

Research Paper

Identification and Validation of Effective Indicators and Factors of Environmental Quality in Branding of Rural Tourism Destinations Using Thematic analysis Method (Case: Ethno-cultural Region of Oramanat in Kurdistan and Kermanshah Provinces)

*Mohammad Reza Rezvani¹, Hasan Ali Faraji Sabokbar², Alireza Darban Astaneh³, Sayed Hadi Karimi⁴

1. Professor, Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
2. Associate Professor, Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
4. PhD Candidate, Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.



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ABSTRACT

The branding of every tourism destination is based on its environmental characteristics and unique features, in other words, environmental quality; because optimal environment quality underlie the formation of a positive sense to tourism destinations and eventually develop tourism. Explaining the environmental quality and consequently branding for rural tourism destination help create an enjoyable and memorable experience in the minds of tourists and will result in tourist's loyalty and ultimately attract more tourists and visitors to the tourism boom in the region. Thus, identifying environmental quality factors contributes a lot to branding and finally marketing and development of tourism destinations. Given the importance of this issue, this study has undertaken to identify and validate the environmental quality of Oramanat ethno-cultural region to branding for its tourism destinations. In this study, qualitative thematic analysis method was used. Initially by purposive sampling method, 29 interviews (12 interviews with beneficiary local people and 17 interviews with tourists) were conducted. Then, the results were analyzed with MAXQDA. To validate the results and increase their reliability, a quantitative method was used such as Exploratory factor analysis. Based on the results of the interviews and the completed questionnaire, 5 dimensions and 22 categories for environmental quality related to branding were identified in the Hawraman region. They are as follows: natural dimension (with 4 categories), socio-cultural dimension (with 7 categories), economic dimension (with 1 category), physical dimension (with 5 categories), and institutional dimension (with 5 categories).

Key words:

Environmental quality, Branding, Tourism destination, Thematic analysis, Ethno-cultural region of Oramanat

Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

Nowadays tourism destinations have to compete with each other at different levels of international, national, regional, provincial, municipal and local. The environmental

quality, including environmental education, cultural heritage, infrastructure of tourism and natural resources have an important contribution in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism destination. If goods and services are not at the level of quality expected by customers, they will go to other centers that meet their expectations. These expectations find meaning in terms of environmental, social, physical, and economic. If any of these factors lacks

*** Corresponding Author:****Mohammad Reza Rezvani, PhD****Address:** Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.**Tel:** +98 (912) 2180492**E-mail:** rrezvani@ut.ac.ir

good quality, customer's level of satisfaction of the living environment can be affected.

Planning for rural areas should improve the quality of tourism environment in the context of sustainable development goals; because an appropriate environment is one of the basic criteria in the selection of tourism destinations. Tourism planning for rural areas should achieve objectives such as sustainable rural development and preservation of the natural environment.

2. Methodology

Due to the nature of the subject matter of this research, our methodology was a combination method, consisting of observation, interviews, surveys, and statistical data taken from the Statistical Center of Iran. Generally, documentary and survey methods have been used to collect the information. In this study, qualitative thematic analysis method was used. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting qualitative patterns out of qualitative data. It turns diverse data into rich and detailed data. Initially by purposive sampling method, 29 interviews (12 interviews with beneficiary local people and 17 interviews with tourists) were conducted. The results were analyzed by MAXQDA. To validate the results and increase their reliability, a quantitative method was used such as Exploratory factor analysis. Also a questionnaire based on the results of the analysis of interviews was designed. Given that locals and tourists have been examined in this study, for each community, a sample size of 300 was considered. Considering that some of the questionnaires may not be returned, a total of 650 people were considered for the study. Although the sample was calculated with Cochran formula, finally the sample size was 372.

3. Results

Based on the analysis of the interviews and the completed questionnaires, 5 dimensions and 22 categories for environmental quality related to branding were identified in the Hawraman region. They are as follows: natural dimension (with 4 categories: attractive view of settlements, dating of the buildings, combining traditional architecture with nature, strength of buildings and native architecture), sociocultural dimension (with 7 categories: religious attractions, cover the locals, local games, Hawraman language and music, crafts and local products, hospitality of the locals, specific local customs), economic dimension (with 1 category: economic efficiency), physical dimension (with 5 categories: favorable climate, high and beautiful mountains, lush and diverse vegetation, and various animal species), and institutional dimension (with 5

categories: communication services, mail and telephone, residential and entertainment services, infrastructure and communications, health services and amenities).

4. Discussion

The branding for each tourism destination is based on environmental characteristics and unique features called environmental quality because optimal environment quality underlie the formation of a positive sense to tourism destinations and eventually develop tourism. Explaining the environmental quality and consequently branding for rural tourism destination help create an enjoyable and memorable experience in the minds of tourists. It is followed by tourist's loyalty and ultimately attraction of more tourists and visitors to the region. Unfortunately, the quality of services in rural tourism areas is often considered as repelling. This is not just for tourists, stakeholders, or customers but also among scientists and researchers. From 2005 to 2016, a total number of 143 articles have been conducted in this topic. Sense of quality is closely and inevitably associated with satisfaction and at the same time loyalty of tourists/consumers that is supported by a large number of researchers. Thus, identifying environmental quality factors, contributes a lot to branding and finally marketing and development of tourism destinations.

5. Conclusion

Because solving every problem in the first step requires a comprehensive understanding of the current situation, in this study, we tried to assess the environmental quality, capabilities and attractions of villages of the study area. Consequently, we has undertaken to identify and validate the environmental quality of Oramanat ethno-cultural region to branding for tourism destinations of this rural area.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.