

## Research Paper

# The Competitive Position of Gilān Province Tourism Brand: Stimulants and Consequences❖


Sadegh Monem Lafmejani<sup>1</sup>, Seyed Mahmoud Shabgoo Monsef<sup>2\*</sup>, Ali Gholipour Soleimani<sup>2</sup>

1. Ph. D Student of Business Management, Department of Business Management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.

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## Abstract

The competitive position of the destination brand is the provision of a framework by the destinations through which they can show their distinction from other destinations. Various aspects of tourism brands have been addressed in various studies, but the issue of competitive positioning of tourism brands has not been addressed. Competitive positioning of a brand not only creates a positive image in the audience's minds towards competitors but also turns relative advantages into competitive advantages, leading to development in various dimensions and identification. The purpose of this study was to present a model of the influential factors and consequences of the competitive position of the tourism brand in Gilān province. It was a mixed-methods study in which the systematic model of data-based theory has been used in its qualitative part. In terms of the data collection method, it is field research. The research population included professors of management and geography and managers of tourism in Gilān province. In the qualitative part, theoretical sampling was used as one of the types of purposeful sampling, and the number of samples due to theoretical saturation was 11 individuals. The results of semi-structured interviews to develop a model of the competitive position of the tourism brand of Gilān province by coding method showed that 321 open codes were identified and classified in 26 concepts based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach in seven main categories, including competitive sources, the competitive position of Gilān brand, contextual factors, destination management, and positioning and destination branding operations, intervening factors and consequences. Also, to measure the model designed in the quantitative part, the opinions of 169 managers, master experts, and experts in the field of tourism in Gilān province were used. The results of this section also showed a good fit of the designed model with the obtained data. Other results showed that the key factor in positioning the destination brand in customers' minds is the operations related to positioning, branding, and advertising of that destination, and all other factors will be more noticeable with the correct implementation of this factor

**Keywords:** Destination Positioning, Tourism Brand, Destination Competitiveness, Destination Brand Competitive Position.

## Highlight

- The competitive positioning indices of the destination brand were identified using the foundation data theory.
- Factors affecting the competitive positioning of the destination brand and the relationship between them were identified.
- The role of destination brand competitive positioning on the environmental, social and economic consequences of the destination was analyzed.

## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Tourism branding means to form a special image of a destination in the eyes of target audience, hoping this special image will help solve the problems of tourism and lead to attract investment. Accordingly, the goal of

❖ This article is extracted from the first author's doctoral dissertation in Rasht Islamic Azad University.

\* Corresponding Author: shabgoomonsef@iaurasht.ac.ir

branding a place is much more than marketing and advertising for destination, it aims to make the given destination competitive (Wei et al., 2020, p. 2). In order to make the brand of tourism destinations competitive, it is necessary to use various tools and strategies, one of which is the concept of brand positioning. Brand positioning is a set of brand activities that leads to gain a specific position in the minds of target market audience for that brand (Donnelly et al, 2020, p. 7). Kotler et al. (2018) in the book entitled as 'fourth generation marketing' emphasize effective brand positioning needs brand identity in its various layers (including roots, essence and outer shell) and brand codes. Positioning tool should also be changed accordingly and redefined from customer's point of view. This is where 4P, i.e. product, price, place, promotion, change into 4C, i.e. customer value, convenience, cost, and communication. Positioning in fourth age marketing does not consider the customer as a goal but as the main ruler who must solve his/her problem (Kotler et al., 2018). In this regard, since the limited study in the field of brand competitive position to investigate the role and importance of tourism brand and determining its position, this study aims to address the causes and consequences of tourism brand competitive position in Guilan through a paradigm approach. By accurate identification of each individual component affecting the brand competitive positioning, tourism brand modeling will help not only to identify the relationship and role of each component, but also to explain its consequences. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to design and explain a model for tourism brand position in Guilan.

## Methodology

The method used in this study is a mixed one (qualitative and quantitative). In qualitative part, it uses 'grounded theory' strategy. The instrument used for data collection in qualitative part, was a semi-structured interview with pre-designed questions. Theoretical sampling method was used to select the sample for interview, so that 11 subjects including university professors, officials and policy makers in Guilan tourism field were the sample members of this part of the study. Qualitative data analysis in the present study is based on the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998). According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative data analysis for theorization requires the use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In this study, coding operations were performed after interviewing and writing them, through MAXQDA. In quantitative data analysis, after performing confirmatory factor analysis test in LISREL 8.8 to measure the validity of the data obtained from the questionnaire, designed model was tested using structural equation modeling of partial least squares method in Smart PLS3.

## Results and discussion

The results of data analysis obtained from semi-structured interviews by coding method showed that 321 open codes were identified and categorized into 26 concepts and 7 categories including competitive resources, Guilan brand competitive position, contextual factors, destination management and its positioning and branding operations, intervening factors and consequences. The study of relationship between categories revealed that destination management, competitive resources, contextual factors and positioning and branding operations plays an effective role in Guilan brand competitive position, which in turn will bring about economic, social and environmental consequences.

## Conclusion

Given to the results and in order to improve the competitive position of Guilan brand, it is suggested first to focus on branding and advertising issues. It can be consisted of three steps. To create a destination brand, first of all one should find the main characteristics and values of destination and travelers' perception from that given destination. Next, appropriate communication skills should be improved in order to increase brand awareness. After implementing destination branding, undertaking organizations should also monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of destination brand through investigation and measurement of communications effectiveness. Therefore, they can determine the success and failure factors of destination brand for proper compatibility.

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