



## Designing a Horse Tourism Development Model in Khuzestan Province Based on Grounded Data Theory

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** The present study aimed to design a model for the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan province based on databased theory. This study was conducted using a qualitative method by conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 professors and specialists in sports and youth departments who were selected using a purposive sampling method.

**Methodology:** The method of collecting information was through the study of previous research and conducting semi-structured interviews. To examine the face and content validity, the research findings were presented to the participants and they studied the text of the theory and then their opinions were applied. The method used to examine reliability was the intra-subject agreement method. The average intra-subject agreement was reported to be 0.83.

**Results and findings:** : Based on a comprehensive analysis of interviews, the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan province is influenced by causal factors (human resources, economy, management), contextual conditions (infrastructure, security, environmental attractions), effective strategies (planning, participation, monitoring), and intervening factors (environment, technology, education). The successful development of this industry will lead to positive outcomes such as economic growth, social advancement, entrepreneurship, and cultural enrichment. Therefore, it is suggested that in order to develop horse tourism, considering the identified factors, focusing on improving infrastructure, strengthening management and strategic planning, and paying attention to intervening factors (environment, technology, education), the ground should be prepared for the active participation of stakeholders and benefiting from positive economic, social, and cultural outcomes.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Horse Tourism, Horse Racing, Grounded Data Theory, Khuzestan Province.

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Tourism is a rapidly expanding industry that has become one of the largest economic sectors on a global scale. This industry is not only recognized as a significant source of income for countries, but also plays an important role in creating job opportunities, stimulating economic growth, and developing infrastructure. Many countries view tourism as a key driver for their industrial and structural progress. One of the most important branches of tourism is sports tourism, which is formed from two sectors: tourism, which is the largest service industry in the world, and sports, which is one of the largest and most important industries in the world today, and many people are employed in it all over the world. Therefore, more research is necessary to identify and address these problems. These and other cultural activities related to horses, if systematically organized and developed, can easily attract the attention of tourists. In this regard, the scope of study in the present study is horse tourism in Khuzestan province. Khuzestan Province, a hidden treasure in the field of horse tourism, with its unparalleled potential, is waiting to flourish. The purebred horse breeds, enchanting natural landscapes, and rich culture mixed with horse riding have made this land a prime destination for the development of horse tourism. However, this huge potential has not yet been fully realized and requires targeted planning and actions. In this regard, conducting a comprehensive and data-based research, with the aim of designing a model for the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan, is necessary and inevitable. This research, by accurately identifying existing obstacles and challenges, providing scientific and practical solutions, and developing documented programs, can contribute to the sustainable development of this industry in the province. Also, this research paves the way for branding and creating a unique identity for horse tourism in Khuzestan and benefits the province from the economic, social, and cultural benefits of this type of tourism. Given the limited studies conducted in this field in the country and the large volume of unknown information, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis is a smart and efficient choice. This research, focusing on designing a horse tourism development model in Khuzestan Province based on grounded theory, takes an important step towards the development of this industry in the province and helps officials, activists, and researchers in better understanding and decision-making in the field of horse racing or equestrian sports.

### **Methodology**

The present study was conducted with the aim of developing a model for the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan Province, using a qualitative approach. In this regard, first, by carefully examining the theoretical foundations and relevant research background, key concepts related to horse tourism were identified and applied. Then, through in-depth interviews and open-ended questions with 15 professors and experts in the field of horse tourism, who were selected through purposive sampling, comprehensive data on horse tourism, especially focusing on horse racing sports activities, were collected. Finally, using the theory method, the data obtained from the interviews were analyzed and categorized through an open and axial coding process, and a comprehensive model for the development of horse tourism with an emphasis on horse racing sports activities in Khuzestan Province was presented.

## **Results and Findings**

In order to analyze the qualitative data in depth and extract valid findings, this study used a systematic and multi-stage coding process. First, based on the categories extracted from the preliminary study of theoretical foundations, open coding was conducted to reveal primary concepts from the data. Then, in the axial coding stage, the relationships between these concepts were identified and categorized to create a more coherent structure of the data. Finally, selective coding was used to integrate and organize key concepts and achieve a comprehensive theoretical framework. This careful and multi-layered approach allowed for the extraction of rich and meaningful findings from the qualitative data. In order to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data, the researcher, adopting a systematic and precise approach, embarked on the open coding stage. After carefully reviewing and analyzing all the interviews conducted, and with the aim of extracting the key points and themes emphasized by the interviewees, initial open codes were identified. At this stage, the main focus was on maintaining the authenticity and richness of the data and avoiding the application of subjective assumptions. These concepts, as the cornerstone of subsequent analyses, paved the way for obtaining rich and valid findings. Accordingly, 141 open codes were classified into 55 concepts and 25 categories. The categories that were analyzed in the initial stages created perspectives, thoughts, and ideas in the researcher's mind that generated subsequent questions and interviews. By conducting these interviews and analyzing the data, the researcher gained a deeper perspective and understanding of the interviewees' experience. Then, a back-and-forth movement was made between the categories and characteristics identified in the initial stage of open coding. New concepts identified in new interviews were added to the identified categories until the categories reached theoretical saturation. In open and axial coding, a suitable paradigm model for the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan Province was developed, a model that includes causal conditions, background conditions, intervening conditions, strategies and actions, and consequences. As you can see, the background conditions, which must be considered for better success in implementing these processes. These conditions are not specific and determining positive or negative effects for the implementation of the processes, but are among the factors that must be considered in the characteristics of the processes and tools used. Unlike background conditions, intervening conditions are those that have positive or negative effects on the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan Province and can facilitate and accelerate its implementation or, as a limitation, lead to disruption in implementation. For this reason, concepts have been included in this dimension of the model that are different from neutral background conditions in this respect. In the main and central phenomenon dimension, the processes of horse tourism development in Khuzestan Province, which was the main subject and question of this research, were included; in the strategies and measures dimension, the main measures and activities that can help in implementing horse tourism development processes in Khuzestan Province were considered; and in the consequences dimension, the expected results and consequences, both tangible and intangible, were considered.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study showed that the development of horse tourism in Khuzestan province is influenced by causal factors (human resources, economy, management), contextual conditions (infrastructure, security, environmental attractions), effective strategies (planning, participation, monitoring), and intervening factors (environment,

technology, education). The successful development of this industry will lead to positive outcomes such as economic growth, social advancement, entrepreneurship, and cultural enrichment. Therefore, it is suggested that in order to develop horse tourism, considering the identified factors, focusing on improving infrastructure, strengthening management and strategic planning, and paying attention to intervening factors (environment, technology, education), the ground should be prepared for the active participation of stakeholders and benefiting from positive economic, social, and cultural outcomes.

## Declarations

- Funding:** There is no funding support for this study.
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- Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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