

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# Content Analysis of Research Articles in Sport Tourism of Iran

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** There are many resources and capacities for the development of sport tourism of Iran which is neglected in terms of performance and research. **Objectives.** In this regard, the purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the content of sport tourism researches of Iran. **Methods.** The statistical population of the study consisted of all research articles in the field of sport tourism during 2005 to 2018 that were collected from the internal and external databases (Academic Jihad of Iran) and the related internal publications system. **Results.** The articles were fallen into three levels: macro, intermediate and micro, 5 general axes and 17 subjects; the most articles focused on the macro level and the axis of tourism development (45.45%) and the least articles on the micro and psychological level (3.78%). At the intermediate level, the two issues of employment, revenue, and quality of service were more of a concern for researchers. The findings showed that among the sports management publications, the highest number of articles (10.28%) were published in the publications of the strategic studies of sports and youth of the Ministry of Sport and among non-sports management publications, the most articles were published in the Tourism Space Quarterly (5.6%). Methodologically, most of the articles used quantitative method and a researcher made questionnaire and standard (86.36%), and descriptive and factor analysis (41.66%). Most studies are done on professors and managers and experts in education and tourism (24.24%). Regarding geographical distribution, the most articles are done with the national issue (23.48%) and the provinces of Tehran, Isfahan and Mazandaran (13.64%). Also, about 90% of the articles are attributed to the 2010s. **Conclusion.** The analysis of the trend of articles in the field of sport tourism shows that the main challenge of the researchers in this area is the strategic dimensions and natural and climatic factors at the macro level; and the quality of services and employment and entrepreneurship is at the intermediate level and in continue, future researches can be focused on the planning on particular areas of tourism and some sociological issues in this area.

**KEY WORDS:** *Content Analysis, Sport Tourism, Tourism Researches, Tourism Publications, Tourism Articles*

## INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is one of the most important economic and sociocultural links that economists call invisible exports, and they refer to it as the off industry (1). The importance of the tourism industry has become increasingly evident in creating positive global economic impacts, and policy makers in developed and developing countries regard tourism as one of the important factor of job creation and decrease of

unemployment rates. It seems that the employment power of the tourism industry in Iran is more than some other economic sections directly and indirectly, and its development may result in an accelerated economic growth with improved income distribution. Also, the development of tourism based on cultural and historical conditions, and especially natural attractions of Iran, can lead to constructive and

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effective interaction with the world and, given its rich economic, social and political resources, the interests of the country will also be met (1). Of course, although some countries, due to the presence of ancient and historical works and sites, are of interest to tourists, other natural sources such as lakes and rivers, mountains, forests, etc. in Iran can attract tourists (2). Accordingly, the resources of the tourism industry can be divided into two categories of natural sources and the attractions of human buildings. Natural sources include good weather, beautiful landscapes, beautiful beaches, mountains suitable for climbing or hunting, mineral waters or hot waters. Applicants for such sources are usually leisure tourists, therapists, and sports tourists. Human building resources and attractions such as museums, ancient and historical works, exhibitions and festivals are made by human beings, and applicants for such attractions are usually cultural, religious, business, and political tourists (3). In addition, one of the scientific orientations of the last decade in various fields of science such as economics and commerce, management, geography, environment and agriculture, sport management, etc. is the focus on tourism, which is one of the priorities of the Fifth and Sixth Development Plan of the country.

The review of tourism researches by content analysis method of 149 doctoral theses by Botterill Hawn (2002) at the universities of the United Kingdom and Ireland during 1990 to 1999 showed that the highest issue coverage was employment and entrepreneurship (4). Also, by analyzing the content of the theses of tourism in Iran from 1965-2006, it has been shown that tourism researches in Iran has mostly focused on four topics including tourism complexes, tourism development, tourism dimensions and economic effects and tourism planning. The least researches were related to the period of Iran-Iraq war (2%) and the most researches are since 1997 so far (67%) (5). Undoubtedly, one of the most attractive aspects of this area is sport tourism, which has attracted the attention of other researchers in related fields. Meanwhile, the three most important elements of tourism include cultural, natural and sport attractions, in all of which Iran has good conditions. Today, sport tourism has found its true identity and has become one of the major economic and social phenomena of recent decades. Sport has created a new and important type of tourism that has been of great

interest to the people of the world (6). Sport tourism sources are also divided into two types. Hard sport tourism is related to active sport tourism so as to witness an event in a group environment such as the Olympics and the World Cup. Soft sport tourism is usually referred to as tourists' trip to participate in recreational or leisure activities, which is significantly related to ecotourism (7).

Using the method of analyzing the contents of scientific articles in domestic publications is very common. For example, by content and documentary analysis of the articles of the Iranian aging magazine from 2006 to 2014, it was shown that the domain of sport and physical activity with 18.5% had the highest share of the published articles (8). These studies in other scientific fields such as librarianship and information, health and medicine, psychology, political science, education, management and accounting, etc. is very common (9-11). The same method has been used in the present study. However, the use of this method in sport management has not a long history, which was first began by content analyses of sport newsarticles (Barforoush, 2007) and the content of the Navad TV Sport Program (Seddighi, 2008). Then Alizadeh (2010) dealt with the content analysis of the researches of the previous physical education organization (12), and this process was continued based on methodology analysis of theses and dissertations of Physical Education dissertations of the Payame Noor University (13). In the review and analysis researches of non-Persian content, Mondello & Pedersen (2003) analyzed the content of the Economics and Sport magazine, Pitts et al. (2014) (8) analyzed the European Sports Management Quarterly during 1994-2012 and Pitts & Pedersen (2005) also analyzed the content of the International Journal of Sport Management articles (14). Smucker & Grappendorf (2008) analyzed the content of the five sports management magazines, international sport management, sports marketing, sports and social affairs, and the legal aspects of sport (15) and Shilbury (2011) focused on the bibliometric analysis of four sports management magazine (16). Of course, due to the lack of specialty of Iranian sports science publications, at the beginning, the content analysis of the articles was limited to the sports multidisciplinary publications, and the content of the sports science publications was generally analyzed (12, 17, 18),

and some researchers also analyzed articles of sports management in a special sports journal (19-22). A review of these researches shows that content analysis of the articles in specialized fields or in a specific topic, such as researches on tourism and sport tourism, is less attended to (14, 23, 24). Of course, various aspects of tourism and sport recreations have attracted the attention of researchers in the fields of biological and medical sciences, as well as the humanity and social sciences, and numerous articles on sport tourism have also been published in non-sport scientific publications.

In general, only two review surveys or content analysis in the country have focused on a specific topic or axis of sport, such as sport entrepreneurship and sport marketing (25, 26). Hence, it seemed that by analyzing the content of the specialized topics and axes of the management of sport, probable research gaps and trends can be better and more accurately revealed. In addition, it will increase the tendency towards more in-depth and more relevant researches, especially that the focus on sport tourism in the country is very important from the point of view of economics and entrepreneurship. From the point of view of research, the topic of sport tourism has also been addressed by sports management researchers. Of course, the field of sport management has a long history in different countries, but the history of this field in Iran does not last for more than a decade. For this reason, attention to the content of published articles by scientific journals can contribute to the enrichment of this discipline (20). Nowadays in addition to various scientific journals in areas related to tourism such as management, geography and environment (18 scientific journals), in the field of sports management also 16 publications are either highly specialized or shared with other fields of sport sciences in Iran (total of 34 Persian publications), which, by analyzing their content on the basis of scientific issues and concepts, a step can be made towards improving the scientific trend of sport sciences (22). In addition, the study of English-language articles published in the field of sport tourism in Iran can add to the comprehensiveness and accuracy of this analysis. The present research seeks to investigate the status of sport tourism researches by analyzing the content of the articles published in the countries' specialized publications during 2005-2018 from the

perspective of key topics and research methodology in order to determine the extent of participation of research journals in the articles of sport tourism of Iran and topic tendencies of the articles, what research methodology has been used, how has the level of analysis and distribution been, in sports tourism articles, how has been the research participation in terms of the number of authors and gender and the process of publishing articles based on different time periods? In general, the importance of analyzing the content of specialized sports management articles can be considered for future decisions; therefore, it is necessary to investigate a phenomenon this wide and frequency of audience in various aspects such as sports industry, sports management domains and many other aspects. So as to help researchers and planners in this area for future decisions.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research methodology is descriptive in terms of strategy, content analysis in terms of performance path and applied in terms of purpose. A tool for collecting research data, was a checklist containing various questions and based on the objectives of the survey, which was used after surveying a number of professors and experts. Information collecting method in this study was in the form of a library. The statistical population of this study includes all published scientific articles (107 articles) in the field of sport tourism during the years 2005 to the summer of 2018 in 34 publications; and 27 English articles up to 2018 were on sport tourism of Iran from 18 journals, which were based on the keyword from the Scientific Information Database (SID), as well as search in the system of related publications system and the latest articles gathered which by referring to its numbers, the required information was extracted from the articles and recorded in the checklist and used for analyzing the data. Of course, the summaries of the articles in the conferences have not been considered in this study. Data collected with Excel software was analyzed. Data analysis used descriptive statistics such as data categorization in terms of frequency distribution, frequency percentage, drawing tables. In order to determine the reliability of this study, two individuals independently attempted to codify the publications and the rate of agreement between them (reliability) was calculated according to the Scott formula (about 80%). For the validity of the coding checklist, the checklist

was distributed among five relevant experts along with the objectives of the study. The final validity of the study was confirmed by applying experts' opinions and final review.

## RESULTS

The description of data in Table 1 shows that the articles examined in the field of sport tourism are not specific to sports management publications, and the focus of other related publications well reveals the interdisciplinary nature of this important subject. On the other hand, the research collaboration of sports management researchers with disciplines such as geography, environment, socioeconomic sciences, etc. can help deepen researches in this area and making them applicable and can be useful even for planning and practice. Of the 107

published articles in this area, 70 articles (65.42%) were published in sports management publications and 37 articles (34.58%) in other publications. From the 16 sports publications, the most articles were published in the Journal of Strategic Studies of Sports and Youth (11 articles, 10.28%), Sport Management and Development Quarterly of the University of Guilan (10 articles, 9.34%), and Sport Management Studies (9 articles, 8.41%), respectively. From the 18 other scientific journals, the most article is published in the quarterly of Tourism Space (9 articles, 5.60%).

The focus of the Quarterly on Sport Management and Development on the topic of sport tourism may be related to the focus of this publication on new topics or the geographical location of the location of publication.

Table 1. Describing Iranian Sport Tourism Articles in Farsi Publications

Journal	Frequency	Percent	Journal	Frequency	Percent
Journal of Sport Management (University of Tehran)	8	7.44	Journal of Geographic Space(Izlamic Azad University- Ahar)	4	3.73
Sport Management and Development (University of Guilan)	10	9.34	Geographical Journal of Tourism Space (Izlamic Azad University- Malayer)	6	5.6
Journal of Sport Management and Motor Behavior (University of Mazandaran)	2	1.86	Quarterly of New attitudes in Human Geography (Izlamic Azad University- Garmsar)	4	3.73
Sport Physiology & Management Investigations	1	0.93	Human Geography Research Quarterly (University of Tehran)	2	1.86
Physical Education Studies and Sport Sciences	1	0.93	Journal of Geography and Environment Studies (Izlamic Azad University- Najafabad)	2	1.86
Quarterly Olympic	3	2.8	Tourism Management Studies (Allameh Tabataba'i University)	5	4.67
Contemporary Studies on Sport Management (University of Hamadan)	5	4.67	Journal of Natural Environment (University of Tehran)	1	0.93
Sport Management Studies (Sport Science Research Institute of Iran)	9	8.41	Journal of Tourism Planning and Development (University of Mazandaran)	2	1.86
Applied Research of Sport Management (Payame Noor University)	1	0.93	Journal of Iranian Social Development Studies (Izlamic Azad University-Science and Research )	1	0.93
Sport Sciences Quarterly (Izlamic Azad University- Karaj)	3	2.8	Quarterly of Geography (Regional Planning)	1	0.93
Applied Research in Management and Life Sciences in Sport	2	1.86	Journal of Tourism Studies(Allameh Tabataba'i University)	1	0.93
Communication Management in Sports Media(Payame Noor University)	1	0.93	Quarterly of Regional Planning (Izlamic Azad University-Marvdasht )	1	0.93
Organization Behavior Management in Sport Studies(Payame Noor University)	2	1.86	Scientific - Research Quarterly of Geographical Data (SEPEHR)	2	1.86
New Trends in Sport Management (Sport Management Association)	7	6.54	Journal of Social Sciences(Allameh Tabataba'i University)	1	0.93
Research and Sport Management & Motor Behavior (Kharazmi University)	4	3.73	Journal of Urban Tourism	1	0.93
Journal of Social Research(Izlamic Azad University-Roudehen )	1	0.93	Heritage and Tourism Quarterly	1	0.93
Strategic Studies on Youth and Sports	11	10.28	The Journal of Spatial Planning (Tarbiat Modares University)	1	0.93

Table 2. Describing Iranian Sport Tourism Articles in International Publications

Row	Journal	Frequency	Percent	Row	Journal	Frequency	Percent
1	Marathon	1	4	10	Report and Opinion	1	4
2	Caspian J. Environmental Science	1	4	11	Annals of Applied Sport Science	3	12
3	International Journal of Science Culture and Sport	1	4	12	International Journal of Sport Studies	4	16
4	Advances in Applied Science Research	1	4	13	Life Science Journal	1	4
5	A Journal of Economics and Management	1	4	14	Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities	1	4
6	International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies	1	4	15	International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences	4	16
7	Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences	1	4	16	Research Journal Of Sport Sciences	1	4
8	International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences	2	8	17	International Journal of Sport Management, Recreation & Tourism	1	4
9	International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities	1	4	18	International Review Special Issue	1	4

Table 3. Levels, Axes and Topics of Sport Tourism Articles in Iran

Subject of study	Number	Frequency	Total	Percent	Total percent
<b>Macro</b>					65.15
<b>Strategic analysis and Planning</b>			26	19.7	
SWOT analysis	17	12.88			
Environment, Strategic design & planning	6	4.54			
Strategic Alliances	1	0.76			
Strategic thinking	1	0.76			
Specific strategies (blue ocean)	1	0.76			
<b>Tourism development</b>			60	45.45	
The Factors of Sport Tourism Development	15.15	15.15			
Driver, Barrier & absorbent	11.36	11.36			
Natural factors & sport tourism climate	14.39	14.39			
Other variables related to tourism development	4.54	4.54			
<b>Mezo</b>					31.06
<b>Economics and Marketing</b>			23	17.42	
Marketing mix	10	7.57			
Income & Employment	10	7.57			
Market segmentation	3	2.27			
<b>Service &amp; Information of Management</b>			18	13.64	
Dimensions of service quality, tourism packages & Infrastructure	9	6.82			
Security	2	1.51			
Informational system	2	1.51			
Internet, Communications & Information	5	3.79			
<b>Micro</b>					3.79
<b>Psychological</b>			5	3.79	
Personal obstacles & restrictions of tourists	2	1.51			
Motives & Satisfaction of tourists	3	2.27			
Total: 132					100

According to Table 2, out of 27 published articles, two published articles in the rows 6 and 14 of journal were completely identical and repeated so they are considered as one article; besides, a similar article was published in Persian and English, which are considered as one article (sum of 25 articles). Of the 18 publications, only the rows 2 and 11 are in the ISI list which are published in Iran. Overall, out of a total of 132 sport tourism articles in Iran, only about 19% of articles have been written and published in English (27-49).

According to Table 3, all articles are divided into 3 levels and 5 axes. Most articles are focused

in the macro level (65.15%) and then the intermediate level (31.36%). This suggests that researchers have considered the main challenge of sport tourism in Iran as macro and environmental factors. From among the two main axes related to macro level issues, more researches (60 articles, 45.45%) focused on the development of sport tourism, and the least researches focused on the micro or individual level and the psychological issue (5 articles, 3.78%).

In the area of sport tourism development, two major issues affecting the development of sport tourism, natural factors and sport tourism climate have been mostly published. At the intermediate

level, issues of employment and marketing, and the quality of services are further noticed (1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 13, 24, 26, 38, 50-156).

Data from Table 4 show that the most research method used in the articles is a quantitative method with 107 articles (81.06%) and qualitative or combination (mixed) methods are used fewer. Also, most of the sport tourism researches have used a researcher made questionnaire and standard (114 articles, 86/36%).

**Table 4. Distribution of Methods and Tools for collecting Research Data in Sport Tourism Articles**

Research of method	Frequency	Percent	Instrument	Frequency	Percent
Quantitative	107	81.06	Researcher- made Questionnaire	90	68.18
Qualitative	4	3.03	Standard Questionnaire	24	18.18
Quantitative & Qualitative	7	5.3	Interviews and Questionnaire	4	3.03
Documentary	14	10.6	Documents and archives	14	12.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5. Description of the Level of Analysis and Distribution Status of the Community and the Statistical Sample of Sport Tourism Articles**

Population & sample	Frequency	percent
<b>individual</b>		
Domestic and foreign tourists	24	18.18
<b>Organizational</b>		
Physical education & Tourism specialist and Managers of agency	22	16.66
Faculty members, managers, Physical education & Tourism specialists	32	24.24
Managers & faculty members of Tourism & Physical education, Top managers of federations, National Olympic Committee, Chiefs of Boards, Managers & Staff of sport boards	15	11.36
Coach, supervisor, player, University students & physician	9	6.81
<b>Environmental &amp; ecological</b>		
Review documents, Records and reports	16	12.12
<b>Individual &amp; organization</b>		
Specialist of sports tourism & tourists	11	8.33
Combination of all the above samples	3	2.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6. Description of the Geographical Distribution of Sport Tourism Articles**

Geographical distribution	Frequency	percent	Geographical distribution	Frequency	percent
foreign tourists	5	3.79	National	31	23.48
Tehran Province	18	13.64	Golestan Province	7	5.3
Provinces with 9 research (Mazandaran and Isfahan)	18	13.64	Provinces with 5 research (Zanjan & Hormozgan)	10	7.57
Provinces with 6 research (East & West Azerbaijan)	12	9.09	Khorasan Razavi	3	2.27
Provinces with 2 research (Gilan, Kurdistan, Ardebil, Kermanshah)	8	6.06	Provinces with 1 research (Zanjan, Semnan, Sistan & Baluchestan, Hamedan, North Khorasan)	5	3.79
Combination of 3 Northern province (Golestan, Gilan, Mazandaran)	7	5.3	Combination of 4 provinces (Alborz, Tehran, Mazandaran) & (West & East Azerbaijan, Ardebil)	2	1.51
Combination of 4 provinces (Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Hamedan)	1	0.76	Not mention	5	3
<b>Total</b>					<b>132</b>

In terms of geographical distribution and in accordance with Table 6, the province of Tehran with 18 articles (13.64%) had the most researches in sport tourism, and Isfahan and Mazandaran provinces each with 9 articles (6.82%) were next. Table 7 indicates that in the field of sport tourism of Iran, most of the articles were written in collaboration with three authors (37.87%) and at least by one writer (4.51%). Also, among the researches

Table 5 shows that the level of analysis of more articles (78 articles, 59.09%) focused on organizational and managerial issues; then, the individual issues of tourists and the environmental and ecological issues of tourism have been studied. According to the statistical sample, in 24 articles (18.18%) the sample was domestic and foreign tourists, and after that the views of physical education professors and managers were used (32 articles, 24.24%).

mentioned, there was at least one female writer in 53 (40.15%) articles. From the total number of authors, 78% of them were men. According to Table 8, in most researches, descriptive statistics method was used with 23 articles (17.42%) and then the method of factor analysis and the combination of factor analysis and structural equations of each with 16 articles (12.12%) were used. Table 9 indicates the statistical software used in the

researches, accounting for about 74% of the articles used (SPSS: Statistical Package for

the Social Sciences) alone or with other software for analyzing the data.

**Table 7. Status of the Number of Authors and the Status of Women's Participation in Sport Tourism Articles**

Number of authors	Frequency	percent	Number of female authors	Frequency	percent
One author	6	4.51	One female author	53	40.15
Two authors	29	21.96	Two female authors	6	4.54
Tree authors	50	37.87	Tree female authors	1	0.75
Four authors	31	23.48	without female author	72	54.54
Five authors	11	8.33	Total female authors	60	19.74
Total number of authors	304	100	Total male authors	244	80.26

**Table 8. Distribution of Statistical Methods in Sport Tourism Articles**

Statistical method	Frequency	percent	Statistical method	Frequency	percent
Descriptive	23	17.42	Binominal Test & Friedman	6	4.54
Paired & One-Samples T Test, Friedman	18	13.64	Friedman& Wilcoxon or Spearman	4	3.03
Correlation (Spearman, Pearson) & regression	14	10.61	Vamplew & Kay & Topsis	7	5.30
Factor analysis	16	12.12	Combination of several statistical methods	14	10.61
Structural equation modeling & Factor analysis	16	12.12	Not mention	4	3.03
chi-squared	10	7.58	Total	132	100

**Table 9. Status of the use of Statistical Software in Sport Tourism Articles**

Statistical software	Frequency	percent	Statistical software	Frequency	percent
SPSS	64	48.49	SPSS, Amos	10	7.58
SPSS, lisrel	14	10.6	No software and no mention	31	23.48
SPSS, Excel	6	4.55	Others (GIS, Taxonomy & ...)	7	5.3
Total				132	

**Table 10. Annual Distribution of Sport Tourism Articles**

Row	Year	Frequency	percent	Row	Year	Frequency	percent
1	2005	1	0.76	1	2013	20	15.15
2	2006	0	0	2	2014	27	20.45
3	2007	1	0.76	3	2015	19	14.39
4	2008	1	0.76	4	2016	17	12.88
5	2009	3	2.27	5	2017	15	11.36
6	2010	6	4.54	6	2018	2	1.51
7	2011	6	4.54	7			
8	2012	14	10.6	8	Total	132	100

Table 10 indicates the increasing trend of sport tourism researches in the 2010s, and more than 90% of sport tourism articles are attributed to this decade.

## DISCUSSION

The distribution of sport tourism articles in a number of scientific fields such as sports management, geography, environment and social sciences suggests that this is a multidisciplinary topic, and in both educational and research activities related to this field, the interaction of different specialists is required or even in policy and planning and the implementation of sport tourism projects, geographic, environmental, sociocultural and recreational sports should be included. The important point is that the sports management publications with 70 articles (65.42%), in line with other non-sport publications, have focused on this issue and regarding the 38.54% distribution of the articles, it's leading in the three areas of geography,

environment and social sciences. From the 34 Farsi publications, 18 non-sport publications (53%) are active in this field, which is an appropriate field for publishing articles by sports management researchers in these publications. Still, more articles have been published in sports science publications (65.42%). However, careful examination of the authors' names and expertise suggests that the research engagement between sports and non-sports science researchers is scarce and should be strengthened especially in PhD theses. In addition, due to the possibility of launching the discipline of leisure and sport tourism in the master's degree in sport management in 2019, it's necessary to increase this kind of cooperation in education, and therefore in the joint researches.

The presence of more articles in the strategic studies on youth and sports (11 articles, 10.28%), regarding the youngness of the publication shows that the topic of sport tourism is considered as a challenging, axial, and macro topic. The same is

true for the publication of Sport Management and Development of the University of Guilan (10 articles, 9.34%), which has only a few years of experience more than other publications, is discussible from two aspects. First, perhaps the attention to the issue of sport tourism is due to the geographical and tourism situation of the Gilan region, or whether it is more likely to publish articles in new topics. After that, the Sport Management Studies of the Sport Sciences Research Institute with 9 articles (9.34%) is in the next rank, and it is clear that these publications pay particular attention to the publication of articles in this area of research. From the 25 articles in all 18 English publications, all writers are Iranian and most of them are published by researchers at Islamic Azad University. In this regard, attention is also needed to international research collaborations and the selection of credible publications is very important.

From the non-sport management university publications in the three areas of environmental, geography and sport tourism, sport tourism has been considered. Quarterly of Tourism Space of Malayer Azad University, with 6 articles (5.60%) and the Quarterly of Tourism Management Studies by Allameh Tabatabaei University, with 5 articles (4.67%), have published the most articles. One of the positive aspects of these articles is the authorship of other disciplines and other fields in conducting these researches. Regarding the fact that sport tourism is composed of two sections of tourism and sports and is an intersecting discipline, writers of different fields can enter this field in the implementation of sport tourism studies and new subjects. Researchers in sports management seem to be able to increase their quality and depth with this research interaction. Of course, some Persian publications have a scientific-promotional rating.

Initially, these articles were divided into three levels of macro, intermediate, and micro; five general axes and 17 topics. Most articles focused on the macro level (86 articles, 65.15%) and the tourism development axis (60 articles, 45.45%). The high distribution of articles at the macro level shows that the researchers have tried to focus on the basic and peripheral aspects of sport tourism. This suggests that researchers have assumed that the main problem of research in this area depends on environmental and macro factors and then on intermediate or managerial factors (41 articles, 31.06%). This comparison for policymakers and

planners may also be useful in focusing on issues of these two levels; researchers, however, can continue to focus on topics of a micro or individual level, such as psychological variables, and design new and innovative researches. At macro level, comparison of articles on two major axes shows that more articles are done in the development of tourism than the axis of strategic analysis and planning. It is normal that the research trends in sport management researches and other areas have shifted from situational analysis or strategic planning and design to a balanced and sustainable development. In particular, in most of the studies, the detailed study of macro-level studies shows that in the axis of the researches related to strategic analysis and planning, most researchers have used the classical (SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) method and few of them has used new methods of situation analysis or external environment analysis and strategic planning. Therefore, the research orientation in this axis seems to be to use other strategic models, strategic alliances, or inter-organizational alliances and specific strategies. At the macro level, among the articles that analyze strategic position, only three articles at the national level focus on explaining the strategy and development of recreational sport tourism of Iran, and the rest are conducted regionally or in different provinces.

Geographically speaking, Iran is also in a very good position as an Asian country, and it can lead the research orientation towards Sport Ecotourism. Of course, this orientation has been observed in the study of Fennell (2001) and Mohd Muzzammil et al. (2015) (157, 158). In this regard, Lawa et al. (2010) classified tourism management articles from 1996-2009 in several areas, with the largest number of studies conducted in the regions of Europe and Asia (159); therefore, Iran as an Asian country and with its natural attractions, can be successful in this area especially ecotourism. As Zhong et al. (2013) emphasizes on the development of ecotourism in China, which is also an Asian country (160). Of course, in Iran with regard to infrastructure, there should be a special focus on tourism development and management.

The distribution of articles in the field of tourism development shows that most researches are focused on sport tourism development factors and the natural and climatic factors of sport tourism. This focus is also very interesting as the



main effective factors include macro and environmental factors where natural and environmental factors are also put in the same class. Meanwhile, recreational sport tourism has a high degree of dependence on the geographical environment and specific regions, as some studies have been focusing on this issue by doing a case study. At the center of the factors affecting the development of sport tourism, three articles at the national level have examined the status of sport tourism industry, which may have been extracted from the doctoral thesis of sports management, while the rest have dealt with effective factors and strategies in provinces. In the center of the natural factors and sport tourism climate, an article has investigated the classification of the country's natural attraction to 7 climbing and caving, nature therapy, desertification, beach and water sports, winter sports, hunting and fishing, and hiking and nature exploring, and other articles has dealt with the analysis of each of specific attractions regionally, most of them on the northern coast of the country. This process shows that we need to focus more on case studies, especially in each of the tourist areas, in order to apply studies and provide executive suggestions to the managers.

Comparing the review of articles on sport tourism in Iran with other articles in this field, it has been shown that now more than 70 journals directly and indirectly examine the topic of sport tourism, which is mainly done by the econometric approach (161). Greffin (2013) also analyzed the content of tourism articles from 1990 to 2010 for 21 years, which at the beginning of the articles focused on marketing and economic issues that gradually tended to be social and community aspects (162). Of course, in Iran's sport tourism researches, less attention has been paid to the issue of economic and marketing issues, and most of them are cultural and social events. If, given the economic conditions and sanctions of Iran, this should be done with an economical approach taken by policy makers and public policy. The same issue in the content analysis of tourism journals and hospitality by Mohmmmed et al (2015), has shown that most research topics focus on market analysis, which includes demand and supply modeling and price determinants, and the role of government policies and macroeconomics has been less investigated (163). As Weed (2009) in a meta-analysis with an overview of the review articles on sport tourism from 1990 to 2008 showed that the focused has mainly been on the

subject of the market and the introduction of tourist centers; while in his opinion, sport tourism researches must respond to the challenges and critique of external and environmental factors (164), which is very important in Iran, since most of the challenges of tourism and sport tourism of Iran depend on the macroeconomic, political and cultural environment. One of the major dimensions of sport tourism is the tourism of sport events that in Iran, due to political and cultural issues, there is little or no opportunity to host large and small events; while in other countries, high investment is done to host regional and global sport events (165), which the efforts of Qatar for hosing the 2020 FIFA World Cup may be mentioned.

The focus of research on the intermediate level is divided into two major axes of economics and marketing (23 articles, 17.42%); which has focused on the management of services and information (18 articles, 13.63%) which further researches have also been done on two issues of marketing including income and employment, and the quality of service and tourism packages. Focusing on these two issues shows that at the organizational and managerial level, attention to marketing and quality of service is very important; as in all sports management studies, the desire to research sports marketing has increased; therefore, it can be claimed that income and employment through sport tourism without the commitment to the quality of service at the micro or individual level cannot be realized. In the field of economics and marketing, the topic of marketing mix (10 articles, 7.57%) has been paid to provinces with tourist attractions such as Mazandaran, West Azarbaijan and Ardebil, and two articles have been nationally investigate the role of sport management in the design of marketing mix of sport tourism (91) and important factors in the marketing of sport tourism of Iran (91). In the income and employment axis, or the effect of tourism on the economics of the host communities (10 articles, 57.7%) the focus has been at provincial and national levels (74, 95). Of course, little case studies have been conducted on sport events such as climbing (Kermanshah), Chookhe wrestling (Esfarayin, North Khorasan), cycling (Azarbayjan), polo and horse riding (Golestan), which seems that similar to the small number of case studies in particular geographic regions, more attention must be paid to this type of studies

so as to make them applicable and usable for managers.

The fewest articles are published on the micro level and the psychological subject (5 articles, 3.78%), focusing on only psychological issue (the barriers and restrictions of tourists, and the motivations and satisfaction of tourists). Although both sports management and geography and rural planners are equally concerned with this issue, with the high attention of scholars to the macro level and intermediate level of sports tourism, it seems better to firstly solve the issues of these levels, such as the quality of services and infrastructure, and in this case, due to the growing trend of trips in Iran, sport tourism will probably also find its own position. Although similar to the trend in Iran's sport tourism articles, researches have focused on individual/micro or psychological dimensions (166-168). However, some studies have focused on case studies and special environments (169), although this has been somewhat respected in Iranian sport tourism research. There are several new trends in sport tourism researches that should be addressed in researches on sport tourism in Iran where e-commerce researches or use of information technology and services can be mentioned (170). Also, the sustainable tourism approach (171) and especially entrepreneurship in tourism (172, 173) and the use of this approach in sport tourism could be mentioned. Additionally, adventure sports tourism and exciting sports are the latest trends in people that need to be explored.

Methodologically, 81.06% of the total research articles were quantitatively and only about 3% were qualitatively done. Moreover, library information has been used only in non-publishing articles; therefore, due to the increasing rise in qualitative researches, especially in the humanities field, more attention of researchers of sports management seem to be required to carry out quantitative and qualitative mix researches, and then qualitative researches in this field; therefore, the frequent use of questionnaire is also natural, which also reveals the need for other methods of data collection. In the field of sport management researches, questionnaire is the most widely used tools for measuring variables. In terms of tools used in sport tourism articles, researcher-made questionnaires (68.18%) were further used in comparison with standard questionnaires (18.18%). Of course, considering the special

national conditions and the diversity of the regions of the country, using researcher-made questionnaire is normal and correct. As most of the standard questionnaires used, dealt with the individual and psychological levels, and then the intermediate and organizational levels, a researcher-made questionnaire was needed to investigate about macro-level issues and some intermediate level issues, and qualitative researches are further needed. Meanwhile, the use of documents and archives, library documents and available evidence (second-hand data from statistical centers) was mostly used by non-sports management researchers. In terms of society and statistical sample, the opinions of professors and managers and experts in physical education and tourism, and the managers of the agencies have been mostly used. In addition, 24 articles (18.18%) were made on tourists (domestic and foreign). It is natural that at the individual and psychological level, and some organizational issues such as the quality of services, the use of comments and views of the main customers of this area is obvious, and with reference to the focus of the articles on the macro and intermediate levels, the opinion of other people have been rightfully used. At the same time, articles that were not at the level of organizational or individual analyses, focused more on environmental and ecological issues, such as the locating of areas and areas susceptible to mountain sports (climbing, caving, etc.

In terms of geographic distribution, 23.48% of the articles are at national level and dealt with macro scale issues. The province of Tehran with 18 articles (13.64%) was the most studied and then the provinces of Isfahan and Mazandaran each with 9 articles (9.09%). On the other hand, collaborative and inter-regional researches were more focused on the north, which was jointly carried out in three northern provinces of the country (Golestan, Guilan, Mazandaran), which again shows the importance of this issue, especially for researches on strategic alliances in northern or western and southern provinces. Meanwhile, an article about provinces of South Khorasan, Kerman, Yazd, Bushehr, Tokkilouyeh and Boyerahmad, Chaharmahal Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, Markazi and Qazvin are not published, which due to the tourism attraction of some of these areas, they should have been considered by researchers and native managers. A glimpse into the location or research area shows

that in almost all of these researches, the north and west tourism areas have been more and more emphasized, and it is well-documented that the topic of natural attractions in part of the geography of Iran can be the focus of more comprehensive studies in sport tourism of Iran.

In terms of gender of the authors of the article, 54.54% of the articles did not have a female author and only one article was published by three women. In general, women's participation seems to be natural due to the gender composition of faculty members and graduate students. Of course, in at least 40% of the articles there was at least one female writer. Based on the findings of the content analysis, descriptive statistics method with the share of 17.42% had the highest share among other statistical methods. This finding is consistent with the results of Asgari et al. (2014) and Azimzadeh et al. (2017). Easy setup and classification of data, graphic displays, use of tables and charts, useful and simple statistical tests in this statistical method, etc., are probably among the issues that make researchers use more descriptive statistical methods. In addition, the results showed that factor analysis and structural equation model, as well as the combination of both methods, covered a total of 24% of the articles. This finding also confirms the increase in the use of Factor Analysis Software from 2011. In addition, correlation and regression methods were of interest by scholars. Also, based on the results, the highest use of statistical software with a significant difference belonged to SPSS software alone (49.48%) or shared with Excel, LISREL and AMOS, indicating the interest of researchers and students towards this software. Also, the increasing trend of sport tourism researches is in the 2010s, and more than 90% of articles are attributed to this decade and the largest number was in 2014 (20 articles).

## CONCLUSION

In general, researchers in various disciplines and fields of study of sport sciences, offer a number of articles that by their content analysis one can make a step towards improving the scientificity of the sport science. The purpose of analyzing the content of scientific products, is the categorization of the subject and recognition of the type of material published in specialized

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publications for quick and easy access to information. In addition, this type of researches identifies the research process on a particular topic, and researchers can continue that process or, by finding the research gaps, help deepen and extend knowledge on that subject and increase its scientific innovation and evolution. On the other hand, such research is highly constructive for the planning and implementation of field projects, and managers can be aware of the main issue by focusing and repeating research variables. One of the new and applied issues regarding the country's capacity, is tourism and, consequently, sports tourism, which has been considered both scientifically as an interdisciplinary and in current situation in terms of employment and income generating; however, so far, no research is conducted for the analysis of articles published in the sport tourism field. In order to achieve this goal, studying and analyzing the articles of sport tourism of Iran was carried out in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses and use it in implementing future researches and planning of the country.

Also, by reviewing scientific publications in each field, we can evaluate and control the progress and improve the quality of research activities. With such goals and approach, this study dealt with the content analysis of published articles in sports and non-sports journals in the field of sport tourism.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Future orientations for sport tourism researches can be further focused on specific areas of tourism, such as free zones and ecotourism.
- Given Iran's capacity in sport tourism, it is necessary to publish more research articles in reputable foreign publications.
- Collaborative and interdisciplinary researches with geography, environment and cultural heritage researchers can help to deepen and extend this scientific field.
- Researches can be generalized to other provinces whose potential is still unknown from this dimension.
- Directors of tourism in Iran can use sports and other attractions related to recreational activities for tourism development.

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