participation in international tourism exhibitions requires that managers of adventure sports tourism tours create communication networks between industry professionals in Iran and other countries to exchange information, experiences, and create international cooperation opportunities. Governments and relevant organizations should also support the active participation of industry professionals in these exhibitions, providing them with the necessary motivation to present their achievements and experiences.

Finally, to counter and neutralize negative advertising against Iran, the following steps should be taken: 1) Strengthen public diplomacy and engage with media and influencers in other countries to present a true and positive image of Iran to the world. 2) Use modern advertising tools such as social media, websites, and mobile applications to more widely introduce Iran's tourism attractions to global audiences. 3) By hosting international events, such as festivals, exhibitions, and conferences, Iran should be promoted as an attractive destination for tourism.

In conclusion, reducing barriers will directly and indirectly impact tourist satisfaction and should be a priority for tour managers and relevant authorities. This study faced limitations such as the lack of accurate and up-to-date statistics regarding the current and future state of adventure sports tourism in Iran, as well as limited access to coaches in all adventure sports disciplines, travel agency managers, and tour guides. Despite these limitations, conducting research in the field of adventure sports tourism is highly necessary, and overcoming these challenges will yield valuable results that will significantly contribute to the development of the adventure sports tourism industry. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies focus on the current situation and foresight, incorporating feedback from all coaches in adventure sports disciplines. Additionally, researchers in future studies may address the

challenges of branding and destination loyalty and

compare their results with those of this study.

5. Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

6. Financing

The article has no financial sponsor or research funding, nor is it derived from a research project

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7. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the staff of the Journal of Sports Marketing Studies and the esteemed referees who provided valuable feedback to improve the article.

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