

The Effect of Social Marketing on Development of Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global economy. Tourism is one of the major sources of revenues in leading countries annually compared to other economic activities. In fact, tourism is the world's greatest industry, which is growing day after day. Iran has great potentials to attract tourists; however, this industry is not well developed unfortunately. Using effective marketing tools and parameters can help to develop and improve tourism industry in Iran. According to theoretical foundations of this research and consultation with ecotourism experts, four variables including building culture, educational level, environment protection and familiarity with nature were considered as independent variable while ecotourism development was considered as dependent variable in this study. The relationship and effect of independent variables on the dependent variable was investigated in this study. Descriptive research method was used to conduct the study. This is an applied research considering the goal of the research. The statistical population included managers and experts in the field of ecotourism in following selected cities of Gilan province including Anzali, Lahijan, Masal, Fooman, Rasht, Langrood, Roudsar, Roudbar, Talesh and Astara in this study. The statistical population was infinite. The samples were selected using random sampling method. The sample size was obtained as 82. To ensure that all questionnaires were filled out, 100 questionnaires were given to the sample. In this study, 10 cities from 16 cities of Gilan province were selected, which were more populous. The questionnaires were distributed among them. In order to obtain solutions for the research issue, four components were developed in a conceptual model. Several questions were designed for each one of components. Finally, a questionnaire with twenty-two questions were designed and given to individuals within the statistical population. After the questionnaires were filled out, the obtained findings were analyzed using SPSS software. Finally, it was concluded that all four components have a positive impact on ecotourism industry. These components include building culture by ecotourism organizations, familiarity with nature, awareness of the people and eco-tourism travel guide in the field of ecotourism, educational level in order to create a positive attitude in the staff and people toward eco-tourism travel guide in the field of ecotourism and environmental protection by local people and eco-tourism travel guide in Gilan province.

Keywords: Social marketing, environmental protection, familiarity with nature, education, nature, education, ecotourism, building culture.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical and Experimental Foundations

Probably it may be argued that tourism is the only service sector, which provides trade opportunities for all nations around the world, regardless of their development (Bohalis, 1999). Tourism is the largest source of foreign exchange income in many developing countries compared to other export sources such as textile, agricultural and clothing products. However, these countries did not face much commercial challenges on the road to development of ecotourism.

Tourism industry is discussed as the third largest industry in the world after oil and automotive industries. This makes a significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (Neto, Frederico, 2003). In fact, tourism is one of the most dynamic economic activities in current age. This plays an important role in local sustainable development. This industry makes great social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits using internal and external sources simultaneously (Ebrahim-Zadeh and Aqasi-Zadeh, 2009). Nowadays, tourism is considerably important in economic development of country. Therefore, economists have called it "invisible exports" (Shaw, G. and Williams, M.A, 2004) and refer to it as the main factor effective on sustainable development (Zarei, 2009). Ecotourism is one of the sectors in tourism industry. Development of ecotourism among domestic tourists led to redistribution of income and financial resources in suburban parts of country, which are usually less developed than other parts of country. Meanwhile, development of ecotourism as one of the country's tourist attractions for international tourists may be considered as a source of attracting huge foreign currency income for the country (a source of income for country). Thus, development of this industry can be greatly beneficial. The importance and effective role of this industry in economic, social and cultural development motivated many local, regional and national managers and planners to make plans and attempt for development of this industry anywhere around the world (Genning, G, 2001). According to tourism experts, one of the main causes of failure of tourism sector in Iran lies in little attention paid to new tourism marketing (Zarei, 2009).

Therefore, this study examined the impact of social marketing on development of ecotourism industry. Social marketing applies both concepts and tools of social marketing in order to affect individual attitudes, which ultimately promotes individual and communal culture.

Marketing

Marketing refers to an effort to establish a relationship between value of the product (goods or services) and the customer. Marketing is sometimes also known as the art of selling; however, sale is considered as one of the small sectors of marketing (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In encyclopedia, marketing is defined as "providing goods or services to meet needs of the consumers." In other words, marketing involves understanding the customers' needs and matching the products with the customers' needs to meet those needs. This provides profit for the company. Successful marketing requires having the right product at the right time and right place and ensuring that the customer is aware of presence of the product. This will result in future orders (Sergio Zimen, 2008).

Social Marketing

This concept is the latest concept, which is introduced in five marketing philosophies. A number of scholars and experts at marketing believe that the concept of marketing only emphasizes on providing customers' needs and demands. In contrast, social and communal health is not included in this philosophy. They believe that organization's managers should develop their own goals and objectives. They should also attempt to identify needs, demands and interests of their own target market, so that their company can provide those needs and demands more efficiently compared to competitive firms. These measures in turn provide well-being and health of both community and the customer (Vinrich, Aklien, 2001).

Ecotourism and Tourism

Nature attractions and different geographic climates along with legacy of human civilization, racial and ethnic diversity have brought great potential in economic field for mankind. Taking advantage of these grounds requires providing a variety of conditions, which as a whole depends on stability of tourism sector. Nowadays, there are great environmental and historical potentials in Iran. Then, this country is one of the world's most attractive tourism area. However, due to several problems, such as false attitudes of foreign tourists toward Iran, several cumbersome administrative processes inhibit tourist arrival in this country. On one hand, these problems may have adverse impact on both quantity and quality of tourism industry; on the other hand, tourism was not taken seriously in this country, as it should be. Therefore, it seems that "tourism industry should be managed and developed based on effective planning in a sustained, controlled and consistent manner in Iran for the purpose of progress, particularly in the sector of natural resources. Thus, tourist arrival makes significant economic benefits without creating serious social and environmental problems in Iran. Moreover, tourist benefits are preserved for future application (Nekouei Sadri, 2006)." Ecotourism is one of various forms of tourism, which is also called eco-tourist or excursion in nature. In fact, tourism based on environmental sustainability, with a primary focus on experiencing natural environments, which enhances both culture and environment, is specially focused on in the tourism industry. This is increasingly growing compared to other forms of tourism industries. Nowadays, most of Tourism Authority institutions in different countries around the world acknowledge importance of ecotourism and more importantly the necessity of environmental protection. Therefore, tourism is proposed as an appropriate strategy to

preserve and take advantage of natural resources. Several countries have tested this strategy. In fact, this strategy is implied as ecotourism based on taking responsibility.

Tourism

Tourism refers to travel, ecotourism or in general leisure travel. However, in recent years, it was referred to as traveling outside work or living places. An individual who travels is called tourist. The term tourist was used when middle class individuals attempted to travel. This was possible when people had more financial capability and longer life.

Most tourists are concerned with climate, culture and nature more than other issues. The rich have always traveled to distant places, not by accident, but for a particular purpose.

For example, they travelled to visit famous buildings and see valuable masterpieces, learn new languages and taste different foods. Nowadays, organized tourism industry is considered as a very important industry around the world. The word tourist (tourism) is extracted from the word tour, which means travelling. This stems from the Latin word turn, which means turning around, going back and forth between source and the destination. This came from Greek culture into Spanish, French and finally into English cultures. Rich people usually travel around the world to see artistic masterpieces, learn new languages, become familiar with new cultures or be familiar with other countries' cuisines. The terms "ecotourism" and "tourism" was first used in 1937 by the League of Nations. Tourism is defined as traveling abroad, which may last more than 24 hours.

By accurately studying the itineraries remained from the past, we can concluded that Muslims explored Middle East and the Far East from the ninth century to the fourteenth century, including Japan, Africa and Europe. Muslim tourists presented their trip reports in geographical books or in historical and religious studies. In this era, there is no report of European and Christian western travelers. Apparently, they did not have any interest in tourism. Sometimes a western Jewish traveler and trader were found that travelled to the East. From the fifteenth century onwards, especially in the seventeenth century, it was found out that tourists stream flow is exactly the opposite. Western tourists were interested in tourism and travelled to the East. There are various reports of customs, cultural heritage, and types of government, goods and products of Islamic cities. In contrast, there is no report on Muslim tourists. If any report was found on Muslim travelers, it only included Islamic pilgrimage from one area to another area (Halicioglu, Ferda, 2004).

Ecotourism

Ecotourism or ecological tourism or ecological travelling refers to a form of tourism in which the tourists travel the world to visit wilderness and intact areas where they come across a variety of plants, birds, fish, and other animals.

The tourists who visit living ecology and nature are called eco-tourist or nature tourist. Foreign ecological tourists contribute to a large portion of revenue in most countries. "This was called nature tourism by Academy of literature in Iran. Due to emergence of nature tourism in Iran and in the world in the past few decades, it is not proper to call it nature tourism anymore. It is better to call it ecotourism" (Nekouei Sadri, 2006).

The principal activities of ecotourism are associated with the living nature. It is defined as a responsible trip to natural areas by conserving the environment and improving the quality of lives of local people. Ecotourism cause the least damage to local environment and culture.

Ecotourism and Marketing

Ecotourism is a modern phenomenon whose main motivations are as follows: tourism, observing and enjoying nature and natural landscapes and cultural phenomena. It may be a new source of income in sustainable development (Noori, 2010). Tourism, especially ecotourism in current world, is a pure industry and the third dynamic economic phenomenon, which is booming and developing after oil and automotive industries around the world.

The World Tourism Organization estimated that revenue obtained by tourism industry might be higher than other global economic activities regarding export items in future decades, which is increasing day after day (England research, 2005). Since tourism and ecotourism increase revenues, many countries around the world were motivated to make large investment in these sectors (Tremblay, 2004). Population growth and consequences of industrial life increased individual needs to recreational areas with natural attractions in order to elude from industrial lifestyle for the purpose of mental relaxation (Rezghi, 2009).

Development of tourism activities with the purpose of tourism often includes a variety of natural, cultural, historical attractions. Leading countries were able to meet a wide range of needs in the area of tourism. They were also able to take advantage of what was achieved in this field due to following reasons: their natural landscapes

such as lakes, sunny beaches and snowy mountains, their ancient history or other terms, creating artificial attractions as well as organizational structure and providing a platform for large investment.

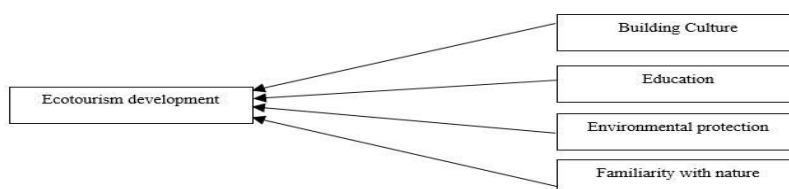
Application of effective marketing tools and parameters are among the factors that can develop and improve the tourism industry (Sardi Mahkan, 2001). In this regard, tourism marketing is particularly important. This is because marketing is considered as a management process (Pender, Lesley, 1999) which includes all activities relevant to planning, production of tourism products and attracting tourists. These require marketing operations and activities. Marketing includes all the activities, which involve assessment of the market and needs of customers of that market along with evaluation of services, facilities, costs and facilities. These aimed at achieving customer satisfaction. This includes programs targeted to specific groups of customers and persuading them to purchase or use services (Van Beynen , M, 2007). Poor tourism marketing in Iran Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts and Tourism Organization is the main cause of retardation of this industry in Iran. However, this industry is growing day after day around the world (Islam, 2003).

Tourism marketing refers to identification and anticipation of needs of tourists and providing facilities to meet their needs as well as informing, and motivating them to visit. This will result in satisfaction of tourists and realization of organizational goals. The tourist aims to travel around the world to enjoy the attractions hidden in tourism destinations. In other words, presence of tourist attraction in tourism destination attracts the tourist to visit various tourism destinations (Brown, Keith, G., 2009). Tourism products differ from physical goods and products. In other words, these are experienced in a period within various stages in the first phase. This is complex process, which is difficult to evaluate. In the second phase, this product is risky for tourists. This is because it not only imposes opportunity costs, but also the time lost cannot be compensated any more. In the third phase, a part of this product is designed based on personal desires of tourists such as escaping from pressures of life, acquiring new experiences, having fun and enjoying life. Therefore, planning and development of tourism requires identification of these motivations and demands. Tourism marketers are responsible for identification of tourists' motivations and demands. In the end, the tourism product is capable of dual operation. In other words, these products are not only used by native tourists, but also local people to take advantage of many products offered in this industry (Xinyan, Zhan, 2009). Due to specific characteristics of tourism products, the role of marketing in this industry is considerably important compared to other industries. Then, effective application of tourism marketing tools is essential for a country or a region. This is because the marketers can present information to potential tourists on what a specific area can offer potential tourists and encourage them to visit that area (Laimer., Peter .and Juergen.,Weiss, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive research method was used to conduct the study. This is an applied research considering the goal of the research. The statistical population included managers and experts in the field of ecotourism in following selected cities of Gilan province including Anzali, Lahijan, Masal, Fooman, Rasht, Langrood, Roudsar, Roudbar, Talesh and Astara in this study. The statistical population was infinite. The samples were selected using random sampling method. The sample size was obtained as 82. To ensure that all questionnaires were filled out, 100 questionnaires were given to the sample. In this study, 10 cities from 16 cities of Gilan province were selected, which were more populous. The questionnaires were distributed among the sample. In order to obtain solutions for the research issue, four components were developed in a conceptual model. Several questions were designed for each one of components. Finally, a questionnaire with twenty-two questions were designed and given to individuals within the statistical population. This questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included questions about demographic information such as gender, age, marital status and level of education. The second section consists of 22 questions. The first to fifth questions were about building culture while the sixth to tenth questions were about education variable. The eleventh to sixteenth questions were related to familiarity with nature while the sixteenth to twenty-second questions were related to environmental protection. After the questionnaires were filled out, obtained findings were analyzed using SPSS.

The Research Model



Research Hypotheses

- Building culture by ecotourism organizations in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism industry.
- Educational level in ecotourism sector in Gilan province has a positive impact on ecotourism industry.
- Familiarity with nature in ecotourism sector in Gilan province nature has a positive impact on ecotourism industry.
- Environmental Protection in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this study, 5% of individuals had diploma degree, 18% of individuals within the sample had foundation degree, 49% had bachelor degree, 27% had master degree and 1% had Ph.D. In addition, 45% of selected individuals within the sample were married while 55% were single. Furthermore, 27% of individuals within the sample were 25 years old, 34% were between 25 and 30 years old, 21% were between 30 and 35 years old and 18% were over 35 years old. Moreover, 24% of individuals were female while 76% were male.

CONCLUSION

The First hypothesis: building culture by ecotourism organizations in Gilan province has a positive influence on development of ecotourism.

Obtained p-value was less than 0.6. Then, H1 is accepted. This means that building culture by ecotourism organizations in Gilan province has a positive influence on development of ecotourism. The results obtained from this study are in line with those obtained by Hedsen, Tosam, Jenkins and Thomas (Hedsen, 2005; Tosam and Jenkins, 1996; Thomas, 2004).

The Second hypothesis: educational level in order to create a positive attitude in the staff and employees toward ecotourism travel guide in Gilan province has a positive impact on ecotourism industry.

Obtained p-value was less than 0.6. Then, H1 is accepted. This means that educational level in order to create a positive attitude in the staff and employees toward ecotourism travel guide in Gilan province has a positive impact on ecotourism industry

Results obtained from this study are in line with those obtained by Malki (Maleki, 2007).

The Third hypothesis: familiarity with nature and awareness of people and ecotourism travel guide in ecotourism sector in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism.

Obtained p-value was less than 0.6. Then, H1 is accepted. This means that familiarity with nature and awareness of people and ecotourism travel guide in ecotourism sector in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism.

Results obtained from this study are not in line with those obtained by Roosta and Satari, Naseri, Bohalis and Hedsen (Roosta and Satari, 2001; Naseri, 1996; Bohalis, 1999 and Hedsen, 2005).

The fourth hypothesis: environmental protection by the people and ecotourism travel guide in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism industry.

Obtained p-value was less than 0.6. Then, H1 is accepted. This means that environmental protection by the people and ecotourism travel guide in Gilan province has a positive impact on development of ecotourism industry. Results obtained from this study are in line with those obtained by White and Gillmore (White, 2001, Gillmore, 2002).

Suggestions

Since the first hypothesis is confirmed, ecotourism industry can be developed by observing following issues: creating an appropriate environment along with mutual respect for the tourists, paying attention to intangible attractions and cultural heritage of communities in province, such as culture, art, music, crafts, etc., improving general culture for the methods to deal with tourists, participation of indigenous people in tourism activities with an emphasis on training mechanism and developing Museum of Anthropology and Museum of written documents.

According to the fact that the second hypothesis is confirmed, ecotourism industry can be developed by observing following issues: identifying tourism attractions and facilities through mass media, newspapers, brochures and manuals relevant to tourism, establishment of counseling offices by tourism-related offices in province to inform tourists, development of educational materials for human resources in tourism-related activities to provide efficient services in this sector, employing experts aware of tourist attractions in province in order to

provide correct information to the tourists, development and establishment of colleges and courses related to the field of tourism in province.

According to the fact that the third hypothesis is confirmed, ecotourism industry can be developed by observing following issues: taking advantage of nature and tourism attraction in province in order to attract more tourists to visit this area, creating artificial tourist attractions suitable for conditions of this area and interests of tourists, employing experts aware of the tourist tourism attractions in province to provide accurate information about nature to the tourists, development of directional facilities such as informative signs, construction of welcome and reception offices and departments to introduce nature attractions to the tourists, establishing consulting offices by tourism-related offices in province to inform tourists. According to the fact that the fourth hypothesis is confirmed, ecotourism industry can be developed by observing following issues: preventing destruction of agricultural and horticultural lands to produce more tourism attraction products relevant to Gilan province and natural resources conservation, restoration and reconstruction of damaged or semi-old buildings and places to create a favorable environment for tourists, beautification of urban resorts in province such as parks, local parks, etc. to optimize available space in tourism centers and nature attractions, paying attention and focusing more on variables such as physical appearance, environmental landscape, etc., existence of suitable and attractive parks and recreational centers in communication paths within province and adopting required policies for environmental protection.

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