THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING MODEL IN ADVENTURE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF IRAN ADVENTURERS

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Introduction

Adventure tourism is one of the important parts of the tourism industry, which grows very fast (Beckman et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2014). The ATTA (Adventure Travel Trade Association) has been surveying its growing database of tour operators every year since 2006. Every year adventure tour operators are asked to share information about their business and trends they are experiencing in terms of demographics, destinations, and activities of travellers (ATIS, 2021). According to the report of this Association, international adventure tourism market is worth 683 billion dollar while an accurate assessment of the global economic value of adventure tourism is impossible due to its non-refined scope (Sung, 2004). The UNWTO points out that growing digitalization and urbanisation are key reasons for the rising demand for adventure tourism, which is resulting from the importance of natural and cultural value. Therefore, the adventure tourism industry provides ecological, cultural and economic benefits to destinations (UNWTO, 2014). Attracting high-value customers, inspiration to sustainable practices, supporting the local economies and environment are major parts of these benefits (ATTA, 2016). In line with industry growth, academic interest has also been increasing significantly since the 2000s in this area (Cheng et al., 2018). But, according to the complexity of this industry, there is still lack of studies and research in adventure tourism (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). One of this research gaps are marketing, particularly sustainable marketing. Because Adventure tourism develops with focus on sustainability, therefore, the concept of tourism marketing should consider the general principle of marketing models with concentration on sustainability indexes (Buckley, 2007; Güzel, Şahin, 2019; Andrada, Felicia, 2018).

This paper is based on research and consultancy on marketing models around the world, where several frameworks have been tested and implemented in adventure tourism. In this research, the authors will illustrate a framework for the sustainable marketing model in this industry. Recently, there are many texts which deal with the marketing mix sustainability, but they are providing little guidance on operating more sustainably, for the benefit of society at large, especially in tourism industry. To fill this gap, this article has proposed a systematic framework.

Sustainable marketing mix

The roots of marketing approach already appeared in the North American marketing research in the 1960s. According to K. Moller, the focus was shifting from functional marketing management theory to strategic areas of marketing as marketing service, the political dimensions of distributive systems management, the interactions of industrial sales networks and the emergence of numerous new trends. Marketing models are the instruments which allow management to structure a problem, identify and evaluate its determinants and solution options, and implement the best solution. In this research, the main focus is on Marketing mix, because it is the easiest and most popular model that companies apply in practice (Moller, 1992). Marketing mix results from the single P (price) of microeconomic theory (Chong, 2003). McCarthy in 1964 presented the „marketing mix" as the „4Ps", as a means of translating marketing planning into practice (Bennett, 1997). Marketing mix is not a scientific theory, but it is a conceptual framework, which helps managers in decisions they make by configuring their offerings, that they can prepare suitable consumers' needs. The tool is useful to develop long-term and short-term strategies (Palmer, 2004). It is possible to modify the proportions in marketing mix regarding each component and differ from product to product. The marketing mix management paradigm has dominated marketing thought, research and practice (Grönroos, 1994), and „as a creator of differentiation" since it was introduced in 1940s. Kent (1986) refers to the 4Ps of marketing mix as „the holy quadruple… of the marketing faith…written in tablets of stone". Marketing mix has been extremely influential in informing the development of both marketing theory and practice (Möller, 2006). Marketing mix is very easy to handle and allows the separation of marketing from other activities of the company and the delegation of marketing tasks to specialists. Also, the components of marketing mix have an influence on a company's competitive position, therefore it is a powerful concept (Grönroos, 1994). There are also two benefits regarding marketing mix. Firstly, it is an important tool, which makes marketing managers able to see, to a large extent, a matter of trading off the benefits of

one's competitive strengths in marketing mix against the benefits of others. The second benefit of marketing mix is that it helps to reveal another dimension of marketing manager's job. All managers have to allocate available resources among various demands, and the marketing manager will in turn allocate these available resources among the various competitive devices of marketing mix. In doing so, this will help to instil the marketing philosophy in the organization (Low, Tan, 1995). Nowadays, companies prefer to consider sustainability in order to maintain steady growth in their business. Sustainability includes the economic, social and ecological responsibility of an organisation and raises the question of how this can be implemented (Liu et al., 2019). With a wide range of sustainability activities, companies make a foundation for long-term growth. The marketing activities of organisations concentrate on social and ethical needs of consumers such as environmental protection, reducing inequality, sustainable production and consumption pattern (Choi, Sung, 2013). Activities in sustainable marketing have a positive impact on the improvement of the brand image, growth in company profits and longevity (Maignana, Ferrell, 2001). Marketing activities based on sustainability must take cultural factors into account in order to improve the cooperation with society and raise the communication between customer of the organisation for sustainable growth (Ko et al., 2015). So, a company with sustainable oriented marketing has to adopt its marketing mix activities with respect to sustainable characteristics, because it promotes the core values that the business actually value like environmental wellness, recourse security and human health (Baldassarre, Campo, 2016; Dangelico, Vocalelli, 2017; Delafrooz et al., 2014).

Adventure tourism and sustainability

Adventure tourism is a substantial industry sector, which is very large and complex, but there is not so much research about it (Buckley, 2004). There are many different definitions for adventure tourism (Weaver, 1998; Fennel, 1999; Manning, 1999; Bentley et al., 2000; Bentley, Page, 2001; Newsome et al., 2001; Page, Dowling, 2002), but in general, this means a commercial tour which will be guided and the main attention is an outdoor activity based on the features of the natural environment that usually needs some sport equipment and existing for the tour clients. However, most of the relevant research literature appears to come from other areas of tourism, outdoor recreation, and outdoor education. In the field of ecotourism or even wilderness management, there are few studies about adventure tourism, although some briefly mention commercial outfitters and outdoor recreational activities.

The concept of sustainable tourism is recognised as a process to manage resources for reaching social, economic, and aesthetic needs with respect the culture, biological diversity, and ecology (Arteaga et al., 2018). The definition of sustainable tourism differs depending on the dimension of the tourism and sustainability terms and is also impacted by the environmental and political approaches (Butler,

1999; Saarinen, 2006; Broccardo et al., 2017). Companies could add value to sustainability by adopting more sustainable processes and practices or by developing and commercialising new technologies; the so-called green technologies to solve sustainability problems (Valeri, Baggio, 2020). Sustainable development is a shared agenda for global concerns that everyone agrees on but bringing these global concerns into public policy is complex. According to the Brundtland report, the most widely accepted definition of sustainable development is 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development must consider the social and economic factors as well as the environmental ones (UN., 1987).

In general, with regard to sustainable development, there are 17 goals which should be achieved: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean Energy, decent work and economic growth. Industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequality, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace and justice strong institutions and Partnerships to achieve the goal (Sustainable Development Goals, 2021). The goals and their meaning have been described in the following table:

The Sustainable Development Goals are the pattern to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. So, the companies committed to sustainable development require to consider all those goals.

Tourism in Iran

In Western countries, Iran is traditionally known as Persia and tourism has always been a common goal *of economic and cultural activity in modern Iran (Mozaffari, et al., 2017). But this industry faces a lot of challenges following the recent sanctions from western countries, but it has witnessed a rapid increase during the landmark nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. In the last three decades, the world oil market changed enormously and in general, most of the oil-exporting countries in Middle East have introduced changes to liberalise their economy with tourism industry. They tried to consider viable opportunities to grow this market (Morakabati, 2013; Prayag, Hosany, 2014). According to the classification in the world tourism organisation, Iran is a part of South Asian countries (Hall, Page, 2017) but it is considered as a middle eastern country in the international media (Ebadi, 2017). In Middle East, Iran has a strong geopolitical existence with long-time tensity with Sunni countries, driven by Saudi Arabia (Zamani-Farahani, Henderson, 2010). In the period of 1967 to 1977, Iran was one of the most important destinations for western and regional travellers (Morakabati, 2011). Even with the huge potential of Iran's tourism industry, this industry was broken seriously since the fall of the Pahlavi ancestry under Mohamad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1979, the time of the revolution in Iran (Ghaderi, Henderson, 2012).

Table 1. The 17 sustainable development goals and their descriptions

GOAL	DESCRIPTION
1. No poverty	The goal is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Its objectives include ensuring that all populations, and particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, have equal rights to economic and natural resources, access to basic services, property, and new technologies.
2. Zero Hunger	In this vision, all elements will be considered that can end hunger, eliminate all forms of malnutrition, and build inclusive and sustainable food systems.
3. Good Health and well-being	The objective is to ensure universal health for all populations and prepare effective medicines and vaccines for everyone.
4. Quality education	It ensures provision of equal learning opportunities for all and every girl, and boy should have free primary and secondary education by 2030.
5. Gender equality	The aim is that all genders have the same right, duties, and opportunities.
6. Clean water and sanitation	The purpose of this point is to improve water quality by decreasing pollution, avoiding waste disposal, and minimising hazardous chemical materials by 2030.
7. Affordable and clean energy	The aim is to guarantee to have affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
8. Decent work and economic growth	The purpose consists in creating opportunities for everyone to work productively with a fair income, security at work, and social security for families.
9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	This goal concentrates on development of high-quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including regional and cross-border infrastructure, in support of economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.
10. Reduced Inequality	The aim is to achieve progressively and sustain above-national income growth for the bottom 40 percent of the population by 2030.
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	The target of this point is to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
12. Responsible Consumption and Production	The vision of this goal is to take proper actions in terms of business policy to adopt sustainable practices.
13. Climate Action	The mission is here to take urgent actions regarding climate change and its influence.
14. Life Below Water	It reflects the sustainable usage of oceans, seas and marine resources and its objective is to decrease marine pollution by 2050.
15. Life on Land	The target should be achieved by 2030. It states that the earth's ecosystem should be considered in a sustainable way and forests should be managed sustainably.
16. Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	It provides clear, effective, and responsible institutions that can raise non-discriminatory laws and policies, and stop violence, terrorism, and crime.
17. Partnerships to achieve the Goal	It means, that the partnership between governments, and private and public bodies in different countries should be increased to achieve all goals.

Source: own elaboration based on Sustainable Development Goals, 2021

Recently, Iran, with an area of 1.648 million km², has unique differences in cultural, ethnic, linguistic, climatic, architectural, and historical features. There are 30 UNESCO-registered landmarks and 74 other sites and monuments on the list of UNESCO. Iran has scorching deserts, humid forests, and cold mountain regions. Iran has also become popular with medical tourism in the Middle East and in the world because of the affordable costs, and advanced medical and health services (Akbari, Azizi, 2014; Asadi, 2011).

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify characteristics of sustainable marketing activities in adventure tourism and create a global framework for the companies in this field. Qualitative research is used to gather information by focus group discussion through an interview with the leader of adventure tourism industry in Iran, Mr. Sina Razmpishe, who is the CEO and Founder of Iran Adventurers Group,

official member of ATTA (ATTA Membership, 2021), and got an international Award for the Best Sustainable Tour Itinerary Program Winners 2021 in the World (The International Ecotourism Society Awards, 2021). This data has been collected from database of Iran Adventures Group. According to the collected data within 12 years of experience and over than 100,000 domestic and international tourists, the following tables show the statistical percentage of adventure tourism in a breakdown into different activities, age and type of travel.

Based on the data, the following figure shows the structure of the Iran Adventures Group in general:

Adventure tourism and ecotourism in Iran started around 2005, and are on the increase. In adventure travel, activities are divided into several categories. They can be land based like hiking or trekking. Another type of activities are water based, like diving and rafting. The third type of activities constitute air-base ones, like skydiving and paragliding. The last type are rope based activities,

Table 2. Statistical numbers of different activities (number of travellers in percentage according to different type of activities)

Type of activity	Land base	Water base	Rope base	Air base
Number of travellers in percentage	67.00%	21.00%	7.00%	5.00%

Source: own elaboration

Table 3. Statistical number of ages (number of travelers in different age in percentage)

Age	15-20	20-30	31-40	41-50	+50
Number of travellers in percentage	0.01%	55.00%	27.00%	10.99%	7.00%

Source: own elaboration

Table 4. Statistical number of types of traveling (number of travellers in different type of travel)

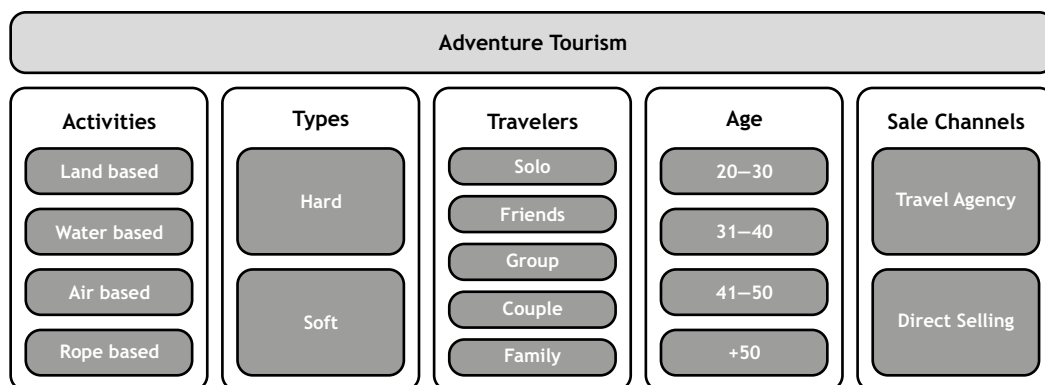| Type of Travel	Solo	Friendship	Group	Couple	Family
Number of travellers in percentage	7.5%	31.00%	20.00%	25.50%	16.00%

Source: own elaboration

Figure 1. Classification of adventure tourism based on their activities, type, age and sale channels
Source: own elaboration

like technical caving and technical canyoning. The type of adventure travel could be hard and soft. Hard adventure refers to activities with high level of risk, intense commitment and advanced skills. The activities like skydiving or scuba-diving belong to hard adventure. On the other hand, soft adventure is the type of adventure, where there is no need for experience or minimum requirement of experience, and the risks are low, like in case of hiking and snorkelling. In Iran Adventurers Group, travels are based on 3 main factors: physical activities, interaction with the environment and natural resources, interaction with the culture of communities. To design a sustainable tour Itinerary Program, trips, routes, accommodation and conditions are examined in detail. The whole route will be traversed, and the parts of the route will be carefully examined. At this stage, the degree of difficulty will be determined, and the required list will be prepared. All threats will be identified, and emergency instructions will be designed. The entry and exit points of the route will be determined and instructions related to management and evaluation will be prepared. All the principles of standard and safety are considered for a high-quality and safe trip. An itinerary program will be designed as a convenience program for the customer. Destinations will be chosen with regard to the values of sustainability and the same applies to Eco-conscious accommodation. The programs will be planned in various seasons in different locations like Lut-Desert in the middle of Iran or Caspian Hyrcanian mixed forests, one of the oldest forests in the world, national parks, and islands in Persian Gulf. The company also prepares specific courses for its employees. They will gain physical and advanced skills such as climbing, first aid & superviral skills, abilities to face risks, management skills, search & rescue capabilities, communication, and customer relation expertise.

Additionally, Iran adventurers supports local economies, and develops sustainable activities. Using energy and water are limited. Iran Adventurers Group aims to develop education and culture at the same time in its programs. Therefore, the travellers will learn about local wildlife and corporate in different programs regarding environment protection. Local businesses will be empowered and enabled to reach the standard level. In fact, the transfer of knowledge leads to the development of the local economy and also improves the quality of tourism services, which contributes to the purpose of sustainable development.

To explore the understanding of traditional knowledge about culture and history, Iran adventurers plans historical cultural theatres and storytelling with local people for travellers. They are also committed to the Leave No trace Campaign (Leave No trace Campaign, 2021). It means, 7 main rules are always considered: Planning and preparing, Travel on double surface (It means, travel should not cause any damage to the land or waterways), Disposing of waste, leaving what will be founded like avoiding damaging live trees and plants and minimising site alterations, minimising campfire impacts, respecting the wildlife and finally considering other visitors. The Code is another organization, which Iran adventurers is committed to. It is organization to protect children in travel and tourism (The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, 2021).

The forms of travelling in adventure travels include: solo, friends, group, couple and family of different ages. Family travel is increasingly popular now, so marketing activities are being adapted to the audience's persona. Adventure tourism is one of the major branches of tourism, which is growing dramatically. The common sale channels are travel agencies and direct selling. The largest share of sales is conducted through travel agencies, but due to the rapid information and branding that takes place, especially in local communities, direct selling is growing rapidly.

In the following part, the result of the above information will be interpreted.

Research results

Based on given information from Iran Adventurers Group, sustainable marketing mix for adventure tourism is classified as followed:

There is a transformation from traditional 7Ps marketing mix to 9Cs sustainable marketing mix in adventure tourism.

Convenience Program: Regarding product in sustainable marketing mix, it needs to be a convenience program, because convenience and control are the most important aspects of a travel policy to a traveller. Designing an Itinerary Program for Iran adventurers should have equipment and facilities suitable for elderly travellers, Cleaning of attractions or accommodation, and security of travel or accommodation that has tourist attractions, service facilities, and tours services.

Customer Price: The price should be customer price, which is suitable for customer with all facilities and services. All ecological, social and environmental costs should be included in sustainable pricing.

Communication, Corporation and communal digital marketing: Instead of promotion, communication, corporation and communal digital marketing are playing an important role. Communal digital marketing is the

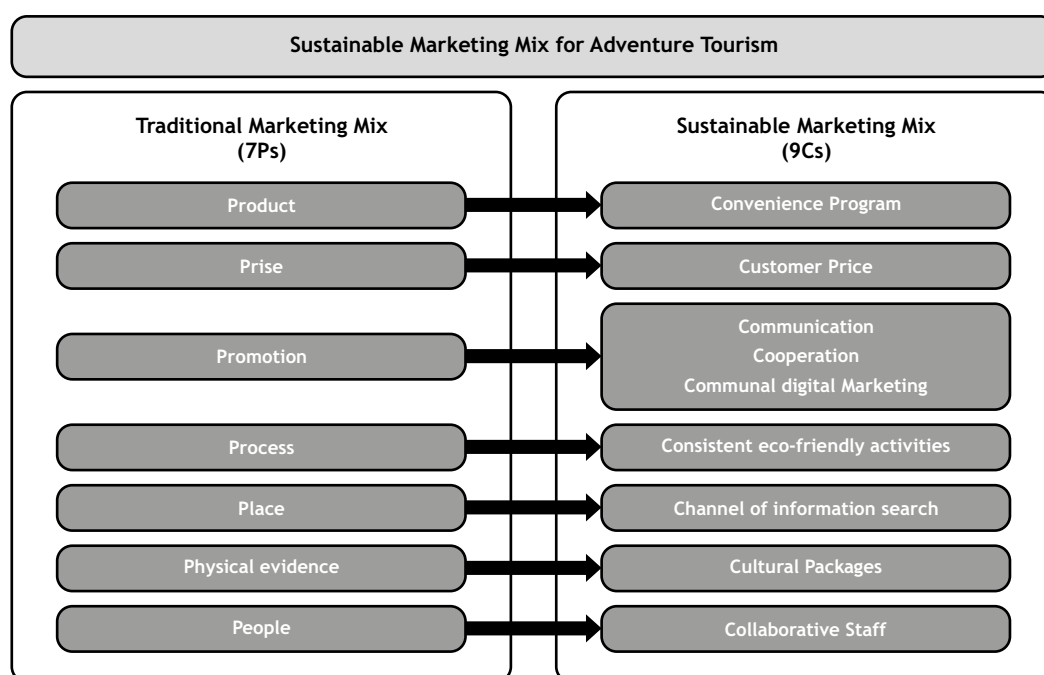| Sustainable Marketing Mix for Adventure Tourism	
Traditional Marketing Mix (7Ps)	**Sustainable Marketing Mix (9Cs)**
Product	Convenience Program
Prise	Customer Price
Promotion	Communication / Cooperation / Communal digital Marketing
Process	Consistent eco-friendly activities
Place	Channel of information search
Physical evidence	Cultural Packages
People	Collaborative Staff

Figure 2. The proposed concept model for sustainable marketing mix for adventure tourism
Source: own elaboration

type of marketing that is based on incorporate customer's experience through different ways like sharing videos, pictures. Word of mouth is the major element to gain the market by Iran Adventurers Group. Corporation with local organisations is also key factor to achieve the loyalty of local and cultural groups.

Consistent eco-friendly activities: The process should include only eco-friendly activities consistently by this company. Additionally, customer involvement will be improved and increased for environmental saving.

Channel of information search: In regard to place, Iran Adventurers Group's sales channel should consist of a convenient route to access tourist attractions or accommodation, transportation services to local attractions or accommodation.

Cultural packages: Physical evidence can have an impact on customers' beliefs and feelings about services. There is also an impact on customer behaviour and the service process of employees. Therefore, it is important to design cultural packages, because every place has a unique story, and a cultural and heritage tour helps narrate it.

Collaborative staff: To achieve the goals of sustainability in each organisation, there is a need to have collaborative staff, who are aware of their mission, and they can trust each other. Collaboration is key success for the innovation. Through the collaborative staff, many conversion opportunities are created. The staff have always different plans like games, watching and analysing movies together, analysing different situations together to find their harmony in the team.

Conclusion

According to the author's opinion, the population in Iran is young and freer in comparison with the last decade. On the other hand, the country has old history and different type of environments in the north, west, south and east. These factors caused that tourism, especially adventure tourism has grown significantly in the last years. Therefore, adapting to this type of tourists has implications for tourism management. Additionally, relevance of sustainable marketing concepts leads to awareness of social and ecological responsibility and became a profitable and competitive advantage for the organisations. Especially, for the tourism industry after the pandemic, a phenomenon occurs called „revenge travel" (Revenge Travel…), where people can suddenly travel without any restrictions and this sudden demand can cause a lot of damage for the environment. Thereby, a unique sustainable concept is essential to satisfy the expectations of travellers, protects the environment and local small businesses at the same time. This research formulates a new concept for sustainable marketing model, which consists of 9 Cs: Convenience Program, Customer Price, Communication, Corporation and communal digital marketing, Consistent eco-friendly activities, Channel of information search, Cultural packages, Collaborative staff. The study results are expected to be useful for the companies in the tourism industry particularly in adventure tourism. For the

next research, the created framework could be compared with the sustainable marketing model in some developed countries in order to assure the consistency of this concept and to examine if it can be considered as a unique universal model in the tourism industry.

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Koncepcja zrównoważonego modelu marketingowego w turystyce przygodowej: studium przypadku irańskich poszukiwaczy przygód

Streszczenie

W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat zainteresowanie naukowców turystyką przygodową znacznie wzrosło. Celem artykułu jest wykorzystanie klasycznego modelu marketingu mix i jego rozwinięcie w postać modelu zrównoważonego marketingu mix na potrzeby turystyki przygodowej, a tym samym stworzenie nowej koncepcji. Do tradycyjnych siedmiu P (produkt, cena, promocja, ludzie, miejsce, proces i dowody fizyczne) dodano nowe składowe, tworząc nową koncepcję 9C: Program Convenience, Korporacja, Cena dla Klienta, Komunikacja, Wspólny marketing cyfrowy, Konsekwentne działania przyjazne dla środowiska, Kanał badań informacji, Pakiety kulturowe, Personel współpracujący. Ta nowatorska struktura została opracowana i zweryfikowana w oparciu o doświadczenia irańskich poszukiwaczy przygód – w ostatnim czasie jednym z liderów w tej branży na świecie.

Słowa kluczowe

zrównoważony rozwój, zrównoważony marketing, turystyka przygodowa