

Review Article

The Impact of the Perceived Value of Tourism Events on Loyalty to the Tourist Destination: (A Case Study of Zanjan City)

Firoozeh Hajialiakbari¹, Sanaz Salmanmohajer^{2*}

1. Assistant Professor in Marketing Management, Department of Management, Zanjan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zanjan, Iran.

2. M.S. in Marketing Management, Department of Management and Economics, Faculty of Humanities, Zanjan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zanjan, Iran.

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Abstract | Recent research in the field of tourism has not paid much attention to the overall effects of the events industry. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to propose a solution to attract more tourists to Zanjan city, increase their interest in visiting it, and enhance its ranking as a tourist destination. This research is practical in terms of its objective and falls under the category of descriptive-analytical research. This study employed a survey-based method. The statistical population of this research consisted of tourists visiting the Ash Festival and exhibitions in the Caspian region of Zanjan city, with a sample size of 384 who were randomly selected using Cochran's formula. The data collection tool was a standardized questionnaire developed by Xu et al. (2016). The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed through face validity and factor analysis, and their reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.841. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used for data analysis. Descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS version 24, while inferential analyses and hypothesis testing were performed using Lisrel software. The results of the study indicate that the perceived value of events has a positive effect on the perceived value of travel, and similarly, the perceived value of travel has a positive effect on loyalty to tourist destinations.

Keywords | *Perceived value, Tourism event, Perceived value of travel, Event strategies, Destination loyalty.*

Introduction | Today, tourism exerts a significant impact on the economy, culture, and the regions that host it. Beyond serving as a bridge for cultural exchange among diverse ethnic groups, tourism also plays a crucial role in economic and social advancement (Makvandi et al., 2024). Recognized as a vital industry, tourism has become a focal point for many countries seeking economic growth and development (Gomez et al., 2018). The cultural fabric of a society provides a fertile ground for the expansion of tourism (Ziari et al., 2015). Among the key cultural indicators that attract tourists are organized events, which serve as powerful tools for drawing visitors (Rezvani et al., 2014; Azadehfar, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017).

The 1990s marked a shift in public interest toward more sustainable and profitable forms of tourism, including ecotourism, cultural tourism, local tourism, industrial tourism, and event tourism. Notably, event tourism has experienced substantial growth in recent years. Events constitute an essential component of a destination's tourism offerings, significantly influencing tourist arrivals during off-peak seasons, enhancing the destination's image, and attracting media attention (Bod & Darman, 2023). Festivals and events rank among the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry worldwide. Destination managers have come to realize the necessity of incorporating novel, exciting, and unique attractions into their tourism portfolios to align with

* Corresponding author: 09127408206, sanaz_salmanmohajer@iaui.ir

the evolving interests of visitors and achieve strategic tourism objectives (Jahanian & Sheikhooni, 2023).

Event tourism requires a multifaceted infrastructure, as it is a complex, system-based activity that involves multiple interrelated sub-sectors (Manouchehri et al., 2023). The appeal of a tourism destination is not solely defined by its natural landscapes, handicrafts, or historical landmarks; rather, the events hosted within a region can serve as a critical factor in drawing visitors. While substantial research has been conducted on the overall effects of tourism, particularly its economic implications, few studies have examined the specific impact of niche tourism industries, such as event tourism (Getz & Page, 2016).

Despite Iran's vast expanse, rich history, and abundant natural and cultural attractions that make it a prime tourist destination (Abbasi et al., 2018), the country has yet to fully capitalize on the potential of event tourism. This sector remains underdeveloped, despite the vast opportunities it presents. Among the various forms of event tourism, local events stand out as a powerful driver of sustainable economic and social development within communities (Khademi et al., 2023).

In Zanzan Province, the tourism industry holds immense potential as a revenue-generating sector. However, the region has not yet effectively harnessed this capacity. Local authorities continue to experiment with various strategies to attract more visitors in the hope of increasing the number of incoming tourists. This is despite the province's cultural, artistic, architectural, and historical significance, which merits deeper exploration and appreciation. Implementing a well-defined strategy to bolster the province's tourism sector could significantly enhance visitor numbers. Hosting multiple tourism events concurrently appears to be an effective approach to engaging tourists and encouraging them to explore Zanzan's attractions.

A prime example of event tourism in the region is the repeated hosting of the Iranian Ash Festival at El Daghi Gavazang, which has evolved into the country's oldest national food festival. Additionally, the Caspian International Exhibition in Zanzan stands as a distinctive tourism initiative. Food tourism has emerged as a growing segment within the global tourism industry, with many countries recognizing its potential as a major tourist attraction (Bahari et al., 2024). However, the underlying rationale, benefits, and challenges of this strategy remain unclear.

This study aims to examine whether the perceived value of tourism events, mediated by the perceived value of travel, alongside the moderating role of event strategies, influences destination loyalty. By analyzing

these relationships, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of event tourism and its broader implications for destination management.

Hypothesis 1: The perceived value of an event influences the perceived value of travel (PVT).

Hypothesis 1-1: The economic value (as a component of the perceived value of an event) has an impact on the perceived value of travel.

Hypothesis 1-2: The social value (as a component of the perceived value of an event) affects the perceived value of travel.

Hypothesis 1-3: The earned value (as a component of the perceived value of an event) contributes to the perceived value of travel.

Hypothesis 2: The perceived value of travel influences destination loyalty.

Research Literature

The economic value of an event refers to a monetary amount that represents the price paid in exchange for acquiring an asset along with the associated rights to benefit from its future use. In recent years, economists have argued that travel costs serve as one of the most effective tools for valuing recreational activities (Khoshakhlagh et al., 2014). To operationalize this variable, six indicators have been identified: affordability in terms of travel time, cost savings, reduction of additional expenses, the monetary value associated with the visit, the value of time spent at the destination, and the enjoyment and entertainment derived from the experience. These indicators are assessed using a six-item scale, with scores ranging from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 30.

Social value in the context of an event is often understood as the general behavioral models, collective norms, and functional expectations accepted and desired by society. The arrival of tourists at a destination fosters interactions and relationships between visitors and local hosts (Haji Hasan, 2018). This variable is operationalized through three key indicators: having ample social opportunities, experiencing positive feelings toward others, and the ability to interact with different people. These factors are measured using a three-item scale, with a minimum possible score of 3 and a maximum of 15.

Earned value pertains to a consumer's overall assessment of the benefits obtained from a product or service based on their perception of what they received relative to what they expended to obtain it. Simply put, perceived quality is the balance between received benefits and incurred costs (Zarei Matin et al., 2012). To measure this construct, four indicators have been selected: gaining a meaningful way to acquire experience, satisfying

curiosity, expanding knowledge, and engaging in new learning opportunities. These indicators are evaluated using a four-item scale, with scores ranging from 4 to 20. The perceived value of travel encompasses the benefits gained and costs incurred from purchasing and consuming tourism-related products or services. This perception reflects a traveler’s overall impression of their participation in a journey, encompassing both positive and negative feelings, ultimately shaping their mental image of the trip (Xu et al., 2016, 5). This construct is operationalized using four indicators: the value of experience gained from the visit, the significance of newly acquired experiences, the extent to which the visit met personal needs and desires, and overall satisfaction with the travel experience. These indicators are measured using a four-item scale, with scores ranging from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 20.

Destination loyalty is a multifaceted concept that includes a visitor’s intention to return, their willingness to recommend tourism products, attractions, and cultural experiences at a specific location to potential travelers (ibid.). The measurement of this construct involves seven indicators: perceiving Zanjan as a destination worth visiting at least once, recognizing it as a beautiful tourism destination, acknowledging its diverse range of tourist attractions, appreciating its abundance of natural sites for recreation, assessing the adequacy of its tourism infrastructure, expressing a desire for a return visit, and recommending the destination to others. These indicators are assessed using a seven-item scale, with scores ranging from a minimum of 7 to a maximum of 35. The conceptual model of this research, shown in Fig. 1, illustrates the relationship between the variables.

Theoretical Background

Jahanian & Sheikhooni (2023) conducted a study titled “Factors affecting the attraction of tourists to the commemoration event of the Sage Abolghasem Ferdowsi in Tus City,” and highlighted that festivals and events constitute one of the fastest-growing sectors in global tourism. Destination managers have realized that to

enhance their tourism appeal, they must introduce novel, exciting, and unparalleled attractions. This ensures that visitor demand aligns with the intended tourism development goals. Furthermore, the researchers emphasized that with the continuous expansion of the tourism industry and increasing traveler awareness, offering specialized services and unique products has become essential to meet modern travelers’ needs. The study’s findings revealed that key factors influencing tourist attraction in event tourism include: (1) organizational and managerial aspects, such as alignment among relevant institutions with event tourism goals; (2) cultural dimensions, such as promoting and presenting historical figures to tourists; (3) infrastructure and technological considerations, particularly the establishment of effective communication channels; and (4) educational aspects, such as conducting specialized training programs.

Manouchehri et al. (2023), in their article “A qualitative analysis of the development of event-oriented tourism based on the International Street Theater Festival of Marivan City,” argued that leveraging event tourism can provide a competitive edge in today’s tourism market. Their research indicated that to fully capitalize on and expand the benefits of festival-based tourism, it is crucial to professionalize tourism stakeholders and enhance their marketing and tourist engagement strategies. Additionally, reinforcing the artistic dimension of such events should be a priority.

In another study, Esmailian & Haghghi (2015), in “Examining the impact of hosting cultural events and music festivals on tourist attraction to Kish Island: A case study of Kish Island,” highlighted that tourism is not a neutral industry; rather, it carries significant cultural and social implications. Their research demonstrated how hosting cultural tourism events positively influences visitor attraction and enhances the destination’s image, ultimately encouraging travel and fostering loyalty among tourists.

Yürük et al. (2017), in their study “Analyzing the effects of social impacts of events on satisfaction and loyalty,”

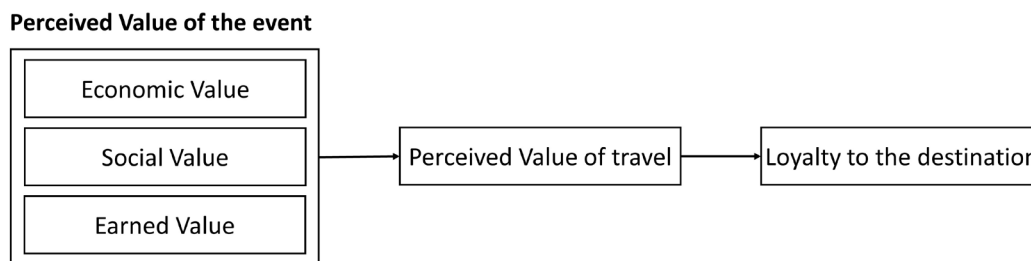


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Study. Source: Authors based on Xu et al., 2016.

noted that the prevalence and popularity of festivals and events are steadily increasing. They suggested that such events significantly contribute to visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

Gao (2024), in a study titled “Research on the impact of cultural festivals on urban regeneration: A case study of Edinburgh festival,” explored the financial effects of cultural festivals on the tourism sector, specifically focusing on the Edinburgh Festival. The findings demonstrated that such events drive economic growth and increase tourist arrivals.

Similarly, Tang (2023), in “Research on the sustainable development of international cultural tourism festivals: The case of Brazilian Carnival and Macau Latin Parade,” analyzed the influence of cultural festivals like the 2023 Rio Carnival on local communities and Brazil’s economy. The study also addressed the challenges and opportunities these festivals present to local populations.

Study Area

Zanjan Province is situated in northwestern Iran. The province comprises eight counties: Zanjan, Abhar, Ijrud, Khodabandeh, Khorramdarreh, Soltaniyeh, Tarom, and Mahneshan. It has 1,210 villages, of which 978 are inhabited, while the rest remain unpopulated. This study specifically focuses on Zanjan County as the research area(Fig. 2).

Zanjan Province spans 22,164 square kilometers, accounting for 1.43% of Iran’s total land area. The county of Zanjan is 330 kilometers away from Tehran. According to the 2016 national census by the Iranian Statistical Center, the county had a population of approximately 521,302 people.

Geographically, Zanjan County is located between 48°28’ to 48°30’ east longitude from the Greenwich Meridian and 36°40’ to 36°41’ north latitude from the Equator.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive and survey-based research approach. It was classified as descriptive-causal since the research variables were examined based

on their existing conditions, aiming to describe and interpret what currently exists. The study focused on prevailing circumstances, relationships, and ongoing processes. Simultaneously, in this study a survey-based methodology was employed to investigate the behavior of a homogeneous sample group, making broader inferences about the target population based on the collected data.

From a temporal perspective, this research fell under cross-sectional studies, as it was conducted at a specific point in time. The statistical population consisted of tourists visiting the Ash Festival and the Caspian exhibitions held in Zanjan. A total of 384 tourists were selected as the sample size, and the questionnaires were distributed and collected from them. The sampling method used in this study was simple random sampling, ensuring that respondents were chosen entirely by chance from the pool of festival attendees.

To determine the appropriate sample size, Cochran’s formula—one of the well-established methods for calculating sample size—was applied. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire adapted from a localized version of the standard instrument developed by Xu et al., (2016). The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale, where responses ranged from “Strongly Agree (5)” to “Strongly Disagree (1).” The questionnaire consisted of general demographic questions—including respondents’ place of residence, gender, education level, age, and annual income—placed at the beginning. Additionally, it contained 27 specialized questions related to the study variables.

The survey was conducted over a one-week period, during which questionnaires were distributed to tourists attending the Zanjan Ash Festival and the Caspian Exhibition. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on the five-point Likert scale. To ensure the questionnaire’s validity, it was first reviewed by the supervising professor and several subject-matter experts. Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was performed to assess

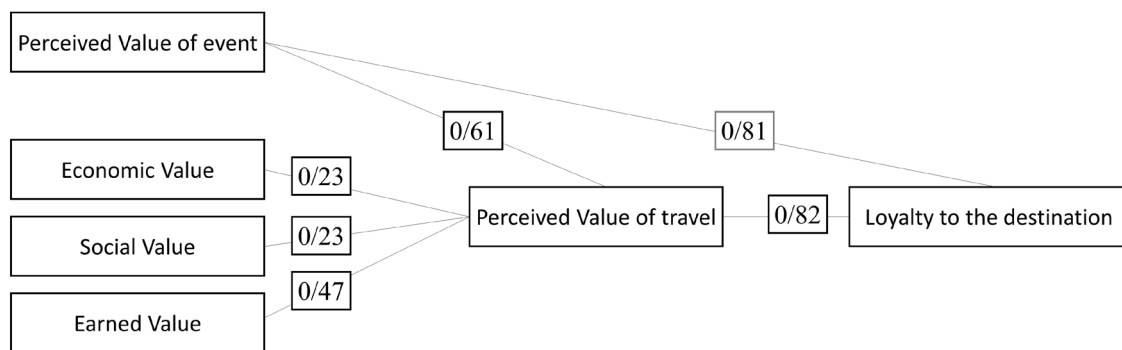


Fig. 2. Illustrates the geographical location of Zanjan City. Source: www StoreGIS.com.

sampling adequacy, yielding values of 0.802 for economic value, 0.76 for social value, 0.782 for acquired value, 0.781 for perceived travel value, and 0.781 for destination loyalty. These values confirmed that factor analysis was appropriate for the selected items.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. With an overall alpha value of 0.841, the results indicate strong internal consistency. Data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics included frequency distributions, percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations, while inferential analysis involved the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and simultaneous regression analysis. Additionally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis and goodness-of-fit indices.

Research Findings

The demographic characteristics of the sample population were first examined. Findings revealed that 228 respondents were female and 156 were male. The majority of participants (136 individuals) fell within the 20–30 age range. Regarding educational background, 144 respondents held a bachelor's degree. In terms of residence, most participants (201 individuals) were residents of Zanjan. Income distribution analysis indicated that the majority (127 respondents) had an annual income ranging between 10 to 20 million tomans. Based on the path analysis model and the values presented in Table 1, the standardized path coefficient between perceived event value and perceived travel, according to Table 3, value is 0.61, with a T-value of 2.92. Given that this T-value satisfies the condition ($|2.92| > 1.96$), it can be concluded with 95% confidence that perceived event value has a significant impact on perceived travel value. Regarding the first sub-hypothesis, according to the path analysis model and the values in Table 2, the standardized path coefficient between economic value and perceived

travel, according to Table 3, value is 0.23, with a T-value of 2.61. Since this T-value meets the threshold ($|2.61| > 1.96$), it can be inferred with 95% confidence that economic value exerts a meaningful influence on perceived travel value.

As for the second sub-hypothesis, based on the path analysis model and the values in Table 2, the standardized path coefficient between social value and perceived travel, according to Table 3, value stands at 0.23, with a T-value of 3.32. Given that this T-value exceeds the critical value ($|3.32| > 1.96$), it follows with 95% confidence that social value significantly affects perceived travel value.

For the third sub-hypothesis, the path analysis model and Table 2 indicate that the standardized path coefficient between earned value and perceived travel, according to Table 3, value is 0.47, with a T-value of 4.85. Since this T-value surpasses the threshold ($|4.85| > 1.96$), it can be deduced with 95% confidence that earned value has a significant impact on perceived travel value.

Concerning the second main hypothesis, the path analysis model and the values in Table 1 show that the standardized path coefficient between perceived travel, according to Table 3, value and destination loyalty is 0.82, with a T-value of 2.00. As this T-value satisfies the condition ($|2.00| > 1.96$), it can be asserted with 95% confidence that perceived travel value plays a significant role in influencing destination loyalty. The final model of the research is shown in Fig. 3.

Conclusion

Theoretical foundations and previous research indicate that the perceived value of tourism events can serve as an effective mechanism for attracting more tourists and, in turn, fostering greater loyalty among them. Today, governments increasingly incorporate events into their strategic frameworks for economic development, national identity reinforcement, and destination marketing. Economists recognize events as essential components of marketing strategies, instrumental in shaping public

Table 1. Key Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Proposed Model (Main Hypothesis Test). Source: Authors.

Index	Abbreviation	Index	Value	Accepted range
Absolute Fit Indices	-	Chi-square	144.29	0.05<
	GFI	Goodness of Fit Index	0.91	90%< GFI
Comparative Fit Indices	AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	0.95	90%< AGFI
	CFI	Comparative Fit Index	1.00	90%< CFI
Parsimonious Fit Indices	RMSEA	Root Mean Square Residual	0.000	10%> RMSEA

Table 2. Key Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Proposed Model (Sub-Hypotheses). Source: Authors.

Index	Abbreviation	Index	Value	Accepted range
Absolute Fit Indices	-	Chi-square	20.86	0.05<
	GFI	Goodness of Fit Index	0.97	90%< GFI
Comparative Fit Indices	AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	0.92	90%< AGFI
	CFI	Comparative Fit Index	1.00	90%< CFI
Parsimonious Fit Indices	RMSEA	Root Mean Square Residual	0.000	10%> RMSEA

Table 3. Path Coefficients in the Structural Equation Model for Hypothesis Testing. Source: Authors.

T-Value	Standardized B Coefficient	(Formative- Reflective) Path	
2.92	0.61	Perceived value of travel (PVT)	Perceived Event Value (ES)
2.00	0.82	Tourist Destination Loyalty (TD)	Perceived value of travel (PVT)
3.93	0.81	Tourist Destination Loyalty (TD)	Perceived Event Value (ES)
2.61	0.23	Perceived value of travel (PVT)	Economic value (EVS)
3.32	0.23	Perceived value of travel (PVT)	Social Value (SV)
4.85	0.47	Perceived value of travel (PVT)	Earned Value (EV)

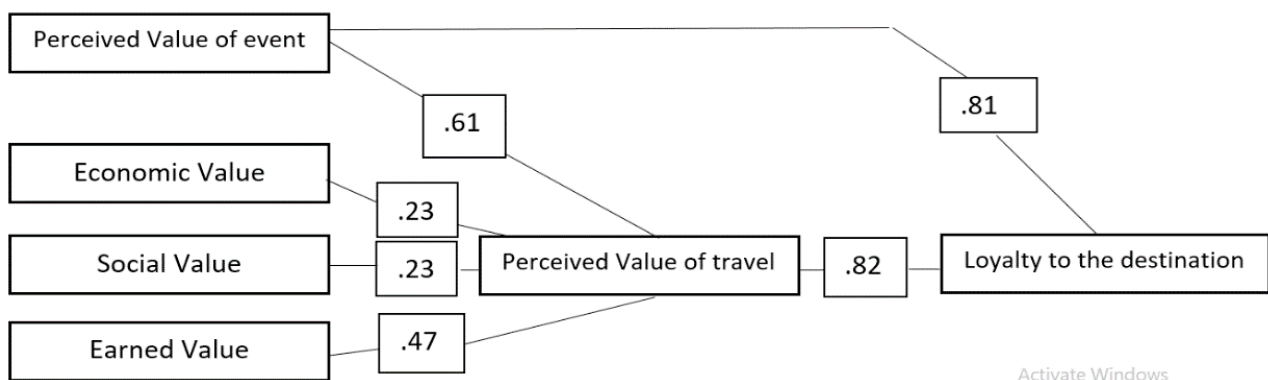


Fig. 3. Final research model. Source: Authors.

perceptions. Given the continuous expansion of the global tourism industry and Iran’s considerable potential across various tourism sectors, careful planning and strategic management can maximize the utilization of the country’s abundant resources to promote different types of tourism, particularly event tourism. However, despite the significant opportunities in this field, this sector of tourism has yet to receive sufficient attention in Iran. The findings derived from hypothesis testing reveal that perceived event value—comprising economic value, social value, and acquired value—has a direct and positive relationship with perceived travel value. Based on this outcome, it can be inferred that the optimal packaging of tourism events requires a focus on economic, social, and acquired values to enhance the

perceived event value, thereby improving the perceived value of travel. Tourists participating in multiple events during a single trip to a destination seek richer experiences, expanded knowledge, increased social interaction, and cost-effectiveness in terms of both time and expenses. These findings align with the research of Jahanian & Sheikhooni (2023), which emphasizes the positive influence of cultural and social factors on tourism development and the necessity of offering specialized services and products tailored to tourists’ needs. Furthermore, the significance of hosting tourism events, creating diverse and novel attractions, and fostering the development of event tourism startups has been underscored. The results related to the second hypothesis confirm that

perceived travel value positively influences destination loyalty. Consequently, for destinations with limited natural resources or those seeking to diversify their tourism offerings, tourism events play a crucial role in the growth of the tourism sector. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Esmailian & Haghighi (2015), which identifies events as a vital tool for attracting tourists. Given the validation of the hypotheses, it is recommended

that event organizers implement measures to enhance tourists' experiences. These could include providing complimentary transportation services, distributing brochures containing information about the event's history, cultural significance, and local traditions, and improving the overall quality of event execution. Such initiatives can contribute to creating a more favorable image of the destination in tourists' minds.

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