

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Residents' Perception of the Sporting Event of Horse Beauty Contests: An Importance-Performance Analysis****Faezeh Asadian Ardakani¹** , **Fatemeh Azizi^{2*}** 

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Received: 17/May/2024

Accepted: 10/July//2024

Published Online: 29/June//2025

How to cite

Asadian Ardakani, F., & Azizi, F. (2025). Residents' Perception of the Sporting Event of Horse Beauty Contests: An Importance-Performance Analysis. *Applied Research of Sport Management*, 14(1), 23- 38.

Extended Abstract**Introduction**

Sports has become a vital component of tourism, which is rapidly developing in the tourism industry and is influenced by the inherent connection between sports and travel (Ishac, 2024: 1). Sports and tourism are related in different sectors of economy and culture (Yun et al., 2024: 1). At the global level, sports event tourism is considered a tool to enhance the tourism experience, strengthen the destination brand, reach broader tourism markets, achieve sustainable development goals and optimal use of tourism resources (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024: 1). In recent decades, hosting sports events has become an essential strategy among destination marketers, which plays a vital role in tourism development (Duan & Wu, 2024: 1). Host communities are the main beneficiaries of sporting events. To strengthen their support for events, the interests of local communities should be considered and enhanced (Kennelly et al., 2022: 1260). Hence, residents' views are an essential factor in gaining support for events at the community level (Polcsik & Perenyi, 2022, 749). To fill the gap in the literature and expand the existing knowledge in this field, the present research has comprehensively investigated the positive effects of holding the sports event of horse beauty contests in Ashkazar city, Yazd province, relying on the opinions of residents. The horse industry is one of the booming economic industries. Creating employment in this industry by raising and keeping horses, as well as attracting spectators and tourists to this field and various events that exist in this industry, provides a good opportunity to achieve long-term benefits. The results of this research lead to more and more detailed familiarization of the policy makers and those involved in this field with the different effects of holding the horse beauty event and understanding the importance of each. Therefore, the central question of the current research is, according to the residents of Ashkazar city, Yazd province, what is the importance and performance of the positive effects of holding horse beauty contests in this city?

Methodology

The current research is applied in terms of its purpose, a survey in data collection method, and descriptive-analytical in terms of method. The statistical population of this research includes residents of Ashkazar. Horse beauty contests are held in this city. The Arabian Horse Festival is held in Ashkazar City, where 120 of the highest-quality and beautiful Arabian horses from all over the country compete with judges from different countries. There are 330 equestrian

and horse breeding clubs and more than 5000 purebred Arabian horses in Yazd province, and this province is known as the hub of purebred Arabian horses in the country (ISNA news, 1402). Due to the lack of a suitable sampling frame, available sampling was used. This research aims to determine the relative importance of the residents' perception of the effects of holding the sports event of horse beauty contests using the importance-performance analysis matrix. Therefore, in this research, the questionnaire was designed based on a five-point spectrum, so that the five-point Likert spectrum, from very low to very high, was used to measure the importance and from very weak to very good to check the performance of each factor. Sixteen factors were used in the research questionnaire. The intended sample in this research is an available sample, which includes selecting people who are readily available and willing to participate. This method of sampling allows the researcher to easily choose the participants who are available in a particular location (Bavuma, 2022: 200). Therefore, this method was selected by the purpose of this research, which was to investigate the residents' perception of the benefits of holding the sports event of horse beauty contests in Ashkazar city. Therefore, 27 residents of Ashkazar city were asked to rate each factor's importance and performance; finally, the data were analyzed using the IPA matrix.

Findings

Based on the results of the research, the effects of "increasing private investment and creating business opportunities by holding an event", "developing tourism by holding an event", and "solidarity and hospitality of citizens towards visitors by holding an event" are respectively of the highest average performance. And the dimensions of "creating an opportunity to show the city's tourism attractions by holding an event," and "increasing private investment and creating business opportunities by holding an event," and "solidarity and hospitality of citizens towards visitors by holding an event" are respectively the highest average importance. The effects of "strengthening and preserving the values and traditions of the local culture by holding the event" and "creating the opportunity for leisure and recreation for families by holding the event" have been determined as significant effects from the residents' point of view. Still, the performance is weak. As a result, managers and those involved in organizing events should focus their efforts on improving performance in the field of these effects, because otherwise they will suffer strategic deviation. The effects of "increasing job opportunities by holding an event", "creating economic benefits for the city by holding an event", "developing tourism by holding an event", "increasing private investment and creating business opportunities by holding an event", "brand Becoming a city as a tourist destination by holding an event", "Creating an opportunity to show the city's tourism attractions by holding an event" and "Citizens' solidarity and hospitality towards visitors by holding an event" are effects that are of great importance to people. Ashkazar also performs well in these fields. Therefore, they should take necessary measures to maintain the existing situation in these fields. The effects of "citizens' use of the infrastructure created by holding the event", "acceptance of "improving the transportation system by holding the event", "improving and revitalizing urban infrastructure (such as streets, urban furniture, etc.) by holding the event", "Increasing community pride due to increasing visibility at the national and international level by holding an event" and "improving the quality of life of residents by holding an event" are the effects that are of low importance and their performance is weak. Therefore, some priority should be given to these factors when allocating resources. The importance of the effects of "introducing the city at the international level by holding an event" and "improving and developing local businesses by holding an event" is low in people's opinion, but their performance is high.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of this research, residents of Ashkazar city of Yazd province have little satisfaction with the effects of "strengthening and preserving the values and traditions of local culture by holding events" and "creating opportunities for leisure and entertainment for families by holding events" and the performance in this field is favorable. They don't know whether these effects are important to them. Therefore, managers and event planners who want to increase performance and obtain positive consequences from it should make a lot of effort to improve the situation of these effects and change the current situation towards reaching the desired situation. In relation to "promoting and preserving the traditions of local culture", event organizers need to consider the local community's culture and the residents' preferences so that the event can be appropriate for its location. Therefore, it is recommended to consider

organizing horse beauty contests, festivals, local ritual ceremonies, and showcasing traditional handicrafts. Planning and designing various tourism programs to familiarize and use the host society's customs and special cultural features adds to the region's attractiveness. The proper cooperation of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Yazd Province with the organizers of the horse beauty event can be the beginning of a new development in the development of tourism, and attract and influence tourists to encourage them to come back to Yazd Province, and especially Ashkazar to watch the competitions. The results of this research show that, from the point of view of residents, it is important to create opportunities for leisure and entertainment for families by holding events. This case refers to the leisure and educational opportunities the event can bring to the community. This result is directly related to spreading happiness and social vitality in the community and creating fun and excitement for the local people. This is especially important when there are not enough recreational facilities for residents in small Iranian cities like Ashkazar city, and holding sports events can help revive these areas. It is suggested to develop and attract tourists to see horse beauty contests by building entertainment places, hotels, and places to provide food.

KEY WORDS

Sports Event Tourism, Event Impacts, Residents, Performance-Importance Analysis.

Doi: [10.30473/arism.2025.71356.3886](https://doi.org/10.30473/arism.2025.71356.3886)



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