Religious Tourism Development Strategies in Qom Province: Using and Comparing QSPM and Best Worst Methods

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After Mashhad county, Qom province has the most valuable religious, cultural, historical and natural potential as the second Iranian pilgrimage centre. This study was conducted to formulate strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province using the most influential view of the strategy-formation process named design school. This school normally uses External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix, Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) Matrix, SWOT Matrix, QSPM matrix, and some other tools. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were determined using IFE and EFE matrices. The SWOT matrix was prepared and then the proper strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province (hold and maintain strategies or ST strategies) were determined using the Internal-External (IE) Matrix in the next step. Extracted ST strategies were prioritised using the QSPM and five strategies were proposed respectively. This study used the Best-Worst Method (BWM) to prioritise the created strategies in addition to QSPM this aims at developing strategic planning methodology. The results of the BWM were compared to the QSPM and the priority of the second and third strategies were modified. The priority of the first, fourth and fifth strategies is the same in the two methods. Moreover, the correlation coefficient between the results of the two methods was calculated. This shows a similarity of approximately 95 percent. So, it seems using the BWM method is more cost-effective than QSPM, due to saving time and cost.

Key Words: Qom Province, religious tourism, QSPM matrix, SWOT matrix, Best Worst Method (BWM)

Introduction

Tourism is considered one of the important ways of development and economic growth in the world (Oh, 2005; Lee & Chang, 2008; Tang & Tan, 2015; Ramirez & Rangel, 2018). This industry has had a significant impact on countries' economic, social, and cultural situation in recent years (WTTC, 2018). Employment (WTTC, 2018; Dwyer, 2018; Campos Soria & Robles Teigeiro, 2019), foreign exchange earnings (Dwyer, 2018), export development (WTTC, 2018) and investment development (WTTC, 2018; Dwyer, 2018). These are but some of the benefits of the tourism industry.

Most people in the world have religious beliefs. Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others all have their opinions and faiths and would like to go to pilgrimage. As noted by Mitchell (2017), 'most people experience religious journey'- that is, religious tourism. Due to growing tourism to religious sites worldwide (El-Gohary, 2016), many countries in the world are increasingly seeking to develop religious tourism as a source of employment and income. Religious tourism has different functions like psychological benefits or psychological revitalisation (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Korstanje, 2018); spiritual relevance, preserving cultural heritage (Rashid, 2018); restoration (Bond *et al*., 2014) and so on.

In cities with a large number of the important holy tombs and historical places of worship, religious tourism and pilgrimage can be the most crucial part of the city's tourism. Therefore, it is possible to use this potential to provide the basis for the attraction of religious tourists. It can be used for the development of pilgrimage tourism as well as historical tourism. Iran has a unique ability to develop tourism services due to its abundant resources

Map 1: Main Cities of Iran, Highlighting Qom

By CIA - CIA, The World Factbook, 2004, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=89450

According to the statistics provided by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Qom province, more than 2.5 million foreign tourists and travellers and 20 million domestic tourists and travellers have visited Qom in recent years, up to 2017. According to Iran's 20-Year Vision statement, the number of foreign tourists should be increased to 8 million and domestic tourists to 41 million by 2025. Qom is the most crucial religious base of the Shia and the second-largest pilgrimage centre in Iran after Mashhad. Qom also has other competitive advantages in addition to its spiritual capacity (Holy Shrine of Fatemeh Maasoume, Jamkaran mosque, and other Shrines). These include proximity to Imam Khomeini international airport, being adjacent to Tehran and Isfahan, and locating centrally. Due to this geographical location, most of travellers to other cities stay in Qom for a few hours just to undertake a pilgrimage at Fatemeh Masoumeh Shrine and partake in prayer. Sometimes, residents of nearby towns and cities such as Tehran, Kashan, Arak, and Saveh come to Qom in the morning and return to their hometown after pilgrimage and noon and evening prayers. We call such visitors 'travellers' or 'day visitors.'

and the cultural history of several centuries. But, it seems that the lack of proper strategies and the availability of oil or other economic revenues has prevented attention to this critical economic sector in many countries.

Some researchers, including Bastos (2007), Macpherson (2007), Cozzo (2016), Errington & Gewertz (1989), Parrinello (2012) have suggested differences between tourists and travellers in some aspects. Tourists and travellers both travel, and while Cohen (1974), suggests that there are no great differences between travellers who are tourists and those who are not. But, there are differences between them. One is that travellers are temporary visitors, staying less than 24 hours in the country / city they are visiting. A tourist, however, is defined as a person 'traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes' (Koerbitz *et al.*, 2013; UNWTO). Moreover, the UN defines a tourist as 'a visitor rather than as a traveller' (Cohen, 1974: 530). Of direct relevance to this paper, The Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organisation of Qom province also considers the difference between tourists and travellers according to the length of stay. So, we identify people who stay less than 24 hours in the city of Qom as travellers.

Despite the mentioned advantages, Qom has failed to achieve its potential in attracting tourists (whether domestic or foreign). According to the statistics provided by the head of the Qom province governorate, the time of residence of a pilgrim in the city is about 6 hours (Ostan-qom.ir, 2019). It seems it is such a short time for staying in such a pilgrimage site and holy capital.

According to the discussed issues, the central question of this research is: What are the appropriate strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province?

Some sub-questions are as follows:

What are the weaknesses, strengths, opportunities, and threats of religious tourism development in Qom province?

What is the primary strategy of religious tourism development in Qom province?

What are the strategies of religious tourism development in Qom province?

How is the degree of significance of the religious tourism development strategies in Qom province?

Is there a significant difference between the results of the QSPM and the BWM method?

Literature Review and Research Background

Theoretical Foundations of Research

The UNWTO define tourism as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents), and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure. Other definitions of tourism and definitions of religious tourism, and pilgrimage are as follows:

Tourism is 'a short-term movement of people to places some distance from their normal place of residence to indulge in pleasurable activities' (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016: 4). Religious tourism can be defined as 'travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions, and architecture' (El-Gohary, 2016: 125). Pilgrimage is defined as 'a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding' (Utomo *et al.*, 2019:55 quoted by Barber 1993).

Religious tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism and can divide into three categories: short-term, long-term, and organisational (Rinschede, 1992). In religious tourism, religious attractions such as shrines, tombs, mosques, churches, rituals, and sacred ceremonies have attracted tourists to the places that are visited. Religious tourism, in addition to religious and spiritual purposes, is also undertaken for experiencing other religious products such as art, culture, traditions, and architecture (Nicolaides & Grobler, 2017).

> The UNWTO estimates that 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites each year. The Asia and Pacific region is blessed not only with religious sites but also because it forms the hub of pilgrim centers, religious festivals, and other related cultural activities of a religious nature (UNWTO, 2011a).

From one side, religious tourism has economic benefits (Alipour *et al.*, 2017; Albayrak *et al.*, 2018; Akbulut & Ekin, 2018). On the other hand, according to the UNWTO (2011b), the Middle East's share of the global tourism market will grow by only 2 percent between 2010 and 2030. So, it is imperative to think about ways and strategies to gain more growth in market share.

Iran, with its long history of civilization and culture, diverse ecosystem, as well as the existence of shrines, has been and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. But, the beginning of the Iranian People's Revolution in 1978 and its victory in early 1979, the start of the war of Iraq against Iran in September 1980 for about eight years, and the subsequent US sanctions caused serious problems for Iran's tourism industry. Since the UNWTO was established on 2 January 1975, there are no integrated global statistics for the 1970s on tourism and the entry of foreign tourists to different countries, including Iran. Currency revenue from tourism in the non-oil exports of Iran in 1978 was 27.6 percent that was an increase of 93 percent compared to the year 1970 (Khodadadi, 2018). After about half a century, currency revenue from tourism in the non-oil exports of Iran in 2019 was 26.18 percent (ICHTO, 2019; Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, 2019).

Although the statistics show relatively good growth in tourist arrivals in recent years, these statistics also show that we have just returned to the conditions of half a century ago, and as clearly expressed by Butler *et al.* (2012: 325), 'International tourism to Iran is tiny.'

After the Islamic Revolution and the war, the number of non-Muslim tourists entering Iran decreased. Most foreign tourists include Muslims from neighbouring countries who travel mainly to Iran for pilgrimage. In recent years, due to the exchange rate and reducing travel costs to Iran, the number of pilgrims from neighbouring Muslim countries has increased.

The many pilgrimage places, including the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) in Mashhad, the sacred shrine of Masoumeh in Qom, have caused many Muslims of the world, especially Muslims of neighbouring countries, to travel to Iran annually. About 98 percent of Iranians are Muslim. There are more than 5,000 holy tombs and religious places. These have created a high potential for the development of religious tourism (Rahmani *et al.*, 2013). There are 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, 300 million of whom are Shiites but only 1 million foreign religious tourists travel to Iran annually (based on statistics for 2012 - Aminifard, 2012) based on this, it seems an important issue and Iran should work to find a

way to increase the number of tourists, with the priority of religious tourism.

There is a wide range of governance models for managing religious tourism around the world (Shinde, 2018). Meanwhile, strategic management and strategy formulation are methods to achieve goals such as the goals set for the management of tourism. Sources and attractions of tourism are essential in all sectors of tourism planning and management. But, the use of tourism benefits is not possible without providing a suitable basis for tourism development (Hataminejad *et al*., 2017). Therefore, it is so important to identify tourism attractions and planning for the development of attracting tourists. In this way, studying and reviewing previous research can help to identify possible solutions and develop and create new solutions.

Review of Past Research

In this section, some previous studies on tourism, strategic planning of tourism, as well as studies that have used the Best-Worst Method, has been reviewed. The purpose of reviewing the literature is to extract the basic indicators of religious tourism strategic planning and research methodologies.

Abouhashem Abadi *et al*. (2018) used the best-worst method to evaluate the strategy of medical tourism development. They concluded that emphasis on services and promotion in addition to the development of specialised treatment centres, has attracted patients from the centre, south, and east of Iran, as well as Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries.

Muriuki *et al*. (2016) studied the relationship between Market appeal and Shrines' authenticity levels with religious tourism branding. They found that religious tourism is an essential tool for development of undeveloped shrines, and there are related niche markets in religious tourism that should be considered. They also found that tourism product diversification is an effective strategy for enhancing tourism development. Taking this to a local level, Kartal *et al*. (2015) explored the potential of Manisa's religious tourism in Turkey from a marketing perspective. The results showed that Manisa is of great historical-religious importance as it belongs to the three major religions. These authors proposed a variety of practical marketing strategies, including selling souvenirs such as miniatures, postcards, local food, and local drinks at shops around religious buildings. Moreover, it is possible to supply religious tourism products and services in combination with activities such as camping, mountaineering, sightseeing, and the like.

Looking at the impact on locals, Nyaupane *et al*. (2015) examined the perception of tourists in religious destinations from a social distance perspective. The role of social distance in the interpersonal relations of tourists from different religions who visited Lumbini (Buddha's birthplace) in Nepal was studied. They concluded that Hindus and Christians are compatible with Buddhism because of their more significant attention to Buddhists, compared to other visitors. Therefore, it could be concluded that the attraction of tourists from the religions that are compatible with the Islamic faith can contribute to the development of religious tourism in Qom province.

Abya *et al*. (2015) used SWOT and QSPM to survey the tourism industry in Galugah city located in the north of Iran. The results showed the strategic position of the region is identifiable using SO strategies. In a similar study, Millan *et al*. (2013) studied sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia. They also used SWOT analysis and concluded that strategic priorities are the opportunity for identification of good governance's critical aspects in the Andalusian tourism sector and provided opportunities for tourists to connect with nature and the environment and to recognise the cultural heritage and customs of the people living there.

Of particular interest to the research in this paper is a 2017 study by Hashemi *et al*. which identified and prioritised tourism opportunities for the desert areas of Qom province. According to their findings, the niche products with the greatest opportunity are:

(1) all types of scientific tourism and eco-tourism,

(2) adventure tourism and sports tourism linked to holding all kinds of sport competitions, and

(3) creating cultural-artistic and therapeutic collections.

It seems the attraction and vastness of the wilderness and natural areas can be used to demonstrate religious culture and to attract religious tourists, considering the findings of this study. Hoseinipor *et al*. (2017) mentioned that according to experts, certain factors are significant contributors to the intentions of religious tourists to visit Qom. Some of the most important motivations include: age, belief in the necessity of pilgrimage, religiousness,

motivation for faith, the experience of religious travel, motivation for the forgiveness of sins, accommodation facilities, seeing the name of the area in religious sources, health services, popularity of the area, and ease of transportation in the region.

According to the results of the various studies, it seems that different views of tourists should be taken into account in the selection of religious tourism development strategies. As an example, Khavarian *et al.* (2014) used SWOT for optimising the use of Tasua and Ashura religious ceremonies to develop a town. They prepared IFE, EFE and SWOT matrixes, and recognised the potential for aggressive positioning on the IE matrix and thus proposed strategies based on the SWOT matrix without other analysis. However, strategic planning is not merely proposing strategies based on the four factors of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). It is necessary that proposed appropriate strategies are evaluated and prioritised using other tools (for example - QSPM). Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) is a tool for the decision stage of the strategy-formulation analytical framework as proposed by David and David (2017). The basis of the strategy formulation model presented by these authors is taken from the Design School of strategy formation.

> *The design school represents, without question, the most influential view of the strategy-formation process* (Mintzberg *et al.*, 2002:24).

Examination of the basic model of the design school shows that analysing the external and internal environment leads to identifying opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses, and combining them on the SWOT matrix just leads to the generation of strategies. In fact, at this stage, only different alternatives are identified, and the choice of strategy or strategies to implement depends on the managerial values and social responsibility of the organisation.

From the review of the past research, it can be concluded that advertising and promotion can provide the basis for the arrival of religious tourists and the development of pilgrimage tourism. Of course, this is only possible if the infrastructure needed for tourist arrivals is provided. Therefore, it is necessary to study the conditions of the tourist attractor in religious cities / destinations and their tourism potential in order to develop a comprehensive plan. Exploring the tourism attraction capacity of an area requires examining its attractions and shortcomings.

Thus, studying the attractions and deficiencies of areas with potential for religious tourism provides an opportunity to utilise existing capacities by planning and formulating effective strategies. These can bring about positive results, such as economic development, in addition to increasing the religious and cultural richness and dynamic of the local environment.

Research Methodology

The work undertaken in this study is applied research. It utilised strategic planning tools to extract strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province. In the study, library research methods and electronic resource searches were undertaken in connection with a survey which was used for data collection.

Choosing the best strategies can be seen as a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) problem, and an extensive evaluation of the criteria must be considered in the strategy evaluation process. Therefore, the collected data were analysed using strategic planning tools. That is examination which included an internal and external factors evaluation matrix, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats matrix, and quantitative strategic planning matrix, based on the strategy formulation model introduced by David and David (2017). Also, the Best-Worst Method (BWM) was used to determine coefficients and priorities. It should be noted that no research about strategy formulation of the religious tourism industry has used a similar combination of these two approaches, and this is the strength of the present study.

Since the purpose of this study is to determine the religious tourism development strategies of Qom province, experts in religious tourism were used as a strategic planning team. This team was comprised of 19 religious and spiritual tourism experts. They are the managers and experts of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Qom province, and the managers of travel agencies that work with foreign agencies to attract foreign tourists to Qom. These persons are familiar with issues related to tourism in Qom province for many years, especially religious tourism.

The Best-Worst Method is one of a number of multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) methods. In this particular model, the decision-maker selects his/her preferences of the best criterion over all the other criteria, and also his/her preferences of the worst overall criterion by selecting a number from a predefined scale (Rezaei, 2016). The purpose of this method is to obtain the optimal weight and adaptation ratio through a

Table 1. SWOT Matrix of religious tourism development of Qom province		
	Strengths	**Weaknesses**
	S1- Historical, Geographical, and Craft attractions. **S2**- Neighborhood with large industrial and demographic poles. **S3**- Geographical position in terms of location on the crossroads and close to Imam Khomeini international airport. **S4**- Old cemeteries and tombs of prominent persons. **S5**- Important religious attractions, Seminary, Imams' offspring holy tombs. **S6**- Existence of religious and cultural figures. **S7**- First ranked in the field of religious publishing. **S8**- Increased accommodation and tourism spaces for pilgrims. **S9**- Reduction of the destruction of religious and historical sites due to raising public awareness. **S10**- Establishing of travel facilities headquarters and tourist home. **S11**- Attraction of Islamic architecture of religious places for Non-Muslim tourists. **S12**- Long-term history and culture.	**W1**- Lack of recreational facilities in Qom. **W2**- Weaknesses in introducing and informing attractions and religious monuments. **W3**- Traffic crisis and lack of parking. **W4**- Mismatch between programs. **W5**- Informal accommodation. **W6**- Lack of change in the quality of religious tourism services. **W7**- Lack of locating and expanding marketing activities for rural products. **W8**- Lengthy and vague process of granting facilities to investors. **W9**- Lack of continuous supervision of religious tourism facilities. **W10**- Lack of tourism staff with foreign language skills. **W11**- Lack of advertising in domestic and foreign media about tourism facilities of Qom province. **W12**- lack of creativity in the development of the religious tourism market. **W13**- Inability to implement and track religious tourism programs.
Opportunities	**SO Strategies**	**WO Strategies**
O1- Near to 3 million foreign and 20 million domestic pilgrims. **O2**- Potential capacity of Qom province to attract religious tourists. **O3**- Government emphasis on e-government and smart city. **O4**- 440 holy tombs in Qom province. **O5**- Opening of the path of the holy shrine of Masoumeh to the Jamkaran mosque. **O6**- Multi-storey car park development. **O7**- Shrine to Shrine project and equipped accommodation. **O8**- Possibility to develop regional tourism between the three adjoining provinces. **O9**- Experienced and concerned travel and tour agencies. **O10**- Increased awareness of potential passengers. **O11**- Local souvenirs and foods. **O12**- Natural attractions around religious sites. **O13**- Opportunities for craft sales in the area. **O14**- Existence of various tourist routes.	1. Physical development and enhancement of services in the holy shrine of Masoumeh and the Jamkaran mosque. (S8-S10-S11-O2-O8-O14) 2. Increased publicity for foreign religious science students to attract foreign pilgrims and international tourists. (S5-S7-S11-O1-O14) 3. Development of desert and mountain attractions as a complementary platform for religious tourism. (S1-S4-S5-S9-O8-O12-O14) 4. Launch of high-speed rail lines to move foreign tourists from Imam Khomeini International Airport to Qom. (S3-S10-O5-O8-O14)	1. Creating an integrated management system for the implementation of tourism development programs. (W4-W5-W12-W13-O3-O8) 2. Strengthen the city's infrastructure and visual image. (W1-W3-W9-O1-O6-O11-O13) 3. Construct and enhance recreational and green spaces. (W1-W5-W6-O2-O4-O12) 4. Training new ways of advertising to managers of hotels and travel services offices. (W2-W7-W10-W11-O9-O11)

Threats	ST Strategies	WT Strategies
T1- Less tourist focus on Qom province compared to Razavi Khorasan Province. **T2**- Increased migration to Qom and expanded informal accommodation. **T3**- Lack of sufficient expertise in services and tourism. **T4**- Reduction of developmental budgets of government. **T5**- Lack of a positive attitude towards tourists. **T6**- Lack of a positive attitude of native inhabitants towards tourists. **T7**- Lack of credit facilities for tourism activities. **T8**- Weakness of regulations, management, and planning for tourism areas. **T9**- Lack of integrated tourism management in the country. **T10**- Lack of support by officials in maintaining tourism infrastructure (ICT, Air and land transportation, ports, tourism services, hotels, cafes, restaurants, and the like) **T11**- Lack of investment in religious tourism by the public sector. **T12**- Reduction of State Budget for Tourism Development.	1. Funding for the development of religious tourism attractions. (S1-S2-S12-T4-T5-T7-T11-T12) 2. Strengthening publicity for branding Qom's religious tourism. (S1-S4-S5-S6-S11-S12-T6-T11) 3. Using natives to guide tourists and pilgrims. (S8-S9-T6-T10) 4. Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate tourists. (S3-S10-T5-T7-T8-T11-T12) 5. Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution to benefit all people. (S2-S6-S9-T5-T6-T12)	1. Modification and improvement of the institutional elements of the religious tourism of Qom. (W10-W11-T1-T2-T3) 2. Establishment of NGOs to prevent informal accommodation and anomalies. (W5-T2) 3. Legal protection of economic operators in the field of pilgrimage and religious tourism. (W8-W13-T1-T10-T11) 4. Facilitate laws related to the launch and development of tourism businesses. (W8-T8-T11-T12)

simple linear optimisation model developed by the comparison system. Moreover, the best-worst method inconsistency ratio is used to assess reliability. The inconsistency ratio reflects the degree of convergence of team viewpoints and can be used as an indicator of research reliability (Rezaei, 2016).

Data Analysis

The main **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats of religious tourism were identified based on the literature review. Then, to screen out the factors extracted and localize them, all the elements were put in a questionnaire which was presented to the expert team, to elicit their opinion about the elements of each set in the form of agreeing or disagree. After gathering experts' views, the elements that received more than 75 percent of the agreeing response were retained as an initial consensus, and the rest were eliminated. In other words, from 80 strengths, 98 weaknesses, 100 opportunities, and 97 threats that were initially identified based on the literature review, 30 strengths, 30 weaknesses, 30 opportunities, and 30 threats were confirmed in this stage.

The confirmed factors in the first round were put in a questionnaire again and the expert team members were asked to identify the final factors by expressing their opinion in the form of agreeing or disagree for a second time. At this stage, the elements that 80 percent of the experts agreed with, were confirmed and used to formulate strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province. The final list of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, and possible strategies associated with them are shown in Table 1. Although some factors, such as O4, O12, O13, T6, and T7, seem to be Strengths or Weaknesses, the members of the strategy development team decided to use them as Opportunities or Threats because they believe they are impossible to change, or not possible to control.

Having undertaken the identification of the SWOT matrix, both Internal and External Factor Evaluations were undertaken. The Internal Factor Evaluation matrix and the External factor evaluation matrix, resulted in a final IFE score of 2.57, which means the strength is above average, and the final score of EFE was 2.42, which means there are threats in the environment. Therefore, the proper strategies for Qom province's religious tourism would be ***Hold and Maintain*** strategies based on the Internal-External (IE) Matrix. In other words, ST strategies (focused on Strengths and Threats) are the

Table 2. Results of QSPM Analysis of Religious Tourism Development Strategies of Qom Province		
Priority	Strategy	Total Score
1	Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists. (C2)	2.982
2	Strengthening publicity for branding Qom's religious tourism. (C3)	2.829
3	Funding for the development of religious tourism attractions. (C1)	2.168
4	Using natives to guide tourists and pilgrims. (C5)	1.973
5	Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to benefit all people. (C4)	1.317

most appropriate for religious tourism development in Qom province. Therefore the five ST strategies for the development of religious tourism in Qom province were analysed using QSPM and Best-Worst (BWM) methods.

To analyse the generated strategies, each strategy was scored 1 to 4 according to their attractiveness and effects of the key factors influencing them in a QSPM matrix. These scores were multiplied by the weight of the related key factors to obtain the total scores. The results of the analysis is shown in Table 2.

The results from the Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) show that among the five ST strategies, the most attractive strategy is *Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists* with a total score of 2.982. The least attractive strategy is *Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to benefit all people* with an overall score of 1.317.

Further analysis was undertaken on the data using the BWM method. This was used to prioritise the generated strategies and compare the results with the QSPM. The first step in the BWM method is to determine the set

of indicators. In this study, the indicators include five strategies of religious tourism development in Qom province that are presented in Table 1 as ST strategies. The second and third step is to determine the best and worst indicators. The best indicator is the one that is most preferred by the experts, and the worst one is the one that is least important by them.

All 19 experts selected *Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists* (C2) as the best indicator. The *Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to benefit all people* strategy (C4) was selected as the worst indicator. By collecting the experts' opinions and calculating the average of them, the pairwise comparison matrix for the indicators obtained, is shown in Tables 3 and 4.

In the next step, the weights of each strategy obtained by solving the following linear programming model (Figure 1).

Table 3. Pairwise comparison matrix of best indicators					
All indicators Best indicator	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
C2	2.4	1	7.5	5.4	3.8

Table 4. Pairwise comparison matrix of worst indicators					
All indicators Worst indicator	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
C4	7.5	5.4	2.8	1	7.7

Figure 1: Linear Programming Model

$$\text{Min } \xi$$
$$\text{S.t:}$$
$$\left|\frac{W_2}{W_1} - 2.4\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_2}{W_3} - 7.5\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_2}{W_4} - 5.4\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_2}{W_5} - 3.8\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_1}{W_4} - 7.5\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_3}{W_4} - 2.8\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$\left|\frac{W_5}{W_4} - 7.7\right| \le \varepsilon$$
$$W_1 + W_2 + W_3 + W_4 + W_5 = 1$$
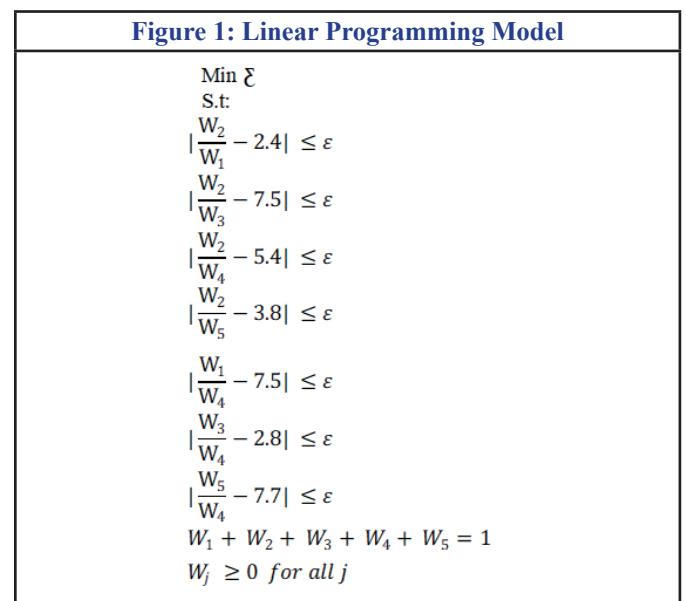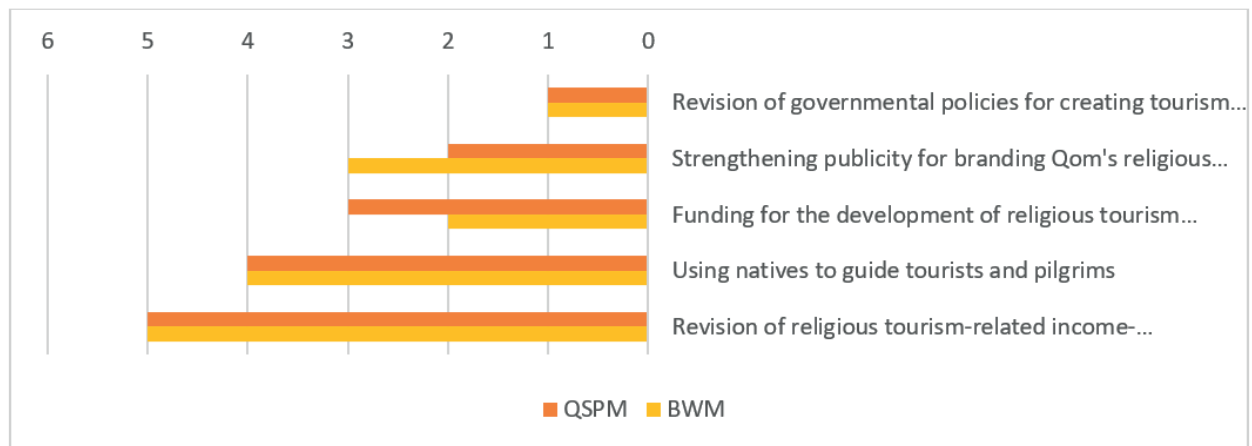$$W_j \ge 0 \text{ for all } j$$

Figure 2. Comparison of Strategies Ranks Based on QSPM and BWM Methods

This model (Figure 1), which has six variables, and 16 constraints was solved using LINGO 11 software in 26 iterations, and thus, the final weight of each strategy was obtained. The results of this step are presented in Table 5.

Based on BWM analysis, ***Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists*** strategy (C2) is the strategy with the highest priority. ***Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to***

benefit all people (C4) is the lowest priority strategy. These results are similar to the results of QSPM. Also, the inconsistency ratio of decision-making calculated for the BWM method is close to zero and indicates the validity of the results. The ranking of strategies based on the results of both QSPM and BMW methods were compared together in Figure 2.

As can be seen, the ranks of three strategies out of the five are similar in both methods. The other two strategies were ranked only by the difference of just one level, by the two methods. Also, comparing the results of the two methods - QSPM and BWM - shows that despite the difference between the analysis methods, there is no significant difference in their results. The correlation coefficient between the results of the two methods were calculated using SPSS software and prove that there is no significant difference between the results of the two methods. The results of the calculations are shown in Table 6.

As can be seen, the similarity of the results of the QSPM and BWM methods is very close - with approximately 95 percent correlation, indicating a very similarity between the two methods. In other words, the results of these two methods are consistent - there is no significant difference.

Given this result, it seems that using the BWM method would be more cost-effective than QSPM because it requires less time and cost. However, further research is needed to compare these two methods to determine whether BWM is more economical and time efficient.

Table 5. Results of Prioritizing Religious Tourism Development Strategies by BWM

Priority	Weight	Sign	Strategy
1	0.314	C2	Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists.
2	0.298	C1	Funding for the development of religious tourism attractions.
3	0.147	C3	Strengthening publicity for branding Qom's religious tourism.
4	0.131	C5	Using natives to guide tourists and pilgrims.
5	0.108	C4	Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to benefit all people.
	0.09567		ε*
		0.01913	Inconsistency Ratio

Table 6. Spearman Correlation Coefficient Between results of QSPM and BWM			QSPM	BWM
Spearman's rho	QSPM	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.586**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	5	5
	BWM	Correlation Coefficient	.586**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	5	5
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)				

Conclusion

This research was conduct to formulate religious tourism development strategies for Qom province in Iran. It used a standard Strategy Formulation model introduced by David and David (2017). Based on this approach, strategies were generated using the External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix, Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) Matrix, and SWOT Matrix. The final score of the IFE was 2.57, which means the strength is above average, and the final score of EFE was 2.42, which means there are threats in the environment. Using the Internal-External (IE) Matrix and considering the scores of IFE and EFE, ST strategies were identified as appropriate for religious tourism development in Qom province. By combining strengths and threats, five strategies were generated in the SWOT matrix. As the next step, these five strategies were prioritised using the QSPM matrix. These strategies in order of priority are

(1) Revision of governmental policies for creating tourism infrastructure to facilitate the presence of tourists,

(2) Strengthening publicity for branding Qom's religious tourism,

(3) Funding for the development of religious tourism attractions,

(4) Using natives to guide tourists and pilgrims and

(5) Revision of religious tourism-related income-generating and resource distribution ways to benefit all people.

This shows that it is important to identify tourism attractions and planning for the development of attracting tourists. In this way, studying and reviewing previous research can help to identify possible solutions and develop and create new solutions.

Moreover, this study used the BWM model to prioritise the formulated strategies and compared the results with the QSPM. Based on the results of the BWM method compared to the QSPM, only the priority of the second and third strategies are changed. The correlation coefficient between the results of the two methods was calculated and showed a similarity of approximately 95 percent. So, it seems that using the BWM method is more efficient than QSPM, due to saving time and cost. However, further research is needed to compare these two methods to determine whether BWM is in fact more economical and fast.

Postscript

The world was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic when the authors were working on reviewing and finalising this paper. It has had a devastating effect on the tourism industry of all countries, and it now looks like the industry will be in recession for a number of years. So, given the speed of strategy formulation with the methodology proposed in this study, researchers are advised to use this method to quickly develop strategies to exit the crisis and to begin promoting tourism in countries as soon as possible.

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