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# Cognitive structures of Iranian senior tourists towards domestic tourism destinations: A means-end chain approach

**Abstract:** This study constructed a hierarchical value map (HVM) which specified how Iranian senior tourists linked various attributes of domestic tourism destinations to definite consequences, and how such consequences helped them to satisfy their individual values. To do so, the present study, for the first time, demonstrated the cognitive structure of destination image on more abstract levels using the means-end chain (MEC) approach. Through the laddering technique and in-depth interviews with 30 Iranian senior citizens (ISTs), the hierarchical value map of the Iranian senior tourists was constructed, as a result of which seven key MECs were identified. The investigation revealed 12 attributes, 11 consequences, and five values that the Iranian senior tourists wished to achieve. Given the shortage of qualitative studies dealing with senior tourists' behaviour, the findings of this study could serve as a key basis for the segmentation of the senior tourism market and the formulation of destination positioning strategies in Iran.

**Keywords:** cognitive structures; destination image; Iran tourism; laddering technique; means-end chain; senior tourism

## 1. Introduction

In the attempt to attract more visitors, tourism destinations normally compete with each other. Although international tourism appears to be the main source of interest for tourists, domestic tourism can still serve a variety of destinations (Huybers, 2003) and has a salient contribution to the national economy (Stylidis, Belhassen, & Shani, 2015). Destinations provide a composite of places, products, services, attributes, activities, attractions and experiences (Pearce & Schaenzel, 2015) which meet the needs of tourists. Tourists may visualise stereotypical images of different travel locations; in response, tourism managers need to promote the image of their site to maximise the number of visitors (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Destination image is a mental structure that

1 represents thoughts, beliefs, emotions and impressions about a destination (Kim &  
2 Chen, 2016). Similar to consumer brands, destination image is a vital factor for future  
3 visitors as it offers “a pre-taste of the destination” (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991, p. 10).  
4 Understanding how the destination image is shaped can be extremely helpful for  
5 destination promoters in terms of creating an appropriate image of their destination  
6 products (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte, & Folgado-Fernández, 2017).

7         Suggesting that a destination image is the consumer’s “reasoned and emotional  
8 interpretation”, Beerli and Martin (2004, p. 658) have added a distinct dimension to the  
9 definition of destination image. An image is shaped through a broad spectrum of  
10 informational and promotional resources, coupled with travellers’ personal knowledge  
11 and direct experience of the location; an image, therefore, is the force that motivates a  
12 visitor to evaluate and choose a destination (Gartner, 1994). According to Baloglu  
13 (1999), an image is composed of two distinct but interrelated components: affective  
14 (feelings) and cognitive (beliefs). An affective image involves an individual’s emotional  
15 response to a product or place, while a cognitive image reflects product knowledge or  
16 place characteristics. A specific tourist destination's attractions or attributes are  
17 measured as a cognitive dimension of destination image (Becken, Jin, Zhang & Gao,  
18 2017).

19         Focusing on the cognitive element represents a trend in cognitive psychology  
20 that has been widely recognised and suggests that an individual’s acquired knowledge  
21 in a specific domain has strong impacts on a significant proportion of his/her cognitive  
22 processes and outcomes (R. Lachman, Lachman, & Butterfield, 1979). Mental processes  
23 occurring between stimuli and behaviour can be understood by cognitive psychology  
24 (Skavronskaya et al., 2017). Kanwar, Olson, and Sims (1981, p. 123) explain that the  
25 content and organisation of the knowledge held in cognitive structures as well as their

1 effects have been considered by many cognitive theorists (Tulving & Donaldson, 1972;  
2 Kintsch, 1974; Anderson, 1976). Cognitive structures fundamentally influence  
3 processes such as attention, encoding, evaluating, storing, and applying information  
4 (Marks & Olson, 1981).

5         The cognitive structure of destination image has been investigated in previous  
6 studies (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). In most of these studies, the cognitive  
7 structure of destination image is based on attributions of the destination and is examined  
8 for various types of tourists. The number of senior tourists are increasing due to the  
9 global rise in aging population (Le Serre, Weber, Legohérel, & Errajaa, 2017).  
10 Therefore, investigating senior tourists' knowledge of the destination and their  
11 knowledge of themselves in the form of cognitive structures of destination image could  
12 enhance our understanding of the behavior of these tourists. This enhanced  
13 understanding could therefore, act as the foundation for formulation of effective  
14 strategies for senior tourism market as one of the emerging and attractive markets for  
15 the tourism industry.

16         Our comprehensive review of the relevant literature in relation to cognition,  
17 destination image, and senior tourism revealed three main gaps in the literature. (1) The  
18 cognitive dimension of tourists' destination image is mostly exclusive to their  
19 knowledge about destinations' attributes (Echtner, & Ritchie, 1991; Alcañiz, García, &  
20 Blas, 2009; Stylidis et al. 2015). (2) The destination image of senior tourists has been  
21 relatively overlooked, and the limited studies available, focus primarily on Western  
22 tourists (Neves, 2012; Utama, 2017). This is despite the growing global population of  
23 senior citizens, especially in Asia (Lee, 2016), and consequently the increase in the  
24 number of senior tourists, the study of the behavior of Asian senior tourists has been  
25 relatively overlooked (Le Serre, Legohérel, & Weber, 2013). (3) Finally, there are

1 limited studies focusing on the Iranian senior tourism market. This research therefore,  
2 aims to investigate the cognitive structure of Iranian senior tourists (ISTs) toward  
3 domestic destination. To do so the following questions have been developed and must  
4 be answered:

- 5 • Which attributions of domestic destination are of particular interest to Iranian  
6 senior tourists?
- 7 • What are the benefits/consequences of experiencing these attributes in the minds  
8 of the tourists and which values these benefits are associated with?
- 9 • What are relationships between these cognitive categories in the cognitive  
10 structure of senior tourists?

11 The contributions of this research are therefore, twofold. (1) Our research, for  
12 the first time, explores the cognitive dimension of destination image in relation to the  
13 Means-End Chain (MEC) theory and identifies the components of consequence and  
14 value. It also demonstrates how they are linked to the concrete attributions of the  
15 destination. (2) Considering the lack of studies focusing on destination image of Iranian  
16 senior tourists (ISTs), this study therefore sheds new light on this relatively under-  
17 investigated area.

18 The paper is organised as follows: first, the literature of senior tourism,  
19 destination image and cognition is reviewed, following which the potential of the MEC  
20 method for investigating cognitive structures is addressed. Subsequently, the MEC is  
21 used for a qualitative study of destination image in a domestic tourism context. Finally,  
22 research findings are reported and discussed, and their implications for further research  
23 and applications are highlighted.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Background to Senior Tourism*

The world is dealing with population ageing. In 2017, 13% of the global population was aged 60 and above and the elderly population is increasing at a rate of about 3% per year. It is predicted that by 2050, nearly a quarter or more of the global population will be 60 or older (World Population Prospects, 2017). Although senior people are usually identified by “calendar age”, there is no consensus about when this period of life starts (Caber & Albayrak, 2014). The lowest age suggested for recognising a person as “senior” is 50 (Patuelli & Nijkamp, 2016). Improved health conditions have aided senior population growth (Ji, 2012). Having more free time and active lifestyles are the characteristics of most contemporary seniors which have encouraged higher levels of interest in travel (Alén, Losada, & Domínguez, 2016). Seniors have significant disposable time and money to spend on travel (Nyaupane, McCabe, & Andereck, 2008) and both the size and purchasing power of this cohort of consumers are steadily increasing (González, Rodríguez, Miranda, & Cervantes, 2009). Consequently, the travel industry cannot overlook the senior travel market as a promising market segment (Losada, Alén, Nicolau, & Domínguez, 2017; Wang et al., 2013).

Tourism and travel literature has been experiencing a considerable amount of growth in the number of studies specifically focusing on the senior tourist market since 2000. These studies have primarily attempted to identify different aspects of the senior market by exploring factors such as travel motivations, travel satisfaction, travel constraints, perceived health status and the associations of those factors with the segmentation of senior tourists, their travel choices and travel purchase decisions (Caber & Albayrak, 2014). Nielsen (2014) provided an overview of the literature on seniors’

1 tourist behaviour and described different methods of approaching it as analysis of  
2 constraints, comparative analysis, analysis of heterogeneity and temporal analysis.  
3 Because of the relation between how seniors' tourist behaviour has been approached  
4 and how seniors are viewed, in Nielsen's (2014, p.118) study, two broad views were  
5 suggested: (1) seniors are seen as an ageing group or (2) as a heterogeneous group.  
6 Following the comprehensive study of Nielsen (2014), the senior tourist market has  
7 encouraged researchers to investigate in this field and examine various topics,  
8 especially in relation to constraints (Huber, Milne, & Hyde, 2018); accommodation  
9 (Anuar, Musa, Khalid, & Anderson, 2017; Losada et al., 2017); length of stay and  
10 frequency of travel (Alén, Nicolau, Losada, & Domínguez, 2014; Losada, Alén,  
11 Domínguez, & Nicolau, 2016); motivation and spirituality (Alén, Losada, & de Carlos,  
12 2015; Moal-Ulvoas, 2017; Moal-Ulvoas, 2016; Patuelli, & Nijkamp, 2016); and  
13 cognitive age (Le Serre et al., 2017).

14 Cognitive age, such as cognitive structure, stems from the field of cognitive  
15 psychology and is often used in senior consumer behavior research. The cognitive age is  
16 connected to self-perception of the individual and determines what age the person feels  
17 regardless of his/her calendar age (Le Serre et al., 2017). Barak (1987) creates a new  
18 multidimensional age scale (cognitive age) to replace the identity age scale. The  
19 cognitive age scale successfully merges the identity age with personal age to gain an  
20 appropriate reliability and validity. The relationship between cognitive age and behavior  
21 of the seniors, including values (Sudbury & Simcock, 2009) and the motivations of  
22 tourists (González et al., 2009) have been investigated before. However, considering  
23 that cultural and personal definitions of age often differ (Barak, Stern, & Gould, 1988),  
24 in one recent study concerning cognitive age, Le Serre et al. (2017) identified culture as  
25 a moderating variable in relation to cognitive age and senior behavior. The findings of

1 this study show that in Asian culture (Chinese), cognitive age relation with travel  
2 perceived risk was stronger than European culture (France).

3 A number of studies have been conducted since 2000 which focus on the  
4 perspectives of senior tourists in relation to tourist destination choice. For example,  
5 Shoemaker (2000) identified a number of criteria for choosing a tourism destination by  
6 American senior tourists. The most important of these criteria were: beautiful natural  
7 scenery, accommodation prices, special discounts for seniors, and transportation costs.  
8 Norman, Daniels, McGuire & Norman (2001), similarly provided an analysis of the  
9 push/pull motivational factors and reported 6 important motivations/benefits (e.g.  
10 family, escape and relaxation) and 9 remarkable attributions (e.g. culture, climate,  
11 people and historical attractions) for the American senior tourists. Furthermore, Huang  
12 & Tsai (2003) found that Taiwanese senior tourists pay attention to historical, natural  
13 landscapes attributes and religious and Western programs. Neves (2012) identified  
14 Portuguese tourism destinations' attractions for domestic senior tourists and analyzed  
15 the relationship between these perceived attractions (nature, shopping, the environment,  
16 health care facilities, and history) and the socio-demographic characteristics of this type  
17 of tourists. Lee (2016) also identified four attribute-level satisfaction factors for the  
18 Taiwanese senior tourists in his study. These factors were (1) diversity of natural and  
19 cultural resources, (2) barrier-free access to tourism and recreation attractions, (3)  
20 provision of senior-related facilities and services, and (4) quality of senior-only tour  
21 operations (Lee, 2016, p.18). Utama (2017) presented the destination image model of  
22 Bali Tourist Destination. In this model, the effect of three variables of push motivations,  
23 destination identity and destination creation on the destination image variable was  
24 measured from the perspective of foreign national senior tourists. The findings of this



1 study show that the destination creation and push motivations affect the destination  
2 image.

3

#### 4 ***2.2. An Overview of Senior Tourism in Iran***

5

6 In the latest census in Iran (2016), the elderly aged 60 and older, make up 9.3% of the  
7 population, which has been steadily growing since 1976 (Statistical Centre of Iran,  
8 2017); it is expected that by 2050, the elderly will account for about 30% of the Iranian  
9 population (Secretariat National Council of the Elderly, 2017). By 2011, Iran had  
10 passed the second phase of the age transition (young stage), and by 2031, the third  
11 phase of age transition (middle aged increase) will finish. After 2031, the aging phase  
12 will dominate Iran's demographic structure (Moshfeq & Mirza'i, 2010).

13 With regard to the movement of the Iranian population towards middle age and  
14 aging, issues such as hygiene, health, the provision of comfort and the wellbeing of the  
15 elderly in the community are becoming more widespread every day (Motie Haghshenas,  
16 2011). Paying attention to the development of senior travel and planning for special  
17 tours can be considered as a way to fill part of the leisure time for Iranian seniors  
18 (Asadi, Rahimzadeh & Ahmadkhani, 2016).

19 As far as senior tourism is concerned, very limited research has been conducted  
20 in Iran. Ghalamkari (2014) divided the market of Iranian senior tourists based on travel  
21 motives and individual characteristics into three segments: younger seniors, rich seniors  
22 and pluralist seniors; this study presented strategies for the development of domestic  
23 tourism for these groups. Asadi et al. (2016) provided a comprehensive framework for  
24 identifying and exploring the direct and indirect effects of each of the factors affecting  
25 the development of the senior tourism industry in Iran. The results of this research

1 revealed that *security, relaxation and comfort of the residence* are the most important  
2 factors in Iran's senior tourism development model. Using a cognitive mapping  
3 approach, Asadi, Boroumand Zad & Maleki Nejad (2017) provided a qualitative model  
4 for explaining the development of senior tourism in Yazd province. Their research  
5 findings demonstrate that factors like security, insurance, health standards, special  
6 services and transportation status play an important role in the development of senior  
7 tourism in Yazd province.

8           Despite the rising median age of Iran's population in recent years and the  
9 formation of the emerging market of senior tourism in Iran, limited studies have been  
10 carried out in the field of Iranian senior tourists. Since the definition of marketing  
11 strategies requires the recognition of consumer behaviour and the amount of research  
12 done on the behaviour of the senior tourist is insignificant, the need to study the factors  
13 affecting the behaviour of Iranian senior tourists is clear.

14

### 15           ***2.3. Cognition and Destination Image***

16 Many researchers who have dealt with tourism regard destination image as a  
17 multidimensional construct which essentially rests on two dimensions: affective  
18 evaluation and cognitive evaluation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; San Martín, Herrero,  
19 & García de los Salmones, 2018). These dimensions create a general image of the  
20 location in question (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b), although the cognitive image has a  
21 greater impact on general destination image (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2017).  
22 Cognitive evaluation is determined by reference to knowledge and beliefs held about a  
23 location, whereas affective evaluation involves all feelings about the location in  
24 question (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Through cognitive

1 evaluation, the tourist relies on the objective attributes of the location within the limits  
2 of his/her knowledge (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). The attributes which may  
3 persuade a tourist to visit a destination include natural and historical background, rich  
4 heritage, lodging facility, the climate, among others (Stylidis et al., 2015). That is, the  
5 more the tourist is aware of the positive features of the location, the more reliable  
6 his/her cognitive evaluation will be (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). Drawing on  
7 sociolinguistic models explaining the formation of the destination image, Dann (1996)  
8 and Gartner (1994) have identified three elements of an image: (a) affective (b)  
9 cognitive and (c) conation. According to Agapito, Oom do Valle, and da Costa Mendes  
10 (2013), these three dimensions of destination image are hierarchically interrelated and  
11 the influence of the cognitive component on the conative dimension is higher when  
12 mediated by the affective component. Moreover, Alcañiz et al. (2009) attempted to  
13 advance knowledge of the cognitive dimension of a destination's image by analysing its  
14 composition and posited three positions (functional, mixed and psychological attributes)  
15 on a continuum. They added the third position, called the "mixed", to Echtner and  
16 Ritchie (1991, 1993). Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) multi-attribute approach to the  
17 cognitive component of destination image was to provide a continuum of Functional  
18 (based on tangible or measurable perceptions) - Psychological (intangible and abstract  
19 characteristics) that different attributions of destinations were posited in its different  
20 position. Given that the destination image is the representation of destination in tourist's  
21 mind (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), we can use the concepts of cognitive psychology to  
22 define this representation as a hierarchy of categories. This constitutes different levels  
23 of abstraction in the mind, and the destination attributions have the lowest abstraction.

24         Early cognitive psychologists were remarkably influenced by computational  
25 analogy, which was increasingly growing as a method of exploring mental functioning

1 (Gardner, 1985). The mind was conceptualised as a data processor or “software” and the  
2 brain was seen as the hardware. Interaction with the external environment was  
3 visualised as informational input; primarily, the mind was described as being a  
4 representation tool that converted sensory input into internal representations, which  
5 produced adjustive behaviour and processes as an output (Garfield, 1990). Knowledge  
6 of the world was an amalgamate of internal representations that were mostly stored in  
7 long-term memory. This primary configuration of cognitive psychology soon developed  
8 into a study of knowledge representation/process which advocated a radically rationalist  
9 explanation of behaviour (Moore, Smallman, Wilson, & Simmons, 2012).

10         The notion of cognitive structure, as far as the *encoded representations of*  
11 *information* are concerned, has become a central concept in consumer behaviour  
12 models. Such models assume that information is encoded and stored in organised  
13 networks of representations known as *knowledge structures* or *cognitive structures*  
14 (Kanwar et al., 1981). In an individual’s memory, these representations can be  
15 organised as schemata (schemas) or cognitive structures which are associated with a  
16 given product. A product schema involves coded representations of brand knowledge,  
17 product attributes, conditions of use, general information about categorising the product,  
18 and selection/evaluation rules. The coded information may be perceived to be organised  
19 or interrelated and may be stored in memory as a structural framework of knowledge  
20 (Norman & Bobrow, 1975). As a result, the schemata or cognitive structures of the  
21 product may encompass both *real* knowledge and evaluations/emotions, whilst storing  
22 purchase criteria and even decision rules and strategies (Olson, 1978). According to  
23 Ghosh and Gilboa (2014), representation of knowledge about a concept including its  
24 attributes and the relations among those attributes happens in a schema as a cognitive  
25 structure. Many researchers recognise knowledge structures or structured knowledge

1 (Jonassen, Beissner, & Yacci, 1993) as a state through which the individual sorts out  
2 facts, concepts, propositions, theories, and raw data (Taber, 2000). More specifically,  
3 knowledge structures are regarded as a hypothetical construct that organises the  
4 association between concepts in memory (Shavelson, 1972). Therefore, it is assumed  
5 that the order of information retrieved from long-term memory can, to some extent,  
6 reflect how an individual cognitive structure defines concepts and their links (Ifenthaler,  
7 Masduki, & Seel, 2011). It is generally accepted that individuals use the information in  
8 their long-term memory to understand, interpret, and store new information (Olson,  
9 1980). Broadly speaking, cognitive structures are expected to leave a strong impact on  
10 individuals' cognitive processes and behaviours (Marks & Olson, 1981).

11         The term hierarchy or cognitive structure refers to a hypothetical link between  
12 three interrelated constructs: product/brand attributes, consequences (e.g. perceived  
13 benefits) of using special attributes, and consumers' orientations or end-states of being  
14 (e.g. personal values including security, happiness, and self-esteem) (Krystallis, 2015).  
15 The foundation of the MEC theory is a model of cognitive structures which represents  
16 the path through which concrete product characteristics are linked with consumer values  
17 (McIntosh & Thyne, 2005). In the literature, people's inner thinking and cognitive  
18 structures in relation to a given product or event have been widely investigated through  
19 MEC theory (Lin & Fu, 2017). There are two approaches to the MEC theory:  
20 motivational and cognitive. The motivational perspective uses MEC to gain an insight  
21 into consumers' purchase motivations. For instance, this approach attempts to detect the  
22 consequences that may follow the use of the marketing mix characteristics of a given  
23 product and the way such consequences are interlinked. The cognitive approach, on the  
24 other hand, employs MEC as a model of the "consumption-related cognitive structure"  
25 which stores and organises the information about consumption in memory. In other

1 words, the cognitive structure is hypothesised as a basic hierarchal model in which  
2 cognitive categories with differing levels of abstraction "are interlinked in chains and  
3 networks" (Grunert & Grunert, 1995, p. 210).

4 Applying the MEC theory to the tourism and leisure context primarily  
5 concentrates on tourist behaviour in terms of the choice of destination (Jiang, Scott, &  
6 Ding, 2015; Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993; Klenosky, 2002; Pike, 2012),  
7 museum and heritage visiting (Thyne, 2001), nature-specific experiences (Lin, Fu, & Li,  
8 2017), choice of accommodation (Mattila, 1999), and other possible areas of  
9 investigation. In these cases, both MEC theory and the laddering technique are used.  
10 These theories can formulate qualitative research methods, as well as conceptual  
11 models, used to interpret the meanings that tourists and hosts associate with buying,  
12 consuming or experiencing tourism-related products/services. Meanwhile, they can  
13 facilitate an understanding the personal values underlying tourists' and hosts'  
14 behaviours (McIntosh & Thyne, 2005).

### 15 **3. Methodology**

#### 16 ***3.1. MEC Theory and Laddering Technique***

17 Broadly speaking, in studies concerned with marketing, MEC is employed to  
18 understand consumer behaviour (e.g. Jeng & Yeh, 2016; Walker & Olson, 1991). MEC  
19 is governed by expectancy-value theory and tries to outline the hierarchical relations  
20 established between product attributes (means), consequences arising from these  
21 attributes for consumers (benefits), and personal values (ends) which are reinforced by  
22 the consequences. The rationale behind MEC suggests that products (e.g. commodities,  
23 services, destinations, and ideas) are meaningful to consumers and that consumers  
24 evaluate meanings when making decisions about buying and consumption (Gutman,

1 1982). MECs are hierarchical cognitive chains whereby consumers' product knowledge  
2 is connected to their self-knowledge. The lower levels of the MEC hierarchy encompass  
3 objective knowledge about product attributes and their perceived associations with  
4 functional (concrete) consequences arising from product use. Such functional  
5 consequences may be associated with more abstract knowledge regarding psychological  
6 consequences of product use. Finally, some MECs may associate psychosocial  
7 consequences with concrete or completely abstract self-knowledge about consumer  
8 values and consumers tend to perceive products as *self-relevant* when their product  
9 knowledge regarding functional attributes and consequences is associated with their  
10 self-knowledge of favourable psychosocial consequences and values (Walker & Olson,  
11 1991).

12 In MEC research, there is a semi-structured, one-on-one interviewing technique  
13 called *laddering*, which is normally used to recognise the components of consumers'  
14 MECs (Klenosky et al., 1993; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The laddering technique  
15 involves a tailored interview format that draws on "a series of directed probes"  
16 revolving around the question "Why is that important to you?". The ultimate purpose of  
17 this questioning is to identify the sets of linkages between key conceptual elements  
18 across the range of product attributes (A), consequences (C), and personal values (V)  
19 (Krystallis, 2015). The interview technique provides the respondents with an  
20 opportunity to speak openly, utter long sentences without being interrupted by the  
21 researchers, and communicate more than one consequence for each attribute or more  
22 than one value for each consequence (Botschen, Thelen & Pieters, 1999).

23 The attributes of products used by consumers can be identified through a variety  
24 of techniques (Krystallis, 2015). Such attributes are then selected as a starting point for  
25 in-depth interviews. Following an analysis of the content of laddering data, a summary

1 table (i.e. the implication matrix) is reached in which all direct or indirect linkages  
2 between Cs, As and Vs (the “A-C-V ladders”) are outlined. Next, most frequently  
3 emerging connections are represented as a tree diagram called the *hierarchical value*  
4 *map*. This map is inherently structural and reflects the associations across all levels of  
5 abstraction (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Gutman (1982) and, Olson and Reynolds  
6 (1983) adopt a cognitive structure perspective, stating that the hierarchical value map  
7 acquired from laddering data is “an aggregate map of cognitive structure” (Olson &  
8 Reynolds, 1983).

### 9       **3.2.       Data Collection and Sampling**

10 In this study, the interviewees were Iranian senior citizens (over 50 years of age) who  
11 had undertaken a minimum of three trips to domestic destinations over the past five  
12 years and had plans for subsequent travels. A qualitative investigation requires  
13 information-rich participants, and individuals with travel experience would be more  
14 likely to have a clear idea of destination characteristics and their own desires. As a  
15 result, a purposive sampling method was used to identify the primary participants who  
16 were predominantly the friends and acquaintances of the researchers. The participants  
17 were then asked to introduce other candidates. The data was collected from March 2017  
18 to June 2017 through 30 interviews conducted in Shiraz, Iran. Generally, a sample size  
19 ranging from 30 to 60 participants would be acceptable for a MEC-specific study  
20 (Reynolds & Gutman, 1984). The time and place of the interviews were arranged based  
21 on the participants’ preferences.

22       Each interview was initiated with a short introduction. The interviewees were  
23 informed of the purposes of the interview and the researchers were allowed to record  
24 the conversations. The respondents were first asked about their next destinations, and



1 they specified at least three different places. Next, the respondents were asked to  
2 describe the considerable attributes of the destinations in question. On average, every  
3 respondent would mention 4-6 cognitive elements concerning attributes. Subsequently,  
4 the attributes which seemed to be more important to the respondents were designated as  
5 the starting point of the laddering procedure. Based on these attributes, through the  
6 conventional probe “Why is that important to you?”, the interviewees were asked to  
7 subconsciously associate product attributes with consequences and/or their personal  
8 values. The same process was continued until the respondents could no longer provide  
9 an answer to the question raised. Interviews with the participants ranged from 30 to 75  
10 minutes and were audio recorded.

### 11 ***3.3. Data Analysis Approach***

12 Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was conducted to identify content  
13 codes which represented the cognitive elements relevant to destinations. First, in the  
14 coding process, the interview data were classified as concept codes. Then, concept  
15 codes with close meanings were classified into content codes. Due to the focal  
16 importance of terminal values in directing the entirety of the cognitive hierarchy, such  
17 values were coded according to Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic  
18 human values. Schwartz's theory of value classified 10 "motivationally distinct values"  
19 into four categories. As part of the coding process, some concept codes were grouped  
20 according to the values of Schwartz's universalism, benevolence and security values.  
21 Codes related to spirituality were also included in the Rokeach's (1973) terminal value  
22 of salvation.

23 Through the coding process, 101 concept codes were identified, which were then  
24 categorised into 28 summary content codes for subsequent analysis (see Table 1). The  
25 content summary codes included 12 attributes, 11 consequences, and 5 values. The

1 reliability of the codes was assessed through the opinions of two evaluators, with 85%  
2 agreement on the codes assigned. Due to the software constraints in analyzing Persian  
3 data as well as the researchers' decision to present the results of this study in English,  
4 content codes were translated from Persian into English. Following the coding process,  
5 ladders based on the A-C-V levels were mapped. Each participant could create several  
6 ladders. The ladders of each respondent were entered into the LadderUX software and  
7 the data was analysed to construct both the implication matrix and the hierarchical value  
8 map (HVM) that represent the Iranian senior tourists' cognitive structure of destination  
9 images (see Figure 1).

10  
11 To establish a comprehensive HVM, direct linkages across A-C-V items were  
12 compared with a cut-off level (Krystallis, 2015). Although Gengler and Reynolds  
13 (1995) proposed a cut-off level at 5% of the sample size, the value was considered to be  
14 2 in this study. In other words, every definite linkage in the HVM had to be mentioned  
15 at least once by at least three respondents. On average, for each respondent, 4.7 ladders  
16 were obtained from a total of 141 ladders and the average element / content code per  
17 ladder was estimated at 2.7 by the software.

18

19 Table 1. Summary Content Codes

20 Figure 1. Iranian Senior Tourists' HVM

21

#### 22 **4. Results and Analysis**

23 All of the respondents had already travelled to domestic destinations in Iran. The  
24 experiences they gained made it possible for them to discuss their knowledge of and  
25 beliefs about the destinations. Table 2 provides a summary of the respondents'

1 demographic information. The study sample included Iranian senior tourists (ISTs) who  
2 were above 50 years of age. In this study, the mean age of the respondents was 64 years  
3 ( $50 \leq$  respondents' age  $\leq 82$ ); 13% had lost their spouse, and 53% were female.  
4 Furthermore, 60% held academic degrees.

5  
6 Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents  
7

8  
9 Out of the laddering data, seven major MECs were extracted that yielded a good  
10 understanding of the Iranian senior tourists' cognitive structures (see Table 3). In the  
11 present study, key MECs are those cognitive chains in the aggregate map of cognitive  
12 structure of Iranian senior tourists, which relationships between cognitive categories are  
13 strong or moderate. While a key MEC can start with several different attributes, it  
14 ultimately leads to a single value.

15 MEC 1 dealt with "*historic attractions- national pride-universalism*". Table 3  
16 illustrates (in)direct linkages in MEC 1 across A-C-V levels; the numbers to the left of  
17 the decimal point clarify how many direct relations at various levels of abstraction were  
18 established between two cognitive categories, whereas the numbers to the right of the  
19 decimal point in every cell show the number of indirect relations (Reynolds & Gutman,  
20 1988). For instance, in MEC 1, "historic attractions" had ten relations with "*national*  
21 *pride*"; that is to say, this direct relation was mentioned by the respondents ten times.  
22 Similarly, there were 14 indirect relations between "historic attractions" and  
23 "universalism"; this suggested when the researchers probed into the cognitive categories  
24 beyond "historic attractions" during the laddering process, the respondents mentioned  
25 "universalism" 14 times at the level of values.

1        ***MEC 1***

2        As Figure 1 depicts, *historic attractions* was linked with the consequence of *national*  
3        *pride*. With a history of about 10,000 years, Iran is a country that enjoys a rich culture  
4        and history and its contributions to human history heritage are well understood  
5        (Khodadadi & O'Donnell, 2018). The ISTs expressed a sense of *national pride* as an  
6        achievement gained from visiting the monumental heritage, which helped them realise  
7        the *universalism* value. For example, according to respondent 8, "I am proud to be  
8        Iranian when I see historical monuments of the Achaemenid period". *Universalism*  
9        value in turn contributed to a sense of accomplishment, originality, and inner harmony.  
10        MEC 1 demonstrated a total of 19 direct relations and 14 indirect relations.

11

12        ***MEC 2***

13        *Culture* and *historic attractions* were sources of interest for the respondents because  
14        these sources generate more knowledge, thus satisfying individual curiosity and leading  
15        to broad-mindedness and wisdom. In the coding procedure used, *historic attractions*  
16        included historic background and tangible objects, for instance old houses and palaces,  
17        museums, caravanserais and castles, old neighbourhoods, the tombs of eminent  
18        individuals, mosques/shrines, and bridges. *Culture* was regarded as an intangible entity  
19        and included artistic background, literature, rites and rituals, local accents and dialects,  
20        handcrafted artworks, foods, and agricultural products. The respondents preferred  
21        destinations with historic attractions and cultural background because such sites offer  
22        diverse experiences and new knowledge and ultimately help the respondents to meet the  
23        *universalism* value which, as they expressed, is founded upon curiosity, wisdom, and  
24        broad-mindedness.

1 For the respondents, *experience differences* was interpreted as a source of  
2 experiencing new and distinct feelings, visiting new places, and comparing them.  
3 Furthermore, *know more* was interpreted as gaining knowledge in a specific area,  
4 learning a lesson from history, and tracing the genealogy of interesting topics. Historical  
5 and cultural attractions brought about similar consequences, *experience of difference*,  
6 *know more*, and finally the *universalism* value. For example, according to respondent 9,  
7 “historical anecdotes can be taken into consideration, and subsequently change the view  
8 of life”; alternatively, respondent 4 stated that “I compare old Kashan's homes with old  
9 Shiraz homes and learn a lot”. As Table 3 shows, there were 55 direct relations and 40  
10 indirect ones in MEC 2.

### 11 **MEC 3**

12 Natural landscapes and shrines are important to the respondents because such places are  
13 considered to be pacifying and reflections of God’s majesty, inspiring them to have  
14 (perceived) intimacy with God. Viewing natural landscapes and being present in saints’  
15 sanctuaries helped the respondents return to their “inner selves” and experience positive  
16 energy. By experiencing *relaxation* in a peaceful place, the respondents mean receiving  
17 positive energy by releasing negative energy, overcoming sadness and worry, achieving  
18 distance from the urban lifestyle, and connecting with their inner selves. In the  
19 respondents’ own words, the main examples of *natural landscapes* are: seas,  
20 forests/jungles, rivers, mountains/plains, caves, palm tree fields, deserts and desert  
21 nights, richly green spaces, and pristine nature. *Relaxation*, with 23 direct relations, was  
22 one of the significant consequences that the ISTs tried to realise in the travel  
23 destinations they visited. Through inner peace and a contemplation of God’s creation,  
24 the respondents sought to feel intimacy with God and to be relieved from the burden of

1 their sins; in other words, their intention was to realise a sense of *salvation* in their lives.  
2 According to respondent 1, “the silence of nature relaxes me”, while respondent 11  
3 stated that “by pilgrimage, I become relax, my negative energies are evacuated and I  
4 feel closer to God”. In total, 36 direct relations and 13 indirect relations were observed  
5 in MEC 3.

#### 6 ***MEC 4***

7 As Figure 1 illustrates, attributes such as *activity in nature* and *previously unvisited*  
8 *locations* released the ISTs from their normally monotonous lifestyle and consequently  
9 helped them to develop a sense of joy and happiness. For *activity in nature*, some  
10 activities in travel destinations were mentioned including cooking out in nature, fishing,  
11 canoeing, swimming and scuba diving, using warm fountains, walking along the shore,  
12 hiking, and enjoying flowers and plants. Respondent 6 made the following statement:  
13 “observing the flowers and plants of other areas is my hobby and creates variety in my  
14 life”. *Old-fashioned markets / shopping centres* in travel destinations were also  
15 desirable and interesting locations for the respondents. For example, according to  
16 respondent 12, “I enjoy the variety of colours and designs in the old markets”.  
17 Moreover, respondent 1 specified that “shopping changes my mood, it's better to say  
18 shopping therapy”. *Better feeling / joy*, with 19 direct relations and eight indirect  
19 relations, was an important consequence that the ISTs tried to realise by recourse to  
20 various facets. Several of them stated that *better feeling / joy* inspired *positive emotions*  
21 which were, in their own words, happiness, cheerfulness, and a life with diversity, joy  
22 and excitement. In MEC 4, 50 direct relations and 26 indirect relations were observed.  
23

1        **MEC 5**

2        Discipline and cleanliness in cities, urban infrastructures, and new tourism attractions  
3        (e.g. flower gardens, bird gardens, and aquariums) were all elements of the code *urban*  
4        *order* (see Figure 1), and were interesting and enjoyable to the ISTs. The code *security*  
5        involved values expressed by the respondents such as social order, cleanliness, and  
6        protection of the environment. In total, there were 13 direct relations and five indirect  
7        ones in MEC 5.

8        **MEC 6**

9        Memory loss is one of the characteristics of old age. Aging adults may even experience  
10       severe forms of memory loss. Some of the respondents expressed that they might be  
11       more likely to remember the names and specifications of *historic attractions* by visiting  
12       such locations. Although they might have heard the names or seen the pictures of such  
13       locations, the ISTs tended to forget the attractions quite quickly. Yet, visiting such  
14       locations in person could make them more memorable (*durability in mind*) to the ISTs  
15       and help them enhance their mental and psychological health. According to respondent  
16       10, for example, “my memory is weakened. Seeing the historic buildings in person  
17       makes them more memorable”. *Security* as a value represented wellbeing in MEC 6.  
18       This chain showed a total number of 10 direct relations and 5 indirect ones.

19

20       **MEC 7**

21       As expressed by the respondents, *visiting family and friends* and buying  
22       *gifts/souvenirs* were two attributes of the destination. Such gifts would primarily include  
23       food and agricultural products, as well as handcrafted artworks, in the travel destination.  
24       A tourist will buy such commodities as gifts for friends and family members living

1 close to home to please them, reinforcing friendship/kinship relationships, and  
2 expressing a pure sense of sincerity. In the Iranian culture, to sustain friendship/kinship  
3 relationships, it is particularly important to respond positively to people’s kindness,  
4 make others happy, and show concern. In Islamic traditions, Muslims are advised to  
5 maintain their relations with their kin, and the ISTs, who are generally faithful to  
6 religious principles, considered such recommendations even when choosing a travel  
7 destination. *Benevolence* as a value in MEC 7 referred to love, friendship and  
8 assistance. As Table 3 shows, there were 30 direct relations and 14 indirect ones in  
9 MEC 7.

10  
11 Table 3. MECs of the Participants  
12

## 13 5. Discussion

14 According to San Martín and Del Bosque (2008) some studies have explored “the  
15 cognitive structure of destination image”; however, the notion of cognitive structure  
16 mainly focuses on concrete cognitive categories (destination attributes) in these studies,  
17 whilst abstract cognitive categories of consequence and value have not been  
18 investigated. In the present study, the cognitive structures shaping the destination image  
19 revealed a path in which various concrete destination attributes were linked to values. In  
20 other words, the content of knowledge in the cognitive structure of the destination  
21 image was identified in three categories: attribute, consequence, and value. Then the  
22 way in which these categories could be organised or linked in the means-end chain was  
23 investigated. Considering the current gap in the destination image literature in relation  
24 to Iranian seniors and Middle Eastern culture, the Iranian senior tourists’ cognitive  
25 structure of destination image was studied.



1           The content of knowledge in the Iranian senior tourists' (ISTs) cognitive  
2 structures of domestic destinations included 12 attributes, 11 consequences and five  
3 values. Concrete cognitive categories/destination attributes, including *historic*  
4 *attractions, culture* and *natural landscapes*, were perceived to be the most interesting  
5 categories. These attributes are of interest to the majority of the senior tourists from  
6 different nationalities. This is for example, highlighted in a number of studies focusing  
7 on destination attributes perceived by senior tourists (Alen et al., 2015; Huang & Tsai  
8 ,2003; Neves,2012; Norman et al. ,2001; Shoemaker, 2000; You & O'leary, 1999).

9           Further attributes such as *activity in nature, previously unvisited locations,*  
10 *buying gifts/souvenirs,* and *pilgrimage sites* constituted another set of domestic  
11 destination specifications important to the ISTs. However, previous studies have only  
12 investigated the first two attributes (e.g. Norman et al., 2001; Shoemaker, 2000; You &  
13 O'leary, 1999). Pilgrimage sites at the destination are important for some Iranian senior  
14 tourist. Similar attribute was highlighted by Huang & Tsai (2003) as "religious  
15 programs" for Taiwanese senior tourists. It is worth noting that majority of Iranians are  
16 religious and visiting pilgrimage sites is part of the religious duty. This behaviour tends  
17 to become more prominent with ageing (Moshfeq & Mirza'i, 2010). The attribute of  
18 buying gift / souvenirs in travel destinations has not been mentioned in previous studies.  
19 However, Jiang, et al. (2015) identified this destination attribute as "gift to relatives and  
20 friends" for Chinese tourists (younger and older age groups) who travel abroad.

21           The respondents mentioned such attributes as *old-fashioned markets/shopping*  
22 *centres, visiting family and friends, urban order, good people,* and *good climate* less  
23 than ten times. The presence of shopping centers in the destination, particularly those  
24 which are historical, was somewhat considered as important by some Iranian senior  
25 tourists. This is similar to European senior tourists who also pay attention to shopping

1 centers (Neves, 2012; Alen et al., 2015 You & O'leary, 1999). The opportunity to meet  
2 friends and family at the destination was also important to the Iranian senior tourists.  
3 This issue has similarly been reported in other researches as one of the travel  
4 motivations for the senior tourists (Esichaikul, 2012; Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys,  
5 2002; You & O'leary, 1999).Iranians are collectivist as far as family and religion are  
6 concerned (Rahmani, Mirzaei, & vosughi, 2005). They endeavour to maintain their  
7 relationships with family members and friends, and the findings of this research also  
8 suggested that the ISTs paid attention to the possibility of visiting friends and family  
9 members whilst deciding on a destination. The findings of this study show that the  
10 climate and people have lower priority which is in line with Huang & Tsai's (2003)  
11 study.

12 In the cognitive structure of the destination image extracted based on the theory  
13 of the MEC chain, the benefits / consequences of the destination attributes are  
14 considered as part of the knowledge formed in the individual's mind. In this study, 11  
15 consequences were identified. The most frequent consequences in the study were *better*  
16 *feeling / joy, relaxation, and know more*. MEC-focused studies in tourism have mainly  
17 viewed consequences and values from a motivational perspective (e.g. Ho, Lin, &  
18 Huang, 2014; Jiang, et al., 2015; Klenosky, et al., 1993; Klenosky, 2002); consequently,  
19 these studies have regarded the consequences (*better feeling /joy, relaxation, and know*  
20 *more*) along with other consequences such as *experience of difference, break from*  
21 *routine and improved communication* as motivations behind non-senior tourists' travel  
22 choices. The benefits of senior tourists have been investigated in previous studies, either  
23 from motivation or push factors perspectives (Lehto, O'leary, & Lee, 2002; Patuelli &  
24 Nijkamp, 2016). Four initial consequences were identified in the study of You and  
25 O'leary (1999); Shoemaker (2000); Lehto et al. (2001) and Esichaikul (2012).

1 Esichaikul (2012) reported *relaxation* as the most important motive for European senior  
2 tourists. The two consequences of *break from routine* and *improved communication* are  
3 also in line with the studies of You and O'leary (1999); Shoemaker (2000); Boksberger  
4 and Laesser (2009) and Norman et al. (2001).

5 Five consequences including *pain relief*, *durability in mind*, *recollection*,  
6 *pleasing others*, and *national pride*, were also identified in this study. The consequence  
7 of the *pain relief* and *durability in the mind* were similarly reported as the motive of  
8 "health / well-being" in the studies of Alen et al. (2015) and Utama, (2017). *recollection*  
9 of the sweet memories of the past and the memories of those who are no longer alive  
10 (*recollection*) were presented as "nostalgia" motive in Sellick (2004) and Moal-Ulvoas  
11 (2016) studies. The consequence of the *national pride* has also been similarly reported  
12 in the LeSerr et al. (2013) study as motive of "pride and patriotism" for senior tourists in  
13 China.

14 In this study, the values expressed by the respondents were categorised into five  
15 codes, out of which the following three categories occurred most frequently: (a)  
16 *universalism* (a sense of accomplishment, originality, inner harmony, curiosity, wisdom,  
17 broad-mindedness, assiduity and a world filled with beauty); (b) *positive emotions*  
18 (happiness, cheerfulness, life with diversity, joy and excitement); and (c) *security*  
19 (health, social order, cleanliness, and environmental protection). Azadarmaki, Venus,  
20 and Karami (2013) observed a dichotomy between tradition and modernity in terms of  
21 cultural values in Iran. The main traditional values included religion, family, seniority  
22 and collectivism, whereas modern value included variety seeking, hedonism,  
23 opportunism, dependence, individualism, and new experiences. Japanese senior  
24 consumers also attach great importance to security and enjoyment values (Kohlbacher  
25 & Chéron, 2012). Security and safety have also been identified as key values for

1 American senior consumers (Schewe, 1990). Sudbury and Simcock (2009) concluded  
2 that senior consumers with younger cognitive ages valued entertainment and pleasure in  
3 life, whereas those who were cognitively older prioritised security. However, there was  
4 a strong positive correlation between the cognitive age of the European senior (British)  
5 consumers and the value of security.

6  
7 In the present study, however, the respondents also emphasised values such as  
8 *salvation* (intimacy with God and release from the burden of sins) and *benevolence*  
9 (love and friendship, kindness, helpfulness, loyalty, and integrity). In their travels to  
10 domestic destinations, the respondents tried to satisfy these values. Accordingly,  
11 Schewe (1991) described *spirituality* and *social connectedness* as key values for senior  
12 consumers. Moal-Ulvoas, (2017), stated that "Spirituality and focus on emotions" are  
13 the remarkable characteristics of the seniors, and in his study, identified traveling  
14 consequences for the seniors as creating "self-transcendent positive emotions" and  
15 contributing to "spirituality".

16  
17 Investigating how the ISTs organised cognitive categories in their cognitive  
18 structures was another purpose of this study. As Figure 1 shows, in the cognitive  
19 structures of the ISTs, seven key MECs can be observed. In MECs 1, 2 and 3, the  
20 linkage between cognitive categories are strong. As the respondents explained, visiting  
21 *historic attractions* in destinations brought about three consequences: *national pride*  
22 (MEC 1), *new experience*, and *know more* followed by the experience itself (MEC 2).  
23 Achieving these consequences could reinforce the respondents' value of *universalism*.  
24 According to Klenosky (2002), cultural and historic attractions are sources of interest  
25 for American students on spring holidays because these sources generate more  
26 knowledge, more learning and new experiences associated with accomplishment at the

1 value level. There is a Persian proverb that explains this research finding. An Iranian  
2 proverb suggests that travelling and life experience are conceptually associated; in other  
3 words, it is believed that travelling could enrich an individual's knowledge and  
4 experience. Accordingly, experienced people who have visited different parts of the  
5 world are respected in the Iranian culture. Gaining knowledge, especially about history,  
6 culture and geography, was one of the main reasons the respondents visited travel  
7 destinations. Domestic tourism, due to its inexpensiveness, could provide the  
8 opportunity for travellers to gain a considerable amount of experience and knowledge  
9 and move beyond their daily routine.

10         The respondents further explained that the major consequence arising from the  
11 two attributes *pilgrimage sites* and *natural landscape* was *relaxation*, which could  
12 consequently realise the ultimate goal of *salvation* (MEC 3). *Relaxation*, with 27 direct  
13 cognitive linkages, following *better feeling / joy*, was the most basic benefit that the ISTs  
14 obtained from destination attributes. Jiang et al. (2015) found that major consequences  
15 motivating Chinese tourists (senior & non-senior) to travel to foreign countries are  
16 pleasure, a sense of calm, experience of difference and enrichment of personal life as  
17 achievements gained from visiting natural landscapes. Although individuals may  
18 prioritise different attributes in a travel destination, they may have similar consequences  
19 and values. For instance, the three attributes *activity in nature*, *previously unvisited*  
20 *places*, and *old-fashioned markets/shopping centres*, with moderate cognitive linkages,  
21 reflected the shared consequence *better feeling / joy* and ultimately brought about  
22 *positive emotions* as a value for the respondents (MEC 4). There was a clear perception  
23 that *better feeling / joy* to some extent resulted from *good climate* and *good people*.  
24 *Buying gifts/souvenirs* and *visiting family/friends*, with moderate linkages, reinforced  
25 friendship/family relationships as a shared consequence and reinforced *benevolence* as a

1 value (MEC 7). The realisation of *security* as a shared value depended on *urban order*  
2 and *historic attractions*; naturally, in this path, there were two different consequences  
3 with moderate linkages: *durability in mind* and *better feeling / joy* (MEC 5, MEC 6).

#### 4 **6. Conclusion**

5 Previous research often studied the cognitive structure of the destination image with a  
6 continuum of functional-psychological attributions and using survey studies. Also, some  
7 previous studies reported tangible attributes of the destination in the form of pull  
8 motivational factors that were interacting with the push factors (internalized from the  
9 person) (Kim, & Lee, 2002). In this research, the cognitive dimension of the destination  
10 image was examined from a new perspective. Our study makes a new theoretical  
11 contribution to the field by investigating the cognitive structure of the destination image  
12 based on the means-end chain theory. The aim was to penetrate the inner layers of the  
13 mind of the individual and, in addition to the attributes of the destination, identifies the  
14 benefits/ consequences of those attributes and the personal values which determine  
15 his/her consequences. In other words, the individual's knowledge of the destination  
16 connects to his/her knowledge of himself/herself. The hierarchical value map resulting  
17 from the implementation of the laddering quality technique offers the integrated  
18 cognitive structure of individuals towards the destination.

19 Additionally, this study contributes to advancing our understanding of the senior  
20 tourists' behavior. There has been an increasing interest in the area of senior tourism  
21 within the tourism literature since 2000. Particularly, researchers based in Europe, the  
22 United States, and South East Asia have played a significant role in advancing our  
23 understanding of this area. However, senior tourism remains relatively unexplored in  
24 other countries that are facing the phenomenon of aging population. Among these  
25 countries is Iran, which despite an emerging senior tourism market, the behavior of

1 Iranian senior tourists has rarely been investigated before. This study therefore, has  
2 contributed to enhancing our understanding of the Iranian senior tourists. This in turn  
3 has contributed to the body of knowledge on senior tourism. In our study, we have  
4 identified the destination's attributes of the Iranian senior tourists and extracted their  
5 benefits from the choice of these attributes and subsequently the values governing the  
6 behavior of tourists. The findings of this study has shed light on important attributes for  
7 Iranian senior tourists such as the possibility to buy souvenirs and having access to  
8 pilgrimage sites, and the consequences of durability in mind and the sense of national  
9 pride. Also the result suggested that a single factor could have different ends. For  
10 instance, the results revealed that *historic attractions* led to different sets of MECs  
11 (*experience differences, know more, national pride, recollection, and durability in*  
12 *mind*). Within these sets of associations, *durability in mind* as a benefit led to *security* as  
13 a value; likewise, *know more* as a benefit led to *universalism* as a personal value.

14 In addition to the theoretical contributions of this research, tourism destination  
15 managers can also utilise the findings of this research. For example, promoting products  
16 and services based on their features is considered to be the most basic form of  
17 advertising, which can have a better impact on the target market by integrating product /  
18 service benefits. Considering that in this research the benefits of destination attributes in  
19 the mind of senior tourists have been identified, this knowledge can therefore, be used  
20 to design effective advertising. Different levels of cognitive structure of destination  
21 image of senior tourists may also lead to the segmentation and formulation of effective  
22 marketing strategies for tourism destinations. Also, tourism managers can focus on key  
23 MECs in order to strengthen the attributes of the destinations identified in these chains.  
24 The aim would be to meet the hidden benefits and values behind these attributes, and  
25 create the driving force necessary to influence destination choice by senior tourists.

## 1        **7. Limitations and Possibilities for Future Research**

2        This study had some limitations. The age-related specifications of the sample of  
3        respondents made it difficult to ensure consistent focus during the interview process.  
4        For example, early exhaustion during an interview, impatience, difficulty in  
5        communicating, or having a delay in remembering particular material slowed down the  
6        interview process. On the other hand, the willingness of some interviewees to  
7        ‘confabulate’ and find someone to ‘lend an ear’ also posed some challenges.  
8        Meanwhile, it was difficult to gain access to respondents who fell under the age group  
9        under study, considering the inclusion criteria. The lack of sufficient information  
10       sources about the income and purchasing power of Iranian senior individuals also  
11       proved to be challenging.

12       This study addresses the means-end chain (MEC) theory from a cognitive  
13       structure perspective and its integration with the destination image literature. It can be  
14       suggested that the model of the cognitive structure of destination image presented in this  
15       study, be examined in other cultural contexts and the variations between cognitive  
16       categories due to intercultural differences be further studied. Further research may also  
17       study the effects of the cognitive structure of destination image on the behavior of  
18       senior tourists. The investigation of the correlation between this model and the senior  
19       tourist behavior variables with the destination image based on the attributions and  
20       behavior of the senior tourist can also be a suitable topic for future research. Finally, it  
21       is necessary to address the cognitive dimensions of senior tourists according to their age  
22       characteristics. Therefore, further studies could contribute to the richness of the  
23       literature in this field.

24



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1 Table 1. Summary Content Codes

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Values	V1. Universalism (29) V2. Positive emotion (20) V3. Security (18) V4. Benevolence (15) V5. Salvation (13)
Consequences	C1. Better feeling / joy (30) C2. Relaxation (27) C3. Know more (22) C4. Experience differences (17) C5. National pride (13) C6. Break from routine (13) C7. Improved communication (11) C8. Recollection (7) C9. Please others (7) C10. Durability in mind (5) C11. Pain relief (4)
Attributes	A1. Historic attractions (29) A2. Culture (19) A3. Natural landscapes (16) A4. Activity in nature (15) A5. previously unvisited locations (11) A6. Pilgrimage sites (11) A7. Gift / Souvenir (10) A8. Old-fashioned market /shopping centres (8) A9. Visiting family & friends (8) A10. Urban order (7) A11. Good people (6) A12. Good climate (4)

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1 Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Age</b>	
Male	14	50–64 years	15
Female	16	≥65 years	15
<b>Education</b>		<b>Marital status</b>	
Below Bachelor's degree	12	Married	25
Bachelor's degree	14	Single	1
Master's degree and above	4	Widowed	4

Table 3. MECs of the Participants

<b>MEC1: Historic attractions → Universalism</b>							
Code	Historic attractions	National pride	Universalism				Subtotal
Historic attractions	0.00	10.00	0.14				10.14
National pride	0.00	0.00	9.00				9.00
Universalism	0.00	0.00	0.00				0.00
			Total				19.14
<b>MEC2: Culture, Historic attractions → Universalism</b>							
Code	Culture	Historic attractions	Experience differences	Know more	Universalism	Subtotal	
Culture	0.00	0.00	6.00	7.03	1.11	14.14	
Historic attractions	0.00	0.00	8.00	2.06	0.14	10.20	
Experience differences	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.00	3.06	12.06	
Know more	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	19.00	19.00	
Universalism	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
					Total	55.40	
<b>MEC3: Natural landscapes, Pilgrimage sites → Salvation</b>							
Code	Natural landscapes	Pilgrimage sites	Relaxation	Salvation	Subtotal		
Natural landscapes	0.00	0.00	12.00	0.06	12.06		
Pilgrimage sites	0.00	0.00	11.00	0.07	11.07		
Relaxation	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.00	13.00		
Salvation	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
				Total	36.13		

Table 3. (Continued)

<b>MEC4: Activity in nature, previously unvisited locations, ... → Positive emotion</b>							
Code	Activity in nature	Previously unvisited locations	Old-fashioned markets	Break from routine	Better feeling/joy	Positive emotion	Subtotal
Activity in nature	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	3.04	0.05	9.09
previously unvisited locations	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	1.04	0.04	8.08
Old-fashioned markets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	0.05	8.05
Break from routine	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	3.04	10.04
Better feeling/joy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	15.00	15.00
Positive emotion	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
						Total	50.26
<b>MEC5: Urban order → Security</b>							
Code	Urban order	Better feeling/joy	Security				Subtotal
Urban order	0.00	6.0	0.5				6.05
Better feeling/joy	0.00	0.00	7.00				7.00
Security	0.00	0.00	0.00				0.00
							13.05
<b>MEC6: Historic attractions → Security</b>							
Code	Historic attractions	Durability in mind	Security				Subtotal
Historic attractions	0.00	5.00	0.05				5.05
Durability in mind	0.00	0.00	5.00				5.00
Security	0.00	0.00	0.00				0.00
			Total				10.05
<b>MEC7: Visiting family&amp; friends, Gift/ Souvenir → Benevolence</b>							
Code	Visiting family & friends	Gift/ Souvenir	Please others	Improved communication	Benevolence		
Visiting family & friends	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	0.06	7.06	
Gift/ Souvenir	0.00	0.00	7.00	1.03	0.05	8.05	
Please others	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	2.03	7.03	
Improved communication	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	8.00	
Benevolence	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
					Total	30.14	

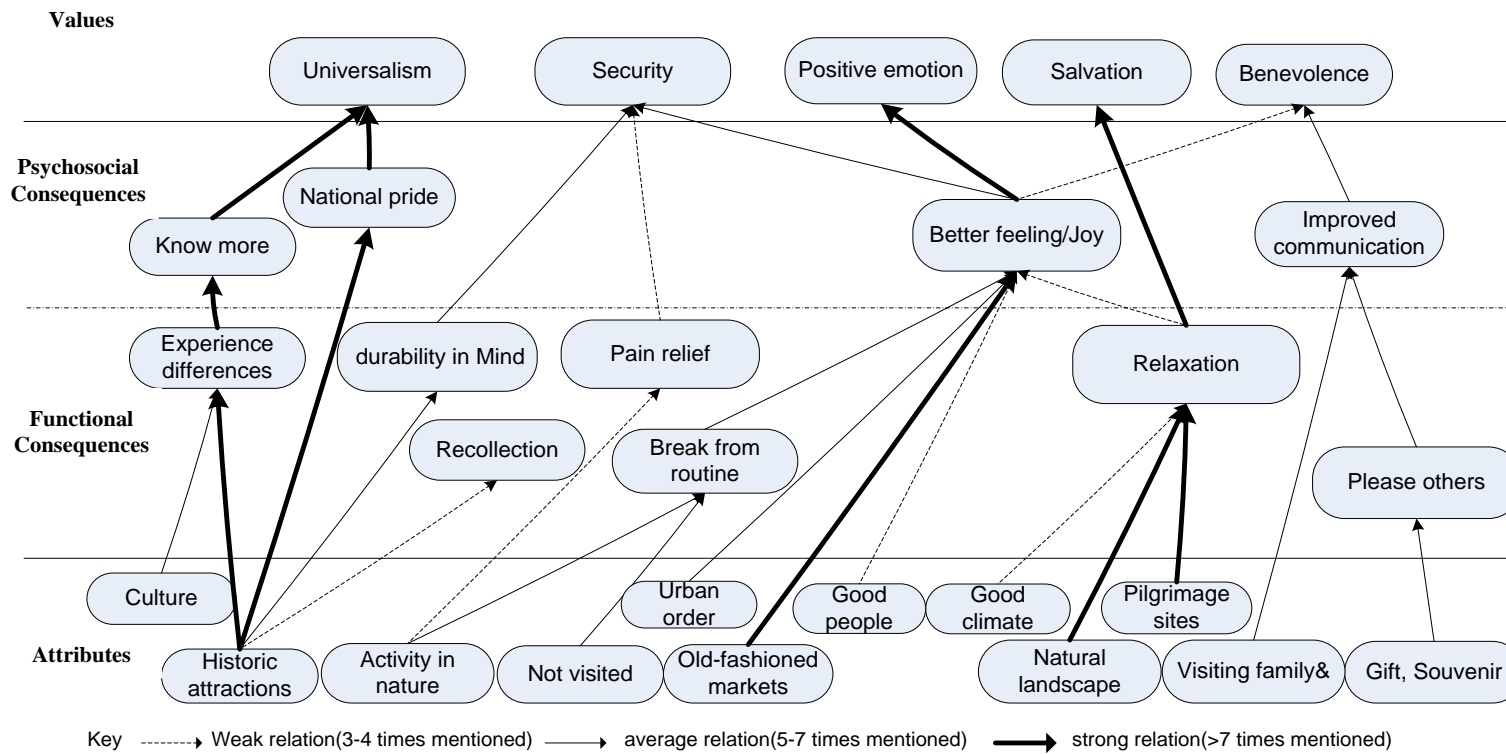


Figure 1. Iranian Senior Tourists' HVM