



Investigating the Role of E-Tourism in Urban Constant Development with an Emphasis on Entrepreneurship (Case Study: Abarkouh Township)

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ABSTRACT: Today towns are regarded as efficient elements in economical development of countries. Towns have various capabilities and potentials in respect with tourism, including residence, food, recreation, transportation, and commercial facilities that are appropriate factors for tourism and attracting tourists. In this study, besides investigating e-tourism as an efficient factor and a driving force for improvement of entrepreneurship and subsequently economical development, benefits of developing e-tourism for the economy of the town has been investigated. The present study aims to analyze various aspects of virtual tourism as well as its role in constant development of the town. The method of this study has been descriptive-analytic; and the method of data collection has been documental and field work; i.e. interview and questionnaire. Findings reveal that on one hand, virtual tourism, with contribution of marketing and advertisement, causes occupational movement and relative economical development; and on the other hand with identifying tourism potentials of the area, contributes to facilitate the identification of the area and subsequently, to constant development.

Keywords: Tourism, Information and Communication Technology, Entrepreneurship, Economic Development, Abarkouh

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INTRODUCTION

Problem statement

Developing tourism is of great importance, particularly for developing countries facing with crises such as high rate of unemployment, limited currency sources, and single-production economy (Tayebi et al., 2007). The growth rate of this industry, until 2020, is estimated to be averagely as much as two times of the average global growth. According to the estimations of the global bank, global wealth will have a 3-percent growth until 2020; while the number of tourists will annually grow by 4.1 percent (Ranjbaran and Zahedi, 2009). Iran is among the five top countries in terms of biological diversity, and is also one of the top ten historical countries. Given these facts, tourism industry in Iran must currently earn 20 billion dollars per year (as much as two times of oil income), but we know that the reality is much different. In reality, tourism in Iran, with an income of less than 600 million dollars per year, is not even among the top eighty countries (Ghasem Kolahi, 2003). On the other hand, in today's world that is called the age of information and communication, without taking advantage of technologies of virtual world and being parallel to digital changes, industries cannot easily develop within the global and even local competitive economy. Apparently, tourism industry is not excluded.

Today in respect with urban virtual tourism, e-tourism and internet play an important role in national and transnational competitions. The quality and amount of taking advantage of their applications are, to a significant extent, effective in competitive markets; and the role of this technology is increasing with an unbelievable rate. Based on the statistics published by the World Tourism Organization, within a close future, countries without appropriate electronic infrastructures will be eliminated from the cycle of global and local tourism competition (Marandi, 2007). With regard to the fact that one of the ten important factors of unwillingness of external investors to invest in tourism industry of Iran is lack or weakness of virtual tourism infrastructures, also considering that one of the main obstacles for entrance of foreigner tourists, particularly wealthy ones, to Iran is inappropriateness of existing technologies, also given that the electronic system of distributing facilities and services of world tourism is in charge of 50 percent of financial cycle of world tourism, we conclude that without a tourism portal, urban tourism remains unknown. Therefore, without appropriate infrastructures for virtual tourism and generalizing its applications to all industries, there will be no hope for competitive superiority and achieving appropriate proportion of world or even local tourism (Khalili, 2005).

Within the present age, applying virtual tourism in towns reinforces and accelerates achieving economical, social and environmental goals as well as constant development. Although various applications of ICT in respect with virtual tourism has been unidentified, beyond any doubt, to escape the current situation, all the experts of tourism must establish an electronic revolution in tourism industry by perceiving the new conditions of world tourism and its dependence to modern technologies. In this respect, extending the general culture of virtual tourism among the community of urban residents has particular significance. Hence, the aim of this study is familiarization of aspects and concepts of virtual tourism, and investigation of its role in establishing constant development.

Research necessity

Today tourism is one of the most efficient approaches to improve economical growth for countries whose economy is static or vulnerable due to being single-production or limited sources of energy (Momeni, 2007). During the past decades, tourism has found a significant position in producing wealth and income in world economy, so that in 2008, 5.8 trillion dollars has been earned through this industry, and 8.4 percent of total occupations have been related to this (Jahanian, 2010). Most cities in Iran have various tourist attractions, and since this industry has great potentials in creating new occupations, employing appropriate policies such as electronic tourism leads to establishment of a significant source of income for areas with tourism attractions, which do not have economical concept in its true sense; and also leads to realization of the potentials of those areas.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Theoretical concepts of the research

Electronic tourism: Electronic tourism (e-tourism) is a new industry which dates back to less than twenty years ago. This tourism refers to presence in a digital world of information and communications on the extensive global network which provide us with access to various visual, vocal, or textual data. Passing through the age of industry, and getting the age of information has changed information communities. When citizens are provided with modern means of informing and communicating, huge changes in lifestyle are expected, one of which is the change in tourism, and creation of virtual tourism. Virtual tourism is a tool by which a person who is interested in tourism can identify tourism potentials of an area in shortest time, with the least expense, even with little knowledge; and can make a trip to tourism monuments with exact planning (Amiri, 2008).

Unfortunately unlike the numerous advantages of e-tourism in comparison with traditional tourism, except for some developed countries, other countries, either developing or undeveloped, are not profiting from this industry; or with inappropriate or limited use of information technology suffice to have a website to indicate their tourist attractions and services such as electronic ticket. Iran is not excluded from this group of countries, although it has been the center of science,

culture, and civilization since long ago and is among the ten top historical and cultural countries (Chatterjee, 2009).

Urban tourism: Although towns are as old as human civilization, the rise of urban tourism was simultaneous with the emergence of information economics (King, 2003). In the past, urban tourism was only the result of population movements; today, however, the town has become a cultural center; a place for recreation, shopping, meeting friends, and spending leisure time (Stefania, 2009). There is no comprehensive definition for urban tourism. The term "urban tourism" describes activities taken place in urban areas and includes tourists' interactions with urban environment. Tourists' intentions of traveling to urban areas include a wide range consisting of commercial objectives, participating in conferences, spending free time, and especial interests such as instructive, cultural, or sport events (King, 2003).

It can be said that urban tourism is not only one type of tourism; rather, it is part of traditional features of urban life (Howie, 2003). Urban tourism has more market proportion in countries such as France, Germany, England, Sweden, and countries of Central Europe; however, it has less proportion in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and other tourist destinations (King, 2003).

Forms of tourism in urban area with particular economical significance include cultural tourism, commercial tourism, shopping tourism, sport tourism, and meeting friends and acquaintances. Also one of the most important forms of this is recreational tourism, in which the main goal is residence and recreation on weekends (Ruetsche, 2006).

In a definition offered by Van Den Berg, Vander Burg, and Vander Myer (1995) about the production of tourism, efficient factors in attractiveness of tourist destinations have been introduced. The main elements present a unique combination of attractions which has the power of attracting tourists to that area. Some of the main elements are as follows:

1. Cultural-artistic facilities: museums, art galleries, theatre and cinema, concert hall, convention centers, and exhibitions
2. Sport equipments
3. Amusement equipments: night clubs, casinos, organized events, and festivals
4. Town location: historical streets, interesting buildings, statues and monuments, water perspectives, and green spaces
5. Socio-cultural characteristics: living location, language, traditions and customs, local costumes, cultural heritage, and security (Jiang, 2006).

The effects of e-tourism on urban communities: Urban e-tourism is simultaneously a great potential and a serious challenge. Those who benefit from towns have identified this opportunity and decided to use this potential to develop the town by maintaining the balance between tourists' needs and those of the local population (Brown, 1998). These developments often have different bases with regard to the chosen patterns. One of the well-known and efficient patterns in this respect is economical development and local

entrepreneurship plan compiled by Organisation For Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD); but unfortunately it has not received appropriate consideration during the recent years. Managers and policy makers can activate their desired aspects in this respect with regard to their planned goals.

Tourists provide financial resources required for restoration of old buildings and establishment of public infrastructures that can be used by the local population. In addition, tourism can play a significant role in implementing economical and physical tasks of old cities. Therefore it may lead to development of improved and new commercial and cultural facilities (Nilsson, 2004). Some of the factors that are affected by tourism in urban communities and can be exploited as bases for entrepreneurship are mentioned below (Hall, 1999):

- ✓ Cultural and recreational centers
- ✓ Health services
- ✓ Social services
- ✓ Handicrafts and local services and productions
- ✓ Basic infrastructures
- ✓ Biological diversity
- ✓ Security services
- ✓ Residential centers and hotels
- ✓ Restaurants and food services
- ✓ Museums and historical centers
- ✓ Shopping centers
- ✓ Traditional bazaars and self-employment

Entrepreneurship: Developing the culture of entrepreneurship is one of the basic needs of the society and completes the process of economical development. Generally, three categories of effective factors have been introduced in most entrepreneurship models, which include individual capabilities, organizational factors, and environmental factors. Amongst them, environmental factors, which include political, social, legal, economical, official, and most importantly cultural aspects, are of great significance. This is because entrepreneurship is significantly affected by environmental factors. A combination of environmental factors forms a comprehensive and integrated system whose components is correlated to each other and can develop and extend entrepreneurship (Hashemi, 2003). Many theorists have so far offered various definitions for the concept of entrepreneurship. These definitions can be categorized from different aspects. Later, some of the definitions that are related to the research title and are mentioned in references will be presented.

Peterson (1980) believes that entrepreneurship is a process and cannot emerge in an individual by itself; rather, its emergence must be accompanied by opportunities and demands. According to Livesay (1982), the person who has perceived the market and has integrated the required capital for exploitation is called entrepreneur.

Joseph Schumpeter regards entrepreneurship as the driving engine of economical development. He explains the concept of economical development as consisting of invention of a new product, invention of a new method of production, opening a new market, opening new sources of primary materials and so on (Mohebi, 2007).

According to Stevenson and Gumpert (1985), entrepreneurship is the process of creating value through the formation of a unique set of resources in order to take advantage of opportunities.

Amit et al. (1993) regard arraying the resources towards potentials which create wealth as the heart of entrepreneurship. According to Peter Drucker, entrepreneurship is exploitation of opportunities to make changes (Moghimi, 2005).

So far many researchers and theorists have commented on the characteristics of entrepreneurs. Thomas (2004) has introduced ten basic characteristics of entrepreneurs in the 21st century including identifying and making use of benefiting opportunities, expertise and *tadbir*, recreation, *doornemasdazi* of independent contemplation, hardworking, optimism, innovation, risk taking, and leadership (Mohebi, 2007).

Role and significance of entrepreneurs in the society: As the engine of economical development, entrepreneurs play different roles in the society, each of which has particular significance. What follows is a summary of the roles of entrepreneurs in the society:

- The factor of employment
- The factor of transmitting technology
- The factor of encouraging investment
- The factor of identifying and developing new markets
- The factor of balance in dynamic economies
- The factor of transformation and national revival (entrepreneurship is far beyond a job or occupation; rather, it is a lifestyle. This can include all activities of human kind)
- The factor of reducing official bureaucracy
- The factor of innovation and facilitating changes
- One of the factors of production, like land, human, and capital
- The factor of encouraging competitiveness
- The factor of organizing resources and making efficient use of them
- The factor of integrating the market (Brandon, 1996)

Introduction of the under study area

Abarkouh Township is the nearest urban spot to the geographical centre of Iran, being located between 52:50° and 54:1° of Eastern longitude, and between 30:30° and 31:35° of Northern latitude in the west of Yazd, with an altitude of 1550 m. This township is situated on a plain area on the road between Yazd and Shiraz, and is surrounded by the heights of Sefid Kouh and Ghanbareh in the southeast, and Aala Kouh in the northwest.

General Status of tourism in Abarkouh Township: With an age of over 4000 years, Abarkouh is an ancient and historical area, where has been the residential place of Caravans passing through the ancient Silk Road. This historical township has 350 historical monuments, 114 of which have been recorded in the list of national monuments of Iran. Among them, Aali Dome, Tavous-al-Haramain, and the Jame Mosque of

Abarkouh have been the first recorded monuments of Yazd Province. Variety of attractions and the inter-regional situation of Abarkouh are regarded as the two important potentials for developing virtual tourism in this township.

Table 1. Some of the national historical registered monuments of Abarkouh

Province	Township	Name of the Monument	Reg. no	Reg. Date
Yazd	Abarkouh	Haj Ali Akbar Mofkhami Tomb	6309	29-9-2002
Yazd	Abarkouh	Mullah Ali Karam Tomb	6307	29-9-2002
Yazd	Abarkouh	Aqazadeh Mansion	1838	12-2-1997
Yazd	Abarkouh	Omid Salar Mansion	6306	29-9-2002
Yazd	Abarkouh	Solat Mansion	1839	12-2-1997
Yazd	Abarkouh	Rabat Fortress	6304	29-9-2002
Yazd	Abarkouh	Hak Stone Dome	2439	24-10-1999
Yazd	Abarkouh	Aali Dome	195	31-7-1933
Yazd	Abarkouh	Jame' Mosque	197	31-7-1933

Statistical analysis

This study is an applied research with a descriptive-analytic method. To collect the required data,

documental investigation and field works such as interview and questionnaire were applied. The research population consists of all families of Abarkouh, the number of which is over 31376 according to the census of 1990; and the number of required questionnaires was calculated to be 215 according to Cochran Formulation. Then using Kendal and Gamma tests, the impact of virtual tourism on components of urban development (economical, socio-cultural, and environmental) has been investigated. Finally, data analysis was performed via SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, based on the recollected questionnaires and performed interviews, the social, economical, and environmental changes resulting from virtual and e-tourism have been studied. To conduct this test, H_0 has been used against H_1 . The results of the polls have been analyzed via Kendal and Gamma tests.

H_0 : there is no significant relationship between e-tourism and components of urban development (i.e. social, economical and cultural changes) in urban areas.

H_1 : there is a significant relationship between e-tourism and components of urban development (i.e. social, economical and cultural changes) in urban areas.

Table 2. The relationship between e-tourism and components of entrepreneurship

No.	Variable	Probability in public view	Test result	Probability from experts' view	Test result
1	Increasing occupations	0.442	H confirmed	0.221	H confirmed
2	Increasing women's occupation	0.697	H confirmed	0.0311	H rejected
3	Attracting work force	0.022	H rejected	0.734	H confirmed
4	Increasing income	0.010	H confirmed	0.032	H confirmed
5	Increasing variety of occupations	0.024	H confirmed	0.052	H confirmed
6	Changing people's attitude	0.015	H rejected	0.637	H rejected
7	Preventing Brain Drain	0.264	H confirmed	0.0311	H confirmed
8	Increasing participation	0.128	H confirmed	0.125	H confirmed
9	Increasing awareness	0.268	H confirmed	0.098	H confirmed
10	Increasing educational level	0.240	H confirmed	0.152	H rejected

CONCLUSION

E-tourism is one of the newest forms of tourism that can lead to increasing the additional value and citizens' convenience; and is a criterion of development of the country, particularly from the viewpoint of other countries. Virtual tourism is the lost ring of tourism industry in towns. With development and revision of strategies, and activities such as concentrating group efforts of experts on developing the comprehensive portal of tourism in towns, providing efficient, up-to-date, and vital services like virtual tours, electronic services for passengers, considering digital heritage and providing clear, in time, and accurate information we can make a long step towards developing this industry and benefiting from its advantages. In this paper, after discussing e-tourism and urban development, the impact of e-tourism on components of urban development has been investigated.

With regard to the findings of this research, from among the total of ten criteria of entrepreneurship, eight criteria were confirmed from people's viewpoint and seven criteria were confirmed from experts' viewpoint. Six of these ten criteria were confirmed both by people

and experts. In respect with eight criteria (increasing occupation, increasing income, increasing variety of occupations, preventing from brain drain, increasing the level of participation, and increasing the level of awareness), e-tourism has resulted in improvement of the situations in Abarkouh, and only in terms of one criterion (changing people's attitude), it has not managed to bring about any improvement. This fact shows that e-tourism, even in minor and primary level, has firstly managed to facilitate the identification of Abarkouh through introducing its attractions, and secondly has lead to improvement of the components of urban development (economical, social, and environmental factors) within this area. Since urban population form 70 percent of the population of Iran, and with regard to the variety of tourist attractions in towns of Iran, we can attract more tourists to these towns and achieve constant development by presenting strategies in terms of e-tourism.

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