

Research Paper

Identification and designing of marketing mix elements to promote rural tourism using a prospective approach: A case study of Babol County

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Citation: Motiei Langroodi, S.H., Gholami, A., & Mohammadzadeh Larijani, F. (2018). [Identification and designing of marketing mix elements to promote rural tourism using a prospective approach: A case study of Babol County (Persian)]. Journal of Rural Research, 9(3), 376-395, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrr.2018.241253.1161>

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrr.2018.241253.1161>

Received: 12 Sep. 2017

Accepted: 12 Mar. 2018

ABSTRACT

This research is of an applied descriptive-analytical type. Data collection was based on documentary and survey techniques. The statistical population of the research included active individuals in the field of rural tourism and local officials. As many as 223 people who were the most active in the local tourism were selected. This selection was in terms of their access and participation in the field. Also, 10 officials were selected. In the first step, an ISM software program was designed for the primary design and data analysis. In the second step, the LISREL structural equation modeling software was used to test the primary model. Finally, to design a futuristic scenario for marketing elements, the Mic-Mac software was used. The results indicated that, from the standpoint of the local authorities, the elements of "promoting and planning" have the most direct impact on the success of rural tourism marketing. However, the element of "planning" has the most dependency on the other elements of the study.

Key words:

Rural tourism,
Tourism market-
ing mix elements,
Futuristic research,
Babol

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The importance of tourism and its role in economic, social and cultural development has led many local, regional and national planners to plan and expand it in the world. In order to succeed in this context and to create appropriate conditions for plans

should be made to attract tourists and better introduce the facilities and conditions to the tourism markets. Tourism planners need to have a better understanding of marketing strategies for tourist destinations and seek more effective marketing strategies.

Rural areas in the county of *Babol*, endowed with natural tourist attractions as well as cultural and historical abundance, have a desirable capacity to attract domestic and foreign tourists. However, according to the statistics,

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this capacity has not been used properly so far, nor has enough attention been paid to the importance of marketing. Indeed, improper execution plans would not move rural tourism to development. This is why the major tourist attractions in the county of *Babol* have remained unknown. An important issue in tourism marketing is 7P Marketing mix model. It is one of the concepts that can be of use for planning to achieve a desirable state of tourism in the region. On this basis, the research seeks to achieve the following purposes:

- Check the status quo components of the marketing mix of rural tourism in the county of *Babol*
- Identify and prioritize the components of the marketing mix impact on rural tourism in the county of *Babol*
- Provide a strategic model for the development of rural tourism marketing in the county of *Babol*

2. Methodology

From the viewpoint of its objective, this study is an applied one, and, in terms of its method, it is analytic. The method of data collection was attributive and survey. The statistical population of this research included 223 active individuals in the field of rural tourism and 10 local officials who all completed a questionnaire. In the first step, the local authorities were asked for their opinions, and a primary model was designed by using the ISM software to evaluate the relationships among the elements of the marketing mix of rural tourism. In the second step, to the test the primary model, the comments of the rural tourism activists and the LISREL software was used. In the third step, an attempt was made to determine a scenario for the future of the marketing elements by means of the MicMac software.

3. Results

The results of the first step showed that, among the seven elements detected for the marketing mix of rural tourism (i.e. product, price, promotion, distribution, physical evidence, planning and people), the two elements of planning and people concern local authorities and are the most fundamental. Also, the elements of distribution, product, promotion and physical evidence were found effective. As for price, it was effective too but as an intermediary element. The results of the second step showed that both groups of the participants considered planning" as the most influential element in the marketing of rural tourism. Next to that, there was the element of distribution. Unlike the officials, the local activists believed that people do

not have a significant effect on the other elements. They also believed that distribution, on the second level of the model, serves as the most fundamental element of mediation, and the elements of product, promotion and physical evidence are of direct effect while price is of indirect effect. Meanwhile, according to the local activists, in terms of the significance of their impacts, product and physical evidence are opposite of price. The results of the last step showed that, from the perspective of the local authorities, promoting and planning have the greatest direct impact on the success of rural tourism marketing. The other elements of the study take impressions from these two elements but more from planning.

4. Discussion

To identify the mixing elements of marketing which are of effect on the success of rural tourism marketing, one should look at the design of the future scenario. As the results show, from the perspective of the local authorities, promoting and planning elements have the most direct impact on the success of rural tourism marketing. They also have the greatest impact on the other elements of the study. This is due to the dynamic nature of environment planning in the future and the need for a dynamic attitude with regard to the changing conditions. The second element that accepts the most impact from the other elements is the product element (Fig.1).

5. Conclusion

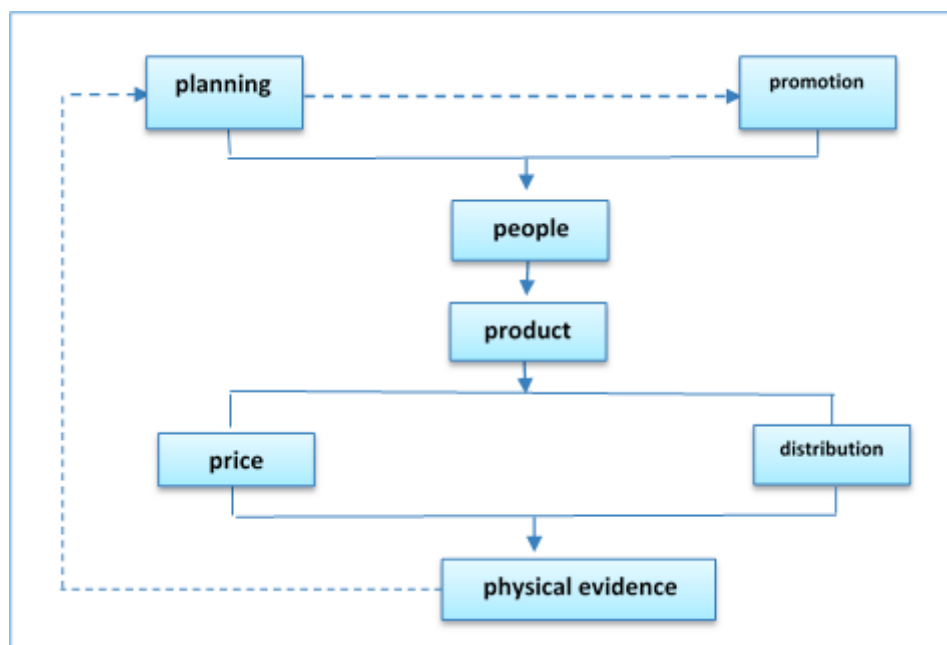
Based on the results, the rural tourism development initiative in the study area is in the hands of the government. Therefore, to improve the status of rural tourism in the area, it is necessary to enact laws, policies and networks. Also, strengthening the skills and culture of the local community through education will help to identify the opportunities of tourism and the market and, thereby, provide the ground for the activity of new actors in the market.

Acknowledgments

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest



(Fig .1):Futuristic Model of Rural Tourism Marketing Elements (Research results)

Journal of Rural Research

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