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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Developing a Model of Barriers to Smart Tourism Development in Coastal Sports Destinations

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

One of the important factors that acts as a source of income and cultural interactions between countries in the world is the tourism industry. The tourism industry serves as a vital engine for economic and cultural development, contributing approximately 10% to global GDP and sustaining nearly one-tenth of the world's workforce. Among its specialized branches, sports tourism has emerged as a significant sector, generating an estimated $800 billion annually and accounting for roughly 25% of global tourism revenue. In recent years, the paradigm of "smart tourism"-leveraging advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and artificial intelligence-has revolutionized the field. This approach transforms traditional services into modernized, personalized experiences by facilitating seamless communication between tourists and destinations.

Recent scholarly work underscores the importance of this digital transition. O'Connor (2023) highlights that without a collaborative, networked approach, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises struggle to compete effectively in the digital landscape. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrate that the adoption of smart technologies significantly enhances tourist satisfaction, revisit intentions, and the overall competitiveness of destinations.

Despite the proven potential of smart tourism to foster economic and social prosperity, the existing literature primarily focuses on general smart destination development, leaving a notable research gap regarding the specific barriers to implementation in coastal sports destinations. Given that tourism is a critical driver for the development of Iran's coastal regions, identifying the obstacles to integrating smart technologies in these specific areas is essential. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the following core research question: What is the pattern of obstacles hindering the development of smart tourism in coastal sports destinations?

Methodology

The nature of the present study was exploratory and its approach was qualitative, based on the Strauss and Corbin data. The aim of the study was to achieve a paradigmatic model based on data collected through semi-structured interviews. The research population was 19 experts in the field of smart sports tourism, including

professors, managers, and researchers. The sampling method was purposive and the sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation. In the nineteenth interview, the researcher reached theoretical saturation and in order to increase the validity and coverage of all components, the interview continued up to 21 people. Reliability in qualitative research is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research and refers to the reasonableness and correctness of the findings. In the present study, reliability was also confirmed by five sports management experts. Dependability is also equivalent to reliability in quantitative research and refers to the accuracy, stability, and consistency of the findings. In the present study, the percentage of agreement between the two coders was used to assess the reliability of the interview, and the overall reliability was reported to be 88%. Open, axial, and selective coding were used in MaxQuda software version 2020 to analyze the data related to the interviews. Also, the final research model was presented using the dimensions of the Strauss and Corbin paradigm model, including causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences.

Findings

Descriptive findings of the research population showed that out of a total of 21 people, 22% were female and 78% were male. 84% had a PhD and 16% had a master's degree. Also, 68% were majoring in sports management and 32% in tourism. Findings from interviews with 17 specialists included 61 open codes, 16 central codes, and 5 optional codes. The findings showed that the causal conditions affecting the lack of development of smart tourism in coastal sports destinations included filtering of widely used social networks, government-run tourism management, and concerns about data security and tourists' privacy. The underlying conditions included the lack of standard sports infrastructure, inadequate lifeguard equipment, low access to quality internet, and high costs of implementing smart tourism. The intervening conditions included negative publicity against Iran, the lack of a coherent system for tourism management, and low motivation of domestic and foreign investors due to the lack of political and economic stability. Strategies included using smart systems to maintain security, involving the private sector to invest, and modeling the performance and policies of successful countries in smart tourism. The outcomes included improving the management of coastal sports destinations, reducing negative environmental impacts, contributing to sustainable development, and increasing tourist satisfaction and economic prosperity.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that the causal conditions affecting the lack of development of smart tourism in coastal sports destinations are consistent with the findings of Gerami et al. (2024) and Maimandi et al. (2024). The filtering of social networks can have a negative impact on the development of tourism, especially in coastal sports destinations. Social networks act as one of the most important sources of information for tourists and play a decisive role in their decision-making to choose a destination. Filtering these networks can lead to reduced access to information about tourist destinations, attractions, and travel experiences. This not only affects the attraction of foreign tourists, but also reduces advertising and introduction of domestic tourism capacities. The background conditions are consistent with the findings of Gerami et al. (2024).

The lack of standard sports infrastructure in coastal destinations can significantly negatively affect the development of smart tourism. Sports infrastructure includes playgrounds, sports equipment, and amenities that are essential to attract sports tourists. The lack of this infrastructure not only reduces tourist attraction but also causes existing tourists to have an unfavorable experience. This can lead to a decrease in the number of tourists returning and, consequently, a decrease in tourism revenue. Inadequate equipment of lifeguards on beaches is another important challenge in the development of smart tourism. Lifeguards play a vital role in the safety of tourists, and the lack of appropriate equipment can lead to an increased risk

of accidents. This not only affects the tourist experience, but also negatively impacts the reputation of the tourist destination. As a result, investing in lifeguard equipment and training can help increase safety and thus attract more tourists. In the interventional setting, Dino et al. (2021) reported that costs and convenience were a higher priority for tourists in their study of factors influencing the adoption of IoT in tourism by Romanian consumers. Negative advertising against Iran is one of the main obstacles to the development of the tourism industry in the country.

This advertising, which is often carried out through international media, creates a negative mindset among foreign tourists and discourages them from traveling to Iran. This advertising not only affects the attraction of foreign tourists, but also has a negative impact on the development of domestic tourism. For example, in the absence of appropriate and positive information at the global level, Iran is not recognized as a tourist destination, which leads to a decrease in the number of tourists. Therefore, it is essential to counter this negative propaganda and present a true picture of Iran through appropriate information programs. The strategies are in line with the findings of Zhang et al. (2022). Smart systems in coastal tourism destinations can significantly enhance security.

By using new technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, a safe and secure environment can be created for tourists. These systems can help monitor the environment, control access, and prevent incidents. For example, smart surveillance systems can help detect and warn about adverse weather conditions or potential incidents, and increase environmental security by using image processing technologies. The entry of the private sector as an investor in the development of smart tourism in coastal destinations can play an important role in upgrading infrastructure and providing better quality services. The results are also consistent with the findings of Foronda Robles et al. (2023). Li et al. (2024) reported in their assessment of the economic impacts of investing in smart tourism platforms that smart tourism platforms not only have a significant economic impact within the industry, but also affect other industries, especially professional support industries such as professional, scientific and technical activities, as well as business support services.

This result can be explained by the emergence of specialized services on two-way or multi-way digital platforms that help individual businesses. According to the findings, it seems that the development of applications that provide tourists with information about sports activities, coastal attractions, weather conditions, and access routes to these areas can improve the tourism experience and increase tourist attraction. Also, providing high-speed and stable internet services on the coast, especially in areas far from the city, can help economic development and attract investment. This connection also allows tourists to access online information and services.

One of the limitations of qualitative research is that the phenomenon under study can have different interpretations and the interpretation that was made is one of the possible and acceptable interpretations. Also, access to the study community and presence at the workplace to conduct interviews were other limitations of this research.It is suggested that researchers explore other qualitative methods and offer innovative solutions to the challenges associated with qualitative research methods mentioned in the limitations section.

K E Y W O R D S
Internet, Beaches, Tourist, Smart Tourism, Sports Destinations.