



# Prioritizing Integrated Marketing Communication Tools in Sport Tourism in Iran Based on ACCA Model

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## Article Info

### Article type:

Original Research

### How to cite this article:

Esmaeili, N., Ashraf Ganjuei, F., & Tojari, F. (2025). Prioritizing Integrated Marketing Communication Tools in Sport Tourism in Iran Based on ACCA Model. *International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior*, 5(1), 133-139.  
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijimob.5.1.14>



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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to prioritize the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tools in the sports tourism sector in Iran based on the ACCA model to enhance the effectiveness of marketing strategies and attract more tourists.

**Methods and Materials:** A descriptive-field research method was employed to achieve the study's objectives. Data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire administered to a statistical population comprising 53 experts and specialists in sports management, all holding at least a master's or doctoral degree in the field. The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) was used as the data analysis method to determine the weight and priority of IMC tools. The study ensured consistency in responses by calculating the inconsistency rate for paired comparisons, ensuring it remained below the acceptable threshold of 0.1.

**Findings:** The results revealed that advertising and public relations hold the highest importance in creating awareness within the sports tourism sector, with television advertising ranking the highest among advertising tools. Sales promotion emerged as the most significant tool for developing comprehension, with discount coupons receiving the highest final weight. For fostering conviction, personal selling and direct marketing were found to be the most influential, with presence selling and catalog distribution identified as the most effective methods. Finally, in the action stage, personal selling and direct marketing remained the most impactful tools, highlighting their significance in converting potential tourists into actual customers.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that an effective IMC strategy in sports tourism should prioritize advertising and public relations to build awareness, followed by sales promotion for comprehension and personal selling for conviction and action. These findings provide valuable insights for tourism authorities and marketers in Iran to allocate resources more efficiently and optimize communication strategies to boost the country's sports tourism industry.

**Keywords:** IMC, Analytical Hierarchy Process, sports tourism, ACCA model

## 1 Introduction

Tourism is a phenomenon that has always existed in human societies, but in the modern age as an industry has become. Tourism industry is considered as one of the largest and the most diverse industries in the world. Many countries enjoy an appropriate status with respect to sport tourism and, accordingly, contribute directly to their nation's economic prosperity (Heydari et al., 2024).

Sports tourism in recent decades is considered a new form of tourism so that the tourism and sport are so interdependent and complementary to each other (Abdollahnezhad et al., 2024; Gerami et al., 2023). The link between tourism and sport has created a new type of tourism that has created new and comprehensive structures for leisure and recreation with mental and physical vitality (Abedi & Doosti, 2023; Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022; Nasrollahzadeh et al., 2024). Sport has the ability to attract many tourists, so events that include sports, are considered a kind of charm and act as a tourism attraction in the city or the country (Gerami et al., 2023; González-García et al., 2022).

The corresponding studies indicate that sport tourism is the most developed sector of the tourism industry (Chang et al., 2020; Herbold et al., 2020) such that it is regarded as a world multibillion trading element, producing 4.5 trillion dollars for tourism industry and world tour (Abdollahnezhad et al., 2024; Abedi & Doosti, 2023; Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022).

Iran with potential natural, cultural and tourism attractions, and having a so-called four-season climate can be considered as a capable country for preparing the conditions for those grasped to the foreign travel, in general tourism industry, and in particular in sports tourism. In many countries, this dynamic industry is known as the main source of income, employment growth, private sector development and infrastructure. Gaye (2003) Also sport as one of the most motivating factors for the tourists and the "sport tourism" is a combination of "tourism" industry and "sport" industry has emerged (Yang et al., 2020). In other words, sport is one of the major tourist activities during the tourism and travel and tourism is also associated with different types of sports (Abedi & Doosti, 2023; Kahdouei et al., 2024).

Hence, it is necessary for countries to develop their capabilities in the field of sport tourism. One of the factors that can improve and develop the sports tourism industry of the country is using tools and the effective parameters of marketing. With regard to the specific characteristics of tourism product, the role of marketing and communication

in this industry have a great importance relative to other industries because by using the promotion and communication tools, the marketing can present information about what the area can offer to potential tourists and urge them to visit it (Heydari et al., 2024; Kahdouei et al., 2024).

Communication is the process of conveying thoughts and sharing the meanings among individuals or organizations. Communication which can be described as the paste that keeps combined a channel of distribution. The function of communication within channel of marketing is an important issue from both a theoretical and managerial point of view. Communication in marketing channel can function as the process by which influential information is transmitted (Gerami et al., 2023).

Therefore, it can be said that implementation of integrated marketing communications programs has a particular importance. Integrated Marketing Communications is a new phenomenon in Marketing Communications that a short time has passed since its introduction (Picton, 2005).

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a term that emerged in the late 20th century regarding application of consistent brand messaging across myriad marketing channels. IMC was developed mainly to address the need for businesses to offer clients more than just standard advertising. Integrated Marketing Communications, which is called briefly IMC, is a simple concept, yet it is important that guarantees the relation and the interconnectedness of all communication tools and sending messages regarding marketing (Picton, 2005). Integrated Marketing Communications of Sports tourism is a combination of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations.

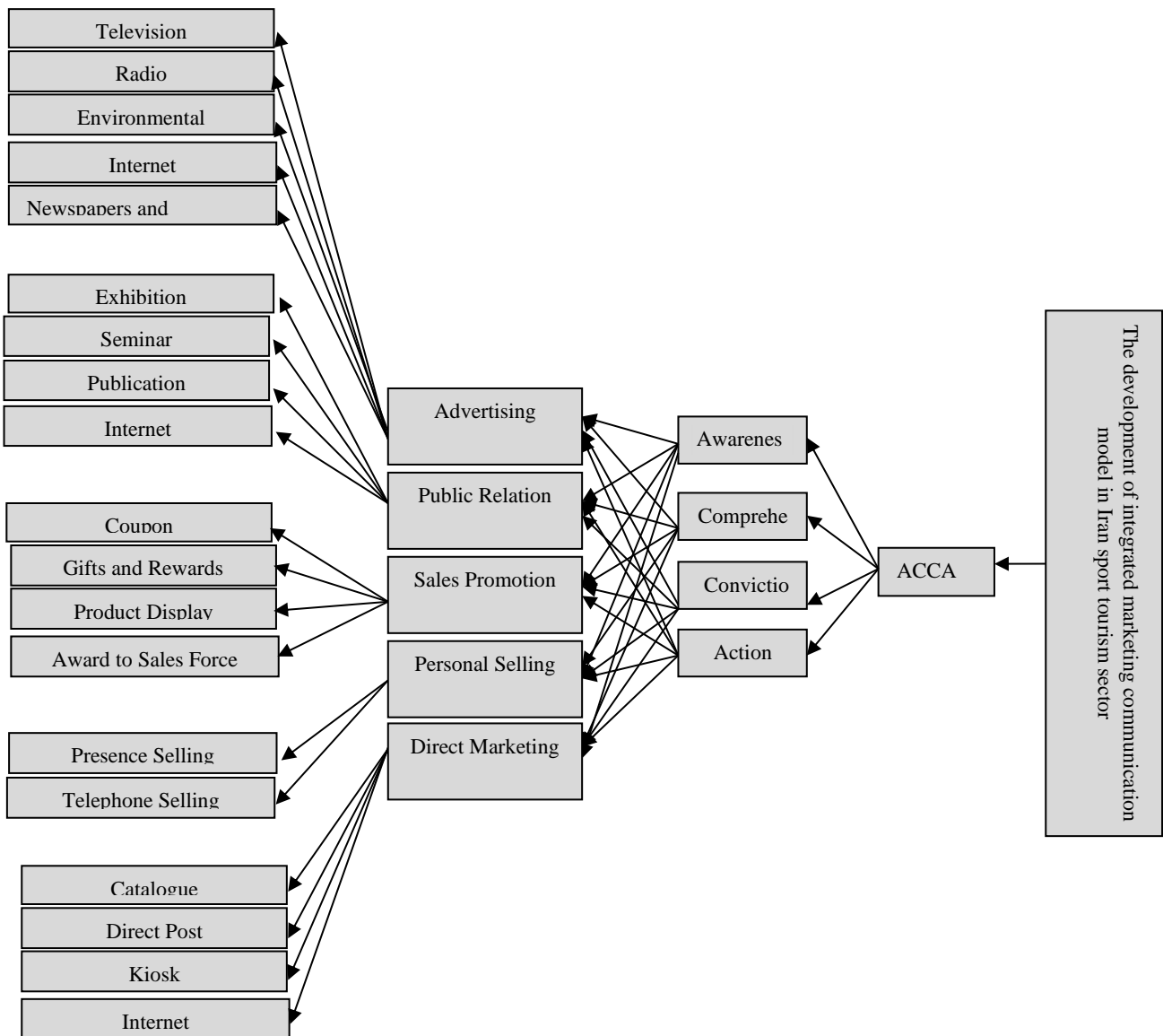
ACCA is an acronym that describes what happens when a consumer engages with an advertisement. The term and approach are attributed to American advertising and sales pioneer, E. St. Elmo Lewis. In marketing, grabbing the Awareness of potential customers or clients is imperative to gaining Comprehension in the product. Once that Comprehension is established, a business must make potential customers or clients Conviction the product enough to take action, generally by purchasing the product. There's a particular way consumers react to a marketing message. Marketers can gain the Awareness of consumers by product samples, large visual signs and other sensory techniques. Once the marketer has the Awareness of the consumer, they must craft their Comprehension through product demonstrations, information and ads. Companies must then build Conviction by focusing on creating a want for their

specific brand, and lastly, consumer action through promotions, discounts and calling out of features or benefits. The ACCA model which stands for Awareness, Comprehension, Conviction, and Action is perhaps the simplest formula you'll ever find anywhere, yet also the most powerful (Gerami et al., 2023; Mahmodi et al., 2023; Picton, 2005). According to the matters that expressed about the importance of integrated marketing communication, and since the behavior of customers and consumers is clearly

influenced by the actions of promotion and communication, and also taking into account the shortage of financial resources of the companies and a fierce competition among them, the need to prioritize integrated marketing communication tools is essential in the sports tourism sector. This prioritization can be based on different communication models that in this study to prioritize these tools, the hierarchy of effects model was used.

Figure 1

The Proposed Research Model (Integrated Marketing Communication in sport tourism in Iran).



2 Methods and Materials

In this study, the descriptive-field method is used for determining options of the decision hierarchy tree of

interviewing with journalism and reviewing books and related articles in this area. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect opinions. The statistical population of the research consisted of experts and specialists in sports

management (the meaning of experts, specialists and sports management professors are, who has Masters and Doctoral degree in the field of sport management and in addition book, article or thesis in the marketing tourism and sports tourism or sports integrated marketing Communications). As far as the researcher has studied, the statistical population of the research was 53 people by the time of distributing the questionnaires. The sample was considered equally with the population. According to the theme and objective of the following research, decision-making analytical Hierarchy Process was considered the most appropriate method of analyzing data. The method begins by providing a decision-making hierarchy tree. Decision-making hierarchy tree shows the comparing factors and evaluating alternative options, and then performs a series of paired comparisons. These comparisons determine the weight of each factor related the competing options and ultimately combine the resulting matrix of paired comparisons with each other to make the best decision possible. According to the matter that the data analysis method was based on AHP model, initially, the paired comparison rate of inconsistency was controlled for each respondent and then after ensuring the acceptable rate of inconsistency (less than 0.1), the Respondents' comments were combined and paired comparison matrix were extracted. The rate of inconsistency reflects the

consistency of comparisons with one another. By determining the rate of inconsistency, we can trust the determined priorities.

### 3 Findings and Results

As can be seen from [Table 1](#) to create Awareness based on the ACCA model, advertising and public relations, to create Comprehension, the Sales promotion had the first priority. To create a Conviction, the personal selling and direct marketing had the most importance. And to create Action, the personal selling and direct marketing had the utmost importance.

In the final stage, the content of relevant studies was reviewed, and initial indicators were identified to clarify the concept of strategic human capital. Subsequently, the findings obtained from the selected studies regarding their quality, the diversity of conducted studies, their potential impact, and the practicality of the findings were discussed. In other words, the findings from all studies were synthesized together, and the final conclusion was examined regarding effectiveness, feasibility, suitability, and significance of the findings. As observed, a total of 27 primary indicators were extracted from the research literature ([Table 1](#)).

**Table 1**

*The final weight of the IMC tools based on the ACCA model in the Iran sports tourism*

ACCA	IMC tools	The final weight	IR
Awareness	Advertising	0.206	0.00
	public relations	0.300	
	Sales promotion	0.145	
	Personal selling	0.210	
	Direct Marketing	0.138	
Comprehension	Advertising	0.115	0.03
	public relations	0.164	
	Sales promotion	0.317	
	Personal selling	0.187	
	Direct Marketing	0.217	
Conviction	Advertising	0.123	0.04
	public relations	0.157	
	Sales promotion	0.210	
	Personal selling	0.250	
	Direct Marketing	0.240	
Action	Advertising	0.130	0.01
	public relations	0.120	
	Sales promotion	0.160	
	Personal selling	0.280	
	Direct Marketing	0.290	

As can be seen from Table 2, in order to create Awareness among advertising tools, television advertising had the

highest final weight and among public relation tools, exhibiting with the final gained the highest final weight.

**Table 2**

*The final weight of advertising and public relations*

ACCA	Advertising Tools	The final weight	IR	
Awareness	Television	0.300	0.01	
	Radio	0.183		
	Environmental	0.157		
	Internet	0.220		
	Publications	0.140		
		public relations	The final weight	IR
		Exhibition	0.343	0.02
		Seminar	0.255	
		Publishing a booklet	0.149	
		Internet	0.253	

As can be seen in Table 3, to create a Comprehension among the tools of Sales promotion, discount coupon obtained the highest final weight.

**Table 3**

*The final weight of Sales promotion tools to create Comprehension in the ACCA model*

ACCA	Sales promotion	The final weight	IR
Comprehension	discount coupon	0.350	0.01

As can be seen in Table 4, to provide reliability and purchase of sport tourism in Iran in personal sales tools, Presence sale and among the direct marketing tools, catalogues had the highest importance. As can be seen in

Table 5, to provide reliability and purchase of sport tourism in Iran in personal sales tools, Presence sale and among the direct marketing tools, catalogues had the highest importance.

**Table 4**

*The final weight of personal selling and direct marketing tools to Conviction*

ACCA	Personal selling	The final weight	IR	
Conviction	Presence selling	0.645	0.02	
	Telephone sales	0.355		
		Direct Marketing		0.02
		Catalogue	0.305	
		Post	0.152	
		Kiosk	0.271	
		Internet	0.271	

**Table 5**

*The final weight of personal selling and direct marketing*

ACCA	Personal selling	The final weight	IR
Action	Presence selling	0.645	0.02
	Telephone sales	0.355	

Direct Marketing		
Catalogue	0.305	0.02
Post	0.152	
Kiosk	0.271	
Internet	0.271	

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, the advertising and public relations to create Awareness based on the ACCA model had the highest importance. The highest importance of advertising and public relations than other integrated marketing communication tools can be due to their more effective role than other means of communication to inform the market of products and services, describe the product or service performance, correct misconceptions, convince the customer to purchase, remind the best purchasing location to the consumer compared to other means of communication. Moreover, the results of this study are consistent with the prior results (Abdollahnezhad et al., 2024; Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022; Gerami et al., 2023; Nasrollahzadeh et al., 2024).

In addition, the research results indicated that to create Comprehension based on the ACCA model, the sales promotion had the most importance. Based on the research results, among the integrated marketing communication tools, the sales promotion is the best tool to create Comprehension toward the sports tourism product. Sales promotion can be helpful in stimulating the customer to respond quickly and creating a sense of urgency. Researchers consider the use of sales promotion tools to stimulate consumers and encourage them to re-use the brand is essential that is consistent with this research results. In addition, the research results are consistent with previous prior results (Abdollahnezhad et al., 2024; Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022; Gerami et al., 2023; Heydari et al., 2024; Kahdoui et al., 2024; Mahmodi et al., 2023; Nasrollahzadeh et al., 2024).

According to the research Conviction based on the ACCA model, personal selling and direct marketing had the highest importance. Since the personal selling requires the interaction of two or more people. Therefore, each person according to the needs and characteristics of other side can quickly be consistent with his condition. In the personal selling, the possibility of establishing any link is provided from a simple sale to a deep personal friendship. Personal selling, at some stages in the purchase process, and especially to create preference selection in buyers and to persuade and compel them to act is the most effective marketing communication tool. Direct contact with the customer gives the opportunity to

the seller that he will be flexible and adjusts the sales message according to the customer's needs. The sales force can receive immediate customer feedback. The research results are consistent with the research results of prior studies (Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022; Gerami et al., 2023; González-García et al., 2022; Herbold et al., 2020; Heydari et al., 2024; Kahdoui et al., 2024).

The research results showed that in order to create Awareness among the advertising tools, the television advertising has the most importance and among public relations tools, the exhibition and seminar is the highest importance. Studies showed that the television advertising has the most effect on attracting customers. Thus, these results are consistent with the prior results (Abdollahnezhad et al., 2024; Alizadeh & Nasiri, 2022; Heydari et al., 2024; Kahdoui et al., 2024; Nasrollahzadeh et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2020). In addition, the research results showed that among the sales promotion tools, discount coupon and prizes and gifts have more weight than other sales promotion tools. Giving awards and gifts and discount coupon to customers result in added value and increase loyalty and retention of customers. Research results (Picton, 2005) showed that the audiences are attracted larger to communication tools that their messages are related to awards. Moreover, prior research results (Kahdoui et al., 2024; Mahmodi et al., 2023) also showed that such messages remain more in the minds of the audience. Based on the research results among personal selling tools, presence selling has the highest importance and among direct marketing tools, catalogs and kiosks have the highest importance. These research results are consistent with prior research results (Chang et al., 2020; Gerami et al., 2023; Kahdoui et al., 2024; Mahmodi et al., 2023).

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study focused solely on experts and specialists in sports management, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other stakeholders, such as tourists or local businesses involved in sports tourism. Second, the use of self-reported data through questionnaires could introduce potential bias, as responses might reflect subjective opinions rather than objective measures. Third, the study's reliance on the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) for prioritization, while effective, may oversimplify complex interactions between

different IMC tools in real-world scenarios. Lastly, the geographical scope of the study was confined to Iran, which may limit the applicability of findings to other regions with different cultural, economic, and regulatory contexts.

Future research should consider expanding the scope by incorporating perspectives from a broader range of stakeholders, including tourists, marketing professionals, and policymakers, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of IMC in sports tourism. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques could offer deeper insights into the effectiveness of specific IMC tools. Comparative studies across different regions or countries could help identify cultural and contextual differences in IMC strategies for sports tourism. Moreover, longitudinal studies could track the impact of IMC strategies over time to assess their long-term effectiveness. Finally, integrating emerging digital marketing trends, such as social media analytics and artificial intelligence, into the analysis could provide more dynamic and data-driven marketing insights for sports tourism development.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

### Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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