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A study on tourist demand for Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as ancient Iranian sport

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Nowadays sports, especially ancient sports, play an important role in promoting tourism. In recent decades, ancient Iranian Sport, especially Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as creative cultural products, attract many tourists to destinations and are well known as tourist attractions in Iran. Hence, the aims of this paper, which was conducted in the city of Isfahan, are: (1) to investigate the attitude of domestic tourists towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in Isfahan city; (2) to measure tourists’ awareness of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (ICH); and (3) to determine the priority given to attractions and activities around Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals from the domestic tourists’ perspective. On the basis of the results of this study, it can be concluded that domestic tourists are interested in gaining experience and increasing their knowledge of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. However, the level of awareness of these ancient sports among domestic tourists in the city of Isfahan is low. The results also illustrated that among the activities, visiting Zoorkhânehes in Isfahan, participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei events and observing the live play of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals have high priority from the tourists’ perspective.

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\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Heritage sport tourism; Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals; sport tourism; tendency; tourism

\textbf{Introduction}

Nowadays, sport is one of the pull attractions of tourism destinations for the purpose of attracting people with interest and motivation to exercise. Sport tourism has different typologies such as sporting events (Thomson et al., 2019); nostalgia sport tourism (Kulczycki & Hyatt, 2013); active sport tourism (Gibson, 1998) and heritage sport tourism (Hinch & Ramshaw, 2014). In recent decades, a strong tendency of tourists towards intangible heritage has led their particular attention to intangible sports heritage. Heritage sports tourism on one hand can preserve and revive sports heritage and on the other hand, it can improve the national identity of communities.

Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals are an example of the intangible sport heritage on UNESCO’s list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the tendency of tourists (domestic tourists as the most important
customers for this market) towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as an intangible sport heritage in the city of Isfahan. Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals – traditional Iranian sport – were registered as world heritage in 2010. It concerns a ritual collection of gymnastic and callisthenic movements performed by ten to twenty men who wield instruments symbolizing ancient weapons (ich.unesco.org). The Pahlevani ritual is held in a place named Zoorkhaneh and the callisthenic movements are based on the music and poems of the “Morshed” (master) who leads the performance of the Pahlevani ritual (Figure 1).

This study attempts to identify Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as a new tourism product and in this regard, there is a need to evaluate tourists’ trends as customers. Novelli (2005) highlighted studies of place and audiences for promoting a new tourism product in a destination and indicated the relation between the demand and the supply side. Since there is a relation between demand and supply, there should be tourism demand studies for identifying Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as a tourism product. Furthermore, before introducing Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals into the market, there should be a study of whether tourists will welcome it, whether tourists have enough awareness of the products and which sub-products are most attractive for them.

Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to introduce Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as a tourist attraction in Isfahan, Iran. In addition, this paper aims to survey the tendencies and awareness of audiences towards this form of ancient sports in Isfahan.

It is noteworthy that, the ancient sport ritual has a more spiritual dimension than competitive. Rituals are also part of sport culture. This spiritual dimension, as a special segment/part of sport, should receive more consideration in tourism research as an attraction and this new dimension of sport tourism is emphasized in the originality and novelty of this research.

**Literature review**

Sport can be a central part of peoples’ culture and can create a tourism image for a destination (Gammon, Ramshaw, & Waterton, 2013). Huggins (2013) noted that travel with sport motivation has a long history and he pointed out the Greek Olympic Games;
mediaeval and Renaissance jousting, shooting and archery competitions; major horse races from the eighteenth century onwards and gladiatorial events in the Roman period as sports and sport events which attracted many tourists to destinations. García Romero (2013) demonstrated that Olympia in Greece is one of the pioneers in historical sport tourism. Zekioglu and Kalkan (2019), who highlighted ancient stadiums in Anatolia, which includes Hellenic and Roman culture, argued that reviving and preserving these cultural heritage features is important for future generations.

Bullfighting is another traditional sport known as a blood sport (Mitchell, 1991) in some countries such as Spain, Portugal, rural areas of Japan, parts of southern France, and some Latin American countries (Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Peru), attracting many tourists to these destinations. Gomes (2001) introduced Barrancos (Portugal) as a famous destination for its traditional bullfighting festival, which takes place each year during the last four days of August. Ishii (2006) investigated bullfighting in the Nanyo district (Japan) as tradition and acculturation; the results illustrated that bullfighting as a tourist event boosted the local economy and is known as intangible cultural folklore, as recorded by the Agency for Cultural Affairs on November 8, 1995. In addition, Cohen (2014) argued that in Spain, bullfighting is known as a tradition, a cultural treasure (Douglass, 1999), national heritage and a tourist attraction; however, due to animal rights, it faces an uncertain future.

Sport tourism has different typologies such as action sports, adventure sports or extreme sports (Brymer & Oades, 2009; Donnelly, 2006); sport events (Masterman, 2014); active sport tourism (Gibson, 1998) and sport heritage tourism (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005; Gammon & Ramshawp, 2013) (Figure 2). Ramshaw and Gammon (2005) classified sport heritage into four categories: tangible immovable sport heritage such as stadiums, tangible movable sport heritage (e.g. objects in sports museums) and intangible sport heritage, such as rituals and goods and services. It is to be noted that the emphasis of the present study is on intangible sport heritage.

Since the Second World War, UNESCO has preserved and supported a series of world heritage items, starting with tangible heritage, natural heritage and most recently intangible heritage as metacultural production (Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, 2004); sports heritage is no exception to this. Chidaoba, wrestling in Georgia (added in 2018); traditional Korean wrestling (Ssirum/Ssireum) (added in 2018); Charrería, equestrian tradition in Mexico (added in 2016); Kuresi in Kazakhstan (added in 2016); Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Iran (added in 2010) and Chogān, a horse-riding game accompanied by music and storytelling of Iran (added in 2017) can be good examples in this regard (UNESCO, 2019).

Figure 2. The typologies of sport tourism (source: own construction).
Ramshaw (2014) noted that there is a significant relationship between sport, tourism, and heritage. Moreover, Ramshaw (2014) argued that sport can open a window to peoples’ culture and that sport heritage is a tool for memorializing conflict and understanding peoples’ culture. He introduced constant making and remaking of sport heritage and marketing as strategies for sport heritage preservation.

However, Gammon et al., (2017) believed that historical sporting sites and sport heritage sites are less popular in the sport tourism segment and are rarely protected and preserved as tourism attractions. It is noteworthy that Ramshaw and Gammon (2017) emphasized the intangible features of sport heritage in studies on the future of tourism.

This study also highlights Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals (ancient sport) in Iran as intangible cultural heritage. There is no general agreement between scholars on the early history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. However, extant evidence such as exercise instruments and equipment, type of facilities and the old Persian names and titles which are still common in the Zoorkhanehs as mentioned by Amirtash (2008) imply an ancient tradition. Accordingly, some researchers suggest that the history of Pahlevani rituals (Ayin-haye Pahlevani) dates back to ancient Iran (Ensafpour, 1974; Goudarzi, 2004; Tolou Kian, 2010). In the nomination file No. 00378 for registration on the representative list of ICH (UNESCO), the history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals has been described as follows:

In the history of Iran, this Element has been influenced by epical myths and a worldview based on the ancient Iranian ethical trilogy “Good Thought, Good Deed, and Good Speech”. It roots back to Mithraism 3000 years ago. This ritual has been and is practiced from the ancient times in most parts of Iran as well as some regions of such neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India.

Sedigh Imani (2008) also refers to words and terms in pre-Islamic and early Islamic sources which show the presence of some sport activities at that time. Some evidence of Varzesh-e-Bastani (an ancient sport) is mentioned in Hedāyat al-mota’allemin from the fourth century AH (10th AD); the manuscripts belong to the Islamic period (Sedigh Imani, 2008). However, it seems that most terms which are now common in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals go back to the seventh century AH (thirteenth century AD) (Tolou Kian, 2010).

The research of Chaghajerdi et al., (2014) reveal that the lack of specialists in the field of sport tourism, the lack of marketing and advertising, the old buildings of Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan and the lack of familiarity with the Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei sport are challenges which Iran faces in promoting Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. The Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei sport, despite its antiquity and physical and moral effects, has now been forgotten among Iranian citizens and providing facilities and advertising through media can develop this ICH (Zare, Noori, Saeidi, & Hosseini, 2015).

However, up to this time, no significant work has been undertaken in the field of investigation of tourist demand for Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in Iran.

It is worth noting that the market demand study is the main pillar of prosperity of a new product (Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in this research) in the tourism market and it is obvious that domestic tourists are a large group of audience/candidates or customers for a tourism market. Thus, a consideration of the level of awareness and tendency of tourists for a new product are key components of market demand studies and constitute the main goals of this study. Figure 3 is a conceptual model of the present study.
Case study

Iran is a historic and ancient country which is known as a cultural destination and includes tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In recent decades, local government has attempted to register ICH of Iran in UNESCO for the purposes of conceptualizing, commodity marketing, connecting to global demand and attracting cosmopolitan audiences (Sammells, 2014).

This study was conducted in the city of Isfahan, Iran with an emphasis on Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. Isfahan is a city in central Iran and is the capital of Isfahan Province, known as a historical and cultural destination. Among the Iranian provinces, Isfahan, with its 98 Zoorkhânehes, is a pioneer and some Zoorkhânehes such as Ali Gholi Agha, Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, Darvazeh Hasanabad, Mola Ali and Zolfaghar are open to the public and tourists (both domestic and international). Due to the numerous and active Zoorkhânehes and celebrities in national and international competitions, in 2010 Isfahan city was selected by the International Zurkhaneh Sports Federation as the cultural capital of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in Iran.

Methodology

The research methodology includes quantitative research. The main objective of this study is to inquire into the tendencies and awareness of domestic tourists towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in Isfahan, Iran. In order to achieve this goal, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Domestic tourists have high awareness about Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals.
H2: Men are more familiar with Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals than women.
H3: Domestic tourists are interested in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in Isfahan.
H4: At least two of the variables (attractions and activities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals from the tourists’ perspective) are significantly different from each other.

In the next stage, a questionnaire (using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very low to very high) was designed to investigate the tendency of tourists towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals activities and attractions. Hence, data for this part of the study were

Figure 3. Conceptual model of study (own construction).
gathered through questionnaires (closed-ended questions). Regarding this, it was focused on tourists and the questionnaire was distributed in the city especially around and in ritual Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan. For determining sample size, the researchers used Veal’s (2006) rules. Veal’s table (2006) illustrated that the sample size should be 384 people. Thus, 385 questionnaires were gathered. The empirical part of this study was conducted from March 2018 to May 2018.

Results

385 responses were coded for data analysis. Cronbach’s alpha is 0.7, which presents a high level of reliability. Among the survey participants, 43.8% were male, and 40.1% were female. Since the data was normal, a one-sample t-test was selected to analyse the data. To measure the level of awareness of domestic tourists towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. The results clearly show that the awareness of domestic tourists regarding the history, celebrities, events, techniques and poetries and golden voices of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals and architecture of Zoorkhâneh is low (Table 1). Therefore, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis is rejected. Since Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals are ancient male activities and women are not allowed to participate and even enter the Zoorkhâneh and only recently have the doors been open for women to visit, these results suggested testing the relationship between two variables (the level of awareness and gender). The chi-squared test for independence, also called Pearson’s chi-squared test or the chi-squared test of association, was used to discover if there is a relationship between two categorical variables (Table 2). Analysis of the data indicated that the two variables of gender and awareness are associated and the level of awareness of men is greater than that of women (Table 2). According to Table 1, the male count for very high awareness is 12 when the expected count based on the chi-squared test is 8.1. Meanwhile, the female count for very high awareness (5) is less than the expected count (8.9). Lastly, analysis of the data through SPSS tools indicated that the second hypothesis is accepted.

In the next phase, to inquire into the third hypothesis (domestic tourists are interested in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Isfahan), a one-sample t-test was used and the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Iran</td>
<td>47.35</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Isfahan</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of events of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei traditional sport</td>
<td>42.91</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of architecture of Zoorkhânehs of Isfahan</td>
<td>41.63</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>-0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei poetry and golden voices</td>
<td>47.27</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-0.506</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei techniques rituals</td>
<td>50.33</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
clearest result of the investigation (one-sample t-test; $\mu > 3$ and Sig < 0.05) (Table 3) is that domestic tourists are interested in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals activities and attractions such as learning about the history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Iran; observing it played live; seeing a film and documents before live play; visiting Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan; participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei events; wearing clothes of this Iranian ancient sport; taking photos with Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei ritual clothes; being familiar with celebrities and techniques of this traditional sport; and observing the photo gallery of celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. Hence, on the basis of the results of the one-sample t-test, the third hypothesis is accepted.

### Table 2. The result of the chi-squared tests to analyse the association of awareness and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Chi-squared tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pearson Chi-Squared = 16.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = 0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>117.0</td>
<td>141.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. The result of one-sample t-test and Friedman test to analyse the tendency of domestic tourists regarding Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals (own construction).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>One-sample test</th>
<th>Friedman Test</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Test Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning about history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Iran</td>
<td>$t = 10.164$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .53766 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .4337 Upper = .6417</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>N = 385 Chi-Squared = 161.673 df = 9 Asymp. Sig. = .000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing the live play of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals</td>
<td>$t = 12.314$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .67792 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .5697 Upper = .7862</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a film and documents before live play</td>
<td>$t = 9.275$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .54026 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .4257 Upper = .6548</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan</td>
<td>$t = 15.135$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .78442 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .6825 Upper = .8863</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei events</td>
<td>$t = 12.802$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .69351 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .5870 Upper = .8000</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing clothes of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals</td>
<td>$t = 3.941$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .25974 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .1302 Upper = .3893</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking photos with clothes of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals</td>
<td>$t = 7.276$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .45714 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .3336 Upper = .5807</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being familiar with celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Isfahan</td>
<td>$t = 8.607$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .47273 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .3647 Upper = .5807</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being familiar with celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals techniques</td>
<td>$t = 6.695$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .38182 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .2697 Upper = .4940</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing the photo gallery of celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals</td>
<td>$t = 5.540$ df = 384 Sig. (2-tailed) = .000 Mean Difference = .30909 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower = .1994 Upper = .4188</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the next step, a Friedman test was used to analyse the fourth hypothesis:

H4: At least two of the variables (attractions and activities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals from the tourists’ perspective) are significantly different from each other.

Analysis of the data (Table 3) illustrated that the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there are differences between variables. Among the variables, visiting Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan, participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei events and observing the live play of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals are those which have the highest scores respectively (Figure 4). It is worth mentioning that the authorities, SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and investors should pay particular attention to the activities and attractions which have priority for tourists in the planning and package tours.

Conclusions

Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals as a performing art can be a creative cultural product for promoting and diversifying urban tourism in the city of Isfahan. Moreover, integrating Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals and tourism can be a strategy to preserve this ancient Iranian sport as an ICH. It is obvious that promoting a new niche tourism and introducing a new product in the tourism market needs customer studies. In this regard, this paper used a quantitative method to investigate the tendency of tourists (domestic tourists as the most important customers for this market) towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. The results of analysis of the data illustrated that domestic tourists are interested in gaining experience and increasing their knowledge of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. The clearest results of the investigation are that tourists are interested in attractions and activities such as learning about history of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Iran, observing the live play of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals, seeing a film and documents before live play, visiting Zoorkhânehs in Isfahan, participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei
events, wearing clothes of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals, taking photos with clothes of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals, being familiar with celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals of Isfahan, being familiar with techniques of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals and observing the photo gallery of celebrities of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals. Lastly, the results of the Friedman test allow us to conclude that among the variables, visiting Zoorkhâneh in Isfahan, participating in Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei events and observing the live play of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals are those with high priorities. However, the results also illustrated that tourists’ level of awareness of Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals is low and the results provide some support for the researches of Chaghajerdi et al., (2014) and Zare et al. (2015). Nowadays, tourists just visit the Zoorkhāneh and can watch the live play, but their knowledge about this ICH is not increased. Hence, in the near future, authorities and tour guides should pay particular attention to organizing workshops, interpretation and educational programmes regarding Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei techniques, history, events and celebrities.

The following suggestions may be useful in raising the level of awareness and knowledge of tourists towards Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals and can attract more tourists to this sport:

- Preparing a tourism map of the Zoorkhânehs of Isfahan
- Providing tourism brochures, signposts and interpretive panels regarding Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in historical parts of city and the places where are tourists are concentrated
- Investigating by authorities of Isfahan city to introduce this ancient sport as an ICH which can be a tourism attraction
- Training tour guides regarding Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals
- Creating documentation and films about Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in order to increase public awareness
- Organizing Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei ritual competitions and attracting tourists to visit

In addition, on the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that men have more awareness regarding Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals than women and this result has been replicated in the study of Masoud et al. (2019).

We believe that this allows us to conclude that Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals can be a new product in the Isfahan tourism market from the domestic tourists’ perspective and that in order to attract more tourists to this sport heritage, the authorities should introduce some fun through observing films and a photo gallery of celebrities, wearing and taking photos with Pahlevâni and Zoorkhâneh clothes, storytelling about celebrities and participating in events in their activities. Lastly, for the Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals we can recommend the following subjects:

- An in-depth study of international tourists’ tendencies and motivations for visiting the Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals
- An investigation of the negative and positive impacts of tourism on Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals in the case study.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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