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# The effect of marketing constructs and tourists' satisfaction on loyalty to a sport destination

## A structural equation model and analysis

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the current study is to explore complicated structural relationships among the variables of tourists' perceptions of quality and the value of a sport tourist destination and their satisfaction level and loyalty that are vital for successful destination marketing and management.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A survey was used to collect data from a sample of 570 sport tourists who traveled to Nowshahr and Chalous cities in Iran during September 2012. These data were gathered by convenience sampling method and analyzed using a structural equation model (SEM).

**Findings** – The results of the SEM revealed that tourists' perceived quality and perceived value have a significant impact on their satisfaction. Further, tourists' satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on the level of their loyalty.

**Practical implications** – Findings of the current study contribute to a better perception of behavioral mechanisms and incentives and provide an acceptable basis to improve tourism industry in both regional and national levels.

**Originality/value** – This is the first such study of the Iranian sports sector.

**Keywords** Perceived quality, Iran, Perceived value, Loyalty, Satisfaction, Sport tourism

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

Today the tourism industry is being seriously considered by various countries due to its positive social, cultural and economic outcomes. The tourism industry is regarded to be the first industry in the world in terms of income and its impact on economic growth of countries, and many countries seek to utilize the advantages of it by creating appropriate infrastructures. In most countries, tourism is regarded as an important source for commercial activities, income, employment and foreign exchange (Haber and Lerner, 1998). The majority of countries earns a high annual income from the industry. For instance, Australia grossed \$50 billion over the past two decades from tourism (Foster, 1997). The industry is referred to as a "clean industry" because of its lack of pollution and negative outcomes and most consider developing the industry following the success of the global tourism industry to enjoy its advantages. However, the achievement and relative advantages in the industry requires the establishment of appropriate infrastructures, catering to tourists' needs and providing desirable tourism facilities. Given the multiplicity of tourists' requirements, tourist attractions and those involved in the development of the industry must identify such needs and work toward satisfying them. Destinations should take action to provide necessary infrastructures regarding their cultural and geographical characteristics to be successful in consistently attracting more tourists. This requires a comprehensive approach with regards to the tourism industry to provide the requirements of tourism development by preparing and providing the intended facilities. The existence of required amenities is the first step in attracting and maintaining tourists. Tourists' expectations of the region are often formed based on the experience of previous trips, advertisements and other incentives and the quality of services and facilities and perceived values have a direct effect on the quality of travel, tourism experience and visitors' demand levels in the future (Uysal, 2003) and the possibility of them returning to a certain destination depends on tourists' satisfaction level. This, in turn, enhances a tourists' loyalty to the destination. An evolutionary circle will be created due to such action–reaction and its results would be the enjoyment of a destination from obtained benefits in economic, social and cultural areas. This research seeks to provide an appropriate information and decision-making framework to develop the sport tourism industry in Nowshahr and Chalous cities by exploring the influential factors on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. This can help to create a desirable framework for sustainable development of tourism in the region by highlighting such factors and considering them in tourism policy-setting.

This study emphasizes the importance of perceived quality and perceived value in tourists' satisfaction in association with tourists' loyalty to a sport destination. First, this study examines the direct effects of perceived quality and perceived value on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Second, the interaction effects of perceived quality and perceived value on loyalty through satisfaction are also investigated. Limited attention has been paid to the cause and effect relationships among perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty in the context of sport destinations, and this study contributes to addressing this research gap. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: first, a literature review on perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty provides an overview of the key issues. This is followed by hypotheses development. We then discuss the research design, data collection and measure validation procedures. Finally, the results and discussion are presented, followed by the conclusion of the study and its potential implications for academics and managers.

## 2. Sport tourism

World tourism arrivals are projected to grow at 4.3 per cent per year and to reach 1.6 billion by 2020. One of the fastest-growing areas contributing to these staggering statistics is sport tourism. Although sport tourism is a relatively new concept in terms of contemporary vernacular, its scope of activity is far from a recent phenomenon (Hudson, 2003). Standeven and De Knop (1999) defined it as non-commercial or commercial purposed traveling for people to leave their residence to participate in or watch sport activities. In fact, sport tourism includes travel away from one's primary residence to participate in a sport activity for recreation or competition, to travel to observe sport at the grassroots or elite level and to travel to visit a sport attraction such as a sport hall of fame or a water park (Gibson *et al.*, 1997). Tourists who are involved in sports at a destination do this for different reasons. Many are drawn to a certain degree of dedication, competition or personal achievement. Because of this, the sport tourism market has often been described as "niche" or special "demand groups". Delpy (1997) stated "a travel market focused entirely on participating or watching sport is a unique and exciting concept". The notion of people traveling to participate in and watch sport dates back to the ancient Olympic Games, and the practice of stimulating tourism through sport has existed for over a century. Hence, sport and tourism professionals have begun to realize the significant potential of sport tourism and are aggressively pursuing this market niche (Hudson, 2003). Sports are associated with rich and various visitor experiences and therefore contribute to the image and characterization of tourism destinations (Higham, 2005). It is important to understand what role places or destinations play in the field of sport and tourism and the relationship between tourists and the places they visit is a very interesting one.

## 3. Literature review

### 3.1 Perceived quality

Perceived quality has been a popular research topic over the past 20 years with numerous studies in the area of services marketing dedicated to it (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Murphy *et al.*, 2000). Perceived quality was pioneered by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) who defined it as an attitude that results from the comparison of consumer expectations with the actual performance. When extended to tourism research, the perceived quality of a tourism destination has been viewed as a combination of tourists' trip experiences and perceived service received in relation to their expectations of the actual service performance (Bolton and Drew, 1991). Therefore, perceived quality can be considered the outcome of the evaluation process of the service in which tourists compare their expectations with the perceived service that has been received (Brady and Robertson, 2001). The service quality construct has been operationalized in several ways. At its inception, the construct was operationalized by a SERVQUAL measure comprising five dimensions of assurance, reliability, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Previous research has tested the SERVQUAL framework in lodging (Saleh and Ryan, 1992), restaurant (Bojanic and Rosen, 1994) and destination (Pizam *et al.*, 1978) contexts. However, this operationalization has received criticism in the recent years for its limited applicability, inferior predictive validity and the psychometric problems stemming from the use of difference scores measure (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Researchers have proposed the importance-performance analysis by presenting, in a grid, the differences between consumer perceptions of certain important

service attributes and judgments of attribute performance (Hudson *et al.*, 2004). Other researchers have claimed that a superior alternative measure might be a direct measurement of perceived quality (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Hence, in tourism research, perceived quality has been viewed as a positive distinguishing characteristic that provides insights into how services meet standards set by tourists (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). Thus, the visitor's assessment of the standard of the service delivery process in association with the trip experience determines the perceived quality of a tourism destination (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Two different approaches have been identified within value research (Gallarza and Saura, 2006). First, there is a significant interest in the dimensionality of consumer value, combining, for instance, positive and negative inputs of value (intravariation approach). Second, the aim of exploring the relations between perceived value and other consumer perceptual constructs, such as satisfaction and loyalty (intervariation approach), is also relevant in tourism literature. The present work must be considered within the intervariation approach as an attempt to explore the relationships among perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty.

### 3.2 Perceived value

Perceived value has been defined as a consumer's tradeoff between the quality of the benefits in which they perceive the product relative to the sacrifice they perceive by paying the price (Monroe, 1990). This tradeoff is described in terms of salient "give" and "get" components and is viewed as a rational or cognitive model of decision-making. In fact, perceived value represents the customer's assessment of the utility of a product/service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). In recent years, researchers have acknowledged that tourist behavior is better understood when observed through value perceptions (Gallarza and Saura, 2006). In tourism research, perceived value is viewed as "a measure of a provider's output" (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Price has been used as a surrogate for the value of a tourism destination, suggesting that when prices are higher, the perception of value also increases. As a result, perceived value has been assessed as a cognitive evaluation of the time and/or money invested in a trip in comparison to the tourist experiences that were gained (Murphy *et al.*, 2000).

### 3.3 Satisfaction

While the literature contains significant differences in the definition of satisfaction, there are at least two common formulations of satisfaction: one is transient while the other is overall satisfaction. Transient satisfaction results from the evaluation of events and behaviors that occur during a single, discrete interaction at a service encounter. A key implication of this definition suggests that transient satisfaction should be captured immediately after each service interaction with the service encounter if a service firm provides multiple service encounters. For example, Danaher and Mattson (1994) measured satisfaction with services after each service encounter in hotels. Overall satisfaction is considered a function of multiple transient satisfactions with services when perceived performance is compared to one or multiple subjective comparison standards. Thus, overall satisfaction is a post-choice evaluative judgment of a certain purchase occasion (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). This conceptualization is notable because behavioral researchers such as Oliver (1980) have developed a rich body of literature focusing on the antecedents (such as comparison standards) and consequences (such as

behavioral intentions) of this type of satisfaction at the individual level. Further, [Anderson and Fornell \(1994\)](#) emphasize that nearly all satisfaction research has adopted the overall satisfaction formulation because it is more fundamental and useful than transient satisfaction in predicting a consumer's behavioral intentions, as well as a firm's past, present and future business performance. [Oliver \(1997a, p. 13\)](#) stated that:

Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment.

Here, we follow [Oliver \(1997a\)](#) and view tourists' satisfaction as the tourist's emotional state after experiencing a trip. This view seems most appropriate for the evaluation of tourism services because they are intangible, and a tourist's emotional response to a destination services can best be captured after consumption. Hence, satisfaction with a tourism destination is the:

[...] extent of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the visitor, resulting in the ability of the trip experience to fulfil the visitor's desires, expectations and needs in relation to the trip ([Chen and Tsai, 2007, p. 1116](#)). Thus, satisfaction is regarded as a post-purchase measure of performance of the destination ([Kozak, 2001; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991](#)).

### 3.4 Loyalty

The concept of loyalty has been widely analyzed in the literature, especially from a marketing perspective ([Oliver, 1999; Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Harris and Goode, 2004](#)). Although there are many definitions of the concept, it is the work of [Oliver \(1999\)](#) that provides the most comprehensive explanation of loyalty. According to his definition, loyalty reflects a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational impacts and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. In the context of tourism, loyalty implies that the tourist gives preference to a particular destination, although satisfactory alternatives may exist. As a result, obtaining consumer loyalty is considered a crucial aspect to achieve company success and sustainability over time ([Keating et al., 2003](#)). Indeed, loyalty development has been an objective aimed at by managers since this not only enables higher future purchase intention, but also favors higher intensity in positive word-of-mouth ([Hallowell, 1996](#)), lower price sensibility ([Lynch and Ariely, 2000](#)), stable and bigger incomes ([Knox and Denison, 2000](#)) or low probability of consumers switching to competitors ([Yi and La, 2004](#)). In sum, loyalty helps build relationships with consumers.

## 4. Formulation of hypotheses

The linkages among tourist satisfaction, loyalty, value and quality are arguably the most widely studied relationships in tourism literature. However, the delineation between the constructs is a widely debated issue. An overview of the marketing literature indicates that as a theoretical construct, customer satisfaction is problematic to define and operationalize, especially in relation to service quality. Some researchers suggest that perceived quality and customer satisfaction are distinct constructs ([Oliver, 1997b; Taylor and Baker, 1994](#)) and that there is a causal relationship between the two ([Gotlieb et al., 1994; Spreng and Mackoy, 1996](#)). In some cases, however, the constructs

are interchangeable (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1994; Taylor and Baker, 1994; Oliver, 1997b; Mittal *et al.*, 1998). In tourism research, Tian-Cole *et al.* (2002) support the former view and consider satisfaction and quality as separate constructs. Similar dilemmas arise in delineating quality and value. Some authors equate perceived utility and product quality (Fornell *et al.*, 1996; Zeithaml, 1988), while others adopt a broader view and define value using several other concepts in addition to quality, such as image (Ball *et al.*, 2004) and brand (Chen *et al.*, 2005). Johnson *et al.* (2001) believe there is some tautology in the relationship between quality and value, which is why they removed the value construct from their Norwegian customer satisfaction barometer (NCSB) model and replaced it with perceived price. A number of studies in tourism research have confirmed a positive relationship between satisfaction and perceived quality (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Murray and Howat, 2002; de Rojas and Camarero, 2008), and between perceived value and satisfaction (Moliner *et al.*, 2007; Murray and Howat, 2002). Several studies also found that the relationship between customer satisfaction and perceived quality is partly mediated by perceived value (Chen and Tsai, 2007; Murray and Howat, 2002). Therefore, the results of the previous research support the view that perceived value and perceived quality are distinct constructs, both affecting tourist satisfaction directly, and that the influence of perceived quality on satisfaction is mediated by perceived value. Hence, the following hypotheses were established (Figure 1):

- H1. Perceived value of a sport tourism destination is positively associated with tourists' satisfaction.
- H2. Perceived quality of a sport tourism destination is positively associated with tourists' satisfaction.
- H3. Perceived quality of a sport tourism destination is positively associated with tourists' perceived value.

In hospitality and tourism, several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between consumer loyalty and satisfaction. For instance, satisfaction with a hospitality experience is a function of satisfaction with the individual attributes of all the goods and services that make up the experience, such as weather, accommodation, social environment and natural environment (Pizam and Ellis, 1999). The possibility of revisiting the same destination in the future is positively associated with tourists' overall satisfaction level (Hui *et al.*, 2007). Kozak and Rimmington (2000) found tourists' overall level of satisfaction with holiday experiences had the most effect on their intention to revisit the destination. Similarly, customer overall satisfaction levels were associated with the likelihood of returning to visited hotels (Choi and Chu, 2001), and a high level of traveler satisfaction resulted in a higher share of purchases and better

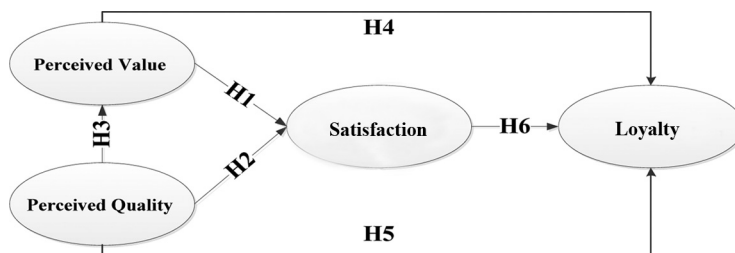


Figure 1.  
Research model

relationship continuity in the hotel industry (Kim and Cha, 2002). The total effect of the satisfaction of visitors attending a festival has been described as a useful predictor of future behavioral intentions (Baker and Crompton, 2000). In their study of 274 students traveling in groups for leisure purposes, Gallarza *et al.* (2013) found that perceived value and perceived quality are the most important determinants of loyalty in a service setting. Thus, taking into account all these ideas, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- H4. Tourists' perceived value of a sport tourism destination is positively associated with loyalty to the destination.
- H5. Tourists' perceived quality of a sport tourism destination is positively associated with loyalty to the destination.
- H6. Tourists' satisfaction with a sport tourism destination is positively associated with loyalty to the destination.

To sum up, the research framework including all the proposed relationships can be seen in Figure 1.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Survey instrument

The present study used a 10-minute self-administered pen and paper questionnaire, written in Persian, using a non-probability, convenience sampling approach. The advantages of the self-administered pen and paper questionnaire include its anonymity that enables opportunity for self-disclosure, cost savings on postage, as it is self-administered on the spot and quick turnaround. However, the disadvantages of the pen and paper self-administered questionnaire are its lack of convenience, missed responses and problems with the reliability of data collected in haste (Kiesler and Sproull, 1986). Because the advantages of anonymity, cost savings, quick turnarounds and the simplicity of the self-administered questionnaire with a convenience sample outweighed the disadvantages, the current approach was justified. The questionnaire was organized into the following eight sections (Table I):

- (1) *Demographics*: Respondents were required to provide personal details relating to their gender, age, education and income. These questions were placed in the last section of the questionnaire so that respondents who had already taken 10 minutes to answer the questionnaire would be more inclined to complete it and provide confidential information.
- (2) *Perceived value*: Respondents were asked to rate their perceived value of Nowshahr and Chalous cities based on their previous visits to the cities. A total of seven items relating to the perceived value of the cities were selected from Chen and Chen's (2010) scale and adapted to fit the context of the present study. Each of the seven items used a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).
- (3) *Perceived quality*: Respondents were requested to rate their perceived quality of Nowshahr and Chalous cities based on their recent visit to the cities. Seven statements were selected from Zabkar *et al.* (2010) and adapted to fit the context of the present study. Each of these seven statements used a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Factor/items	Label	Standardized loadings	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
<i>Perceived quality</i>					
Accommodation	PQ1	0.76	3.37	0.996	
Food and beverage	PQ2	0.68	3.25	0.932	
Climate	PQ3	0.69	3.11	1.212	
Availability of public transport	PQ4	0.76	3.11	1.197	
General infrastructure	PQ5	0.66	3.03	1.255	
Cleanliness of city	PQ6	0.72	2.89	0.941	
Parking facilities and space	PQ7	0.78	3.07	0.996	0.73
<i>Perceived value</i>					
I enjoyed my recent visit to Nowshahr and/or Chalous	PV1	0.65	2.94	0.989	
I had a relaxing time there	PV2	0.77	3.03	1.768	
My decision to go there gave me great pleasure	PV3	0.83	2.99	1.026	
The trip was good value	PV4	0.69	3.02	1.044	
The trip improved the way I was perceived among my friends	PV5	0.80	3.08	0.984	
I felt good about my decision to go there	PV6	0.75	3.10	1.203	0.88
<i>Satisfaction</i>					
The visit was exactly what I needed	SAT1	0.87	2.95	1.014	
I truly enjoyed the visit	SAT2	0.81	3.25	0.954	
The visit was a good experience	SAT3	0.75	3.42	0.891	
The visit worked out as well as I thought it would	SAT4	0.68	3.33	0.967	0.82
<i>Loyalty</i>					
I would visit these destinations again	LO1	0.73	3.18	0.945	
I encourage my friends to visit these destinations	LO2	0.63	3.47	0.967	
I consider these destinations as my first choice for future visiting	LO3	0.68	3.12	1.111	
I would recommend these destinations to my friends	LO4	0.86	3.38	1.224	0.77

**Table I.**  
Initial 21 items measuring four constructs

- (4) *Satisfaction*: Respondents were requested to rate their satisfaction with Nowshahr and Chalous cities based on their recent visit to the cities. Four items relevant to the satisfaction literature (Forgas *et al.*, 2012) were chosen and adapted to fit the context of the current study. Each of the four statements used a seven-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).
- (5) *Loyalty*: Respondents were asked to rate their loyalty to Nowshahr and Chalous cities. Four statements relevant to the loyalty literature (Forgas *et al.*, 2012) were chosen and adapted to fit the context of the current study. Each of the four items utilized a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

### 5.2 Sample and data collection

The data were collected from Nowshahr and Chalous, as they were considered the most important sport tourism destinations in Iran in September 2012. These cities include diverse tourism attractions, particularly sport tourism attractions. Nowshahr is known



for its humid climate and immense natural beauty, and is therefore an attractive destination for domestic tourism. Nice hotels and private villas accommodate hundreds of thousand tourists every year. Natural parks, green mountains and the Caspian Sea with its great water for swimming are located within a few kilometers around Nowshahr and most of the other cities in northern Iran. Chalus is the neighbor of Nowshahr in the east. The scenic landscape and nature of the Chalous region makes it a top destination of eco-tourists, and every year thousands of tourists visit this region. The astounding green landscape along Tehran-Chalous road is highly attractive and is flanked by the Alborz Mountains, with the Chalous River running alongside it. The beautiful flowing river and its natural waterfalls, thick forests, numerous tunnels, large number of trees, regional wildlife and scenic paddy fields attract the attention of every viewer. In Chalous, the green landscape, mild coastal breeze, hospitable and friendly people, premium tea and rice, grilled fish and confectionaries await tourists, and the city is home to several hotels, forests, parks, the Namak Aabroud tourist complex and pretty villas have turned this city into a top tourist destination. In fact, throughout the spring and summer seasons, a large number of Iranian and foreign tourists visit the city and its surrounding areas of natural beauty. The structural equation modeling (SEM) requires some consideration of sample size, as does most every other type of research. Where the proposed SEM is the basis for a research hypothesis, *ad hoc* rules of thumb requiring the choosing of 10 observations per indicator in setting a lower boundary for the adequacy of sample sizes have been widely used. In general, a model should contain 10 to 20 times more observations than indicators (Kline, 2005). According to the rule, 600 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and a total of 570 usable questionnaires were collected from the sport tourists who have traveled to the cities to watch or participate in sport activities. The sample was 65 per cent male and 35 per cent female. Age groups were balanced, between 16 and 24 years old (24 per cent), between 25 and 34 years old (34 per cent), between 35 and 44 years old (26 per cent) and above 44 years old (16 per cent). In terms of education level, 15.5 per cent of the respondents completed primary school; 38.2 per cent of the respondents completed secondary; and 46.3 per cent of the respondents finished university. With regard to annual income, 10.7 per cent of the respondents earned less than US\$10,000, followed by 29.6 per cent between US\$10,000 and US\$19,999, 34.6 per cent between US\$20,000 and US\$29,999 and 25.1 per cent earned more than US\$30,000.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Measures validation

An in-depth review of the literature concerning perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty was developed to propose an initial set of items, and this helped guarantee the content validity of the scales. We also tested face validity through a variation of the Zaichkowsky (1985) method where each item was qualified by a panel of experts. Finally, items were retained if a high level of consensus was observed among the experts. The first step in the process of measures validation was an exploratory analysis of reliability and dimensionality. In this sense, Cronbach's alpha indicator[1], the item-total correlation[2] and principal components analysis were used to assess the initial reliability and dimensionality of the scales. All items were adjusted to the required levels: perceived value ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ), perceived quality ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ), satisfaction ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and loyalty ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ). To confirm the dimensional structure of the scales, we

utilized the confirmatory factor analysis. For these tasks, the statistical software AMOS version 18 was used, and we used the Robust Maximum Likelihood as an estimation method and the composite reliability indicator to assess construct reliability (Jöreskog, 1971). We obtained values above 0.65, exceeding the benchmarks that are suggested as acceptable (Steenkamp and Geyskens, 2006). Finally, convergent validity was tested by checking that the factor loadings of the confirmatory model were statistically significant (level of 0.01) and higher than 0.5 points (Steenkamp and Geyskens, 2006). On the other hand, discriminant validity was tested in two ways (Table II): first, we checked that the correlations between the variables in the confirmatory model were not much higher than 0.8 points (Bagozzi, 1994); second, we checked that the value 1 did not appear in the confidence interval of the correlations between the different variables. Results showed an acceptable level of convergent and discriminant validity.

### 6.2 Structural equation modeling

SEM was used to test the proposed model, and the fit of the hypothesized structural model was tested after developing the measurement model. Table III illustrates the results of the structural model and the overall fit statistics. In short, the results of the hypotheses testing indicate a good fit between the model and the empirical data. The results of SEM show that four hypotheses underlying this model are supported at the 0.05 level of significance. The parameter estimates for perceived value (0.43) and perceived quality (0.61) are significant, which shows that these constructs have a significant influence on tourist satisfaction with a sport destination, thus confirming *H1* and *H2*. Perceived quality has a significant and positive effect on perceived value (0.41) and, consequently, *H3* is supported. According to the standardized estimations, we may say that loyalty is positively influenced by perceived value (0.45) and perceived quality (0.31); therefore, *H4* and *H5* were supported. Finally, overall satisfaction has a significant positive effect on loyalty (0.72) supports *H6*.

Pair of constructs	Correlation	95 % confidence interval	
PQ-PV	0.625*	0.48856	0.74933
PQ-SAT	0.418*	0.28483	0.55633
PQ-LO	0.510*	0.28557	0.58474
PV-SAT	0.347*	0.18432	0.52868
PV-LO	0.548*	0.38526	0.71077
SAT-LO	0.329*	0.17487	0.48515

**Notes:** \*Coefficients are significant at the level of 0.01; PQ = perceived quality; PV = perceived value; SAT = satisfaction; LO = loyalty

**Table II.**  
Discriminant validity

Index	Criteria	Cutoff value
Chi-square/df	2.34	< 5
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	0.94	> 0.90
Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	0.96	> 0.90
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.94	> 0.90
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.008	< 0.10

**Table III.**  
Goodness of fit of the structural model

**7. Conclusions**

The main motivation for this study was to gain a better understanding of tourist loyalty to a sport tourism destination. This study is based on the related literature and hypothesizes that perceived quality and perceived value have a positive direct and indirect effect on loyalty and that satisfaction mediates these relationships. In addition, the influence of perceived quality on perceived value was examined and the effects of perceived value and perceived quality on satisfaction were supported. In fact, our analysis showed that perceived value and perceived service quality make a considerable contribution to the tourist loyalty toward a sport destination. This is particularly relevant as some scholars have noted that quality and value perceived by tourists may lead to satisfaction with the destination (Murray and Howat, 2002; Tian-Cole et al., 2002; de Rojas and Camarero, 2008; Moliner et al., 2007). The results of the study confirm the existence of a relationship between perceived value and perceived quality. This finding is consistent with the results of prior research that state there is relationship between perceived quality and perceived value (Chen and Tsai, 2007; Johnson et al., 2001; Murray and Howat, 2002). Additionally, the positive linkage between perceived quality,

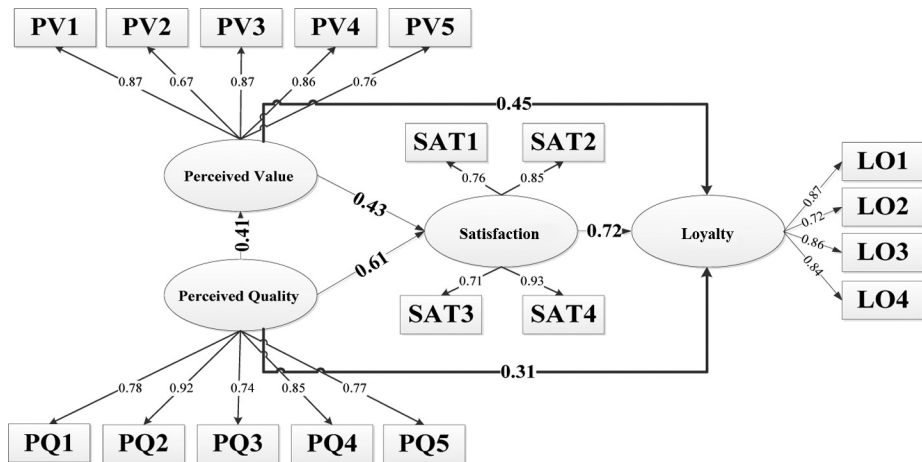


Figure 2. SEM

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	t-value	p	Result
H1	Perceived value → Satisfaction	0.43	4.23	*	Supported
H2	Perceived quality → Satisfaction	0.61	7.55	*	Supported
H3	Perceived quality → Perceived value	0.41	4.02	*	Supported
H4	Perceived value → Loyalty	0.45	4.67	*	Supported
H5	Perceived quality → Loyalty	0.31	3.81	*	Supported
H6	Satisfaction → Loyalty	0.72	8.52	*	Supported

Table IV. The results of hypotheses testing

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.001$

perceived value and tourist loyalty to a sport destination was substantiated. Thus, the causal relationship suggested in the literature about loyalty (Gallarza *et al.*, 2013) was supported within our tourists sample and in the context of the sport tourism. The other significant linkage is found in the relationships between satisfaction with the sport tourism destination and loyalty to the destination. This result could be interpreted as consistent with previous studies which found that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is significant (Pizam and Ellis, 1999; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Hui *et al.*, 2007). Unlike the results of this study, Chen and Tsai (2007) demonstrated that perceived quality is not directly related to satisfaction level and behavioral purposes. They estimated a model which links destination image, the quality of travel to a destination, perceived value, satisfaction level and behavioral intention with each other. Further, some variables may exogenously affect the existing relations (such as climatic conditions and natural attractions). The importance and level of each index could be evaluated by focusing on the personal parameters for perceived service value. However, considering some points is necessary in the evaluation of the results. For example, it is not possible to claim universally that perceived value and perceived quality can form sport tourists' satisfaction and loyalty because the constructs may have different importance in various cultures across nations and, as a result, researchers believed that there is no optimal and universal competitive model for all destinations (Omerzel Gomezelj and Mihalic, 2008).

### 8. Managerial implications

Several managerial implications can be derived from our findings. First, managers of sport destinations should pay special attention to the value perceptions of sport tourists. They should support tourists' role in a manner that emphasizes the benefits they receive apart from obtaining lower costs. Consequently, the helpfulness of the perceived value as a segmentation tool should be focused on by managers of sport destinations in Iran. Sport destination managers should focus their efforts on the perceived value of their offerings, as value proves to be the crucial concept that has a decisive impact on destination competitive advantage and, consequently, destination performance. Moreover, investments in destination service perceived value are multiplied with greater care for perceived quality. Sport destination managers should also be aware that perceived value by tourists influences their satisfaction, which, in most cases, also leads to tourists making decisions about whether to revisit a particular sport destination. Because the relationship between the perceived value and tourist satisfaction is strong, we suggest that sport destination managers consider the information available about how to add value to their offerings as the immediate consequence of such efforts is greater tourist satisfaction. Second, the importance of perceived quality for the tourist's formation of loyalty to sport destination managers may be an indicator of the change in the tourist consumer toward the "new tourism" (Alegre and Cladera, 2006). Alegre and Cladera maintain that tourism is changing from "old tourism", directed at a mass market and characterized by offering a standard "sun and sand" product, to what they call "new tourism", characterized by a more demanding tourist focused on product quality. Therefore, sport destination managers need to be aware of the complexity of the tourism services used by sport tourists in each destination, as the complexity of services increased the value – loyalty link in the context of sport tourism. If sport destinations provide high quality services, they increase the probability that tourists will be satisfied

and also that the tourist will travel again to the destination and recommend the destination to friends and family. If a sport destination obtains loyal customers, it will obtain greater economic benefits from retention (current tourists) and increased market share (attraction of new tourists through hearsay). Policymakers should encourage service providers to keep their existing services as per expectation level of visitors, perhaps adding new services such as good warranty facilities and increased security of the destination. Third, tourist satisfaction has an important role in the planning of marketable tourism products and services for sport destinations and its assessment must be a basic parameter used to evaluate the performance of sport destination products and services (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). The complexity of sport destination marketing is increasing as sport tourists consume regions as integrated experiences, and a high degree of integration (networking) of suppliers is essential for achieving distinctive competitive advantages of any sport destination in Iran. The task of measuring satisfaction at the destination level should be assumed by sport destination managers and the results should be disseminated by all supply stakeholders at the destination level (including hotels, restaurants, tourist information centers and tourist agencies) to facilitate and/or enhance their cooperation, the general level of the sport destination's quality and ultimately its attractiveness. Finally, for marketing practitioners and managers in the sport tourism industry, our study emphasizes that if there is harmony among all four concepts (perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty), better competitive positioning can be achieved. Sport tourism managers should account for the fact that tourists from different cities may have different experiences and different cultural, social and other backgrounds.

### 9. Limitations and future orientations

There are also several limitations with regards to opportunities for future research. Non-probability sampling with self-reported data that was used by the study is a drawback and probability sampling in conjunction with demographic information is suggested for further investigation. The issue of loyalty to a sport destination that was examined by the current study is suggested to be replicated in other sport tourism destinations to offer more generalizability of the findings in future research. According to the results, perceived quality and perceived value are important in the sport tourism context to create satisfaction, long-term relationships and loyal tourists. Finally, the data collected could not examine cultural and religious issues related to the research theories. Hence, the impacts of culture and religion on the model constructs need more analysis.

### Notes

1. Considering a minimum value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).
2. Considering a minimum value of 0.3 (Nurosis, 1993).

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