

## Research Paper

# An Analysis of the Relationship Between Sustainable Competitive Advantages and Tourists Satisfaction and Loyalty (Case Study: Rural Tourism in Golestan Province)

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**Citation:** Baghaei, S., & Dadkhah, H. (2019). [An Analysis of the Relationship Between Sustainable Competitive Advantages and Tourists Satisfaction and Loyalty (Case Study: Rural Tourism in Golestan Province) (Persian)]. *Journal of Rural Research*, 10(3), 470-487, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrur.2019.279360.1352>

**doi:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrur.2019.279360.1352>

Received: 16 April 2019  
Accepted: 04 Aug. 2019

## ABSTRACT

Recently, rural tourism is a type of tourism that has the capacity to attract tourists along with rural development by making surplus income, providing a better quality of life for residents, and improving infrastructures. Regarding the mediating role of overall satisfaction in the rural tourism industry, this study investigates the relationship between the factors of sustainable competitive advantages and loyalty through a descriptive-analytical approach. The statistical population of the research involves all visitors of Golestan province villages. The statistical sample comprises 386 tourists based on Krejcie and Morgan Table. A questionnaire is used for data collection, and a pre-test is applied to test its validity and reliability. The validity of the survey is confirmed by content methods, tools, and constructs, and its reliability is confirmed by Cronbach's alpha method. The authors, while thoroughly reviewing the theoretical foundations and selecting the members of the statistical sample using simple random sampling, have tested the research hypotheses by a structural equation modeling method. Using LISREL 8.8 software, the results of the structural equation model show that there is a significant relationship between factors such as quality, value, image, and satisfaction and dependent variables of overall satisfaction and loyalty.

### Key words:

Loyalty, Satisfaction, Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Tourism Industry

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## Extended Abstract

### 1. Introduction

**T**oday, visitors are considered the most critical asset in tourism areas. Therefore, the attention of visitors is of the main concerns of tourism development organizations, and they attempt to attract and maintain visitors and make them permanent and loyal

visitors. This study investigates the relationship between the factors of sustainable competitive advantage and tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Image of tourists, quality of destination, tourism destination evaluation and satisfaction in the destination are the main sustainable competitive advantages in the tourism industry. Accordingly, the study efforts will be centered on marketing tourism destinations, determining competitive positions and ways of attracting tourists.

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Another purpose of this study is to understand better how loyalty to a destination works better. Through identifying the factors leading to loyalty, this study shows that loyalty leads to the development of strategies that will open up possibilities for improving competitiveness. Therefore, this study aimed to provide useful solutions for managers in tourism destinations to enhance the level of loyalty and increase the number of visitors, by which the profitability of tourist destinations and places will be increased.

## 2. Methodology

The research is an applied study carried out through a survey. This is, from the perspective of research, descriptive correlation research because it investigates the relationship between the research variables. For statistical analysis, Factor analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), and LISREL software are used. The study population is all tourists who visited rural areas of *Golestan* province. The statistical sample is 386 people based on Krejcie and Morgan table. A questionnaire is developed for data collection, and a pre-test examines its validity and reliability. The content methods, tools, and constructs confirm the validity of the survey. Additionally, reliability is confirmed by Cronbach's alpha method.

## 3. Results

The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between sustainable competitive advantages and satisfaction and loyalty of the rural visitors. In other words: first, the destination image has a positive effect on overall satisfaction. Secondly, the destination image has a positive impact on loyalty. Thirdly, the perceived quality of destination has a positive effect on overall satisfaction. Fourth, the perceived quality of the destinations has a positive effect on loyalty. Fifthly, the perceived value of destinations has a positive effect on overall satisfaction. Sixthly, the perceived value of the destinations has a positive impact on loyalty. Seventhly, satisfaction has a positive effect on overall satisfaction. Eighthly, satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty. Ninthly, overall satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty.

## 4. Discussion

The development of the tourism industry has many benefits, including employment creation, economic prosperity, and improving income distribution in tourism regions, and as a leading industry, it can play an essential role in the economic, social, and cultural development of communities. Tourism has become a new and significant factor in rural development and attracts tourists to rural areas

and contributes to a better spatial and temporal distribution of these flows. Rural tourism also increases non-urban profits, in addition to other aspects, through creating an additional income and providing a better quality of life for residents, and developing infrastructures and employment level.

## 5. Conclusion

The study shows that satisfaction and loyalty are critical for maintaining a destination's competitive advantages, which in turn leads to economic stability and a positive effect on the level of employment in local communities.

Keeping visitors engaged and loyal guarantees development. The findings of the study showed that tourists evaluated the destinations positively because of improving the quality of services in the tourism destinations. This, in turn, can attract more visitors and allows the previous ones to re-visit the destinations and can create sustainable competition.

Building upon the research findings, the following suggestions are provided:

1. It is suggested that media advertising and guides are created, and the pictures of rural tourism attractions in *Golestan* province are made available to visitors.
2. It is suggested that a suitable and favorable environment in tourist destinations is created, and short and long-term plans are developed to improve the rural tourism space and increase the loyalty of tourists.
3. It suggests putting resolving issues related to the rural tourism destinations in the priority to increase tourist's satisfaction. Therefore, actions such as extending communication routes, creating suitable places for visitors to rest, promoting environmental health, etc. are high priority requirements.
4. It is suggested to extensively address the issues related to the satisfaction of rural tourists, such as security in tourism areas, improvement of the overall tourism environment, creation of proper environment health, increasing tourism services.

## 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