

Factors of Travel to the Village of Masooleh in Iran

Maysam Musai

Full professor, University of Tehran
E-mail: mousaaei@ut.ac.ir

Mohsen Mehrara

Associate Professor, University of Tehran

Hossienali Mahmoudian Ardakani

M.A in Economics, University of Tehran

Fateme Nemati

M.A in Tourism Planning, University of Tehran

Marzie Nekoolal

M.A in Tourism Planning, University of Tehran

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Abstract

Masoole, a rural protected national heritage of Iran is characterized by the unique architecture of its inhabitants. This paper tries to survey the reasons of traveling to Masooleh as an important center of rural tourism in Iran. Two factors were studied during this objective: 1) rural properties 2) socio-economic factors. Statistical societies were selected from tourist whom two times or more travel to Masooleh. This survey done during two weeks, May, 2010. Results acquired from surveying method and completed 100 questioners with interview. 56% of respondent were male and the others were female. Results show that in the properties of village attractive, behavior of people village and their inform had the most effective factors in demand of traveling to Masooleh. From the socio-economic factors age, gender, education, season of travel and duration of traveling had an impact on demand.

Keywords ethnic identity, religious identity, tourism, Social-cultural tourism effect

1. Introduction

Important issue in tourism, especially in developing countries, is increasing demand for rural tourism. Global statistics show that each year more than 30 percent of tourism is allocated to rural tourism. Despite, Rural tourism is small in size and volume, it has a lot of complication

and balance development could abundant impact on preserve the village source and tourism proportion.

Due to tourism is competition activities and tourist 's behavior and interest is changing during times , so that should be recognize the effective factors on travel demand and variety of tourism product and adjust with tourist's interest . The aim of this paper is recognize the factors that case the Masooleh village convert to one of the important tourism area in Iran and based on this recognize present some solution in preserve and improvement of the rural tourism.

2. Review of Literature

The results of rural tourism studies show that success factors such as effective factors on growth of rural tourism demand and rural development with respect to tourism have high position in sustainable development discusses .

Some of these studies present visiting and attention of life style of rural people in different area as a more suitable source of attracting tourist.

A significant number of studies examine rural tourism in Spain and survey strengths, weaknesses, and resources as well as the effects and consequences of rural tourism (Maria & Perales, 2002).

Also, numerous studies have been devoted analyzing the mechanisms of organization of rural tourism development bookkeeping. The results of these studies show that factors such as management, planning and technical assistance are essential in the development of rural tourism.

(PatricT.Long&JonelleS.Nuckolls , 1994 ; Marcouiller , 1997). Some studies also pointed out the demand of rural tourism and consider the tourists' attitude. (Frocht , 2003 ; Pelar et el. , 2003)

Most studies of rural tourism were case study which reviewed the various section such as native people attitude and success factors of rural tourism including attractions.(McDonald & Jolliffe , 2003 ; Murphy & Williams , 1999 ; Briedenhann&Wickens , 2004)

It should be noted that to achieve the desired rural tourism, it need to consider the both of economic and social aspect and should be ensure success factors of rural tourism to using of economic and social aspect (Murphy, 1985; Gunn, 1988; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Having summarized the opinions of various researchers, it could be categorize the success factors like below:

Attractions: Natural Attractions (mountains, plains, etc.) - architectural attractions - local foods and Information and advertising about the attractions and the village

Tourism infrastructure: access to facilities (transport, roads, etc.) - Parking Services- Recreational facilities and...

Services: accommodation - restaurant - health services - health care and...

Hospitality: behave with tourists by residents and workers

In this study, these factors have been examined from tourists' attitude.

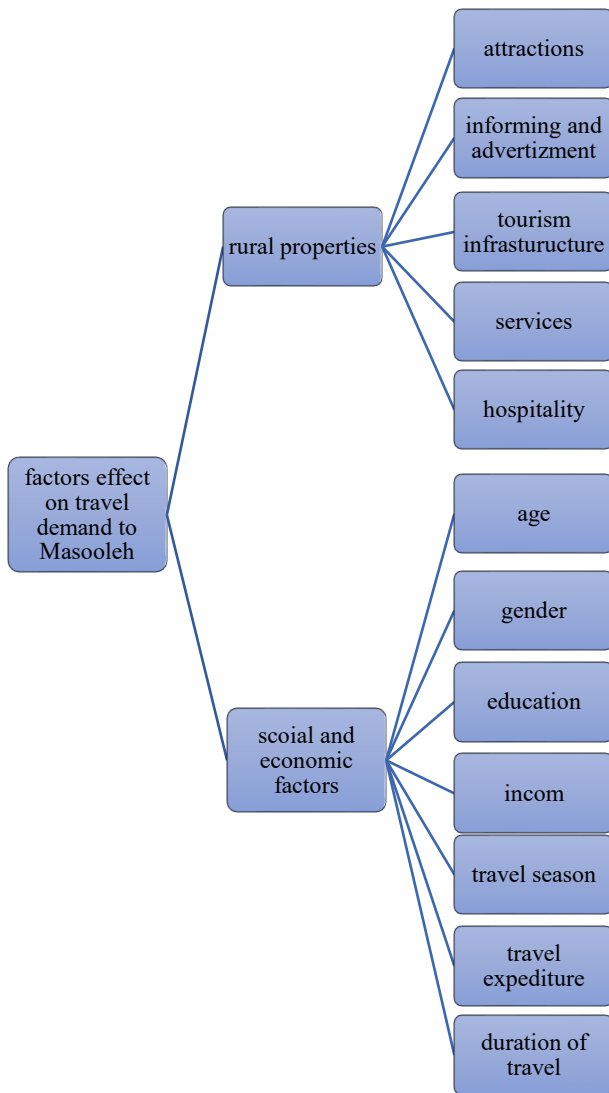
On the other hand, a **socio-economic** factor which most commonly affects the travel of tourists has also been considered. To examine these two affective factors is used the demand theory. According to this theory, the travel demand to the village of Masooleh (i) is a function of village properties and **socio-economic** factors related to person.

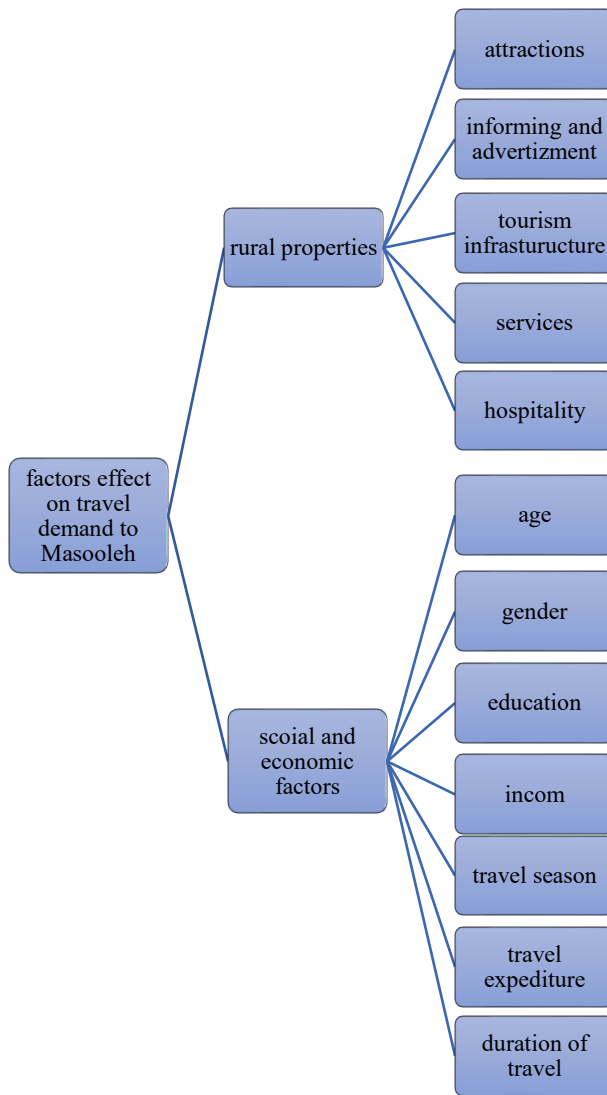
$$D_i: F(f_{e-s}, f_{sf})$$

F_{e-s}: & Social Factors

F_z: special feature of the rural

According to division of each section, in a final summary, the research comes in the form below:





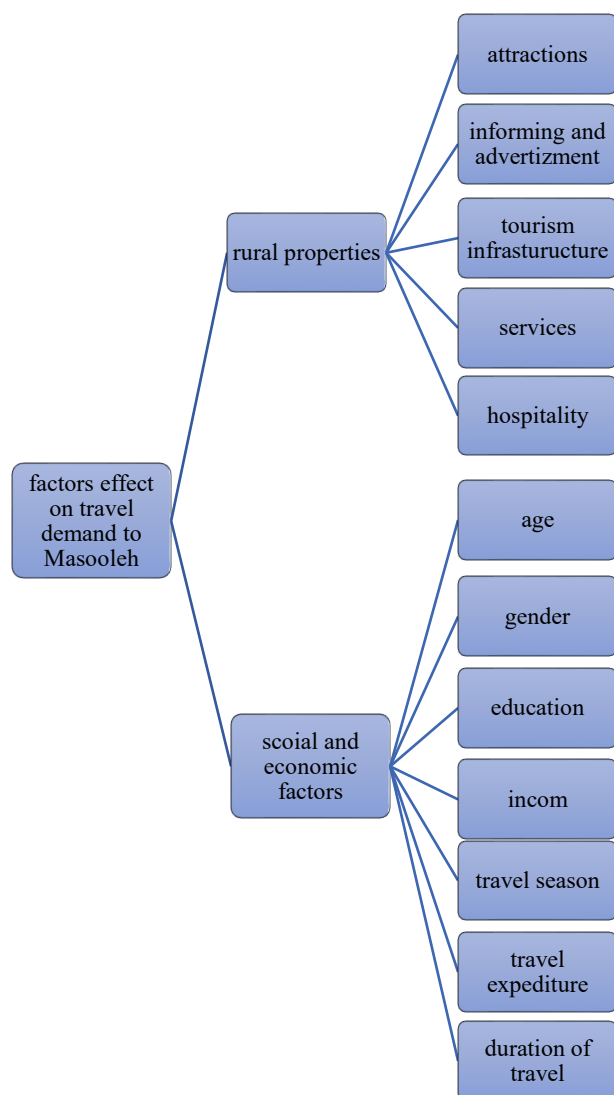


Figure 1: Research Model (source: authors)

3. Study area

Masooleh is located in the northern part of Iran, 1050m above the sea level, and close to the Caspian Sea. The town has its recorded history of more than 1000 years (ICHTO, 2004). Ancient history and architecture, desirable climatic conditions and natural beauty are distinctive features of this area. The special feature of the town lies on its stair like architecture with courtyards and roofs both of which serve as pedestrian areas. In Masooleh the street design prohibits motorists passing through the area. This prohibition is unique in Iran (ICHTO, 2004-2006). The town is inhabited by 700 people during fall and winter (Iran's Ministry of Health, 2006). However, the number escalates in spring and summer when the weather is more desirable and job opportunities are in abundant especially in the tourism sector. In the past, the town was a crossroads among traders from other regions. However, the economy of Masooleh has been sluggish in the last six decades which caused businesses 'failure and residents' out-migration. With the current global tourism trends and the unique heritage attributes which the town possesses, government now is planning to revive the

economy of Masooleh by developing tourism and other economic sectors which provide linkages such as handicrafts, agriculture, and livestock. Masooleh is the main tourist attraction in the region. The town is protected under the list of the National Cultural and Natural Heritage Organization in 1976 (ICHTO, 2004-2006). The organization was a governmental body which was later renamed as the Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization in 2004.

The overall responsibility of this organization is to protect, introduce, preserve and restore the country's historic-cultural legacy as well as promote tourism industry. Masooleh is one of its many archeological projects. In 2003, UNESCO has included Masooleh for the implementation of its international project for the development of Culture and eco-tourism in the mountains regions of central Asia and the Himalayas (ICHTO, 2004).

The town is primarily visited by domestic tourists. There is no evidence of visit friends and relative tourism activities in the area. The reasons for tourists to visit Masooleh are to enjoy natural beauty and the unique architecture of the buildings. The typical visit is short and seasonal. Tourists normally visit the area during the NowRuz (Iranian New Year) period, spring, summer, and other public holidays. The town is also visited by international tourists especially in spring and fall. Their visits are mainly organized by tour operators. At the peak tourist season Masooleh may host more than 10,000 tourists per day.

4. Methodology

This study was done by survey methods. 100 questionnaires were designed based on the independent variables and dependent variables that measure the following goals:

- Situation and demand of travel to Masooleh (dependent variable)
- Tourists attitude toward properties of area (independent variable)
- The characteristics of arrival tourist to Masooleh from the social and economic aspect (independent variable)

These questioners study only the village properties and economy and social effect factors on travel demand to Masooleh. Questionnaires had been completed during two weeks in May 2010 by a number of interviewers whom visited the village of Masooleh two times or more.

5. Results

According to the questionnaire, 56% of respondents were male and 44% were women. 63% were single and 37% were married and the majority of them have traveled with families. 62% had bachelor and 38% had under bachelor.

The earning of 24% were over 1 million Toman, 46% were 1000000-700000 Toman and 30% less than the 700,000. Tourists had traveled from different cities to the village of Masooleh so there were very differences between travel expenditure. Over 80% of tourists said that they usually traveled to the village during the spring and early summer.

The average of duration of stay was 2 to 6 days. According to them, they visited the following attractions during their stay:

- Natural Attractions (forests around the village, Masooleh river,...)
- Architectural features of the village (site of the old historical Masooleh, - ----Neighborhood and Markets , Bridges on the River)
- Qanbar Abad Mosque
- Rood Khan Castle
- Shrine and tomb
- Crafts

But more than 70% of visitors were not satisfied with the preservation of nature and rural heritage . They also state that rural have poor infrastructure and services available for tourists which are not enough for the tourists. But the behavior of the local population is excellent with tourists.

- To assess the relationship between the quality of attraction and travel demand to Masooleh was used the Pearson correlation coefficient: $r = 0.63$, sig: 0.00.

According to meaningful level, it could be conclude that there is a strong and positive relationship between them and improving quality of presenting attraction effect on increasing travel demand.

- The relationship between information and advertising and demand for travel to Masooleh is: $r = 0.52$, sig = 0.01. Based on meaningful level, it could be conclude that there is a strong and positive relationship between these two factors and increasing of advertising and extension of information lead to increasing to travel demand to Masooleh.

- The relationship between travel demand to Masooleh and tourism infrastructure is: $r = 0.18$, sig = 0.002. According to meaningful level, there is a weak and positive relationship between tourism infrastructure and travel demand.

With respect to another information obtain from tourist, if the quality of infrastructure increase, travel to Masooleh will raise.

- The relationship between services and travel demand to Masooleh is: $r = 0.34$, sig = 0.01. According to meaningful level, there is a moderate and positive relationship between the two factors and it show that increasing in presenting services lead to raising in travel.

- The relationship between the hospitality agent and the hospitality of the residents and travel demand to Masooleh is: $r = 0.57$, sig = 0.000.

According to a meaningful level, it could be conclude that the behavior of local people with tourists has effected on raising travel.

- In multiple regressions using stepwise, three factors had greatest impact: quality of attractions, behavior of local people, advertising and informing. These three variables can explain 47 percent of the variance of the tourism demand variable.
($R^2 = 47$)

In surveying of **socio-economic** factors, following results were obtained:

Age	F = 15.134 , sig = 0.02
Income	r = 0.34 , sig = 0.25
Education	r = 0.42 , sig = 0.001
Gender	F = 12.597 , sig = 0.000
Travel season	F = 13.625 , sig = 0.003
Travel expenditures	r = -0.54 , sig = 0.185
Duration of Travel	F = 14.98 , sig = 0.002

Table 1: Results of the relationship between socio-economic factors and travel

According to table 1, there is meaningful relationship between ages, travel season, duration of travel with travel demand to the Masooleh .Also, there is no meaningful relationship between income and travel expenditures with travel demand.

5. Conclusion

Masooleh is one of the most important rural tourism sites in Iran.

The study shows that the power of Masooleh in attract tourist based on the unique attractions. And tourists announce that local people's behavior is one of the most important factors to return to Masooleh. Most of the people emphasized that developing of tourism infrastructure and improving services could encourage potential tourists to visit this village.

Also, from the foreign tourists' attitude increasing of advertising and awareness at the international level can help to introduce the attractions of Iran and especially Masouleh.

In total, we offered the following suggestions:

- Increase funding of tourism section and accelerate the completion of rural tourism projects
- Established stable management systems for better planning in villages
- Expansion of infrastructure facilities such as hotels, restaurants, parking, restroom, water networks and ...
- Increased advertising and extensive marketing and establish a formulized system for advertisement.
- Educate Host community in cooperation and participation to developing rural tourism
- Educate tourists to behave responsibly in preserving the rural heritage
- Development of tourism infrastructure required in order to achieve sustainable development of rural tourism

The following aspects of software could be effective in achieving high quality of rural tourism:

- Government support of local institutions
- Capacity building and marketing
- Attention to limitations in the area of tourism development projects
- Establish a Branding
- Ensuring the quality of products and services

This paper surveyed tourist attitude.

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