

## Analysis and prioritization of factors affecting the tourists' satisfaction (Case study: in Southern Khorasan Province)

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**Abstract:** Religious tourism with the history related to the past centuries is one of the most common forms of tourism throughout the world which has constituted a considerable share in tourist activities. Experts of tourism industry believe that religious tourism has a great growth and development opportunity in Iran, which is related to its special religious and cultural situation in the region. Despite the existence of 8919 sacred religious locations in Iran, its religious tourism still lacks any kind of centralized and specialized organization. Today, tourism development is not possible in the absence of knowing the needs and satisfaction rate of tourists as well as their effective factors; this issue has been also specifically considered at national, regional, and international levels. Therefore, the present study aimed to measure the satisfaction rate of tourists and its effective factors in order to develop religious tourism in South Khorasan Province. This research was an analytical-descriptive work. Ranking results of the effective factors for the satisfaction rate of religious tourists revealed that information quality for tourists gained 0.861 value score, life and financial safety 0.793 value, and environmental calmness 0.787 value, had a better position than others.

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, satisfaction, TOPSIS technique, South Khorasan.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is one of the oldest and most prolific tourism of past and present time around the world (Ajit, 2004, 2). Because of its specific structural and functional characteristic, the religious tourism has been able to have a place in the global tourism. So that its scope has dominated the entire world and based on current estimates 26 percent of total world tourism is devoted to religious tourism (Moemeni and et al, 2008, 13). In the religion of Islam, visiting the graves, appealing and the intercession asking are considered as major religious affairs. Graves and shrines have had a special effect in the lives of Muslim people by accepting huge numbers of enthusiasts and followers and have caused political, social and economic upheavals. Experts of the tourism industry believe that in terms of the specific cultural-religious situation of Iran among other countries, religious tourism in our country will be able to be developed highly (Ghanbar and et al, 2012, 2). Tourism processing of any geographic area will be made in the process of versatility attractions, needed settlements and facilities. It forms the process of accepting tourists by itself that in one side there is the recognition of tourism and on the other side there is the depth understanding of the related atmosphere (Ghafari, 1999, 2). Providing of facilities for touring, visiting and recreation in all parts of the country is one of the most important factors in attracting tourists so tourists can freely see what they want (Rezvani, 2007, 118). The facilities are also seen in all fields of tourism including religious tourism. Religious tourists need facilities and possibilities when traveling to pilgrimage places for their welfare.

In Iran, religious tourism is one of the major and activities for spending leisure time and that's why the religious places of country are often visited by pilgrims who travel to cities and villages for pilgrimage, praying for meeting their needs. In addition to the individual religious beliefs, the amount of facilities and services provided at religious places is one of the factors that attract pilgrims to religious sites. Possibilities are significantly effective in travel satisfaction. Since, tourism satisfaction is important in the tourism industry and whether his expectations are met or not, his expectations must be determined at first then some goals must be determined and in this way the basic steps to satisfy the tourists must be taken. Because the satisfied tourists are a source of profit in the region and areas that cannot keep the tourists satisfied will lose their profits in the long term.

Southern Khorasan province has a very good position to attract religious tourism, with 102 holy tomb and religious places and its adjacency with Khorasan Razavi province of Iran, which is the pole of religious tourism. So, this research seeks to study the amount of tourists' satisfaction from tourist services in the region, as well as their expectations about these services so that effective steps shall be taken to meet the needs of tourists and improve the delivery of services appropriate to their needs in order to provide their consent.

### **The goals of the research**

- The study of religious tourists' satisfaction with the services offered at religious places in South Khorasan province
- Prioritization of factors affecting the satisfaction of tourists
- Evaluation of the gap between the quality of present tourism services and expectations of tourists

### **The history of the research**

Marin and Tabrner (2007) examined characteristics of tourism destinations and its effect on overall satisfaction and willingness to return to the islands of Balarik of Spain. By surveying of 1,218 coastal tourists, they have concludes that the experience of dissatisfaction has decreased total satisfaction and the negative emotions resulting from commercialization, crowding and environmental degradation significantly decreases the tendency of tourists to return to the destination.

Using descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis of questionnaire, Kanoknon (2009) has concluded that demographic characteristics, historical and cultural characteristics and motivations of tourists had a significant relationship with the satisfaction of tourists and they are the key indices of satisfaction of tourists in Thailand.

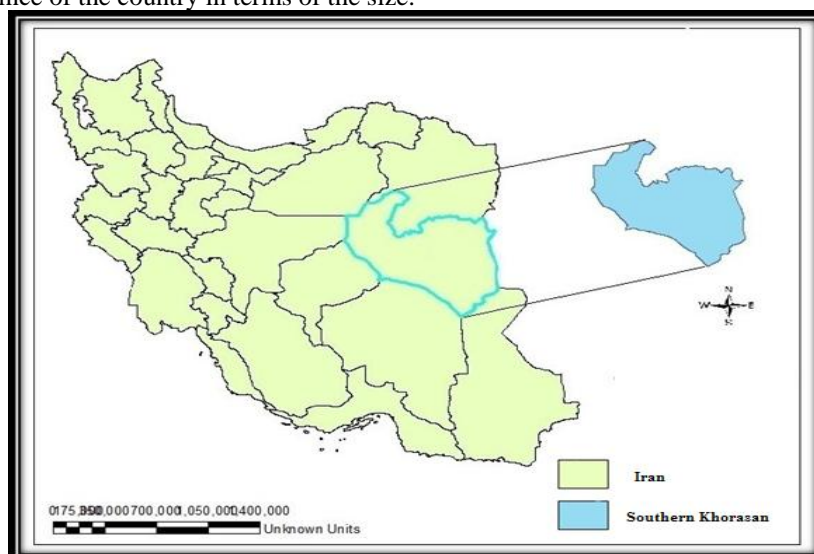
Yonggui et al (2003) in a study have offered a model of the relationship between service quality and reputation of banks in China. Based on research findings, the five dimensions of service quality have a direct impact on the reputation of the Bank. In addition, according to the findings of the researchers, the reputation of banks play an important role in determining of buying behavior and the repurchase and the loyalty of customers.

Riahi Samani (2005), in his book, analyzes religious tourism and its development strategies and introduces a number of mosques and shrines in various provinces of the country.

Taghvai and et al (2009), in his article, have analyzed the development of religious tourism in the city of Nour Abad of Mamaseni. The results of this study show that the revival of religious tourism in shrines of this city will be possible by correct managing and planning in the study area.

### **The study area**

Southern Khorasan province is situated between 30 degrees and 21 minutes and 34 degrees 54 minutes of northern latitude and 55 degrees 28 minutes and 60 degrees 58 minutes eastern longitude. This province is located in east of Iran and it is restricted by Khorasan Razavi and Semnan provinces from north and by Isfahan and Yazd province from west and by Kerman and Sistan and Baluchestan province from south and it has 430 km common border with Afghanistan country. South Khorasan and the city of Birjand as its center has an area of over 150,848 square kilometers that has occupied about 11% of the total area of Iran country and it is the third largest province of the country in terms of the size.



**Figure (1):** Geographical location of South Khorasan province: Source: research results

## II. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### TOPSIS model steps

**First step:** in this step, a matrix will be drawn that the options will be placed in its row and the people will be placed in its column. The junction of each row and column is the point which is given to each option by expert (Table 1).

**Table (1): Matrix Comments tourists (N)**

| Individuals Options | N <sub>1</sub>  | N <sub>2</sub>  | ... | N <sub>n</sub>  |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------|
| A <sub>1</sub>      | r <sub>11</sub> | r <sub>12</sub> | ... | r <sub>1n</sub> |
| A <sub>2</sub>      | r <sub>21</sub> | r <sub>22</sub> | ... | r <sub>2n</sub> |
| .                   | .               | .               | .   | .               |
| A <sub>m</sub>      | r <sub>m1</sub> | r <sub>m2</sub> | ... | r <sub>mn</sub> |

Source: research results

**Step two:** normalizing of matrix of tourists Comments (normalizing):

In order to be comparable, the matrix of tourists Comments will be changed to normalized matrix or not scaled matrix (N<sub>1</sub>) by using the formula (1):

$$r_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij}}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^m x_{ij}^2}} \quad \text{Formula (1)}$$

**The third step:** obtaining of not scaled and harmonious matrix:

For obtaining of not scaled and harmonious matrix, the not Scaled Matrix of the second step is multiplied by the square matrix (W<sub>m</sub> \* n) which the elements of its main diagonal and other elements are zero (Formula 2).

$$V = N_1 \times w_{mn} \quad \text{Formula (2)}$$

**Step Four:** determining of the positive and negative ideal factor

At this stage, options must be identified which have been specified as the most important or the least important options. In other words, the positive ideal is the largest amount of V and the negative ideal is the smallest amount of V, the following equation will express this issue:

$$A^+ = \{(max_i V_{ij} | j \in J) | i = 1, 2, \dots, m\} = \{V_1^+, V_1^+, \dots, V_n^+\} \quad \text{Formula (3)}$$

Negative ideal:

$$A^- = \{(min_i V_{ij} | j \in J) | i = 1, 2, \dots, m\} = \{V_1^-, V_1^-, \dots, V_n^-\} \quad \text{Formula (4)}$$

Table 2 shows the positive and negative ideal:

**Table (2): Positive and negative ideal**

| Tourist | positive ideal | negative ideal | Tourist | positive ideal | negative ideal | Tourist | positive ideal | negative ideal | Tourist | positive ideal | negative ideal |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---------|----------------|----------------|---------|----------------|----------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| N1      | 0.002          | 0.001          | N26     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N51     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N76     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N2      | 0.002          | 0.001          | N27     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N52     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N77     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N3      | 0.002          | 0.001          | N28     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N53     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N78     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N4      | 0.002          | 0.001          | N29     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N54     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N79     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N5      | 0.002          | 0.001          | N30     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N55     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N80     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N6      | 0.003          | 0.002          | N31     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N56     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N81     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N7      | 0.003          | 0.002          | N32     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N57     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N82     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N8      | 0.003          | 0.002          | N33     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N58     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N83     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N9      | 0.003          | 0.002          | N34     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N59     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N84     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N10     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N35     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N60     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N85     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N11     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N36     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N61     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N86     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N12     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N37     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N62     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N87     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N13     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N38     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N63     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N88     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N14     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N39     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N64     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N89     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N15     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N40     | 0.003          | 0.001          | N65     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N90     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N16     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N41     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N66     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N91     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N17     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N42     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N67     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N92     | 0.002          | 0.002          |
| N18     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N43     | 0.003          | 0.002          | N68     | 0.002          | 0.002          | N93     | 0.002          | 0.002          |

|     |       |       |     |       |       |     |       |       |      |       |       |
|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| N19 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N44 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N69 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N94  | 0.002 | 0.002 |
| N20 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N45 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N70 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N95  | 0.002 | 0.002 |
| N21 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N46 | 0.004 | 0.001 | N71 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N96  | 0.002 | 0.001 |
| N22 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N47 | 0.004 | 0.001 | N72 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N97  | 0.002 | 0.001 |
| N23 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N48 | 0.004 | 0.001 | N73 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N98  | 0.002 | 0.001 |
| N24 | 0.003 | 0.002 | N49 | 0.004 | 0.001 | N74 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N99  | 0.002 | 0.001 |
| N25 | 0.003 | 0.001 | N50 | 0.004 | 0.001 | N75 | 0.002 | 0.002 | N100 | 0.002 | 0.001 |

Source: research results

**Fifth step:** Calculate the distance from the positive and negative ideal:

At this stage of every one of the options of the positive and negative ideal will be determined. Interval between each one of the positive and negative ideal is in the table (3).

**The sixth step:** Calculate proximity of each of the factors to the negative and positive ideal factor:

In this stage the proximity of each of the factors to the negative and positive ideal factor (CL) will be obtained. Table 3 also shows the values of (CL) in each option.

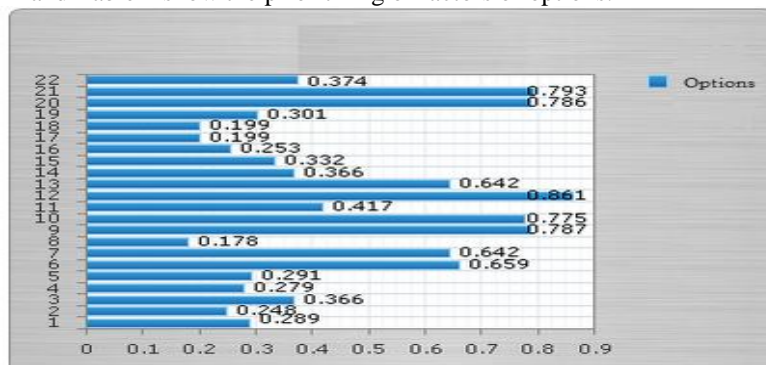
**Step Seven:** Ranking of options: In this stage, the options will be ranked based on the value of CL, In other words, any option that has a higher CL will earn a better ranking. Table 3 shows the ranking of Options.

**Table (3): Ranking Options**

| Rank | CL    | distance from the negative ideal | distance from the positive ideal | Options | Row |
|------|-------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|-----|
| 16   | 0.298 | 0.004                            | 0.009                            | A1      | 1   |
| 19   | 0.248 | 0.003                            | 0.009                            | A2      | 2   |
| 12   | 0.366 | 0.004                            | 0.008                            | A3      | 3   |
| 17   | 0.297 | 0.003                            | 0.009                            | A4      | 4   |
| 15   | 0.291 | 0.004                            | 0.009                            | A5      | 5   |
| 6    | 0.659 | 0.008                            | 0.004                            | A6      | 6   |
| 8    | 0.642 | 0.007                            | 0.004                            | A7      | 7   |
| 22   | 0.178 | 0.002                            | 0.001                            | A8      | 8   |
| 3    | 0.787 | 0.009                            | 0.003                            | A9      | 9   |
| 5    | 0.775 | 0.009                            | 0.003                            | A10     | 10  |
| 9    | 0.417 | 0.005                            | 0.007                            | A1      | 11  |
| 1    | 0.861 | 0.001                            | 0.002                            | A12     | 12  |
| 8    | 0.642 | 0.007                            | 0.004                            | A13     | 13  |
| 12   | 0.366 | 0.004                            | 0.008                            | A14     | 14  |
| 13   | 0.322 | 0.004                            | 0.008                            | A15     | 15  |
| 18   | 0.253 | 0.003                            | 0.009                            | A16     | 16  |
| 20   | 0.199 | 0.002                            | 0.001                            | A17     | 17  |
| 21   | 0.199 | 0.002                            | 0.001                            | A18     | 18  |
| 14   | 0.301 | 0.004                            | 0.008                            | A19     | 19  |
| 4    | 0.786 | 0.009                            | 0.003                            | A20     | 20  |
| 2    | 0.793 | 0.009                            | 0.002                            | A21     | 21  |
| 10   | 0.374 | 0.005                            | 0.008                            | A22     | 22  |

Source: research results

The results of the ranking of options, the same factors in tourists' satisfaction with TOPSIS technique suggests that the option of quality of inform the tourists in the region with a score of 0.861 have the higher place than other factors. Figure 2 and Table 4 show the prioritizing of factors or options.



**Figure (2):** Ranking the options: Source: research results

**Table (4): Ranking the options (factors)**

| Rank | Options   |
|------|---|
| 1    | Quality of informing the tourists in the region is acceptable                                   |
| 2    | There are financial and life security and environmental peace in the region                     |
| 3    | Quality of service (meals, grocery shopping...)   |
| 4    | Authorities of tourism centers have the required knowledge and skills                           |
| 5    | There is acceptable health services in the region   |
| 6    | Quality of accommodation just for a few hours or overnight (at least one night)                 |
| 7    | Information about the easy access to the region   |
| 8    | The number of overnight accommodation are adequate and satisfactory                             |
| 9    | The system of rubbish removing in parks, streets and pilgrimage and tourism places is desirable |
| 10   | The staff of Tourist services have the necessary competence                                     |
| 11   | Health status of recreational, pilgrimage, accommodation is ideal                               |
| 12   | The cost of transportation in the region is fair  |
| 13   | There are adequate means of transport within the region   |
| 14   | The consent of the traditional markets and crafts in the region                                 |
| 15   | Appropriate Climatic conditions of the region   |
| 16   | The consent of the appearance of tourist attractions, especially religious tourism              |
| 17   | Good quality entertainment and recreational facilities of the region                            |
| 18   | Providing food services and accommodation to tourists timely                                    |
| 19   | Lighting of the desired area is desirable   |
| 20   | Culture of hospitality of the host society is satisfactory                                      |
| 21   | The consent of polite behavior and honesty of the host community towards tourists               |
| 22   | Existence of the prayer room and its quality  |

Source: research results

### III. CONCLUSION

Tourists' satisfaction is one of the most competitive and the best indices for ensuring of future profits growth. Nowadays, many of the centers, agencies and organizations consider tourists' satisfaction as an important criterion for the quality of their work and this trend is still rising. Tourist satisfaction is achieved when the appropriate processes to be designed in such a way that the provided services meet the tourists' expectations. Since tourism satisfaction plays an important role in ensuring the tourism industry and its future, it is one of the subjects that have been explored in scope of tourism. Because tourists tend to transfer their positive experience with others and travel to the same place again, the recognition of the factors of tourists' satisfaction is one of the most important research scopes of tourism.

Therefore, the present study aimed to measure the satisfaction rate of tourists and its effective factors in order to develop religious tourism in South Khorasan Province. This research was an analytical-descriptive work. Ranking results of the effective factors for the satisfaction rate of religious tourists revealed that information quality for tourists gained 0.861 value score, life and financial safety 0.793 value, and environmental calmness 0.787 value, had a better position than others.

The various acquired points made by the model show that the tourists who were respondents in the survey, have had not the same satisfaction with the provided services and the factor of the quality of informing the tourists has placed on the highest rank in this prioritization.

#### Suggestions

- Improve the quality and quantity of tourism infrastructure, including accommodation, food centers, restaurants, entertainment centers and green space and transportation.
- Development of religious tourism in Southern Khorasan province requires providing special advertising Programs by media.
- Strengthen and develop the advertising, information and guidance of tourists' centers.
- Creating, strengthening and expanding of Pilgrimage tours through travel agencies coordination with government agencies and schools.
- Strengthen the indigenous culture through schools and other educational centers to interact with local and foreign tourists.
- Develop the tourism culture through the development of tourism and knowledge centers.

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