

# Codification Model of Sports Tourism in Isfahan Based on Market Segmentation Approach

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## ABSTRACT

This research is a survey study in terms of type and applied in terms of objective. Field method also was used to collect the data in this research. The research population included 100000 sports tourists and top managers of Isfahan Sport and Youth General Directorate, Isfahan Sport and Youth Department, Isfahan Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, Isfahan Sport Board Heads, Physical Education Department Professors, and Marketing and Tourism of Isfahan Azad and State Universities (n=81). Delphi technique was used to develop the questionnaire. In descriptive statistics section of this research, frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used based on the questionnaire. In the inferential section, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) methods were used to determine the importance and identification of the important factors in sports tourism based on sustainable development with a market segmentation approach from the viewpoint of the research subjects. The advanced method of factor analysis was used in multivariate analyses. Its main function is determining the weight or importance of factors. Moreover, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to evaluate the interactive effects of demographic characteristics. PLS method was also used to establish the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The model fit was also assessed. In order to provide a basis to compare the views of experts with those of sports tourists, questionnaires of these two groups were encoded separately and the collected data were presented using spss21 software.

**Keywords:** Sports tourism, Isfahan, market segmentation

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## **Introduction**

Tourism industry is viewed as one of the most important service industries around the world and governments and planners view tourism as a tool to develop and protect the environment and traditions with the minimal negative impact (Bhuiyan, 2013). The value of the tourism industry is estimated to be about \$ 10.478 trillion in 2019, accounting for 9.5% of global gross domestic product (GDP). Governments need to pay more attention to the growth of the tourism industry in such situation (Chen et al., 2011). The knowledge of communities of this issue has made tourism to be a very broad concept in various economic, social, and cultural dimensions and viewed as an industry (Yoon et al., 2005). Sheler and Ervi argue that tourism is the largest industry in the world, accounting for 8% of export earnings and 8% of world employment (Doris et al., 2008). Along with the oil and automobile industries, tourism has been considered as one of the three important revenue-generating industries in the world. This industry plays major role significantly in creation of job opportunities given the wide dimensions of unemployment, distribution of wealth, resolving regional imbalance, reducing poverty, enhancing the life quality of people, and positive cultural interactions. The tourism industry has economic, environmental and cultural, and social impacts at various levels (Michal et al., 2008). In addition, this industry is effective factor in interaction among the cultures and dialogue among the nations. Tourism can be viewed as an industry since it produces goods and services and is associated with labor, capital and value added. In addition, the services provided in this industry, as experiences of tourists, are intangible, so they are not comparable with other industries. Among the service industries, the tourism industry is one of the leading and growing sectors at international level. Based on the estimates, demand for international tourism will increase to 1.6 billion per year by 2020 (Chen et al. 2011).

Tourism has various forms, which sports tourism is one of them. Sports tourism has the greatest growth among different sectors of tourism (Khatibzadeh and Honarvar, 2011). Sports tourism is an industry emerged by combination of tourism industry and sports industry. In other words, sport is one of the important activities of tourists during tourism (Yates, 2006). In current world, sport tourism is a rich source of profit and income, so that it has created a serious competition among various countries in order to gain the privilege of hosting major international competitions. Hence, any country which can provide the conditions of using this source, it will take advantage of its benefits (Pomfert, 2006). At present time, one of the concerns of managers and organizers of sporting events is to enhance the number of visitors and spectators of sporting events and identify various causes and factors affecting the development of sports tourism (Khatibzadeh and Honarvar, 2011). It is very important to use the sports as an accelerating factor in tourism development. The sports depending on natural, coastal and marine resources are considered as most important part of sports tourism. The impact of sports on tourism development is related to attractions. In light of great capacity of Iran, it can benefit greatly from them, since according to the studies conducted in this regard, it is one of the top ten countries in the world in terms of tourist attraction. Knowledge of the priorities of the tourists is one of the factors, which should be considered in the development plans for sports tourism (Honarvar et al., 2011).

Owing to its high natural potential and cultural and recreational attractions and four-season climate, Iran can be considered as a capable country in preparing favorable conditions for foreign tourists. It is considered as an important center in the tourism industry in the general sense and sports tourism in its special sense. In this regard, in light of having valuable cultural heritage and a collection of amazing natural and historical works, Isfahan city has high potential in development of this industry, which guides human towards better understanding of the world). The Isfahan has climate diversity. Based on the existing statistics, it has approximately 20,000 works of art. Therefore, it can be considered one of the most important destinations for domestic and foreign tourists. Having the necessary potential and capabilities can play a major role in attracting a variety of tourists, especially sports tourists.

Therefore, comprehensive planning is required for tourism development, with the aim of increasing the number of tourists and enhancing the quality of services for economic and cultural development of Isfahan in order to achieve optimal and effective sports tourism model. Paying attention to marketing dimension of

tourism has always been considered as an important issue. The role of tourism marketing is development of knowledge of the nature of the tourist and the creation of a decisive image for him or her. Historically, the role of marketing in the development of tourism is advertising the places in order to attract more tourists. As each tourist has unique demands and needs, each potential purchaser is considered as a separate market. Thus, it is desirable that each seller to have a distinct marketing plan for each purchaser (Alvani et al., 2012). The market segmentation strategy aims to achieve competitive advantage by focusing on a specific type of customer and designing existing products and services with considering the expected values or social, economic, geographical values, lifestyle, type of behavior, benefits, and the demographic characteristics (Vagianni et al., 2004).

The process of segmentation per se does not provide solutions for marketing problems, but it describes the market. However, if approaches for tourism markets segmentation are achievable and innovative, it provides the possibility of developing of solutions, which have not been exploited yet by competitors (Vagianni et al., 2004). The market segmentation involves viewing a heterogeneous market as a group of smaller groups, which are homogeneous in characteristics, demands, responses to different products, and satisfaction with seller (Saleh, 2014). In fact, those who expect the same benefits or are at the same category of consumption patterns will be classified as a market segment (Ritchie 2004 & Lorant 2013). Using market segmentation, organizations will be able to identify market segments which have great number for their products and services. Hence, the available marketing resources are not wasted (Robinson et al., 2004).

Hit and Wale (2012) argue that "market segmentation is based on the assumption that various segments of the market have different needs of different sets of personality, expectations, and demands, and different levels of current and potential of consumption, different level of knowledge of the product and they are exposed to different communication channels. Hence, different concepts of marketing mix should be invented for different market segments. Properly segmentation of market will increase the sale and profits, since it allows organization target specific market segments which more likely maintain the facilities of the organization. Several advantages have been reported for market segmentation, such as testing the requirements of each segment with regard to competitors' supply and measuring the level of customers' satisfaction, using the information of each retail market to allocate appropriate marketing budgets to different markets, the ability of accurately predicting of the market response, increasing the likelihood of discovering new opportunities in the market, creating a systematic attitude towards the market, the company faces with it (Laurent, 2013).

In a successfully segmentation of market, several criteria should be considered in order to achieve the proper and usable results. Researchers have described a wide range of rules for the process of segmentation. However, it should be noted that the goal of all of these criteria are specific and relatively similar. Some of these characteristics include the ability to increase earnings and return on investment, the similarity of the needs of purchasers in each segment, the different needs of purchasers in different segments of the market, the possibility of marketing activity to achieve a segment, the simplicity and cost of market segmentation into different segments. However, from the Katler's perspective, to be successful in management in segmentation, it is necessary that each important segment to be measurable, operational, accessible, and different. When making decision on tourism market segmentation, the marketing manager should adopt a systematic approach for critical thinking and accurate analysis. Tourism market segmentation is one of the key actions, which can help marketers and planners of tourism destinations identify the needs and requirements of tourists. The tourism market segmentation based on the notion that tourism markets consist of different and diverse groups of tourists, which members each of groups have similar needs, demands, interests, personality, travel behavior, shopping style and responses to the variables of a tourist product or service (Saleh, 2014). Isfahan is a prominent example in tourism industry of Iran. It has unique attractions and great number of capacities in attracting tourists (temperate climate, ancient monuments, religious and holy places, caravansaries, handicrafts, natural green space) and tourism related to sporting events. No study has been conducted so far on development of tourism model and knowledge of the prioritizing the factors affecting the

model based on importance and the effect of market segmentation in tourism in Isfahan. Therefore, the researcher aims to develop a sports tourism model based on market segmentation in Isfahan city in the present study.

### **Methodology**

This research was carried out quantitatively and quantitatively. It is survey-descriptive type of study. It is also considered applied research in terms of objective. An applied research is a type of research conducted to meet the needs of the communities and humanity practically. Owing to lack of research on the research subject academically and scientifically and the need for planning and establishing a scientific ground to achieve this goal and increasing the necessary infrastructure in Isfahan, the researcher decided to develop a new model for the development of sports tourism based on the market segmentation approach in Isfahan. First, the questionnaire was developed using Delphi method by studying the theoretical foundations in the considered area and through a semi-organized interview with experts, professors and sports and tourism management experts in this area and identifying the important and influential factors.

The research population included two groups of experts or top managers and tourists. With regard to the first research community, included top managers (specialists), purposeful sampling method was used. With regard to the second research community, included tourists, a simple randomized sampling method was used. Cochran's formula was also used to determine the sample size. After investigating and studying the theoretical foundations in the field of research in this research, valuable and important concepts were achieved through semi-structured interview with 30 experts and professors in sports and tourism management. Interviews were performed in face-to-face, semi-structured and semi-organized way with asking open-ended questions during Delphi approximate time.

Delphi means to achieve group consensus through a series of questionnaires rounds by keeping the respondents' anonymity and feedback of the views to panel members. Request for professional judgments from heterogeneous experts lasted 20 minutes. To prepare and develop a questionnaire, the views of experts on a particular topic are repeatedly obtained until to achieve the group consensus. The main components of Delphi include the retelling of the questionnaire, experts, controlled feedback, and anonymity, analysis of results, consensus, time, and coordinator team. Participants of this research included experts who had four characteristics of knowledge and experience in the subject, the willingness, adequate time to participate in the research, and effective communication skills. The key parameters of the research included the competence of the panelists, the size of the panel and the method of their selection. In this research, purposeful sampling was used to select the 20 experts. The Delphi process in this research included three rounds. It acts ideas generating strategy after submitting the first semi-structured questionnaire. It aims to reveal all topics related to the subject of study. Each expert is asked to propose his or her ideas and to list their considered topics briefly and without mentioning the name. After collecting the returned questionnaire, the similar views were integrated and grouped and repetitive and marginal topics were removed and the responses were shortened, as far as possible.

After collecting the returned questionnaire, the same views were integrated, grouped, and repetitive and marginal issues were removed and, and responses were shortened as far as possible. The first round responses were analyzed based on the paradigm of the research and the questionnaire was structured, and the same subjects in the first round were asked to identify the agreement and disagreement cases, and they created a space to identify new ideas, correcting, interpreting, removing and explaining their strengths and weaknesses. After collecting the second questionnaire and a providing statistical summary of them, in the third round, the experts were asked to re-review the responses and, if needed, review their views and judgments, and report their reasons in non-consensus cases and rank their importance. In this step, the final results and the main questionnaire were approved after final examinations by experts.

The researcher-developed questionnaire was constructed based on sports tourism dimensions and market segmentation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole questionnaire and its indices was found more than

0.7, so the high reliability of the questionnaire is confirmed. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the statistical data of results in two separate sections in this research. The descriptive statistics of the subjects, statistical characteristics of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. In the inferential section, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method were used to determine the importance and to identify the important factors in sports tourism based on sustainable development with market segmentation approach from the perspective of the subjects. The advanced method of factor analysis was used in multivariate analysis. Its main function is determining the weight or importance of factors. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also used to examine the interactive effects of demographic characteristics. PLS was used to establish the relationship between dependent and independent variables and present the model. In order to create a framework to compare the views of experts with sports tourists, questionnaires of these two groups were separately coded and the collected information was presented using spss21 software.

## Results

The first-order and second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used in order to identify the dimensions of sports tourism, to identify the market segmentation dimensions based on the sports tourism approach and to identify the dimensions of sustainable development based on the tourism approach in Esfahan (as secondary objectives). In the first-order factor analysis, performed by using Amos software, it was examined if the items related to each factor can be used based on the data collected for each factor (variables or dimensions studied). According to the results of Table 1 and Table 2, which show the model fitness criteria for each of the components of sports tourism variables and the market segmentation, the relative chi-square index is acceptable for all dimensions. It shows that models have a good or excellent status. The RMSEA value is also considered as the most important general fitness index for all dimensions, and shows that the model has generally good fitness.

The standardized regression coefficients in all examined models are higher than 0.3. Thus, all questions in the models are significant. The relevant diagrams have been presented. In the second-order confirmatory factor analysis, the relationship between components was measured with the main variable or index. Table 3 shows the model fitness criteria of the second-order confirmatory factor analysis obtained for sports tourism variables and the market segmentation. Figures 1 and 2 show two models presented.

Table 1: Fitness criteria for first-order confirmatory factor analysis model for sports tourism

	$X^2$	$DF$	$X^2/DF$	$CFI$	$RMSEA$	$IFI$	$NFI$
Facilities and services	11.892	7	1.699	0.996	0.038	0.996	0.99
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Security	7.407	5	1.481	0.998	0.032	0.980	0.993
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Accommodation	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Tourism attractions	9.898	16	0.619	1	0	1	0.995
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable

Table 1 (continue): Fitness criteria for first-order confirmatory factor analysis model for sports tourism

	$X^2$	<i>DF</i>	$X^2/DF$	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>IFI</i>	<i>NFI</i>
Human resources	84.636	41	2.064	0.984	0.047	0.984	0.969
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Facilities and equipment	15.899	12	1.325	0.997	0.026	0.975	0.989
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable	acceptable	acceptable
Transportation	15.061	10	1.506	0.997	0.033	0.997	0.992
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Sports events	14.769	10	1.477	0.997	0.032	0.997	0.991
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Advertising and marketing	14.930	10	1.493	0.998	0.032	0.978	0.993
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable

Table 2: Fitness criteria for first-order confirmatory factor analysis model for market segmentation components

	$X^2$	<i>DF</i>	$X^2/DF$	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>IFI</i>	<i>NFI</i>
Purchasers' goal	0	1	0	10	0.0641	1	1
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Moderate fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Purchasers' need	13.623	8	1.703	0.997	0.038	0.997	0.992
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Purchasers' behavior	15.245	8	1.906	0.996	0.044	0.976	0.991
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
demographic	2.749	2	1.357	0.999	0.028	0.999	0.998
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable
economic	161.765	112	1.444	0.989	0.03	0.954	0.966
result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable	acceptable	acceptable

Table 3: fitness criteria of second order confirmatory factor analysis model

	$X^2$	DF	$X^2/DF$	CFI	RMSEA	IFI	NFI
Sports tourism	5586.004	2252	2.480	0.9	0.056	0.903	0.719
Result	-	-	Good fitness	acceptable	Appropriate fitness	acceptable	acceptable
Market segmentation	1240.852	695	1.785	0.953	0.041	0.953	0.9
Result	-	-	Excellent fitness	acceptable	Excellent fitness	acceptable	acceptable

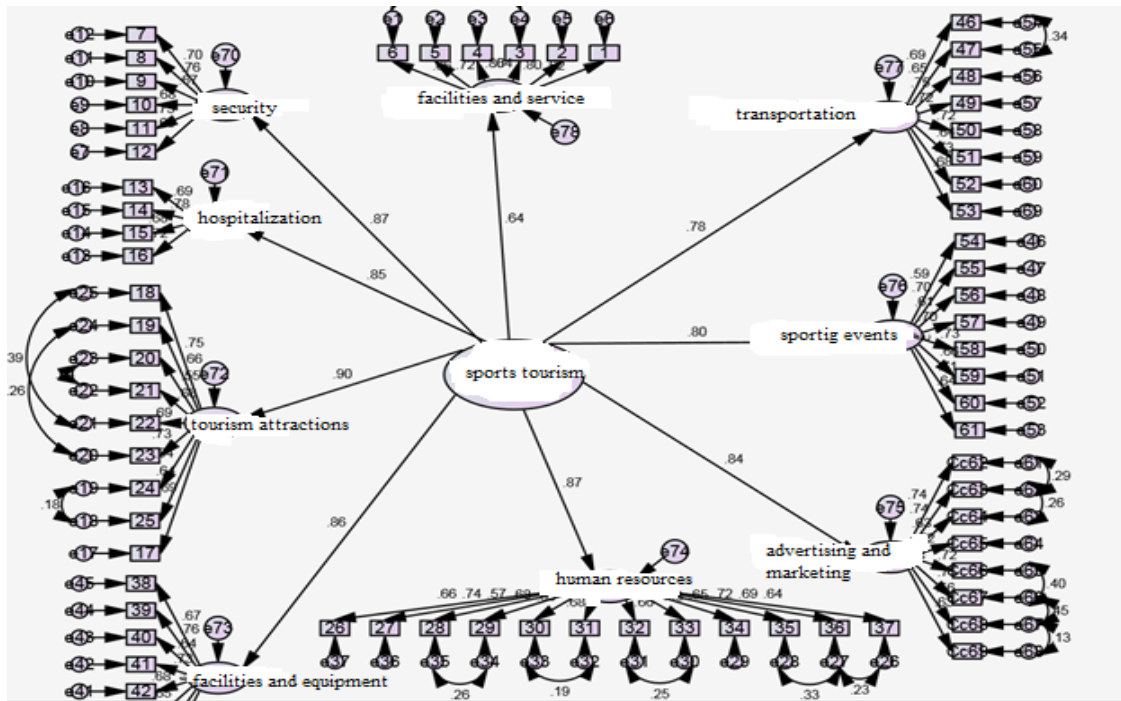


Figure 1: Second-factor confirmatory factor analysis model for sports tourism

Table 4: Correlation between sports tourism dimensions and sports tourism structures

	Structural (standard) coefficients
Facilities and services	0.64
Security	0.87
Accommodation	0.85
Tourism attractions	0.9
Human resources	0.87
Facilities and equipment	0.86
transportation	0.78
Sporting events	0.8
Advertising and marketing	0.84

The correlation between sports tourism and sports tourism structure is significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.01$ ). The level of this correlation is significant for all dimensions. Facilities and services showed the lowest correlation and tourist attractions showed the highest correlation with sports tourism.

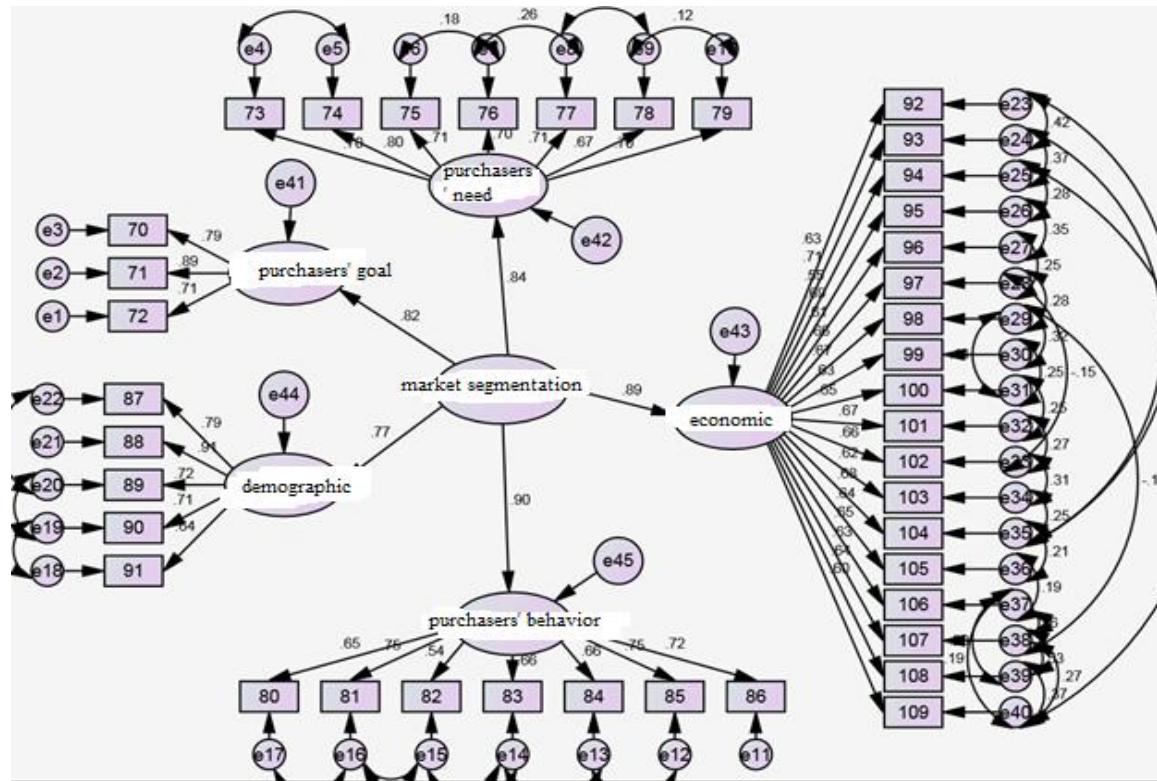


Figure 2: Second-order confirmatory factor analysis model for market segmentation

Table 5: Correlation between market segmentation tourism dimensions and market segmentation structure

	Structural (standard) coefficients
Purchasers' goals	0.82
Purchasers' need	0.84
Purchasers' behavior	0.90
Demographic	0.77
Economic	0.89

The correlation between market segmentation tourism dimensions and market segmentation structure was obtained significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.01$ ). The value of this correlation is significant for all dimensions. Demographic dimension showed the lowest correlation and purchasers" showed the highest correlation with market segmentation.

**Discussion and conclusion**

1-Based on the results obtained, the dimensions of sports tourism include facilities and services, security, accommodation, tourist attractions, human resources, facilities, transportation, sporting events, advertising and marketing, and sports tourism.



2- Based on the results obtained, market segmentation dimensions include purchasers' goals, purchasers' needs, purchasers' behavior, demographic, economics and market segmentation.

3-the correlation between the dimensions of tourism market segmentation and the market segmentation structure was obtained significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.01$ ). The value of this correlation is significant for all dimensions. Demographic dimension showed the lowest correlation and purchasers' behavior showed the highest correlation with market segmentation.

4- The correlation between sports tourism dimensions and sport tourism structure has been found significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.001$ ). The value of this correlation is significant for all dimensions. Facilities and services showed the lowest correlation and tourist attractions showed the highest correlation with sports tourism.

The results of the analysis of the hypotheses of this research showed that the identified dimensions of sports tourism include facilities and services, security, accommodation, tourism attractions, human resources, facilities and equipment, transportation, sporting events, advertising and marketing, and sports tourism. In this regard, Li (2014) and Siwanen (2011) state that the quality of services and facilities in the region is considered as one of the advantages affecting the decision of tourists.

Kim and Patrick (2005) argue that sporting events can attract tourists, both at a limited and wide level, at that region. Lumesden (2007) also argues that tourism cannot survive without proper transportation. Thus, paying attention to the development of tourism is necessary. In addition, Grampton (1979) views the security as among the social-psychological motivations for travel. Nowadays, security indicator is considered as the most important parameter in attracting tourists. Esfahani (2012) states that sports tourism has close association with components such as security, transportation, attractions, accommodation, equipment and sports facilities, and insecurity in each of them might compromise the security of sports tourism. Higham (1999) stated that sporting events can have a more positive impact on communities. Thus, the presence of foreign sports tourists from different cultures from different points of world in sporting events indicates high interests of tourists for attending in these events. Undoubtedly, developing political relations with different countries would increase the welcome of sporting events.

The results revealed that the identified market segmentation dimensions include purchaser' goals, purchaser' needs, purchaser' behavior, demographic, economic, and market segmentation. Nowadays, this industry plays significant role in economic development of different regions. In addition to the economic aspect, this industry can create important cultural and social changes in the destination and contribute to social development and growth and welfare and public health through income distribution, creation of employment, and reducing poverty. Schneider et al. (2012) state that the market segmentation is the core of modern marketing and has traditionally segmented the market into different segments based on demographic, geographic and psychological characteristics.

In market segmentation, it should be noted that every tourist destination has its own characteristics and displays a specific image and provides some special attractions for group of customers. Thus, in every economic activity in the tourism industry, accurate knowledge are required on audiences and products and the tourism market should be analyzed, and finally, the most appropriate segment of market should be determined.

The results revealed that the correlation between market segmentation tourism dimensions and market segmentation structure was obtained significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.01$ ). The value of this correlation is

significant for all dimensions. Demographic dimension showed the lowest correlation and purchaser behavior showed the highest correlation with market segmentation. This result is in line with that of research conducted by Almeyda et al (2013). In tourism market segmentation studies, the demographic and socioeconomic variables such as gender, age, and education are often used as descriptive and initial variables.

However, such variables do not have a high predictive power. Based on these views, interests, volume of income, and demographic characteristics of target customers equip this segment of market, as directing capital resources in line with demographic characteristics of the target market segment of the tourism market will lead to increasing success. As tourists are able to identify their needs in some segments, they are looking for activities which are closer to their goals. Kimperman et al (2009) views purchasing as one of the most important behaviors of purchasers. Dusa et al (2010) referred to motivations of travel and the level of tourists' satisfaction with the tourism experience as two psychological and determinative elements of the behavior of tourists. Diana Gray et al (2016) state that people select the destination based on psychological and social motivation, such as sports competitions. It is also associated with equipping of event and necessary information the necessary information with regard to service elements, such as the destination of the characteristics, the factors of loyalty and innovation, increased competition, and high level of maintenance of that event.

The results of this research revealed that the correlation between sport tourism dimensions and sport tourism structure is significant for all dimensions ( $p < 0.01$ ). The value of this correlation is significant for all dimensions. Facilities and services showed the lowest correlation and tourist attractions showed the highest correlation with sports tourism, which is consistent with the results of research conducted by Schneider et al. (2012), and in the facilities and services area, it is inconsistent with the results of research conducted by Esfahani et al (2009) and Mousavi Ghilani et al. (2012). Given the results of the research, in order to develop sports tourism, a special attention should be paid to the tourist attractions topic. Esfahan city can be very successful in this area, given its historical and cultural background. It can be stated that tourism attractions are at the core of sport tourism, establishing direct relationship between tourism attractions and tourism industry growth. In this regard, based on the information collected in this research, investigating the attractions which are successful in attracting tourists is also helpful in planning and designing favorable facilities for the region in question. Schneider et al. (2012) identified climbing-related tourist attractions as the most important factor. Sports and its activities are considered as an important issue for attracting tourists. Sport tourism provides the conditions for optimal use of natural and sports attractions to attract sports tourists, and thus, increase the income gained from tourism. Esfahan has unique sports potential which have not used optimally. Hence, research and investment in this area is necessary.

In addition, the variable of service facilities, known nowadays as one of the most important principles in the development of sport tourism strategies around the world, is one of the important parameters in attracting sports tourists. Thus, based on the results of this research, the presence of appropriate facilities and services for the use of tourists can create motivation for sports tourism among them. It reflects the necessity of paying special attention to the facility and services. Based on Archer (1980), medical and health services and physical health are important factors in motivating people to travel. Thus, the destination of tourists should have many facilities and services to attract tourists.

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