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Original Article

Analysis of Ethical Dimensions Affecting the Personal Narratives of Sports Tourists in Yazd Province

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Abstract

Introduction One of the emerging branches of the tourism industry is sports tourism, which not only impacts the economy but also raises new challenges in designing personal narratives and engaging with tourists. Accordingly, the present study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the ethical dimensions influencing the personal narratives of sports tourists in Yazd Province.

Material and Methods: This research was qualitative in nature and employed the grounded theory approach. The statistical population consisted of experts who had prior experience with personal narratives in sports tourism. Using purposive sampling based on theoretical saturation, 16 individuals were selected as the sample. The research instrument was in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was carried out through open, axial, and selective coding.

Results: The coding results included 117 codes grouped into 40 categories and 17 concepts, which, within six dimensions, formed the paradigm model of the research.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, it was determined that the personal narratives of sports tourists are influenced by causal factors including the social and ethical characteristics of the host community and the characteristics of the tourists. In this regard, contextual factors include citizen-oriented behaviors and infrastructures, while intervening factors comprise methodological barriers and ethical barriers to hosting. Strategies for greater effectiveness on the tourist experience include implicit ethical and social norms, awareness-raising, facilities, operational measures, and services. The outcomes of these strategies encompass community-centered, cultural, economic, psychological, and distinctive capacity dimensions. Overall, it can be said that one of the most important resources for influencing and attracting tourists is the ethical culture and citizen-oriented behaviors, the social and ethical characteristics of the host community, and the implicit ethical and social norms, whose significance was illustrated in this research from the perspective of experts.

Keywords: *Personal Narratives, Sports Tourists, Ethics*

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the tourism industry is recognized as one of the key pillars of the global economy, playing a role not only in job creation and increasing national income but also in encompassing a wide diversity of sub-sectors. One of the most important emerging branches of this industry is sports tourism—an interdisciplinary field formed at the intersection of two powerful and profitable industries, tourism and sports, which has rapidly secured its place in the sustainable development planning of countries [1]. Sports tourism not only impacts the economy but also introduces new challenges in destination management, personal

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narrative design, and tourist engagement. Today, tourism managers face a growing need to design interactive and unique experiences—experiences that go beyond participation in sporting events to include scientific–cultural interactions, active learning, and co-creation of meaning with the host community [2, 3]. In this process, tourist expectations have also changed; they now seek narratives and personal storytelling that led to personal enrichment, the discovery of new horizons, and deep engagement with the environment. On the other hand, the tourism experience is a multifaceted, subjective, and highly personal phenomenon in which various elements—such as location, sports activities, and psychological motivations—interact to shape a unique experience [4]. Among these, memorability is considered one of the key indicators of success in the tourism industry. However, research on the "memory of the tourism experience" is still in its early stages [5]. Designing innovative and impactful experiences has now become a core capability in the tourism industry and has gained extensive reflection in social literature. According to theorists such as [6–8], individuals' desire to travel can partly be attributed to a sense of alienation in everyday life, wherein tourism emerges as a way to regain meaning, authenticity, and social interaction. In this context, sports tourism offers a unique opportunity to create a multidimensional and valuable experience in the minds of tourists through excitement, challenge, and sociability. In line with this, numerous studies have been conducted to define, describe, and understand the nature of the tourism experience. Memorable narratives or extraordinary experiences are considered decisive aspects of the overall journey [6]. Traditions of tourism research that examine the nature of tourists' narratives range from descriptive and interpretive perspectives to quantitative and positivist approaches [9].

Within this scope, the importance of ethics in sports tourism cannot be overlooked. Despite its significance, this industry faces numerous ethical challenges:

One of the main ethical challenges in sports tourism is balancing the economic benefits with social and environmental costs. While this industry generates significant revenue, it can also have negative impacts on local communities and the environment. For example, it was reported that the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil generated USD 14 billion in revenue but also resulted in the displacement of thousands of local residents and considerable environmental destruction [10].

Another challenge lies in ensuring fair treatment of local communities. These communities often bear the brunt of the negative impacts of sports tourism, including rising living costs, displacement, and environmental degradation. It is essential that local communities be involved in decision-making processes and that measures be taken to ensure they benefit from sports tourism [11].

Therefore, as this industry grows, it is crucial to ensure that the benefits of sports tourism are fairly distributed among stakeholders and that negative impacts are minimized. Ethics in sports tourism contribute to [12]:

- Promoting cultural understanding and mutual respect between tourists and local communities
- Protecting the environment and preserving natural resources
- Ensuring fair labor practices and safe working conditions for local workers
- Supporting and contributing to the development of local economies

Accordingly, attention to ethical components in the host community is of great importance. At the same time, without a doubt, the experiences and personal narratives of sports tourists are also influenced by the ethical and social components

of the host community. Thus, the present study was conducted with the aim of examining the ethical dimensions affecting the personal narratives of sports tourists in Yazd Province. This objective stems from the fact that little research has been conducted in this field, while the city of Yazd—as a historical city with morally principled people—possesses great potential to motivate and attract tourists, particularly in the sports sector, and can foster the development of tourism, especially sports tourism. Therefore, designing and evaluating the personal narratives of sports tourists from multiple perspectives is necessary and can provide valuable guidance to decision-makers in this field.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and field-based in terms of data collection. A qualitative research method (grounded theory) was employed to gather data.

The statistical population of the study consisted of experts who had prior experience with personal narratives in sports tourism (with over seven years of experience in tourism and interactions with tourists in various areas of sports tourism). Using purposive sampling based on theoretical saturation (a method also known as snowball sampling), 18 individuals were selected as the sample.

Description of interviewees' characteristics: The personal characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of the interviewees

Gender	Job	Educational Degree
Female	Faculty member	Ph.D.
Male	Employee	Ph.D.
Male	Faculty member	Ph.D.
Female	Researcher	Ph.D.
Male	Faculty member	Ph.D.
Female	Sport tourist	B.A.
Female	Expert of sport tourism	M.A.
Female	Expert of rural tourism	M.A.
Female	Expert of sport tourism	Ph.D.
Male	Staff	Ph.D.
Female	Researcher	Ph.D.
Male	Athletic	Ph.D.
Female	Tourist	M.A.
Male	Faculty member	Ph.D.
Male	Dean of mountain climbing	M.A.
Male	Sport tourist	Ph.D.
Male	Sport tourist	Ph.D. student
Male	Sport tourist	Ph.D.

The research instrument was in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was carried out using open, axial, and selective coding.

RESULTS

In the first step toward extracting the data obtained from the interviews, open and axial coding was carried out. The results of the qualitative interview analysis showed that the effective indicators, derived from 117 extracted

codes, formed 40 subcategories. Subsequently, selective coding was conducted. The results of the coding process are presented in Table 2. Finally, the selective codes, or the main categories of the study, were classified according to Strauss and Corbin's method, and the research model was designed.

Table 2: Selective coding of research data

	Open codes	Concepts	Categories
Casual factors	• Historical attractions • Art works • Social diversity • Warm and friendly behavior of the citizens of the host community	Social and cultural attractions	Social and moral characteristics of the host community
	• Ethical and fair • Paying attention to ethical and cultural training • Charter of citizenship right • Public justice	Social and Ethical characteristics	
	• Familiarity with local culture • Knowledge of the local environment • Interaction with local culture	Ecotourism	Tourists' characteristics
	• Interest in sports • Desire for recreational travel • Attractiveness of local culture and art	Tourists' motivation	
	• Social risk-taking • Positive attitude • Social interactions	Tourists' behaviors	
Background factors	• Harmony and alignment • Communication and friendship	Altruism	Citizen based behaviors
	• Voluntary and benevolent behaviors • Willingness to help • Strong relationships based on empathy and trust	Empathy	
	• Presence of companions and family • Family welfare services	Group services	Infrastructures
	• Standard accommodations • Efficient transportation • Shopping markets	Infrastructure facilities	
	• Adequate parking • Gym facilities • Proper nutrition	Hosting services	
	• Removing cultural barriers • Facilitating private investment • Obtaining necessary permits	Facilitating laws	Regulations
	• Medical support for tourists • Safety regulations • Tourism guarantee fund	Supportive laws	
Intervening variables	• Restrictions on issuing tour permits • Lack of authorized tours • Strict supervision	Irrational Rules	Methodological obstacles
	• Lack of government investment	Investment	

	• Lack of support for the private sector		
	• Lack of clear goals • Weak management • Neglect of economic development	Management Inefficiency	
	• Cultural conflicts • Inauthentic handicrafts • Concerns about cultural impacts	Cultural and ethical conflicts	Host ethical obstacles
	• Environmental destruction • Tourist crowds • Holding events during sensitive seasons	Environmental impairments	
	• Violent behavior • Vilification • Disregard for the privacy of others	Unethical behavior of tourists	
Strategies	• Overt and hidden values of the host community • Optimizing the social desirability of the host community	Attention to the values of the host community	Implicit social and ethical norms
	• Value areas of the host community and tourists • Attention to the customs and beliefs of the host community and tourists	Creating shared value for tourists and the host community	
	• Training tourism staff • Improving the skills of activists	Awareness	Awareness raising
	• Using tour leaders • Cooperation with agencies • Attending exhibitions	Public relations	
	• Online services • Sharing experiences on social networks	Media services	
	• Developing railways and airports • Security infrastructure • Advanced transportation	Infrastructure	Facilities
	• Appropriate equipment • Catering services • Cleaning the area	Welfare	
	• Regular monitoring • Unification of laws • Prevention of illegal construction	Legalization	Executive
	• Effective macro-management • Comprehensive development plan • Attention to demographic characteristics	Planning	
	• Introducing local culture • Offering local souvenirs • Holding traditional ceremonies	Cultural services	Services
	• Local music and art • Special pristine tours • Recording memorable moments	Attractiveness of programs	
Concequences	• Creating vitality • Strengthening social motivation • Increasing life expectancy	Social activity	Sociocentrism
	• Supporting sports events • Interethnic communication • Indigenous participation	Social participation	

	• Preserving historical monuments • Using new energies • Paying attention to endangered species	Environmental protection	Cultural
	• Mutual respect • Mutual understanding • Changing attitudes	Values and beliefs	
	• Preserving local culture • Accepting diverse cultures • Strengthening indigenous identity	Culturalization	
	• Local employment creation • Business boom • Increasing GDP	Revenue generation	Economical
	• Economic innovation • Allocation of capital to tourism • Improving the regional economy	Economic growth	
	• Memorable experiences • Strengthening emotional feelings • Enhancing spiritual perceptions	Tourist perception	Psychological
	• Creating individual tendencies • Respect for personal identity • Discovering identity in interactions	Identity development	
	• Increasing interest in sports tourism • Yazd's competitiveness • Sustainable development	Attracting tourists	Distinctive capacity
	• Destination branding • Positive mental image • Tourist satisfaction and loyalty	Image creation	

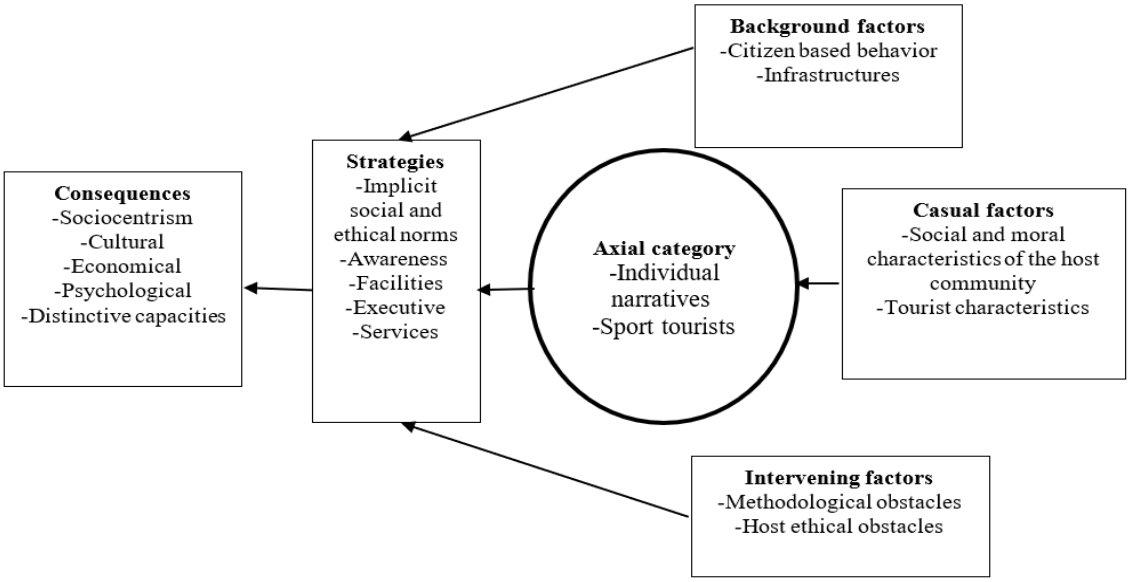

Figure 1: Conceptual research model

DISCUSSION

The coding results encompassed 117 codes, 40 categories, and 17 concepts, which, within six dimensions, shaped the paradigm model of the study. Based on this, the causal factors included the social and ethical characteristics of the host community and the characteristics of the tourists; the contextual factors included citizen-oriented behaviors and infrastructure; the intervening factors included methodological barriers and ethical barriers to hosting; the strategies included implicit ethical and social norms, awareness-raising, facilities, operational measures, and services; and the consequences included community-centered, cultural, economic, psychological, and distinctive capacity dimensions. Numerous studies support and align with the findings of the present research.

In this regard, a study [13] entitled The Effect of Tourism Experience Quality on Perceived Competitiveness and Behavioral Intentions of Foreign Sports Tourists found that the quality of the tourism experience can influence the perceived competitiveness of Iran, and in turn, perceived competitiveness can affect the behavioral intentions of sports tourists. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that by improving the quality of the tourism experience at all stages of travel—from planning to post-trip—the perceived competitiveness of Iran as a sports tourism destination can be enhanced, ultimately having a positive effect on tourists' future behavioral intentions. Similarly, some researchers [14] in their study stated that when tourists evaluate their personal narratives at a high level, tourism destinations can expect loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion to help market their products. Previous research has shown that the tourist's experience of a destination can influences many aspects of their attitudes and behaviors toward that destination [15]. Researchers [16], in a study entitled The Impact of Experiential Consumption and the Social Environment of Local Tourists on the Intention to Revisit Tunisian Hosts: The Mediating Role of Participation in Personal Narratives, found positive and direct effects of the social environment on participation in the experience, whereas experiential consumption did not show such an effect. Moreover, the results indicated significant and positive indirect effects of the social environment on the intention to revisit through participation in the experience. Additionally, some researchers [17], in a study entitled The Effect of Tourism Experience on Revisit Intention through Destination Image and Satisfaction, found that the tourism experience has a direct effect on destination image, satisfaction, and revisit intention. Other researchers [18] showed both direct and indirect effects of memorable tourism experiences on behavioral intentions through destination image and tourist satisfaction in yoga tourists. There is also a considerable body of research emphasizing the importance of ethical components in tourist experiences and in the growth of sports tourism, which can serve as important resources for validating the findings of the present study [19–21].

Therefore, it is suggested that destination managers understand the consequences of structuring tourism moments and consider new approaches for designing and analyzing destination experiences. By developing ethical protocols and establishing the necessary infrastructure for their implementation, they can create a pleasant tourism experience for sports tourists.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the nature of narratives and experiences in sports tourism holds the key to effective management of tourism destinations. Ethical and social factors are among the most

important components influencing these narratives, yet despite their significance, they have received limited attention in previous studies. Hosting any type of sporting event in a country can serve multiple purposes in promoting a sport: focusing on social values, involving multiple stakeholders, strengthening relationships, stimulating integration and dialogue between different cultures, keeping traditions alive, promoting the uniqueness of the host territory, validating the administrative capacities of governing bodies, and generating profitability. Organizing a sporting event can be a useful tool for regional, urban, and tourism marketing, as it can help increase the number of tourists and visitors to certain locations, enhance the image of these places, boost their reputation, provide important recreational activities, attract investment and funding, and generate significant economic impacts. However, in the "experience economy," tourist satisfaction primarily derives from reconnecting with the local community. The quality of tourism depends not only on the reception system but, above all, on the quality of the territory-defined as the integration of resources, facilities, and intangible assets. A sporting event, regarded as a potential generator of tourist flows, can be considered part of the tourism supply of a territory and, in fact, becomes a "tourism resource" and a "pull factor" for the destination, selecting one or more "demand segments." Clarifying the concept of a destination in relation to sports tourism events is essential. A territory, in itself, is not a tourism destination. A tourism destination is a combination of natural and/or cultural resources that possess sufficient attraction to persuade a traveler to make the necessary effort to reach it, along with the facilities required for accommodation. One of the most important of these resources for influencing and attracting tourists is the ethical culture and citizen-oriented behaviors, the social and ethical characteristics of the host community, and the implicit ethical and social norms-whose significance, from the perspective of experts, has been illustrated in this study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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